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The Incentives and Actors of Protests in Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2013

Ana Dević and Marija Krstić

Introduction

In analysing the processes and actors that would make for a meaningful comparison of the protests in Gezi Park and the demonstrations in Bosnia-Herzegovina pushing for uniform personal ID numbers, we aim to outline the political processes and venues of political discontent in Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where, in both cases, the course of the elites’ actions and the accompanying dominant ideology had been an orientation to democratisation reforms, economic and political modernisation and social mobility. Subsequently, this was perceived by a substantial number of people as a failed promise. We then illuminate the ‘triggering perceptions’ of the events – the decision to destroy Gezi Park in Istanbul and the inability of the Bosnian elites to agree on uniform ID card numbers – which led to protest mobilisation. In presenting interviews with the participants of the protest in the Gezi Park, we will highlight the consequences of the protest – the new forms of civic solidarity, with its moral and emotional elements.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that, although the protesters in both Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina addressed their pleas and claims to the state, their aim was not a radical political change at the top, but rather reforms in several spheres of the system – political, economic, cultural and social. In fact, we did not find antagonising single dimensions of the conflict in either case: it would be erroneous to characterise them as class or ethnic, nor could they be understood as direct responses to economic crises. They, instead, developed the features of the pressures for a ‘different distribution of resources or for new rules’ (Melucci 1994, 107) and for ‘democratization of structures in everyday life’ (Cohen 1985, 667).

Turkish Case: Political Change and Gezi Park Protests

In the Turkish case, in the fifty years before the AKP first came to power in November 2002, the Turkish military had intervened four times to banish
elected governments. Although it has become routine to attribute all of the flaws of the pre-AKP Turkish political system to the system of military supervision as an impediment to democratisation processes, reality is more complex. According to a number of studies, many Turks perceived the political role of the military as a counterbalance to the frequent chaos and crises produced by civilian governments. Moreover, both qualitative and quantitative research on political attitudes in Turkey has shown that a stable trust in the military and support for democracy are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Gürsoy 2012). The surveys, which show that positive attitudes toward democratic processes and the military rule are held by the same large numbers of Turkish constituencies, may be indicators of the public discontent with the coalition governments that were in power throughout the 1990s, and whose period in office culminated, in February 2001, in Turkey’s worst economic crisis in its modern history. While it has been frequently argued that Turkey’s public sector, with its bureaucrats and politicians lobbying the government for ‘favourable’ taxing, spending and regulatory policies, created an ideal environment for corruption, leading to the 2001 crisis and enraging the public, Cizre and Yeldan (2011, 391) convincingly argue that Turkey’s ‘so-called rent seeking activities (of the bureaucracy) result not from excessive government intervention, but from the very processes of how private industrial and financial capital seeks to appropriate resources to sustain its livelihood.’ In other words, in Turkey, as in all capitalist peripheral societies, the public’s perception of the culprits of the economic crisis has been shifted away from the neoliberal economic policies and its global actors and resulted in ‘a strong anti-state and anti-bureacracy discourse expounded especially by proponents of the neoliberal consensus’ (Ibid., 392). Hence, the victories of the AKP party are diagnosed as a combination of the reinvented use of the populist strategy and the anti-statist sentiment for furthering the neoliberal hegemony, and an introduction of ‘Islamism into the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and World Bank-oriented secular neoliberalism’ (Balta-Paker and Akça 2012, 78). According to these authors, those who believe that the AKP government made a revolutionary turn away from the anti-democratic policies of the military rule thus are tricked: ‘right from the very beginning, simultaneously with its democratic discourse, the AKP has always embraced a unitarian state discourse mixed with militarist and non-pluralist positions.’

In outlining the problems of the political structure and the alleged opposition between Islamism and secularism in the context of the Turkish neoliberal consensus, we should also mention the much admired path of Turkish economic growth since the beginning of the 2000s. Even as the rate of economic growth in Turkey has exceeded 7 per cent in the mid-2000s (in comparison to about 4 per cent a decade earlier), the indicators of rural poverty and unemployment (10 per cent), especially youth unemployment, the disappearance of formal jobs and expansion of informal ones, have been consistently disconcerting (Yeldan and Ercan 2011). In this context, as elsewhere in the de-industrialising world with fragmenting and shrinking workers’ unions, and the phenomenon of the ‘jobless growth,’ one could expect that large sections of society would seek new forms of articulating their discontent.

In outlining the context and precursors of the Gezi Park protests that predate the AKP rule, we should finally mention that already by 1982 and the new Constitution, the military government introduced a ‘new ideological construction’ named ‘Turkish-Islamic Synthesis’ as part of the mandatory primary and secondary school curricula (Grigoriadis and Ansari 2005, 317). The spread of the communist ideology, along with its particular influence on Kurdish nationalism and the armed uprising of the PKK, were attributed to the secularist policies of the previous era. The new perspective on Islam as a homogenising ‘glue’ of the Turkish nation, which was to be taught to pupils as part of regular school curriculum, was also meant to curb and counterbalance the influence of Kurdish nationalism. It was accompanied by new restrictions on human rights and freedoms, and a refusal to recognise the existence of Kurds as a separate ethnicity in Turkey. Citizens of Alevi ethnicity, the second biggest Muslim minority group in Turkey, practicing a heterodox form of Islam, were also threatened by the new state homogenisation policies favouring Sunni Islam (Grigoriadis and Ansari 2005). In the late 1980s, the government of Prime Minister Turgut Özal made some initial steps toward the recognition of a separate Kurdish ethnic identity. In the early 2000s, the coming to power of the AKP coincided with the EU’s acceptance of Turkey’s candidacy for full membership. The latter required Turkey to introduce various reforms, including the abolition of capital punishment and special provisions for minority rights, which ended the prohibition of publications and broadcasting in Kurdish, and introduced various laws allowing teaching Kurdish as an elective subject in schools.

With this picture of the passage from the military to secular governments, and changes in the ruling parties’ approaches toward social development
and minority rights, it is not so striking to observe that among the Gezi Park protesters one would find a large number of young people who were initially sympathetic to and voted for the AKP (in many cases, with parents who had never voted for conservative-Islamist parties). The explanation they give for their positive evaluation of the AKP programmes is that, in the early 2000s, it had sought to reinvigorate the values of democracy, human rights and rule of law, perceived as originating in the West but now universal. Back then, in the mainstream Western media, too, the AKP was presented as a pro-EU reformist movement within Turkish Islamism, as an antidote to the rise of religious fundamentalism and as a role model for the Islamic world. Other promising steps by the AKP included limiting the army’s power by ‘facilitating trials targeting top military officials for allegedly plotting coups’ and pacifying the 30-year-long conflict with the Kurdish minority by bringing the PKK leaders to peace negotiations.  

A 31-year old female LGBTI activist protesting in the Gezi Park acknowledges the AKP’s efforts to carry out democratic reforms:

I was very happy with the first years of AKP, you know, because they made some wonderful democratic attempts even though it was just, as we say in Turkish, a make-up. They are not changing the essence, but they are just, you know, coating it with candy. Well, I knew that but I still saw that as an opportunity for my society.

A 29-year old feminist activist and a volunteer in the ‘Purple Roof’ (Mor Çatı) organisation, concerned mostly with violence against women and children, comments in a similar fashion:

Even some intellectual dissidents were supporters of the AKP just because of this army issue and people would think that, at least, they are not criminals. Because all previous governments, especially in the 1990s, were

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3 Marija Krstić conducted sixteen interviews with twelve protesters between the second half of June and end of July, 2013. The respondents came from the following movements and groups:
1. LambdaIstanbul (LGBTI)
2. Anti-capitalist Muslims (Anti-Kapitalist Müslümanlar)
3. Purple Roof (Mor Çatı)
4. Human Rights Association (İnsan Hakları Derneği)
5. SPOD (LGBTI)
both corrupt and connected with some inner state murders, especially of Kurdish people.

Indeed, in the past eleven years of AKP government, those who had previously benefitted from the modernisation process have had difficulties in grasping the ways in which Erdoğan's government has managed to improve the level of social welfare for the previously invisible majorities. Members of the privileged classes would not notice how people's lives have changed since the price of a simple medication dropped from 100 to 10 liras. Although the health system has not been changed radically, the reform was a serious one. This was followed by free textbooks for pupils in primary and high schools and then substantial stipends for university students.4

The activists interviewed in Gezi Park, while acknowledging the importance of the trigger events in 2013, also spoke about the measures that the AKP had started introducing since the mid-to-late-2000s, which they deem as alarming and contradicting its earlier pledges to work for democratic change. The ban on public assembly on Taksim Square came under the pretext of possible accidents that might occur due to the construction works on the square. Despite the ban, trades union groups vowed to mark May Day in Taksim. Subsequently, the subway, bus and ferry services across the Bosphorus were partially suspended and bridges were closed down to prevent large groups from gathering in Taksim. Some 20,000 police officers were deployed to the city centre, subsequently throwing tear gas on the demonstrators and using water cannons. The day after the May Day violence, the prime minister declared that no gatherings were to be allowed from that time on İstiklal Avenue – the shopping and promenade artery of Istanbul.

While the environmental activists who started the Gezi Park protest soon after its onset became a minority in the growing mass of activists and supporters, the reasons for coming to the protest have become increasingly diversified and articulated in broader political terms.

A 30-year old LGBTI activist and the volunteer of LambdaIstanbul notes how the ban on the May Day gathering was absurd:

On May Day, it is traditional – everybody comes to protest. It is mainly for the workers, but it is a very meaningful thing. We wanted to gather in Taksim, but they [the government] told us that we cannot, because there

is construction and we might get hurt. But with the tear gas and water cannons they hurt more people than the construction sites.

Another activist of LambdaIstanbul, a 39-year old woman, observes that due to a number of violent clashes between the police and protestors throughout the month of May, a growing number of previously quiescent people stopped being afraid to take to the streets and clash with the police:

During May, they [the police] attacked all kinds of activists, but also those who were not affiliated with them. So, people who would come to Taksim with their friends to have fun, they would all smell the tear gas. So, I believe they [people] started to get angry and they started to feel – ok, it’s not a nice thing, but you can handle it [the tear gas]. It’s not a nice thing to smell it or to cough. But you can bear it, it’s not like you are dying. It’s not that you have to be afraid of it. People started to learn this during May, I believe.

The by now notorious way in which the Turkish media failed to report on the events and police violence in the Gezi Park gave impetus to more people to become sympathetic to and join the protests:

I started to question myself – if they [the media] do this in the Western part of Turkey, where people are more educated, more intellectual, more aware of what’s going on, ok, what the hell was going on in the Eastern part [where there is a permanent war with Kurdish rebels]? I said to myself: Cem, you have to accept something now – the media are two-faced. I knew it before but I couldn't accept it. And it helped us actually. Without the media, we started to exchange our ideas through different channels. We started to ask questions to each other. That was actually incredible. We started to learn what is really going on in Turkey, in general, while gathering in Gezi Park.

A series of laws and debates, which specifically affect the private lives of women, were perceived by the protesters as both anti-democratic and infringements on the private sphere: the law that bans caesarean sections, except in cases where the woman’s health is in danger, attempts to drastically restrict abortion rights and Erdoğan’s infamous call to women to stay at home with the ‘mandatory’ three children, accompanied by his disapproval of childcare centres. One of the respondents (from the group against domestic violence):
This is now [...] interfering in people’s lives, especially women’s lives [...] I think this is also linked to why lots of women attended the protests [...]. Telling women how many children to give birth to, interfering with their rights to give birth with C-Sections or to have an abortion, etc. People feel like the state is trying to get into their houses and this bothers them a lot.

A 23-year old graduate student, a religious covered woman, states:

We, Turkish women, are fed up with others speaking for us and telling us that we can be just two things – women who are afraid that someone will put a headscarf on us, or women afraid that someone will take it off.

The rapid gentrification of the city and the accompanying expulsion of the poor residents from the city centre became issues that were highlighted in the interviews as linking the hypocrisy of the government’s rhetoric of religious piousness to the authoritarian control of urban spaces and the free rein given to real estate investors:

The money obtained from the selling of public property goes to the pockets of the small economic elite and power holders, and those who had to be relocated in this process are left on their own. They [the government] are selling everything and they are changing our daily lives and spaces we got used to into something else. It’s like they are taking our memories from us [...]. They change your environment without asking you.

Finally, outrage at the increasing authoritarian stance of the prime minister brought to the protests those who are not commonly defined (in the Western mainstream discourse on ‘new social movements’) as ‘leftist’ or dedicated to the rights of individuals. A 30-year old member of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims from Ankara:

We have a very hierarchical political system, so instead of people being heard from below to the top, all the decisions are taken from top to down. [...] We always hear some very small group, or in certain cases only one person – the prime minister – make all the decisions, and then he imposes them on the population.

Another member of the Anti-capitalist Muslims, a man in his mid-30s, tells how the Gezi Park experience of being against authoritarianism contributed to a new sense of tolerance and helped overcome partisan animosities:
In the first week when we could go to the park, nationalists wanted to come there, and racists wanted to come there. These were very hard times for us. But God changed all of them. Racists became non-racist people. How can it be? I don’t know. Seeing others, they changed their idea. They didn’t come there to change their ideas, of course, but they changed ... But as you saw, everywhere in the park there were [Turkish] flags, which are a nationalist symbol. And there was a picture of Mustafa Kemal [ Atatürk] everywhere. But I think they changed their idea [referring to Kemalists/nationalists]. When they came there, young [Kemalist] people didn’t know anything about protesting. They just knew some slogans like ‘We are the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal.’ The only march they knew was the nationalist march. But, in the second week, they became very friendly people. We were a commune […]. I know some people who drink a lot. Ok, I accepted them like that, and they knew that I was a Muslim, and they accepted me as well. And it was excellent, I think.

Here is how one of the respondents, again a member of Anti-capitalist Muslims, explains the sources of his generation’s powerlessness by referring to the legacies of the military rule:

We were considered by our parents as apolitical individuals, like they went through this, especially in 1970s. People killed each other on the streets because of the ideology, because of the political alignments, and they were manipulated by the real actors behind the scene. And we were always told: ‘Don’t go out to the streets, don’t protest, go to the university, find a job with a good salary, and then get married, establish a family, live a peaceful life, don’t worry about politics, leave it to them.’ We were raised with these constant warnings. People were afraid of gathering in non-governmental organisations, they were afraid of protesting in the streets, of any kind of political activity, but on 31 May, all these warnings were left behind, all these advices were left behind, […] and nothing will be the same from now on. I think that this is the main thing that the Gezi Park movement achieved. I think that now, people will be more courageous, more willing to join organisations which more or less represent their own ideas, and if they do so, if this can be done massively, then I think that the protests will gain a different momentum, and it will be more difficult for the government to suppress and manipulate them.

While one could get the impression that the protests were overtly against the current government or anti-Erdoğan, calling him to resign, this, in fact,
never became a general idea or the main goal of the protest. It was perceived that the resignation of the government would not change anything. Instead, it was the political system that should undergo some changes.

An LGBTI activist and member of SPOD (Social Policies Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association or Sosyal Politikalar Cinsiyet Kimliği ve Cinsel Yönelim Çalışmaları Derneği, an NGO for ‘equality and human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people’), does not find it problematic if the AKP government stays in power since there seems to be no alternative:

There is a popular slogan: ‘Tayyip should quit!’ I have never supported it, I have never shouted it. I can even say that Tayyip Erdoğan still has more potential to create more democracy in Turkey comparing to I don’t know who. The problem is that there is no alternative to create that kind of balance. Of course, he is quite anti-democratic. Although Tayyip leads toward an almost authoritarian regime, he at least has the popular support of 50 per cent. Let’s say, 40 per cent now. Probably the ideal would be to convince him to be more democratic.

Another LGBTI activist agrees that Erdoğan’s legitimacy cannot be questioned, but he also wants the prime minister to be more democratic:

I don’t want him to be my prime minister, but so many people wanted him and that’s ok with me. It is legitimate. But I want him to consider my opinion too. He is also my prime minister, but he doesn’t want it. [...] He may stay there by exercising a real democracy. He was elected because he was using the word ‘democracy’ quite a lot.

To sum up, while the majority of protesters did not envision the goal of overthrowing the government (as most of them viewed the elections as fair and legitimate), AKP rule is increasingly perceived as abandoning its course of democratic reforms: democracy is seen as incompatible with the rampant subjugation of city spaces to profit interest, with the use of violence against peaceful demonstrators and the entrenchment of a militarist, patriarchal and paternalistic discourse and, in particular, with what is seen as a one-man rule.

In the segment that follows, we aim to compare the Gezi Park case to the protests in Bosnia-Herzegovina, i.e. the relationship between the failure of political and social reforms and the recent protests over the issuance of personal ID numbers.
The Common Denominator of the Protests in Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina

In the decade that followed the signing of the Dayton agreement in 1995 and the constitutional arrangement that ended the war, the international actors succeeded, on several significant levels, in developing and enforcing a fundamental political structure in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Relying on the Bonn Powers, the Office of the High Representative ruled the use of common state symbols, a single currency, common car licence plates, a single army and state police force. However, as Jasmin Mujanović (2013) observes:

Since 2006, reforms have stagnated and the international community has consistently shown unwillingness to confront local belligerents, even as chauvinist rhetoric and obstructionist tactics reach levels not seen since the war. [...] [W]e have witnessed only retrenchment and the hardening of the oligarchy’s rule. No significant reforms have been enacted since then, while the EU’s policy towards the country has dissolved into complete nonsense. Deadlines are repeatedly issued, never to be met or enforced, while the only ‘local partners’ the Union is willing to engage with remain the same political big men. Civil rights groups, NGOs and protest movements remain actively marginalized, by both local and international officials.

Research conducted in 2008 on ethnic distancing in Bosnia-Herzegovina shows that there is a deterioration of inter-ethnic accord and communication across ethnic lines, i.e. there was a greater acceptance of Bosniaks by Serbs and vice versa in 2002 than was the case in 2008! Top-down political agendas seem to be, once again, crucial movers of the sense of peaceful coexistence among the three ethnicities.

Ethno-collective rights in Bosnia-Herzegovina are cultivated at the expense of both individual rights and collective social rights: political representatives cannot act or identify themselves and their programmes outside of the ascribed and fixed national collective body and the homogenised national territory (Mujkić 2011, 26). In a recent survey conducted among 1500 respondents, this problem was implicitly highlighted by the fact that, while over 80 per cent of the respondents defined their main problems as being of an economic nature (unemployment and grim prospects of existing employment, lack of social rights and benefits), they also could not ‘attach’ these grievances to any existing political programmes of the parties for which they vote (Dević 2014). To conclude, in line with Asim
Mujkić, a political-administrative construct that is not engaged in defining and protecting individual rights of all of its citizens throughout its entire territory cannot define and protect any claims for collective rights – since it is not a citizens’ state.

In the light of these characteristics of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a quasi-state, the ending of the ID card number protests is, in fact, less surprising than their mobilisation and (short) survival. On the path towards the EU, Bosnia was encouraged to make the necessary reforms by changing its constitution to allow minority representation in the political process as a condition for membership. This, however, remains the longest-lasting unfinished reform project since the signing of the Dayton Agreement. The Bosnian elites across the ethno-nationalist divides and the EU are unified in systematically dismissing the criticism and activities of local civil society. Bosnia-Herzegovina lacks a ‘normal democratic dynamic’ due to non-existing cooperation between the state and civil society organisations, which ought to be ‘capable of filtering popular demands and making them “political”’.5

The constant conflict of interest between political representatives of three ethnicities brought the whole country to the brink of dysfunction. Besides, the tripartite political system, which requires a complex administrative apparatus with huge numbers of public servants, ‘costs this impoverished country around 66 per cent of its entire budget.’6 Therefore, in this context, it is not surprising that a seemingly trivial administrative issue about ID numbers has given rise to a criticism and civic resistance that spread even across ethnic dividing lines. After all, ‘Bebolucija’ [the protest movement] had a simple goal – to obtain from the government the services the citizens have paid for.7 Not only did the behaviour of the Bosnian politicians, who were continuously engaging in ethnic skirmishes, result in the blockade of the whole system (of which the absurd abolishment of ID numbers was just one aspect), but it even turned out to threaten the very lives of the citizens, as could be seen in the case of two newborns (Belmina and Berina) who needed urgent medical help abroad, yet could not cross the border without issued ID numbers. This showed that such irresponsibility by politicians could have grave consequences for Bosnian citizens whichever ethnicity

they belong to. It seems that the ‘protesters finally found a lowest common denominator’ and that is access to elementary citizen’s rights be they economic, social or political and expressed their discontent with politicians who failed to pursue necessary reforms. Moreover, by adopting a new law on identity numbers, which ought to identify each citizen by their ethnicity, they strived to undermine the common citizenship of Bosnian and Herzegovinians (Keil and Moore 2014, 58).

Not since the beginning of the civil war had such a large and heterogeneous group of protesters taken to the streets of the majority of Bosnian cities. The dysfunctional state, slow implementation of reforms and problematic access to basic citizenship rights concerned the majority of people no matter which ethnicity, political affiliation or class they belonged to. The protests in Turkey also mobilised people from all walks of life: Turkish nationalists (rightist and leftist), ethnic minorities (Kurds, Alevi, Armenians), religious people (predominantly Muslims) and non-religious people, anarchists, feminists, LGBTQI, environmentalists, workers (blue collar and white collar) businessmen, students, unemployed, housewives, retired people and so forth. They all joined the protests to express their dissatisfaction with the government’s increasingly authoritarian politics reflected in recently-passed laws which can greatly influence the private lives of Turkish citizens, dragging them into a more conservative society.

The protests both in Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina broke out and developed unexpectedly. The protesters used several non-institutional, yet peaceful, tactics to make their voices heard, such as civil disobedience, boycotting, ‘occupying’ public spaces, organising citizen forums, etc. They were led by citizen movements, organised and coordinated through social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) and openly rejected any sort of political, national/ethnic or ideological affiliation: ‘Different opposition parties and groups tried to utilize the protests to push their own agenda, but failed to do so effectively in both countries’ (Keil and Moore 2014, 58). If the protests had taken on the real political agenda, they would have probably turned away potential adherents. Their egalitarian character, political significance and effectiveness are, in fact, ‘rooted in’ their ‘public performativity’ (Göle 2013, 12), which could be the reason why they attracted so many previously apolitical actors. Yet, grievances could not have kept so many diverse people together for such a long time without a certain feeling of belonging being created in the meantime. Through their communication, actions and shared

experiences, people created new solidarity bonds because they are all in “this” together.9

The biggest problem lies in the misinterpretation of democracy by the political elites of both countries in question. While the Turkish Prime Minister, Erdoğan, ‘identifies democracy with the rule of the moral majority’ (conservative Muslims) and the wide support for the AKP by almost 50 per cent of the electorate as an expression of ‘national will’ (Taşkın 2008, 66), in Bosnia-Herzegovina the ‘tripartite hegemony of dominant ethnicities’ (Sarajlić 2010, 19) – Muslims, Serbs and Croats – ‘excludes anyone else who does not fit the ruling ethno-political mould’ (Ibid.).10 The populist rhetoric could be seen as an attempt to silence ‘the real plurality of the people’ (Taşkın 2008, 66) by disregarding those who oppose the government’s decisions and even referring to them as marginal or deviants.

However, the protesters in Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina proved once again that ‘citizens and their acceptance of the political system are fundamental’ (Keil and Moore 2014, 62) in true democracies. The people cannot be easily silenced through repressive laws, control of information, intimidation of the media, police violence, ‘downplaying the significance of the protests’11 by emphasising the deviant actions of the protesters, showing the protests as non-representative (Gitlin 2009, 301) as they are allegedly organised by the oppositional party, plotting together with the army against the government in the Turkish case, and by another ethnic camp plotting to split the country in the Bosnian case, etc. Moreover, such authoritarian, repressive and discriminatory policies of both Turkish and Bosnian elites resulted in public outrage, which mobilised citizens of different backgrounds to cross ethnic and societal divides and ‘take their dissatisfaction to the streets’ (Keil and Moore 2014, 62). Although it might seem that the Gezi Park protests and ‘Bebolucija’ are the signs of the failure of democracy in the respective countries, in fact, they express the maturing of a civil society and the creation of a new political space that may give a boost to more participatory democracy.12

10 In terms of Bosnian discriminatory laws the ‘Finci-Sejdić’ case is the most famous. The political rights of two political candidates – Mr. Finci and Mr. Sejdić – were virtually denied as they were banned from running for the state presidency and the House of Peoples (upper house) of the Bosnian Parliament due to their Jewish and Roma origins.
Conclusion

What we may conclude is that these protests were ‘organised’ in quite similar ways and mainly by actors who cannot find their place in the current system of majoritarianism (the ethno-national one in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the religious-partisan one in Turkey). Those actors who cannot take part in the decision-making processes through an official/institutional framework tend to create, through civic struggle, a new political space in order to make their voices heard. What might also appear interesting is that those changes are not the result of Europeanisation or motivated by joining the EU, but rather the outcome of genuine striving for a functional state, direct democracy and respect for human rights.

After long-accumulated grievances, two trivial issues – the issuance of ID numbers and protection of a park – turned out to be the straws that broke the camel’s back and mobilised people, whether through anger or solidarity, to overcome the old divides and disagreements and stand for a more humane and democratic society.

While the protests that occurred in Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina are, most manifestly, the embodiments of a power that acts within civil society, on the margins of the elite power circuits, they had also made demands on the state, signalling that they could influence political changes in the long run. However, these new political subjectivities do not represent anything concrete or materialised in the sense of organisations similar to political parties. They are rather fluid – stemming from the triggering perceptions and an awareness of the potential for acting together, amalgamating in common actions, which then turned to a new awareness of grievances and solidarities across the social field that grew bigger in comparison to the beginning of the protests. As long as the actors are able or willing to maintain their newly established solidarity bonds by coming together, disseminating their ideas, negotiating, collaborating – in a word, strengthening their collective identity – they will be empowered to stand against any authority, to criticise it and possibly pursue a change within the society.

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The incentives and actors of protests in Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina


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