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Volunteering and Voluntary Associations in the Post-Yugoslav States. An Introduction

This special issue originates in the international workshop ‘Voluntary Work, Volunteering and Voluntary Associations in Southeastern Europe, 1980–2000’, which was held on 22–23 March 2018 in Ljubljana. The workshop was part of the international research project ‘Volunteering in Local Communities between Late Socialism and Liberal Capitalism. The History of Volunteer Fire Departments in Germany and East Central Europe, 1980–2000’, which was supported by the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, DFG) and the Austrian Science Fund (*Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung*, FWF) from 2017 until 2020.¹ As a postdoctoral researcher in the project, I organised the workshop in Ljubljana in cooperation with the Institute of Cultural and Memory Studies (*Inštitut za kulturne in spominske študije*) of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (*Znanstvenoraziskovalni center Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti*, ZRC SAZU).² The workshop focused on forms and experiences of volunteering and voluntary associations in the last two decades of the 20th century in Southeastern Europe.

The collection of six research articles in this thematic issue stems from assorted papers presented at the workshop in Ljubljana. They were selected in order

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is a historian of Central and Southeastern Europe in the 20th century. Her research explores the history of socialism, nationalism, urbanism and voluntary action. Before joining the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana, she worked as a researcher and teacher in Prague, Potsdam, Pittsburgh, Liverpool and Dresden.

¹ See the project description on the websites of the Department for East European History at Vienna University and of the Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Research, <https://iog.univie.ac.at/forschung/laufende-projekte/volunteering-in-local-communities/> and <https://hait.tu-dresden.de/ext/forschung/forschungsprojekt-3135/>. All internet references were accessed on 29 June 2020.

² Cf. the workshop report, Tagungsbericht: Voluntary Work and Voluntary Associations in Southeastern Europe, 1980–2000, 22.03.2018 – 23.03.2018 Ljubljana, *H-Soz-Kult*, 2 October 2018, <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-7863>.

to present the heterogeneity of volunteering practices and forms, voluntary associations, and personal experiences of volunteering in the transformational phase between late socialist Yugoslavia and its successor states. Tatjana Rakar and Zinka Kolarič analyse the role of civil society organisations in the welfare system in Slovenia after 1990. They show that a relationship of complementarity, not subsidiarity, was established between the state and civil society organisations. Ana Kladnik focuses on the political and national mobilisation of volunteer firefighters, one of the oldest and most popular volunteer activities in Slovenia, during the period of double transition: to a democratic system and to an independent Slovenian state. Ana Ljubojević investigates the Young Researchers of Serbia, an association which was established in 1976, coordinated a series of youth organisations and ran youth exchanges in Serbia and abroad. She examines its postsocialist transition, with a special focus on how this association collaborated with Serbia's antiwar movement during the 1990s. Julia Nietsch explores one of the largest associations in Kosovo in the 1990s, the Mother Teresa Society (MTS). While the MTS's main activity was to provide healthcare services, Nietsch highlights its political aspects and its close links to the Kosovo-Albanian so-called 'parallel structures'. Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinić examines female activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina's civil society in postsocialist times—during the war of 1992 to 1995 and in the war's aftermath. Her study reveals how women's civil society organisations grew from informal and mostly humanitarian groups during the war into smaller and larger organisations, often with a prevailing donor-driven approach. Anna Matthiesen analyses examples of volunteering in Serbia during the 2014 floods as well as the practice of donating via SMS, thereby showing how new forms and practices of volunteering reflect the neoliberal ethos of self-reliance, while echoing the collective dynamics of the socialist past.

The case studies cover the period of the emergence of new independent states after the collapse of Yugoslavia, the postsocialist transition, the wars of the 1990s, and more recent years. This analytical timeframe reveals the transformation towards new forms and practices of volunteering as well as persisting continuities. All authors pay special attention to the relationship between voluntary associations and the state. They contribute to scholarship which views the relationship between civil society and the state not as opposed and separate from one another, but as flexible and multifaceted.³ Ana Ljubojević, in her study, reveals that in the postsocialist transition years relative continua-

³ Cf. Fabio Giomi / Stefano Petrunaro, eds, *Voluntary Associations in Yugoslavia (1918–1941)*, thematic issue, *European Review of History* 26, no. 1 (2019), DOI: 10.1080/13507486.2018.1474178; Nicole Kramer / Christine G. Krüger, eds, *Freiwilligenarbeit und gemeinnützige Organisationen im Wandel. Neue Perspektiven auf das 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, Boston 2019.

tion existed in the programmes, values, objectives and financing of the Young Researchers of Serbia. While in socialist Yugoslavia the association had been financed through annual state budget grants, in postsocialist and postwar Serbia it received public funding from the Serbian government as well as donations and carried out fundraising projects. Similarly, Tatjana Rakar and Zinka Kolarič point out how characteristics of the socialist welfare system in Slovenia determined the nature of the relationship between civil society organisations and the public and state respectively during the postsocialist transition. In the 1990s, no Slovenian government attempted to privatise the public sector with respect to the provision of citizens' welfare. Slovenia was thereby not confronted with a growing 'welfare gap' to be filled by civil society organisations, but instead civil society organisations established a complementary relationship with the state. Likewise, Ana Kladnik detects durability and continuation in volunteer firefighting practices and organisation in Slovenia going back to the socialist and even the presocialist past. She highlights, however, that in the first years of the postsocialist transition, after the organisational structures of the Yugoslav self-management system, within which the voluntary firefighting departments and their umbrella organisation had operated, were abolished, their role was taken over by the state.

With regard to the concept of civil society, these three studies argue that there was a continuation of associational civil society throughout both socialist and postsocialist times. This thematic issue thus joins the debate on and enriches the recent history of civil society in Eastern Europe, pointing out that civil society went well beyond the anticommunist oppositional movements hitherto often in the focus of studies on civil society.

Yet, there were noticeable transformative shifts, too. Anna Matthiesen shows how the postsocialist transition in Serbia was for a good part determined by a neoliberal doctrine characterised by the absence of the state and the responsabilisation of private, individual citizens. As Matthiesen points out, 'It is like there is no state' was a constant refrain among volunteers in Serbia during the floods of 2014. To add further nuance to the relationship between volunteering and the state, Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović demonstrates that in postsocialist and postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina associations have constituted the largest category of civil society actors and have received most of their funding from government institutions. However, the state's activities have created competition between volunteering organisations. There are substantially more male-dominated associations that receive government support, while women's organisations, especially at the local level, often receive only symbolic amounts. Support for female-dominated associations predominantly comes from foreign donors, characterised by the so-called 'project-driven' approach and causing the various women's groups to compete with each other for funding. Finally,

Julia Nietsch astutely shows how the borders and relations between the state and associations have fluctuated in Kosovo. In the 1990s, the Mother Teresa Society, supported largely by international donors, permanently negotiated its relationship on the one hand with the Serbian state and on the other with the Kosovo-Albanian 'parallel' state.

Several studies stress the importance of including volunteering and voluntary associations in the study of nationalism in the post-Yugoslav space of the 1990s. Ana Kladnik analyses how after the ten-day war of 1991 in Slovenia, firefighters were modelled as patriots who contributed greatly to the process leading to Slovenian independence. The new Slovenian government attempted to nationalise firefighting action and present the firefighters as an essential part of the Slovenian nation. Julia Nietsch exemplifies the relationship between voluntary associations and nationalism in her analysis of the Mother Teresa Society. Here, volunteers were all Kosovo-Albanian, and their patients were Albanian, Roma and Turkish, while no Serb families came for health consultations. Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović writes about the different legal frameworks that exist for volunteering in Bosnia and Herzegovina: while there is no law on volunteering on the state level and in the Brčko District, a law on volunteering was introduced in the Republika Srpska in 2009 and in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2012, accounting for distinct 'nationalised' paths of volunteering since the end of the war in 1995 at the latest. Ana Ljubojević addresses the fact that the Young Researchers of Serbia association managed to send volunteers abroad in spite of the country's international isolation during the 1990s, thereby actively contributing to the fight against xenophobia taking place in Serbian society.

Another goal of this thematic section is to examine the changing—and persisting—perceptions and forms of volunteering since the last decade of the 20th century in the post-Yugoslav states. Tatjana Rakar and Zinka Kolarič show the discrepancy between the numerical growth of the civil society sector in Slovenia and its development. The rapid growth of civil society organisations in the 1990s did not translate into the genuine development of civil society as measured by two main indicators: professionalisation and a share of civil society sector revenues as a percentage of GDP. Associations have remained the most common form of civil society organisation in Slovenia; no other organisational form has gained sustainable footing. Ana Kladnik analyses an example of such development by looking at the increasing numbers of local volunteer firefighting departments. Volunteer firefighters have demonstrated a strong adherence to their voluntary tradition and independence from any government structure. The studies by Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović, Ana Ljubojević and Julia Nietsch are especially concerned with the personal experiences and motivations of volunteers. Popov-Momčinović, in her analysis of women's civil so-

ciety organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, highlights that regardless of the size of the organisation, all volunteers connect volunteering with positive values such as solidarity and commitment. Ljubojević points out that in Serbia during the 1990s volunteers perceived the voluntary workcamps as a sort of 'rebellion' against growing political pressure and unease. Similarly, volunteering for the Mother Teresa Society (MTS) in Kosovo, as Nietsch demonstrates, represented a kind of 'voluntary activism', 'empowerment', and 'personal obligation' to the volunteers. Adapting a concept coined by Piotr Goldstein, Nietsch refers to the volunteers of the MTS as 'everyday activists'. Finally, Anna Matthiesen, using the example of volunteers during the heavy flooding in Serbia in 2014, argues that the volunteers, while expressing genuine pride and exhilaration, were also full of anger and frustration at the apathy of the populace and the absence of the state during that crisis. In addition, Matthiesen points to another form of volunteering, namely 'virtual voluntarism', and exemplifies how the neoliberalization of the Serbian state has been characterised not only by the absence of the state and the responsabilisation of the private citizen, but also by the creation of markets in which individuals must participate if they wish to become recipients of digitally transmitted donations.

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