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THE YOUTH IN A POST-TRUTH ERA

European Identity and Education

Edited by

IZABELA KISIĆ and SEŠKA STANOJLOVIĆ

Helsinki Committee
for Human Rights
in Serbia

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AND EDUCATION

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PREFACE

Contribution to the global debate

Ongoing public debates frequently focus on European identity. What sparked off such debates were tremendous global changes after the Cold War, disappearance of two opposing blocs, ethnic conflicts, migrations, sociopolitical crises of liberal societies as well as the mass renouncement of value-based orientations Europe and the whole world had been built on after World War II and defeat of Nazism. People all over the world are now growingly concerned with the issues of statehood, ethnicity and the notion of “being a citizen.” Political manipulation of collective identities badly affects people’s lives and policies on which societies are being built. Many theoreticians are questioning – and with good reason – the very notion of collective identity, ethnic in the first place, as extremely exclusive.

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia has launched a series of round tables under the title “Youth in a Post-Truth Era: European Identity and Education.” Participants were intellectuals of younger generations mostly, NGO activists and civil sector representatives, but secondary school and university students too. What we wanted achieve with these open debates – never devoid of controversial arguments – was to give shape to authentic views with impact on practical politics and (in)formal education of the youth.

Our researches and experience in communication with young people show that they do care about collective identities, and that their ethnicities and religions are crucial in identity-building. Although they recognize the potential of Euro-integration for, say, better schooling or economic progress, a snail’s pace of the accession process and domestic propaganda make them turn to other international players. Young Serbs are turning to Russia and Putin, Bosniaks to Turkey and Erdogan, while young Hungarians to Serbia’s neighbor in the north and Orban. Revisionism also strongly influences the youth regardless of their ethnicities. They practically always oppose strongly any questioning of patriarchal values and react fiercely to it.

Value-based orientations as such are mostly the effects of the spread of fake news and narratives predominant in the media, schools environments and families; the narratives that forced their way into the public sphere in the 1980s, bloomed in the 1990s and are thriving now against the global backdrop.

Is the narrative about European identity and education a key to changes and inclusive enough? When I say European identity I am not advocating for Euro-centrism, especially not now when it implies social and economic exclusion of people heading for

Europe from various continents and countries, or those outside the European Union. In Balkan countries aspiring to EU membership European identity is used as a political instrument supportive to integration processes. At the same time, it supports the transfer from a one-dimensional, nationalistic and wartime identity to a multi-dimensional, civic one. As it has turned out so far, the issues of class consciousness, socioeconomic justice and the right to education for all will be predominant in the debates to come.

We do not intend to impose alternative narratives on the youth but to capacitate them for critical thought; to help them recognize and stand up against social repression and collective identities that have been imposed on them and exclude any “otherness.”

Ever since the early 1990s the European Commission has also been focused on the researches of European identity (or identities). The European bureaucracy was interested in it for very practical reasons: the European Commission’s concern with the manner in which different processes of identification with the European Union shape integrative processes and strengthen the sense of solidarity among Europeans.

On the eve of the Gothenburg Summit in November 2017 the European Commission issued guidelines for strengthening of the common European identity through education and culture, under the motto “unity in diversity.” The document was meant for the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the European Socioeconomic Committee and the Committee of Regions. It was motivated by the rise of populism “at home” and beyond the EU, the spread of fake news and manipulation of information networks. Given that the EU administration interferes not into educational systems and culture of its member-states but leaves them to national, regional and local authorities, its role is limited to strengthening of cooperation and support to national projects in these spheres. It realized that education and culture make Europe attractive for learning and working, attractive as a space of freedom and shared values reflected in fundamental rights and an open society. And education as such builds foundations for active citizenship and helps to prevent populism, xenophobia and violent radicalism. Education, along with culture, plays a key role in cross-border meetings and learning about the true meaning of “being a European.”

According to an analysis commissioned by the European Commission, joint, cross-border actions such as engagement in social movements or in organizations with shared goals (such as ecologic organizations) can promote the sense for European identity since collective actions are always taking into consideration the “other’s” points of view.

How to involve candidates for the membership of the EU in the debate on Europe’s future and identity (identities) is among major issues. Isolated periphery and people’s frustration with accession that is being constantly postponed incite Euro-skepticism and passivity of the youth who actually stand for European integration.

The publication “European Identity and Education” resulted from a series of discussions and debates organized by the Helsinki Committee. Its introductory section presents

one of the essays and political analyses of the international and local context in which Serbia's youth are being raised: "Democracy, Pluralism and Extremism" by Vladimir Gligorov.

The following section presents readers with draft practical politics for those dealing with institutional and informal education of the young. These draft policies, actually suggestions, are about teaching methods that may efficiently develop critical thinking among the youth and their awareness about alternatives. Inter alia, the suggested approaches are meant to motivate young people to get actively involved in building of a democratic society based on pluralism, inter-culturalism, solidarity and socioeconomic rights. Recommendations can be summed up as follows: 1. Strengthening of the idea of active citizenship; 2. Media literacy and development of critical thinking of the youth; and 3. Development and modernization of educational programs and present approaches to education of school children.

Drafts of public policies were on the agenda of debates held in Belgrade and Novi Sad with participation of scholars and activists from younger generations mostly, concerned with the issues of identity and education. This publication also presents excerpts from those debates.

How possibly could cosmopolitanism, inter-culturalism, anti-fascism and open society be promoted in today's Serbia but also in Europe where extremism, fear of "otherness," concerns for the safeguard of one's own national identity that is allegedly threatened, be on the up and up? This is one of major dilemmas facing us today.

Few students have access to informal education that rests on the principles guiding a democratic society. Speaking from experience many participants in debates pointed to the lack in professional staffs involved in educational process. Civic education is being marginalized in elementary and secondary schools. The participants also presented well-thought-out arguments against religious teaching in school curricula.

The majority of participants take that strengthening of informal education that would lead towards incorporation of similar contents and methods into the educational system could be a solution to the above-mentioned dilemma. That would be a chance for attracting young people whose interests and ambitions are well beyond the rigid educational system, they argue. Positive experiences of Yugoslavia's inter-culturalism and socialism, and the common history and culture can be used as resources for strengthening interculturalism throughout the region. Small steps forward within institutions that depend, above all, on individual activism and courage are another possible approach to resolution.

This publication is meant as a contribution to local but also more extensive debate on European identity and new European policies that would cope with today's challenges by far more efficiently.

The publication and tape-recording of almost the entire debate are also available at the Committee's website at www.helsinki.org.rs.

Izabela Kisić

I INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

VLADIMIR GLIGOROV

Democracy, Pluralism and Extremism

Summary

The difference between the right-wing and the left-wing populism is that the former is a class populism while the latter nationalistic. However, there are some similarities between the two when it comes to means and sometimes to final objectives. In the situations with sharpened ideological competition and, especially, territorial disputes between states the rightist populism has a bigger power of mobilization and, therefore, better chances to win the struggle for power. Although both are authoritarian, it is much harder to democratize the rightist one. They both should be distinguished from totalitarianism although they often lead towards it. Some form of institutionalization of international relations is imperative for curbing the spread of populism. As illustrative examples this paper focuses on the cases of Yugoslavia and Serbia.

Introduction

Democracies are not unconditionally stabile. Whether or not they will be depends on three circumstances at least. One of them is pluralism of interests. The other is a lasting, a stable value system. And the third is security: physical, legal and social. How are democracies being destabilized? And what role does populism play in this?

Pluralism of interests

Theoretically, three mutually competitive outcomes in three domains of public policy have been harmonized. In the first, political domain distribution of power is crucial and the power is manifest in the level of support given to it no matter how this support has been mobilized (Gligorov, 1985). The second domain is ideological and hence implies value systems endorsed by individuals or groups. The third is economic in the largest sense of the term, but here focused on just and equal or unequal distribution.

These three dimensions have different structures or, to put it other way, their competition – political, ideological and economic – leads to different distributions in each. For instance, in politics they compete for amassing popular support since having the majority of any sort ensures stronger influence on, say, governmental decision-making and, therefore, usually does not give an upper hand to peripheral or minority interests. Unlike political ideological competition is after strengthening authentic, original, true or consequent stances and, therefore, may favor minority but in certain sense true and moral value systems. Finally, inequality incites disputes between, say, the middle class and the poor, let along between these two and the wealthy.

So, we have three competitive dimensions of decision-making: one in which people with similar interests join hands in order to become more politically powerful, the other that confronts consequent with, say, pragmatic stands, and the third which is redistributive on, say, class basis (Acemoglu, Egorov, Sonin 2012).

For instance, democratic decision-making, decisions that are being made by the majority, confronts the majority and the minority; ideological disputes bring about the split between orthodox and revisionists; economic competition results in separation of those who are poorer and those richer. If interests, for instance, are diverse enough, the majority set of interests, majority coalition of interests, which should also stand for governmental program in democratic decision-making, is usually concentrated around the center of political arena. However, since ideological stands aspire to propriety and credibility, aim at being reliable, ethic and true to themselves, it is only logical that they are far apart; it is quite possible, therefore, that the minority defends certain stands, and that's why those genuinely committed to an ideology are more likely to be the advocates of extreme than moderate values vis-à-vis, say, supporters of predominant political interests. On the other hand, distribution of benefits should usually favor more those who are richer, and the interests and values advocated by the majority, although not to the extremes the ideological division may reach.

More precisely, we can see how the distribution of values in those three dimensions functions in some of stable democracies. Interests should not be polarized but pluralistic and relatively equally distributed in a political space; therefore, those interests that are somewhere in the center should be the interests the majority would vote for in elections (Aristotle's idea of a middle class or, later on, a civil class).

However, ideological values have to maintain some distance between each other (what is it that makes us different from them); that is why they will be, say, more to the left or more to the right of those suited to the political majority.

On the other hand, the distribution of benefits would reflect some inequality: there would be more those who are poorer than those well to do, so that an averagely rich person would be wealthier than someone representing a democratic majority (this is the sum and substance of the so-called theory about a middle, average voter that leads to the conclusion that democracies do not exactly tend towards favoring the poorer).

Should we divide the space of those three dimensions into a left and a right segment, ideologically confronted people with more extreme stands would be to the left and to the right of a political center, while a middle voter would be in the majority, the same one both sides need to win over to ensure majority support, while an averagely rich person would be, say, to the right from that middle voter.

The majority obviously depends on whether, let's call it in general, public space is stable or not. Shifting it to the left or to the right is one of the ways of changing its relations. If interests are, say, relatively stable due to overall social and economic stability and, hence, the level of inequality also relatively stable, the space can be shifted to the left or the right through ideological competition. Since ideologues are almost professionally more consequent or dogmatic than most of their followers, in the case political and economic interests are subordinated to ideological because, say, it is taken that political and economic decisions have to be more clearly and consequently justified, the entire space could shift to one side or the other.

And so, the possibility for political extremism is to be found in the very nature of ideological competition.

Moreover, because of the possibility to have a political space shifted through ideological competition, the latter could be played on for this very purpose. Therefore, besides advocating proper interpretation of a political teaching, ideologies could also stand for rationalization of certain political or economic interests. And indeed, the term ideology is used in both senses: as an authentic interpretation of certain values and as promotion of political or economic values to the level of true values. We could call them either inherent or instrumental. In both cases they aspire towards proper interpretation, opposite to a wrong, dogmatic or revisionist one, which is why they want to be more extreme or less prone to compromise than, say, political or economic interests. Their goal is to separate commitment to values from commitment to interest realization or from a concern that endorsing an ideology may cost one giving up one's existing or attainable benefits.

The public space will shift to the extent of a success of an ideological competition; so, for instance, it will be more adjusted to the interests of those better to do or those who are poorer. This requires having the influence of pluralism of interests reduced or at least polarized in accordance with ideological division.

Desirable and attainable

Division into an ideological and political competition sources from the very nature of public activism that has to determine how desirable and attainable a goal is and consider that social contribution could be differently distributed. Each of those three elements of public assessment and activity can be a matter of independent choice; a choice of a goal need not be made by its attainability, while the attainability itself may depend

on readiness and not only on capability for reaching it, on strong will and not only on available resources. For instance, a goal can be binding even if unattainable at the moment but will be in the future, while hesitating to start realizing an attainable goal as it implies, say, unequal distribution of responsibility could make the very goal undesirable.

Let's take, for instance, Rawls' realistic utopia (1971): a set of goals and means to realize them, which is conceivable and attainable only if distribution of rights and duties changes in a major way. That would be an ideological offer extreme vis-à-vis a political or any other system and, therefore, utopian; but not necessarily unattainable should an ideological space shift enough to this side and ensure mobilization of political support. So, this is a way for ensuring legitimacy to alternative political project though ideological competition.

It is assumed here that this is about a desirable goal that is attainable if the necessary readiness to invest necessary resource in its realization is ensured. At least one form of populism can be determined when compared with a real utopia. It relates to a set of desirable goals that are unattainable and not only because of the absence of the needed readiness or, to put it otherwise, political support.

Now it probably makes sense to digress to the sphere of economic understanding of populism. Researches of political developments in Latin America in the 1970s and 80s are probably most thorough (Dornbush and Edwards, 1991). In them, populism referred to economic policy for redistributing income from those better to do to those who are poorer. These researches were after analyzing attainability of such redistribution either by usual measures of economic policy or systemic changes. They resulted in criticism of populism as an unattainable economic policy.

The simplest example of this – not to bother ourselves with detailed analysis of this theory of populism – is probably the so-called original sin. A government, for instance, decides to finance public expenditure with inflationary policies or, to put it simply, by money printing. This will lead towards replacement of domestic currency by foreign (which is the “original sin”) and reduction of the amount of taxable income, which stands – so to speak – for total sum of domestic currency; and to ensure a desirable fiscal result this will necessitate a speedier and speedier inflation.

For instance, this is how Serbia's wars financed in the early 1990s. Finally, a hyperinflation testified of impossibility of such monetary and economic policy. Here we have the original sin since replacement of domestic currency by foreign turns into a permanent tool of restricting the use of inflationary taxes. This original sin is being “inherited” as it results – as it did in the case of Serbia – in long-term use of foreign currency – first the German mark, and Euro now – in changed circumstances, which remains the same even when inflationary taxing is given up. This is how monetary policy becomes unavailable, which, in turn, restricts fiscal and hence practically every other redistribution policy to the advantage of the poorer and puts a brake on the leftist populism making it unfeasible.

It could be said here that a reason behind the said unfeasibility is the fact that foreign currency is available at all. A strict control of cross-border financial transactions would simply make it impossible for domestic currency to flee into foreign. More generally speaking, protectionist measures of one sort or other would make populist goals attainable. This is in the basis of teaching – like that of Dani Rodrik – that economic nationalism, or democratic in his case, ensures economic progress while reducing inequalities in distribution of wealth and income. In Serbia’s case – to be discussed more in the paragraphs below – we had the argument against signing the Stabilization and Accession Agreement with the European Union.

It should be noted, without further analysis of economic sustainability of economic populism, that we are faced here with two different types of populism, which are somewhat mutually connected if connected around the idea of protectionism or shunning competition with foreign states or foreigners in general. One of the two, so to speak, is leftist or class populism that aims at reducing the gap between the poorer and richer, while the other, also in a way, rightist or national meant to increase “our” wellbeing rather than “theirs” or, as they usually say over here, to pursue the economic policy that is in the service of national or public interests. Ideologues of both populisms aspire at blending class and national interests, which in itself questions not only desirability but also feasibility of so “blended” populism.

Generally speaking, economic studies of populism, primarily in Latin America, in the second half of the past century mostly indicated the incompatibility of political goals and available resources, while concluding that populism, leftist in this particular case, rather paves the way to regression than to economic and social progress. This is still a predominant analysis of economic populism despite the fact that some findings and conclusions have been corrected in the meantime (Rodrik, 2017).

Two populisms

As stated above, most economic studies of populism have been focused on Latin America. One of the reasons why is that Latin America’s experience resulted in the so-called Washington consensus (Williamson, 1990), notably criticized by leftist economists and commentators although not them only. However, the experience of the 1930s when advocates of the leftist, class populism and those of the rightist, national came into real conflict is probably more relevant. Such conflict is nonexistent in the studies of Latin American populism in the 1960s and 70s because the advocates of autocracy or dictatorship who were not directly connected with the rightist, nationalistic populism were on the right.

The main difference between the leftist and rightist populism is in the policy for redistribution of property and income – in other words, whom it is desirable to take from and whom to give. The leftist, class populism takes the rich are those to be taken from and the poor to be given to. The rightist, nationalistic populism argues,

“Take away from them and give to us.” In the 1930s – under considerable influence of Russia’s October Revolution but also of the ideology of revolutionary changes – the right-wing did not perceive democracy as an efficient tool for reducing the class gap. It was argued that class conflicts could not be settled in elections but in the streets only.

On the other hand, the rightist populism advocated ethnic cleansings and international conflicts aimed at changing ethnic fabric and state borders. The rightist populism simply needs enemies on racial, ethnic, cultural or territorial basis. Therefore, what matters the most in the competition of the rightist and leftist populism is a conflict to be given the upper hand and whether “national” is stronger than “class,” so to speak.

For instance, the 1930s testify that the rightist nationalism – in mobilization, ideological and, after all, economic sense – is more attractive than class nationalism, especially when argued, as it was, that national and class are one and the same, i.e. that nationalism is actually concerned with the poor and discriminated against; and that it stands for a concern for national territories or territories in general that would ensure better living to those humiliated and insulted.

The main reason why the rightist populism has bigger political potential than leftist is that its mobilization power is bigger. It’s only logical that there are more of us, members of a national, than us as members of a class, which is why it is, say, easier for us to ensure directly, by democratic means such as referendum, support to national than to class interests; and the more so – and most importantly – since the means for meeting those interests – ideological, political and economic means – are mostly the same.

But what is by far most important is a difference in expectations: the rightist populism is seen as attainable while the leftist is not.

The rise and success of the Serbian nationalism in the 1980s exemplifies the rightist populism victory over leftist. While criticism of the regime – at least by dissident circles and especially after 1968 – was hued by the leftist populism that mostly insisted on the growing inequality, in the mid-1980s it turned nationalistic as it became obvious that the rightist populism was not a proper answer to the persistent economic and political crisis of the era. So, it happened that the advocacy for better living conditions for the poor and criticism of “a new class” was replaced by the advocacy for national, not only economic but mostly political, and territorial interests. It turned out that unlike consequent socialism nationalism has a bigger mobilization power. Besides and characteristic to every populism, this mobilization goes hand in hand with authoritarianism and can be used to change the establishment and justify discrimination against minorities on various grounds.

What is not populism?

In the 1930s Stalinism and Nazism (as well as fascism) were invoking masses or a nation (people) while spreading propaganda against foreign and domestic

enemies. For Stalinists the enemies were private proprietors, especially kulaks, but also the new class of the privileged alienated for the people. This also included “unreliable” nations; the latter, however, played by far more important roles in Nazi ideologies and regimes. About the same could be said for subsequent fascist regimes in Spain and Portugal. But these were not populist regimes in literal sense but most of all were ideological, political and economic foundations of totalitarian and autocratic regimes that used nationalism and the masses to justify dictatorship and warring goals. The rightist populism resembles very much these regimes but is not, in principle, totalitarian.

Besides, in the period after they abandoned the worst forms of Stalinism the so-called people’s democracies were not populist though this was how they referred to themselves. They just formally legitimized their alternative systems of allegedly direct democracy, which was autocratic and dictatorial by usual criteria for liberal democracies. To those regimes the people were means rather than goals. The people were there just to demonstrate their massive support to political and economic goals of the ideological avant-garde either at manifestations or in elections. Regimes as such could be labeled plebiscitary one-party dictatorships.

This is why totalitarian regimes, no matter how soft or softened, should be mixed with populist either with rightist or even less – leftist.

The argument that populism can end up not only in authoritarianism but also in totalitarianism is a different story. Indeed, there are nuances of populism-totalitarianism kinship that have to be taken into account. And once again, the difference between leftist and rightist populism should also be noted given that, in the nature of things, it is harder to establish totalitarianism on class basis than on national: the former involves a conflict within a state while the latter between two states. Consequently, there are – at least in principle – ways to settle conflict of interests in the first case by, say, democratic means, while in the second case it is always about this type of hostility or another, which may involve violent methods for settlement, especially if the two countries are in dispute over territories.

Democracy in crisis

Although totalitarian regimes in the 1930s were not the same as those populists, the crisis of democracy helps both to emerge. This is why when considering the crisis of representative democracy in the period between two world wars it is rather important to understand the problems democratic countries of today are faced with. This is the point of one of Schmitt’s most influential books (1923). His theory of the crisis of representative democracy seems to be most modern even to this very day. Namely, according to him, debates in representative bodies – as their key means – do not result in political decisions and, actually, a paralysis of representative bodies is

to be realistically expected but not necessarily their polarization. Therefore, investing power into one person or a group or a party through democratic procedures or in the streets could be the consequence of disagreement within representative bodies or their decision-making incapacity.

Hence, the paralysis of representative bodies – Schmitt sees as an inevitable trait of representative democracy – may strengthen the roles of authoritarian leaders enjoying peoples' direct support.

Therefore, it is also inevitable that populist regimes grow into totalitarian given that the latter requires certain ideological and accompanying economic footing. These preconditions were fulfilled in the 1930s with the ebb of ideological liberalism and deep economic crisis liberal and democratic institutions and policies were blamed for. Besides, territorial disputes between states were not settled despite the outcome of the WWI. Finally, the paralysis was also caused by polarized, extremely rightist and leftist ideologies and not only in representative bodies but most of all – in the street.

So, all preconditions for the rise of populism were there: mass unemployment resulted in endorsement of nationalistic ideology and protectionist and interventionist measures, all of which not only encouraged authoritarianism but also the use of such power for mobilizing the society and homogenizing national goals.

This last step is not imperative and probably not that easy to make in the absence of an external enemy. When it comes to totalitarian regimes between the two world wars, they grew out from ideological and economic populism as their goals were either ideological or economic nature. An external enemy is needed not only for national homogenization but also as a major support to a totalitarian regime once people stop trusting it. A war – be it cold or real – is one of the ways for abandoning democratic decision-making as was the case in the 1930s.

The case of Serbia clearly illustrates political paralysis and ideological radicalization of nationalism, along with warring goals, resulting in populist and authoritarian rule. As usually the case, Serbia's fate depended on the outcome of war. And while defeats left political and territorial goals unattainable, the predominant nationalistic ideology survived and remained as such in public life; along with accompanying proneness to authoritarianism.

Different goals, similar means

In order to come to power populists need a change in public sphere. In principle, democracy enables individualization of interests as everyone has one vote so that those individual votes, summed up in elections, are sufficient for taking over the power; and they also encourage pluralism in political sphere into the majority and minority. Besides, neither individual nor collective consistency are necessary – at least as times goes by – as democracy is a system in which the people and the government

may change their minds (for instance, once in four years). The latter is important as it ensures the needed flexibility in changed circumstances. And when circumstances change – and when democracies function properly – pluralism of interests and partisan competition based on it stabilize regimes and strengthen their legitimacy.

And the other way round: to ensure support in democratic systems populism necessitates a coalition between those sharing same goals but are actually ideologically very distanced one from another: say, some belong to the left and others to the right wing. This populist, leftist-rightist coalition may result from mutual consent not so much about goals as about means. Namely, both leftist and rightist populisms tend towards protectionism and privileges for some strata of the society vs. those considered anti-people elements on this ground or other.

For instance, populism of the right and left wings in both the US and Europe is a response to globalization. Protective measures are more or less the same when it comes to trade and cross-border investments. Guest workers and immigrants in general play a most important role in all this. Regardless of differences in motives and justifications, let alone in goals, both leftist and rightist populisms advocate bans on jobs for foreigners or their immigration.

Though such attitude towards foreigners and their rights may seem logical as they are not citizens of one's state, the same attitude towards strengthening of rights within own nation actually unites leftist and rightist populists; for, in practice and independently from goals aspired to, protection from more rights for some strata or categories of population is identical to that from foreigners: equalized rights encourage competition in limited resources, be they jobs that are of special interest to the left-wing or, say, cultural heritage rightist populist may be notably concerned with.

Therefore, protective measures against foreigners – either when it comes to imports or investments, or to inflow of immigrants – are basically so much the same when directed against equal rights to one or another group of citizens of one's own state, members of the same nation – that populism is not all-encompassing; in other words, there are always some segments of people that do not belong to it, this way or another. Denial of rights to foreigners or certain members of one's own nation is common to rightist and leftist populisms, regardless of the fact that their goals may be quite the opposite.

Populisms of no matter what kind need not only foreign nations but also “foreigners” within one's own nation – alienated elites or unassimilated minorities, or minorities having the same rights and the nation itself.

Fear of an open society

Naturally, this fear is evident in two cases; first specifically characteristic for rightist populism targeting, above all, the so-called establishment; the other marks leftist populists who implicitly see social homogeneity as contrary to the devastating effects of an open society, to put it so.

Criticizing the alienated social strata as much too cosmopolitan or auto-chauvinist, or both, probably best illustrates nationalistic populism, at least in Serbia. These allegations in a small and underdeveloped country such as Serbia associate auto-colonialism and this or that type of intellectual corruption allegedly because of their sense of inferiority but more frequently due to actual, overt or covert corruption. Usually they are all unspecified and opposed to true interests of the people – of the real, right-minded or orthodox, authentic and patriotic people. Persistent criticism of Radomir Konstantinović's *Filosofija palanke* (*Provincial Philosophy*) may best testify of this. Here the author dissects the fear of an open society, exemplified, above all, by Serbian poetry. His critics, on the other hand, either directly or indirectly advocate a closed society of this sort or other, while emphasizing the necessity of permanent dedication to national and state interests in cultural policy, let alone domestic and foreign.

Unlike its rightist counterpart, the leftist populism rests on the assumption about a homogeneous society that disintegrates when capitalism infiltrates it, at home and abroad alike. Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* is probably most influential in its criticism of liberalism and market economy (Dani Rodrik is the author's today's follower). According to the two of them, what keep up societies are territories and their specific social relations that disintegrate once countries' markets – markets of capital and labor markets – open. While barter is something natural, trade in fictive goods such as labor, capital and land are not. The trade in the latter brings about social differentiation and destroys traditional and homogeneous human relationship. Often quoted in the context of Serbia, for instance, are social relations in the system of self-government, the adoption of market and capitalist economy have destroyed.

While leftist and rightist populisms use the same means regardless of their different goals, leftist and rightist populist are much closer in goals than in means when it comes to their attitude towards an open society. Both populists stand for their specific political and social homogeneity, they just differ one from another in means for its realization. One of their similarities is in the way they see the alienated elites: either as cosmopolitan or selfish, and as responsible for adverse cultural or social developments. Both of them aspire to achieve national or social homogeneity and advocate policies to be used; although they have different means in mind, those means are, generally taken, protectionist, since meant to protect a nation or society from foreign influences of this kind or other.

Embarrassing similarity

Many advocates of leftist populism are embarrassed with similarities – either in means or in goals – with their rightist counterparts. In this, the position of the left-wing is worse than that of the right: both ideologically and politically.

This is especially evident in trade policy. Given the significance of this sphere it makes sense to elaborate a bit the point. Namely, it is important for a small economy to be open to international trade since there is no doubt that great global market provides better opportunity for more production and sales than a domestic. However, an open market implies specialization: one cannot compete in everything, especially with limited resources a small market has at its disposal. The said specialization also keeps changing according to developments at the global market; some countries can strengthen their competitive edge exactly in the areas one's own economy has specialized in. Under such circumstances more developed small economies, especially in Europe, need insurance programs against such structural shifts, to put it so. This, above all, refers to protection of business and income of those who have not been in the position to predict the said shifts. So, if someone has invested in certain qualification that is no more competitive, this risk needs to be insured against with public means for adjustments through, say, re-skilling one's labor force or in some other way that ensures adequate employment.

Public authorities in bigger countries need not offer such forms of insurance since possible effects of structural changes – ergo, potential loss of competitiveness in some sector of production – are relatively negligible when compared with overall production. Besides, as a rule, bigger economies are less open, which means that exports and imports have a smaller share in total production. Authorities may be pressed to protect domestic production against foreign competitors if and inasmuch as these forms of insurance against risk – unpredictable, at least from the standpoint of employees – are inadequate. And protectionism may win considerable political points if structural changes produce negative effects on some region or industrial towns; and such support is the more so important if it can be used for mobilization on class or national basis.

The above illustrates differences between mobilization powers of the right and the left. In cross-border competition the right-wing populism can rely on patriotism by claiming that interests of “our people” are opposite to those of foreigners. Besides, along with corrupted businessmen and cosmopolitan elites, other cosmopolitans and auto-chauvinist may be pressed to face up their patriotic duties. On the other hand, the left-wing populism would probably rather advocate strengthening of social state, ergo, stronger rights and forms of insurance against structural changes at the global market, but mobilization power of such demands would be weaker when the number of persons affected is smaller. No wonder, therefore, if voters affected by foreign competitiveness vote to the right-wing populists. This, in turn, influences their program as they practically adopt populist means – closer economies – of the right-wing populists.

Though a small economy that hardly benefits from economic policy of isolationism, Serbia exemplifies what happens in such political developments. However,

for a longer period of time – and certainly ever since provisions on foreign trade of the SAA with the EU have been in force – the right-wing populists have been mostly influential; they have spoken of workers' and social rights though they have had in mind national interests when calling the SAA harmful to economic activity and especially to state budget because of income lost on tariffs. But such criticism ended when it turned out as time went by that Serbia's economic activity has been kept alive only thanks to free access to Europe's markets. Such effects on bigger economies are smaller, hence enabling more persistence on such populist mobilization.

This is evidenced by findings of the research of the effects of globalization – in other words, the effects of more liberal trade and cross-border movement of finances and capital both in the US and Europe (the author et al. 2016; Algan et al. 2017). This probably the most referential study – actually a collection of studies – on the effects of China's membership of WTO on American market of labor and goods found that this impact was unexpectedly big in some regions and manufacturing sectors and relatively small from the standpoint of economy as a whole. According to the findings, the effects on European economies were about the same or, to put it precisely, even smaller. On the other hand, political consequences were bigger since the affected voters were mostly supporters of right-wing populists and, as such, had even more distanced right-wing populist agendas from traditional leftist political programs. Hence, the support to closed markets grew stronger, and demands for better social and property protection less influential.

Those from the left-wing who had advocated protectionism seem to be embarrassed by the fact that the right-wing populism is now promoting the same. Those who have studied populism on the South American case were after detecting industrial policy as a developmental alternative that would be easier to implement should there be market protection. This assumption was valid in most South American countries given that bigger countries in this region had not been much exposed to foreign trade, while having probably the highest degree of inequality in the world; therefore, the leftist populism prevailed over the rightist (besides, territorial disputes between these countries are rare).

Everything is different when stronger protection from foreign competition is placed on the agenda in traditionally more open countries. Justification of such measures goes hand in hand with populist mobilization and the line drawn between "us" and "them," which plays into the hands of rightist populism. And so, it happened that leftist populist had to argue for measures of economic protectionism they had advocated themselves at the time right-wing populists had already taken over such economic program; like, say, in America and Britain.

The fact that the left-wing has democracy as its major ally since there has always been more those who were poor or working for salaries than the right living on their wealth or properties was a reason for extra embarrassment. However, populisms, as a rule, lead towards authoritarian regimes, at least temporarily. Therefore, it is hard

to stand up to, say, Roderick's democratic nationalism when the national economic program is mostly in the hands of rightist, autocratic populists.

So, it is a most complex task facing the advocates of leftist populism and economic protectionism to distance themselves from the prevalent rightist populism; and especially now when leftist populism is not even influential in South America. In the of Serbia populist and protectionist economic policy – i.e. protectionism against the European Union – has gradually died out due to the benefits from exports to EU markets and the time of the country's economic and fiscal crisis. However, this is somewhat to the advantage of rightist populists to whom ideological, cultural and national protectionism is by far more important than trading protectionism especially if it is oligarchic or, as they like to put it, in national and state interest.

Attraction of extremes

Why populisms lead towards or support authoritarian regimes? The above-mentioned paralysis of representative bodies can be one of the reasons why. The use of resources that can barely ensure support in pluralistic conditions may be another. The third may be in the very nature of ideological competition that is somewhat to advantage of extreme stands.

An analysis of ideological competition should distinguish different forms of rationalization of interests – the initial Marxist understanding of ideology – and comprehensive interpretations of political goals and means inherent to them as, say, in the case of ideologies based on religion. The latter lead towards extremism or can be used, as least, to justify extreme stands.

This is nothing new. Actually, this is the bedrock of understating of European history, especially if expanded to all the parts of the world that have been under Europe's influence and that have been either Westernized or have opposed to it in the meantime. Referring to multiculturalism or secularism on the one hand and Serbia's political integration into Europe on the other makes sense here. It goes without saying that referring to the case of Yugoslavia, its emergence and reasons behind its disintegration, also makes sense in this context.

It is well-known that religious conflicts had been among the problems plaguing Europe's stability and security. This is why as the time went by European policy has been secularized. About the same refers to nationalistic conflicts that influenced the idea about creating some sort of European political union. Finally, ideological conflicts between extreme right-wing on the one hand and Stalinism on the other influenced, no doubt, better understanding of the significance of democratic decision-making.

It is also known in Europe's history and politics that ideological competition incites extremism, which is the reason why we need the context of public debates and decision-making to undermine its influence if it cannot be rationalized. The said context is secular and pluralistic.

Ongoing developments in Europe somewhat resemble political developments on the eve of Yugoslavia's disintegration. Here, one should also take into consideration similarities of economic circumstances since Yugoslav economy has stagnated in its the last decade while considerable parts of the EU are now faced with similar economic challenges. The difference is, to put it straight, that there have been no territorial disputes in Europe so far while territorial disputes were crucial in the case of Yugoslavia's disintegration (Gligorov, 1994).

Nevertheless, revival of ideological disputes in Europe – either nationalistic or religious by nature – incites extreme stands. However, the latter are more influential at the right-wing than on the left. The leftist populism would move to the territory of its rightist counterpart should it resort to religious or national extremism, which would be contrary to political interests of the left-wing as such cases testify of. Generally speaking, in the case of Europe at least, the left-wing populism has contributed to the growth of the rightist while the contrary has not been the case – at least not up to now.

And yet, Yugoslavia and the states emerging from it provide a good example or good examples. Although the left-wing usually blames liberals or neo-liberals for more or less everything, unwillingness to draw a clear ideological line between leftist and rightist nationalistic populism is basically the reason why the political space trends towards the right in all the states, and why the right prevailed on the eve of Yugoslavia's disintegration.

Therefore, ideological competition not meant to mobilize voters' support but believers of this sort or another usually tends towards extremism, especially when it invokes collective goals – national, religious, cultural – and thus usually provides an upper hand to rightist and authoritarian populism.

Conclusion

Populisms resemble one another as they trend towards protectionism, although the left, class populism differs from the right one by its goals or attainable goals at least. The goals of the rightist, nationalistic populism are usually territorial, which is why it is often hostile to neighbors. But, generally speaking, populisms are undemocratic either because their representative bodies are paralyzed or because they emerged against the backdrop of ideological polarization. The latter results from ideological competition aimed at erasing pluralism and, therefore, trends towards inciting extremism. In addition, mobilization, ideological and political power of nationalism is bigger than any the power of any version of the leftist populism. This is especially so in economic crises and, even more, in the situation of long stagnations. Serbia is a good example of the rise of the rightist populism and its ideological survival of defeats suffered even in a war. It is easier to democratize the leftist populism

than the rightist since the former is pluralistic, at least when it comes to social classes, while the latter is not being based on homogenization enabled by an ideology, which is, as a rule, extremist by its national, statehood, cultural and historical goals.

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II PRACTICAL POLITICS: RECOMMENDATIONS

(Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Kragujevac 2017/2018.)

Young people's response to framed realities

This paper is about ways in which a group of the youth from Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kragujevac and Niš perceive the state of affairs in the society and respond to it. They had their say at workshops where they have been encouraged to consider problems from the angle of possible solutions. Once all the workshops were over the project team formed a work group that included three youths from each of the said towns and a workshop facilitator. Along with their own research findings, members of the work group put the ideas the youth from four towns came up with into recommendations that are given in the end.

Today's young generations are growing up in the so-called "post-truth" societies where emotions, personal beliefs and stands rather than proven facts shape public opinion. In the context of a society the term "post-truth" not only refers to plain lies but also to deliberately ruthless disregard for the truth.

Framed realities are built on interpretations of developments tailored to certain solutions that leave no room to reconsiderations from various angles. By means of selection-exclusion method, exaggerated argumentation, distortion of facts and untruths, framing not only sweeps facts under the carpet but also ignores it openly.

* * *

Young people argue that the problem is not in how to obtain information but how to detect reliable facts and filter them from the sea of interpretations.

Social networks as means of virtual communication are quite fit for the exchange of information through countless interactions of users openly active in public life. People create and spread their own contents, which other users who see or hear them for the first time perceive as *news and often the truth they believe in inasmuch as their trust its source.*

It is hard to recognize, in that sea of information, what can be taken as fact that can be easily checked up, say participants in workshops.

Discussing extremism young people call the hate speech a "mother tongue" of extremists acting online, and see open discrimination of and violence against members of some different group as something resulting from impunity for those who resort freely to it in everyday life and virtual world alike. Whatever can be said openly, can be done in practice. Contents of speech, meaning of terms used and emotions each term provokes are inseparable from a context. By invoking historical and cultural

contexts, hate speakers are calling for violence against, intimidation of, enmity for and discrimination of members of various groups.

The Codes of Acceptable Online Behavior serves as a preventive measure the power of which is limited by the practice of repressive institutions in local communities.

Young people perceive those whose argumentation is based on proven facts as lone individuals trying to “throw” certain facts to the public and seeking every opportunity to discuss the past with younger generations. Since such people are exposing the framed, fabricated realities, they also see them as martyrs the extreme right-wing has named enemies, traitors and mercenaries. There is no systemic, institutional approach to improvement of contents of history textbooks. Everything about it boils down to initiatives taken by the civil society and some experts, mostly active online.

Young people say that extremists are all those who draw on their own the boundaries of their activities contrary to social codes of non-violent struggle for one’s goals. They recognize such people by extremist views they are spreading about members of certain social groups.

According to young people, the problem is that only in Serbia NGO activists and human rights defenders are being earmarked extremists. The police and the prosecution are inefficient when it comes to assaults at NGO activists and human rights defenders, they say. Respectable authorities promoting facts in new media (movies, interviews with victims of human rights violation, virtual museums exposing the warring past, and the like) are not active in the virtual world in which the youth spend most of their time.

Judging by what they said, it seems that young people have to “mooch” information from those who control or have them given that their knowledge about something depends no longer on having information but on the chance to discuss them either within or outside educational institutions. Those information are not included in regular curricula available to all children but only to privileged ones who manage to force their way to informal classes or are taught by lone individuals in regular schools: by loners bold enough to critically reexamine contents they are supposed to teach and allow the youth to pose questions and reveal alternative narratives about the way in which the society they were born in was formed in the aftermath of the 1990s wars.

What it is young people are recommending about three issues they would like to have influence on

Strengthening of active citizenship

Programs that promote the idea of active citizenship in everyday life empower citizens for recognizing and addressing a problem of public interest by assuming personal responsibility for smooth functioning of common goods – healthcare, education, employment, etc. An active citizen is a free citizen who critically reconsider the reality and is able to influence it.

Recommendations

- Regular study tours for students of faculties of political sciences, diplomacy and security, philosophy (departments of history, anthropology and psychology), law and the like; courses that envisage regular study tours, which ensure the youth's mobility and opportunities for meeting "the other and different;"
- Well-planned visits to EU institutions by future decision-makers that strengthen youth activism in local communities, as their peers who have been in visits are capable of drafting practical policies based on European values and international covenants on human rights and freedoms.
- Internships in offices for European integrations.
- Corrective pedagogical measures deriving from findings of opinion polls wherein students are asked to assess their teachers (the extent to which teachers allow them to have their say, respect views different from their own, give them everyday examples of tolerance for otherness, etc.). Conclusions a school pedagogue draws from the findings are then discussed with teachers so as to have some aspects of teaching changed for the better.
- Faculties at which students are expected to assess their professors form a pedagogical council that works together with negatively assessed professors for the sake of improvements.

Media literacy and development of critical thinking

Predominantly personal narratives as a generally accepted mode of imposing one's own views on social groups also contribute to the world of post-truth, say young people.

Young people barely have the opportunity to meet individuals whose narratives would help them understand some developments from different perspectives. They stress out that regular curricula insufficiently promote social empathy and skills for decentralization.

Recommendations

- Online innovations against indiscriminate and uncritical approach to information (such as fake news hunters);
- Media literacy on the agenda of all ongoing programs of informal education;
- An online platform available to users for voicing their reactions to situations when individuals or groups are being dehumanized, and facts presented by respectable authorities discredited;
- An online curriculum for all ages helping the youth to demystify the myths that are being spread in the virtual world at light speed;
- Courses in media literacy as parts of elementary and secondary school curricula (prior to courses relevant contents such as those to be found in The Teacher's Guide to Civic Education for the fourth grade of secondary schools, and sociology, Serbian language and psychology textbooks should be upgraded with educational tools developed within the project "Civil Society for the Promotion of Serbia's Accession to the EU").
- An online course titled "Deconstruct Yourself" for secondary school and university students as a part of regular curricula.
- The book "About Media Literacy" by the Ebarth Media Archives used as referential literature in courses in civic education, psychology, sociology and other subjects relevant to media literacy;
- Modernization of the teaching methodology for informatics; media literacy is to be taught along with basics of informatic literacy so as to develop skills of critical examination and interpretation of media contents (access to online encyclopedia of knowledge, the use of fake news hunter in class, online courses in internet safety, etc.);

- The Action Plan for the Media Strategy of the Ministry of Culture and Information to include a variety of educational contents that strengthen media literacy among the youth;

Modernization of school curricula and approaches to education

- The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Developments to form a work group composed of young people from various NGOs who the ways in which to modernize school curricula with contents relevant to the youth from different strata;
- Methodology of teaching that includes interactive communication in humanities to be obligatory to all teachers and professors;
- Opportunities for contextual learning and understanding of different narratives to be ensured for students (regional cooperation among the youth established at summer schools, study tours and by student exchanges);
- History workshops to be organized in schools, enabling young people to share their experiences (peer-to-peer education);
- Study tours to civil society organizations and institutions for the protection of the rights of citizens to be included into the following courses: civic education, Constitution and citizens' rights, history and sociology; the youth to be provided the opportunity for visiting prisons, courts of law and similar institutions;
- During summer vacations members of youth pedagogical councils to be able to work as volunteers for local self-governments and civil society organizations that can assist them in organizing public events about the culture of memory (exhibitions, round tables, debates, etc.);
- Math classes to encourage analytical skills and instruct students how to apply mathematics in economy and some groups' access to material resources; such classes strengthen social empathy and solidarity;
- More Serbian language classes to be focused on cultural heritage of minority communities in Serbia proper and peoples of neighboring countries;
- Along with competitiveness, physical exercise classes so organized as to develop the spirit of cooperativeness;
- Chapters on the culture of memory to be inserted into history textbooks;
- History classes to have youth pedagogical advisers – student-monitors scrutinize the manner in which students are being taught to understand and recognize the

- facts about the recent past and perceive neighboring countries and peoples (student-monitors who assess good and bad practice in teaching);
- Open calls for application for engagement in a media outlet of choice that examine situations of victims of wars, during the wars and/or in their aftermath;
 - Regular study tours to places where gross violations of human rights were committed, lectures at memorial centers and interviews with victims to be organized;
 - Online courses in the history of Yugoslavia's disintegration for the youth enabling them to learn about multi-perspective narratives and recognize facts;
 - Student parliaments to initiate adoption of rules for scoring extra-curricular activities by the European model for development of media literacy and critical thinking
 - The Union of Secondary School Students to initiate adoption of the methods for better functioning of student parliaments with focus on regular thematic meetings.

Development of critical thinking through media literacy programs

- Opinion polls in schools: students attending civic education courses are asked to have a say on the way their classes are being conducted; findings of the polls are meant to help teachers to improve their methods of work with students, and possibly introduce peer-to-peer education in classes;
- Contents relevant to media literacy to be added to civic education curricula;
- Engagement of young civil society activists as lecturers in civic education classes;
- Forums organized in all elementary and secondary schools so that the youth could learn that their argumentation is as valid as it can be proved.
- Development of workshop curricula on the prevention of extremism on the ground of the information obtained from an analysis of media coverage of activities by extremist groups in the society;
- A series of workshops on the freedom of expression on the one hand, and the right to privacy on the other to be organized for student parliaments.

Interculturalism vs. Ethnic Nationalism

One can barely answer the question about what it is that being a citizen of Europe means to young people in Serbia and whether national identity is on their priority list or not, without a thorough search for answers to the questions about whether national identity is still seen in Serbia as most desirable form of collective identity, discrepancy between the two and the extent of their contrariety, the youth's value-based stands about multiculturalism, "being a citizen of Europe" as a territorial or ideological determiner, and the latter implying something unpatriotic or disloyalty to one's nation.

The fact that in the 1990s value-based stands of cultural elites and embedded in mass culture were focused on the establishment and safeguard of cultural and national integrity and identity, perceived both as threatened and superior, considerably determines the answers to the questions above.

No doubt that an ideological matrix based on threats, conspiracy, foreign enemies ("Europe" being often pointed to as a source of) and domestic traitors was predominant in Serbia at the time. Such matrix was in the function of the regime's isolationism but was also used to justify the hate speech, which allegedly connoted rightful mobilization of masses for "taking vengeance" for the territories snatched away from them and the harm done to the entire nation. So amalgamated value-based construct was forced into the public sphere through synergic activism of mechanism of distribution: the media, culture and educational system.

Theoretical and field researches of identity orientations or identity (self)perceptions of Serbia's youth in 2017 – seventeen years after democratic changes and more than twenty years after the end of the wars waged on the territory of Yugoslavia – show that the youth are still focused on some old and regretfully still open questions, but also on certain new challenges of transition, migrant crisis, the rise of right-wing movements all over Europe, growing extremism, racism and xenophobia, poor economy and poverty. Ideological potential of nationalism that has never been fully deconstructed and substituted with some new value-based paradigms is also on the list of challenges.

Generally speaking, the problem can be contextualized through evaluation of basic identity-related denominators for citizenship and/or ethnic origin, the denominators comprising well-argued theoretical wording of the two, but also an analysis of the context that either enables or disables them, their overlapping and interaction, and mutual exception.

Latest sociological and cultural analyses provide some major indicators for the picture of a fact-based frame of the problem, and relate to identity-learning, tensions

between collective and personal identities, identity-based stances as ideological stands decided on and implemented by the media, educational system, cultural institutions, families and religious denominations, and to evaluation and perception of the challenges of multiculturalism and the possibility for applying pluralist, cognitive methods of education.

What happened to the designed, ideologized national identity, accepted and developed by no other than educational and cultural institutions as most responsible and efficient of all, after the 2000s?

According to a study of citizens' value-based orientations after the change in 2000 by Zagorka Golubović and Isidora Jarić, published in 2010, "a problem of continuity in sociopolitical practices in Serbia's transition, that are changing slowly the remnants of an old legacy" is manifest. Adoption of the majority's taste as a normal criterion of one's personal views ("siding with the majority is legitimate") is among these deep-rooted stances; and especially indicative in the context of our analysis of the problem of the identity of Serbia's youth is a set of views indicating clearly the belief in the superiority of the Serbian nation ("we are better than others") and second thoughts about a better life in the EU (hence, a considerable number of interviewees opposes Serbia's accession to the EU, while a percentage of them are in dilemma about it). "Traditional system" combined with "divine values" dominated the stands of the majority of interviewees.

As an answer to the question about what happened to an individual's mind and personality," in that mixture of traditionalism (pre-modern society) and post-modernism, Zagorka Golubović quotes the role of "establishment of a new tradition" – Dubravka Stojanović also refers to, which implies revisionism and revival of old narratives, and thus anesthetizes both perceptions of the realities and the future in each generation – as a major parameter. Golubović points out to Dubravka Stojanović's analysis of the practice of revisionism after 2000 in history textbooks and the educational system's influence on shaping "national consciousness" independently from facts.

Evidently, the biggest challenge to identity self-perception and perceptions of the youth in Serbia is an ideologically, politically and culturally paradoxical context of their everyday existence that frequently turns the problem of national/patriotic identity into something traumatically opposed to civic identity, given that the majority seek their identity in the past.

Identity-based confusions of Serbia's young citizens in 2018 are still caused by insufficiently defined or half-done ideological constructs about "us and them," friends and enemies, traditionalism, anti-Westernism, authoritarianism, collectivism and populism. The pictures of ideologically shaped history that are imposed on them keep revoking the imperative of value-based orientations that breathe life into old identity-based conflicts and passions; pictures as such not only usurp their

awareness about real time and space they live in but also impose destructive, binomially schematized stereotypes about “belonging” and “not belonging,” “loyalty” and “disloyalty,” and “patriotism and treason.”

Against the background of the media, dominated by some tabloid-construed realities meant to convert critical thinking into populistically hued, the very question about what being a European actually means seems to young people – faced with a formally inter-cultural and pro-European orientation on the one hand, and a traditionalistically national and anachronous matrix on the other – pretty paradoxical and, above all, demanding, unless seen as merely a territorial denominator.

Young people’s perceptions and reactions

Our work with young people was focused on analyzing their perceptions of European, civic and national identities through the ways in which ideological notions and fixed narrative shape their pictures about others, and the role of social constructs promoted by the media, educational system and cultural institutions play in ethnic and cultural conflicts; the role of the media in shaping “an imposed reality:” and significance of inter-cultural dialogue and empathy in practice. While analyzing collective and individual identities, manipulated collective feelings and the right of thought and expression, we paid particular attention to the distinction between categories of “facts” and emotions.

Young people’s perceptions about the topics that were on the agenda, their stands, reactions and suggestions clearly indicated that they saw the existing educational system as something that had to be reformed, and alternative educational program offered to the young. They pointed to their problematic history and literature textbooks that either revised or hushed up all the contents that could make one question the priority of national over civic identity.

According to them, revisionism of their history textbooks and literature courses that hush up regional heritage by excluding major Croatian, Bosniak, Slovenian or Albanian authors still promote xenophobia, revive and spread the stereotypes of the 1990s, and breathe life into retrograde, archaic matrixes.

As things stand now, they say, secondary schools and universities provide not elementary theoretical facts about cultures and histories of the countries emerging from Yugoslavia. They point out that classes in humanities offer scarce information about theoretical approaches to the notions of collective and individual identities, the right to choose one’s identity, as well as about the notions of inter-culturalism, multiculturalism, deconstruction of stereotypes, xenophobia, nationalism and the difference between declarative human rights and the actual state of affairs.

During discussions that followed on keynote addresses, young people suggested that theoretical assumptions for and analyses of ideologies and ideologically shaped

reality should be taught in all relevant courses (history, sociology, literature, philosophy and civic education); their suggestions also included lessons in models of interculturalism promoting empathy, collective-individual identity tensions, consequences of destructive ethno-nationalism in politics and culture, and the culture of memory.

Recommendations

On the ground of their stances and suggestions, we take the youth have to be continually encouraged for social activism and taught in deconstruction of anachronous ideological matrixes and stereotypes standing in the way of their perceptions of citizenship, and civil rights and freedoms – from minority rights to the freedom of expression, and significance of European prospects in this context.

Therefore, it is necessary to:

- Empower continually civil society media and independent media that provide factual information about social processes and realistic prospects, as well as encourage their cooperation in social networks as major forms of communication among the youth, which be barely put under ideological and political control;
- Keep strengthening alternative educational programs and involving young people in projects, public debates, seminars and workshops organized by the civil sector;
- Campaign for a course in inter-cultural education to be either introduced in the secondary and university education or incorporated into the existing social science courses;
- Keep supporting projects developed by the independent cultural scene (not prone to ideological manipulation) and the programs of cultural exchanges, and have as many as possible young people involved.

Pluralism vs. Extremism

Extremism usually implies acts and ideologies beyond the boundary of socially acceptable (pragmatically or morally) concepts. Given that notions of extremism and radicalism have been defined “arbitrarily” by “predominant social forces in a society” (Ilić) and are relative and relational, and the fact that “socioeconomic and cultural axis of the majority-minority relationship” decides what is the right or left in an ideological-political spectrum (Bakić), extremism is always determined vis-à-vis the usual or average; and this raises the question of legitimacy, conformism and populism.

What was considered was the dynamics of the exonomical notion of extremism – a number of social situations in which a person at one point labeled an extremist on some other turns into the person with a final say about what is extreme and what is not.

The notion of extremism was analyzed vis-à-vis notions of tradition, conservativeness, fundamentalism and literalism it is often being uncritically and arbitrarily not only connected with by also taken as one and same.

- Young participants associate extremism with *Wahhabis* and *Islamic terrorists*;
- They admit, however, that they are not informed about local right-wing and extremist movements or capable to recognize an organization as extremist;
- They make difference between notions of “plurality” and “pluralism,” and know that plurality implies not communication and cooperation between different social groups (ethnic, religious, etc.);
- Making stereotypes of something or labeling it is a predominant pattern of “modeling” notions of usually minority groups in a society, and participants are aware of the power that is mostly in the hands of the media, as agents of youth socialization;
- The problem of “politics in schools:” discussions about present-day sociopolitical problems in schools are often seen as pollicization of schools rather than questioning and critical analysis of ongoing developments, and learning about contemporary social processes;
- To avoid being accused of discussing politics in classroom teachers refuse to comment on ongoing developments; hence, do not help students to develop their civic consciousness;
- Student parliaments are usually not efficient as envisaged. They are often formed and exist just as an obligation, and do not function so as to strengthen democratic potential of the youth;

- As they do not trust institutions and witness overt partisan politics in action, young people are often becoming apolitical and doubtful about official, formal channels of social mobility; hence, they are turning somewhat socially autistic and seeking refuge in “safe” social environments;
- Social mobility – both horizontal and vertical, as well as spatial – is rather poor; one of the reasons why it is so is of economic nature but most of them are to be ascribed to social exclusiveness – and exclusivity as well;
- Euro-skepticism is on the rise due to a deepening gap between proclaimed values of the EU and actual policies of many European countries; participants often quoted the examples of refugee policies; because of policies as such they consider themselves somewhat “cheated and betrayed,” and are tend more towards traditional, even more conservative (time-tested and reliable) ideas and practices;

Recommendations

- “Approach” the youth in a way familiar to them, i.e. in the spirit of the time they are growing up in; do not to expect them to ask for information since they usually obtain them through social networks;
- Organize meetings of students from different communities, and meetings with their peers from neighboring countries, whose stands differ from widely spread, rightist views, so as to help them recognize the realities (conservative, right-wing discourse insists on differences as something bad and producing bad effects);
- Engage guest lecturers on a variety of subjects and organize visits to different institutions, including civil society organizations, to ensure recognition of “otherness;” apart from being educational, visits to institutions are most important for making the youth – isolated from alternative narratives and bombarded with right-wing doctrines – realize that there is a quite another world out there, a world with a different system and a multitude of people with different values;
- Watch with them movies or theatre plays dealing with certain social problems, and then sit together and discuss what you saw so as to help them accept alternative narratives;
- Ensure safe school environments so that the youth can feel free to discuss some issues without having to mince their words.

III PUBLIC DEBATES

DEBATE IN BELGRADE, JUNE 29, 2018

European Values and European Identity

Izabela Kisić, Helsinki Committee

We would like this debate to be informal and as open as possible. You've been provided many documents about and suggestions for practical policies for education of the youth; they are still to be worked on. We would appreciate your comments on them and recommendations. Today's meeting is a sequel of the series of discussions with the young and round tables held in Novi Sad, Kragujevac and Nis over the past year. Ever since its establishment the Helsinki Committee has been working with the youth, mostly secondary school students. Our longstanding experience in discussing with them indicates that belonging to a religious community and a nation plays a crucial role in identity-building of the youth; they are mostly ethno-centric.

As such, they are often against Euro-integration and are turning to other international factors depending on their ethnic origins. Further on, they are prone to revisionism – characteristic of all ethnic communities – and take conservative attitudes towards human rights, endorsing anti-feminism and the like. Therefore, we would like to have figures dealing with the said issues from a variety of angles as active participants in these debates. The values the youth see as threatened the most are freedom, solidarity, justice and socioeconomic equality.

Today we shall discuss building of European identity. To make it clear: we do not intend to argue for Euro-centrism, especially not now when we consider it within global context and from the angle of the rights of all those people plagued by wars, hunger and poverty who are seeking refuge in Europe. Keynote speakers will address you from their experience in workshops and informal schools of human rights for the young.

Sonja Biserko, the chairwoman of the Helsinki Committee

Let me start with just a couple of remarks about the larger context all of us have found ourselves. In this sense, Serbia is not a specific case. The international order

– the liberal one – is in a crisis of sorts and, paradoxically, undermined by the very same who had established it after the Second World War. We are witnesses now of destroyed values and demolished institutions that have kept that order under control, regulated it and promoted liberal values. We witness a fragmentation that began with disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, and now continues, this way or another, even in Europe and other regions.

Now we have some kinds of emotional reactions to all those deep structural changes that have strongly influenced international policies as well, as evidenced in Brexit, Trump in power, let alone the rest. In his book “Geopolitics of Emotion” Dominique Moisi points to three crucial emotions: fear of losing status quo (he ascribed to Western countries and the entire sphere of the West), humiliation that has to do with the Muslim world, and hope – the later in the countries in Asia that are rising and, in a larger context, profited the most from globalization.

At the same time, we witness information revolution that has opened the question of identity in various ways but also contributed to the spread of fake news that are creating even more confusion at all levels. Besides, I would say that political power of states has been largely reduced by non-governmental actors such as the media, corporations, religious communities, non-governmental organizations, mafias and others undermining their power. There are also transnational forces that are after the safeguard of interests of their own rather than general well-being.

Yugoslavia’s disintegration and emergence of new states unavoidably led to new political identities – in Serbia as well – in a painful way considering the legacy of the 1990s. It should also be stressed that all these societies are ethno-centric and their national identities primarily focused on the biggest nation – the nation that has seized control over all goods. This refers to all these newly emerged states and poses serious problems to minority communities and regional relations as well. Without inclusiveness it is hard even to imagine regionalization and regional relations as the EU has defined them when conditioning countries in the region, which are, at least declaratively so far, oriented towards the membership of the EU.

National, ethnic identities are exclusive, above all, and usurp the entire public sphere and all national institutions so that regardless of standards and regulatory norms imposed by European institutions minorities are still segregated in a way. It was disintegrations of Yugoslavia and Soviet Union that motivated Europe to pass the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities. However, norms as such are not sufficient; what is needed are state policies and strategies for such social cohesion that would make minorities see themselves as equal citizens while keeping their own identities. How these policies should be shape is the topic of our today’s debate and has to be on the agenda of all the societies undergoing turbulent changes and regional organizations, the European Union in the first place. We see multiculturalism as a desirable form of relationship between the majority and

minority or between different cultural and ethnic communities. However, multiculturalism also implies some threats, often the threat of segregation. Without the policy for inclusion multiculturalism can be dangerous to societies, especially such as ours. Interculturalism is the best formula for creating social cohesion as it ensures coexistence and people's sense of belonging. All this necessitates serious strategies and policies for younger generations through education, cultural policies and activism in public sphere.

I wanted to present some background that would indicate that in this context we do not think as one and that our topic is now being on the agenda all over the world. You should be brave enough to speak your mind now that all values are being reconsidered and new models of social organization are searched for in this chaotic world of ours.

Aleksandra Đurić Bosnić, cultural scholar

Not all of the young people we've been working with are expected to become experts in social sciences, on the contrary. Their professional orientations were different regardless whether they were secondary school students or university freshmen. Those who had not yet enrolled themselves in university were "in search" for their identity but still manifested encouraging civic consciousness and interest in the problematic under discussion. On the one hand I was optimistic, feeling some strange optimism I thought inappropriate to this time and space since we've got used to being seized of all our optimistic views. That optimism of mine derived from their open-minded perceptions, willingness to obtain new knowledge, and readiness not to respond to that information new to them with stereotypes and bias they have been probably raised with in their families. On the other hand, paradoxically, I was mildly disturbed because those young people actually proved they were fully aware of the context they were living in. While discussing cultural issues with them I realized they were fully aware that they were reliving, in a way, the 1990s they knew little about. However, they are capable to recognize the effects of the 1990s in their everyday lives – and not only in culture but also in international affairs and relations with neighboring countries that had been a part of Yugoslavia once.

We were using typical workshops as methodology. We had to do our best not to burden our introductory lectures with theoretical notions as that would not be attractive to them, and not to elaborate the notion of identity but to give them actual examples instead. If we tell them that culture is ideologized we have to prove our thesis with concrete examples, attractive enough to motivate them for interchange.

The thematic framework we opted for was focused on the possibility of changes in cultural paradigms created by the policy of ethnonationalism and isolationism in the 1990s. They were posing questions to lecturers and, taken as additions, their

questions were really valuable. Some of them were about concrete information; and listening to them we concluded that knew absolutely nothing about proven information about the beginning of Yugoslavia's disintegration, about the way it all happened. Some of them used to comment, "Yes, but the same happened to other countries as well." Then I mentioned the collection of papers "Serbian Question Today" published after a scholarly conference sometime during the 1990s that actually followed in the footsteps of the argumentation of the infamous Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. That publication pleaded for raising children in the spirit of a single cultural identity, the ethnically-based identity, and was brimming with terms such as patriots and traitors. Biljana Plavšić penned the preface to the book.

Step by step, starting from the 1990s to this very day we were going through what identity meant to them, collective and individual alike. We discussed whether collective identity was more important than individual, and why if so, or whether collective identity was necessarily based on ethnicity or could be national even when it became civic. We also discussed the actual meaning of one's individual identity that could be fluid; this issue proved to be really capturing to them. They actively discussed the manner in which collective identity is being created and incites people to react emotionally when it is aggressive vis-à-vis some other collective identity. They used to comment that they would not accept any identity imposed on them but would prefer an opportunity for mixing themselves a cocktail from a variety of identities, which suits best their personality.

But the context we were faced with – here and in Europe alike – was most problematic. Now that we are speaking about European values we witness waves of xenophobia, racism, extremism, we are faced with incredibly shameful reactions to the challenges of migrations and the migration crisis. So, we were in some paradoxical situation having to speak to those young people about European values. Therefore, we had to kind of classify notions and tell them that, of course, there are things that stand for values, that there are developments that are breaching those values, but the value-system, nevertheless, always and everywhere has to rest on openness, pluralism, communication and intercultural dialogue – in action not in theory only. They liked very much the notion of empathy. They gladly discussed it concluding that without empathy there could be no intercultural communication. Then we had to explain to them what is called the culture of memory illustrating its meaning with examples they could not have learned from their teachers or their textbooks.

Their proposals were quite appropriate as they said that the educational program should be revised if possible. They need more alternative programs as such, they also said. They would like to join in the initiative for more media run by the civil sector and, generally, actively engaged in some independent cultural scene. They noted that their space for self-expression was limited, and admitted that their

knowledge about Yugoslavia's culture and literature, as well as about the culture of the region they lived in was rather poor.

Srđan Barišić, sociologist

I would like to share with you as many as possible personal impressions. I've gone through the phase from an optimist to a discouraged pessimist and am now left with no other option than to be a possibilist. I've been teaching for a decade now. I was terribly discouraged when I entered that system as I had been actively engaged in alternative education. And one feels very bad when realizing that the same youth team from all over Serbia, a perfect one, is attending all those events organized within alternative education. But this is just a handful of them, no more than count in three figures. So, you keep asking yourself about the rest of their peers who are all around them... This bothered me all the time. How to shake up that huge majority and reach them? If some of you had worked in a secondary school must be fully aware how hard struggling against their stereotypes and bias is.

Secondary nationalism is still insufficiently analyzed and explained in theory. Young generations have been fed on the value-system dating back in the 1990s. As I grew up at the time I know we sort of a traumatized generation having gone through a blocked transformation, wars and their consequences: national homogenization, atomization of the society... But we also had a therapeutic moment, something that alleviated our trauma. Working with young people today is painful, they endorse nationalism by default, take ethnic and religious distance as something normal, the same as everything characteristic of the distorted identity we are functioning in. It's hard to explain them the difference between the notions of identity and integrity. How can one pass over such identity, from the one most trivial such as identifying oneself with two biggest football teams, let alone some skip over some ethno-religious ring? That's an endless struggle.

I've done a research on education and prevention of radicalism among the youth. Teaching staffs, unfortunately, are not competent enough, they have no institutional, sociological and social power to influence properly younger generations. Literally, everything boils down to enthusiasm of a handful of individuals trying to accomplish something beyond the set framework. Of course, the effect of their endeavor can be no other than limited. That's evident in field work. There are children you can make wonders with, children who would grasp everything on the double. Unfortunately, as Sonja put it, that's a global problem. Serbia is no exception. Even in much more developed countries with by far better systems there are huge departures from what was what used to be socially acceptable two or three decades ago, the global context has changed. I've worked with many schools, from the United States to Asia. In some of them teachers and students are separated by a Plexiglas divider – as they

could not solve the problem by legal means – so you are physically isolated from your students and teach them by avoiding any contact with them or incident. Simply, your interaction is highly limited because the system has not found a proper solution for how to protect educators and cope with a growing trend among the youth.

For instance, I cannot erase from my memory the situation I found in Prijepolje where they had three cases of discrimination in schools. Upon return to Belgrade we searched internet but found nothing about that form of discrimination. A girl was asked to leave a prom because of wearing a headscarf. This information was simply blocked by the municipality authorities and no media outlet learned about it. More than with fake news I am bothered by the control of free flow of information from the control over contents of textbooks to that of curricula and educational programs. I was at odds with my colleagues because during my studies I badly wished to analyze textbooks authored by Mitrović-Petrović generations of us had to use while preparing admission exams for the studies of sociology; in those textbooks religious and ethnic identities are treated as one, indivisible, and normalized as such. Islam is openly discriminated against vis-à-vis other religions. I finally managed to analyze these contents and still cannot what the consequences of my deed would be. I've probably closed the doors to my career forever. And that was what bothered me. Today's generations are still being spun in this centrifuge. Then, in logics textbooks we used to find that explanation of the notion of red herring was the case of Croats believing that Serbs have the entire Yugoslavia under control because the capital city is Belgrade. We are using red herrings in everyday life even when having coffee with our friends, and are constantly resorting to such socio-psychological acrobatics.

It was in 2006 that I visited Sandzak for the first time. I was very pleased with the opportunity to see the region at long last. My colleagues in the teachers' room, all of them highly educated people, with MA and Ph.D. diplomas, wondered why the hell should I go there and was I nervous about it, as if I set myself for some desert island and are bound to survive on it. I was confused by the context in which such questions were posed. And this was a consequence of interpretations – how Sandzak is being presented. No matter what happens there, broadcasters air pictures of covered women and men in shorts while blurring the rest. This leaves viewers under the impression that the entire region brims with Wahhabi cannibals. People are living there the same as in Negotin or any other place. The same troubles are bothering them, they are anxious about their well-being and everything else.

Miloš Ćirić, politicalologist

I would like to comment on the proposals you've sent to us. One should be reserved about what young people are suggesting. Their suggestions about practical policies that would improve social realities as they see them are based on their

experience and often on personal impressions. Personal experiences and impressions are actually shaped by public experience and our social atmosphere. They are obviously aware of the context they are living in but simply find no ways out of it, except for some general cases of the struggle against discrimination. In my work with young people I've noted how often they resort to predominant narratives. And this is that vicious circle we are simply incapable to escape.

The last group of young people I worked with, a month ago, were born in 2002 and 2004. So, they were born after everything that happened over here and in the region. When discussing with them Yugoslavia and what is used to be – either at media trainings or at trainings in facing the past – when discussing what Yugoslavia is associating them of, I never miss the chance to brief them about some actual facts. I usually witness how strongly they react to such information; those facts have been masked by lies we've been bombarded with on daily basis.

I find it interesting that the media are recognizing Donald Trump as the one who spreads fake news. According to some relevant researches, only 4% of what he said over his election campaign was true, while our President, according to similar researches, uttered 8% of truth in his statements during election campaign. They are practically hand in hand when it comes to the frequency and spontaneity in telling lies. Those in power here, including Vučić, are direct heirs to the warring ideology.

When you hear some fake news or something that is obviously untrue even you, taken psychologically, believe in it even for a second. But your brain is defending itself by the facts you know about; however, bombarded daily by lies and under the heavy burden of them your brain simply gives up sometimes. Then you find yourself in a vicious circle. Education, lies in textbooks, lies invading the public space, family circles, the media and are finally transferred to laws are all in that vicious circles. Today a law on war memorials was passed; under the law all wars Serbia has ever waged were for liberation. And it has a paragraph providing removal of memorials that do not commemorate Serbia's liberation wars or negate Serbia's identity and territorial integrity. In other words, we shall never have a memorial in Batajnica, which means that the ideology of war is still pursued. This is not backsliding, that's some new mutation, but remains the very same ideology.

And we have yet another attempt at revisionism: allegedly, the Serbs were liberators in WWII, the Serbian army liberated Yugoslavia rather than the Yugoslav one. Erasing Yugoslavism from every context is rather dangerous as that plays into the hands of nationalists and identity-based policies that have been on the increase in the past twenty years.

I am making distinction between the term Europe and the term EU as a political player at the scene for some time and will remain there for some time also and then disintegrate like any other alliance throughout the history. But European values are the values that gave birth to the EU, and these values, as well are all aware of, are

anti-fascism, peace, democracy, tolerance and everything they entail. Regretfully, today we are not only witnessing how these values are abandoned on some occasions, and those quite contrary to them, contrary to what we've been advocating for at least in words, endorsed instead. We fit finely into this global trend considering our political and social situation.

Young people are, by default, aware of a larger picture of Europe and the region. They correctly quote Albania and other countries that have not all emerged from Yugoslavia as parts of the region. I believe that such perception is actually their potential in developing public policies.

As for empathy we've touched on, I noted it as new political category for the work with the young. Talented director Vlatko Ilić says that in this era of post-ideology, post-truth we are all being drowned into this or that, empathy expresses solidarity and turn into a political tool.

I've noted that young people suggest political engagement in projects of an independent cultural scene. When I say political engagement, I do not have in mind partisan one. I agree that younger generations should be more actively involved into political life. We may have some independent cultural scene as a counterbalance to actual reality, but we learned from experience that a counterbalance as such would not prevail. One should be persistent, and keep encouraging young people for political involvement in concrete ways.

Jelena Vasiljević, anthropologist

I would like to comment on the last statement, the one about activism. I am not exactly optimistic that the change in curricula and work on the youth's awareness-raising and extra-curriculum education would lead towards a better society. In the 1970s and 1980s ethnic and religious distance among the youth was by far smaller than among later generations. And still the generations of the 1970s and 1980s were generations of the war. That means that the way in which any narrative is being imposed on the society and gets the priority is in the hands of a political organization.

No doubt that nationalistic narratives were blooming in the 1980s. But claims that they have so much influenced the value-system of one generation are questionable. The war caught that generation unawares. Some people have managed to get politically organized, some have not. That's always a problem. of them have got engaged in politics, some have not. Not those having cultural hegemony are winners but those who have managed to get organized politically. Encouraging the youth to get organized does not necessarily imply some politically-hued organization. They may get organized for clearing parks from, say, plastic bottles. What matters is opening the avenues towards alternative interpretations of history and the present-day. But one must not allow to be caught unawares.

Dragan Stanojević, sociologist

European integrations are main objectives of our political scene. The problem is that integrations are emptied. At the level of ideas you can see none supporting of the process. And people do recognize this, as testified by opinion polls. Answering the question about why Serbia should be a part of the EU, young people usually quote easier travelling, better education, opportunities to get jobs there or maybe an investment of two in Serbia. When asked what the problems are, they say something like “European Union has economic and political control over your country.” That’s the mainstream reasoning about European integrations. And the problem is that stigmata of anti-Europeanism still follows the political elite that is in power now, while the opposition is incapable of producing programs based on different values to motivate voters. On the one hand we have the situation when people support a political grouping set for the EU membership, while it is fundamentally anti-European at every level; on the other, those expected to be for the membership of the EU are often against it. Urban anti-Europeanism is growing. More and more people from middle classes, urban and highly educated people, are turning into Euro-skeptics because of the present situation in it; and yet, there are people at the political arena capable of articulating clearly European values that would motivate the rest.

Speaking of values and identities, the problem is that we do not have those intermediate collective identities. They need not be even explicitly pro-European but have to be adjusted to European values. And that’s the problem the young are specifically faced with. Secondary school students are more prone to conformism than other age groups. Their identification with some group is more explicit. We do not have alternative collective identities that would not be nationalistic. In other words, most of our collective identities are close to the ideas of football fans. All contents given to the youth are ethnonationalist.

In the 1980s and even in 1990s we did have alternative identities. We had music and had sports that did not necessarily have everything to do with ethnonationalism. We had amateur sports with their own fans...I’ve grown up in a small town there were fan groups named by young people, which stood for their identity of a kind. All that has disappeared in the meantime. A fluid individual identity is not the only alternative identity. There is a variety of collective forms that can fill the void, and some of those forms have definitely to be above state borders.

Communication with other people is among major preconditions for undermining ethno-nationalism: migrations, departures, returns, study tours, etc. The said “departures” should be the groundwork for building bridges. School excursions are something else: to the young, they mean conquest of freedom and much less getting to know different cultures.

Aleksandar Miletić, historian

In the 1990s the Socialist Party of Serbia considerably changed the ideology of the time. However, I see a much more important turning point in the developments of the October 5 change of the regime and the establishment of some grotesque perception of neoliberal system. In the 1990s negative stereotypes did not appear with such intensity in textbooks as they do today, and there were no so problematic textbooks such as ABCs on Ravna Gora that appeared on stands in the 2000s. There were no such things in the Milošević era. In that era, we had some grotesque system resting on the inertia of the once self-government system. Milošević was more focused on the media, while history classes remained boring as before and were more or less OK. And then some kitschy, distorted narratives and movies brimming with everything one could possibly imagine came with Ljušić at the helm of cultural life.

That was an embryo of the modern history. Textbooks could not have been written at the time of Srebrenica. What we witness now in the science of history is by far more bizarre and creepier, but only because the synergy between science, culture, arts and the media implanted the embryo of the modern history and reality. And we are still chewing this product over, interpreting it and, of course, stressing it out because it all worked fine once.

The syntagma of the Chetnik movement's anti-fascist character has taken root. Paradoxically, there also persists the narrative about anti-fascist collaborators. You can find something similar in Albania too in the narrative about the Bali movement (literally, National Front) – its followers were also British allies who all the time collaborated with fascist Italy. They also try to present this movement as anti-fascist, at least in the ideological sense.

As a history teacher once I could have leaned on my enthusiasm only. I was actually committing a crime because I taught my students contrary to history curriculum and what was published in their textbooks, but was happy to have the opportunity to achieve my ambition. I could be brave because I knew I would get a job at the Institute one day and my daily bread did not depend on teaching; I knew they could fire me but was happy all the same, I felt myself free as a bird. My students were not so much suspicious about what I was teaching them. And even today when Srđan Milošević and I are organizing workshops all over Serbia kids are listening carefully and express no doubts. True, we are telling them some facts that are definitely undeniable and then slowly take them towards a narrative they will finally accept. Their teachers who are seated in the front row are nervous, interrupting us, stage-whispering to their students and asking us whether we were after restoration of brotherhood and unity, and the like. They are the problem we have to cope with. And the problem is also in curricula and educational programs, the problem is in political will.

The big change that took place in Germany in the 1960s triggered by philosophers and intellectuals is being discussed a lot; but everything that happened there was actually provided under federal legislation. A federal state in Germany has no authority over educational policies that are in charge of individual states. And those educational policies largely differ from one state to another, which Holocaust should be taught. That was a political will. Your discussion here moved me deeply, it took me back to the time of my enthusiasm; however, we have to be aware of the fact that we do not have a normal situation over here and that everything that should be treated as something regular rests on enthusiasm of a handful of people who have put on their boots, wade across province and trying to make some change. And things could be simple and easy with laws and regulations. Even in then there would be lousy teachers telling students some narratives of their own, but they will be in the minority.

Although there are much more textbooks at the market now, the same history textbooks have the upper hand, while the same (Radoš) Ljušić is Alpha and Omega. There is the freedom of choice, but the choice conditioned by many didactic-pedagogic reasons; a teacher will not opt for a textbook that will not help a child prepare for its admission exam, a teacher will not opt for doing it an ill turn. The fact is that today's textbooks are "healthier" than they used to be but it is also the fact that they are still far from regular teaching.

Srđan Milošević, historian

It is hard for me to speak about the notion of identity because I am close to what Ivan Čolović termed finely as parting from identity. I take the very concept as harmful and analytically useless.

What I acknowledge as a kind of collective identity is class consciousness if it still exists. That's the biggest achievement of some collective identity. Collective identities are nothing else but some stereotypes and that's all. Hence, a self-stereotype or stereotype about others – this is the collective identity that is functioning in everyday life. And why is it harmful? Speaking about a society we are actually speaking about inter-personal relations, we are applying the stereotype about ourselves or someone else to everyone, which is usually a glaring error. And then we are supposed to fit that narrative about identities into some other fluid story such as European values we have prescribed under the Constitution. The Constitution is a warrant of European values. And we have to fill this warrant with positive contents.

In my opinion going against the narrative relativizing the idea about European values, the EU, is counterproductive because the EU is a major facilitator of communication. If what young people say about the profiting from the possibility of getting education in Europe is true, that's great. I think that's the only tangible thing that gives Europe some sense, makes this political framework the contents of which

with their proclaimed policies contrary to daily implementation is not to our liking – sensible. But yet, it provides a frame that enables communication, exchanges of ideas...and finally ask ourselves what should we do against such background. Well, exactly what we've been more or less doing so far, trying to promote ideas we see as beneficial for both the society and each individual beyond institutions; and, asking for some small institutional support in parallel.

And what can we offer the youth with all this? Well, a palette of legitimate choices; what their minds would accept as illegitimate hating and unworthy of solidarity, and that solidarity, empathy, mutual understanding, etc. equal justice. Actually, that's what we used to have once upon time.

Ivan Đurić, Youth Initiative

We all are aware that the same group of some 100 young people has been participating in various programs, street performance and actions. The same problem plagues the opposite, extremely rightist, nationalistic side. And the number of their active organizations is spiraling down. Tiers of seats in stadiums are practically empty in both east and west sides where people with children used to go but are now afraid of watching football games alive. Even south and north sides usually occupied by extreme fans are empty. The fall in activism is not only evident at our side but at the other side of the "cordon" too. This kind of absence is common to almost all present generations.

We who are advocating for European civilian option are to blame for insubstantiality of European integrations over here. In other words, we are the only ones responsible for it. Talking with young people but among us as Europeans should be at our priority list. We need to introduce debates on Europe's future and its values-based policies, like the debates that are being organized throughout Europe now. We cannot wait some ten years when they admit us to the membership of the EU and only then start considering European future. We should join in the debate right now. Our European partners are still not showing any understanding for something like this, which makes things harder to us, but we need to overcome these difficulties and find some way to join the debate on Europe's future. Especially young people should be part of it, have their say about how they expect Europe to be.

Sonja Biserko

For more than ten years Serbia has been separated from all the goings at the international scene. The problem is in the fact that its society and political elites have been totally autistic and it has been hard to find a channel through which to join in the dialogue in Europe. We are nothing but observers who are kibitzing and looking

for an opportunity to profit from something but, in fact, there is nothing we really want. I think this is the problem, which you have so well formulated. Nevertheless, we need to consider how to have channels of dialogue with Europe opened. European scene could learn a lot from the experience of the Balkans.

Srđan Atanasovski, musicologist

I want to follow in the footsteps of what Srđan Milošević said and radicalize the problematic of our identity concept. I would say that in the past ten years, from a notion of identity social sciences offered as a tool or a concept for understanding the realities we have turned this concept into something essential and are now discussing identities as if they were empirically nonexistent. I believe that's a gross and dangerous logical mistake we should not afford. Some researchers, ten years ago, were alerting us against discussing identities but to speak about the processes of categorization and identification instead.

Categorization processes are violent social processes. I am a bit afraid of situations when we, as activists, ask young people to tell us what their identities are. In this way we are referring to identities as something essential. We should ask them instead how they take the society is categorizing them and feel about it. Are we subject to some violence? When in the 1990s some people used to be killed because of their ethnic origin, they had already been categorized and subjected to social violence on the ground of such categorization.

I also want to make some remarks about the issue of the cultural scene. Cultural activism is OK, it's nice to have an independent cultural scene, and nothing is "dirty" in having young people politically organized while not considering politics as something dirty but an activity we are engaged in on daily basis.

What we need badly is genuine political activism. However, what we have to be well aware of is that being engaged in culture or in politics alike is a privilege to the majority of people. This is why I think that the issue of class consciousness Srđan Milošević opened is most important. We have to establish a system wherein political engagement would not be a privilege but a product of one's class identity and sense of class belonging.

Now, about European identity. I really do not know what one shall tell young people when referring to European identity, how possibly one can persuade they by simply saying, "Let go that ethnic identity of yours and take the European one instead!" To me the term European identity associates something exclusive. To me it associates centuries of colonization. Europe is a continent that has built its identity on colonization of other parts of the world. That's Europe's identity. Europe's identity is also in the fact that it has created an economic system based on endless growth and, therefore, endless colonization and exploitation of people and territories. The fact

is that Europe closed its borders today. So, Europe as such is very exclusory. When I watch TV programs on that European identity, say by Deutche Welle, all I see and hear are some fine stories about those start-ups, about some people making pine-wood or some others footballs out of snake skins. What about stories about class inequality, about exploitation? How shall European identity cope with these issues? Forget about those start-ups of yours or pinewood.

This system of ours is in crisis but that crisis is also an integral part of that system. Production of crises is nothing new to capitalism, it practically lives on it. I would not say, therefore, that growing nationalistic rhetoric in the region is an autochthonous to us who have undergone the 1990s. Nationalistic rhetoric is growing stronger because capitalism has taken a turn to the right, while we have no issues of our own to be pulled out of some drawer. Unlike Hungary we are not so much concerned with refugees, we are concerned with some local problems of our own. But in all this we are part of a global system, that that system is in crisis.

Biljana Đorđević, politicologist

What is the purpose of education, let me ask you. If it serves reproduction of the present order, the system we are having now, then I suppose we are not speaking about this type of education. So, we are discussing education that would surpass the said order. The suggestion about offering the Ministry of Education some new strategy for education or for culture, or for no matter what, and expect our proposals to be given a green light is in vain. Unfortunately, we cannot look forward to such major systemic changes. Therefore, we have to consider solutions that could be given a pass.

The main question here is about the methodology of our work. I am privileged as I work with students, which is by far easier than working with secondary school students. University students may join in voluntarily, the Bologna system obliges some to attend and there are ways to avoid it all. But those who join in have generally made their own choice to do so. I am dealing with political theory, which implies classes on multiculturalism, the theory of citizenship and feminism. My experience in the work with students shows that from the very start they get grouped by their orientations that are in turn products of the classes they attend, professors who teach them, the methodology of teaching and the way an institution is organized.

I am in dilemma about the suggestion for approaching the youth through social networks. It is difficult for people dealing with theories, like me, to say something in two or three minutes, arising questions in such a simplified way. That's a problem per se. In this era of instant communication, the majority of my students are using Instagram which is all about photos and presents life in perfect colors; they are not even using Facebook that provides space for much more information. In this sense it is hard to pass on information, even a brief one. We would be reducing ourselves by

using this form of communication with our students. The problem is in how to slow them down – as they consume everything quickly – they read scripts from their cell phone and barely ever read a book. They are less and less getting informed from their textbooks, rarely go to libraries, they get informed in quite another way. How should one restore them to time-consuming activities, to reading, to long discussions about a topic? In the critical discipline I am dealing with students are being told at the very beginning that they would learn different theories and have to learn arguments of various theoreticians, as well as counterarguments. Once you learn all those arguments you can use them and interpret in a specific context, and define yourself. I usually tell my students that they have right to their own opinions and we shall consider it our success if you can eventually tell us your argumentation. You cannot tell them – as written in those recommendations – that they should say their views. This is what they expect to be able to do from the very start when they had read nothing at all. Everyone has some opinion of his or hers.

According to my experience in the past seven, eight years they have learned pretty well how to discuss issues such as multiculturalism or national minorities. Although you might not think so, these topics are being discussed and written a lot today. They have learned by heart how one should speak about it. But any discussion about feminism triggers an explosion. Feminism has been somehow neglected as a branch of knowledge. Generally, their answers about this topic are socially acceptable whenever they feel themselves in the minority. I am encouraging them to have their say so that we can together deconstruct their argumentation, but they rarely collect their courage to utter something awful and socially unacceptable. That's what I witness at my classes in feminism.

This is when I begin educating them step-by-step and provoking at the same time. But such a methodology is more suitable to informal education when you can use filmed material and then discuss it. In such situations they feel more at ease to speak their minds than within formal education. The youth have to learn something before they start debating it. Unfortunately, we do not have time enough to go through the entire process, so we have to select what it is you want to accomplish.

I think it would be fair if someone offering an alternative narrative first says his or her position on it. Whenever I offer them my alternative narrative I explain my point of view about it. If the purpose, a democratic purpose of education is to teach them how to think critically we simply cannot present them with alternative narratives that are rounded off, no matter from what position.

There are different theories about identities that compete one with another. And I work on it as a theoretician. But to measure empirically some identity you have to interview people, examine their support to Euro-integration and some kind of unification. Whether you are right when saying that the result of your research indicates of an identity, that's another story as the results you get will not be the same

as the results one gets through different theoretical solutions. But what you can do is to open to doubt each topic. For instance, if we speak about European values by boiling them down just to human rights, it is debatable why those values should be European as they are universal. If we search for some European identity we can easily turn into someone standing for Christian Europe. In this context it seems to me a paradox that we now have the regime that declaratively supports the process of European integration at the point when Europe is practically taking over Victor Orban's model for solving the migration crisis. Many people are Euro-skeptical today. There is a difference even among Euro-skeptics. Not every Euro-skepticism is anti-European when it comes to some European values that are universal enough to be endorsed.

I would say, referring to recommendations, that we should consider what methodology to use, and not necessarily the outcomes. We have no control over the outcomes, one cannot impose them on people as some values, unless in the case of some political revolution and we are at its helm. Methods are most important and we have to work on them. That's a kind of fraud that could turn out fine. My students live in the time brimming with information. One can find everything by searching the internet. In the fourth year of their course in the culture of human rights student have to write papers on actual cases of human rights violations in Serbia and or the region, they are obliged to reconsider ongoing developments. But what they first ask me is whether they could write about Iran or Saudi Arabia. "No, you have tons of such cases in Serbia. Just read newspapers and you will find a case to write about every single day," I tell them. Eventually, the majority of papers I am handed over are about socioeconomic rights or political rights such as the freedom of assembly. It's interesting noting that at the beginning they have no idea where to trace something down, do not know how to manage by themselves.

To conclude with, I would focus on methods of empowering young people to find information and recognize them. Even we who are pretty qualified are not always capable of recognizing some things. We need a dose of doubt, which can, unfortunately, often get mixed with the post-truth drama, the drama about fake news and their sources. In our context it is probably better to call things by their proper name. To say simply, "The regime is lying." One can openly call a lie a lie, rather than speak about the post-truth. I would rather encourage opposing views than seek to reach a consensus.

Aleksandra Đurić Bosnić

We have not discussed so much narratives that should be replaced, or one narrative to be substituted by another; on the contrary. We wished to accomplish something quite different, to discuss what is to be done to change young people's perception of present-day realities and the past. Their perceptions are schematized no matter how often they go to libraries or know about political theory. We are also working with young

people who will become dentists, physicians, etc., we are working with citizens. And now we are not discussing narratives someone can but would not change, we are speaking about how to substitute untrue perceptions rooted in faked history and faked reality.

Biljana Đorđević

Political theory is a theory for citizens. People are using all those things on daily basis but they just do not know how to use those notions or probably do not recognize them clearly enough. When she writes about a lie and truth, Hannah Arendt differentiates the truth and a rational truth. Rational truths are mathematical formulas, applicable to everything regardless of a context. And, this or that happened today – that's a factual truth. To be sure we have gathered today we must have something to prove it with, some tape-recording or writing. The entire knowledge rests on quotes, double-checking or denying, as there is no sufficient proof for something and opens the door to doubts as such. That's a part of science but also a part of this kind of manipulation. Narratives are interpretations. Ways in which people are thinking and ways in which they are connecting notions has nothing to do with what really happened but with how they saw it happen and what conclusions have we drawn from it. In this sense, we cannot give people a formula for thinking or a narrative to stand for. We shall be arguing about it.

Aleksandra Đurić Bosnić

As for Hannah Arendt and the type of perception you are speaking about, that's all true. However, we are moving beyond theories; we are after reaching simple truths and untruths that are created by social systems. We have facts about what happened in Kosovo happened indeed, this or that year, we have facts about Srebrenica or Prijedor. Naturally, we are not entitled to force someone say that genocide was being committed in Srebrenica or in the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina at the time. And yet, we should not encourage someone's doubts about what happened just because someone else claims the contrary. I think, therefore, that the potential of knowledge is something pretty exact. I've researched the culture of the 1990s, had to do it methodologically well, the topic was problematic per se and I was not allowed to go beyond factual information. In order to collect all the information I needed I had to go through 200 issues of the *Politika* daily, had to analyze literature, and everything were mere facts to me.

Časlav Ninković, Humanitarian Law Center

There are billion things I would like to comment on. First, about what Srđan (Barišić) said about pessimism. I am awfully pessimistic about local and international

contexts we are living in, about what happens in classrooms, at universities, about our students or participants in our schools of transitional justice. When I began teaching the course in civic education I asked my principal, “What am I supposed to teach now?” “Well, suit yourself, be free,” he said. “What do you mean by free,” I asked. “Teach from what you know about it,” he told me. And that possibility for improvising was something great to me. But the others who are passive, those who are gradually giving up, are given the same power and freedom. And that’s the problem – this is how awful things are being produced. Textbooks are of major importance. You are given the possibility of choosing a textbook, but the process of having a textbook approved is most complicated. The state wants to have lessons on the 1990s wars left for the end of terms, when everything is over, grades are decided on and school excursions are being prepared. So, young people can learn about all those issues through informal education only, which is something welcome at the same time.

There is great potential in that freedom we are given at the courses in civic education. Students attend these courses for twelve years – eight in elementary and four in secondary schools – once or twice a week, that’s a great opportunity for us to speak in classrooms about things we are speaking about today. The Ministry of Education should be asked first of all and then other institutions as well under its wings not to make a show of the courses in civic education like other domains such as, say, war crime trials are being made show of. They are telling Brussels, “We do have trial” but those courts are not in session. The same thing happens with the courses, they say, “We do have courses in civic education” but in fact those courses are good for nothing. I learned recently that as of September six new courses would be introduced into elementary schools, one of them titled “Individual, Group, Society” or something like that. Well, the state has launched yet another instrument we could make a good use of. According to unofficial sources, they still have not idea about what happens with this course as of this September. They simply set nine new courses loose, as they’ve done with the civic education, and will be thinking about its contents as time goes by. Secondary schools will have nine new subjects including culture, the media and geopolitics. This means two classes per week, which is also great.

Jelena Vasiljević

The polemics between Biljana (Đorđević) and Aleksandra (Đurić Bosnić) is most indicative of confusion that prevails over here – so it seems to me at least. We are first taken to the field where academic concepts are being clarified while we want to define ourselves through discussion, decide what European identity is and whether identity is a useful term or not, only to remind ourselves that we are here and are supposed to consider some concrete policies and recommendations. It’s not easy to have experts and people whose researches are focused on the topics

we are discussing today following their own trains of thought. Most arguments in my book are against identity and culture, and about harmful concepts that need to be removed. But the problem is that such concepts remain in everyday language as crucial rhetorical points, and the problem is that that we simply have to understand the way in which they are being reproduced. True, this is about instruments of categorization. The problem is that there also are processes of cultural appropriation.

We should recognize the state of affairs: we live in a global era of identities and various collectivities. They are all very much present and color politics and ways in which people represent or self-represent themselves. They color narratives too – and that's how it is, we cannot simply renounce it just because we take a concept as such as absolutely useless and harmful to analysis.

I think we should adjust some theoretical and research-based knowledge we have to the ways these notions are being used, because people see them as something very important. We need to understand the processes leading towards identifications Dragan (Stanojević) was speaking about in the 1980s and 90s, understand that now they are somehow different, always ethno-centric and interwoven with ethno-religiousness. Why does it happen? And how does it happen? Is it really happening? Maybe all this is just on the surface. Maybe some other processes are going on deep down. It is most important to comprehend all this, and through constant researches and a selection of most appropriate methods Biljana (Đorđević) talked about, find a space suitable for subversion of sorts, the space we could occupy with some progressive story. We simply need to be shrewd. But the problem is whether we would be what we are if foxy.

We do not share the same narratives, do not necessarily share the same ideologies, but we have to form a coalition of liberally thinking people to promote some other narratives and facts in an organized way. Biljana is right. We do have facts. But when you wrap two facts in a package you already have an interpretation.

Dragan Stanojević

Whenever we talk about education, curricula, as Časlav (Ninković) put it exactly we are opening a major class issue. Those curricula he spoke about are not fit to all young people who want to be admitted to secondary schools but only to those who get enrolled in gymnasiums; hence, young people in occupational schools will be deprived of such curricula. In that way we are reproducing class inequality. All the youth are open to a variety of facts.

In the research we are doing now we are comparing the so-called normative order with an auspicious social order. And when we ask the young what factors of social advancement should be in their opinion, they usually quote education, hard work and ambitiousness. And when you ask them what social factors are in play nowadays, they

say “Political ties, personal ties and sheer luck.” We’ve noted generations of young people have been growingly adjusting themselves to the state of social affairs as it is. And when we take a look at Serbia’s political participation in Europe, we see two totally different trends. Participation in political parties slopes downward all over Europe, especially when it comes to young people. We are having 10 to 12 percent of party-members among the young but the biggest discrepancy between active and inactive members at the same time. When we asked young people what their reasons for joining political parties were, 98% of answers to “whys” were of the nature of usefulness. Those at the bottom of party ladders, the least active ones, joined in just to be able to find jobs. They are joining in, doing something here and there, and one out of 20 of them gets some underpaid job. Even in the 1990s when the Socialist Party of Serbia took over the infrastructure of the Communist Party of Serbia and Yugoslavia things stood differently. Political game, a multi-party game that began after 2000 actually intensified the struggle over public resources, all of which eventually led to the situation – as we found out in our research work – when people simply have to ensure some political ties no matter what job to get, even as waitresses, janitors, whatever. And that’s what the young ones are well aware of. Some of them try to make a good use of that channel as something legitimate, and to them it turns more and more legitimate as time goes by. Speaking about alternative scene and understanding of political activism in general, we note a growth, though a modest one, but more and more young people are getting engaged in that way. They are more involved in actions that are not being politicized in an ideological sense, but are ecological, staged in the street and the like. This is how things stand mostly in bigger cities.

We also interviewed them about things that would indicate the extent to which civil values are close to people. We asked our interviewees, “Do you take that not paying your taxes is justified? Do you avoid payments for public transport? Do you seek welfare to which you are not entitled?” We realized that even people who are politically active, of activist temperament, or those associated with various non-governmental organizations, display no more responsibility than general population. Ergo, should we be better just at the level of discourse and words or offer some practical relationships, even to organizations, is the question.

Izabela Kisić

This is not supposed to be our last meeting. I am glad we did not have just like-minded people here, but witnessed polemics too. Jelena (Đorđević) made a good suggestion – a coalition of liberally thinking people. We shall go on discussing this issue – with you here or even more people – but also other topics of significance to social reforms, and significant from both local and European angle, the topics on what has to be changed and how possible it is to be done.

Debate in in Novi Sad, July 2, 2018

Schools Without Liberal Ideologies

Duško Radosavljević, Professor at the Faculty of Law and Business Administration and President of the League of Anti-Fascist of Vojvodina

Together with the Helsinki Committee we organized a series of seminars for students at our Faculty few years ago. The experience of this undertaking is precious indeed. We problematized the issue of identities, collective and individual. We worked ex-cathedra and used notions they knew about. In other words, we were discussing actual situations and social systems, exemplified them with the cases dating back in the 1990s and not only with cases that had taken place in Serbia but also those in the history, the cases when collective identities usurped individual, turn repressive and decide on the realities. We discussed regimes and systems that count on manipulation of collective identities, circumstances in which manipulation is possible and accomplices – the media, culture or even science can often influence this sort of people's docility by firstly proscribing which collective and individual identities are welcome, and then tailor them to their purpose and plan.

We also discussed the meaning of the post-truth, the notion and significance of the phenomenon of the spread of fake news, and talked with them about the ways in which repressive regimes, dogmatic or ideological matrixes, form desired collective and individual identities and create some new truths adjusted to their ideologies.

Making students recognize such repressive social practices is most important. Many of the said notions are already threadbare and theoretically emptied due to a variety of connotations, and that's why they have to recognize them in their everyday life. We also dealt with repressive usurpations in the 1990s as we saw these developments as testing grounds, while we had before us children of the people active at the time, this way or another, and more or less victims of that system. We had interesting situations emerging from discussion: for instance, one girl participant said her father participated in war operations in Kosovo. It was really amazing to see this very same girl was quite open-minded, she was listening carefully to everything said about the facts she could not have learned about from her family or in school. No matter how different participants were we usually came to conclusion that they were with good reason revolted with today's faked realities. They said their schools,

classes and undergraduate course were not imparting proper information about the present-day reality and the recent past, that is about the times in history that were still determining our lives in Serbia and the region alike.

Aleksandra Đurić Bosnić, culturologist

My finest discovery during this cycle of workshops “The Youth in the Post-Truth Era” was the fact that in their motivational letters many participants used to quote they would badly like to attend – regardless of their future occupations – to be capable of deciding on social realities. They were not just sociology students but also secondary school students eager to study political sciences, philosophy or literature, even those after diplomas in business administration or natural sciences. I know those young people do not stand for a representative sample but all of them manifested civic consciousness and readiness for an open dialogue even when opposing some of our definitions or perceptions. That famous difference between theoretical explanations of notion is another story. I must say that young people were not seeing theoretical determinations that important, crucial to their perceptions of the realities and problems. As it turned out, they were taken as important just to help them define things that could be repressive and to what extent that could deprive them of the right to choose their identity on their own; repression can actually prevent them from opting for a civic identity in a modern society but make them continue seeing identities in the ethno-national context.

These types of alternative schools are more important than theoretical explanations as they encourage the youth’s social activism and incite them to actively participate in the change of their surrounding and social relations.

They also complained against a distorted picture of the history they’ve been presented, history textbooks tending towards revisionism, the same as against literature textbooks not providing comprehensive information about regional literatures and cultures.

Pavel Domonji, politicologist

On many occasions while working for the Helsinki Committee’s educational outreach programs for the youth I realized that young people did not discuss some issues among themselves in school premises. I used to ask participants if they knew what human rights were about and whether they wanted to discuss them. They said no one has ever spoken to them about human rights. They were shocked after my keynote address. A week after the end of one of schools we received a letter from some school in Vojvodina: a sociology professor had asked them what was it they had discussed, and they told her that a certain Domonji speaking about clitoridectomy.

She herself has never heard about it before. So, she asked her students to ask me to send her appropriate literature. The problem is not only in kids but also in those who are teaching them.

Young people are often just parroting flosses they hear in some ideological productions. A conference on national identity and globalization was held in Vuk's Legacy in Belgrade last week. That conference was told that globalization was calling into question Serbian national identity and all identity-based criteria such as language, culture and tradition. Some also said that globalization was depriving the Serbs of the universal right to self-determination to which even national minorities were entitled to, while the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina denied. Since this year we shall be marking the 100th anniversary of Backa, Baranja and Banat's integration into the Kingdom of Serbia it would be good to remind ourselves that the said integration was realized by the criteria of the right to self-determination, including secession, they said. When reading or listening to what our ideological wisemen are saying about the right to self-determination you realize that the only thing they have in mind is the right to self-determination and establishment of a state of one's own.

At the same time, they have never or barely ever said that the right to self-determination has an inner dimension, which prevents it from being the right to inner self-determination, the right to change state borders but just to establish an institutional structure that contributes to peace and freedoms for some communities. If I properly understand nationalists – from majority or minority communities alike – they take that globalization undermines a nation-state through investing power on some transnational political institutions, universal human rights and non-governmental organizations. They also see a nation-state as the only legitimate form of political organization in modern times, and a predominant instrument for the safeguard of national identity; ergo, since identity makes the sum and substance of a nation, while a state means power, a state is expected to use its power for the safeguard of a cultural and ethnic identity.

Let me give you an example: Vučić (Aleksandar) and Dodik (Milorad) announced a declaration on Cyrillic letter and the safeguard of the Serbian identity. Do we really need a declaration as such? I would say no. But if there is some declaration we do need, it will be a declaration on citizens' right to use an alphabet of their own choice. Every citizen should be entitled to opt for an alphabet he or she will use in private or official correspondence, and this right imposes only one duty on the state: to reply in the same alphabet a letter has been sent to it. The state is not expected to defend either Cyrillic or Latin letter but to stand for citizens' right to use a letter of choice. Such solution would go good to everyone, whether a Serb, Hungarian, Kurd or Trojan, nationalist or not. The problem is that nationalists despise the freedom of choice because it connects an alphabet with an individual's free will. According

to them, a free choice is not a foundation sound enough to defense of Cyrillic letter, therefore, it should be defended with the state's force.

What I said now is about the same thing I witnessed in Belgrade too were kids were defending their views vehemently. What I also found interesting at that meeting in Vuk's Legacy was the warning against globalization's perfidy. Globalization is not perfidious, the said, because it is against the Serbs and their national interests; on the contrary, globalization counts on the Serbs, but only on those who suit it. Nationalist's need to draw a line between suitable and unsuitable citizens is nothing to be surprised with. It testifies of their belief that apart from being superior, their national identity imposes a moral duty on all members of the nation, obliging them to safeguard language, culture and tradition with the same passion as they do.

Every nationalist on TV would say, "I love my nation but hate no other nations." The problem is in the term "love" they are using. They are after turning an inner feeling into a principle everyone else is bound to respect. And this is nothing but an overt terror. As Terry Eagleton put it, a nation is not something you would put into a Walkman but a reason why you are killing people in Bosnia, Kosovo or wherever else. Or course, all the Serbs have not developed such national identity or are truant in its protection, are not true Serbs but alienated, inferior or morally rotten Serbs. And those Serbs globalization is counting on have the duty to annul Cyrillic alphabet, to impose some common language on the Serbs and turn traditional Serbs into Euro-Serbs. The purpose of such differentializing is to stigmatize, socially and politically isolate the so-called bad, unauthentic members of the nation. Why is it they think a national identity is superior to other identities? One could have heard the answer even at our schools in Belgrade: because a national identity legitimizes politics. You are all witnesses today of national identity being used for political legitimization. Or, as Marko Đurić (head of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija) said, "There can be no national identity without Kosovo, and without a national identity Serbs are non-existent." But who do we have over here is there are no Serbs? Well, there are women, politicologists, lesbians, journalists, professors, workers and the like. There are scores of identities the national one is not morally superior to. And every single individual has many identities and which of them would mobilize his or her attention, passion, energy, time and money, bodily strength, etc. depends only on context.

Individuals may, of course, declare they are not only Serbs but also Europeans but such declaration will always be somehow scoffed at morally. Why is it so? Well, nationalists say, "Serbia has always been in Europe and, in this sense, we have always been Europeans." They simply have to snuff at such declaration as by invoking European identity they are questioning their own stance about national identity being natural, authentic and innate, while the other one is artificially construed and unnatural. They are, of course, bothered with these ties with European identity as

they perceive the latter as a rival they have to compete with for the control over material and immaterial resources.

This is all about the same when it comes to subnational identities. Just remind yourselves how nervous officials were when billboards promoting Vojvodianian identity appeared during the last census. To nationalists Vojvodianian identity is nothing but a scenario for a complot; to them Vojvodianians are those who have renounced Serbhood. And the Academy of Arts and Science of Vojvodina has been after rooting Vojvodianian identity on the grounds of which it would call for Serbia's federalization that eventually leads towards Vojvodina's secession and establishment of an independent state.

But Yugoslavs, Europeans and Vojvodianians are functional concepts in the ethnically mixed society. No wonder, therefore, that these identities appear in a pluralistic community. Why? Because it makes it possible for members of minority communities avoid minority statuses. If they can choose between assimilation into majority identity and Yugoslavism, they will opt for the latter as it implies universalistic ideology rather than a primordial, ethnically defined nation. In this sense Yugoslav, European and Vojvodianian identities are the only forms of a civic identity that should be promoted. As far as I can tell, the Helsinki Committee has been promoting this concept and deserves to be supported in it.

The very notion of Europe has been pluralized too. We have several concepts of Europe. We have Europe, the fortress; Europe –the community of values that disintegrated before our eyes when faced with the migrant crisis; and there is Europe – Utopia that wants to safeguard social justice, the state of well-being.

Miroslav Keveždi, philosopher of religions

We are referring to alternative narratives as if they were some wooden irons because they are not included into the educational system just for being alternative; contents of the educational system have been institutionalized and are not alternative as such; the alternative could belong to informal education. This can be discussed in several directions. One of them is to try to soften the educational system; however, there are several obstacles on this course, such as institutionalized educators capable of teaching an alternative narrative. I know from experience that their capability is rather poor.

The educational system is questionable per se; in some of its segments it remained incredibly rigid and strongly fixed. Here's an example of it: on the one hand, workshops as a more modern method of teaching should be an imperative to people engaged in educating others; on the other, there are no preconditions for using this methodology. I may illustrate my point by using political sciences; I've read that a political system can be recognized by mere looks of a parliament. physical appearance.

So, seeing seats rowed in some semi-circle with a left and right side you would recognize a kind of democratic system, while seeing one rostrum and all the seats so placed to face it you will recognize a dictatorship or totalitarian systems. And this is how our workshops look like. Therefore, in a liberal-democratic surrounding all the seats in a workshop should be placed in a semi-circle. In schools there usually is no room enough for such seating. And how am I supposed to conduct a workshop in premises looking the same as they were 50 years ago, speaking from a cathedra and facing obedient persons sitting and looking at what I am doing?

Allow me make yet another philosophical observation. Matter and form are always in tension. A form is conservative, unchangeable, while the matter is Heraclitan, alive and in movement. So, institutions are mostly fixed, placed like statues, sculptures meant to last. This is how education is positioned, it has to be studies like some canon, some subjects have to be learned in a certain way; on the other side you have a material part that usually deals with life. There is a perfect Saint-Exupery's phrase about life establishing order, while the order does not establish life. In other words, with its fixed nature an educational system doesn't create life but often makes life a bad favor, while life simply seeks its own form and goes in some other direction. The same gap is to be seen among students: on the one hand the school teaches them to observe St. Sava and, on the other, they are looking over the fence in search for a job abroad. From my brief experience as a philosophy professor in a gymnasium can say that many of my students have gone abroad; those who have not been so good students are now working as truck drivers in Austria, while the good ones, unfortunately, as working in beauty shops in Italy, in Samsung factories in Austria, etc. All in all, you can realize that the order that has been imposed on them meets not their needs in life.

In this context, alternative education is a chance. As the rigid educational system is incapable of following a path of students' lives, the civil sector has a great opportunity to do so and offer a form that would help those young people realize their needs, offer a liberal principle every individual has a need for. The problem is that only small, privileged groups of the youth have access to the alternative education, mostly kids from urban areas, who are better educated and have more liberal parents. It can be assumed that one third of young people in Novi Sad, some 100,000, and some 600,000 of kids in Vojvodina have this privilege. One can work with a couple of tens of young people in Novi Sad, while half a million of young people all over Vojvodina is left to someone else. And in the case of the civil sector this someone could be classified ad hoc in two groups.

There is a conventional civil sector of cultural-artistic associations that also has the matter-form dialectics mostly tending towards the form of folklore, folk songs, etc., everything that preserves conservativeness. When you ask young people what their needs are, they say they would like to travel. The youth have always wanted it. Bad

students wish to go abroad the same as good ones, children from rural areas wish it like their peers in citizens. Those in cities would usually quote study tours, while village kid would like to travel with some folklore groups. New players are emerging too. In today's Vojvodina is netted by citizens' associations that usually have the syntagma of Serbian-Russian friendship in their names. Barely any municipality in Vojvodina is without such an organization, an indoctrinated one. Organized by whom and when, what the program are, what is going on there, that's the question for investigation.

Another phenomenon to be taken into serious consideration are numbers of motorcyclist associations registered at local level, which, I feel free to say, have all the characteristics of Putin's "Night Wolves." And the fact is that half a million of young people in Vojvodina will witness events such as meeting of motorcyclists and may easily adopt a model that would govern their lives.

And then we have the pro-European civil sector oriented towards education and relatively small urban population. In a democratic system they will always be outvoted by the majority: half a million of kids throughout Vojvodina will always prevail over 100,000 kids in Novi Sad. We need to be more focused on the youth in rural areas, offer them knowledge suitable to their lifestyles. From a sociological point of view, their lifestyles do not differ much from lifestyles of their urban peers. According to some researches, life in rural communities means urban life in another way. Take, for instance, gardening: kids in cities are not gardening, but neither are those in villages any more.

According to a mini research I've conducted, children in rural areas in Vojvodina leave schools as they do not perceive education as a functioning social lift. They see the latter in three conventional ways: one can step higher on a social scale through marriage, heritage and education. Education is in the third place as less functioning. You simply see young people give up schooling and are more after making their own living. This probably has something to do with chapters in accession negotiations with the EU that are more oriented towards the issues that matter more to young people in rural areas such as the chapter on agriculture. The story about agriculture may be telling of European values and inter-culturalism. For instance, growing asparagus in Germany and Serbia is not same. Study tours organized for rural children could be most interesting to them and they provide them the opportunity for gaining useful knowledge and skills that are often neglected over here. Should I have a say, I would try to "sell" something about European values, democracy, the media or communication through programs as such that do matter to them.

Allow me to make yet another brief comment on the paper about pluralism vs. extremism. I would say extremism would be better defined as violation of human rights. In other words, the one who violates the right to life, expression, etc. of someone else is an extremist. Trump's blow in the face of the entire UN system is a part of international context, including human rights. The system of human rights was

established in 1948 as an alternative to the outcomes of WWII. If we sweep human rights under the carpet we shall be really returning to the system WWII has created.

Aleksandra Đurić Bosnić

The very notion of alternative narrative is so often referred to that it has to be further problematized and explained. While discussing alternative narratives we had in mind a narrative different from those spread over that had impregnated the cultural and educational systems in the 1990s. When speaking about a change or a deconstruction of such ideological layers we had in mind the necessity to substitute them by alternative narratives but not so as were working on imposing some new ideology on the society but to actually deconstruct delusions. This is not about narratives to be switched but about substituting what's untrue and ideologically distorted for facts.

Miroslav Keveždi

Introduction of religious teaching or civic education into the educational system exemplifies such narratives. I see a huge difference or discrepancy between these two narratives. How does it work in real life? In religious teaching classes children are being lectured starting from the Creation. They are taught that God created the man, and the woman, and so on. This is what they learn in the first grade. The theory of evolution reaches them much later and when reaching them it is being faced with children already "embalmed" with some other narratives five years before. On the one hand, it goes without saying that the theory of evolution cannot be taught to first graders, and on the other it is pedagogically questionably whether one can teach them about holy trinity.

Izabela Kisić, Helsinki Committee

How we have the question how to define the notion of alternative narrative. The Helsinki Committee is takes that students should be allowed to hear some other facts and listen to some different views. Not long ago, students of one of Belgrade's elite gymnasium staged a performance about the prevention of extremism and invited the Helsinki Committee.

Firstly teachers barely allowed us to enter school hall, actually they were even preventing students from attending the performance. Secondly, students told that that their history teachers were teaching them that the Norwegian government at the time of WWII was a puppet government, while the one of Milan Nedić a rescue government. How should one reply to this? We are not in delusion about being capable to restore facts in schools, have things that used to be taught one taught again.

And most probably – unless some major changes take place in our society – the facts about domestic quislings in WWII will never be restored in curricula.

True, just a handful of people comparing with the entire population attend our alternative schools. More students than we can possibly accommodate usually apply to our trainings. We are capable of admitting some 20-25 students per a school and conduct one course of training in two months. The only possible solution at this point is to ensure more support to informal education, and put such message across to the international community. For almost two decades the Committee has been advocating for civic education as an obligatory course rather than alternative to religious teaching. The quality of civic education in our schools is catastrophic.

Pavel Domonji

What's a teacher's duty? Is it to teach students to think reproductively and reproductively? Or is to teach them to think critically? Imagine now a teacher eager teaching students how to think critically. Who is there to support his plan and where? Is it the educational system, will it back up that professor? I doubt so. So, what's the purpose of the educational system? Is it to reproduce faithful sons to the nation or thinking citizens? No need reminding anyone here that regimes like the Serbian do not lean on public use of human mind and active political subjects.

Let me touch of religious teaching in this context. As you well know, it has not been introduced into schools by chance only; it had been a well-thought-out project. Its purpose is not to develop but repress critical thinking. As the saying goes, a child, like a tree, can be bent only while still young. Maybe the Helsinki Committee could ask the authorities to put an end to religious teaching after this project's duration. Religious teaching has nothing to do with public education. If you want to learn about religious phenomena you will find plenty material in literature, philosophy, sociology, paintings and music. If you really care to, you may focus on the phenomenon of religion within sociology, you may use comparative methodology, whatever, but definitely there is no place for religious teaching in public education. This is not about courses in Eastern Orthodoxy since more than 90 percent of citizens follow Eastern Orthodoxy as the Church misleads the public, and only 10 percent or even less observe some other religion. This is not about percentage but a principle, and the principle goes – there is no room to religious teaching in public education. Ergo, the fact that Eastern Orthodox believers are in the majority is meaningless.

Miroslav Keveždi

Whoever teaches philosophy in secondary school or gymnasium has to teach what he or she is being asked to, and that's history of philosophy rather than a

problematic approach, not what's the problem philosophy tries to solve but what someone has said once. I found myself in hot water in the first year of my philosophy teaching in a gymnasium when I approached the subject problematically. For instance, talking to them about Spinoza, I had the opportunity to tell them what's there to be found about him in ethics or political essays, about his life situation, going to Spain and Holland, why was it he was found unwelcome in Holland already a liberal country at the time, and about migrations taking place for the same reasons as today. I tried to make it all as close as possible to everyday experiences in everyday life.

I was thinking I was doing something good until students began phoning me during the summer, seeking answers to a list of questions planned for their university admission tests. Among them was the question about the date of Spinoza's birth. This is when I realized I've done my students an ill turn while believing I was doing something good – I taught them things that were of no use to them for their admission tests.

An answer to Pavel's question could be that a teacher should prepare his students for a next level in their education; and this next level on which they step by passing admission exams is not organized so as to develop open minds and critical thinking but fixed, focused on dates and names, and things like that, and on fixing already formulated bodies of knowledge. The education system per se calls for a thorough reform. I would welcome exclusion of issues that belong to privacy, families, even to a national community, the church and the like. People may go to church for their religious education. But I am afraid educational reforms is not even in sight, it's a part of what we are living in now, with all those obstacles including in exercise of human rights. And even human rights include contradictions in their nature. One of them is that religious teaching stands for parents' right to have their children educated in the spirit of their religion. I only paraphrased what the Declaration of the Rights of Children says. In some instances, as you'll see, even a system that should be self-supportive has inner contradictions that deny it.

Duško Radosavljević

I will begin with football since we are having World Cup now. Spain and Russia played last night. I've watched the game in a coffee shop together with some 100 people. They were roaring and crying because Russia lost. Thirty years ago in Yugoslavia, no one liked any Russia team in any sport. No matter against whom Russians were playing no one would cheer them. Everything that has changed in a brief period of time could be restored soon.

A state that prescribes the manner of education is the state with its ideology it needs to promote through education. We are faced with a problem, therefore, because we had no ideology in the past 30 years and allowed ruling parties to do everything to their hearts content. Liberal ideology is non-existent in schools. Capitalism

is understood over here by the scheme – privatization, plus nationalism, plus war. Capitalism is not a competition here; it's neither a market nor equal chances for all. You may have equal chance only if you are a Serb, pay your SNS membership fee and work for them for some percentage of profit.

Secondary education is in ruins; it's a burden to such stupidly planned system we have. Secondary school is like a policeman preventing people brimming with hormones from going into the street. And what's the oldest, Eastern Orthodox, etc., gymnasium in Serbia doing now? It is opening sports classrooms. Informatics is being studied in thousands and thousands places now; and our Prime Minister claim that everything will be digitalized. I am eager to see a pigpen digitalized. How can one digitalize crops and the rest things alive? And then she says how we need so many and many people in IT sector. That's great indeed: we are educating them for foreign countries. We are all aware how incapable technical, technological and other natural sciences are in posing socially correct questions. All of their questions are about how much something costs. That's a product of secondary education. There is nothing you have to wonder about, you get a job at the age of 18 and die at 68 if you are lucky enough. Secondary school destroyed children with its stupidity. Their manners are unruly, they do not think critically, they are obedient.

Proper studies of philosophy and language were put to an end in the 1990s. Now they just added a short story by Danilo Kiš and that unfortunate Pavić, his Dictionary of the Khazzars, to literature curriculum; and none of modern international authors. As the head of the Department of Philosophy Milenko Perović refused to host to Rorty in 2002. All that matters now are computers and foreign languages for first graders. Some may take me for a dogmatic, but I free to say that this is a sort of janissary education...Learn languages, computers and then flee...

After 2000 even some decent people were fooled by the story about multiculturalism that boils down to national ghettos with its councils and princes. Eventually they are arguing for alternative education. But how to ensure sufficient funds for free universities? We do not have some Soros to pay for free schooling. Students' social status is spiraling downward. People in small towns cannot afford education for their children in regional centers. There are no scholarships.

I like your idea about inter-cultural education in curricula. Philosophy, history, sociology, literature, music, sports and exercise three times a week need also to be introduced.

Education also mirrors the absence of state policy. They have withdrawn courts of law from small towns. For instance, a man from Šid has to travel some 60 kilometers to Mitrovica to go to a court. They've also withdrawn secondary occupational schools from small towns. Who will grow into local elite if there is no school in town? Who will be at the head of small municipalities? Who will be in charge of decentralization if there are no elites? Ljig, the town with population of 10,000, has only one

doctor and no secondary school. Schools are being closed down in villages for not be profitable, they say. But they do not provide buses to take children to schools. Some have to travel ten kilometers on foot.

Branislava Opranović, journalist

You (Radosavljević) say there is no system, the state has not established a system. We, working in the NGO sector, are trying to create, independently or in tandem with like-minded people, a system parallel to the non-existent one because we need it badly.

During the 1990s wars I cooperated with the Helsinki Committee. I was tasked with analyzing “Magyar Szo,” the only daily in Hungarian in Vojvodina, and “Dnevnik,” the only state-run daily in Serbian. It was easy to analyze hate speech in papers in which war was begot and then moved to battlefields. Then, five years ago, in cooperation with the Center for Regionalism and an organization from Bujanovac, I was working with young people on dissipating the legacy of hate speech that had generated antagonism, hate, segregation, etc. among the youth. The said organization in Bujanovac is practically only one woman with two small children, but she is enthusiastic and very active. I taught a course in journalism for children for a week. They came from two of the town’s secondary schools, one in Albanian and the other in Serbian. They were supposed to produce a school bulletin together at the end. In goes without saying that bringing them together was a tool to help us accomplish something else. I entered the room very enthusiastic and in good mood. Chairs were arranged in a semi-circle, and I was supposed to ask them something, to write, to talk, to draw...I see children coming in and all placing themselves on one side. I tell them naively, “Hello, gentlemen, there is place enough,” and bring them chairs...They keep silent and bunch together. I have no idea whether they are Serbs or Albanians, nothing is written on their foreheads. Nevertheless they were grouped tightly. Then children from the other school come in, and all of them go to another side. I realize this is no good, I shall accomplish nothing. So I decide to use a method I am strongly opposed to as it is contrary to all democratic principles, and tell organizers, “I will end the course here, I shall not conduct it.” I cannot work with two separated groups when we want to accomplish the contrary. We had to wait for them for half an hour to start mingling. Half an hour of silence is eternity.

I learned from their teachers later on that children were not to blame. And coming to teachers I recognized the common denominator of all we are talking about. They are responsible, and those who had been their teachers are responsible too. Teachers argue that is not their fault, they do not know one another at all. One school is built at one side of the town, and the other on the opposite. They have never met. They have never walked the same street. Children do not know the language on which to

speaking to one another. I was faced with many obstacles. I conducted that course, we had everything translated from Serbian into Albanian, neither did teachers speak any good one another's language. That was a horrible week to me. I go back home, and then they send me their papers their teachers will be translating voluntarily from Serbian into Albanian and the other way round. We had a week to produce the bulletin, but were making it three months. That was a hell of a job.

Eventually, this paper was made and I was in touch with teachers, but also asked to be in touch with students so that I could suggest them topics to write about. I asked them what their mothers were cooking or what were they going to do after graduation, all those topics that could bring them closer to one another. The first sign that we have accomplished something was when they began commuting via Facebook. Three months later they formed a mixed group, and that was a planetary success to me. I asked them to admit me but first to discuss and take a vote about it since I was not a student. I simply had to see what they were doing in the group. They voted me in. Bit by bit, I began suggesting them what to do, to go for an excursion or visit a coffee shop together. I went to Bujanovac to sell the bulletin together with students. Kids came on their rollers, which was also a common trait. Boys were a bit more nervous than girls, they were nervous about evenings, waiting for girls to have their say because women were not "doing that" on the street. But all the girls were rolling up and down street at night, boys were following in their footsteps and selling copies. And they planned to spend the money they earned on an excursion. But what they earned was not enough to buy bottled water. Then we developed some joint projects and earned money enough for that excursion of ours.

We are now going to form students' commune, they understood that they had to have some common products; not having just me speaking to them theoretically about making newspapers or anything else, but just them working on something together. They had not been prepared for democratic principle and agreements. Our students' commune was selling T-shirts and badges. Then children came up with the idea about having the front page in English. All those T-shirts had inscriptions in English. Serbian "proja" or "gibanica" pies and some of those dishes characteristic of Albanian cuisine were written in English. That was a serious project. Then they came all together to Novi Sad by bus, Serbs and Albanians. And to them Novi Sad was a cultural shock. And they began liking one another in Novi Sad. They found out some many things they had in common. That was my shrewd plan, but it produced results. Such projects should be continued, we have to write to donor organizations, plea to them, ask for funds. A lady for the EU came and said, "We have taught them how to work, let them earn money now and support themselves." And she says, "Why shouldn't their parents help them to pay for their activities?" "Hey, Madame, their parents are unemployed, they live from hand to mouth!" That was five years ago. Those kids are phoning me, writing to

me, many are at university, some are very good friends. Out of 30 children five have become close friends, and that's a major success.

Now five years later I am working on another project in Vojvodina, again with secondary school students in Temerin, a small town nearby Novi Sad. Temerin was chosen because it's a litmus test for what we have in Vojvodina. There was a story in papers about young people in Temerin fist fighting not because they were Serbs and Hungarians but just bumps. That's nonsense. Two groups were fighting because they were Serbs and Hungarians. We organized a school for inter-culturalism in Temerin, assembling Serbian kids, kids whose mother language was Hungarian, those with Hungarian parents or coming from mixed marriages, then we had Serbs and Ruthenians from another school. Communication between Serbs and Ruthenians was OK, but Hungarians did not know how to speak to anyone else. Researches showed that there were many right-wing organizations in Vojvodina, including even children: *Stormfront, Obraz, Arrow Crosses, 64 Counties Youth Movement*...these are all serious extremist, fascist organizations. Children know about them, know nothing about human rights, sex freedoms, minority rights...But they do know how those religious and extremist political organizations are functioning. It turned out that Serbs and Hungarians going to the same school and sitting in next-door classroom – not like in Bujanovac in two separate schools – have never been together in school halls and yard. Never. Do you know what they said about the reason behind their fight? They first told me they had nothing in common, they were going out to different places and listening to different music. That a reason emerged: language barrier. Languages spoken in one's community are not taught in school as it used to be in decent times.

What was most important – but also most frightening – to learn was that Serbian youths were seeing their Hungarian peers as rivals in the competition for jobs. In other words, he is my enemy because he belongs to the so-called minority and will be, therefore, have priority over me; or, he speaks Serbian better, he has to know how to speak it, while I'll never learn Hungarian, and this being a bilingual community I can never get a job in the post office or municipal administration.

We took them to Eastern Orthodox and Catholic churches, even to Synagogue. They knew nothing about the Synagogue or Jews. All they knew was what they were being taught in classes of religious training. We took them to the theatre staging plays in Hungarian. "What the hell are we going to do there?" they asked sulkily and indignantly. The cashier, the manager, the wardrobe assistant, they all spoke both Serbian and Hungarian. We had a workshop at which Hungarian were supposed to read out a text in Cyrillic alphabet, while Serbs in Hungarian. Everything sounded funny. They began relaxing and moving closer to one another. "You haven't learned, so you have to stammer," I told them. These are all plain things at first glance, but can be so easily mastered and are important.

I asked them to tell me their suggestions at the end. They said, “What we learned here we haven’t learned from our textbooks, it was really interesting, we would like to come again.” But this depends not on NGO activists as we are, but on the state and the system. Children said their parents were standing in their way. Who is there to teach teachers or educate parents? The media! Media literacy and education are inseparable.

As of this year some schools will have courses in media literacy. I was very glad to hear that. We shall be able to correct some things. And then I had second thoughts. What if the program is taught by someone of nationalistic views, someone unprofessional? That’s a double-edged blade.

Ana Pataki, sociologist

I’ve gone through a cycle of informal education and developed my critical thinking there. As a third year student of sociology I realized I had passed all exams finely, fulfilled all the conditions, have good marks but know nothing. I don’t know how to apply my theoretical knowledge, thing I’ve learned *ex cathedra*. That’s when I began attending seminars, researching, taking interest. And that’s why alternative education is that important, as it is informal, one does not gain knowledge *ex cathedra* but is encouraged to think critically.

The problem is that young people are still not travelling. In 2002 barely 6 percent of the youth crossed the border and went abroad. When I was a student the Embassy of Germany paid for my visit to Germany within some project of theirs. At the time, 27 percent of the youth crossed the border of the once FR of Yugoslavia. We had no scholarships, had no families living abroad, that was for the first time that we travelled and saw foreign countries with our own eyes. We experienced “the other” and different from us. The youth who never leave Serbia are cocooned in the story about the Western Europe and the EU that would transform us and steal our labor force. That’s why there dread it all, that’s why we have various extremisms, fascisms, blooming.

The labor market is another story, it’s all about offer and demand. I have a friend who studies geography and informatics. When he graduates he goes to the Employment Agency where they tell him, “Well, there is no code for your studies.” So, he has to choose between teaching geography or teaching informatics in schools. And he is expected to give up one half of his studies, one half of exams he had paid for, choose what he would be doing for living and probably not get a full-time salary for his work. Everything just because the codebook of occupations recognizes not some 170 occupational profiles we are having now.

The so-called dual education is being imposed on us. And the problem is in the context we are working, living and growing up in, rather than in the educational system. In the secondary school I was having theoretical classes school four days in a week

and had one day of practice; during four years of my studies I had 60 lessons in the methodology of teaching sociology. And that's all what we are getting from the educational system. Application of a body of knowledge is left to students' own devices.

I was a child in the 1980s, in the so-called golden age. I grew up in the 1990s with sanctions imposed on the country, rocketing inflations, closed borders, devastated economy and destroyed value system. And then came 2000, the year of great changes, when my generation was to build their careers, have families and plan the future for their children. This is why better students find it easier and more profitable to go to Slovakia, work at Samsung assembly line than to get any job over here.

And that's why I take it most important that everyone working on alternative education should go on persistently and consequently without imposing themselves on the youth as some authorities – otherwise they will stop being exotic and attractive to the young. To teach children how to think critically they need to be concerned with politics not in a partisan way but in the sense of management of one's own life. I participate in initiatives launched by the National Association of Parents of Children with Rare Deceases for the amendment of the Law on Healthcare. That's politics from my point of view. We must be concerned with politics but have to have knowledge about it, and learn how to think critically so as to recognize the things that are wrong...and then start pulling officials by their sleeves, knocking at their doors and doing whatever it takes to overcome a deadlock. The idea of the EU such as it is, is important not only because of free flow of goods but also free flow of people. Exchanges are crucial.

Andrea Ratković, philosopher

I think that speaking from one's own experience is best in the situations as this one. I teach aesthetics of painting to post-graduate students and anthropology too third-year students. There is not some big generation gap between the two but there is when it comes to understanding of subject matters on the one hand, and their right to ask lecturers for clarifications on the other. MA students communicate without making bones about anything, while I am the one who holds monologues about basics, while they are those who are posing questions.

Whenever I teach Heidegger's understanding of arts my students are asking what it was he actually said and why he understood arts as he did at some point of time. That's marvelous because not even students of philosophy are concerned with such issues. However, when I told them at the beginning of the course that I would not be holding conventional lectures but also screening some documentaries and that we would reading together various texts that was such an effort to them, they were even physically exhausted, they were sweating and feeling uneasy just because of the chance to have their say.

I was so happy when a post-graduate student told me she would like to apply to a conference in Poland and I mailed her the invitation. The topic of the conference was rather general. When they admitted her she was so excited that she shared the news with her mentor who then told me he wanted to have a word with me. He told me he didn't like my little experiments. Mailing a post-graduate student an invitation to a scientific conference was a small experiment, imagine! But during our talks I understood what it was about. They had qualms about a way our faculty would be presented; they were afraid a student could embarrass them with her inadequate theoretical knowledge.

My students are not allowed to take their exams unless they have paid all their dues to the faculty. The faculty administration is interested in whether or not they attend classes regularly, were active or inactive, or written their semester papers, all it cares about are finances paid in due time. Actually, all those institutions – private faculties – are functioning like corporations; all the care about is the profit and acting in accordance with the system they depend on directly. They are offering a minimum to their student on the one hand, and questioning their capabilities because they attend a private faculty on the other.

No wonder, therefore, that most intellectuals – whether or not working for academic institutions – are turning to non-governmental organizations for alternatives. To me the Center for Affirmation of Free Taught was a place that made it possible – to me and my colleagues – to participate in various activities and scientific conferences that level any conference organized by the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. That was an opportunity for us to prove to ourselves that opting for humanities had not been in vain, but makes sense. This is why I am always trying to draw my students' attention to the fact that aesthetics as philosophy of art and philosophic anthropology are not the matter of history but help us to apply our knowledge here and now; that we need to understand what we learn so as to be able to use our knowledge in the best way and to our benefit.

Student conferences the Center for Affirmation of Free Thought is has been organizing stand perfectly exemplify what I mean. The topic of this year's conference was "Crisis Aspects of Thought." We believed the topic itself would make students feel free to speak about things that are not being discussed at their faculties and which they cannot write about in their semester papers. Judging by applications sent to us we could see that students were anxious about going beyond the frame imposed on them. The topic itself was loosely defined and no one discussed politics. Politics are not being dug into. This is a serious problem. The conference offered them fabulous programs – we had a round table discussion with participation of topnotch theoreticians from whom they could learn many new things. They said they had a problem with authorities; this is because authorities are being imposed on them as someone to stand in awe to, rather than authorities respected to their knowledge. They seem

to think that probing into present-time, things that happened here and now, detracts from science and is not scientific enough. Indeed, is that insufficiently scientific or we are more at our ease with trimming the sails and riding the wave: just dealing with Hegel, Kant and Fichte without moving them out from their original contexts.

What we working on with the Alliance of Anti-Fascist in Vojvodina and the Center for Inter-cultural Communication this and last year exemplifies alternative narratives in the educational system. In the Karlovac gymnasium we discussed issues that are not being taught within official curricula, and got a marvelous feedback on it from young participants. We managed to capture their attention and point to a different, perfectly legitimate perspective on the present and today's reality. And no matter how many young people participated – even should there have been just five, but I believe there was much more – had all of them begun questioning once back home and discussing the knowledge obtained with their peers I would say we struck the beam.

And it was not that easy to enter the gymnasium, especially because it for a round table organized by the Alliance of Anti-Fascists the agenda of which was unacceptable to history professors; we were discussing origins of fascism, ongoing fascist tendencies and anti-fascism. Children were listening carefully. When I visited the same school several weeks ago, they were still talking about that round table. That means that we accomplished something. Cooperation between organizations that are following through on their missions, rather than looking after profit or putting moneys into some pockets, and the institutions we have could be a major step towards changes we want to make. We cannot accomplish something great overnight, but can obtain good results in the long run.

I am fully aware that finances will always be the biggest problem to cope with; with all the good will and enthusiasm we have, and even some personal resources, without financial assistance we cannot go much further from Novi Sad, Belgrade or Niš.

Duško Radosavljević

A week before that round table in the Karlovac gymnasium Andrea spoke about – and in which she had invested so much energy – three professors had gone to their principal to tell him that four doctors of humanities – two politicologists, one historian and one philosopher – were not authorized to speak about fascism. And that's the problem.

Iskra Vuksanović, post-graduate in gender studies

I want to raise some questions to be discussed, too.

As the entire region we live in is patriarchal, works by women writers should be added to the curriculum of regional literature. In literature women are usually

pictured as taciturn, sexual objects, etc. And the region has to get self-defined about the issue the same as literature in its approach to it. The educational system should also include thorough examination of sexuality and not in the way this is being done by activists who just round it off by defense of sexual orientations. The fact that one is sexually oriented this way or another means not that he or she puts no stress on oppressive sex acts.

We are learning about sex from history, TV, etc. In any movie – be it and old or a modern one – a classical position you see is a man upon a women. You cannot even see elderly people making love. Such welcome picture of sexuality has its roots in the control over women's sexuality. We are still living in patriarchy. Men with patriarchal value-systems are still those who promote the narrative about women and their wishes. By patriarchal value-system everything concerning women is personal and private. This is why we are faced with the problem of violence against women. War rapes are just consequences, but do expose that there are no such things as personal and private spheres – that are interwoven.

For instance, erotism is touched only in the contest of sexual activity. Erotism is much more. It can be connected with the issue of friendship, the issue of one's attitude towards nature, etc. The same refers to desire and longing. People are not speaking at all about it. We live in a sexually frustrated society in which sexuality and sex are used so as to subjugate someone. A whole spectrum of swearwords testifies of this. Swearwords are means and as such usually one-sided; speaking of which we should bear in mind that being a gay or a lesbian does not mean a person is not patriarchal. Gays and lesbians are also known for taking over that totally heteronormative matrix by role-playing man-woman, passive-aggressive, etc. And what we also need in curricula are topics such as love and friendship, and the policy of friendship. Just speaking against hate speech is not enough – we need to open the room to love and the potential of love.
