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The reconfiguration of social movements in post-2011 Romania

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ABSTRACT

Since 2011, a series of citizen mobilizations have emerged in Romania, from local replicas of the 'Occupy' movement to the 2017 and 2018 mass protests against corruption. In this article, we develop three arguments for a better understanding of the successive waves of protests that have shaken the Romanian social and political landscape since 2011. First, while each protest has a specific claim and target, the forms of commitments, repertoire of actions and relationship to politics point to clear continuities between protest events that should be analyzed as part of the same cycle of protests. Second, while some analyses have emphasized the specificities of the Romanian context, we maintain that the actors and dynamics of this cycle of protest are simultaneously deeply national, embedded in the mutations of Eastern European civil society, and in resonance with the post-2011 global wave of movements. Third, while it is indispensable to analyze these citizen mobilizations as a whole, it is equally important to understand that they result from the convergence of diverse activist cultures, from left-wing autonomist activists to right-wing citizens and even nationalist militants. Each of these activist cultures has its own logic of action and its vision of democracy and of politics.

In 2017 and 2018, Romania experienced its largest wave of protest since 1990. Hundreds of thousands of citizens took to the streets in all major cities of Romania against the corruption of political elites. The demonstrations reached an unprecedented international resonance for post-communist Romania, inspiring protests in Bulgaria, Albania and France. In this article, we develop three arguments for a better understanding of the 2017 wave of protests in Romania and, more broadly, the reconfiguration of civil society, citizenship and the relationship to institutional politics underway in the country. Firstly, to understand better the 2017 demonstrations, we need to analyse them as part of a cycle of protest that started in 2011 and has fostered a deep reconfiguration of Romanian civil society. The 2017 mobilizations against corruption have their specificities, and some of its actors did not take part in previous protests. However, we highlight clear continuities with previous steps of this cycle of 'citizen protests', particularly when it comes to the claims, forms of commitments and

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repertoire of actions. Secondly, while existing analyses emphasized the specificities of the Romanian context and of the 2017 mobilizations, we show clear resonance with the 'post-2011' global wave of citizen movements. Actors and dynamics of this cycle of mobilization in Romania are simultaneously deeply national, embedded in the mutations of Eastern European civil society, and in resonance with global movements. Thirdly, while it is indispensable to analyze these citizen mobilizations as a whole, it is also essential to understand that they result from a convergence of diverse activist cultures, from left-wing autonomist activists to right-wing citizens and even nationalist militants. Each activist culture has its own logic of action and vision of democracy and politics.

This article draws together the results of research on social movements in Romania conducted by Raluca Abăseacă and on activist cultures in 'post-2011 movements' in 15 countries, which included a short research stay in Romania, by Geoffrey Pleyers. It is based on 45 semi-directed interviews with Romanian activists conducted between 2013 and 2017. We selected the interviewees among activists that were actively involved in protest movements but were not part of the most visible and institutionalized circles of activists and intellectuals, who are usually considered as the representatives of Romanian civil society.

A new cycle of protest

Far from being new, corruption, social inequality and mistrust towards political elites have been major problems in post-communist Romania (Gallagher, 2009) despite changes triggered by the legal reforms to combat corruption in the adhesion process to the European Union (Coman & De Waele, 2007). Anti-corruption rhetoric became prevalent in political debates after the 2004 presidential elections (Hein, 2015). However, despite citizens' mistrust towards political elites and the impoverishment of the population following the transition and the economic crisis, ordinary Romanians did not massively mobilize in the 1990s and 2000s.

The situation changed in 2011, when a series of actions and occupations opened a new cycle of protests (Tarrow, 1997) with activists from different backgrounds who shared forms of organizing, a repertoire of action, protest infrastructure and a cumulative memory of a succession of mobilisations. Unlike the 1989 and 1990 anti-communist mobilizations, in 2011, a large number of protesters began organizing outside of political parties, unions and NGOs. For instance, on 15 October 2011, a few dozen young citizens gathered in a public space in Bucharest to 'talk about politics' as part of the global day of action launched by Occupy Wall Street. On 7 November 2011, seven activists occupied a historic building in Cluj-Napoca, a university town in the West of the country. They protested against a mining project of the 'Roșia Montană Gold Corporation' (RMGC), a Canadian transnational company. From the occupied building, activists denounced the 'lies and disinformation about the RMGC project, the lobbying by the government and the president who defend the interests of a foreign company rather than their own citizens'. They highlighted the devastating impact of the mining project on the environment, the local population, and the archaeological heritage. This action, presented as 'radical' by its organizers, gained public attention and wide media coverage. It also attracted new activists to a 10-year old

struggle initiated by the Roșia Montană rural community and a few national NGOs. Many of the activists interviewed in the following years described the 2011 and 2012 events as 'an awakening' which led to a deep change in their way of thinking and living: 'The year 2011 brought together many young people who hadn't found a place for themselves in this society. It was resistance to everything happening around us. Young people started discussing politics in the bars. Friendships were struck. (...) In the demonstrations, I found others like me who didn't accept the misery that was around us.' (Marius, 27, 14/09/2013, Cluj-Napoca). These direct actions and mobilizations have built solid interpersonal networks among activists, many of whom had no prior activist experience and did not belong to any organization.

The occupation in Cluj-Napoca ignited other mobilizations that exposed the distrust and outrage towards post-1989 elites and political parties. In January 2012, thousands of students, retirees, ultras and NGO activists demonstrated against the centre-right government's project to privatize the healthcare system. For some activists, the demonstrations were an opportunity to protest against the austerity measures adopted by the center-right government in the aftermath of the economic crisis. What came to be known as the 'Romanian Autumn' started in September 2013, this time targeting a centre-left government's plan to authorize gold mining in Roșia Montană. The activist networks forged during the winter of 2011–12 contributed in changing the scale of the mobilization. For four months, 'neighbourhood marches' were organized in Romanian cities to inform and mobilize citizens. It considerably expanded the number of protesters and reached a national audience, eventually leading the government to repeal the bill.

In November 2015, a fire at a nightclub in Bucharest triggered another wave of marches and occupations. Sixty young people died in the tragedy. Thousands of citizens took to the streets to denounce the corrupt political class that granted operating permits without passing the legal procedures and with no concern about people's safety. They eventually forced the social-democrat government to resign. Corruption was already an important issue in the 2013 mobilizations. However, the 2015 mobilizations made anti-corruption a central concern, reaching out to 'ordinary citizens' beyond activist circles and institutionalized civil society organizations.

The centre-left Social Democrat Party's (PSD) decree to decriminalize some forms of corruption, previously punishable by imprisonment, was the spark that started the widest protest wave since 1990 in Romania. On February the 5th 2017, over 600,000 people protested against corruption, obliging the government to abrogate the aforementioned decree. The repeal of the bill on the very same day did not put an end to the protests. Demonstrations continued until 2018, thus showing that beyond this immediate cause, the mobilization were rooted in deep changes in the relationship between citizens and the political sphere and the actors within. The rally organized on August 10th, 2018 in Bucharest and in major cities of Romania to demand the resignation of the social democrat government blamed for its mass corruption followed the line of the 2017 anti-corruption protests. This time, the protest was mostly organized by the Romanian diaspora that traditionally comes back to the country by mid-August. Several of their slogans blamed the corruption of political elites as the root of the economic situation that caused their emigration to Western Europe.

The circle of citizens who took part in protests has considerably expanded, from a few dozen activists in 2011 to hundreds of thousands of citizens in 2017 and 2018. This rise in the number of participants would not have been possible without the cumulative individual and collective learning from previous experience or without the movements' infrastructures (personal and organization networks, online platforms, national and international connections) built in the successive waves of this cycle of protests.

Global resonance, regional evolutions, and national mobilizations

The media have often compared the 2017 demonstrations with the 1989 revolution against the communist regime (e.g. Popescu, 2017). These comparisons and the idea of a 'Romanian exceptionalism' (Tismăneanu, 1997) led to a focus on the national context by journalists and political scientists. However, the emergence, evolution and meanings of the post-2011 movements in Romania rely on local, national, regional and global dynamics.

Romania in the global wave of movements

Resonances of the global wave of protests have been observed at each stage of the cycle of mobilization that started in 2011 in Romania. The activists who sparked the mobilizations in 2011 by occupying the historic building in Cluj-Napoca directly connected their action to international movements. Their Facebook page stated: 'This action joins the Occupy movements mobilizing thousands of people around the world whose starting position is general unhappiness with the failure of the global financial system.' Slogans such as 'Solidarity with Greece', 'against the IMF', 'We are the *Indignados* of Romania' and 'real democracy now' were used in the 2011 and 2012 demonstrations. In 2013, the 'Romanian Autumn' was fostered by the geographic proximity of protest movements underway at the time in Bulgaria and Turkey (Mărgărit, 2016, p. 56). Clear connections to the 'post-2011′ global movements have been visible at four levels: demands and sources of outrage, repertoires of action, movement organization and cultures of activism. The last level will be considered in the second half of this article, while the first three levels can be covered more concisely, as follows.

The *demands* of Romanian activists, the sources of their outrage, and their relationship to democracy reflect in many ways the claims and spirit of the global movement. More than the economic crisis itself, what caused the outrage in Romania, Madrid or New York City (Glasius & Pleyers, 2013) was the way the crisis was managed, the lack of ethics by policy makers, and their collusion with economic and media elites. Romanian activists were shocked by the homogenous discourse of the government and mainstream media in support of the gold mine, which 'mono-polised the debate on television'. Like in Mexico or in Sao Paolo, activists organized an action at the headquarters of the main national broadcasting company to denounce the bias of mass media towards transnational companies. This bias made activists distrust television and overwhelmingly turn to social media, blogs, and civil society websites for information.

The activists borrowed various elements from the *repertoires of action* of international movements. On different occasions, Romanian youth occupied public spaces, inspired by the model used by the Spanish M15 (*indignados*), Occupy Wall Street, and Gezi Park activists. Performances, dances, spectacles, games, use of humour, and other creative direct actions that elucidated hidden conflicts multiplied in the following years. The criticism of mass media led an increasing number of citizens to mistrust television and to keep informed through social media, blogs and activist websites. For instance, the 'Mindbomb project' gathers artists, journalists and writers who compose creative posters that have played a key role in post-2011 local mobilizations, giving posters once more a place in Romanian activist cultures. Another example concerns the performances and symbolic direct actions, such as the 'die in' organized to denounce the mining project, in which 400 participants in Cluj and 50 in Bucharest lay on the ground to mime death by cyanide poisoning. Western alter-globalization activists had also used these kinds of creative direct actions. However, in Romania, the emigration of activists from anti-globalization networks of the 2000s and the repression of organizers of the mobilization against the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest (Gagyi, 2013) generated the disbanding of most activist groups. It created a sharp discontinuity in the transmission of memory and repertoire of actions between activists of the 2000s and the post-2011 movements (Abăseacă, 2018). The resonance of the Occupy movements with the mobilizations in Romania thus contributed to spreading repertoires of action and activist cultures.

The Romanian movement's *modes of organization* are also similar to those of many movements of the 2010s global wave of protests. Mistrust towards traditional organizations led most activists to organize in networks, creating spaces of experience and flexible coordination for individual citizens, many of whom had no prior activist experience. Activist networks question hierarchy as a feature of the institutionalized civil society and set up more open and participatory decision processes and, in some cases, regular assemblies. The direct influence of the occupied squares in Spain and the US was also felt in the organization of thematic working groups to deal with legal issues, media relations or international communication that were set up in various occasions, notably during the 2013 'Romanian autumn'. Social media and the Internet are widely used to spread messages, share opinion and organize protests.

Some foreign activists and Romanian activists with an international experience have played the role of 'brokers' (Tarrow, 2005) in the diffusion of the global movement practices and ideas. For instance, some Romanian activists participated in the Gezi Park mobilization in 2013, acquiring activist know-how, a sense of alter-activist and cosmopolitan practices (Caraus & Parvu, 2017): 'It is clear that we have many things in common with the Turks, like the non-violent nature of our mobilizations. On the other hand, Turk activists have joined forces against fascism. I had a hard time getting used to that, because you will never see that in Bucharest.' (Mihai, 33, 17/11/2013, Bucharest). However, as Agnes Gagyi (2013) shows, global symbols and registers of signification are not simply adopted unaltered by Eastern European demonstrators but appropriated by actors who translate them into national and local culture, history, and practices.

The reconfiguration of civil society and the rise of new actors in Central and Eastern Europe

The regional scale is just as important as the global one, as recent mobilizations in Romania are part of a deep transformation process of post-communist civil societies in Central and Eastern Europe. The NGOs that dominated civil society after the transition to democracy were quickly co-opted by the institutional political system. Various NGOs were hit by corruption scandals, which contributed to spreading the image of an elite cut off from ordinary people. At the beginning of the 2010s, citizens' movements and less formalized actors have emerged and have taken an increasing space in most of the countries in the region (Jacobsson, 2015). This included informal activist groups, community organizations (Polanska, 2016), small-scale urban movements, and other actors characterized by a distancing from political parties, an aversion towards institutionalization and the NGO system, and more asserted social and political claims. Moreover, various countries of the region, including Bulgaria (Barouh, 2015), have seen the rise of citizens' protests with strong creative and expressive dimensions.

Placing the Romanian movements within the regional context avoids simplistic projections of Western movements onto local movements. While they share many features, significant differences should also be taken into account, particularly in two areas. First, the distinction between progressive and conservative actors is less obvious in Eastern Europe than it is in Western countries. In their 1982 analysis of the Polish union *Solidarnosc*, Alain Touraine's team showed that, while in Western countries social problems are relatively independent of national problems, class and national consciousness blend in Eastern Europe (Touraine, Dubet, Wieviorka, & Strzelecki, 1982). This statement remains largely valid. Second, the generational effect is particularly significant in the region. Today's young people are the first generation that did not live under the communist regime. They grew up with the 'hopes of the transition'. Hence, what lays at the heart of their mobilizations is not so much fighting neoliberalism and social precarity as it was for their counterparts in Western Europe (Flesher Fominaya & Cox, 2013). They were rather fueled by disappointed hopes in democratic and liberal transition processes and by the ties of the political elites with the former communist regime. These regional particularities and the connection often established between anti-communism, pro-capitalism and the myth of technocracy are reflected in the appeals to the European Union to support their struggle against corruption. On the 27th of February 2017, demonstrators formed a giant European flag in Bucharest. Polish activists had also brandished European flags during demonstrations against their conservative government in 2016, as did Ukrainians in Maydan square a few years earlier (Emeran, 2017).

There are striking contrasts in the evaluation of the EU between activists from Southern and West Europe is striking. Western activists denounce 'the power of Brussels' and its neoliberal policies while aiming to establish a counter-power to control and counteract the European Commission (Della Porta, 2015; Pleyers, 2015). Their Eastern European counterparts also underline the need of counter-democracy (Rosanvallon, 2006); but, for them, the counter-power capable of monitoring and curbing the crony and authoritarian tendencies of their own government is the European Union.

'Europe is the best thing that happened to us. Not because we had to make many sacrifices to enter, but because our country is so corrupt and at least, the EU forces our politicians to do something. Without the EU they would have stolen even more.' (interview with an activist, Bucharest).

While alter-activist youth in Western Europe criticize the limits of liberal democracy and denounce a 'democracy without choice', most mobilized Romanian youth demand 'western' liberal democracy, believing that one of the main promises of the transition remains unfulfilled. This explains a slogan often chanted on the streets of Romanian cities in 2017, 'we want a country just like abroad', in the continuity of the anti-communist dissidents (Meardi, 2005).

A Romanian movement

The global and regional dimensions of these protests should not obfuscate their national character. In fact, one of the main features of the global wave of 'post-2011 movements' is precisely the importance of its national dimension (Glasius & Pleyers, 2013, p. 549). The Romanian flag, national anthem, and symbols of the 1989 anti-communist revolution (flags with holes, the symbols of the anti-communist Revolution, prayers) were present in most of the post-2011 mobilisations in Romania.

The prominence of the national dimension rose in the 2017 and 2018 protests, as the corruption of the *national* political elites has become the major source of outrage. The discontent with all political parties and the critique of neoliberalism developed during the protests between 2011 and 2013 gave way to more targeted criticisms of the ruling Social Democrat Party (PSD) in 2017. The slogan 'PSD, the red plague' replaced 2012 and 2013 slogans such as 'different parties, same misery' or 'all parties steal in rotation'. More broadly, the international context of the 2008 economic crisis and references to European anti-austerity movements, the opposition to the neoliberal measures of the 2012 protests had little bearing in 2017. The social backgrounds of demonstrators reflect these evolutions. The 2012 protests emerged in a context of deep economic frustration that mobilized a wide range of social groups, including retirees, unemployed people, nationalists and the middle-class. On the other hand, the first studies (CeSIP, 2017) of 2017 protests suggest a very different profile of the demonstrators: 83% voted in the last elections and 59% did so for the centre-right. Most have university degrees and are middle class and our interviews confirm that 'young entrepreneurs' (see below) with neoliberal or right-wing political stances played a major role in 2017.

Five activist cultures

The hundreds of thousands of citizens who took part in the protests and rallies share a sense of distrust towards political elites and a will to take a more active part in the functioning of their national democracy by 'monitoring' policy makers (Keane, 2009). They also share a similar repertoire of actions and way of organizing, as suggested by their preference of informal networks to institutionalized organizations. They all gather in protests against corruption, a governmental bill, a political scandal or a mining project. However, below the apparent unity of mass protests, the citizens who converged in mass rallies are actually moved by distinct and partly opposed worldviews and political programs.

Our research points to five main cultures of activism among the citizens who have converged in successive waves during this cycle of protest in Romania: progressive alter-activists, the democratic right (free market supporters or 'liberal entrepreneurs'), expert activists (including NGOs and supporters of traditional political organizations), and nationalists. By 'activist culture', we mean consistent sets of visions of the world, democracy, the goals of the movement, its role, its adversaries and the practices in line with these perspectives (Escobar, 1992; Pleyers, 2010). These activist cultures exist neither in pure forms nor in isolation. They emerge and consolidate around local projects, transform through actions and projects and mix with other activist cultures. Heuristically, it is nevertheless useful to define them as analytically separate types.

Alter-activism

Individualized and solidarity-based political involvement

Alter-activism (Pleyers, 2010) is an activist culture that prioritizes individualized but strongly altruist and solidarity-based commitment. Alter-activists denounce the social, cultural and environmental ravages of neoliberalism. They develop individualized forms of activism where they express their creativity and personality. The core of their concept of activism and social change lies in the defense of lived experience (Habermas' *Lebenswelt*) and in the consistency between the movement's practices and values. Alter-activists view prefigurative activism and resistance to capitalism as intrinsically linked.

Instead of marching behind union banners, Romanian alter-activists write their own placards, expressing both their messages and their distrust of traditional forms of representations advocated by political parties and unions deemed 'bureaucratic', 'hierarchical', 'opportunist' and the successors of the communist regime. They conceive democracy as a demand addressed to political leaders but also as a personal requirement, a value that must be embedded in one's practices and way of connecting to others.

> 'The first actions we participated in after 2011 changed something in me. (…) I became aware that, when you begin to be an activist, you cannot stop being one, and that this invades all of daily life, your entire way of consuming and living.' (Marius, 27, 14/09/2013, Cluj-Napoca)

> 'Our activism must involve happiness. The community must show that our way of living brings satisfaction, pleasure. You can choose to be one of those who instrumentalizes others to get something, to take their money, or you can reject this capitalist profit-based system and try to build relations and spaces that function in a different way from the rest of the economic system.' (Carolina, 23, 27/11/2013, Bucharest)

Local embedding and spaces of experience

Mostly from educated, middle-class backgrounds, Romanian alter-activists translate global issues into local spaces. While inspired by transnational movements, they are still particularly interested in local experiences and resistances. Although this culture of activism becomes visible to the broad public during big demonstrations, it actually grows in local projects such as alternative cultural centres, *Biblioteca Alternativă, Claca, Spatiul DIY, Centrul Sofia Nadejde, Acasa*. Dozens of similar autonomous, self-managed initiatives rooted in neighbourhoods' alternative spaces sprang up after 2010.

The interest of alter-activists in local issues and their quest for social and personal relationship rooted in conviviality put them in opposition to both top-down communist projects and elitist and institutionalized NGO civil society. Largely from urban backgrounds, alter-activist youth and autonomists are often the carriers of a new relationship between cities and the countryside. In the same way that international alter-activists took the Zapatista indigenous and peasant struggles for autonomy as major references (Pleyers, 2010), some Romanian alter-activists are inspired by horizontal, self-organized peasant cooperativesthat they see as concrete alternatives to both state communism and the post-1989 neoliberal policies.

> 'We have imported a lot of things from the West and it often lacks a real basis here [in Romania]. Thus, we must begin by decolonizing our mind and our emancipatory practices. In the countryside, we have maintained the idea of community, a form of cohesion. Building on these experiences, we can be more radical than Western European activists, because we are not distorted by certain theories and fixed stances.' (Alex, 29, 04/11/2013, Cluj-Napoca)

Solidarity, interest in local practices and political thoughts have also motivated alter-activists to engage with local mobilizations of the Roma, notably with their struggles for housing rights and against forced evictions. In 2014, alter-activists created the Common Front for Housing Rights (FCDL) to support families threaten by eviction. It calls for immediate solutions by policy makers but, unlike existing NGOs, it also aims at creating autonomous alternatives to the current economic system:

> 'We are not only fighting for rights, but also for a collectivization of resources. We want people to fight for themselves and their community. We had to collaborate with some NGOs when people were evicted but we don't accept anyone as an ally. Unlike NGOs, in our group, we don't think about its results in terms of effectiveness and public policies. Our 'effectiveness', if you want to use the term, lies in the number of people who organize with us and in our capacity to decentralize.' (Veda, 29, 25/10/2014, Bucharest)

Anti-authoritarians and anarcho-punks

Anti-authoritarian and autonomist youth mix most elements of this alter-activist culture (rooted in local projects, antifascism, occasional participation in large demonstrations, etc.) with a youth subculture (Feixa, 1998) constructed around punk music and the redeployment of some forms of anarchism. The punk scene has been a crucible of a radical activist sub-culture in Romania since the 1980s. It has played an important role in socializing activists and in providing spaces to express and spread their revolt against the repressive communist state, nationalist tendencies and, after 1990, against neoliberal reforms (Piotrowski, 2013).

> 'There were many fascists in Romania in the 2000s and public opinion was very tolerant towards them. It was difficult to listen to punk music. Our group came together first as a matter of self-defence, as a way we could listen to our music.' (Bogdan, 32, 20/12/2013, Timisoara)

Though not particularly numerous in the post-2011 demonstrations, anorcho-punks played an important role in various occasions. In Cluj-Napoca, both in 2011 and in 2013, they initiated the organization of community meetings based on horizontal practices and consensus-based decision-making processes. These collectives pulled

away from the rest of the protestors after what they saw as the 'take-over of the demonstrations by authoritarian and nationalist groups'.

The democratic right and young entrepreneurs

While alter-activists and autonomists are unequivocally on the left of the political spectrum, citizens with more right-wing (neo)liberal stances were also prominent actors in the post-2011 mobilizations. The activist culture that we may qualify as '(*neo)liberal entrepreneurs*'[1] has been particularly active during the 2017 and 2018 anti-corruption protests, in which bank directors and employers took to the streets alongside their employees. In Romania, opposition to neoliberalism and socio-economic claims has not been the common ground of post-2011 protestors. The word 'neoliberalism' is actually rarely used in interviews as many activists maintain it is 'not adapted to the Romanian reality':

> 'In Romania, there is a mafia which is unrelated to capitalism, neoliberalism and imperialism. In France, we could say that ideologies are significant. In Romania, the problem is not neoliberalism, but the immorality of the political elite.' (Dragos, 7/11/2013, Bucharest)

The key concept mobilized in this '(neo-)liberal entrepreneur' culture of activism is the 'rule of law'. These citizens are particularly vigilant when it comes to the legality of public action. They combine the denunciation of the corruption of the political elite with a critique of 'crony capitalism', a 'perverted form of capitalism that benefits the political class'. In interviews, 'liberal entrepreneurs' define themselves as 'people who have made something of their lives and have a professional and material comfort, who have never received charity from anyone, and don't believe in the PSD's orders.'

The young 'liberal entrepreneurs' share many elements with the alter-activist culture, notably when it comes to individualized forms of commitment, the importance of personal ethics, distrust towards political actors and institutional civil society, online activism and creative actions. For instance, in 2017, they set up a 'flash mob' in which hundreds activists used their cell phones to form giant Romanian and European flags. Like alter-activists, they firmly distinguish themselves from traditional civil society organizations and favour activist networks. In 2012, small entrepreneurs and employers created the informal network '*Together 2012*' to 'defend the value of the private sector productivity' and to denounce the 'obese public sector'.[2] The network 'Geeks for Democracy' was founded in 2016 by people 'who recognize themselves as part of the business world' and who participate in demonstrations on an individual basis as 'ordinary citizens'. The group is open to 'everyone who wants to use knowledge acquired in the business world for civic projects.' Its activists share the principles of human rights, the rule of law, a pro-Europe orientation, a claim for more civic participation, the entrepreneurial spirit, and a distrust of hierarchical organizations and formal civil society organizations. In 2017, young 'liberal entrepreneurs' set up their own networks and meetings to promote their entrepreneurial spirit. The involvement of actors who enjoy a certain professional and economic status contrasts with Western European movements and mobilizations (Andretta, Della Porta, 2012).

However, the 'liberal entrepreneur activists' strongly differ from alter-activists in their defence of the connection between democratization and capitalism. During the

citizens' forums of '*Uniți Salvăm*' (United, We Save) held in September and December 2013, many interventions stressed the demand for transparency of the institutions and presented the citizens' mobilization as a revolt against 'the corrupt social state, not against capitalism'. '*Neoliberal entrepreneurs*' do not challenge austerity measures and are actually in favour of more flexible labour laws.

Calls for a downsizing of the welfare state were present since the start of the cycle of protest in 2011. However, they remained relatively marginal until 2017, after which they increasingly gained visibility during the anti-corruption mobilizations, notably with the opposition to the increase of the minimum wage. Some activists even moved from anti-state to anti-poor discourses:

> 'All these people are out there in the streets only to demand 10 more Euros, as though we were still living under a communist regime. The quality of people changes when they come with socio-economic demands, so I don't want to be associated with them (the retirees)'. (Mircea, 24, 7/11/2013, Bucharest)

Expert activists

Most Romanian NGOs and actors of the institutionalized civil society have lost their contentious role as there have been caught up in the competition for funding and transformed by professionalization, institutionalization and de-politization processes in the aftermath of the political transition (Jacobsson & Saxonburg, 2013). Most post-communist civil society actors avoid popular mobilizations and seek to achieve their objectives through direct contacts with politicians and policy makers (Petrova & Tarrow, 2007). However, some NGO actors and civil society experts have maintained contentious stances and have actively contributed to the post-2011 movements. For instance, some 'expert activists' played a decisive role in the campaign against the Roşia Montană mining project through their analysis of the potential impacts of the project on the environment and the health of the local population. They built their arguments on the decisions of international tribunals and on the analysis of similar mines operating in Latin America. On this basis, they initiated petitions to challenge the project and took part in the demonstrations. Their collaborations with expert activists from Latin America and Western Europe were crucial both in building scientific expertise and in organizing the campaign:

> 'The presence of foreign activists was very important because, when we began the Save Roşia Montană campaign, we didn't start from zero. Stefanie [a German activist who worked for *The Ecologist* magazine] taught us that we should distance ourselves from political parties and people who wanted to divide us. Stefanie knew many activists in Western Europe and she was able to put activists from Western Europe and post-communist spaces in touch. At the beginning, I didn't know how to organize a grassroots campaign and the examples we had in Romania didn't impress me. I don't know if we would have succeeded in organizing this campaign without her.' (Tudor, 34, 5/09/2013, Cluj-Napoca)

Two years later, in 2015, members of the campaign against the gold mining project created the online petition platform 'De.click' that combines expert reports and incentives for citizen participation. During the anti-corruption mobilizations of 2017, 'expert

activists' and NGOs professionals set up 'citizen workshops' to inform and train people about the core principles of democracy, the constitution, access to information, political communication, and opportunities for active participation in political life.

Union activists and political party activists

Romanian trade unions have lost part of their influence upon state policies after the first wave of privatizations in the 1990s (Varga & Freyberg-Inan, 2015). In 2010, the mobilizations led by the unions failed to stop the center-right government's austerity measures and pay cuts for civil servants. In the following years, trade unions remained focused on specific socio-economic claims and seldom took part in the post-2011 civic protests. However, while their organizations remained distant, union activists took part in various mobilizations in their own name, sometimes playing an important role in the organization and diffusion of protests.

Political parties also participated in or interfered with some of the post-2011 mobilizations. For instance, in 2013, some of the activists of the 'Uniți Salvăm' network decided to join the new centre-right party 'M10', a decision that eventually led to the fragmentation of the network. The opposition party 'Save Romania Union' (Uniunea Salvati România) was founded in 2015 by people who took part in various local protests. They participated in the 2017 anti-corruption mobilizations as a party.

Nationalists and far right

Nationalist groups and platforms, often close to the ultras, fundamentalist orthodox trends, networks against the LGBT community and even the far-right party called 'The New Right' also joined various post-2011 protests. In 2013, the nationalists protested alongside civil society experts and alter-activists against the goldmine, denouncing the stranglehold of a foreign company on Romanian resources.

As it was the case in the 1990 (Cesereanu, 2003), many Romanian activists are more permissive of nationalism and far-right than in Western Europe:

> 'I do not know what you mean by 'nationalism'. In Romania, nationalism and anti-Semitism are not problems (...) I have friends that say they are Nazis, make Nazi signs and read Hitler, but that would help me when I need. So, I have no problem with their views.' (Cristina, 34, expert activist, 13/09/2013).

The populist outlook can drift towards less democratic practices and ideas that are strongly rejected by Western progressive movements but are accepted in Romania 'in order to avoid dividing the group'. For instance, during the 2013 protests, the *Uniți Salvăm* coalition refused to condemn the attack initiated by nationalist groups against a young activist showing anti-fascist banners and symbols.

The presence of nationalist groups, messages and slogans during the post-2011 mobilizations resonates with recent movements in other post-communist country, notably in the Ukrainian Maydan movement (Ischchenko, 2016). It also echoes the participation in the 1990 anti-communist protests of actors who borrowed elements of the legionary movement, a far-right movement of the inter-war period (Verdery, 1995).

Convergences and mistrust

Social media and more individualized forms of citizens' participation have enabled new and more fluid forms of confluence and organization among civil society actors in Romania. These convergences leave more space for personal connections and for affinity groups. They allow an escape from civil society organizations, which these movements partially oppose. Such convergences are both an outcome of the post-2011 wave of protests and the infrastructure that made it possible.

Flexible convergence networks have proven able to gather citizens beyond traditional cleavages and have been major actors of the 'post-2011′ mobilizations. For instance, the convergence *Uniți Salvăm* ('United, we save') gathered alter-activists, entrepreneurs, and nationalists and played a key role in the protests against the gold mine project. Founded as a temporary alliance of individuals against the Rosia Montană project, it has conducted other activities and campaigns after 2013. Likewise, the platform '*Corruption kills*' that played a major role in the 2015 and 2017 protests was created online with the aim of informing, publishing calls to action and coordinating citizens mobilized against corruption. Its members present themselves as 'young and less young individuals, coming from different professional backgrounds and united by a common desire to live in a better Romania'.

Convergences in networks and mass protest should however not hide deep, mutual misunderstandings and tensions that have marked the post-2011 citizen protests, notably between alter-activists and liberal entrepreneurs on one side, and unions and political parties on the other. A survey (Sandu, Stoica, & Umbres, 2014) shows that 90% of Romanian youth distrust the existing political parties and the 'traditional ways of doing politics'. Some young activists we interviewed ironize on the 'manipulated citizens' that constitute the bases of political parties and unions, those 'people brought by buses to demonstrations and don't know why they protest'. This mistrust also finds it roots in the memory of the violent demonstrations of the miners' unions in support of the Social-Democratic party and against the anti-communist mobilizations in the first months of the democratic transition in 1990.

In 2012, supporters of the Social Democratic Party clashed with activists who wanted to organize themselves outside of political parties and challenged the political class with slogans such as 'All parties steal by rotation' and 'All parties are the same trash'. In 2013, conflicts broke out with unions and political parties in favour of the Rosia Montană gold mine, arguing for the economic benefits and the jobs it would generate. In 2017, the supporters of the Social Democratic Party organized a counter-demonstration in front of the presidential palace to support the government, while an anti-corruption protest was held in front of the government building.

In most countries, the post-2011 movements have articulated social, economic, cultural and political demands, overpassing the analytical divide between 'old social movements', centered on economic demands and 'new social movements' centered on the politics of recognition, post-materialist values and identities (Glasius & Pleyers, 2013; Grasso & Giugni, 2016). In Romania, the distinction between the generations socialized in the communist regime focusing on materialist demands and young people who demand the respect of rule of law and partly defend the principles of the free market, remains a strong divide that was particularly prominent during the 2017 protests against corruption.

Another feature of the post-2011 mobilizations in Romania is the misunderstanding and mistrust between citizens who remain marked by their involvement in the 1989–1990 revolution and the new generation of citizens and activists. Many of the older generation of militants, as well as most nationalist activists, prefer more structured organizations rather than individualized and networked forms of activism that have dominated recent protests.

> 'I'm not like the other activists that you see here. I am 45 years old and in 1989 and 1990, I had a rifle with a bullet in the barrel. At that time, thousands of people took the streets because they were desperate. Nowadays, very few activists get involved by conviction. Most of them take the streets only because it has become trendy. As long as the youth of former communist countries imitate what is happening in the West, nothing will change. (…) Today activists are investing too much energy in the pursuit of horizontality.' (Andrei, 45, 12/09/2013)

Conclusion

Recent mobilizations in Romania suggest a convergence of democratic dynamics in the East and the West, notably on the rising importance of protest and 'monitory democracy' (Keane, 2009), even though the 'West' remains as much an object of idealization as of dissent. The current wave of citizens' movements in Romania is part of the global wave of protest that has spread across the world since 2011. Its claims, forms of commitments and repertoire of actions and its citizens' mistrust to structured organization and political elites resonate with protests and occupations on all continents. The five activist cultures identified in Romania have been partly shaped by their interactions with this global wave of movements.

While the reconfiguration of civil society currently underway in Romania cannot be understood without taking into account this 'post-2011′ global wave of movements, simplistic projections of analyses of "global movements" onto a specific country are misleading. Methodological nationalism and methodological globalism have to be equally avoided, as global, regional and national contexts and actors have all shaped the reconfiguration of citizens' movements in Romania. In this perspective, as much as the global wave of movements helps us understand the resurgence of citizen movements in post-2011 Romania, the latter is full of lessons for social movement scholars far beyond Central and Eastern Europe.

First, successive citizen movements in Romania after 2011 show that the global wave of 'post-2011′ movements is far from being over and needs to be analyzed through a broader time/chronological framework. Although limited in their range and in the number of mobilized citizens, the 2011 protests in Romania have opened a cycle of mobilizations. Each protest campaign has contributed to building the infrastructure for future protests, including inter-personal relationships, organizational networks, experience of direct actions and cultures of activism based on active citizenship and more contentious relationship towards policy.

Secondly, Western analysts tend to focus on innovative alter-activists that simultaneously oppose the communist model, Western neoliberalism, and the NGO-ization of Romanian civil society, dominated by considerations of funding and individual professional careers, and come with a more general critique of the transition (Kopecek & Wcislik, 2015). However, most of the large mobilizations that shook the country and

particularly the 2017 protests against corruption show a more complex panorama where various cultures of activism and political orientations converge in mass protest but develop different claims and ideologies. While the concept of 'cycle of protest' usually focuses on actors on one side of the political spectrum, post-2011 protests in Romania show that a cycle of protests opened by progressive citizens mobilizations also provides spaces, opportunities and a repertory of actions that may be implemented by neoliberal or nationalist activists. Similar trends were observed in Brazil (Bringel & Pleyers, forthcoming). However, while the mobilization of progressive and right-wing activists has resulted in an increasing polarization of society in Brazil, in Romania, as in other post-communist countries (Frölich, 2012), the borders between left and right have often been blurred in post-2011 protests, even if ideological tensions were not absent, in a scenario that echoes recent protests in Ukraine and in Hong Kong.

Third, the meanings and significances of these movements are not limited to its outcomes in the institutional policies arena. The emergence of social actors, the construction of activist networks, the transformation of personal subjectivities and relationship to politics, the redefinition of citizenship and democracy as well as the proliferation of alternative spaces are just as important outcomes. Throughout Romania, forms of resistance that foster social relations and support communities have strengthened. Cultural centres, housing movements and self-organized spaces in cities serve as a reminder of the major roles played by local projects and activist cultures that remain largely invisible to the national media play. On the other side, the role of 'citizen experts' and the participation of 'neoliberal entrepreneurs' highlight that, in Romania just as in Western Europe, citizens' civic education and counter-expertise play an increasing role in contemporaneous democratic regimes.

While the different cultures of activism we have observed in Romania are opposed in some of their claims, they all contribute to structural changes in the Romanian social, cultural and political landscape. The networked infrastructure of protests and the cultures of activism that have emerged in recent years, as well as the different concepts of democracy, civil society and citizens' participation they entail will provide the grounds for future waves of demonstrations and campaigns in this country and in many others.

Notes

1. 'Liberal entrepreneurs' and 'alter-activists' are analytical categories that we have built based on our interviews and fieldwork. These expressions are not used by the actors and refer to cultures of activism that are heuristic concepts that do not exist in a pure form in reality.
2. Expression used by the president Traian Basescu in the context of the adoption of austerity measures in 2010 and adopted by some activists.

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