

STRENGTHENING THE ACTIVITIES OF YOUTH ASSOCIATIONS IN THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT - CERTAIN LEGAL AND SOCIAL MATTERS

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ABSTRACT

In the previous ten years in the EU, the youth have become one of the priority groups that is being strengthened for more intensive involvement in the life and development of society. Research has shown that the youth are quite uninterested in getting involved in political and social activities that contribute to the development of the community and society. The still current pandemic caused by Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) has further “pushed” the youth into the virtual world because they are now forced to conduct their daily activities (for example, schooling, additional education) in an online environment. The youth, otherwise avid fans of technological achievements, are now trapped in their homes with computers, smartphones and other technological aids, thus losing direct contact with their peers and adults, remaining deprived of some of the socializing effects of the teaching process and are at risk of complete alienation.

EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 addresses youth organizations, as one of the key actors that strengthen the competencies of the youth and promote their social inclusion. Youth associations and associations for the youth, in addition to providing various services and programs for the youth, strengthen empathy among the youth, raise awareness of the youth on the needs of society and, through the development of additional competencies, empower them to actively participate in community life.

This paper presents the results of the part of the research created within the Youth Activation Network project. The research was conducted using the focus group method, where the re-

spondents were representatives of youth associations and associations for the youth from entire Croatia. Research questions were focused on trying to identify and differentiate youth associations and associations for the youth from other associations, ways to activate and involve the youth in the work of associations, and assess the current legal framework of associations. The results obtained from the implementation of focus groups were transcribed, processed in Dedoose computer program and presented in the paper according to main research issues. For results analysis, content analysis method was used, as well as comparison method and contrast method.

The results of the research show that it is necessary to legally define work with the youth so that it can be used as one of the distinguishing criteria of youth associations and associations for the youth. Associations involve the youth as volunteers, users and service providers, and empower and motivate them to further engage in social activities. The biggest problems pointed out by the representatives of associations are related to the ways of financing the work of the associations. Although some respondents pointed out certain shortcomings, research results indicate that the existing legal framework for the work of the associations is satisfactory, while its amendments could further complicate the work of youth associations.

The revocation of the complex consequences of the pandemic requires the active involvement of all factors in society, where active and engaged, socially responsible and empathetic youth can be the bearers of change and improvement.

Keywords: EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, youth, youth activation, youth associations

1. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has affected all segments of society, so recovery is possible only by including all relevant factors. Young people who are just beginning to develop their professional, personal and political competencies must be an important stakeholder in this process. Opportunities for mobilizing this part of the population are numerous (involvement in decision-making processes, engagement in the provision of social services, implementation of information and communication technologies etc.), but associations have proven to be one of the most common forms of organization in which the youth are involved. When the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 defined three key lines of action (Engage, Connect and Empower), it required that youth organizations be recognized as providers of competence development and social inclusion services through youth work and non-formal educational activities.¹ Therefore, the focus of this paper is focused on exploring opportunities that would further strengthen youth associations and associations for the youth and thus contribute to the overall recovery of society.

¹ EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, [https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/empower_en], Accessed 30 December 2021

The paper was created within “Youth Activation Network”² project, which aims to build a thematic network to support the youth in the process of active involvement in community life. The aim of the project is to map the current situation within the youth sector, and to explore economic and legal factors that may affect the activation of the youth. The obtained data will be used to suggest possible changes in the legislative framework or the need for additional investments in the youth sector. In this paper, we present only a part of the results obtained by implementing focus groups with representatives of youth associations and associations for the youth.

2. GENERALLY ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH IN SOCIETY

The scientific study of the youth began in the late 19th century when they were recognized as a problematic part of society. Due to the consequences of economic crises, young people were looking for an identity, they were jobless, with a lot of free time and therefore prone to risky behaviours.³ Despite all subsequent efforts to provide the youth with a well-deserved influence in society, the youth are still often marginalized and excluded. Underdeveloped African countries are a glaring example of failed youth policies,⁴ but such trends are also observed in western,

² „Youth Activation Network” project, UP:04.2.1.06.0048, whose holder is association “Zamisli” from Zagreb in cooperation with 17 other institutions. The project connects various organizations that work programmatically for the youth, scientists, academia, business and decision makers in the processes of open dialogue on the youth. The diversity of the partners involved is a fundamental feature of the project as research and focus on the youth expands to more different institutions, at different levels. The project gives the youth the opportunity to be actively involved and be an example to their peers, while various educations and research strengthen the resources of civil society organizations working with the youth and create sustainability and visibility of working with the youth. The planned duration of the project is 30 months. One of the authors was an external research associate on the project, and she uses this data with the permission of the project manager

³ Ostrowicka, H., *Suitable enemies? Governmentality of Youth: youth as a threat*, European Educational Research Journal, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2012, pp. 534-544, [<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2304/eej.2012.11.4.534>], Accessed 20 May 2021

⁴ Mabala, R., *Youth and „the hood” - livelihoods and neighbourhoods*, Environment & Urbanization, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2011, pp. 157-181, [<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0956247810396986>], Accessed 20 May 2021. According to the author, in African countries, as a result of better health care and reduced child mortality, the proportion of the youth compared to the rest of the population has increased to 30%. On the other hand, economies are not developing fast enough to provide for the youth, nor is the education system keeping in step with the economy. Thus, the youth remain unemployed, left to fend for themselves, often engage in criminal and terrorist activities, and are therefore a threat to security. The measures that are taken then, unfortunately, are not aimed at their permanent training for work, but are more “mitigation measures”. Even international donor organizations design their projects in a way that is not aimed at creating lasting values, projects are fragmented and brief,

more developed countries.⁵ The youth are seen as “our future”, which expresses distrust in their current capabilities and abilities.⁶ The European Union⁷ and the European Council⁸ have been working more intensively with the youth for the last twenty years, by encouraging the youth to become involved and active in the community. The last cycle of the European dialogue with the youth was aimed at achieving goal 9 – Space and Participation for All, which aims to strengthen the democratic participation of the youth and ensure adequate influence of the youth in all areas of society.⁹

Numerous studies of youth participation in society indicate their inactivity and lack of interest, which is most often the result of their distrust of institutions. Although it was expected that, in the post-communist era, the youth would have a more favourable environment for action, their confidence in social and political institutions turned out to be lower than ever.¹⁰ The youth believe that there are no real mechanisms for their influence because politicians do not respect their opinions. Therefore, the primary family still has the largest role in the social integration of the youth, which only perpetuates and deepens existing social inequalities.¹¹ A survey

targeted at a small proportion of the youth already in the system, while the vast majority of the youth, especially those in rural areas, remain out of reach of these programs (*Ibid*, pp. 158, 173)

⁵ Robbins, C. G., *Disposable Youth/damaged Democracy: youth, neoliberalism, and the promise of pedagogy in the work of Henry Giroux*, Policy Futures in Education, Vol. 10, No. 6, 2012, pp. 627-641, [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2304/pfie.2012.10.6.627], Accessed 20 May 2021

⁶ The initiators of various social movements that target youth groups are older people who work in a way that is not adapted and attractive to the youth (more in Elliott, T.; Earl, J., *Organizing the Next Generation: Youth Engagement with Activism Inside and Outside of Organizations*, Social media+Society, January-March, 2018, pp. 1-14, [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2056305117750722], Accessed 22 May, 2021). Mabala emphasizes that raising the age limit for defining a young person (according to the African Charter to 35 years of age) marginalizes them and devalues their current capabilities (Mabala, R. *op. cit.* note 4, p 158)

⁷ In the field of youth regulation, the European Commission has adopted a White Paper: A new impetus for European Youth, (COM (2001)) 681, followed by the European Youth Strategy 2010-2018, which emphasizes the need to promote youth participation and support their organizations and the latest EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, which re-emphasizes the importance of youth involvement

⁸ In 2010, the Council of Europe adopted a Resolution of the Council of the European Union on youth work calling on young people to take responsibility for their actions through their activism, while the 2020 resolution (2020 / C 415/01) further emphasized the importance of working with the youth with an aim of achieving the set European agendas for working with the youth

⁹ EU Youth Goals, [https://youth-goals.eu/yg9], Accessed 19 January 2022

¹⁰ Ilišin, V.; Spajić Vrkaš, V., *Uvod: konceptualni okvir istraživanja*, in: Ilišin, V.; Spajić Vrkaš, V. (eds.) *Generacija osujećenih – mladi u Hrvatskoj na početku 21. stoljeća*, Institut za društvena istraživanja, Zagreb, 2017, pp. 11-27 [http://idiprints.knjiznica.idi.hr/792/1/Generacija%20osujece%C4%87enih.pdf], Accessed 27 May 2021

¹¹ Gvozdanović, A., *et. al.*, *Istraživanje mladih u Hrvatskoj 2018./2019.* Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Zagreb, 2019, p. 67, [http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kroatien/15291.pdf], Accessed 27 May 2021

conducted on a sample of 11 European countries shows the paternalistic attitude of decision-makers in public debates on youth, and the inadequacy of media announcements to the youth.¹² Contrary to popular belief that the youth are inactive, there are studies that indicate that the youth want to be politically active but are not given opportunities to do so.¹³ The forms of participation that policymakers offer to the youth are marginal compared to many other existing opportunities.¹⁴

The youth are prone to technology that is tempting, fun and allows the creation of a “parallel reality” in which everything can be achieved easily and quickly, which in the youth creates completely unrealistic expectations of life. With the emergence of the pandemic, the youth are additionally focused on the use of technological aids in those areas that were reserved for common forms of social interaction. Thus, the youth are in danger of completely losing the property of sociability as a fundamental component of human life that connects people to social relations.¹⁵ Due to all the above, the work with the youth needs to be intensified more than ever before, and associations can play a key role in that.

3. LEGAL AND SOCIAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORK OF ASSOCIATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Associations are extremely important in society because they promote freedom of association, provide additional space for the promotion and representation of cer-

¹² Lahusen, C.; Kiess, J., *The Diverging Presence of Youth in Public Discourse: A Comparative Analysis of Youth-Related Debates Across Countries and Issue Fields*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 5, 2020, pp. 574-590, [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002764219885426], Accessed 20 May 2021

¹³ Elliott, T.; Earl, J., *op. cit.*, note 6, p. 11

¹⁴ Walther, A., et. al., *Regimes of Youth Participation? Comparative Analysis of Youth Policies and Participation across European Cities*, *Young*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2021, pp. 191-209, [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1103308820937550], Accessed: 20 May 2021

¹⁵ Wong, M., *Hidden youth? A new perspective on the sociality of young people „withdrawn” in the bedroom in a digital age*, *New media&society*, Vol. 22, No. 7, 2020, pp. 1227-1244, [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1461444820912530], Accessed 21 May 2021. The most intense negative impact of digitalization on the youth was observed in Japan, where in 1978 “withdrawal neurosis” syndrome was mentioned, which means the complete social withdrawal of the youth who are demotivated to work or study (Teo, A. R., *A New Form of Social Withdrawal in Japan: A Review of Hikikomori*, *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, Vol. 56, No 2, 2010, pp. 178-185, [file:///C:/Users/kor123/Downloads/ANewFormofSocialWithdrawalinJapan-aReviewofHikikomori_PubMedVersion.pdf], Accessed 25 August 2021). Subsequently, in the 1990s, the term “hikikomori” or hidden youth was mentioned, which includes people who refuse to leave the room for months, even years, while their social contacts are reduced to an online environment (Wong, M., *op. cit.*, note 16, pp. 1230). Unfortunately, this phenomenon is increasingly present in the rest of the world (Suwa, M.; Suzuki, K., *The phenomenon of „hikikomori” (social withdrawal) and the socio-cultural situation in Japan today*, *Journal of Psychopathology*, Vol. 19, 2013, pp. 191-198, [https://www.jpsychopathol.it/issues/2013/vol19-3/01b-Suwa.pdf], Accessed 25 August 2021)

tain interests, and affect the quality of democratic political systems.¹⁶ There is a high probability that people who join some organizations will later be active in civil or political discourse.¹⁷ The youth who are active in the community develop three important strengths: Capacity, Motivation and Opportunity.¹⁸ Youth participation in associations helps them acquire certain knowledge and skills that they will need to participate in traditional political institutions.¹⁹ An increasing problem, especially after the 2008 crisis, are the NEET youth,²⁰ and civil society organizations are the organizations that most often implement programs for this category of the youth.²¹ In addition, the theory of social capital advocates active participation of citizens in civil society organizations as a basic component of social capital and the foundation of stable democracy because it encourages members to cooperate, show solidarity and focus on the public good.²² According to the research on youth work, civil society organizations are the most frequent providers of numerous services for the youth, emphasizing the need for legal regulation of youth work and the professionalization of the profession of youth workers.²³ Youth work is differently regulated and not standardized in the countries of the European Union. There is a certain level of convergence on the content of youth work, emphasizing the support and strengthening of personal development of the individual with an aim of achieving empowerment, emancipation, responsibility and tolerance.²⁴

¹⁶ Šalaj, B., *Civilno društvo i demokracija: što bi Tocqueville i Putnam vidjeli u Hrvatskoj?*, Anali Hrvatskog politološkog društva, Vol. 8, No. 1., 2010, pp. 49-71, [https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/115469], Accessed 10 February 2021

¹⁷ Almond, Verba, 2000, according to: Šalaj, B. *op. cit.* note 17, p.57

¹⁸ Martin, S. *et. al.*, *Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making*. Washington, D.C.: The Forum for Youth Investment, 2007, [https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/building_effective_youth_councils.pdf], Accessed: 27 May 2021

¹⁹ Ilišin, V. *Mladi i politika: trendovi (dis)kontinuiteta*, p. 188, in: Ilišin, V.; Spajić Vrkaš, V. (eds.) *Generacija osujećenih – mladi u Hrvatskoj na početku 21. stoljeća*, Institut za društvena istraživanja, 2017, Zagreb, [http://idiprints.knjiznica.idi.hr/792/1/Generacija%20osuje%20C4%87enih.pdf], Accessed: 27 May 2021

²⁰ The acronym NEET means young people Not in Employment, Education and Training. It is estimated that economic losses due to their exclusion are 1.2% of European GDP (see Majdak, M.; Baturina, D.; Berc, G., *Ples na rubu: okolnosti i iskustva položaja mladih u NEET statusu na području Grada Zagreba*, HKJU-CCPA, 21(1), 2021, pp. 89-128, [https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/370122], Accessed 27 May 2021).

²¹ Baturina, D.; Majdak, M.; Berc, G., *+populacije u urbanoj aglomeraciji Zagreb prema percepciji stručnjaka i mladih u NEET statusu – kako im pomoći?* Sociologija i prostor, Vol. 58, No. 218 (3), 2020, 403-431, [https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/362334], Accessed 6 December 2021

²² Putnam, 1993, according to: Šalaj, B., *op. cit.* note 17, p. 54

²³ Morić, D.; Puhovski, T., *Rad s mladima - definicije, izazovi i europska perspektiva*, Agencija za mobilnost i programe Europske unije, Zagreb, 2012, [http://www.alfa-albona.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/05_1340010259_Istrazivanje_o_radu_s_mladima_final.pdf], Accessed 27 May 2021

²⁴ Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union, European Commission, 2014, [https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/study/youth-work-report_en.pdf], Accessed 10 October 2021

An association²⁵ may act as an unregistered association or may acquire legal personality by registering in the Register of Associations of the Republic of Croatia kept by the competent administrative body of the county, i.e. the City of Zagreb, in electronic form unique to all associations. If an association wants to apply for funds from public sources, it must be registered and additionally entered in the Register of non-profit organizations maintained in electronic form by the Ministry of Finance.²⁶ All registered associations are required to prepare financial statements, keep business books and accounting in adherence to the bookkeeping principles of accuracy, truthfulness, reliability and individual presentation of positions. During the first three years of operation, all associations are obliged to keep books on the principle of double-entry bookkeeping, after which they can, in accordance with certain conditions, decide to continue with single-entry bookkeeping.

When entering in the Register, associations are classified according to the form of association, according to the target groups and according to the activities that achieve the goals prescribed by the statute of an association. The classification of the association's activities and the List of target groups are prescribed by a special regulation.²⁷ The classification of activities that an association will be engaged in, as well as the target groups of beneficiaries, is relevant when applying for individual tenders for project financing. If an association has a registered economic activity, it becomes a taxpayer and is obliged to register in the Register of Taxpayers kept by the Ministry of Finance.²⁸ As can be seen from the above, each registered association has a minimum of three identification numbers, i.e. Personal Identification Number (OIB), Registration Number and number in the Register of Non-Profit Organizations. In addition to this general legal regulation, there are a number of

²⁵ An association is any form of free and voluntary association of three or more natural or legal persons who, for the purposes of protecting their interests or advocate for the protection of human rights and freedoms, environmental and nature protection and sustainable development, and for humanitarian, social, cultural, educational, scientific, sports, health, technical, informational, professional or other beliefs and goals that are not in conflict with the Constitution and the law, and without the intention of gaining profit or other economically assessable benefits, are subject to rules governing the structure and operation of this form of association (Art. 4 of the Associations Act, Official Gazette No. 74/2014, 70/2017, 98/2019)

²⁶ Pursuant to the Financial Operations and Bookkeeping for Non-Profit Organizations Act, Official Gazette No. 121/2014

²⁷ Ordinance on the Content and Manner of Keeping the Register of Associations of the Republic of Croatia and the Register of Foreign Associations in the Republic of Croatia, Official Gazette No. 4/2015, 14/2020

²⁸ Art. 2, par. 7 of the Income Tax Act, Official Gazette No. 177/2004, 90/2005, 57/2006, 80/2010, 22/2012, 146/2008, 148/2013, 143/2014, 50/2016, 115/2016, 106/2018, 121/2019, 32/2020, 138/2020

other regulations governing certain specific associations.²⁹ Such legal regulation is often the subject of questioning and was therefore one of the key issues in the research we describe below.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the initial phase of the project, teams for the preparation and implementation of focus groups were formed. Team members were representatives of project partners and external experts who first prepared a framework questionnaire for the implementation of focus groups. Focus groups were held by moderators divided by counties covering the entire territory of the Republic of Croatia in the period from 8 February to 8 April, 2021. In this group, 24 focus groups were held with the participation of 80 representatives from 59 youth associations and associations for the youth. Due to the specific situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, all focus groups were held via Zoom platform, recorded, and respondents were recruited online by public call, email or personal contacts. The course of each focus group was transcribed and encoded in the Dedoose computer software program. For the analysis of the obtained data, the method of content analysis, methods of comparison and contrast, and the method of “cutting and gluing” similar statements were used. Prior to starting the content analysis, let's say that, in this research, as well as in all similar ones conducted by the focus group method, all potential pitfalls of this type of research

²⁹ In accordance with the Student Union and other Student Organizations Act, Official Gazette No. 71/2007, student associations whose records are kept by each higher education institution may be registered with higher education institutions. These are associations without legal personality, if they want to acquire legal personality they must register in accordance with the Institutions Act. According to the Free Legal Aid Act, Official Gazette 143/2013, 98/2019, an authorized free legal aid provider may also be an association that must then be entered in the additional Register of Primary Legal Aid Providers maintained by the Ministry of Justice and Administration. In addition to the Register of Associations and the Register of Non-Profit Organizations, sports associations are also entered in the Register of Sports Activities, which, in accordance with the Sports Act, Official Gazette No. 71/2006, 150/2008, 124/2010, 124/2011, 86/2012, 94/2013, 85/2015, 19/2016, 98/2019, 47/2020, 77/2020, is managed by the competent administrative body of the county, i.e. the City of Zagreb according to the seat of the association, within whose scope is the entrusted tasks of state administration related to sports activities. Trade unions and employers' associations are additionally entered in the Register of Associations, which, in accordance with the Ordinance on the Content and Manner of Keeping the Register of Associations, Official Gazette No. 32/2015, 13/2020, is kept by the ministry in charge of labour affairs or administrative bodies of the county, i.e. the City of Zagreb, within whose scope is the entrusted tasks of state administration related to labour affairs. Pursuant to the Croatian War of Independence Veterans and Members of Their Families Act, Official Gazette No. 121/2017, 98/2019 and in accordance with the Ordinance on Keeping Records of Croatian War of Independence Veterans Associations and Cooperation and Support to Homeland War Associations, Official Gazette No. 21/18, Croatian War of Independence associations are additionally recorded in the Records kept by the Ministry of Croatian War Veterans

are present.³⁰ The focus group was conducted by several moderators, which could lead to uneven results. Nevertheless, all focus groups were guided by a pre-prepared questionnaire, which, at least in part, eliminated this potential shortcoming and ensured uniform coverage of topics. The problem of the dominance of one respondent and the imposition of their opinion on other respondents was annulled due to the small number of group members (3.3 on average). Although such sporadic cases can be found in the transcripts, the other respondents sufficiently elaborated their views with their answers, which can then be accepted as originally theirs. Regarding the representativeness of the sample, we believe that the same was achieved because the target group included representatives of youth associations and associations for the youth who are active in some counties throughout Croatia. Each individual moderator is well acquainted with the number and work of youth associations and associations for the youth in their area, and the representativeness of the sample was ensured by public invitation and personal contacts.

The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain data on general information on associations, opinions of representatives of associations regarding parameters that define the meaning of associations that programmatically work with or for the youth and the need for special legal regulation of youth associations and associations for the youth.

From the City of Zagreb, 12 representatives of 12 associations participated, while for the rest of the Republic of Croatia, 72 representatives of 47 associations participated (some associations have an area of activity in several counties). The largest number of associations were founded in the period from 2001 to 2010 (38.98% of them), associations founded from 2011 onwards 37.29%, while only 23.73% of participating associations were founded in the period from 1980 until 2000. The largest number of participating associations (49 of them, which is 83.05%) has less than 10 employees, while only 5 associations have more than 20 employees (8.47%). The analysis of the research results lists the original statements of the respondents coded with the letter R and the ordinal number of the respondent.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the research will be grouped by the key research questions to be answered. At the very beginning of the focus groups, the question of defining the term “youth work” arose. Several respondents clearly stressed the need for a clear definition of the content of the term in Croatia, recognition and promotion of

³⁰ See in Skoko, B.; Benković, V., *Znanstvena metoda fokus grupa – mogućnosti i načini primjene*, Politička misao, Vol 46, No. 3, 2009, pp. 217-236, [<https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/78151>], Accessed 16 March 2021

youth work as a special occupation or profession³¹ and that it would be very useful to organize a study program³² or other form of education that could provide education and relevant competencies for working with the youth.³³ According to the respondents, youth work is a job that should be done by experts³⁴ who could design programs that could be interesting to young people, while youth work could be carried out by peers and aimed at empowering young people in preparation for their further inclusion in the community.³⁵

5.1. Criteria for distinguishing youth associations and associations for the youth from other associations

The second key group of questions prepared for the implementation of focus groups referred to the parameters by which an association could be categorized into a group of associations working for and with the youth. Here, too, as a preliminary question, the question of distinguishing the terms “youth associations” from the term “associations for the youth” arose. Opinions of the respondents are divided on this issue, for some the youth association is only an association of young members (and therefore members of governing bodies are the youth),³⁶ while others are less exclusive and consider any association that allows activation and involvement of the youth is a youth association.³⁷

³¹ (R13) Here I would say first and foremost we need to define that youth work, working with the youth according to the law and the profession of working with the youth. So that the Employment Service does not list me as an administrator, but that my occupation exists in the system that is not 50 years outdated... They have no idea what our occupation is, it is not defined

³² (R44) ...a youth worker should definitely be formalized. Realistically, studying for a youth worker would be much more useful than the large number of studies that can currently be studied in the Republic of Croatia

³³ (R50) One of the things is education and recognition the acquired competencies of youth workers

³⁴ (R3) There are certain organizations that work for the youth and that work with the youth. These two may sound almost the same in the context of language, but those are definitely not the same activities according to the content... there must be that distinction that when you work for the youth, then it must be done by professionals, and when you work with the youth, then it can be peer to peer approach without any problems

³⁵ (R11) The first involves a systematic, long-term building of trust and empowerment of these young people so that they can implement, or get involved, activate (work with the youth, A/N)... work for the youth and so we develop some programs that perhaps may be interesting to the youth

³⁶ (R25) To me it seems that if an association is youth association, the governing bodies should mostly comprise of the youth, and an association for the youth includes the youth, but the youth are not the majority, that would be mine definition...

³⁷ (R53) And associations that are oriented towards the development of additional competence skills in the youth and are open to any suggestions by the youth and function in such a way that the youth are welcomed or that the youth can form various activities, associations that are not exclusive, I would call such associations youth associations

Research question: which parameters define an association as a youth association or an association for the youth?

Table 1. Criteria for distinguishing associations

Categories	Terms
Defined in general acts	Provided by statute The youth as a target group Programs for the youth
Membership in an association	The youth as members The youth as members of governing bodies
Involvement of the youth in the work of the association	The youth as users The youth as service providers The youth as users and service providers The youth as activity development advisors The youth as volunteers The youth as employees Youth-friendly principles of work

Source: the authors

5.1.1. *Legal definition in general acts*

As we can see from Table 1, the answers of the respondents in the survey show several criteria for distinguishing these associations from all other associations. First of all, it is about the legal definition of the target group of users,³⁸ activities³⁹ and membership⁴⁰ in the founding and general acts of associations. This formal legal moment is necessary for an association to operate legally, but certain respondents emphasize that, for several reasons,⁴¹ it should not be a decisive criterion for defining an association as a youth association and an association for the youth. A much more important criterion is the content of the activities of associations that should

³⁸ (R30) I mean, in our statute we end all those parameters that we looked at and wrote down what an association should do, what to act on, at the end of each sentence we ended with “the youth”

³⁹ (R32) ...but programs aimed at the youth are mentioned, and this is important, these documents, the legal framework, must definitely emphasize the work with the user group

⁴⁰ (R20) ...according to the statute, the youth are in fact members of an association and can be elected by the bodies

⁴¹ (R56) When I look at the register of associations, each association has all the users. Anything that can be clicked, people click it and that is okay

be aimed at the youth,⁴² taking into account the needs of the youth and their active involvement in the work of the association,⁴³ and that the programs offered by an association are aimed at the youth.⁴⁴

5.1.2. *Membership in an association*

As a criterion for distinguishing between youth associations and associations for the youth, the question of members of associations and members of governing bodies displayed a high frequency of occurrence. Given the fact that the members of an association are the ones who practically plan, propose and implement the activities of the association, this criterion is very understandable,⁴⁵ with the membership in an association, the youth are involved in the work of the assembly. The answers to the question of running an association and membership in other governing bodies are varied. Certain respondents state that it is necessary for the youth to be in governing bodies since it empowers them, enables the acquisition of additional skills and competencies,⁴⁶ the youth know best the needs of the youth and therefore can best define the goals of an association.⁴⁷ The frequency of responses claiming the opposite is higher.⁴⁸ In this part as well, the answers rely on the distinction between youth associations and associations for the youth.⁴⁹ Given that being a youth is a time-limited status, the work of associations could be jeopardized by frequent changes in governing bodies due to crossing the age limit,⁵⁰

⁴² (R26) To me, the proportion of activities that have the youth as target groups or end users in relation to some overall set of activities would define an organization as an organization that works primarily for the youth

⁴³ (R10) ...means one that implements activities that are aimed at the needs of the youth and those that actively involve the youth in their work

⁴⁴ (R37) Well, certainly one of the huge differences is that it is known that these programs that an association offers are exclusively for users who belong to the youth group aged 15 to 30

⁴⁵ (R23) ...the youth are members and make all decisions related to an association and run an association themselves, they create programs and even lead some workshops and trainings of members of an association

⁴⁶ (R12) ...but I think the involvement of the youth in all leading positions and in general the introduction of possibility to put the youth in leading positions is one of the main differences because a lot of associations that work with the youth, even some that work for the youth, have very a large number of people involved in these "main" functions

⁴⁷ (R46) ...So that the youth set strategic goals and priorities that an organization will address

⁴⁸ (R44) Youth associations do not necessarily have the youth in leadership positions

⁴⁹ (R77) ...we think that an association for the youth can be programmatically intended for the youth, but the youth do not lead it, while for an youth association, in my opinion, it seems logical to be led by the youth.

⁵⁰ (R52) It is normal that you have to have the youth if you work with the youth, you can't talk to yourself. On the other hand, as you learn to do certain things and learn everything – after 30 years, you are no longer a youth. So, as far as this governance structure is concerned, yes, it goes fast

while the limit itself is questionable.⁵¹ Organizing the work and running an association, as well as writing and applying for projects require certain competencies to be learned, which takes time. If the age limit is accepted as a key criterion for distinguishing associations, associations are exposed to constant fluctuations in membership and uncertainty. Members who train and acquire all the necessary knowledge and skills should leave an association when they cross the age limit of 30. This problem can be alleviated in larger communities, where there are a sufficient number of new young people to take over an association. However, in smaller communities, which already lack the youth and interested stakeholders, this can seriously jeopardize the work of associations and even lead to their termination.⁵² In addition, the youth can be dealt with in a quality way by associations registered for some general areas (such as human rights), and such a restriction would prevent them from working with the youth.⁵³

5.1.3. *Ways of youth involvement*

All the mentioned associations primarily involve the youth as users of the programs and services they provide. However, as the youth are often also members of the association, the youth appear in multiple roles:⁵⁴ as service providers,⁵⁵ counsellors for the development of various youth activities,⁵⁶ activists,⁵⁷ em-

⁵¹ The issue of defining the age limit is regulated differently, with the majority agreeing that these are people aged 15 to 30. However, the answers of the respondents show that, in practice, due to various practical issues, individuals older than 30 years are perceived as the youth. (R31)... Well, as a youth association, our members in principle range in age from 16 to 40. There are some who are 45 years old, if they are fully young in their heart and passionate, then such individuals are our honorary members

⁵² (R39) Let's be realistic, the youth sector is highly dynamic and changeable and fast and at one point you have some youth, the next day they are already employed in another country, in another city, they enrol in student exchange programs, they go to college somewhere else and are gone, thus there is a need to maintain certain and certain continuity

⁵³ (R56) ...when it comes to governing bodies, I do not think they should necessarily be exclusively made up of the youth. It would be good if some of these people are young, but associations often do not only deal with the youth, i.e. if they are declared as a youth association, maybe that is not the only thing they do and therefore I think that should not be conditioned

⁵⁴ (R9) At the same time, we are all volunteers and members and we help in these activities and, it could be said, in the implementation of certain strategies

⁵⁵ (R12) Many volunteers who get involved in our work as users also most often become future providers of youth services. For example, through designing some activities, workshops, courses for the youth, so we see both

⁵⁶ (R39) In all situations, the youth are involved as direct beneficiaries of our services and programs, but also active contributors to the development of certain activities

⁵⁷ (P39) ... then they fully come up with their own ideas, how they imagine that activity and then we give them full support to design, organize, we are the absolute support and give them advice, resources, finances and everything they need to realize their ideas themselves

ployees⁵⁸ and especially as volunteers.⁵⁹ The answers to these questions give us an insight into the real role of youth associations and associations for the youth in the personal development of the youth. People who appear first in the role of users, see the quality and importance of what an association does and become volunteers themselves. This is obvious evidence of how youth associations and associations for the youth act to activate the youth in the community, motivate them and create in them the habit of participating in activities. Another value of the associations pointed out by the respondents is the possibility for the youth, who were active members and / or volunteers in the association, to be employed by an association and thus satisfy their employment needs.⁶⁰ In addition to all the above, it is very important that the way of working of an association is adapted to the youth, clear, acceptable and interesting so that the youth respond to the activities to which they are invited.⁶¹

5.2. Special legal regulation and identification of youth associations and associations for the youth

One of the goals of the “Youth Activation Network” project is to strengthen infrastructural forms that would strengthen the work with the youth through their activities in the community, because this is a prerequisite for their activation. It is unquestionable that associations are the bearers of the largest number of activities aimed at the youth, operating within the existing general legal framework for the work of associations. Starting from all the above problems related to the work of an association, one of the objectives of the research was to examine the views of representatives of associations on the existing legal framework, i.e. the need for changes.

From the obtained results, it is possible to identify the key problem of the work of associations, and that is funding. All the arguments “for” and “against” the existing or additional legal regulations start from the possibility / opportunity to finance the program and the work of associations. We must say that in this part

⁵⁸ (R52) Likewise, regarding our employee, it may be important to note, that most of our employees are youths and we are constantly educating, exchanging knowledge related to actually working with the youth population how to attract, how to work with the youth

⁵⁹ (R25) ... in our case, many who were beneficiaries became volunteers and went from that role of beneficiary to the role of volunteers

⁶⁰ (R3) All association employees used to be volunteers, they are either the youth or they were the youth volunteers and as a reward they got a job with an association

⁶¹ (R70) I would add the *modus operandi*, which must be appropriate for the youth; when I say *modus operandi*, it means from language, to content... Commitment to allowing the youth to have a real influence and participation

the answers of the respondents were often contradictory,⁶² aware of the potential problems of the existing and possibly future, amended legal framework.

Research question: do you think that it is necessary to change the legislative framework for the establishment and work of civil society organizations in the direction of clearer differentiation and identification of associations that work programmatically for the youth and for the benefit of the youth?

Table 2. Legal framework of associations

Categories	Terms
Legal framework of youth associations and associations for the youth	Work with the youth needs to be defined There is no need to change the existing legal framework (additional regulation) Changing the bookkeeping rules for associations Changing the way in which associations are financed
Special legal regulation	Special register of youth associations and associations for the youth Delimitation of associations according to economic activity criterion No special register of youth associations and associations for the youth is needed

Source: the authors

The obtained results presented in Table 2 undoubtedly show that, first of all, it would be necessary to legally define youth work.⁶³ By legally defining the concept, standards and criteria of working with the youth, we would get a clear criterion for differentiating youth associations and associations for the youth from other associations, which would facilitate the financing of these associations.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the respondents are aware that such a delimitation could jeopardize the existence of some associations that deal with a wider range of users or activities.⁶⁵

⁶² (R48) I think it would help in some way (changing the existing legal framework), but there is a lot of danger of potentially excluding very good organizations... I don't think such a decision would be of much use at the moment

⁶³ (R58) The first thing I think should be done is to professionalize the term of a youth worker, so that it becomes an occupation and a profession, and not a hobby for someone while looking for a real job

⁶⁴ (R56) If we want to work on the status of the youth, then we need to define what are the standards and qualities and what are the categories of scoring according to which we will then differentiate associations in this area

⁶⁵ (R32) ...I definitely think it is not bad to have certain standards and criteria, and I do not see anything wrong with that, it would just be a shame, maybe it is a matter of that terminology, it would be a shame to isolate other associations

The majority of respondents believe that amending the existing legal framework or supplementing it would further complicate the work of associations. Arguments are based on the personal characteristics and competencies of the founders, members and employees of associations,⁶⁶ existing registration provisions,⁶⁷ which the respondents find difficult,⁶⁸ restrictive⁶⁹ and overly complicated.⁷⁰

The next problem pointed out by the respondents is the issue of bookkeeping rules for associations. As mentioned earlier, associations are required to keep books, regardless of the scope and types of activities. Bookkeeping required specific knowledge that members and volunteers of associations, as a rule, do not have, as well as funds that cannot be raised from the project activities of associations, which can often create problems.⁷¹ In addition, if any of the prescribed obligations are not met (through the fault of the accountant), the associations may suffer serious consequences, although there is no fault on their part.⁷²

Although the financing of associations was not specifically mentioned in the prepared questions for the focus group, it imposed itself in the category of the need to change the existing legal framework.⁷³ The basic source of financial resources for the work of associations are projects, which are limited in time by their nature.⁷⁴ Such a way of financing prevents any long-term planning and strategic direc-

⁶⁶ (R19) I think that the very fact that it is necessary to register an association in the way the association is registered, with the statute and everything, is already a big barrier for the youth. I think the fact that the association must have a bank account so the youth, someone who is 18 years old, must go to a bank etc., already constitute a kind of barrier...

⁶⁷ (R29) I would not additionally regulate the obligation in any way, I simply think that the existing burden is enough

⁶⁸ (R67) I do not know if this should be changed in a special way, because it is already complicated to lead one into another, and then to make differences between associations, I do not think it would make much sense

⁶⁹ (R6) to create compartments in addition to all the limitations we have, I am absolutely not for it

⁷⁰ (R42) No, no, I do not support that, in fact, the institutionalization of the non-profit sector in Croatia, we are starting to look like, in my opinion, institutions, and that is how we lose, in fact, what is the point of why we exist, why we operate

⁷¹ (R31) We definitely agree with this part about separate bookkeeping, because it really costs associations too much given how much we get from the municipality and possibly some sponsorships

⁷² (R43) ...our accountant did not submit our annual financial report to the Financial Agency (FINA) on time. It came back, he did not correct it, and in the end when the deadline passed, the financial report could no longer be submitted... which created a big problem for us in most tenders last year because we are considered non-transparent...

⁷³ (R48) I think that the funding mechanisms for youth associations and associations for the youth should certainly be better regulated and resolved, perhaps less legally, more institutionally...

⁷⁴ (R24) So I think even the problem is the way youth associations and associations for the youth are funded. They depend on certain projects and cannot develop their operations and their programs in the long run

tion of associations, complicates the regular work of an association,⁷⁵ prevents employment,⁷⁶ transparency⁷⁷ and continuity of work of associations. Apart from the fact that projects are limited in time, the deadlines for announcing tenders and the tenders themselves are not published regularly, especially during changes in the state administration system.⁷⁸ Due to such financial uncertainties, many aspects of the work of associations suffer: it is very difficult to monitor the timeliness of payments and maturities of project commitments, the implementation of project activities depends on the payment of funds and they are often late in relation to real needs.⁷⁹ Simultaneously with the implementation of existing ones, it is necessary to prepare others to apply for future tenders, all in an extremely uncertain environment⁸⁰ imposed by domestic or foreign institutions.⁸¹ Due to all the above, the magic circle is closing: although the respondents think that it would be good to classify youth associations separately, in order to ensure financial sustainability and survival of youth associations and associations for the youth, these organizations themselves “encroach” on other departments, apply for tenders for different target groups in order to survive at all.⁸²

⁷⁵ (R53) ...not just this year, but for some time, for approximately six months certainly, we do not have financial support for the implementation of these programs, in general we operate more less on a volunteering basis

⁷⁶ (R52) In order to keep people working with the youth in the workplace, we have to be very creative and do a lot of work, apply for a lot of projects to keep someone’s job.

⁷⁷ (R36) I honestly think that it is a matter of how good the website is, how much you can spend financially to create a website, I know how much we spent financially on it and worked hard every day on our website, publishing articles and other content every day, we share reports from others. And that is very important if you want to be perceived professionally and seriously by the outsider

⁷⁸ (R54) In reality, continuity is something that we lack when it comes to tenders by the competent ministry, which in our case is the Ministry of Labour and Pension System, Family and Social Policy, which changes its name every year or every two to three years and every time it changes the name we can say that the things get worse, i.e. tender announcements are delayed more and more, so we are faced with voids that last for six months when nothing is being done or we are waiting for the results of a tender, these results take months and then financing is ensured for a certain period in a given year, we start implementing the tender the next year, then we have to send reports, is it really that hard for the Ministry to keep records on when the tender was announced, when the project was implemented etc..

⁷⁹ (R55) ...because it happened to all of us in Croatia... to implement projects for the unemployed two years later than they were supposed to be implemented, at a time when the Employment Institute has more employees than ever before

⁸⁰ (R78) that we are uncertain whether the project will go for another term or not, whether we will get the money, how much will we get, we have big problems, just to mention that in the middle of December we received 50% of the funds we should have received throughout that entire year...

⁸¹ (R13) the fact that we follow the agenda of the EU or the Social Fund, the European Commission, or the City of Zagreb etc. means that the youth are never considered as a group that can express their needs... it is always about a higher political agenda or something at the EU level

⁸² (R75) ...because we now see that associations that dealt with the youth and were primarily focused on the youth... in the absence of financial resources, turned to various other projects, programs such as

This group of questions sought the views of representatives of associations on the introduction of special registers for youth associations and associations for the youth (the same as a special legal framework for veterans' associations, for example). In this section, too, we find very contradictory views of the respondents, which are conditioned by the scope and general characteristics of the associations they represent. Certain respondents consider it necessary to specifically record youth associations in order to create preconditions for the professionalization of youth work.⁸³ However, even they are aware that categorization alone does not bring much if the categories do not have a purpose and meaning,⁸⁴ moreover, it could negatively affect the work of a number of associations.⁸⁵ The purpose of categorization would be to be able to apply for targeted tenders,⁸⁶ but here we return to the fact that in Croatia associations must "do everything", they must have registered in their legal acts a wide range of target groups and activities to survive. For some associations it is inevitable, for others it is unwanted competition in the financial market.⁸⁷ The next significant argument for which additional registers should be introduced is the issue of economic activity of associations. Today, in Croatia, a music band, a football club or a café can be classified as an association.⁸⁸ Without diminishing the importance of what such associations do, it is the fact that they have revenues (often generous) which makes them very different from associations funded by donations, membership fees and projects.⁸⁹ The rules of

"Zaželi"... just to save jobs, i.e. employee financing...

⁸³ (R13) I believe that what is needed, and what was the question, is to make a certain distinction between youth associations and other associations. That would, naturally, be achieved after the professionalization of youth worker occupation, otherwise we would have a complete mess on our hands

⁸⁴ (R62) Well, it would be nice, it would be nice to know which organizations are those, it would be nice to have some categories maybe for other organizations, but that those categories have to make some sense.

⁸⁵ (R75) Regarding that legal framework, classification, I do not think it would be bad if there was a classification, but of course that does not mean disabling applications for other tenders, since associations deal with everything and everyone...

⁸⁶ (R62) Well, perhaps if we are already talking about these categories, then it would be okay for those categories to go in the sense of linking something further, some benefit maybe for organizations working in the field of youth where they could apply for a certain tender category

⁸⁷ (R56) We are all associations in the register of associations and it is enough to include the youth into a statute in one word to get a project worth HRK 1,500,000.00. That is our reality. It does not seem particularly bright to me and I think we need to stand up for the young

⁸⁸ (R7) the state has created a framework, allowed the space of civil society organizations to be occupied by cafes, football clubs... when you look at the latest analyses of offices for associations, how much money went through the offices, and then we are perceived as entrepreneurs earning unprecedented money

⁸⁹ (R80) that associations need to be additionally categorized and work, I definitely believe so because it is not the same to have HRK 200,000 of revenue or 2 million or 5 million of revenue. Furthermore,

general legislation apply equally to all associations, while the financial and human resources, goals and activities of associations differ significantly.⁹⁰

On the other hand, a significant number of the respondents express dislike for the special register of youth associations and associations for the youth since they do not see any benefits⁹¹ or see it as an additional complication of the work of associations.⁹²

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

During the processing of the transcript, the phrase “we are all in the same boat” was noticed, which appeared in 6 different groups and which indicates the justification of the conducted research. It is obvious that there are no criteria for differentiating, evaluating and funding associations.

Based on the views of representatives of youth associations and associations for the youth, we can conclude that the field of youth work in Croatia is still quite undefined and marginalized.⁹³ The research indicated several criteria according to which youth associations could be different from other associations, but it also pointed out the possible negative consequences of such categorization. Undoubtedly, it is necessary to define work with the youth, to establish standards, criteria and conditions for performing youth work, and to provide an educational program for youth work.⁹⁴ Recognition of youth worker profession does not mean preventing others from working with the youth, there would only be clear and unequivocal criteria for distinguishing between associations that provide activities, services, support or opportunities for development to the youth. Professionalization of youth work would also solve the problem of criteria for the allocation of chronically insufficient financial resources.⁹⁵

a sports association that directly receives certain tenders is not the same as we who have to apply, then wait for the results...

⁹⁰ (R77) Certain associations are literally companies, we should call them that, they have 10, 15 or 20 employees, we have one, two, we fight for the same rights

⁹¹ (R53) ...I think that four million of us have another register, I do not know what it is for, and that is all for the sake of tenders themselves

⁹² (R24) ...I do not think that is necessary. We have several registers... We already have enough of paperwork and numbers of various registers and I do not see why youth associations should stand out and be placed in some kind of additional register

⁹³ (R12) I still have a feeling that the youth are still, for a lack of a better word, a marginalized group, like we have these youth, what we can do with the youth, we should do something with the youth...

⁹⁴ (R59) Meaning, work should be done to organize serious education for people who will work with the youth in order to strengthen these human resources, but also to work on strengthening the capacity of organizations that will work with the youth

⁹⁵ (R56) It is important that we are categorized... this should be advocated because I think that is the only way in which we can distinguish youth work and decide which funds are allocated for the pro-

Although the answers of the respondents are often contradictory, most of them are not inclined to change the already complicated legal framework for the establishment and work of associations because they are afraid that the changes would bring even more paperwork. However, a significant part of the respondents would accept changes in the direction of reducing the regulation and obligations of associations, i.e. in the direction of easing the rules for bookkeeping of associations, employment and special financing of associations. We can say that there is a general consensus on the inappropriateness of the existing funding of associations. The introduction of institutional ⁹⁶ and multi-annual ⁹⁷ support for the work of associations is the only solution that can ensure the stable operation of associations. Respondents especially emphasize the importance of local self-government⁹⁸ which should, in combination with other government levels,⁹⁹ be the main bearer of funding for youth associations and associations for the youth. The public often has a rather negative image of the civil sector in general,¹⁰⁰ both youth associations and associations for the youth,¹⁰¹ thus it is necessary to improve communication and cooperation with all levels ¹⁰² and government institutions,¹⁰³ and increase the responsibility of those who evaluate and monitor projects.¹⁰⁴ As one respondent stated: (R51) “Well, my vision for the future is to fix things, to introduce more

fession in relation to these general activities from organizing for example conferences or something similar.

⁹⁶ (R40) In my opinion, primarily financial support must absolutely be multiannual...

⁹⁷ (R49) Financial dependence on project financing should be reduced and long-term institutional support should be strengthened in this regard

⁹⁸ (R29) This is perhaps an appeal mostly to local governments and self-governments to invest a little more money when it comes to working with the youth

⁹⁹ (R40) ...to break them down into different levels means that the state provides one sum of money, the county provides the second sum of money and the local community, i.e. local self-government units provide the third, naturally, I mean in proportion to their budget and means. So without networking all three sectors, i.e. the three public sector levels, it is impossible for everyone to know what is happening and what is being financed

¹⁰⁰ (R74) ...civil society is perceived as a competition to politics, as long as it is perceived as an enemy and not as a partner offering services that local units do not offer, so they can offer them through civil society...

¹⁰¹ (R36) I often think that it is considered that youth associations should exist, that they should do their job, but they should do it independently, no one takes them seriously anyway

¹⁰² (R64) ...however, for example, it would be great to have maybe more cooperation with decision makers... for example, it would be good to have maybe a little more intensive cooperation at different levels of decision-making...

¹⁰³ (R5) ...without cooperation with educational institutions and their founders, we cannot work with the youth on anything...

¹⁰⁴ (R75) ...It is a matter for donors and evaluators to monitor this a little better and create some type of a framework within which certain associations are classified

fair play into financial situation and in all other aspects, and then we, as a society, will have an easier time.“

The paper presents only a part of the extensive material obtained by organizing focus groups, a lot of good suggestions and comments did not fit into the scope of this paper. From the results, it can be unequivocally concluded that youth associations and associations for the youth need to be further strengthened, especially financially, in order to be able to operate smoothly on the empowerment and activation of the youth. There is a need to continue to systematically explore the challenges that youth associations face in order to maximize their potential for the recovery of society as a whole. The challenges posed in this pandemic and post-pandemic time are an opportunity to create new patterns of behaviour of all relevant stakeholders in society, especially those authorized to make decisions that guide the further development of society.

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3. Ordinance on Keeping Records of Croatian War of Independence Veterans Associations and Cooperation and Support to Homeland War Associations, Official Gazette No. 21/18
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