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Remembrance about the Yugoslav Wars – the Survey



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The survey, named 'Remembrance of the Yugoslav Wars' is aimed at seeing how the 1990s Yugoslav Wars are remembered and commemorated across Europe. The survey is part of part of the EUROCLIO project 'Learning about History that is 'not yet History', a project funded by the Erasmus+ Europe for Citizens Programme in partnership with ISHA, the International Students of History Association. This survey was conducted between October-December 2017 among the members of ISHA and EUROCLIO, particularly during the regional training event in Maribor (late October) as well as during local seminars organized throughout the region.

The survey was filled in by 175 respondents who came from 30 countries. As the image shows, the respondents came from following European countries: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The most dominant nationalities of participants are Croatians and Serbians. Together they form close to 50% of all responses. There are almost twice as many Croatian responses as there are Serbian ones. The most common occupation among responders is either history professor or student. Finally, the average age of most responders is mid-forties.

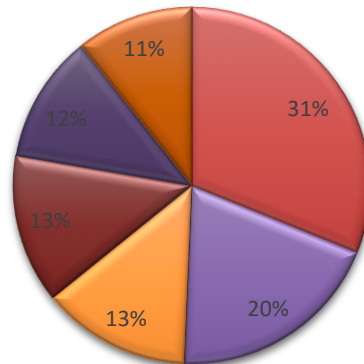


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The survey is divided into three sections. The first section covers the view of the 1990s Yugoslav Wars and this mostly concerns with the reasons behind the break-up of Yugoslavia. The most significant causes of the break-up are the rise of nationalism as the cause of the break-up (39.4%). Following that, 24.7% respondents believe that it is the continuation of centuries old conflict between ethnic and religious groups in the region that is behind the break-up. The other response relate to the death of Tito, the collapse of communism, economic collapse and political response by the international powers. The distribution is presented in the pie-chart below.

Causes behind the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1990s

- Rising nationalism
- Continuation of centuries old conflict between the ethnic and religious groups of the region
- The death of Tito
- The collapse of communism
- Political response by the international powers as strategic importance of the region diminished
- Economic collapse and opening up of the market under international pressure



These results may imply that there is no prevalent answer and that the majority of participants see nationalism as the main reason for the collapse of Yugoslavia, which could also be indicative of the political orientation of the participants in regards to the contemporary political constellations in the post-Yugoslav area.

Within the first part, we also looked into the extent individual countries where involved in the war. It should be noted that during this part of the survey, the participants were able to check multiple boxes to indicate their response. Out of 175 responses, 60% answered that their country took in refugees, 48.2% stated that their country was involved in the fighting, 35.3% responded that it participated in the UN peacekeeping missions and 4.7% claimed that their country was not involved. Finally, 5% of respondents claimed that they were not familiar with the work put in by their respective governments.

The second chapter of the survey focused particularly on remembrance and memorials. When analyzing the data, we divided the data into Yugoslav and non-Yugoslav responses. 15 respondents (out of 77) indicated that in their (non-Yugoslav) country, there is either a state commemoration or a commemoration organized by a civil society. These answers came from respondents from Austria, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Romania, Russia, Turkey and the United Kingdom. On the other hand, in post-Yugoslav countries, only 8 out of 98 respondents indicated that in their country there is **no** commemoration. These answers came from participants in Albania, Macedonia and 1 person from Serbia. In non-Yugoslav countries only 2 out of 77 indicated that there are memorials for the 1990's wars in their countries, and those were the responses from Italy and Turkey. In post-Yugoslav countries, 11 out of 98 responses indicated that in their country there are no memorials for the 1990's wars. Those answers were from Albania, Macedonia and Serbia. It should be noted that all of these respondents were students.

When asked what exactly is commemorated on those days (event/person/group) they had an

option of answering with a longer sentence. These examples here are worth highlighting.

- *"Independence proclamation, 'victory and patriotic gratitude', specific military operations, specific army groups, specific conflict sites, specific victim groups"*
- *"Commemoration for the victims of NATO bombings"*
- *"In the city of Kukes, Albania, it is build a commemorative monument to commemorate the Kosovo war, the genocide and ethnic cleansing that the Slavic Serbians has made against the Albanian population of Kosovo."*
- *"Srebrenitsa, some meetings were arranged about Bosnia and we listened to students come from Bosnia to University in Trabzon"*

Several answers indicated that some memorials were contested. When asked why these memorials are contested, some of the answers were:

- *"These memorials concern the struggle of the Albanian people of Kosovo"*
- *"Because of Nazi symbolism"*
- *"What is in Croatia a day of victory, in Serbia is a day of tragedy because many Serbs from Croatia were left homeless and were forced to flee in Serbia"*
- *"For presenting only one perspective, disregarding context or consequences, glorifying war"*
- *"Because it is true"*

When asked 'What lessons can we in Europe learn from the 1990's Yugoslav Wars?' some responded:

- *"How easy it is to wage a war by exploiting feelings; how hard it is for a pacifist civil societies to resist a general media hysteria to propagate the idea that there is no alternative to war" (Austria)*

- *"The dangers of rising nationalism in times of economic turmoil."* (Cyprus)
- *"One thing: ethnic, national and religious identities can easily be revived when there's a certain political advantage to be gained by it."* (Netherlands)

When asked 'How should the 1990's Yugoslav Wars be taken into account today in Europe in history teaching?', some responded:

- *"The recentness of the conflict should be highlighted - often history classes looked back to generations old conflicts. The fact that such bloody wars took place on European soil in my lifetime is something so foreign and devastating to me that I have trouble conceptualising it."*
- *"It should be an example of how waves of exclusive rabid nationalisms could mask themselves behind economic collapse and cooling of cold war for sole purposes of dissolving a common multi-national state. Also, today's history teaching could observe how new states born from the fire of Yugoslav wars stay in the clinical state of post-socialist transition for over two decades later."*

After finalizing the results of the survey, we can conclude that there exist both nationalist and anti-nationalist discourse. Another point that came as a result of this survey is the belief that the events that transcribed during the Yugoslav Wars from the 1990s are regarded with bigger complexity from within Yugoslavia, as opposed to the respondents from outside of Yugoslavia. The results of this survey implies that there is a need for implementing a coherent narrative in the history curriculum in the region, as well as in Europe. Not only that, but it will be useful for opening up the public space towards dealing with the topic. Therefore, the survey was a successful part of the 'Learning History which is not yet History' project, and it made a valuable contribution towards the better understanding of the general atmosphere among history students and teachers in both the region and Europe as a whole.