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The Youth Shall Inherit the Earth? Supranational Identity-Building in Socialist Yugoslavia and the EU Compared¹

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Summary

This article focuses on the intention of Youth Labor Actions in former Yugoslavia and the European Solidarity Corps in the EU to contribute to the creation of a Yugoslav and European supranational identity respectively. It does so by analyzing the programs' evolution, ideological underpinnings, but also implementation modalities. The article argues that both programs, despite being developed in different historical periods, nurtured a similar spirit of solidarity and the idea of work for the common good. Both have had a comparable tendency to create and maintain supranational identities in subtle, but at the same time formalized ways. While following the same principal idea, they differ in the context in which they emerged, their treatment of national identities and the type of ideological baggage they carried. Creation of Yugoslavs ultimately failed, while creation of Europeans is still pending, aggravated by EU's poly-crisis, politicization of European integration and clashing conceptions of identity within the EU.

Keywords: Youth Labor Actions, European Solidarity Corps, Yugoslavia, European Union, Supranationalism, Identity, Youth Programs

Introduction

The politics of youth labor actions started soon after the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, where it served as a tool of educating youth in the socialist spirit. However, the politics of youth labor actions spread throughout Europe and the US in the early 1930s' Great Depression, where it served primarily as a tool to employ masses of

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unemployed youth (Senjković, 2016, pp. 259-261). Since (voluntary) youth labor actions include routine interaction of a great number of people through a substantial period of time, they can turn out to be especially important in boosting friendship and a sense of solidarity. The potential of youth labor actions to build identities can be significant too, especially in cases of supranational polities such as Socialist Yugoslavia and the European Union (EU), in which citizens' compliance and legitimacy of the system depend on economic results and political success, while national identity-like emotional attachment of their citizens cannot be assumed.² Thus, this paper compares the Youth Labor Actions (Omladinske radne akcije – hereafter ORAs) in Socialist Yugoslavia and the European Union's youth program – the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), as tools to lever the building of Yugoslav and European supranational identity.

ORAs in Socialist Yugoslavia have been subject to extensive research in the last two decades. Although this research comprehensively explained the organization and structure of ORAs, and documented the modes of ideological indoctrination that ORA participants were exposed to in the regime's attempt to forge a 'new socialist man' out of the youth, it did not focus comprehensively on the nexus between ORAs and Socialist Yugoslav supranational identity-building.³ On the other hand, research on the interconnection between the ESC and European supranational identity-building is almost completely absent. The few studies that focus on the ESC program mostly concentrate on the knowledge and skills that participants obtained (Sherraden *et al.*, 2006; Hagh Talab, 2013; Telcian, 2015), or approach it as a form of informal education, while focusing primarily on the (potential) role that formal education should have in the process of European supranational identity-building (St. John, 2021). Conversely, research on the (positive) effects of educational mobility programs in the EU, such as Erasmus, on reinforcing European identity is well established (see Mitchell, 2014).

This paper shows that ORAs and ESC programs raised a notion of solidarity in the ranks of their participants of different nationalities, thus contributing to

² Bojan Kovačević and Slobodan Samardžić use the concept of output legitimacy to describe the type of legitimacy that is based predominantly on rational compliance of people to a particular type of governance and polity. According to Kovačević, the lack of a definite answer to the question 'who are we and why are we together?' characterized Socialist Yugoslavia and the EU respectively, unlike national states (Kovačević, 2017, pp. 201-206). For a comprehensive overview of the causes why a minor proportion of the population in Yugoslavia and the EU adopted Yugoslav and European identity as their primary identity, see Sekulić *et al.* (1994) and Fligstein *et al.* (2012).

³ The most important texts written on ORAs since the 1990s are Selinić (2005), Popović (2010), Vejzagić (2013), Nametek (2014), Ristanović (2014), Matošević (2015), Senjković (2016), and Šarić (2017, pp. 325-365).

the development of supranational identity in Socialist Yugoslavia and in the EU, respectively. Since communism can be characterized as ‘authoritarian ideocracy’ (Best, 2012), the paper demonstrates that the nexus between youth labor actions and identity-building was much tenser and more coercive in the case of Socialist Yugoslavia than in the case of the EU. Moreover, this paper will show that ORAs were much more focused on (intense) physical labor than the ESC, which could not be ascribed only to the necessity to reconstruct a war-torn country, but also to symbolic coupling of physical labor to the communist ideology. Eventually, ORAs had become a subject of the past, while the ESC has been a subject of the present, with increasing importance in the near future, if one takes into consideration the remarks by the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in her 2021 State of the Union Address that young Europeans should inevitably be provided the opportunity “to create bonds and help forge their own European identity” (Von der Leyen, 2021). Similarly, European institutions have called upon greater integration of civic education into existing EU mobility programs, including the ESC, to create a more lasting effect on, amongst other things, young people’s sense of belonging to the European community (European Parliament, 2022; Council, 2018; European Commission, 2017).

The idea of supranational identity is often an object of great skepticism because of the widespread disbelief in the prospect of “post-national” solidarity (Brkić, 2011, p. 51). In contrast to national identity which relies upon the notion of solidarity cemented by common myths, language, history and memories, the notion of supranational belonging has been projected to transcend culture and to reflect nothing but common consent emanating from shared (cosmopolitan) moral values (Kraus, 2003, p. 669). As Anthony D. Smith points out, emotional commitment of belonging to supranational polity can be forged only by raising a notion of solidarity between peoples of different nations (Smith, 1991, pp. 152, 172-175). Smith underscores that solidarity cannot be entirely achieved only by virtue of shared moral values, but should be necessarily supplemented by shared notion of at least some common cultural values and of common history.⁴ In the words of Benedict Anderson, the notion of common history makes individuals believe in family-like ties of belonging to a particular group, although individuals “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1983, p. 6).

⁴ Here it is important to stress that another outstanding scholar of nationalism, Rogers Brubaker, whose approach to nation has been quite adversary to Smith’s approach, also highlights that every national identity has its civic and its ethnic component, even in cases that are usually considered to be role models of civic nations, such as with the American and the French nation (Brubaker, 2006).

On the other hand, studies of transcultural memory emphasize that (supranational) solidarity does not necessarily need to be forged by national state practices of forging common myths and memories, but instead that a transnational circulation of memory practices, disseminated especially by modern digital mnemonic media (movies, TV, internet, etc.), may affect a change of perspective in viewers from different countries, and thus lead to empathy and to trans-ethnic solidarity (Erll, 2011, pp. 12-13). Other authors posit that notions of solidarity and commonness can be boosted by symbols, routine face-to-face interaction and everyday practices of people of different nationalities (Fligstein *et al.*, 2012, p. 109; McNamara, 2015). Brubaker and Cooper suggest that the notion of identity should also be approached by clusters of other less ambiguous and more differentiated notions such as self-understanding and social location, commonality, connectedness, and groupness. According to Brubaker and Cooper, these categories can describe in a much more differentiated way the various aspects and levels of emotional “load” related to belonging to a group, like the sharing of some common attributes, and the relational ties that link people on their own. Although these phenomena do not necessarily generate groupness in the strict sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidarity group, they can still generate a notion of solidarity and sameness in social life (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

The notion of solidarity and sameness as exposed by Brubaker and Cooper turns out to be especially important for supranational identity-building in the cases of Socialist Yugoslavia and the EU respectively due to the several challenges that top-down supranational identity-building has been faced with. Namely, both supranational polities were founded on the basic principles of ending the history of conflicts and of subsequent bringing of welfare to each individual nation and people in the frame of the new polities. The latent ideological background assumed that integration, once set in motion, would suppress the importance of nationalism and national identity as agents that inflicted past conflicts (Deutsch *et al.*, 1957). Thus, both polities invested in the promotion of a kind of post-national identity, conceptualized almost only on acceptance of a political statement by the citizens. On the one hand, that of brotherhood and unity of Yugoslav peoples in building a self-managing socialist society, and on the other hand, that of the unity in diversity of European people in promoting peace, prosperity and common European values (Pavković, 2014, p. 302). Although Socialist Yugoslavia had engaged in what Tomaž Ivešić called ‘soft nation-building’ during the 1950s – promoting greater unity between Yugoslavia’s principal nations within the field of language and culture – it was abandoned in the course of the 1960s (Ivešić, 2020). Relating any idea of ethnic notion of Yugoslavism to the “Greater-Serbian” legacy became commonly exploited in the struggle between the reformist and the conservative factions of the Party in the early 1960s. As Audrey Budding nicely points out, the tendency to relate ethnic

Yugoslavism to the concept of Greater-Serbian nationalism eventually meant that any Yugoslav ethnic identification, regardless of its content, would inevitably become related to “Greater-Serbian” nationalism (Budding, 2007, p. 410).⁵

Since this article is dealing with (supra)national identities which are concepts of cultural practice, the comparison will be designed as a cultural comparison in social sciences. Cultural comparisons in political science employ the design and methods of comparative history through the use of description, reconstruction, and analyses of concepts and narratives. Cultural comparison in social sciences is primarily focused on describing and interpreting a distinctive case followed by a comparison of both similarities and differences with respect to each of the cases (Beichelt, 2005). As Heinz Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka have pointed out with regard to the method of comparative history, “comparison is not a method in the strict meaning of the word, but more a perspective” (Haupt and Kocka, 1996/2004, p. 151).

This article will look at Youth Labor Actions and the European Solidarity Corps in such a way that each of the organizations under research will be firstly comprehended as regards their organization and goals, with eventual exposition of their similarities and differences, before sharing some final thoughts.

Youth Is Building (New) Yugoslavia

The first ORA was organized in 1942, when the youth engaged in harvesting in vast territories of western Bosnia liberated by the Partisans. In November 1942 the United Alliance of Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia (Udruženi savez antifašističke omladine Jugoslavije – USAOJ) was founded as a branch of the partisan antifascist movement that was to take care of inclusion of youth in the anti-fascist struggle. The task that the USAOJ was commissioned to carry out was not only to organize youth combatant units, but also to infuse the youth with a sense of dedication to brotherhood and unity of Yugoslav people in their struggle against fascist forces. Once Socialist Yugoslavia was founded, the task to organize youth was commissioned to the People’s Youth of Yugoslavia (Narodna omladina Jugoslavije – NOJ), which in the course of time changed its name several times until it became known as The League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia (Savez socijalističke omladine Jugoslavije – SSOJ) (Šarić, 2017, pp. 33-35).

The evolution of ORAs as a political project can be divided into two critical periods. The first one lasted from 1945 until the early 1960s – a period in which la-

⁵ For the 1960s-onwards politics of relating Yugoslav ethnic identification to the legacy of “Greater-Serbian” nationalism, see Haug, 2012, ch. 7, 8; Budding, 1998; Miller, 2007; Wachtel, 1998, pp. 184-219.

bor actions were primarily focused on creating a “new socialist man” and on developing Yugoslav socialist patriotism in the ranks of the youth. In this period, the actions involved mass-scale participation by the youth in the construction of seminal infrastructural projects – like railroads, motorways, etc. – that were to rebuild and industrialize the country. The participation of the youth labor force in the immediate postwar period was of decisive importance in rebuilding the country severely destructed by the war (Selinić, 2005).⁶ The second phase came as the outcome of the overall self-management reforms that the Yugoslav state and society underwent from the mid-1960s onwards. In this phase, ORAs lost their rigid form of organization, while the regime sought to attract young people by emphasizing the recreative aspect of labor actions, simultaneously trying to uphold the core principles of Yugoslav socialist patriotism (Popović, 2010, pp. 279-280).

On an ideological level, the Yugoslav Communist Party used ORAs as an instrument to forge the youth as bearers of the new system, that would embody the principle of “brotherhood and unity”, as Tito bluntly expressed in a speech delivered to brigadiers in 1946:

Comrades, this line and the work on it do not mean merely the construction of a communication project of importance to the economy. Here something much more important is taking place. Here new men with new ideas about work are being tempered and turned out... Here the brotherhood and unity of our people is being created, tempered, and hardened still further... You, young generation, have a host of tasks, and great merits in the creation of this brotherhood and unity (Tito, 1963, p. 72).

The entire organization of ORAs till the 1960s almost entirely focused on multiple layers of forging new socialist Yugoslav people among the youth. The voluntary work was understood not only as a self-sacrifice for the well-being of the country, but also as a return to the authenticity of work and the abolition of the wage relationship (Ristanović, 2014, p. 1123; Zubak, 2013, pp. 48-49). Besides, the purpose of the actions was to bring together not only youth from different social milieus (rich and poor, urban and rural), but also from different nationalities, in a way “to bring together the active communist people with ones who are passive, or even

⁶ This included the Brčko–Banovići railway that connects northern and central Bosnia, and Šamac–Sarajevo railway that connects western Bosnia with the Bosnian capital, the new urban district of New Belgrade, and the “Brotherhood and Unity” motorway which connected Slovenian Capital of Ljubljana with Macedonian capital of Skopje. The motorway project was gradually built from the late 1940s till the early 1960s, thus becoming a symbol of large infrastructural projects done by ORAs (Grupa autora, 1988). The famous historian E.P. Thompson, who participated in the Brčko-Banovići railway construction in 1947, left a testimony on the significance of youth labor in railway construction (Thompson, 1948/2020).

hesitant” (Supek, 1963, p. 12). Thus, the purpose of the actions was to provoke internal dynamics in the ranks of the working brigade, where the youth with the non-partisan and non-communist family background would be exposed to indoctrination by their peers of the partisan/communist background. The labor actions were propagated to have a voluntary character; indeed, the fact that from 1945 till the early 1960s around two and half million young people participated in ORAs points to a great enthusiasm about labor actions in the ranks of the youth (Selinić, 2005, pp. 87-90). Simultaneously, it is hard to claim that there was no coercion to participate, as several testimonies exist on forced participation by people of various social backgrounds that were labelled as ‘antisocialist’.⁷ However, some of these testimonies demonstrate how in the course of a labor action the initial hostility evaporated mostly due to comradeship atmosphere experienced in the daily life of a brigade (Senjković, 2016, pp. 87-95).

Besides internal dynamics between the youth in cooperative work, the young laborers were exposed to various forms of education and indoctrination that was to forge a new socialist supranational identity. The most important was, for sure, to conceptualize the spiritual bridge between the youth labor actions and the wartime partisan struggle. In the words of Dragan Popović, the nexus between ORAs and partisan fighters was conceptualized by underlining the brigadiers’ self-sacrifice in hard work, which was to allow the youth to experience a motivation similar to the sacrifice that partisan fighters underwent during World War II. By the same token, the individual worth and dedication of each brigadier in rebuilding the country was stressed, similar to that of the partisan fighter: each brigadier who would achieve more than the target set for a particular task was awarded the title of ‘shock-brigade worker’ (udarnik) (Popović, 2010, p. 284), in a similar vein as distinguished partisan combatants were awarded the title of ‘first fighter’ (prvoborac) or ‘people’s hero’ (narodni heroj). Moreover, the organization of the brigades resembled the organization of partisan units: strict vertical organization with simultaneous development of close horizontal ties between brigadiers, while appointed commanders of ORA brigades were usually young distinguished partisan fighters (Vejzagić, 2013, p. 23). Moreover, the nexus between ORAs and the wartime partisan fight was very frequently anchored in the various educational and cultural programs that young brigadiers were exposed to in the afternoons, where the dedication and self-sacrifice

⁷ The means of pressure to join labor actions were various, like conditioning allowance of enrolling to university, job opportunity, or even of shorting sentence to imprisoned family members. The coercive aspect of labor actions can also be indirectly interpreted from Tito’s speech delivered to youth in 1946 expressing that “anyone who stands on the side, wanting to see what you are going to accomplish, is no friend of yours, or of the nation, or of his country... the man who stands on the side is an enemy of new Yugoslavia” (Tito, 1963, p. 76).

of the workers was related to “expression of the very same patriotism that made our youth join the partisans during the war” (Supek, 1963, p. 24). In Tito’s own words, ORAs “show that our people have understood the spirit of today – that after the war, the same heroism, unity, perseverance and sacrifice are needed as during the war. Our youth gives great examples of working heroism here” (as quoted in Mihailović and Spasović, 1980, p. 43).

ORAs and the Yugoslav People’s Army were the only all-Yugoslav institutions in which people from different social backgrounds and nationalities were exposed to routine interactions throughout a substantial period of time. So, it comes as no surprise that Tito saw these two institutions as laboratories to prospectively forge a single Yugoslav nation out of brotherly Yugoslav peoples. He expressed these aspirations publicly on several occasions, the most explicit being during a speech delivered to the youth working brigades in 1952, when he stated:

[A] great role was played by this mixing and getting to know each other between the youth. This represents a strong element in creating a national compactness in a Yugoslav sense. We have created brotherhood and unity, also confirmed it by the law, but the old [national identifications] has not withered away. This is not going to happen so easily. [...] The unity of our nations needs to be created with the merging of peoples, and the concept of a community cannot be a concept of an individual republic but of a country as a whole, since a republic is only a part of our community. By working on different working sites and by getting to know each other, you will prevent the youth from inheriting the old understanding of the national. There are no borders here. It does not matter if someone is a Serb, Croat, Slovene, or any other nationality. He is a Yugoslav (as quoted in Ivešić, 2020, p. 78).

It seems that Tito’s aspirations found a fertile ground in the ranks of the youth. Namely, the first sociological survey on aims and motivation for participation in the youth labor brigades done in the late 1950s showed that ‘building of brotherhood and unity’ and ‘socialist patriotism’ were the main catalysts for youth to take part in ORAs. The survey was done on a sample of 5880 brigadiers from twenty-seven brigades from all Yugoslav republics; a lot of them stated ‘Yugoslav’ as their national identity, while very simultaneously protesting against posing a question on national identity, which according to the author of the survey meant that the youth did not see national identity as a fundamental part of their personality (Supek, 1963, pp. 305, 311). However, having in mind the blatantly authoritarian character of the Yugoslav regime during that time, the truthfulness of these results should be assessed with a grain of salt, as part of the explanation as to why the young respondents gave such answers may also lie in the suggestive nature of the questions asked and the social desirability of the answers they offered.

However, from the early 1960s on, the state underwent a fundamental transformation of the political, economic and social system, including empowering of authorities of the federal republics at the expense of the federation, liberalization and further development of socialist self-management, which granted a high share of autonomy to enterprises and local units (Rusinow, 1978, ch. 5). These changes in the political and economic system were followed by changes in the prospect and ability of supranational identity-building. The ethnic component of Yugoslav identification was entirely abandoned, while socialist Yugoslavism and Yugoslav socialist patriotism were defined only in terms of dedication to Yugoslav self-management path to socialism (Ivešić, 2021, p. 150). This process of transformation brought an end to the initial representation of ORAs as all-Yugoslav, federal, large infrastructural project with massive participation aiming at socialist Yugoslav transformation of youth to a socialist new man. From the 1960s onwards, ORAs were usually arranged at republican and local levels, with only minor participation of brigades from other republics and thus other ethnic groups.

Since the liberalization of the regime dissuaded the interest of society at large in politically directed events like ORAs, the number of participants also rapidly declined, prompting the communist party to change the initial reasoning of ORAs by placing the emphasis on youth socialization and leisure in order to attract younger generations to participate (Popović, 2010, p. 287). While the federal ORAs in the 1940s and the 1950s usually lasted for a few months – starting on 1 April, which was proclaimed as ORA celebration day, and ending on 29 November, the Day of the (socialist Yugoslav) Republic holiday – the new ORAs were organized during summer holiday season for pupils and students. Although ORAs from the 1960s on included physical labor as well, work itself was less strenuous in comparison to the 1940s and 1950s labor, since the projects involving the construction of huge infrastructural projects were no longer opportune. Since ORAs also lost any aspect of compulsory character and became an entirely voluntary action, they henceforth attracted participation predominantly by youth of low social status living in villages or small towns. Thus, from the 1960s ORAs became a medium through which certain strata of Yugoslav youth would spend their summer holidays free of charge (Matošević, 2015, p. 102).

Although ORAs ceased to exist as a specific tool for the ideological shaping of brigadiers, the ideological content of the new ORAs stayed in the foreground of the actions. Namely, the organization of ORAs had changed radically in respect to the organization practiced immediately after the Second World War, and during the 1950s, when the brigades were organized as military type units exclusively dedicated to accomplishing the commissioned tasks. From the early 1960s onwards, the hierarchical organization was loosened, leaving much more space for various enter-

tainment activities that were organized individually. By the same token, the regime tried to infuse practicing of self-management in the running of a brigade's organization and work. However, the self-management practice in ORAs ended up with poor results, mostly due to disinterest of the youth in any form of political activity (Mihailović, 1985, pp. 113-135). The several studies conducted in the 1970s and the 1980s showed that making friendship with other youth from all around Yugoslavia was by far the strongest motivation to participate in ORAs, while the categories that can be ascribed to socialist ideology (reconstructing the country, erasing differences between social classes, etc.) had lost in currency (Popović, 2010, pp. 293-295). These results could be quite worrying for the regime, especially if one takes into consideration that, according to one research done in 1974, the predominant segment of participants were either party members or offspring of party members (Obradović, 1974, p. 55). However, although ORA participants in the 1970s and the 1980s obviously did not care much about the regime's ideology of brotherhood & unity, the main motivation of the participants – to have fun and forge new friendships from all around Yugoslavia – indicates that youth to a greater extent than the general population were inclined to feel attached to Yugoslavia as a whole.

This claim had been to a certain extent corroborated by a few sociological surveys about Yugoslav identity in youth conducted in the 1980s. The surveys showed that young people declared themselves ethnically as Yugoslav, and also declared non-ethnic Yugoslavist orientation as preferred identification much above average (Flere, 1988, pp. 115-116).⁸ Eventually, it is speculated that relatively high emotional attachment of youth to Yugoslavia could to a certain degree be explained by the interactions experienced in the course of the labor actions. We now turn to the issue of the ESC.

Youth Is Building the European Union

As the EU developed, so did its institutions, expanding and deepening its powers, introducing and exchanging different governance models and modes of decision-making. Although based on the idea of overcoming the past conflicts on European soil and striving to prevent future hostilities and increase collective prosperity through closer economic integration, the process of political and economic integration has inevitably created the need to build a European identity to ensure broad loyalty to the EU supranational project. Realizing that neither the common experi-

⁸ The 1981 population census in Yugoslavia showed that 5.4% of Yugoslav population declared as ethnic Yugoslavs (1,219,000 out of 22,424,711 inhabitants). On the other hand, the survey done by Sergej Flere on the ethnic attitudes of the youth showed that more than 16% of the respondents aged below 30 declared to be ethnic Yugoslavs, while close to 40% stated Yugoslavist orientation as preferred identification (Flere, 1988, p. 116).

ence of World War II nor the common security (peacekeeping) and economic interest (building a single market) cannot be strong enough adhesives that will create a sense of community among citizens of different nationalities, religions, languages, and traditions who are beginning to notice an increasing concentration of power at the European level, European elites have realized the need to reconcile and complement national identities with a new European identity (McNamara, 2015). Over time, EU elites have carefully crafted the understanding of European identity to be based on shared EU values which largely reflect EU's Occidental heritage of ancient Greece (democracy), the Roman Empire (rule of law), Enlightenment (freedom and equality), and Christianity (solidarity) (Akaliyski *et al.*, 2022, p. 573). The intention was to appeal to a wide EU audience without suppressing existing national identities or creating conflicts between European, national, regional or local identities (McNamara, 2015).

Promoting a shared (and not single) European identity rather required a balancing act between different levels of identity and the localization of the EU through the reframing and embedding of national histories, traditions and cultural traits into a larger European narrative (*ibid.*) Thus, the EU is promoting both cultural diversity by Europeanizing national culture into common historical and cultural heritage, and fundamental values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and fundamental human rights, pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women, as enshrined in the EU treaties. By and large, European identity as promoted by the EU institutions therefore applies to a civic conception of identity in which "people who identify as European view themselves as in favour of peace, tolerance, democracy and cultural diversity" (Fligstein *et al.*, 2012). The dominantly civic conception of European identity as promoted by the EU is at odds with an ethnic sense of European identity found among right-wing political forces which view identity in exclusionary terms ('us' against 'the others') pertaining to a common European Christian religion, tradition, culture and history (*ibid.*). These conceptual clashes were particularly pronounced during the debate on the draft European Constitution whose reference to "religious inheritance of Europe" drew strong criticism from cosmopolitan forces (McNamara, 2015, p. 20).

In the absence of strong legislative powers in the field of formal education to shape young people into European citizenship, the area of non-formal and informal education is becoming the key locus of fostering solidarity among Europeans, with the active participation of civil society. According to St. John: "If non-formal education is learning that takes place outside the institutions of formal education systems, then the EU is indeed well placed to develop and coordinate a European citizenship education program" (St. John, 2021, p. 266). As the literature suggests, the

experience of the Erasmus student exchange program and other EU mobility instruments present the greatest opportunity to cultivate a sense of social cohesion among European youth, which are the most receptive group to form a shared European identity in the future by adopting European values and embracing cultural diversity (McNamara, 2015; Bruter, 2012; Fligstein *et al.*, 2012). Against this background, the EU has doubled the Erasmus+ program from 14.7 billion euros (2014-2020) to 26.2 billion (2021-2027) and expanded the ESC program to 1 billion euros, compared to 2018-2020. In addition to educational activities, the second most important medium for building a European identity are volunteer programs for young people in the EU. The idea of a program dedicated to youth volunteering in Europe and beyond came to life in 1996 as a two-year pilot version called European Voluntary Service (EVS), initiated by the European Commission (Telcian, 2015).

The 1996 Communication of the European Commission proposing a draft decision to establish the EVS program to the European Parliament and the Council points out in one of the annexes that the idea of the EVS is “to give young people an original way of integrating into society while at the same time offering them the opportunity to make a real contribution to building Europe – and with it a sense of European identity and citizenship – and also to demonstrating solidarity between EU and non-EU countries” (European Commission, 1996, p. 42). Already in the immediate aftermath, both volunteerism and civil society gained in importance through Declaration No. 38 of the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force in 1999 (*Voluntary Service Activities*) recognizing the importance of volunteering for the development of social solidarity (Ljubojević, 2020, p. 188). The founding document of the EVS (1998) emphasized that the intention of the program was to develop a component of active citizenship through support for youth mobility and to actively influence the spread of “ideals of democracy, tolerance and solidarity in the context of European integration...” (European Commission and the Council, 1998, p. 4).

The EU institutions’ proclamation indirectly confirms that the EU aims to build a European identity among the young people participating in youth volunteering programs. One of the European Commission’s studies on the impact of transnational volunteering through the European Voluntary Service points out that an important part of the EVS is the idea of strengthening European identity and attitudes (European Commission, 2017, p. 212). The study shows that (young) respondents self-identify as Europeans to a greater extent. Proof of their commitment to the EU is the fact that in the preparation of this study, 25% of respondents said that the EVS motivated them to participate in the European parliamentary elections. 36% of them said that they feel more European after the program (*ibid.*, pp. 156-160). Although the literature on the effects of EU youth mobility on European identity produces

inconclusive results, some studies on the Erasmus program have come to similar conclusions (Mitchell, 2014, p. 339).⁹

As the implementation of these and similar programs is (mostly) related to the *Multiannual Financial Framework*, the EVS was an integral part of the Erasmus+ program budget for the period 2014-2020. However, the migrant crisis in the EU clearly required an immediate response. Thus, the program of the ESC as successor to the EVS was announced suddenly through an address by the then President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, in the *State of the Union Address* on September 14th, 2016, when he announced that:

... the Commission is proposing today to set up a European Solidarity Corps. Young people across the EU will be able to volunteer their help where it is needed most, to respond to crisis situations, like the refugee crisis or the recent earthquakes in Italy. I want this European Solidarity Corps up and running by the end of the year. And by 2020, to see the first 100,000 young Europeans taking part (Juncker, 2016).

The ESC was formalized just a few months after this speech and presented in the Commission Communication on December 7th, 2016 (European Commission, 2016). In its form, the ESC, in addition to being somewhat broader in scope, follows the same implementation matrix as did the EVS (Broeck and Buiskool, 2017, p. 12). However, unlike the impersonal name of the predecessor, the very name of the ESC suggests a stronger value orientation of the new program in which the concept of solidarity comes to the fore. Thus, all the basic features of the new program can be clearly read from the Communication of the European Commission. The main goal of the ESC is to: "... strengthen cohesion and foster solidarity in European society" (European Commission, 2016, p. 4). Being at the very core of the ESC program, the promotion of solidarity can be observed in the book *4Thought for Solidarity* that has been published with the support of the European Commission. In the words of the authors, the book has been imagined "as a contribution towards the common narrative on the concept of solidarity from the perspective of research, practice, policy and young people" (Bačlija Knoch and Nicodemi, 2020, p. 5). The main topic of the book, solidarity in Europe, has been defined as:

⁹ Mitchell develops two dimensions of identification: identification as European and identification with Europe. They do not necessarily correspond, since the former dimension includes self-identification, while the latter dimension includes a sense of emotional attachment and connection with the group, i.e. a sense of belonging (p. 331). Previous empirical studies of Emmanuel Sigalas (2010) and of Iain Wilson (2011) have provided adversary evidence that Erasmus does not strengthen European identity. However, Sigalas did his research on Erasmus students visiting the UK and British Erasmus students going abroad, and Wilson's research included primarily British students going to France and French students coming to the UK, while the research by Mitchell targets students in six countries.

... a concept that transcends the national level. It is something supranational, that binds people (overcoming national boundaries) and creates something that is superlative. There is an extra value that creates Europe, making the Union bigger than the sum of its parts. The transnational connection creates a cohesive, tighter network between countries. It knits people closer together, despite language or geography (*ibid.*, p. 54).

The ESC is a European Commission program that directly involves young people aged 18 to 30 who are EU citizens in volunteering projects¹⁰ and programs and paid internships, whereby young people aged 17 to 30 can apply. In particular, the ESC covers several implementation models: volunteering, traineeships, jobs and local solidarity projects and networking activities (European Commission, 2020, p. 13). Volunteering is intended for young people regardless of their qualifications. It is an unpaid full-time engagement where volunteers are covered for transportation, accommodation, meals, pocket money and insurance, and the organization is recognized for part of the volunteering costs. It is possible to volunteer individually (2-12 months) or in a group (2 weeks – 2 months). The internship, on the other hand, represents the acquisition of work experience through a full-time internship (2-6 months). Furthermore, jobs can last a minimum of 3 months, and financial support to organizations is provided for up to 12 months. Both internship programs and jobs contain components of learning and training. Finally, local solidarity projects and networking activities enable the gathering of at least five young people for 2 to 12 months around a common project idea that seeks to address a burning social problem within their own local community. In doing so, projects must fit into broader European priorities such as the fight against climate change, social inclusion, or gender equality.

According to Broeck and Buiskool, the ESC as a program succeeded in uniting several important goals: “stimulate solidarity activities of young people; offer more (and different) opportunities; better match supply and demand; and provide better support services insurance, quality, training, etc.” (2017, p. 25). Speaking about this program as an opportunity for young people, the director of the Center for European Volunteering, Gabriella Civico, notes that such and similar programs contribute to the affirmation of solidarity because they primarily respond to community needs, contribute to youth employability, but most importantly, through international exchanges depicting all European values best contribute to the development of the European project as such (Civico, 2017, p. 104). On the other hand, the founding document of the ESC features a similar intention contained in the state-

¹⁰ Only those who have a residence permit in the EU and citizens of other countries can apply for volunteering programs, but not for paid work programs, depending on the Program and its goals, which change for each year.

ment that solidarity is a guarantee of necessary unity and a landmark for young people in whose “minds and hearts lies the strength and wit to further advance the European project” (European Commission, 2016, p. 2). The ESC is also expected to “support integration, fostering inter-European and inter-generational solidarity, promoting common values, reducing nationalism and generally enhancing the concept of citizenship” (European Commission, 2021, p. 5). Therefore, the most concrete evidence of the intention of this program for young people to influence the creation of a common identity matrix can be found explicitly in the statement on the general goal of the program:

to enhance the engagement of young people and organisations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities, primarily volunteering, as a means to strengthen cohesion, solidarity, democracy, European identity and active citizenship in the Union and beyond, addressing societal and humanitarian challenges on the ground, with a particular focus on the promotion of sustainable development, social inclusion and equal opportunities (*ibid.*).

From all this, several conclusions can be drawn. The ESC represents continuity in European activities to encourage youth volunteering. However, amid growing internal tensions between Member States over the future development of the European project, the politicization of European integration, rising skepticism, conflicting visions of desirable values and the many EU crises, the ESC places greater emphasis on promoting cosmopolitan values and civic virtues among young people. The ultimate objective is to instill in new generations of Europeans a European civic spirit in line with the EU’s democratic-liberal foundations. Modalities aimed at building European citizenship through the ESC include individual and collective volunteering, with collective engagement primarily seeking to strengthen local youth communities. So, although all activities are expected to address the collective problems facing the EU, but also of humanity altogether (e.g. climate change), different projects have different potentials for building a European identity (cf. Bačlija Knoch and Nicodemi, 2020, ch. 7). Also, various forms of activity often seek to reconcile identity and economic goals, so in addition to the expected contribution to the development of European identity by promoting solidarity, community and civic values, internships and paid work in ESC mobility projects are also expected to strengthen the economic competitiveness of young people in the labor market by honing market-valuable knowledge and skills.

Therefore, the potential for strengthening European identity may vary depending on which goals take precedence in a specific ESC activity. Overall, the ESC represents an instrument in the arsenal of EU mobility programs which intend to naturalize the EU through everyday experiences and practices (McNamara, 2015). Thus far, the factors contributing to a European identity through participation in

the ESC have been both interest-based, in the sense that participants could reap tangible benefits in the form of skills and experience acquisition and thus become Europeanized, and communicative in the sense of being exposed to local cultures, practices and experiences (cf. Borz *et al.*, 2022). The recent calls from the European parliament to supplement the ESC with parallel EU citizenship modules and visits to EU heritage and memory sites in order to “promote an intercultural and dialogical approach to history and strengthen European values and principles” (European Parliament, 2022) indicate that ‘cognitive mobilization’ through greater knowledge acquisition about EU values, citizenship, and the shared history and culture of the EU is also considered an important building block for identity formation.

A Comparison of the Basic Features of ORAs and the ESC

When both programs are considered, a comparison can certainly be made on several levels. Nevertheless, we want to initially view both phenomena as voluntary activities in their deepest sense, more precisely as a means of integrating young people into a supranational identity that encourages the building of “young socialist Yugoslavs” on the one hand and “young Europeans” on the other. Voluntary service is defined by Michael Sherraden (2001) as “an organized period of engagement and contribution to society sponsored by public or private organizations, and recognized and valued by society, with no or minimal monetary compensation to the participant” (cited in Sherraden *et al.*, 2006, p. 165). Both ORAs and the ESC can be subsumed under Sherraden’s definition of voluntary service.

Here it is important to highlight another pertinent approach to understanding volunteer work that Hagh Talab writes about, quoting Bussell and Forbes (2001), who differentiate four questions for assessing volunteerism: what (definition), where (context), who (characteristics of volunteering), and why (motive) (Hagh Talab, 2013, p. 23). Guided by these four broad issues from the literature, we constructed a more detailed classification of the criteria and defined the main determinants for comparison based on: timing, implementation model, results and purpose of the program, creation model and formalization model, timing and level of implementation and scope, objectives and principles, target groups, character and types of work, functions, and participation. We base our analysis of ORAs and the ESC on a cultural comparison and draw on the method of comparative history by using description, reconstruction, and analyses of concepts and narratives. The cultural comparison in this paper first described and interpreted each case separately (ORAs and the ESC), and in the following sections we offer a comparison of similarities and differences with respect to each of the cases (Beichelt, 2005).

Similarities

There are fewer similarities between ORAs and the ESC than differences, and the parallels that can be drawn are mostly either the result of a change in the character of ORAs in the early 1960s or similarities are only present on the surface while a deeper analysis reveals fundamental differences. For starters, both programs include young people and map them as their target group. In both cases, it is (mostly) young people who are beneficiaries of the program and who work for the common good of the community and society, participate in programs without compensation (registration fee) and do not receive compensation for their work (ORAs) or it is modest and covers only basic living needs (ESC). Both programs have been formalized and institutionalized at the federal, i.e. European level and the implementation of concrete actions is structured within the given framework.

Both programs are in principle voluntary as their primary determinant, although it should be considered that the two programs were developed in different ideological contexts, so ORAs take on a voluntary character only in the second phase of their development, from the 1960s onwards. Until then, the Yugoslav regime and top leadership made no secret of the fact that refusing to participate in ORAs would not be met with sympathy (see footnote 6). Therefore, ORAs in their first phase are more coercive in nature, as volunteering among young people is instructed and imposed even with the threat of punishment for disobedience. Furthermore, although we could conclude that both programs led to the strengthening and development of tourism culture among young people, youth mobility is still the common denominator. The development of tourism culture is more present in ORAs in the second phase when young people of lower socio-economic status started considering ORAs as an opportunity for free holidays, while the ESC also partly offers an opportunity for young people to immerse themselves into a local context of a foreign or home country.

Surface similarities between the two programs can also be found at the level of objectives and topics being promoted. The two topics in the ESC that are most prevalent in written projects can be brought into direct interrelationship with the objectives of ORAs. On the one hand, the goals of ORAs are clear: building the country, nurturing the achievements of the National Liberation War, brotherhood and unity, the right attitude towards work and work habits among young people, development and nurturing of social relations and self-management awareness. On the other hand, we have the objectives of the ESC: strengthening cohesion, promoting solidarity in Europe, encouraging the involvement of young people and volunteering organizations aimed at (apart from cohesion and solidarity) strengthening democracy, European identity, and active citizenship. We can put the two sets of goals together. These are the relations: rapprochement and brotherhood and unity – inclusion; and assistance in building the country – community development. In a certain

sense, even building self-management awareness in the later period of ORAs implementation can be linked to the emphasis on fostering employability and entrepreneurship among young people in the ESC as both groups of objectives emphasize the economic aspect. However, although the goals seem complementary, they reflect different ideological-regime positions of a socialist-authoritarian regime on the one hand, and of liberal democracy and market capitalism on the other.

This fundamental difference leads us to a key comparison of the fundamental purposes of both programs. From the previous descriptions of the programs, we can state that, taken at face value, both really share a common purpose – building a supranational identity of young people, in one case Europeans, and in the other case Yugoslavs. However, Yugoslavia and the EU approached the construction of a supranational identity with different ideas of how to overcome the tension between supranational and national identities. Although the official ideology in Yugoslavia emphasized the differences between peoples, the ultimate idea was to supersede distinct national identities in Yugoslavia with the development of socialism and ultimately to overcome national identity by (socialist) Yugoslavism. ORAs intensively tried to pass on the socialist ideas and values of the national liberation struggle to new generations. On the other hand, the EU is carefully balancing its approach in light of cultural differences across the EU, whereas ultimately, the goal is not to replace national identities with European ones but to complement them with a shared European identity that would be the common denominator for all Europeans.

The EU seeks to achieve this goal through the affirmation of civil society and through all levels and types of education, thus actually building the identity component locally. Namely, an important vector for successful identity-building is the education system in which the competencies lie with Member States. The EU is increasingly trying to Europeanize the sharing of EU's fundamental values, the understanding of the EU's work and history as well as social, cultural and historical diversity of the EU through a "European dimension of teaching" (Council, 2018). The EU has also realized that a cognitive component of identity-building needs to supplement EU mobility programs and young people's experiences to better foster a common sense of belonging to the EU. However, it is completely up to Member States to localize the notion of the EU in their education systems and embed European meanings, symbols, and practices within the national setting for the European identity to take root (St. John, 2021, p. 243). A similar situation could be found in Yugoslavia, since the republics had the opportunity to independently shape their educational content, while the Party supplied the frame of reference for the education system, promoting the idea of socialism and socialist Yugoslavism from an early age¹¹ (i.e. Tito's pioneers and pledge-taking).

¹¹ In Socialist Yugoslavia, the responsibility for education and culture lay with the republics, while there was neither federal department of education, nor some strict common content of hi-

Differences

The most obvious difference between these two programs is certainly the time period. ORAs were created in 1942, beginning with the Sanica Valley harvest (Mihailović, 1985, p. 199), while the ESC emerged from a long process of developing programs and policies at EU level, which can be traced back to the case of a French student from 1985 in the period of intensive integration during Jacques Delors' mandate as the president of the European Commission. Interestingly, two similar programs emerged more than half a century apart. It also follows that their understanding of the type of work differs. While ORAs emphasize heavy physical exertion, the ESC is a post-industrial project, so physical work is not central. Also, the post-war period in Yugoslavia required a "striking" form of work in order to initiate social and economic reconstruction after the devastation of the war. However, as we have seen, intensive physical labour at ORAs also had a distinct ideological function which, on a symbolic as well as an ethical level, glorifies the value of physical labour from the perspective of communist ideology.

The issue of the form of work is just another in a series of implementation details that epitomizes the most significant difference between ORAs and the ESC, and that is precisely the difference in the ideological mantle. Of course, although these differences have significantly affected the implementation of youth programs, both programs share the purpose of building a supranational component, seeking to instill it in young people, because they were perceived as future carriers of social development.

Furthermore, the programs evidently also differ in the time frame of implementation. While ORAs can be considered a short-term volunteer experience or some kind of service, which is mainly related to the interpretation of this form of organizing youth work camps by gathering several groups of young people in one space, the ESC is a continuous program that is renewed annually, with a separate Guide published yearly that enables organizations and potential program participants to learn in detail about the directions and goals of the program for that year. Experience at the ESC can be short-term and long-term (2-12 months), but also renewable under certain conditions, while experience with ORAs can be renewed without special restrictions (Sherraden *et al.*, 2006, p. 168).

According to the volume and number of participants, ORAs can be considered massive and collective actions while the ESC is focused on individual experience,

story which should be implemented by each and every republic. There was only a general Party's policy that history textbooks should teach on commonalities of the centuries-long struggle of Yugoslav peoples for their freedom. In spite of that, the textbooks brought not only different perspectives, but sometimes even competing interpretations of certain events, as could be observed in the Croatian, Serbian and Slovenian textbooks (Koren, 2013; Wachtel, 1998, ch. 3).

although it is established as a collective opportunity for all young people. Thus, according to available data, in the four decades of its existence, ORAs included every tenth inhabitant of the SFRY, more precisely over 2 million young people (Mihailović, 1985, p. 197), while the predecessor of the ESC (EVS) managed to include about 100,000 young people in its 20 years, and according to the ESC Report 2018/19, an additional 27,316 were included (European Commission, 2020), well below the 100,000 youth target set in the European Commission President's address on the state of the Union in 2016. However, by the end of 2019 over a quarter million of young people were registered with the ESC and ready to take part. The fact that ORAs are of a mass character and emphasize intensive collective activity, while the ESC on the other hand opens the door to individual development, but also to collective action, shows how much importance the socialist ideological system attached to collectivity and collective experience, unlike the ESC that seeks to strike a balance between the needs of individuals and the community.

Table 1. Comparison of Basic Characteristics of ORAs and the ESC

CRITERION	ORAs	ESC	Similarity / Difference?
Ideology	Socialist-authoritarian	Liberal-democratic	Diff.
Time of origin	1942	1996/2016	Diff.
Origin model	Top-down	Bottom-up	Diff.
Formalization model	Top-down	Top-down	Sim.
Goals and principles (Program)	Contribution to building the country, nurturing and enriching the achievements of the National Liberation Struggle, brotherhood and unity, building the right attitude towards work and valuing work results, acquiring and deepening work habits, building self-governing awareness, developing and nurturing social relations. The three most common opinions of the brigadiers claim that the goals of ORAs are: bringing together young people (brotherhood and unity); developing self-governing awareness and relationships; helping to build the country.	Strengthening cohesion and promoting solidarity in European society, respect for human dignity and human rights, promoting a society of justice and equality, constructive engagement in society, respect for the rules and practices of participating organizations or a voluntary decision by a young person to join the ESC.	Both

Target group	Young people	Youth (18-30)	Sim.
Character and initiative	Coercive / voluntary	Voluntary / self-initiated	Both
Work Type	(Intensively) physical	Physically and mentally less intense	Diff.
Participation opportunity	Multiple – for several months / later during the summer	Multiple – 2-12 months	Sim.
Level of implementation	Federal / republic	Interstate / international / national	Sim.
Volume	Collective / massive	Individual / collective	Diff.
Result	More than 2 million participants in almost 40 years of implementation	About 100,000 participants in 20 years of implementation (EVS) and 27,316 in 2 years of the ESC	Diff.
Purpose	Building a Yugoslav identity (civic)	Building a European identity (civic)	Sim.
Participation costs	Free	Free / paid	Both

Source: Authors

Conclusions

This paper sought to describe in detail and then compare the intention and modality of building a supranational identity through volunteer programs for young people created in completely different socio-political systems and time periods, one in Socialist Yugoslavia (ORAs) and the other in the liberal democratic European Union (ESC). In general, it can be concluded that at the level of ultimate purpose, ORAs and the ESC are two very similar programs designed to contribute to strengthening on the one hand Yugoslav and on the other European identity as supranational categories. However, the ways in which this was sought to be achieved in the first phase of ORAs and how it is encouraged through the ESC are contrasting. ORAs attempted, with their implicitly mandatory character, to overcome existing nationalisms and to implant the socialist Yugoslav as the dominant identity point in the minds of young people through ideologized symbols, practices and experiences.

On the other hand, the ESC is a very flexible program with multiple objectives that unobtrusively seeks to encourage young people to broaden their consideration of community life in order to embrace through solidarity actions a system of values that in the eyes of the European political and intellectual elites constitute a European civic identity. In the new 2021-27 programme, the traineeship and jobs arms of the ESC have been discontinued and a stronger emphasis will be put on the solidarity

aspect. Together with the more explicit EU commitment to strengthen the cognitive dimension of European identity formation and following citizens' demands within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe to step up activities to foster European identity (CoFeU, 2022), the ESC is likely to promote even further the European dimension of cross-border mobility programs. For the EU, this is a logical move because it is a supranational structure that does not manage national formal education systems through which it could also work directly on the ideologization of young people from an early age. That is why the EU wisely uses exchange programs and voluntary activities for the dissemination of the European value system.

Although the significance of comparing ORAs and the ESC in terms of political science may not be clear at first, this paper has shown that comparison is important to open a discussion on the impact of youth volunteering programs on identity transformation, and calls upon more empirical work, which is currently missing, to examine to what extent EU cultural and volunteering activities promote a shared feeling of European identity. The attempt to create a Yugoslav man ultimately did not work out well, while the EU still has the chance to subtly encourage the emergence of a European identity among young people through various, unobtrusive instruments. Given the great value distance between different cultural circles in the EU and a widening gap between Member States on issues of personal freedoms, ethnic tolerance, and gender equality (Akaliyski *et al.*, 2022), and the discrepancies between civic and ethnic conceptions of European identity (Bruter, 2012), the EU will find it increasingly difficult to nurture a shared understanding of European identity. The aftermath of the Maastricht Treaty, and EU's multiple crises that ensued, increased the politicization of European integration, which strongly affects EU identity politics, and therefore the understanding of what European identity should contain is not unique (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). It remains to be seen how growing conceptual disagreements between (clusters of) Member States and European political families will affect the further development of the EU and thus the processes of fostering a dominantly civic conception of European identity.

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