

Impact Evaluation of Student Protests of 2009 in Belgrade, Serbia

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HE	Higher Education
UoB	University of Belgrade
UoA	University of Arts
MoE	Ministry of Education
FPS	Faculty of Political Sciences
FaP	Faculties at Plato
DS	Democratic Party (Demokratska stranka)
"budget" student	student funded by the state budget

1. Introduction

Ever since the beginning of the educational reform through the implementation of the Bologna declaration (officially since the passing of the new law on HE in 2005), student protests were reoccurring annual events in Belgrade - each year since 2006 there have been protests in the final quarter of the year, preceded by occasional protests in the first half of the year, demanding for resolution of various issues that the implementation of the Bologna reform has created or brought into the spotlight. This research will look into details of the protests in the final quarter of 2009 aiming to determine their immediate and long-term impacts on the issues they tried to address, as well as answering several questions, most importantly in which manner has the student movement contributed to student empowerment and educational reform.

1.1. Scope of research

This paper primarily looks into the student protests occurring in the period of autumn 2009 with a less detailed look at the student protests in the period of 2010-2013. Although the protests have been occurring yearly since 2006, there are several reasons why the protests of 2009 are in the focus of this research:

Firstly, according to the preliminary findings, the student protest of 2009 attempted to go beyond addressing only the immediate issues and contribute to education reform and student empowerment, both during some of the protest activities and during the post-protest cooperation between protest organizers. Exploring this aspect of the protests could yield useful information and experiences which would contribute to other movements which deal with similar issues in HE.

Secondly, the protest movement of 2009 itself had several characteristics which might yield useful data. It included rather active participation of all the relevant stakeholders over a longer period of time, with various types of activities and occurrences - the protest walks themselves, divisions within the movement once some of the goals were achieved, attempts after the protest activities to form a student organisation/movement... All of this has given a much richer picture

of various interactions between stakeholders as opposed to some of the later student protests which took place over a shorter period of time and/or did not involve so many stakeholders.

Thirdly, given the fact that I took part in the organisation of the 2009 protests, I was already aware of the various stakeholders who took part in the protests (especially those less visible), as well as how to reach the most adequate people for interviews, which would have proven to be much more difficult for the other years.

Fourthly, a detailed press clipping of the protests of 2009 was done by one of the protest organizers during the protests themselves, including news reports and materials which might not be available through regular research. Consequently, these protests are the best documented and therefore, the most suitable for in-depth research.

Finally, taking a detailed look into several years of protests exceeds the scope of this research considering its temporal and financial limits.

Research methodology

The methodology for this research primarily consists of desk research conducted using critical analysis and field work focused on semi-structured interviews.

Desk research: Under the scope of my critical analysis are the following documents. Firstly, research papers done by relevant institutions (e.g. Centre for Educational Policies), secondly, official documents of government institutions and universities, thirdly, press clippings, and finally, information from mailing lists and protest-related websites. The data has been reviewed carefully, due to the fact that there was: 1) known media manipulation e.g. the number of participants in some of the protest marches varied significantly between various media outlets 2) previous experience with the government showed that the government would sometimes resort to making agreements with protestors, but then not implementing the agreed upon decisions. Desk research was useful for describing the background of the protests, a general outline of the timeline of protest activities and "official" outcomes.

Interviews: I used semi-structured interviews because they provided a much more detailed look into the protest activities, interests of stakeholders and the real outcomes. Various stakeholders

have been interviewed (a detailed analysis of their interests will be presented in the stakeholders section):

- Student protesters: Marina Savic (a student at the Faculty of Philology who was active in the protests as a regular participant), Vuk Vukovic (a student at the faculty of Philology, who became active in the leftist movement after the protest), Marina Kvrzic (a former student at the Faculty of Philology, at the time of her participation in the protests she had no previous organizational experience. She also took part in the protest's organizational meetings as an observer and became active after the protest in the local student parliament),
- Student organizations' and student leaders - Jelena Veljic (one of the protest organizers, former student vice-dean of Philosophical Faculty, at the time she already had experience in previous protests), Vladimir Smudja (one of the protest organizers, former student vice-dean of Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy), David Bakic (one of protest organizers, former student vice-dean of FPS, at the time already had significant experience from 2008. protests), Branko Vucinic (one of protest organizers, member of one of the organizations at the FPS, at the time already had significant experience from 2008. protests), Milos Miletic (student vice-rector of UoA and the main organizer of the student protesters from the Faculty of Visual Arts),
- Radical leftists: Matija Medenica - one of the leaders of Marks21, a "an initiative for a fighting workers organization, based on ideas of classic Marxism"¹, with the aim of mobilizing workers in a fight for establishing "direct and democratic control of the working class over society in which workers take over control and production in their places of work", he took part in protest organizing. University of Belgrade : Petar Bunjak, professor at Philological Faculty of BU. As Professor Bunjak was the vice-dean for studies of his faculty on two occasions (period 90s and 2000s), this has made him familiar with the numerous issues which the university dealt with throughout the years, as well as giving him perspective for comparison of circumstances in HE in Serbia before and after the reform.

¹ <http://www.marks21.info/o-nama>

- Education related institutions - Jelena Brankovic, former student activist (before the time of the 2009 protests), currently a researcher on education at Centre for Educational Policy, an independent multidisciplinary research centre (registered as a citizens association) and considered one of Serbia's leading institutions when it comes to research, policy analysis and policy making in education.
- Intellectuals focused on educational reform- Srbijanka Turajlic, retired professor (Faculty of Electrical Engineering) and well-known intellectual, considered one of the biggest authorities on HE and educational reform in Serbia, she is a former member of Otpor (the resistance movement which largely contributed to the overthrow of the Milosevic regime in 2000) and the minister's assistant for HE in the MoE in the period 2001-2004.

Apart from common questions, specific questions were prepared based on the stakeholder being interviewed.

There have been several challenges facing this research:

- Possible hostility from some of the interviewees: having in mind that I was a member of the formal student structures during the protests, which might have made some of the interviewees perceive me as getting involved in the protest for my own personal gain rather than for the students (e.g. I might have been perceived as having been involved in the protests on with instructions from the faculty officials to weaken the protest organization. I occasionally received such accusations at the time of the protest) I endeavoured to conduct the interviews in a neutral tone with due respect to all the interviewees and I believe that this hostility has been avoided.
- Possible factual inaccuracy by the interviewees, due to the fact that the protest took place four years ago, as well as the fact that most of those being interviewed took an active part in at least two student protests over the years, which might have lead to their confusion in their distinguishing between events. Practically all of the interviewees themselves noted this issue with their recollection of events.
- Possible bias/lack of professionalism of the media reporting on the protests (e.g. when reporting about one of the protests one media mentioned 200, while another stated 1000 students being present). I endeavoured to look into reports from various sources for the most precise data

possible and always pointed out any possible discrepancies or warnings concerning the data presented.

- Possible lack of concrete data to support all of the statements - While there have been analyses of various aspects of the system of HE in Serbia and much of its shortfalls are well known by the general public, the true scope of many of its characteristics and issues is difficult to ascertain (e.g. unethical behaviour of professors is reported by the media, but there is no clear data on how widespread certain behaviour are, due to the fact that, for instance, students are often afraid to lodge a formal complaint, believing that the professors will be protected and will then retaliate during the exam periods). As with the previous point, the researcher endeavoured to look into reports from various sources for the most precise data possible and always pointed out any possible discrepancies, as well as put forward warnings concerning certain data which was presented.

2. Background

2.1. Higher education in Serbia before the Bologna reform

An overview of relevant factors in HE in Serbia, leading up to the reform of HE, as well as an overview of the reform process itself, will be presented, in order to gain an understanding of why the protests occurred and what motivated various stakeholders.

In Belgrade there are two state universities:

University of Belgrade - consisting of faculties which are divided into four groups: 1) social sciences and humanities 2) medicinal sciences 3) sciences and mathematics 4) technology and engineering), with approximately 60.000 students.

University of Arts - consisting of four faculties - Music Arts, Fine Arts, Applied Arts and Drama Arts, with approximately 1.700 students.

Before 2005, university programmes consisted of four-year undergraduate studies for a Diploma of HE. After the undergraduate studies, there were two-year Magister programmes, and finally in order for postgraduate student to obtain PhD titles they had to write a doctoral thesis, with distinct contribution to knowledge.

The autonomy of the university and its professors, which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter, developed, according to professor Turajlic who quotes Hambleton's model, as a result of a "silent pact" between the state and the universities: "When the national states were being created, someone came to an idea that the university is a place for free-thinking, but that national values should also be promoted. This is where a silent pact was formed between the university and all European states - you will do whatever you want, but you are the defenders of national values. And through this, when you look at the books, you can explain the total collaboration of German universities with Hitler, Soviet universities with Stalin, our universities with Milosevic, it's all the same matrix. We won't touch you, just don't not-support what we do, everything else is fine. You don't even have to support us out loud, just don't be against us. This is how we got into the position of absolute freedom."

According to Jelena Brankovic, the biggest, most important change in the state of HE in Serbia in the past two decades is the expansion of the HE system: the doubling of the student population, from approximately 120.000 in 1991. to over 240.000 in 2008. (the latest data shows a slow decline, with some 230.000 enrolled students), with a gross enrollment ratio (GER) between 55-60%, which is in line with European trends in HE (though this expansion, according to Jelena Brankovic, took place in Europe in the final two decades of the previous century, while in Serbia it took place during the '00s). With a GER of over 50%, Serbia's HE system can be categorized as a universal system, meaning that it is expected from a person graduating from high school to enroll into university, as a natural progression of their education. With this rise came the same issues which Europe faced, which is the question of the goal and quality of HE, of educating such a numerous, diverse population for the rapidly evolving local and global markets that are demanding a more and more highly educated work force. However, these issues further developed in Serbia in line with the particularities of Serbia's pre-reform system of HE, which will now be presented:

The funding system of HE in Serbia consisted almost entirely of funds received from the state budget, tuition fees from self-financed students and charging additional study expenses to all students (to be explained later in this section), with comparably small funds received from faculty projects and similar sources of revenue. However, due to government policies of continuously reducing the budget for HE, the ratio between financing from the state and from the students changed significantly over the past 20 years - as noted by university professor Petar Bunjak: "From the time of Milosevic until today there is a process of state's disavowal of the university. How? By constantly slicing and decreasing the state's part in the financing [of the university] and [thus there's] the need to fill this gap with its own income. Own income means skinning the students with various administrative costs etc. So, our source of income is the student. [...] Our material expenses are supported by the state less and less literally month by month. When I was the vice-dean, it was disastrous, and if the trend remained the same, then in reality the state is not supporting the university any more. So, the university has to pay everything from its own income - heating, electricity, water, even the location tax." This trend of continuous reduction of state funding has resulted in a parallel continuous increase of tuition fees for self-financed students and an increase in additional study expenses for both the state-funded and self-financed students. Following is a more detailed explanation of the expenses and funding status of the students:

Upon enrolment into the first year of undergraduate studies, students are divided into those financed by the state ("on the budget" students, henceforth called "budget" students) and those who are self-financed, depending on particular marks from high schools and the results from entrance exams. The social circumstances of the student (i.e. financial assessment of family income) are not taken into account when determining the student's funding status. However, both the "budget" and self-financed students still have to pay various additional expenses, regardless of their status, such as tax for taking exams, tax for the printing of the graduation diploma and similar expenses (which will be explained in more detail by the end of this section).

Another characteristic of pre-Bologna studies is the system of exams and how a student could change their financing status. Each year, there were several exam periods in which a student had the opportunity to pass exams. A self-financed student who passed a certain number of exams per year (not necessarily all the exams, but a previously defined number) before the last of the exam periods for that year would be able to enrol into the next year of studies and transfer onto the state budget - a motivating mechanism to encourage students to do well in their studies. They could also lose their state financing by not passing enough exams per year. In addition, even though during enrolment in the first year of studies there was a limited number of budget spaces (with those under the line enrolling into the also limited number of self-financed places), there was no limit to the number of students who could obtain "budget" financing if they pass enough exams - theoretically, by second year of studies all students could be on the state budget if all of them passed the pre-required number of exams (which will become relevant during the protests as certain faculties attempted to change this rule to the detriment of students, by limiting the number of available budget spaces).

The average length of undergraduate studies was approximately eight years and around half the students would quit their studies before their completion. There are several reasons for this:

Firstly, the manifold increase in the number of students meant that now the students entering into universities consisted of people with various capacities and not only the graduates with the top marks, while the study programs still remained primarily aimed at the top students - "All universities in Europe were meant for schooling the elite. You can school 15-20% into an elite, but you cannot do so with 60% of the population as they do not have the capacities to become the elite. As the universities kept the elite programs with the same level of difficulty, suddenly no one could complete them." remarks professor Turajlic.

Secondly, the study conditions were oftentimes very inadequate - regarding the design of the curriculum, many of the study programs demanded much more work than could be realistically expected from an even above average student - Professor Bunjak concedes that: "It's a fact that the old [pre-Bologna] study programs were knotty and somehow clumped together - you had a whole lot of nothing and you had a lump [an exam] which you couldn't swallow.". What further exacerbated this issue was the unprofessional behaviour of certain professors: " In both of my

terms as vice-dean of teaching, I had problems related to the professor-student relationship.[...] with those [professors] who put criterion above meritum, you can't talk with them and there were at least two or three such people at our faculty, who would halt the progress of the students through their studies and because of whom students would quit." He goes on to characterize the problematic professors as either "people with personal issues or an overly hypertrophied expert who asks for not only the details, but also how to reason [...] you can demand this from the most talented ones, [...] but you cannot do this in a subject with a massive audience."- " However, he goes on to point out that mostly the professors were authoritative and respected, and that while some exams did require years of preparation by the students, this was more due to a lack of knowledge by the students themselves.

Whatever the reasons for this behaviour of certain professors, they were for the most part left unchecked by the administration, since, as professor Bunjak recalls: "[...] the pre-Bologna system did not have any sort of formal mechanism of this kind [of monitoring of the work of professors]. In the old days, the professor was god.". Professor Turajlic shares the same opinion: "It's a fact that the [future of the] students really depended on the professor. I can, if I took offence to them, fail them over and over again, and no one would ever ask me why this is so. [...] Life at the university was the most beautiful life you could imagine. You choose what to work on, you choose what to teach, you are not accountable to anyone, no one asks you whether you're doing your work, no one asks you *when* are you doing your work". This lack of monitoring also resulted in some professors (whether due to lack of qualifications and/or unrealistically high expectations) organizing exams in such a way that passing them was not possible without at least several attempts, oftentimes more than the number of exam periods in a year, which would result in practically unavoidable loss of "budget" funding and prolonged studies for a significant number of students. One infamous example of this behaviour is a professor at the Faculty of Geography who has been stopping generations from graduating on time for the past 15 years. Some of the students have been trying to pass her exams for 10 years. One student noted that: "My average mark is 9.4/10, I have passed all my exams on the first attempt, and yet this is the third time I am trying to pass this exam, which is not that bad considering this will be my colleague's 12th attempt." The dean's statement regarding the issues with this professor was: "I

do not know of any disciplinary action with which the behaviour of a professor can be contained." ²

Indeed, professors were so well protected by their universities that they faced practically no danger of ever losing their job - as a prominent example, professors who were caught taking bribes for passing students ("selling exams") in 2007, which has been perceived as possibly the biggest scandal in HE in Serbia in the past decade, still haven't been charged after over 6 years of trial, and are doing their work as normal - many of them have in fact received promotions, and one professor even became the dean of his faculty. This particular case also shows the failing of the judicial system, as in Serbia any case where the defendants are in any kind of position of power, such as university professor, are stretched over many years and often remain unresolved. A recent statistic shows that over 10% of trials in Serbia have lasted over 10 years ³. These failings of the system are the consequences of Serbia's turbulent period of wars, sanctions and economic crisis during the 90s which lead to a rise in corruption in all aspects of the system, including in HE. As Filip Brkovic, former student activist, remarks: "The professors, as bad as they are, and they *are* bad, are not an independent part, but are pieces of a broader puzzle, and this puzzle, called our [Serbia's] society, does not look good at the moment - it's missing a few pieces such as rule of law, good work practice, meritocratic advancement, departization..." According to Jelena Brankovic: "Corruption is on the rise and the system's integrity falls, everything has a price. The problem with corruption is that when it reaches a certain point, it becomes normal behaviour." A survey on Corruption in Higher Education⁴ done in the period 2007-2011, gives examples of professors avoiding work, corruption in the administrative processes (unlawful enrolment of candidates not meeting the formal criteria) and other cases of unethical behaviour by professors. In 2013 so far, for instance, the Anti-Corruption Agency

² <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Beograd/291803/Profesorka-koci-cele-generacije-studenata>

³ <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/425068/Tomic-Zakonske-izmene-skratice-trajanje-sudskih-procesa>

⁴ https://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=13&cad=rja&ved=0CDoQFjACOAo&url=http%3A%2F%2Fprijemni.infostud.com%2Fdocs%2FKljucni-rezultati-anketnog-istrazivanja---korupcijau-visokom-obrazovanju.doc&ei=IP6iUpDfLInCtQaC1YHYDw&usg=AFQjCNEU_fyYrTIKHT0wOhRyPOX9niJV1w&sig2=uyhadbug-kJBNI46Tprgpw&bvm=bv.57752919,d.Yms

announced it is monitoring 54 cases of university deans and high school principals and other workers in education who have unlawfully accumulated several functions.

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Another major issue which contributed to student dropout is the financial strain of studying for many of the students. According to a study done by one media portal in 2008, the average monthly student expenses in Belgrade ranged between 150 Euros (for those living with their parents in or near Belgrade) to 500 Euros (for those living in rented apartments)⁵. Furthermore, depending on which faculty they were attending, the students, no matter what their funding status is, would have to pay for a range of services (depending on which faculty they were attending) such as registering for exams, study books, getting any sort of official document from the faculty (e.g. confirmation of enrollment which is necessary for certain documents such as visas, health insurance). These expenses were a considerable strain on many of the students, bearing in mind that the average monthly salary in January 2009. was around 280 Euros and "the average family with two employed and two supported [unemployed] members could not afford even the most basic living expenses", which were calculated at around 800 Euros per month for such a family⁶. The problem of the massive financial strain on the students is further exacerbated by an almost complete lack of recognition of the social circumstances of a student in determining his funding status, as well as a lack of policies which would support and enable students from lower income households to pursue their studies. In fact, the self-financed students were in a dramatically more difficult situation expenses-wise than the "budget" students: Apart from the constantly rising annual tuition fees which the self-financed students had to pay, the allocation of student dormitory rooms, financial stipends and places in the student canteen heavily prioritizes "budget" students, i.e. they rank the students almost solely by their academic success (with only some 2% of the ranking being influenced by social factors such as personal income of the student's family, according to Jelena Brankovic), with places available to self-financing students only after the initial distribution to "budget" students. Even when the self-financed students receive a place in the dormitory or the canteen, they have to pay higher prices than the "budget" students, or would

⁵ <http://www.e-novine.com/index.php?news=15473>

⁶ <http://www.bgsvetionik.com/novosti/servisi/potrosacka-korpa-za-prvi-kvartal-2009.html>

need to look for other, far more expensive alternatives (for instance, a "budget" student in the dormitory would pay 10 Euros per month for a room, while another, self-financed student would pay at least a 100 Euros per month for similar, private accommodation). This disparity becomes even greater, as Jelena Brankovic points out, due to the fact that, as everywhere throughout the world, statistically the better the economic situation of the student's family, the better study results the student will achieve (and thus is more likely to receive "budget" status). This essentially means that those who are more financially stable have a higher chance of receiving a funding status that is expenses-wise dramatically more favorable, compared to those who already face financial difficulties even before enrolling into university.

In summary, the difficult study programs unadapted to a constantly growing number of students and unprofessional and corrupt behaviour by certain professors led to many students losing their "budget" status, and in many cases quitting their studies before completion, due to being unable to deal with the considerably higher financial strain of a self-financed student. As was previously mentioned, every other student would drop out before completion of their studies.

2.2. Bologna reform

The Bologna declaration was signed in 1999 by several European ministers of education, starting a reform that had as its goal the creation of a unified European system of education and research, thus allowing for easily comparable degrees and significantly increased mobility for students. The degrees would also be relevant to the European labour market at an appropriate level of qualification.

To achieve comparability and mobility, the Bologna process introduced ECTS - European Credit Transfer System, a system of points which would define the amount of work hours on various levels of HE. One academic year would correspond to 60 ECTS credits, or 1500-1800 hours of study. Undergraduate studies would become 3 to 4 year bachelor degrees (180-240 ECTS points) with 1 to 2 year master degrees (60-120 ECTS) instead of magister degrees. PhD programs are 3 years long (180 ECTS).

The implementation of Bologna reform of HE in Serbia commenced in 2005, when the new law on HE was passed. However, Serbia was in most ways grossly unprepared to handle this education reform - possibly the most useful example which illustrates the (lack of the) reform's achievements is that even now in 2013, eight years after the commencement of the reform, there are over 300 exams (more than 10% of the total number of exams of BU) which still have less than 30% pass rate, meaning that numerous students cannot enrol into the next year of their studies or graduate due to these exams.⁷ There are several reasons behind such poor implementation of the reform:

Firstly, as professor Bunjak points out, the faculties received no funds from the state to aid them in the reform process: "This kind of reform cannot be done without money. The founder has to invest in the people who will educate themselves and undertake the reform process more easily. We not only did not receive a single cent from the state for the reform, but we also had to pay, in impossible conditions, an exorbitant amount for accreditation⁸. So, a state institution [the university] has to pay the accreditation fee to a state institution. This money was never compensated by the state." Secondly, according to professor Turajlic, there was a strong resistance by Serbia's universities, as in many others across Europe, to accept the reform process: "[...] making 10 elite universities and leaving the rest of them to educate the crowd. This was the point of the reform, which no one did as it radically required that we first understand that we are not only educating the elite. [...] " On the one hand, resistance to this kind of reform is not inappropriate - indeed, one of the main arguments against the Bologna reform is that it attempts to simplify and standardize knowledge based on market needs, which results in the loss of breadth and quality of the education being received. On the other hand, there was a marked resistance by some professors to change their methods and curriculum even where it was

⁷ <http://www.akter.co.rs/27-drutvo/36887-prolaznost-studenata-i-dalje-ispod-30-odsto.html>

⁸ accreditation is the process through which a faculty receives a certificate that it has met the requirements and standards as proposed by the Law on higher education - whether it has qualified teaching staff, whether the study programs are well organized, is there an adequate number and size of classrooms and other facilities based on the number of students enrolled etc.

appropriate⁹. Branko Vucinic stated that almost none of the professors at FPS adjusted the study programs according to Bologna reform guidelines - "they were simply too lazy to do it."

Thus, the reform of many of the study programs was implemented only cosmetically – the ECTS credits were oftentimes assigned haphazardly to exams, the amount of literature was not regulated based on the amount of work hours it demanded. The extent to which the reform was *not* done can be recognized in the fact that in November 2009 (at the height of the student protest movement), the Commission for the Accreditation and Quality Control announced that not a single study program of any faculty in Serbia has received accreditation so far¹⁰ - the accreditation being the official recognition of successful reform of a program to Bologna standards. Some of the interviewees note that some of the harmful changes implemented under the auspices of the Bologna reform in fact had nothing to do with what the Bologna reform proposed - as Jelena Veljic points out: "The Bologna is on its own a bad system, but it is additionally bad as it has been perverted into something completely pointless. Now you have a system where you can get at most three minuses [absences from classes] during the school year[...] and then you have to pass exams in particular exam periods as some exam periods are more valuable than others. They made a lot of stupid changes which are really not connected to Bologna, no one made them do it, but the professors did it out of god knows what reason, and then you have to ask the question whether the students have time to do anything else [beside studying] if their goal is to complete their studies."

However, at the same time as the programs were not being rationalized, certain basic rules presumed by the Bologna system were to be enforced - most importantly, students were supposed to pass all exams in an academic year in order to enrol into the next year of studies. This tension between the significantly increased amount of work required of the students and the lack of proper reform which will make these study goals achievable, together with the already mentioned issues in HE, led to the development of new issues which the student protest attempted to resolve.

⁹ <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/247023/Za-predugo-studiranje-krivi-su-profesori>

¹⁰ <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/120374/Studenti-blokirali-zgradu-Rektorata>

2.3. Issues which arose

These are the key issues which arose due to the inadequate implementation of educational reform:

- *Enrolment policy*: Students were now faced with the situation that while the same amount of work was required from them as in the old system, they were now without the benefit of being required to pass only a certain number of exams in order to enrol into the next year of studies. They were now supposed to pass all the exams in one academic year or they would fail their entire academic year, lose their state budget financing and be obliged to attend again the classes they failed (meaning for instance that if a student failed only one exam and passed all others, he would have to pay for an entire year of studies during which he would only attend the lectures related to that one exam). Coupled with the fact that tuition fees at most faculties of both state universities in Belgrade are very high relative to average earnings, this meant that failing a year and losing "budget" funding meant for many students that they will be unable to continue their studies (at the time of the 2009. protests it was estimated that only 20% of the students could achieve 60 ECTS points which are, by law, the required number of points to enrol into next year of studies¹¹).

- *Value of diplomas*: Much confusion arose due to the fact that from around 2008-09, when the first generation of Bologna students graduated, there would now be graduates from two different educational systems competing on the market. On the one hand, there was the old system of four years of undergraduate studies and two years of Magister studies, while the new system had 3-4 year undergraduate studies and 1-2 year Master studies. As there was no official document which would clearly state what sort of job qualifications a certain diploma would provide, not only were certain graduates with the new diplomas unable to find out what they were qualified for, but some of them were rendered practically unemployable. According to one article on the topic, "By introducing the Bologna system in Serbia's universities, new occupations have been devised, such as business psychologist, MA of spatial planning, cyber forensic... These occupations did not previously exist in the registers, so people with these titles are invisible to both the National

¹¹ <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1108582>

Employment Service and the employers. Due to the National Qualifications Framework not existing, there is still no official explanation what kind of knowledge and skills their diploma entails." ¹² Another paper states the need for the drafting of the National Qualifications Framework, as due to its nonexistence "tens of thousands of people in Serbia cannot be adequately employed (and they could if they had a precisely defined professional qualifications) or are receiving smaller salaries (due to undefined professional qualifications which in certain companies have a direct impact on the salary and on the defining of the employee's status in the human resources department)"¹³. Furthermore, certain faculties changed their study programs, making the bachelor diploma practically without value in the job market, even though in reality the change in the particular study programs was for all purposes either minor or completely insignificant. For instance, a pre-Bologna student of languages at the Philological Faculty was qualified after graduation of his/her four year studies to become a language teacher in a state school. However a student of languages in the new, reformed system would find out midway through their four year studies that they will also have to enrol in a master course to be qualified to become a teacher, as their bachelor diploma would suddenly not give them sufficient qualifications to be employed as teachers (Furthermore, it is no coincidence that these master courses often had high tuition fees and no "budget" places for students, meaning that the students would be obliged to pay for another year of studies - a way for faculties to earn more money). To solve these issues, the already mentioned National Employment Framework was announced, with the goal of defining learning outcomes and levels of education (i.e. what a student is supposed to know and what he/she is capable of doing based on a qualification obtained at a certain level of education). However, while the basic version of the document had been crafted, there was no adequate legal framework to recognize its existence and thus it was unclear who is the one responsible for its finalization and implementation¹⁴. As of the writing of this research, the Framework has still not been implemented (showing, among other things, the extent of the lack of motivation of either the faculties or the state for a thorough, long-term reform of HE).

¹² <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1085388>

¹³ "Diploma in the work market - National Qualifications Framework?" the text in brackets is part of the original paper as well - http://www.trend.uns.ac.rs/stskup/trend_2010/radovi/Tema5/T5.1-12.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1116034>

- *Study expenses*: As mentioned previously, the tuition fees at most faculties in Belgrade are very high, and they have been steadily increasing over time. While the fees were an issue well before the reform, the implementation of the Bologna reform contributed with a new set of difficulties. Firstly, as mentioned in the enrolment policy issue, students were now more likely to end up with a self-financed status. Secondly, many of the faculties' study programs demanded almost complete attendance to the lectures by the students (i.e. they would be allowed only 3 absences from a course, otherwise they would not be able to take the exam, meaning they would fail the year and receive the self-financed status), and the badly-designed class schedules often meant students would be in classes from morning until evening. This prevented many of the students from working part-time jobs which were meant to pay for the study expenses. Finally, the faculties themselves started thinking up various ways to charge the students additional expenses, likely due to both the pressure of continuously decreasing state funding and the corruption among university workers. One of the measures which some of the faculties attempted to implement was the creation of enrolment lists, where only a certain percentage of self-financed students enrolling into next year of studies would receive budget funding, even if all of them received top marks.

These major issues - value of diplomas, enrolment policy and study expenses - manifested themselves in more specific issues depending on various circumstances at different faculties. During the course of this research these specific issues will be more clearly defined and connected to the student protests.

3. Stakeholders

3.1. *Student protesters*

What must be taken into account when analyzing the motivation and characteristics of the average student participant in the protest activities, is that it is extremely difficult to give a precise account considering that they came from many different faculties with various specific local circumstances. Thus, experiences and impressions from the interviewees are the main source for this overview, and should be read with this disclaimer in mind.

Regarding the general outlook of students on participation in a student movement and fighting for their rights, Professor Turajlic recalls that a student recently wrote to her, saying that "In 1988 you were telling us [the students] how perplexingly inactive we are, and you said "If I were to order you to run 3 blocks around the faculty, you would do so without asking why."".

Turajlic continues: "I was surprised that I perceived the students in this manner already in 1988. However, I am completely certain that you could not give that kind of order to students at the beginning of the 80s. [...] The students have become passively compliant. My impression is that the school made them this way".

When it comes to the protest of 2009, there were certainly some students who believed that they were fighting for a greater cause. For instance, Marina Kvrzic notes that for her, participating in the protest was an extremely positive experience: "I felt great during the protests. I was a part of a group of people who wanted to bring about some changes, at least that's what I felt. I was a complete optimist during the protest, because I really thought that we could change something." However, she also comments that the low turnout on the protests is due to "apathy, laziness and selfishness", remarking that the students were disappointed because the expected changes after the hardships of the 90s did not take place. She also notes that the students were not brave enough to sacrifice their studies and get involved in the protest (taking part in the protest meant that they would not be able to attend classes, and would thus not receive attendance points necessary for the final exam.) Marina Savic recalls that she was disappointed with the lack of interest of her colleagues to get involved in the protest: "They did not care about the injustice being done, it seems as if it was all the same to them whether they would have to pay the high

tuition fees or not. Money was obviously not an issue for them." Meanwhile, Vuk Vukovic notes that it seemed like many students got involved in protests for the fun of it: "I'm not saying that they did not perceive the goals, we all had serious issues with the ECTS points and all of that, but they went to the protest more as tourists, to check out what's going on, like they're just passing by."

On the other hand, David Bakic believes that due to good organization at their faculty [FPS] "I think there were [also] students at our protest were there out of solidarity for their colleagues, even though they were not struck by the issues the other students were facing." However, at the same time he notes that a lot of the student protesters were from outside Belgrade, with just enough financial support from their families to cover the expenses of living and studying in Belgrade, and the most likely consequence of their losing, or not obtaining "budget" funding would be quitting studies and going back to their home town - thus, being "on the budget" was perceived as their primary motivation, without any real wish for broader changes in HE or strengthening of their position: "[...] Without any further pondering, ideas of changing the world and so on, the problem was that people simply did not have the money to pay for their studies [...] Every day we would have people coming into our office, people coming from god knows which place in Serbia, saying: "I really don't have the money. I've done all I can. I've obtained the maximum 60 points, I've passed all the exams, I have a high average mark... And if I lose the budget funding, I'm quitting my studies, going back to my hometown where I will do nothing like all the other people from there. So, please help me somehow." After hearing a thousand such stories, which basically have a social background, we decided to solve our students' existential problem."

Finally, the students from the UoA were very proportionally very involved and regular at the protests, due to its small size and the fact that students would spend a lot of time together at the faculty during their studies, meaning that they would develop a stronger sense of mutual solidarity. The extent of this solidarity was such that even when the students of UoA became aware that their demands will be met and even when they were being offered a solution to their problem if they abandon the protest (one of the protest organizers received this offer on his personal phone number), they still continued to regularly support and take part in the student protest of the other groups.

Overall, based on input from the interviewees, what came up as significant factors which influence the motivation of protest participants of a particular faculty are the following: the organizational capacities of the local student protest organizers (as those with better organizing and information dissemination capacities tended to perceive the students as more motivated to protest than others, e.g. FPS), the number of students in, and structure of, classes (as was the case with the high attendance of UoA students) and the financial status of the students (with those without money issues seem to have been less likely to get involved, such as Marina Savic's example of her colleagues from the Philosophical Faculty).

When it comes to the demands of the students, they would vary based on the circumstances of their particular faculty due to the faculties' autonomy, giving them a lot of freedom to choose how to deal with the issues at hand. This also brought the challenge of rallying the students of various faculties behind a common list of demands, while also keeping the list relatively concise in order to retain focus in the demands. One of the recurring themes in the interviews with student organizers is the fact that practically each faculty, sometimes even different departments at a faculty, had their own set of demands, which had to somehow be brought together. "It was always crazy [at the meetings of protest organizers]. You had to find the smallest common denominator" remarks Branko Vucinic. It was at times challenging to find a compromise, according to Marina Kvrzic: "Someone did not have proper heating [of the faculty premises] and they were so stubborn - 'This is the only thing important to us' They were not interested in anything beyond the heating issue, you couldn't persuade them in any way." Another factor which complicated matters is the fact that many particular demands would also change over time, based on the actions and reactions by other stakeholders, as well as other circumstances. Thus, the entire list of demands will be presented throughout the protest timeline section, as well as their evolution over time, while the most important three demands, shared by most of the faculties, would be presented in this section:

- Enrolment into next year of studies for students who obtained 48 ECTS points (instead of the planned 54) during the academic year. Considering the study programs had mostly not been revised, the majority of students would be unable to obtain the necessary 54 ECTS points which was the planned minimum for that year, as part of the plan to annually increase the minimum

required number of points by 6 per year, until 60 in 2010 (semi-official statistics at the time noted around 50% of the students won't even be able to obtain the minimum 48 points).

- transfer to "budget" funding status for students who obtained 60 ECTS points (the maximum number of points) during the academic year. This demand was made due to the fact that many of the faculties had announced, at the end of the academic year, that they had decided to add "ranking lists" to establish which students would receive "on budget" funding. This was perceived as grossly unfair by students, for two reasons: First of all, the lists presupposed that only a certain number of students could receive "budget" funding status, even if all of them obtained the maximum number of points, contrary to the rules established at the beginning of the academic year, which stated that all those obtaining a certain number of points would receive "budget" funding - now even an excellent student had no way of knowing what their status after enrolment would be. Secondly, this list was published at the end of the academic year, contrary to the original guidelines and long after the students could plan their studying according to the new demands. This demand was very quickly updated and joined with the previous demand, in the following manner: any student who obtained a minimum of 48 points during the academic year would enrol into the next year of studies and get "budget" funding status, due to the fact that the programs were felt to be so badly reformed that, as mentioned, around 50% of students could not get even the minimum 48 points.

- cumulative enrolment into next year of studies, meaning that the ECTS points which the students needed to obtain do not have to belong only to exams from the current study year, but rather from exams from any of their study years. This demand was created due to the fact that a student who did not pass all the exams from his/her previous year of studies would have to pass both these "old" exams together with the required minimum number of exams from the current year of studies - this would in certain cases mean that the student would obtain more than the maximum 60 ECTS points per year, which is incredibly challenging for even the above average student (considering the already mentioned statistic that the estimate at the time was that only 20% of students could achieve 60 ECTS points). This demand was advocated particularly by the FaP group.

3.2. Protest organizers

The protest organizers came from various sides - a lot of them were student activists, either in student organizations or formal student bodies (student vice-deans, members of local and university student parliaments), some were regular students who simply got more involved and some were in other types of organizations (e.g. radical leftist organizations). What could be said that these organizers had in common was that, whatever their personal motivation was and no matter how aware they were of the broader issues or what their long-term plans were, their primary short term goal was mostly focused on solving the immediate issues which the students were facing.

The motivations of the organizers varied: some saw it as their duty (whether due to the fact they were formal student representatives or they simply saw it as their natural duty as fellow students), others were motivated by the fact that this would contribute to their professional goals (e.g. those not taking part in protests would very likely lose the next student parliament elections, as was the case at FPS) and some were students who were facing the issues they were trying to solve. Some of the student representatives who were elected in the formal student bodies, namely the Student Parliament of UoB, were also members of the parties in the government coalition (for instance, Jovan Licina, the president of Student Parliament of UoB at the time of the protests, was a member of DS, the leading party in the coalition at the time). Their membership in the youth sections of political parties very likely seriously influenced their motivation to participate in the protest, as Srbijanka Turajlic remarks: "The [student organizers] who belong to the ruling party will most certainly do everything to quell the protest, as it is not in the interest of the ruling party that the protests take place." The leftists generally had a very negative view of student organizers who were also official student representatives, seeing them as corrupt individuals who serve either their personal or the agendas of their political parties - their view is not only due to their ideological perception of the corruptness of representatives, but is also likely a strong echo of the prevalent sentiment in Serbia concerning people with political functions, no matter whether they're government or student representatives (a survey from 2013. showed that 69% of those

polled believe that the politicians put their political party's interests before the interests of the citizens, and 62% believe that the politicians are not telling the truth¹⁵).

Following is an overview of the most active protest organizer groups. As the protest included a large number of faculties, with numerous regular, as well as impromptu organizers getting involved in the protest, it would be very difficult and well beyond the scope of this research to document all of them. Furthermore, covering the following three groups of organizers will thus cover practically the entirety of protest activities and organizing methods, as all the other organizers involved did not seem to have contributed in any organizational manner other than motivating the students from their local faculties to join the protest. Finally, when it came to choosing the student representatives in the official negotiations with the government, this unofficial division of faculties was taken into account, with at least one representative from each of the three groups.

- Faculty of Political Sciences - perceived to be the driving force behind a group of faculties located in the Belgrade municipality of Vozdovac (including Faculty of Transport and Faculty of Organizational Sciences), making them close both geographically and in terms of some of the more particular demands. Practically all of the organizers from FPS were members of student organizations and/or representatives in the local student parliament. They were people with previous experience and skills in organizing protests and other activities. They were respected by the students of FPS, where, due to the nature of the faculty itself, student representatives are seen as legitimate and competent individuals.

- Faculties at Plato - This name was not used during the protests themselves; it has been chosen now based on the need of distinguishing the organizational methods of the different groups of faculties. The name has been chosen based on the location where the protests of this group of faculties typically started - the Plato (name of famous bookstore and plateau next to the Faculty of Philosophy), as well as the fact that the faculties which took most of the organizational responsibility were located very near to this location: Faculty of Philology, Faculty of

¹⁵ <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/382929/Alarmanтно-nepoverenje-gradjana-Digli-smo-ruke-od-politicara>

Philosophy and Faculty of Geography. Other faculties involved were the Technical Faculty, Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Chemistry, Faculty of Biology, Faculty of Mathematics, Faculty for Special Education and Rehabilitation - theoretically all the Faculties of UoB. Furthermore, several of the faculties in this group were also joined around the demand for cumulative enrolment. These organizers were more varied than those from FPS - some were simply students who got more involved and some were activists and representatives, some had virtually no previous experience in organizing protests or similar events while others had experience from several previous years of protests.

The University of Arts consisted of students with generally little previous experience in student organizing primarily from the Faculty of Visual Arts and the Faculty of Applied Arts. At the Faculty of Visual Arts, the most active student organizer was Milos Miletic, the student vice-rector of UoA, who had previous experience in student organizing.

3.3. Radical leftist activists and organizations

The leftist activists and organizations had as their main goal the reform of HE in two ways - making it free for students (abolishing study fees) and abandoning the Bologna reform (summarized in their main slogan "Knowledge is not merchandise"). Some were involved in the protests as individuals, while others were members of organizations, primarily Marks21 (describing itself as "an initiative for a combative, labour organization, based on ideas of classic Marxism and is in the tradition of internationalist socialism") and ASI (Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative, "a propagandist-combative anarchistic revolutionary syndical organization"). They also advocated that student organizing should be based on values and methods of direct democracy, in which all students would take part in the discussion and decision making processes.

While some of the leftists were perceived by protest organizers as cooperative and contributive to the student movement, some organizers, particularly those from FPS, perceived the leftists as incompetent and borderline-violent individuals with personal agendas, who used the protest organized by others to present their own programme and draft the student protesters into their

movements. Branko Vucinic notes: "You realize they have no clue what they're doing. I mean, ok, I respect you and all, but friend, show some weight. I can talk like this because [in each protest] we would bring 400-500 people to the street [from the faculty of FPS]. [...] What they do is: we [the organizers from FPS] bring the people [to the protest] and they [the leftists] come and pull out their flags, take pictures and put it on their website, like 'Look how much people we gathered'"

3.4. Faculties and Ministry of Education

These two stakeholders will be presented together for practical reasons, as they are very much interconnected in various manners: First of all, on one level both the Ministry and the faculties benefited from a lack of a strong university - the government would not expect any real pressure or resistance from such a divided group which could easily be further divided based on individual interests - for instance, one faculty could accept a compromise on a certain issue, or would not tackle the issue at all, and thus would not provide the required support to the initiative of other faculties to resolve the issue in a more thorough manner: "For instance you can't fix the finances [of UoB] because the Faculties of Law, Economy and Organizational Sciences, also Technical Engineering as they make good money on the side, would all be against it, and there you have four faculties that will destroy any attempt by [all the] faculties to fight for a better financial status, and if I [as the Ministry] need to achieve anything else [break up some initiative by the faculties], I will play [make a deal] with someone else. It's the divide and conquer principle.", remarks professor Turajlic. As can be gathered from this example, most of the faculties also valued their autonomy as it suited the particular interest of each of faculty: " The faculties do not want to form a [strong] University so that none of the local thugs would lose their power. [...] So, unfortunately, neither the employees [of the faculties] nor the Ministry want the existence of a [strong] university", concludes Turajlic. However, at the same time there was a constant tension between these two stakeholders - The Ministry had to present to European officials that there was progress in the reform, while the faculties, as had been mentioned, found various reasons to resist the reform. Furthermore, whenever any problem related to HE arose, the

Ministry and faculties would shift the responsibility between each other: the faculties would say that they cannot do anything without an official document or financial support from the government (while many were in fact not only passive, but would operate and make decisions based on their own interests), while the Ministry would blame the faculties for their excessive autonomy, unwillingness to properly implement the reform and a general lack of motivation to tackle the various issues which arose. In such a divided university, the institution of the University itself is perceived as having little actual power. "The rector represents no one. He is in the position of the Queen of England.", remarks Turajlic.

3.5. Media

What all the protest organizers agree on is that the media were, for the most part, initially completely unfamiliar with either the concrete demands of the protesters or with the broader picture and circumstances in HE which resulted in the protest. Other than this common observation, the protesters had different experiences with the media:

The organizers from FPS see their experience with media as a positive one, due to their specific circumstances which will be mentioned in the organizing methods section. They also noted that, apart from the aforementioned initial lack of knowledge by the media concerning the student movement, they do not believe there was any sort of negative bias or censorship within the media towards the student movement.

Some of the organizers from FaP had a different experience with the media. Jelena Veljic noted that due to the initial lack of knowledge by the media of what the student movement set out to achieve, reporting of the protest demands was often unclear and thus prone to manipulation and misinterpretation of "lazy students again complaining". Furthermore, she believes that some media would change their reporting style based on the way the protest was developing, and that there was a partial media blockade of the protest, with a prominent example of Blic, the most-read daily newspaper ("While DS [Democratic party] was in power, I had the impression that Blic would never report something against DS") and Politika, the oldest daily newspaper in Serbia, publishing "some pointless articles, comments by so-called experts, about what the students actually want, but most of those [articles] were about how the students are complaining

without a reason. So, there were also these kinds of articles, critical towards the protest and student population". She also noted very favorable reporting by the anti-government daily newspaper Pravda, which "had the most objective reports which though they were on our side, they gave information to the people on what was actually happening. Meanwhile other newspapers were not at all interested in this aspect of reporting."

In summary, though the protest participants had different experiences with the media, the underlying, prevalent impressions is perhaps best summarized by Milan Miletic, who believed that: "the media was curious and open in the beginning, but the instant the student movement gained momentum, there was strong pressure on the media by the state to change the way the protests were presented."

4. The protest movement

4.1. Timeline of major and minor events

Following is an overview of the protest activities, as reported by the media, with adjustments made based on the input by interviewees. This approach was used considering that all of the interviewees noted that they have a very difficult time remembering anything other than the major events, as these protests took part four years ago and they have been active in more than one protest during their student activism career. Furthermore, I was unable to find any other documented source of these activities.

Though, as mentioned, the students at FPS have already been preparing for the protests during the summer months, the first activity reported in the media was on September 16, when the students of three departments at the Faculty of Philology filed a formal complaint to their vice dean of academic affairs, stating that the Faculty administration has, due to irregular posting of information, brought upon the students the issue of possibly losing their "budget" financing status. They explained that the Philological Faculty is interpreting the law differently than the manner of other faculties when it comes to the amount ECTS points needed for enrolment into next year. Instead of the expected requirement of obtaining 48 points for passing any exams

during the academic year, regardless which year of studies the exams relate to, the new requirement is for the students to pass both the exams from previous year, as well as obtain at least 48 points from their current year of studies - this implies that they would have to obtain, in total, more ECTS points than the 60 presupposed by the Bologna reform to be the maximum number of obtainable points per year. They have announced a protest for September 21, if they do not receive an official reply from the faculty administration until then.

This opened the issue of the so called "cumulative enrolment", which was on September 23 announced as the official demand of students by the student vice rector: " We demand that, if the student earns at least 48 ESPB points by the end of the 2009/10 academic year, they can enrol into the second year of studies. Furthermore, those who earn at least 90 points (42, which was determined for the enrolment for the previous year, plus 48, which is the current requirement) can enrol into third year of studies. Or, the student who has at least 127 points (37+42+48) earns the right to enrol into the fourth year of studies as a "budget" student. In other words, we are respecting the trend of growth of the number of points necessary for the enrolment into the next year of studies which was adopted last November, while having in mind that they do not have to be obtained in the current academic year, but rather during the entire period of studies." The second stated demand was that all students with self financing status who obtain 60 points (the maximum number of points) during the academic year should receive "budget" funding. The rationale for this is that the current law is unfair due to the fact that a student who obtained the maximum amount of points would remain with a self financing status, while another student with "budget" funding would keep his status even if obtaining the minimum required 48 points.

This article also mentioned a number of faculties which were struggling with these issues, showing beyond any doubt that this is not a local problem - faculties of natural sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy, FPS and Faculty of Organizational Sciences.

This article also reports that some 100 students gathered in front of the building of the Rectorate of UoB, while the session of the Senate of UoB (the highest body for decision making within UoB) was taking place inside, waiting to hear the decision regarding their future status and chanting "Thieves, thieves". After being stopped from the security to enter the Rectorate, they announced that they will organize protests soon.

The string of media articles over the following days more or less repeated this information, some quoting the Rector of UoB who said that the students are right when they say that the study curriculums have not been completely reformed, and that it is a fact that some professors do not want to accept the new rules. The Senate of UoB announced that a decision has been made that all the faculties must deliver reports of student pass rates by October 10 and stated that only the government can make a decision on what the rule are for the enrolment requirements. The Student Vice-rector also officially announced that there will be student protests organized if the demands of the students are not met, while at the same time the student vice dean of the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy announced massive protests if the student demands are not approved by October 5, where he expects 2000 students to attend. He also stated that talks with the MoE were supposed to have already taken place, however they for some reason were not organized. Zarko Obradovic, the Minister of Education, stated that the ministry is ready to talk with students, while pointing out that some of their demands (particularly, the demand that all those obtaining 48 ECTS points should receive "budget" funding status) are not realistic (a relatively common tactic by the Ministry officials, seen at various points in the media reports, of attempting to shift responsibility from themselves onto the students, by labelling their demands as unrealistic, the students requesting them as slackers etc. At times, however, this seems to have went beyond merely being a tactic and simply becoming a manner of disrespectful and even humiliating addressing of students) The Ministry also sees as the main source of the problem the fact that not all the faculties had done their share of the work of reforming their study programs, with some having changed absolutely nothing under various excuses. This article is also the first where two new demands by students have been mentioned - the forming of commissions which will check whether the faculties are doing the required rationalization of their study programs, as well as enabling all students of the Faculty of Architecture who graduated this year to enrol into the Faculty's master programme.

In one of the news articles in the following days, the main issue of the students of the Faculty of Architecture was further explained - the president of the Faculty's Student Parliament stated that any sort of official document with either the terms nor the number of available places for the Faculty's masters program still hasn't been published, while at the same time the students have been told by the administration that the first payment of 40000 dinars must be made

(approximately 400 Euros, out of the total masters programme tuition fee of 2400 Euros. As way of comparison, the average monthly salary in December 2009. was around 375 Euros) and that they must sign a contract which states that they are familiar and agree with the terms of the masters programme. Meanwhile, the students are practically forced to continue with master studies upon graduation, as according to the new study programmes their three year bachelor diploma would not be recognized in the job market and only by enrolling into master studies would they receive the qualifications which they had been previously told they would acquire with the completion of their primary three-year studies (as has been explained in section 2.3.). However, they are all also being forced to pay the tuition fees for the master course regardless of their previous academic accomplishments. They also stated that they have been in communication with the faculty administration and will organize protests if their demands are not met. From October 01 they also blocked the Faculty from conducting classes.

The first major protest occurred on October 05, a significant date in recent Serbian history, as on October 05 2000. the regime of Slobodan Milosevic was overthrown. The protest walk started from the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, soon joined by students from the FPS, as well as Faculties of Veterinary, Chemistry and Technology and Metallurgy, as well as students of Architecture and Law who joined the march at Slavija square (the most appropriate point for the joining of the protesters which will be used from then on - further explanation in the organizational methods section). The march proceeded to the government building where student representatives from several faculties handed over the student demands, which consisted of the aforementioned demand regarding ECTS points, as well as defining the number of "budget" places for students enrolling into masters and PhD programmes. Reportedly over a 1000 students took part in the march.

It was at this point that the demand for 48 points as a minimum for enrolment into next year was updated so that this minimum number of points would also secure the "budget" funding status for a student. The minister responded to this updated demand as unrealistic, "as not everyone can be on budget funding". Another new demand was for pre-Bologna students to be able to enrol into the final year of studies without needing to pass any exams ("unconditional enrolment"), so that they would not have to be transferred to the new Bologna programs and could finish their studies as students within the pre-Bologna system.

The protest continued locally at the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, where the students blocked the student administration service and demanded the withdrawal of the faculty's decision to make the "budget" students pay for unpassed exams which they transferred into the next year of studies, a seemingly illegal practice done by this and other faculties as means of getting more money from students. The next day, students of this Faculty also blocked the street next to their faculty for a short period of time.

On October 14, the session of the Senate of BU took place, where the Faculties representatives were expected to discuss the issue of how much money will be available for budget students (i.e. to answer whether they can approve the demand of the student protesters that all students obtaining 48 points will receive "budget" funding). The resolving of this issue was postponed, officially due to the fact that not all faculties have supplied the number of students who have obtained 48 points so far. However, a positive development for the protesters was the fact that the Faculty and the Ministry have agreed that 90% of students enrolling into master studies will be receive "budget" funding, or some 5400 students from across Serbia.

Unsatisfied with the lack of resolution of their most important demand, the students organized another protest on October 19, with (reportedly) some 150 protesters gathered for one hour in front of the Government premises, as a warning before the follow-up session of the Senate of UoB scheduled for October 21.

With the continuous postponing of the resolution of the main demand of the protester's, another protest march took place on October 26, with some 200 students of Faculties of Political Sciences, Technology and Engineering and Organizational Sciences walked from the FPS building to the Government premises, where the protesters waited while their representatives talked with government representatives.

On the beginning of November, students of the UoA commenced their own protests, according to media reports (though Milos Miletic believes that they had protest activities already in September). On November 02 Students of the Faculty of Applied Arts organized a protest gathering at one public square in the city centre, and on the following day they continued their protest by refusing to leave the building premises, demanding that all who passed the required minimum number of exams should receive "budget" funding. On November 10, students of the Faculty of Drama Arts blocked the building of the UoA Rectorate, and they were joined by the

students of the Faculty of Applied Arts, a total estimate of 300-400 protesters. The students of Faculty of Drama Arts, who are studying according to the pre-Bologna system, found out that they are being ranked for enrolment into next year of studies the same way Bologna students are, meaning that some of them would not receive "budget" funding, even though they have the right to do so according to pre-Bologna system of studies. They are thus demanding "budget" funding and all the benefits of a "budget" student. The student protesters also demanded more "budget" places for their master studies. On the following day, they were joined in their blockade by students from the Faculty of Visual Arts. The students of UoA announced that they will continue their protests and organize protest marches.

On November 11, students of Faculty of Geography blocked their faculty during the day. On November 12, one of the student representatives of FaP announced that they do not find as acceptable the proposition by the government for the students to pay a third of the tuition fee instead of the entire amount, and that they will continue protests.

With no solving of the issues in sight, the students announced new protests, and the most intense week of protesting took place:

On Monday, November 23, between 1000-1500 students protested, with the usual march route to Slavija Square and then to the government premises. However, the students now announced that they will intensify the protests until their demands are met.

On Wednesday, November 25, another seemingly similar protest march took place. However, upon reaching the government premises, a part of the protesters broke off and went to block Brankov bridge, one of the most important bridges in the city. The combined blocking of the important traffic intersection in front of the government premises and the mentioned bridge by the two group of protested resulted in a massive traffic jam. A dispatcher of one taxi service stated that "This kind of a traffic collapse is unheard of, all the main traffic routes are at a complete standstill". After walking across the bridge, this protest group returned to join the one which remained at the government premises and the student protesters stayed there until almost midnight. This protest received significant media coverage and the plan for the Friday protest was reported in detail: The protesters planned to walk across two bridges, with a detailed route outlined, likely both to put pressure on the government and to inform the citizens on how to plan their transit during the day. The students would also remain in front of the government building

until one minute before midnight, alluding to the government's lack of will to deal with issues in HE until the final moment.

On Friday, November 27, the protest reached what was likely its pinnacle, with estimates of between 2-3000 students present. After again reaching the government premises, almost a 1000 students broke off and proceeded to march across two of the most important bridges in Belgrade. This protest however caused a much lesser traffic jam, as both the city officials were now more prepared for the protest march, and the citizens planned their day accordingly and used cars to a much lesser degree. At one point during the march, the protesters stopped in front of the building where the international conference "Application of ECTS points and learning outcomes: questions and challenges" was taking place. There they organized a performance of selling Bolognese pasta to each other, with a price of 1000 euro per portion, a clear allusion to the expensive tuition fees and failure of educational reform.

While the protest group walking across the bridges, led predominantly by student organizers from FaP, was returning toward the government premises, one representative of the protesters at the government premises, Jovan Licina, president of Student Parliament of BU, was invited inside for negotiations, where he accepted the decision by the government to partially acknowledge the demands of the protesters (all the demands except the one for the cumulative enrolment). This led to the division between the two groups of protesters, as the cumulative enrolment was seen as essential for the UoA and the faculties of Philosophy, Chemistry, Technology and Metallurgy, while the Faculties of Political Sciences, Organizational sciences, Security and Geography were satisfied with this decision. One major point of discontent for the remaining student protesters was that Jovan Licina was a member the youth section of the ruling party (DS), meaning that he very likely agreed to these demands due to his party affiliation. (However, one of the organizers from FPS, Branko Vucinic, who is not a party member, explained during the interview that the student organizers of FPS made this decision together, knowing that they will thus completely lose their reputation within the other faculties, but that this decision needed to be made now, as they estimated that the coming cold weather and length of the protest meant that the protest movement would likely collapse soon. On the other hand, several of the interviewees claimed that this decision was largely influenced by pressure from DS).

On Thursday, November 03, the students of the FaP organized another protest, with several hundred students attending, marching to the government premises where they were joined by construction machines, brought by the construction company Sumadija put (who were dissatisfied with their treatment by the mayor of Belgrade and decided to support the students in order to gain media exposure for their own cause) - wheel loaders, which are symbols of regime overthrow. The following day, however, only two media outlets seem to have reported this protest, an extremely small number of reports considering how much the protest was covered during the previous weeks. This is likely due to the fact that the image of loaders could spark much larger protests, due to their symbolism. On December 10, the final protest took place at Plato, with a concert organized, with small attendance by protesters. Seeing the media blockade, the dwindling interest by student protesters, the fact that winter cold came and the exam periods were looming, as well as the fact that many organizers were exhausted after more than two months of organizing protests, the student protest movement of 2009. finally ended after this protest gathering.

4.2. Overview of organization methods

First a general overview of the organizing of protest marches and blockades will be given, while a more detailed explanation of organizational procedures for each faculty group will be presented later on.

The march routes were coordinated between student representatives in meetings and were planned in such a way to cause significant disruption of traffic and thus put pressure on the government to react. The common route for the FaP group would be to gather first at the Plato square, where they would be joined by students from UoA, and then they would all march through Kralja Milana, one of the busiest central streets. They would stop in front of the premises of the then-ruling party, which are located in this street, and would chant various anti-government messages (such as "thieves", referring to the fact that the ruling coalition was widely perceived as corrupt and stealing large amounts of money from the state budget, leaving many areas of Serbia, including HE, drastically underfunded). After this performance, they would proceed towards Slavija square, where they would join with the protesters from FPS and the

other faculties. Geographically, Slavija Square it is the most closely in the middle between various faculties across town, as well as being near the government premises, and strategically speaking, it is one of the most important points in the city for traffic, meaning that blocking it effectively paralyzes the city traffic and thus brings more attention to the protests.

Each faculty group contributed to the planning of "fun activities" and design of the banners used in the protest marches. FPS for instance organized a small game of soccer in one of the marches and brought a car with speakers which played loud music during the march, as well as drummers. Students were motivated to bring objects which create noise, such as whistles, dishes, drums etc. The students of the FaP brought the construction machines at one protest, and were reportedly the organizers of the possibly most famous performance with pasta Bolognese.

According to one student organizer from FPS, the chants used to raise the atmosphere were often made up on the spot:

- Thieves!
- Come on, let's go, everyone on "budget!" (variation of a famous sports cry)
- Oh the student woes are the greatest of all!

messages designed on banners:

- Students we are, sheep we are not
- Where I'm gonna get 1000 euros?
- I study so that I can go bankrupt
- I'm selling my kidney for a semester
- This is injustice! (with a picture of Calimero)
- Where are our rights?
- +Who ate the budget?
- The state and Bologna are riding us like a horse (rhymes in Serbian - Država i Bolonja, jašu nas kao konja)

The various blockades of faculty premises were used to exert pressure on the faculties, ranging from short term hour-long blockades to those several days or even weeks long. Students

organized shifts in which they would keep watch of the faculty premises. The most notable blockades were the month long one of Faculty of Architecture and the blockade of the UoA lasting several weeks. These students also took part in the protest marches and would return to their faculties after the march was over.

The organizing structure and approach of the protest organizers and leftist organizations can be broadly divided in the following manner:

Faculty of Political Sciences - The set of circumstances surrounding FPS led to good protest organization on their behalf. First of all, FPS, by its very nature, fosters a more proactive spirit within the student body, with numerous organizations operating at the Faculty and fighting for the students attention and their votes for the annual elections for the Student parliament. This means that members of these organizations receive concrete experience in organizing methods and communication skills, and have a strong network through which they can reach a relatively large number of students of their faculty. Furthermore, with the awareness of the protest looming in autumn, every organization was aware that they will have to get involved in the protest in order to receive student support in Student parliament elections - any organization not backing the protest would fare badly in the elections, according to Branko Vucinic. This resulted in the following development:

Already during the summer holidays, the student organizations (motivated by the realization that they have to get involved in solving the coming issues if they are to have a chance at the next student parliament elections) worked, through active posting on social networks and other means, on creating an infrastructure for disseminating information and keeping strong the motivation of the students for the protest in autumn. This was particularly necessary as the students had practically no real source of information for their future status other than the students active in organizations. Indeed, constant communication and dissemination with students proved to be the key to keeping them informed and motivated.

Secondly, the organizers did not hesitate to use other means to keep the motivation going - for instance, when the Faculty officials released a ranked list of students which would certainly enrol into the next year "on budget", the protest organizers forcibly removed the list so that no student

knew what their future status will be ("if the student knew that they were high on that list, it meant that these students would not support the protest, as they were not in a problem anymore.").

When it comes to communicating with the media and the general public, the organizers from FPS had an overall positive experience, due to several circumstances:

First of all, FPS has a journalism department, meaning that not only are students in the department connected with certain media, but many journalists working in media at the time were former students of the department and were thus more open for communication with the protest organizers. Secondly, the fact that the protest organizers tried to constantly involve and inform as many students as possible ensured that students with media connections who were in no other way involved in the protest stepped up and provided their contacts.

Secondly, the protest organizers took an active stance in creating an image of the student protest for the general public through the media, in several ways. To begin with, as the media was uninformed concerning the student protests and issues in HE, many of the journalists, when first approaching the protest organizers, asked them to write to them with all the details concerning the protest, meaning that from the start the protest organizers often had the opportunity to make the news reports in these media favourable to the student movement. Furthermore, the protest organizers took special care to make the protest walks themselves look presentable to the media and thus the general public. This included organizing an unofficial security team of the protest, consisting of students-members of a rugby club, who were tasked with ensuring that there were no incidents within the protest march. Possible incidents being prevented included control of alcohol consumption by protest participants (as two years ago, a photo of students drinking alcohol next to a famous statue painted a negative picture of the protesters) and controlling the activities of radical leftists (preventing them from displaying their signs which would make the protest perceived as organized by leftists). The organizers also at times resorted to active manipulation of the perception of the protest, as best summarized by David Bakic: "For instance, in our first protest we had 200 people. All the media reported that there was around 1000. Because what happened was [the journalists asked us] -How many people do you have at the protest? -Well, between two and three thousand. And then they give you a look, they see 200

people and they write down 1000. We literally did these kinds of things. [...] I think the key to our victory was the fact that we were able to create the public opinion to our advantage."

Faculties at Plato

Considering the organizers of FaP came from various faculties, their experience in organizing varied considerably between themselves, as was previously mentioned. Some were seasoned veterans of student protests while for others this was their first involvement in any form of student activism. Student organizers from these faculties would meet at various places (ranging from faculty premises to cafes) where they would discuss and plan their activities, without any one place being designated as the main meeting point.

Though often not as experienced, these organizers also made significant contributions to the protests:

- The initiative to radicalize the protest and walk across the bridges came from FaP, after it was felt that the current march route will not make sufficient pressure on the government and could also tire the students due to repetition.
- As was mentioned, one of the most notable activity, the eating of the Bolognese spaghetti in front of the premises where the conference on Bologna reform took place, was reportedly created by the FaP group
- A method for taking photos of the entire protest column was discovered by an activist from this group, whereby a photographer would wave at people looking at the protest from apartment windows and would ask them through mime gestures whether he could enter their premises. At some point some of the tenants would comply and the photographer would be able to take pictures of the protest march from a higher altitude. This method was used in protests in the following years.

University of Arts

The students from the UoA contributed significantly with their creative and humorous banners in which it was evident that a large amount of effort was put, and which were the visual highlight of each protest march. The already mentioned strong sense of connectedness between students of this university meant that they were a reliable source of support, in the sense that two hundred of

these students could always be expected to take part in the protests (20% of the entire student body of UoA), compared to the much more unreliable number of participants from other faculty groups. Furthermore, at least two students of UoA made video recordings of the protests which they used later on to create clips and even documentaries in support of the student movement.

When it comes to the organizing methods at UoA, a large number of students would take part in daily meetings where they would discuss what the protest development and next steps. "We more or less conducted plenums, though we didn't call them that", notes Milos Miletic. However, the UoA students for the most did not have a developed political awareness and were not keen on giving suggestions in meetings, as Miletic points out: "Due to this lack of a political awareness, of social awareness, it often boiled down to: Ok, what do we do? And because I am the student vice-rector, I am expected to say what we should do. And then I say I think we should do this and that, and someone adds something more and then we vote on that and do it" Miletic also believes that it wa

Radical leftists

While there were certain ideological differences between the various leftist activists and organizations, in reality their modus operandi was the same, according to Vuk Vukovic, a student protester who became active in Marks21 after the protests of 2009: the main system of organizing which the leftist activists advocated and practiced was based on direct democracy. This meant conducting "plenums", meetings where all the students present were to join in the discussion and decision making directly. Any task would be delegated to whomever was interested during the particular meeting, with work groups formed based on the number and type of tasks. What was particularly important for plenum organizers was that any person chosen to issue statements to the media or take part in negotiations would have this responsibility on a very short-term basis, most often only until the next meeting. This was to prevent the appearance of student representatives, which the plenum organizers viewed negatively, as already pointed out. These plenums were occasionally organized, primarily within the Plato group of faculties (mostly at the Philosophical, sometimes at the Philological and Mathematical faculty), as a means of the leftists' coordination of their portion of protest activities and an attempt to guide the student protest towards the leftists' more global demands (advocating for free education and

direct democracy as a form of student organizing). The leftists would bring their own banners to the protest walks, with messages such as *Non passaran*, because of which they would clash with the other non-left protest organizers, who did not wish to have the protest perceived as organized by the left, believing that this would discredit the entire student movement. For instance, Vuk Vukovic, one of the student protesters, notes that at the time of the protests he believed that people from Marks21 were one of the main organizers, and in fact he perceived some people, who were not involved in the organizing, as members of the organization.

The effectiveness of the plenums as a method of organizing is differently perceived by the interviewees. Vuk Vukovic believes that the plenums "were meaningful, especially in the beginning. However there were meetings which dragged on for hours, though they were functional". Marina Kvrzic recalls the plenums after the breakup of the protests - "The topic was mostly what to do next [...] It was insisted that we should focus solely on free education. And nothing happened afterwards because they were not organized well enough. It was all just talk. The plenums had a good story, but it was FPS and the faculties surrounding it that had good technical [protest organizing] skills". Based on the experience by some of the protest organizers, the plenums involving large number of students and constant rotation of responsibilities never became efficient enough to take over as a viable solution for protest organizing - certain students were always turn out to be more active within the meetings, and there would always have to be further, smaller meetings where more detailed planning would take place, as it was extremely difficult to plan activities with dozen or even hundreds of participants in a meeting at the same time.

5. Outcomes of the protest (short term and long term)

As mentioned in the protest timeline section, the government approved all the demands except those for the cumulative enrolment. The direct effect of approving some the protest demands resulted in several thousands of students continuing their studies, as many would have been unable to continue studying if they had to pay the tuition fees. (One interviewee, David Bakic, emphasized this by saying that through the protests throughout the years "we have saved at least 4 generations of students who were thrown into the Bologna [system]).

When asked in which manner has the student protest movement contributed to student empowerment and educational reform, practically all the interviewees answered that there was no contribution in either fields. Professor Turajlic noted that the protests have in fact the regressed the reform of HE, as they have again postponed the solving of the actual reasons behind the issues. However, upon further discussion some indirect outcomes were defined:

- The student protests played an important role in informing, even educating both the media and general population on the state and issues of HE in Serbia. "I believe the protests attracted a lot of attention", Vladimir Smudja notes, continuing "[...] we have certainly explained to people what Bologna is." He also believes that the parents and future students have become more aware of the fact that being "on budget" is a very uncertain thing, which gave wind to the private universities in Serbia, a claim shared by Marina Kvrzic - the parents would reason that if there are so many issues in public universities and the tuition fees are expensive, and if the tuition fees in private universities are not that different, then private universities become a viable option.

- Most of the protest organizers noted that taking part in the protests was for them a very significant experience, which resulted in new skills, connections, motivation for activism, "friends for life", as well as strong respect from other students. All of these gains also became the foundation for future work of these activists in HE, with some notable achievements:

- popularization of nonformal education in student representatives and broader student population: after the protest was officially over, several protest organizers from the FaP continued their cooperation through a number of projects of nonformal education for both the wider student population and student representatives. One of the most successful

projects was a free school of foreign languages through which thousands of students over the years have received free language classes, and hundreds of students of the Philological faculty received adequate practical teaching experience which they would otherwise not have received through their formal education (which was why they were willing to conduct these classes for free). The various faculties at which the classes took place provided the classrooms for free, considering that they were vacant at the time the language classes would take place. The only expenses were the copying of textbooks for the classes, which the class participants paid for (this was an extremely small expense for the individual student, due to the high number of copies additionally reduced the already quite cheap copying fee).

Apart from these projects, an important development was the embracing of nonformal education by some of the protest organizers, most notably those at the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy (FTM). One of the seminars in project writing, conducted after the protests as part of the cooperation between protest organizers, strongly motivated the student leaders of FTM to focus themselves on further spreading nonformal education. Their personal development through nonformal education led to one of FTM students becoming the president of the Student Association of Belgrade (SAB), a syndical student organization with significant logistical resources which was at the time focused primarily on organizing student parties and field trips (in spite of presenting itself as a non-profit organization, there were numerous rumours of their making a profit through these activities) etc., and was mostly inactive when it came to dealing with deeper educational issues, as well as not being involved in any manner in the protests. Now, with the involvement of FTM students, their goal is to reorganize SAB to mobilize its resources and become more focused on nonformal education and contribution to student empowerment and educational reform, through the organizing of various seminars and projects, as well as drafting policies.

- some of the protest organizers used their new experience, connections and reputation to take power of the Student Parliament of UoB, through which they've:

- initiated the re-evaluation of study programs BU faculties and for a comparative analysis of local study programs and those from abroad, with the goal of improving study programs.
- Initiated surveys as part of the Report for self-evaluation of faculties (as part of the process of accreditation of study programs) for two standards - student standard and procedure of student self-evaluation.
- lobbied for and took part in the creation of the standard for student leaders, a detailed document on the character traits, skills and knowledge a student leader should possess, which was adopted by the TEMPUS office¹⁶
- Lobbied for and achieved the formal recognition of extracurricular activities of students, particularly in volunteering and student organizing. The students would now receive extra ECTS points for this involvement.

- The ministry recognized the students and student representatives as a more influential stakeholder than before the protests, due to the strong presence of the protest activities in the media, as several interviewees pointed out. This led to better communication between the Ministry officials and student representatives on various issues - David Bakic recalls that at one point the Minister "had a red line [emergency telephone] with Vladimir Smudja for any issue that arose." This recognition also meant that all of the student protests after 2009, related to the same issues of enrolment policy achieved their demands much more quickly - in fact, Marina Kvrzic points out that one year the protest practically didn't even take place, with the Ministry accepting the demands of the students in early negotiations.

- leftist organizations profited from the protests as they strived to create the perception that they were the ones responsible for organizing the protests, thus raising their reputation in one part of the student and general population "as the only ones who are still fostering the tradition of student resistance", according to Vladimir Smudja.. The leftists also received an increase in their membership, as reported by both Vuk Vukovic and Matija Medenica, which likely contributed to

¹⁶ Tempus (*Trans-European mobility scheme for university studies*) is an EU program which helps the reform and modernization of higher education in partner countries

their later activities (such as the blockade of the Philosophical Faculty which was mostly organized by leftist activists).

-Students-members of youth sections of political parties who were involved in the protest, advanced through their ranks due to their breaking-up of the protest, according to Vladimir Smudja. At the same time, due to their very visible political background and negative involvement in the protest, the student parliament became very discredited by a large number of students, which Milos Miletic sees as a positive development.

6. Overview of protests 2010-2013

The protests in the following years have repeated the pattern of primarily focusing on postponing the negative consequences of the inadequate implementation of the Bologna reform, with very similar demands to the ones in 2009. While there have been some variations in the protest approach, including a more comprehensive blockade of the Philosophical and Philological Faculties by leftist activists in 2011 and with a hunger strike in 2012, the interviewees feel that none of the later protests achieved any change when it comes to educational reform and student empowerment, with some organizers also noting that none of the following protests could match the 2009 in size and indirect impact. In fact, according to professor Turajlic, looking at the latest protest of 2013, while the change in the Law on HE answered the demands of the students (48 ECTS points and 6 exam periods) might seem beneficial to the students, it is in fact "a disaster that the students got this, but in fact it's a disaster that the students were demanding these things at all. Because what they demanded and got is an ideal way to hide the university's avoidance of work [on the reform]. In other words, instead of opening the question of why the students cannot achieve 60 ECTS points and thus put the ball in the court of those responsible for making this possible, they have opted for 48 points and allowed the university to do as it pleases." Furthermore, several of the interviewees noted that they have also perceived a change in the student population in the recent years - they are even more divided and focused on their own personal interests, and given even less free time due to intense schedules at the faculties (before the Bologna reform, they had much more leeway when it came to attendance in classes). One possible explanation, according to professor Turajlic (echoing how the student protest participant

Marina Kvrzic described some of the protesters of the 2009 protest), is the fact that they grew up during the 90s and 00s, meaning that in the first decade of their lives they saw the poverty and insecurity during Milosevic's regime, while in the next decade they saw the disappointment of their parents - all of this leading to the students becoming mostly focused on themselves, on finishing their studies and figuring out what to do next.

7. Conclusion & lessons learned

Following are the reflections, conclusions and ideas of the interviewees on how the student movement should develop in order to significantly contribute to HE reform and student empowerment:

Firstly, any future movement dealing with issues in HE in Serbia needs to make extensive preparations before major activities. Several interviewees stress the importance of preparation: Vladimir Smudja states that "what was missing [in the protest movement] was the preparation. What we lacked is that we only got introduced to one another at the protests themselves when we already had certain plans. The students, when we were starting [with the protests], did not know much about it [the issues]. [...] What was missing was one year of educating the students themselves and what I find as the key - preparing for the [student] parliament. We shouldn't have allowed the student parliament to enter the protest. What literally happened was that the parliament supported the protest, and then killed it.". Marina Kvrzic believes that it should take at least a year of preparation through communication with/through the media to talk about a concrete issue, and then for the finale an action such as a protest should take place. Branko Vucinic notes that one of the reasons for the low attendance in the protests from some faculties was because of their lack of preparation: "They were not organized [...] We at FPS had a flow of information, Facebook groups, mailing lists of each year of each study program, but this infrastructure was being built during the summer of that year [...] And then you had people [from the faculties with low student participation in the protests] who would just write a Facebook status "Hey, protest is tomorrow". No one will come this way."

This importance of preparation and good organization is evident when comparing the high level of competence of organization of student protesters at the FPS and the more diverse, but in general less organized groups at FaP - consequently a much larger number of protesters proportionally came from FPS than from FaP. However, both of these groups have a proportionally lower number of students participating in protests compared to the UoA, due to the specific circumstances of the faculties of that university. Therefore, apart from organizing skills, having in mind the size, amount of socializing, motivation and other characteristics of the student body of particular faculties, as well as departments within faculties, is essential during the planning of protest activities (an often heard complaint, for instance, from organizers at the Faculty of Philology is that the students are simply not motivated to join the protest - even though that Faculty is one of the largest faculties in Serbia, it had a dramatically low percentage of its students taking part in the protests. However, there was not a truly systematic approach by the protest organizers of FPS to creating an organizational structure with clear ideas on how to inform and motivate such a large study base - the problem was only perceived, without a proper reaction to the situation)

Several interviewees agree that the student movement should define itself positively and not simply against something, with a long-term strategy and broader goals other than reacting at the last moment while attempting to solve the immediate, annual issues. Marina Kvrzic states: "The era of the protests is over. If I was part of a movement, I would base myself on mini-actions for raising of awareness, and it would take me some 10 years of working only in this to achieve a significant change." Srbijanka Turajlic believes that an organization should be formed which would then draft a serious policy programme, which would offer concrete measures and then mobilize students: "For instance, what do they see as the key issues of their studies? Outdated study programs. Yes, our programs are a disaster. Let's see how we could solve this. Some measures are proposed and later an ultimatum is set, and then you go out into the streets. The students need to realize that there is someone who is willing to take care of their interests, in order for them to support it [such a movement]" Jelena Veljic stated she would from now on only get involved in major projects: "For example, let's try to make free education happen at any cost, and then think up a strategy of how to achieve this."

Both Jelena Brankovic and professor Turajlic believe that the reform of the system of funding is a major topic that must be put into focus by any future student movement, and that the social background of the students must be taken more strongly into account. Jelena Brankovic further suggests "to start with the faculties, I would first make a team at several faculties which would decide on what we would do, under the assumption that we understand each other in the sense of the values which we share. Then I would start the work on my faculty, a project which would be very much online, which would be provocative, make the students think about some things they haven't thought of before. Some sort of campaign which would later spread. I wouldn't hit the institutions or anyone until we have a critical mass. Asking general questions and working on making every student ask themselves this question. High school students too. Something which would be recognizable to people and could be summed up in 3 questions, in order to attract people. Nothing too aggressive, as people would try distance themselves from that, seeing it as a potential threat. People are attracted by the average, that's what they need." Milos Miletic believes that allying with other stakeholders, such as trade unions, and focusing on broader social issues is a must for any future student movement.

Vladimir Smudja believes that "the first thing is connecting the students between themselves. The second is education - of the student leaders themselves, we should all go through this education and know at least a little bit about everything [related to student issues], and then [we should educate] the other students, who are not enthusiastic enough to lead, get out on the street, who need to know their own rights, who can't just come and act like they're in high school. When they are educated, they can educate their families. And then the next step is - the media. When we have a lot of students, we have a lot of media attention. Through the media we would send a message about what's not working, point out the problems and offer solutions, and then, independently of the state we could undertake some things at our faculties. For instance, I am doing the re-evaluation [of study programs] for the fifth time at our faculty this year. Re-evaluations, surveys, comparative analysis of programs with similar programs from abroad... All of this can be done without any resources, all you need is people willing to do it. This would more or less be the fifth step - achieving concrete results and then going into the public again with this."

As one of the most important steps in this process, several interviewees emphasize the need for good communication between the protest organizers and the student body, which was often lacking in the protest movement of 2009: "What I think should have been and should in the future be different is that there should be much more talking with the students, which can last a year or two before a major action, this can be tough and boring work, but until we know what the people want, we can only hope that our previously constructed demands will correspond with theirs. But from my experience, in the past four years there is less and less of this corresponding", observes Vuk Vukovic. Commenting on the faculties that participated the least in the protests, Branko Vucinic points out that organizers from those faculties "were not charismatic and were not respected at their faculties, and they were people who were not studying under Bologna and did not have contact with these generations. "

Furthermore, the student movement should show more boldness and creativity in its actions. Having in mind that the students are generally perceived positively by the majority of the population, no government in Serbia would dare use violence against them. "This is the reason why the students never received a beating during Milosevic, unlike regular citizens. They are in a way protected and this is an advantage that has to be used.", remarks Srbijanka Turajlic, who also feels that the students did not make use of this enough. One example of good use of this tactic are the protest marches across the bridges, which were first perceived as a too risky move, as there were already threats from the police that certain student leaders would be detained or even violence would be used against the students. However, after the decision was made to march across the bridge, the police dared not intervene. This act of blocking two bridges, unheard of in recent history of Belgrade, brought much attention to the student cause and pressure on the government. Many similar actions could be organized which could have a significant impact, without a big expenditure of resources. Matija Medenica also notes that the protest should involve more creative activities, "as [over time] you tend to get too focused on the technical issues, endless pointless arguments..." and thus the involvement of UU students and other creative individuals should be encouraged due to their contribution. Finally, the students should strive to move away from the two narratives which were often present in the media during the protest, " either 'the poor students who couldn't get enrolled [into next year of studies] even

though they have good marks or you have 'the slackers'. You have to talk about education as a public service.[...] education is a need of the state.", remarks Milos Miletic. He also believes that the students first need to address the socio-economic issues related to HE before tackling the issue of the reform of the purpose and curriculum of HE itself.

In conclusion, it is my hope that this paper has, first of all, answered the main research question to a satisfactory degree - in which manner has the student movement contributed to student empowerment and educational reform. Furthermore, my belief is that the interviewees' reflections on their protest experience, as well as their ideas and suggestions for future student movements, should provide the reader with ample information helpful for any future organizing, whether in HE or in other areas. Finally, the various indirect and/or originally invisible effects, which were both more numerous and more significant than either myself or any of the interviewees imagined, should be a useful and encouraging reminder to all activists that it is easy to overlook the effects of what one does, and that it is extremely important to properly evaluate all the activities, without resorting to conclusions based on prejudices. Only through such reflection and a critical analysis of what we have and haven't achieved can we create a clearer picture of not only the change we want to bring about in the future, but of what we can and should do right now.



one of the most popular signs designed by UoA students - "To je nepravda!" (It's not fair!)



gathering at Plato square before one of the protest walk, various signs by UoA students



gathering at Plato square before one of the protest walk, various signs by UoA students



Beginning of the walk of the FaP and UoA students



protest march of FaP and UoA students towards Slavija square



meeting of FaP and UoA students at Slavija square with the FPS/Vozdovac group



all the protest groups walking together towards the government premises



all the protest groups walking together towards the government premises



consstruction machines at the final protest walk