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THE IMAGE OF THE OTHER IN SERBIA - FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF HISTORY TEXTBOOKS AND FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF YOUTH

"We speak in different languages as always, but the things we talk about do not become any different because of that."

Mihail Bulgakov

I INTRODUCTION

When you tell someone in Serbia today that you are dealing with history, they will inevitably ask you "Which history?", and the question can easily follow, "Will we, and when will we find out the real truth about our own history?" This especially applies to people who are old enough to have lived in the SFRY, in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in Serbia and Montenegro, and finally in the Republic of Serbia.

History, like few sciences, is often (mis)used for ideological, national, and political purposes. Historiography and historical textbook literature in Serbia for the last 70 years have often been, from various sides, labeled as one-sided, marked by strong ideological messages and assessments, mythologizing of certain personalities and phenomena, and different interpretations of certain historical facts. With the help of history as a science and a teaching subject, certain political actions were justified, one personality was glorified and included in textbooks, while others were denigrated and expelled from textbooks.

The ideologically repressed and conflicting national interests of the federal units of the SFRY, which in the raging nationalism of the 1990s made Yugoslavia the battlefield of the civil war, created separate historiographies that shaped and continue to shape a partial historical consciousness and promote their own truths, confirm national identity and the newly established statehood, ignoring the whole of Yugoslavia, except, perhaps, in the most general indications as a framework for certain events. On the other hand, only



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what was agreed and harmonized in the republican centers could be the history of Yugoslavia, or the history of the Party.

The peoples of Yugoslavia, who lived together for decades, nurturing "brotherhood and unity", after the bloody civil war, got their statehood and the opportunity to present to their young generations, through the teaching of history, their view of what was happening in these areas.

If we expand the story to neighboring countries and Balkan peoples who share a dynamic common history, things become even more complex. During the centuries of living together in the unstable area that many call the "powder keg", many stereotypes and prejudices that the Balkan peoples have about each other have been formed, which are often supported by emphasizing all the negative things that happened in the past, including mutual conflicts, wars, occupations, uprisings, and liberations. At the same time, consciously or unconsciously, everything that unites the Balkan peoples, what they have in common and is close to all of them, such as culture, tradition, customs, value system (common values such as: FREEDOM, TRUTH, JUSTICE, FAMILY, HONOR, SOLIDARITY), as well as a way of life, does not stand out enough, or not stand out at all. The context of looking at this must also be extended to the status that the Balkan peoples have today, in terms of state, politics, security and in every other sense - in Europe and the world, regardless of whether their countries are members of the EU or are on the path to European integration, whether they are, or not, the members of some military alliances. The question arises, in addition to the one about our attitude towards others, also about the attitude of others towards all of us – the Balkan peoples.

If the context is expanded a little more, to the war that is happening now in Europe and to the tectonic changes that are looming at the global level, it may not be an exaggeration to say that good neighborly relations between the Balkan peoples become a question, not only of a better common future, but also of their survival.



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That is why there is an obvious need, today perhaps more than ever, for a continuous, conscious dialogue among the Balkan peoples, which can only lead to liberation from all simplified images, stereotypes and prejudices, negative feelings that lead to discord and hostility, as well as to the establishment of good relationships, the ones which are filled with mutual understanding, respect, empathy, a sense of community and closeness, as well as awareness of long-term common interests.

Young people from all Balkan countries have the capacity to initiate and lead this dialogue, supported by elders who have enough goodwill, knowledge, and awareness that this is the way to build a better future for the entire Balkans, and provides a good example of the direction where the whole of Europe should go, and ultimately, the whole world.

II PRESENTATION OF THE HISTORY CURRICULUM IN SERBIA TODAY

GOALS OF HISTORY TEACHING

Officially, the goal of history teaching in Serbia today is to ensure that all students acquire basic language and scientific literacy and progress towards the realization of the appropriate Standards of Educational Achievements, to be able to solve problems and tasks in new and unfamiliar situations, to express and justify their opinions and discuss with others, develop motivation for learning and interest in subject contents, as well as developing historical awareness and humanistic education of students.

The goal of teaching history is to contribute to the understanding of historical space and time, historical processes and flows, as well as to the development of national, European and world identity and the spirit of tolerance among students. The tasks of history teaching are that students, by observing cause-and-effect relationships, understand historical processes and flows, the role of prominent figures in the development of human society,



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and to know national and general history (political, economic, social, cultural...), as well as the history of neighboring peoples and countries.

History is an important field of study in the education system of Serbia because it is:

- a subject that explains concepts from social theory and practice (state, ruler, democracy) to students,
- a subject that, along with the Serbian language and geography, provides the basis for building identity (national, cultural, etc.),
- science that should educate for democracy, peace and tolerance by explaining terms such as: war, peace, elections, parties, opposition, historical process, etc.,
- science that should provide elementary political literacy and political culture,
- science that provides the basis for the adoption of national, regional, European and world cultural values.

If we look at what kind of recommendations the Institute for the Improvement of Education officially gives to history teachers, the teaching of history should help students create a clearer picture not only of "how it really was", but also why something happened and what consequences resulted from it. To understand the events of the past, the student needs to "relive them in his mind", which can be greatly helped by using selected historical sources, literature, maps and other data sources (documentary and animated video and digital materials, museum exhibits, illustrations), visiting cultural and historical monuments and visiting cultural institutions. Furthermore, the influence of history teaching and learning on the cultivation of language and speech culture (oratory and debate skills), as well as on the development of a culture of remembrance and awareness of social responsibility and human rights, should be used.

The educational authorities in Serbia today believe that it is necessary to take into account the integrative function of history, which in the educational system, where knowledge is divided by subject, helps students to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the connection and conditioning of geographical, economic and cultural conditions of human



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life. They point out that it is preferable to avoid fragmentary and isolated learning of historical facts, because it has the shortest duration in memory and the weakest transfer in acquiring other knowledge and developing skills. In teaching history, it is therefore necessary, whenever possible, to apply the didactic concept of multi-perspective.

In this sense, the selected examples should indicate the use and abuse of both myths and history, with a special focus on the consequences of these phenomena in the modern age. Special attention should be paid to historical political myths, circumstances and reasons for their origin, as well as consequences. The teacher should choose illustrative materials and methods that enable a clear critical attitude towards the abuses and manipulations of history for the sake of propaganda, creating negative stereotypes and spreading intolerance, discrimination, and hatred in society.

The work on this topic should by no means be chronologically limited, but should, in order to fulfill its purpose, include phenomena from ancient to modern times (Hellenic myths, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, the Song of Roland, Joan of Arc, Kosovo legend, Marko Kraljevic...). As in other topics, an even representation of examples from general and national history is desirable here, as well as a comparison on a spatial and chronological level.

At the end of high school education, in the fourth grade, the period of modern history is studied, which includes the treatment of many sensitive, even contradictory, or controversial topics, on which there is no consensus in scientific circles and the public. These are topics that are present every day in news and documentary programs, on the Internet, and are discussed by politicians, public figures, and journalists. Such topics are often an integral part of family history and personal narratives, which further increases their topicality. Students are exposed to different interpretations of historical events and therefore it is particularly important for them to develop a critical attitude towards the information offered to them.



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The proficiency in this skill is also stated in the educational standards, and within the program it is mentioned in the objective of the course, as well as in certain outcomes for the end of the grade. Therefore, one of the most important competencies of a successful teacher would be to know how to encourage critical and historical thinking in students, which would enable students to develop humanist values based on tolerance, respect for diversity and respect for others.

At the end of high school education, students should be able to analyze contradictions with arguments, to de-center themselves (see and appreciate someone else's point of view on a certain historical phenomenon), to notice similarities and differences, ask questions and easily connect new information with existing knowledge. In this way, they will be able to recognize propaganda and actively participate in breaking down the prejudices and stereotypes they encounter every day. Such an approach would enable them to have an autonomous and rational attitude towards information and further facilitate reflection and making reasoned conclusions and judgments.

CONTENTS OF THE HISTORY TEACHING

A look at the contents and topics of the history curriculum in elementary school shows that the contents of national and world history are fairly evenly represented. It's the same with the history curriculum in high school. However, while the chronological approach to the presentation of historical events is nurtured in elementary school, in the last few years, efforts have been made to change the approach in the history curriculum in high school, i.e., to apply the thematic, or problem-based, approach.

This caused, and is still ongoing, a lively debate among different groups of historians - while some demand that chronology be respected, because otherwise confusion is created in the minds of students (because they are dealing thematically with events about which they still know nothing in terms of basic historical facts), and while others insist that the teaching of history in high school must not be a repetition of the teaching of history



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from elementary school, only slightly expanded, others require a combined approach. The current government in Serbia today is extremely interested in the teaching of history in Serbian schools, and constantly emphasizes the importance of that teaching for the preservation of the country's national interests.

No	GRADE	CONTENTS AND TOPICS OF HISTORY CURRICULUM IN COMPULSORY EIGHT YEAR EDUCATION
1.	The 5th grade	-INTRODUCTION (Terms: Past, Time, History as a science of the past), -PREHISTORY (in the world and the central Balkans), -ANCIENT CENTURY (Ancient East, Ancient Greece, Hellenistic Age, Rome, Fall of the Western Roman Empire).
2.	The 6th grade	-Europe and the Mediterranean in the early Middle Ages, -Serbs and their environment in the early Middle Ages, -Europe in the late Middle Ages, -Serbs and their environment in the late Middle Ages, -Serbian lands and their surroundings during the Ottoman conquests.
3.	The 7th grade	- The rise of Europe (Europe from the end of the 15th to the end of the 18th century), - The Serbian people under foreign rule from the end of the 16th to the 18th century, -The Age of Revolutions (Industrial Revolution, Political Revolutions, French Revolution, Revolution 1848/49, Civil War in the USA, Great Powers, Eastern Question and Balkan Nations),



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		- The Serbian people under foreign rule from the end of the 18th century to the seventies of the 19th century.
4.	The 8th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The world in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, -Serbia, Montenegro and the Serbs in the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires from the Berlin Congress to the First World War, -Modern times - the First World War and revolutions in Russia and Europe, -Serbia and Montenegro in the First World War, -The world between the First and Second World Wars, -Kingdom of Yugoslavia, -Second World War - Total War, -Yugoslavia in the Second World War, -The world after World War II, -Yugoslavia after the Second World War.

III BASIC ACCENTS FOR BUILDING SERBIAN IDENTITY

WHAT IS THE "SERBIAN NATION"?

"They are looking to cut our roots, to destroy us.

But they are wrong in thinking that our roots are in the earth.

We are planted upside down; our roots are in the sky!"

Abbot of Jovanja monastery, Archimandrite Mihailo Bikovic

There are several theoretical conceptions of the nation. According to the most represented, a nation consists of a population that speaks one language, and almost all European nations were formed on this ideological basis. In old Serbian and Slavic texts,



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the terms language and people are often synonymous. Therefore, according to this definition, those who speak one language (and whose ancestors spoke the same language) constitute one people, regardless of the religion they profess and the countries they live in. According to the aforementioned definition, the Muslim population of the Serbian language is an integral part of the Serbian nation, just like the Catholic population of the Serbian language and origin.

According to another conception, a nation is made up of the population of a state union, and some of the nations were also created on this idea (for example, the Swiss and Belgian models, and above all the American nation). This approach cannot be applied to the Serbian ethnos, as it excludes a huge number of people of Serbian identity and origin who live outside the Serbian states.

There is also a concept that emphasizes religious identity as primary, and in this sense Catholics of Serbian origin and Muslims of Serbian origin can be spoken of as separate nations. And indeed, the role of the Orthodox Christian faith and the Serbian Orthodox Church in preserving the identity of the Serbs and the Serbian spiritual space throughout history has proven to be decisive, along with the Serbian language.

Of course, there are those conceptions of ethnic identity that allow the subjective possibility of free ethnic declaration regardless of mother tongue, origin, state and culture. Accordingly, "a Serb is one who considers himself a Serb", regardless of the historical, anthropological and cultural aspects of his origin. In this sense, Serbian identity is determined primarily by the idea of "Serbianity" as a historical and spiritual mission that unites individuals with an identical consciousness.

SERBIA AND ITS SYMBOLS - NODAL PLACES OF SERBIAN IDENTITY

First of all, a large number of Serbian symbols are related to Orthodox-Christian identity, then to ruling dynasties, folk customs, and traditions, etc. The symbols of the Serbian states (flag, coat of arms, anthem) have changed over time, with the red-blue-white



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tricolor, the coat of arms with a double-headed white eagle, a crown and a cross with four C (S in Cyrillic), as well as the anthem "God of Justice" being in effect today.

On the other hand, Serbian symbols are the Serbian language, national heroes/heroines (Milos Obilic, Toplica Milan, Kosancic Ivan, Vozd Karadjordje, Milos Obrenovic, Zivojin Misic, Milunka Savic), ritual customs (family and village Glory), script (Cyrillic), folk costume (vest, opanak, shajkaca), instruments (fiddle, flute), dances (kolo) and others.

Of course, Serbian symbols also include exceptional individuals, those who made a great contribution in the field of science (Nikola Tesla, Mihajlo Pupin, Mileva Maric, Milutin Milankovic), art (literature - Milos Crnjanski, Ivo Andric, Mesa Selimovic, Milorad Pavic, painting - Nadezda Petrovic, Milan Konjovic, Petar Lubarda, Paja Jovanovic, graphics - Vlada Velickovic, Bosko Karanovic, music - Stevan Mokranjac, Stanislav Binicki), philosophy (Milos Djurić, Mihajlo Djuric, Branislav Petronijevic, Djuro Susnjic, Svetozar Stojanovic), sports (Novak Djokovic, Nikola Jokic, Jasna Sekaric, Dragutin Topic, Ivana Spanović, Sinisa Mihajlovic, Nemanja Vidic, Dragoslav Sekularac, Nikola and Vanja Grbic, Vlade Divac, Dragan Kicanovic).

One of the central spiritual symbols of Serbs and Serbia represents the ideal path of Saint Sava, in the specific, Orthodox sense of preserving the original Christian tradition through the Christian reimagining of the entire national life. Today, Saint Sava is called the founder of the Serbian church, education, culture and "the entire Serbian idea". Justin Popovic writes that Saint Sava "became, and always remained, the wisest and greatest Serbian philosopher with his Gospel works". He is also considered as the founder of education and the originator of Serbian medieval literature.

Serbian monasteries, sacred places that are thousands of years old, represent important symbols of Serbian nationality, history, tradition, and religion. These are buildings that over the centuries have been the most important pillars of preservation and defense, gathering and maintenance of what is special for Serbia and its people. Apart from their magnificence, stunning architecture, beautiful icons, monasteries are also significant



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because they contain the relics of the most prominent figures of Serbian history, saints, rulers, and creators. To this day, they have preserved their ranks, who dedicated their lives to God and who are there to provide believers with comfort and strength for life's struggles. Their importance, size, and history amaze even those who are not committed to the faith.

Serbian medieval monasteries (Studenica, Sopocani, Mileseva, Gračanica, Visoki Decani, Gradac, Djurdjevi Stupovi, Ljubostinja, Banjska, etc.) represent a particularly emphasized symbol of the Serbian people, just like Kosovo, in the sense of the sacred space of the first order that determines the essence and destiny of the entire Serbia.

A special symbol of Serbia is represented by legal monuments - the Nomocanon of Saint Sava and Dusan's Code, which bear witness to the primal need of Serbs to organize their community according to the rules that everyone, including the emperors, must adhere to. Among all Serbian symbolic systems and representations, the symbolism of the "Heavenly People" and the "Heavenly Kingdom" has a particularly emphasized role in the Serbian tradition. Even numerous historical events have confirmed the undoubted importance of these performances in the collective consciousness of the Serbs, because in the turning points in history, the seemingly more difficult and disastrous paths were chosen that insisted on the defense of national honor and the idea of unconditional submission to the demands of Heavenly Serbia, destined by Kosovo Covenant.

In some of the most significant aspects, the Serbian symbolism is formulated precisely by the Kosovo Covenant, primarily in connection with the symbolism of the Heavenly People and the reformulation of the Serbian ethnos into the New Testament people of God, with the mission of a nation-model, with whose help other nations should rise to God.

There is a great misunderstanding of the Serbian Kosovo Covenant, because it is difficult for many to understand why the Serbs are celebrating their great defeat, and they even think that they are showing something masochistic or self-destructive. The Serbs do not consider the Battle of Kosovo (1389) a defeat. They sincerely believe that, if anyone



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suffered a defeat, it was great nobleman Vuk Brankovic and not King Lazar Hrebeljanovic, the deceased Lazar won and Vuk lost. For the Serbs, whoever sacrifices his life in the fight for the truth and justice of God, he sacrificed the greatest that he could and had, and - he won. Even if the battle was technically lost, he remains the winner. And since the entire Serbian army fell on the field of Kosovo - and that voluntarily - for the truth and justice of God, it won. It offered as a sacrifice to God everything it had and could; that's why it won. It lost its body, but it saved its soul.

Over the centuries, from generation to generation, Serbs have transmitted, preserved, and nurtured their Kosovo Covenant, thus preserving their hierarchy of values, which they have not changed even in the most tough times, nor in the greatest trials.

IV SERBIA, THE BALKANS AND EUROPE IN THE EYES OF YOUTH OF LESKOVAC

In order to gain a better insight into the attitudes of young people about Serbia, the Balkan countries and Europe, we realized:

- Two workshops on the topics "Imagine Europe" and "Rewrite history", with students of the Medical School in Leskovac,
- Two workshops on the topics "Imagine Europe" and "Rewrite history", with young people aged 19-30, NGO activists from Leskovac,
- Three focus group interviews with history teachers (6), high school students (12) and young NGO activists (9),
- Online questionnaire "Me and Europe", conducted with 121 respondents aged 15-30.

"IMAGINE EUROPE" AND "RE-WRITE HISTORY" WORKSHOPS

One workshop "Imagine Europe" was held with a large group of students from the high school of Medicine and one workshop with the same theme with a smaller group of young NGO activists from Leskovac. The young people, with the help of 25 thumbnails-symbols



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that depict the characteristic symbols of Europe, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, and Turkey, created their image of Europe.

The strongest impression from these workshops is the really great interest of young people from both groups to freely discuss this topic, to express their views and to hear others, to confront different arguments.

We would highlight a characteristic image created by the students, whose group name "European Phoenix" speaks of their perception of a Europe that may have burned down, but which can be reborn and rise from its own ashes. The way to do this is shown by the arrangement of thumbnails-symbols, because in the center of the picture is placed the eternal Olympic flame (the one that unites all people and nations), around it, as very important, great men of science and art are lined up, and they are all in a ring composed of from different national symbols standing friendly next to each other. In remote corners, completely isolated, there are ideologues, conquerors and those who wanted to conquer the world through total world war.





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The two "Rewrite History" workshops, held with the same two groups, were also very successful, because it was very interesting for the young people to, understanding the connection between cause and effect, at least in their imagination, change the course of events in the First World War, which would lead to much better present and future. In general, all the changes in the events proposed by the youth led to the outcome that the war would not have occurred at all, but that all disputes between nations would have been resolved through skillful diplomacy.

We would single out, as remarkably interesting, the discussion that developed after the presentation of their proposals, where a group of young activists connected the events related to Serbia from the time of the First World War with later events, in which they recognized the matrix of the behavior of the great powers towards Serbia until today. Their story goes like this:

- The assassination of Crown Prince Ferdinand by Young Bosnia and Gavrilo Princip was not the cause of the start of the First World War, but only an occasion, while the causes were deeper and did not come from the Serbian side.



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- The Austro-Hungarian monarchy sent Serbia an ultimatum that simply could not be accepted.
- A similar ultimatum, an offer that cannot be accepted, was sent by the West to Serbia in Rambouillet, which was followed by the bombing of Yugoslavia.
- A similar agreement was offered to Serbia today, where Serbia is asked to give up a part of its territory, and that very part that represents its soul, cradle, and sanctuary, which cannot be accepted. How long like that?
- The conclusion of the young man from the group: "It is clear to me that they are big and powerful and that they are also considered themselves very cunning when they try to convince us that we are to blame for all the suffering we are going through, and that they consider us very naive and that we will not understand what is actually in the background. But it is not clear to me that they do not understand that international relations which are based on mere force and violence, can destroy not only Serbia and Serbs, but also the entire world. It is unsustainable. Maybe now is the right moment for a radical change. All problems and disputes can be resolved peacefully, through dialogue and mutual respect. This world should be given a chance to survive, the moral evolution of humanity should continue. We can all be better; everyone should do their best."

CONVERSATIONS WITH TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND YOUNG NGO ACTIVISTS

The conversations we conducted with history teachers, high school students, and young NGO activists showed comparable results and conclusions as the other realized activities. It is noticeable that all these groups think about their country, neighbors, and the EU as vitally prominent issues, because they are aware that all these international relations directly affect the quality of life they live, and not only in terms of a high or low standard of living. Values, tradition, culture, and identity are especially important to everyone. Everyone would like the relations between the nations to be better, and they would also



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like the relations between the Serbs to be better and to overcome the divisions between the people.

The biggest disagreement between these groups relates to the perceptions of teachers and young people about how much young people read, how much they know about national and general history, how much they are interested in learning about the past. Teachers believe that young people are not really interested enough in history and in learning history in a scientifically based way, but are more informed through the Internet, social networks, and the media. But young people, in fact, showed a great interest in finding out what really happened in history, in order to understand the time in which they live today and to understand which direction should be taken further.

"ME AND EUROPE" - HOW YOUNG PEOPLE THINK

The online questionnaire "Me and Europe" was conducted in two parts, where in the first part high school students gave the answers, aged 14-18, 54 of them, and in the second part, young people aged 19-30, 67 of them. There was a total of 121 respondents, of which 76 were female and 38 were male, while 7 respondents did not want to declare their gender. The questions were identical in both questionnaires.

The analysis of the answers given by young people shows how they think about themselves and others, what their perception is and what their attitudes are about the world around them.

- In relation to the statement that cultural differences between Serbian and European cultures are unimportant and that everyone should adhere to one set of cultural norms and values, there are slightly more of them who disagree with it (42.98%) than those who agree (35.54%), while the number of those who do not have a strong opinion on this is not negligible either (21.49%). This question can be connected with the fear of the possible "drowning" of the Serbian cultural



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identity in the European one, if Serbia becomes a member of the EU one day, that is, it shows a desire to preserve its own cultural identity.

- When it comes to the statement that there are no significant differences in the cultures of Serbs, Bulgarians, Macedonians, Romanians, Greeks and Turks, more than half of young people (53.72%) do not agree, while a slightly smaller number agree (33.05%), while 13.22% of respondents have a neutral attitude. This could indicate that this group of young people did not think enough about all the similarities and closeness of the cultures of these Balkan peoples, but firmly clings to the "specialness" and "uniqueness" of their own culture.
- Already with the next statement, which speaks of the need to defend and preserve one's own cultural values and beliefs in interaction with people from European cultures, we come to the confirmation of what was said previously, because 80.99% of respondents agree, only 6.61% disagree, and 12.40% have a neutral attitude.
- Although the situation is a little better, when it comes to interaction with the Balkan peoples, still half of the respondents (50.41) believe that they should defend their cultural traditions and practices, 22.31% of the respondents do not agree with that, while 27.27% is neutral.
- It is interesting that a slightly larger number of respondents believe that it is not better to be a Serb than a European (37.19%), compared to those who think it is better (33.88%), although even the neutral group of respondents in relation to this issue is not small (28.92%). This situation arises when the question is posed as "either-or", because a large number of young people otherwise believe that one does not exclude the other, if "European" is a broader concept than the term "EU citizen".



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- 39.67% of respondents agree with the statement that cultural differences between Serbian and European cultures are minimal and can be ignored or overlooked in communication and interactions, 37.19% disagree, while there are 23.14% of neutral respondents.
- More than half of respondents (52.89%) do not think that the differences in values, beliefs, customs, traditions, and practices of the Balkan peoples are small and insignificant, in contrast to 28.92% of respondents who think that they are, while 18.18% the respondent has a neutral attitude. This is completely in line with one of the previous statements that there are no significant differences in the cultures of the Balkan peoples.
- Regarding readiness to understand and respect European values, beliefs, and behavior, even if they differ from their own, as many as 93.38% of respondents express a positive attitude, there is no negative attitude at all, while 5.78% of respondents have a neutral attitude. The readiness of the overwhelming majority of respondents to accept and respect diversity is evident here.
- When it comes to this type of tolerance for diversity in the context of cultural diversity among the Balkan peoples, as with the previous statement, the majority of respondents have a positive attitude (86.78%), compared to negative (1.64%) and neutral (11.58%). Considering all the previous results, it could be said that the majority of young people perceive their culture as special and want to preserve it as such, but at the same time they have a developed tolerance when it comes to European and Balkan cultures.
- Willingness to adapt their communication and behavior in interaction with people from European cultures, for the sake of effective communication and cooperation, was shown by 75.21% of respondents, 9.92% are not ready to do so, and 14.87% have a neutral attitude.



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- Adapting one's behavior and communication style to people from Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, and Turkish culture, with the willingness to avoid their cultural practices and expectations, is accepted by 34.71% of respondents, not accepted by 42.97%, while the neutral group consists of 22.31%.
- Almost half of the respondents (46.28%) want an inclusive and diverse society and are ready to integrate elements of European cultures into their own for the sake of it; a twice smaller group of respondents (22.31%) is not ready for it, while 31.40% have a neutral attitude. This indicates a certain anxiety of the young respondents, that accepting elements of other cultures can lead to endangering their own culture, which, above all, refers to national identity. This anxiety can be neutralized by a deeper reflection and insight into the fact that nothing in the world is "petrified" and that diversity does not endanger us but enriches and ennobles us. A significant role can be played by the introduction of learning about interculturality in Serbian schools on a larger scale than is the case today.
- When it comes to integrating aspects of the languages, customs, traditions and values of the cultures of the Balkan peoples into Serbian culture, due to the intersection and mutual influence of all Balkan cultures, 32.23% of the respondents expressed readiness for it, 28.10% were not ready for it, and the largest group of respondents are those with a neutral attitude, 38.84%. It is a realistic assumption that a large number of young people from Serbia did not have the opportunity to visit the countries of their neighbors and get to know them better, because if they did - they would see how much all the Balkan nations have in common.
- Although there has been a noticeable increase in Euro-skepticism among young people in recent years, there is still a strong desire for their country to become a member of the EU, which can be seen in the fact that the vast majority of respondents want the EU to expand by accepting new countries from the Balkan



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Peninsula, the group of 59, 50% of respondents. A negative attitude is shown by a group of 19.00% of respondents, and a neutral attitude by 21.49%.

- An overwhelming majority of young people agree with the statement that food is what unites the Balkan peoples, 80.16%. Only 8.26% disagree with that, and 11.57% are neutral. Among the young people of Serbia, there is a belief that maybe all the nations of the world have good national cuisines, but that the Balkans have the best food by far!
- 70.25% of respondents agree with the statement that differences in religion have contributed to conflicts among the Balkan peoples, 10.74% disagree, and 19.01% are neutral. This perception of young people is not surprising, because it really looks like that, and they still do not have enough knowledge and experience for deeper insights into what are the real causes of some historical events. And the truth is that any difference can be misused to throw a spark that will light a big fire. The causes of this often lie in the interests of the great powers that peacefully play their "world chess" while small nations perish in mutual conflicts. The question is whether everything would have happened like that, if only the Balkan peoples had been asked. Especially when it comes to different religions. Because the one who respects his religion, whatever it is called, respects other people's as well. For the one who lights the fire, faith does not exist, except as an instrument, because he does not know and acknowledge no one above himself.
- The answers to the question what can contribute to good relations between the Balkan countries in the future, show the following: "Economic cooperation and exchange" (54.54%), "Increasing awareness of mutual respect and feeling of closeness and togetherness" (52.89%) and "Demonstrating sincerity, empathy and friendship with other Balkan nations" (43.80%).



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- When asked to choose five characteristics that best describes an European, the Youngs did it in this way: “High living standards” (60.33%), “Human rights” (59.50%), “Environmental protection and sustainable development” (56.20%), “Democracy” (48.76%) and “Freedom” (42.15%).
- When asked to do the same, and choose five characteristics that best describe a Serbian, they have chosen the following ones: “Low living standards” (79.34%), “Freedom” (59.50%), “Conflict” (49.59%), “Cooperation” (47.93%), “Support for vulnerable groups and assistance for disadvantaged individuals” (39.67%).
- The general conclusion based on the presented results could be that a lot of work still needs to be done to overcome the simplified images, stereotypes and prejudices that the young people of Serbia still have about other nations and about themselves, but also that they are sufficiently open and capable of change when the necessary conditions for that are created. And that is exactly what we do when we realize projects like "Meet our Neighbors 2" and such as the youth exchanges that we realize as part of the Erasmus + program. Experience shows us that these are opportunities that lead to the creation of sincere friendships, great mutual understanding, and acceptance, which is a force that can bring a better future for all of us.

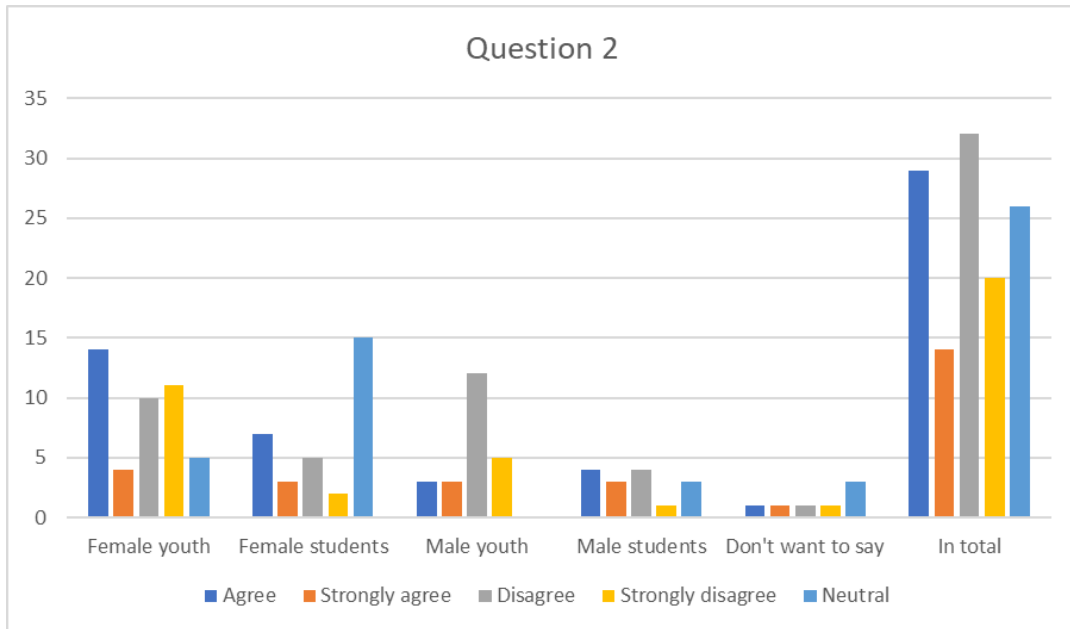


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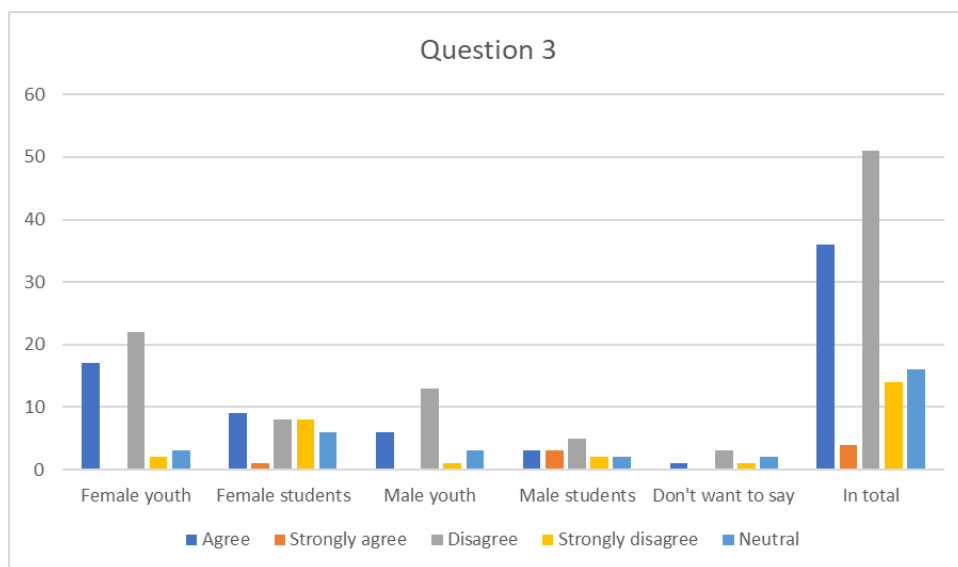


V ANNEX - RESULTS OF THE "ME AND EUROPE" QUESTIONNAIRE

2. Cultural differences between my own and European cultures are unimportant, and everyone should conform to one set of cultural norms and values.



3. There are no significant differences between Bulgarian/Greek/Macedonian/Romanian/Serbian/Turkish cultures.



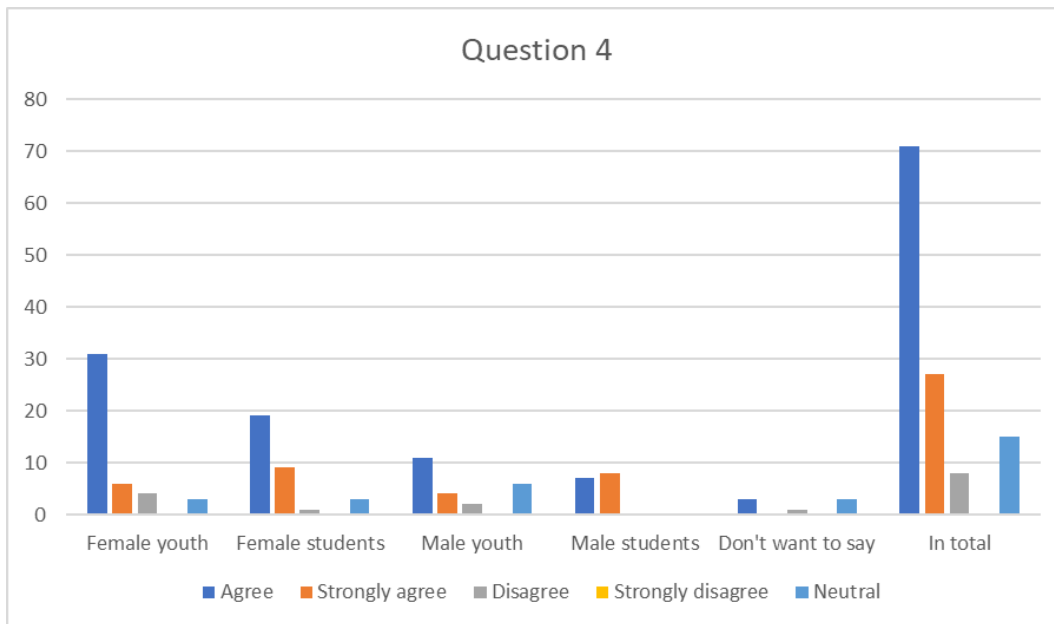


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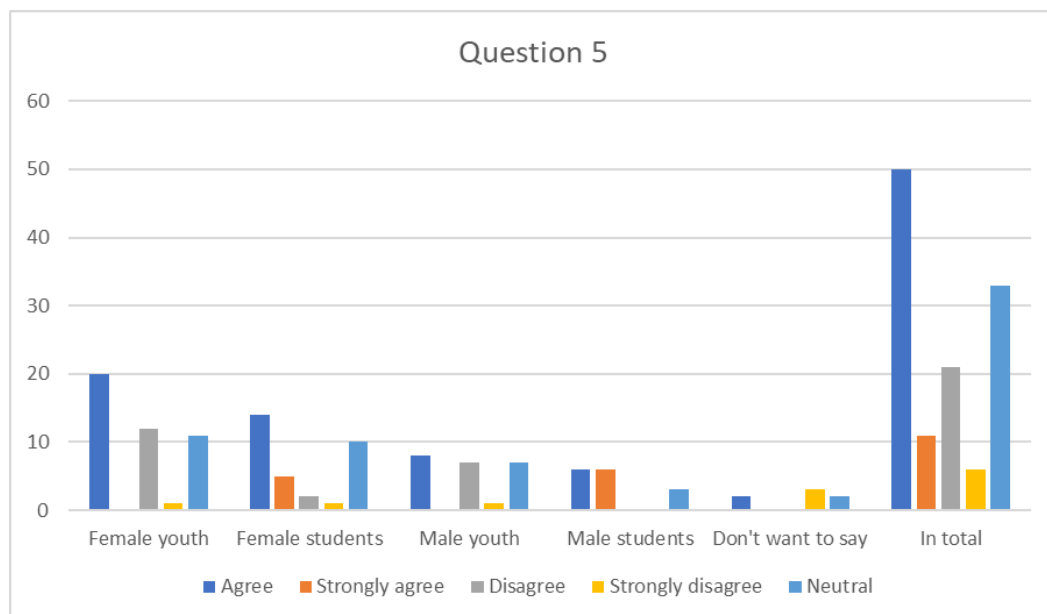


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4. It is essential to defend and preserve my cultural values and beliefs when interacting with people from European cultures.



5. I need to defend my cultural practices and traditions when I meet with a person from Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, and Turkish cultures.



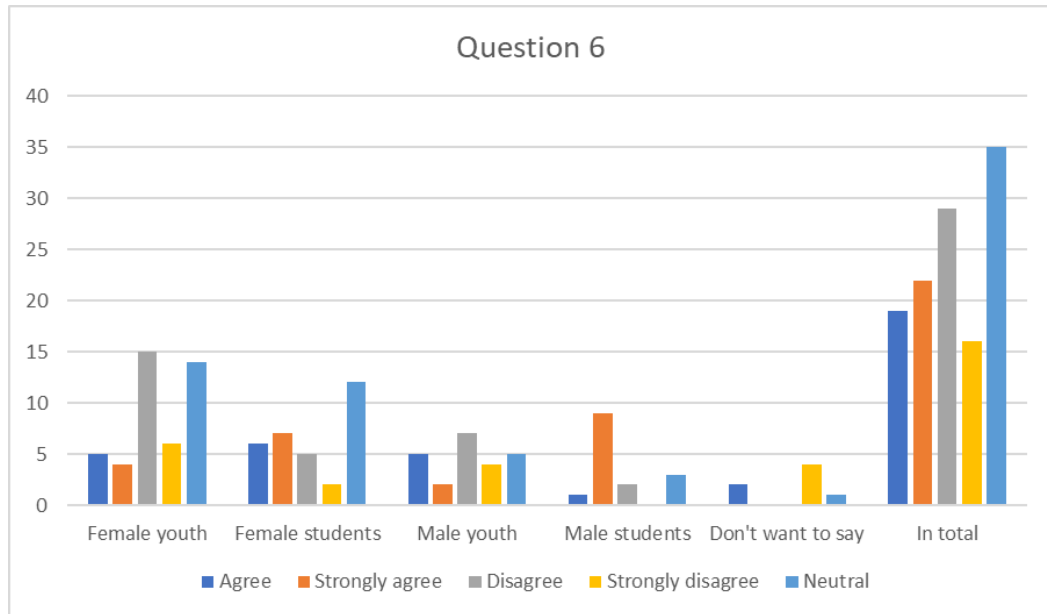


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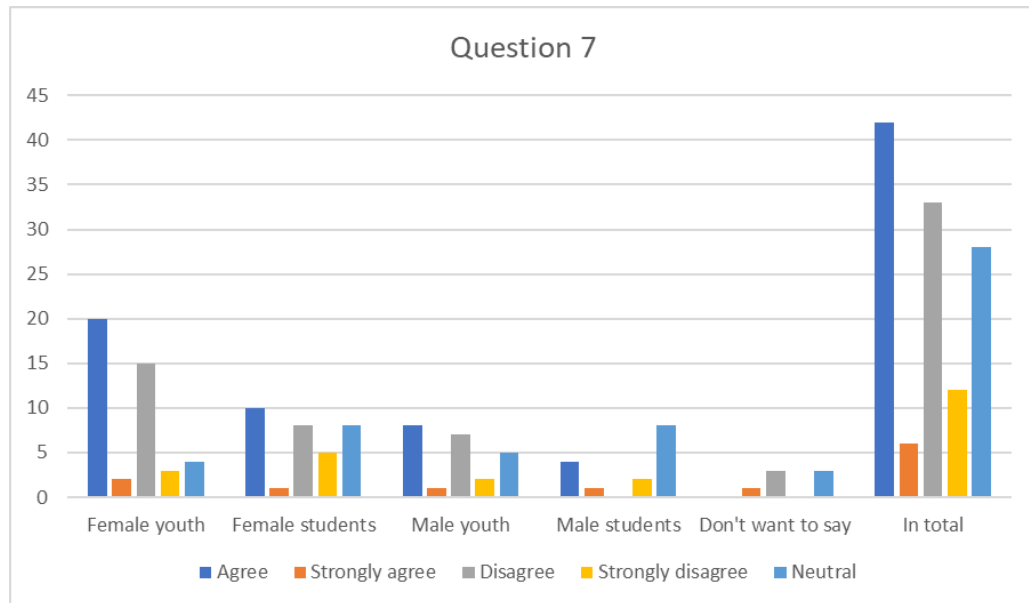


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6. It is better to be Serbian than to be European.



7. Cultural differences between my own and European cultures are minimal and can be ignored or overlooked in communication and interactions.



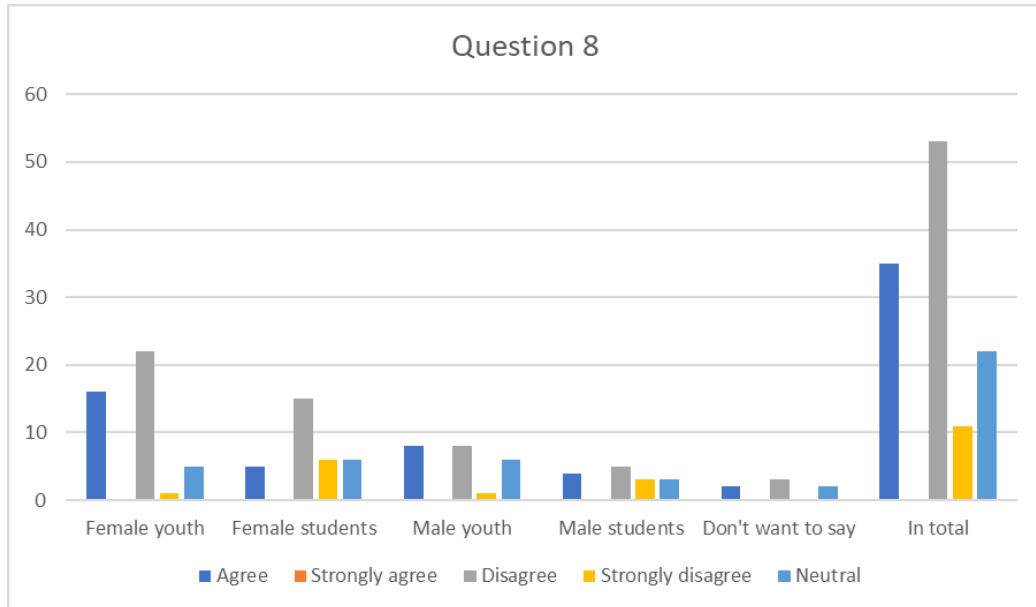


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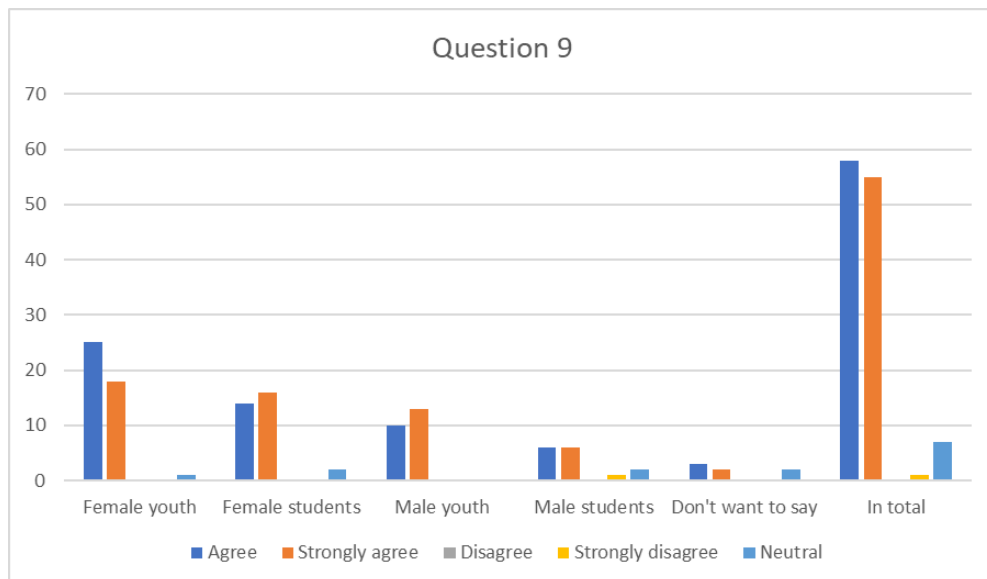


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8. Differences in values, beliefs, customs, traditions, and practices between Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures are minor and insignificant.



9. When interacting with people from European cultures, I try to understand and respect their values, beliefs, and behaviors, even if they differ from my own.



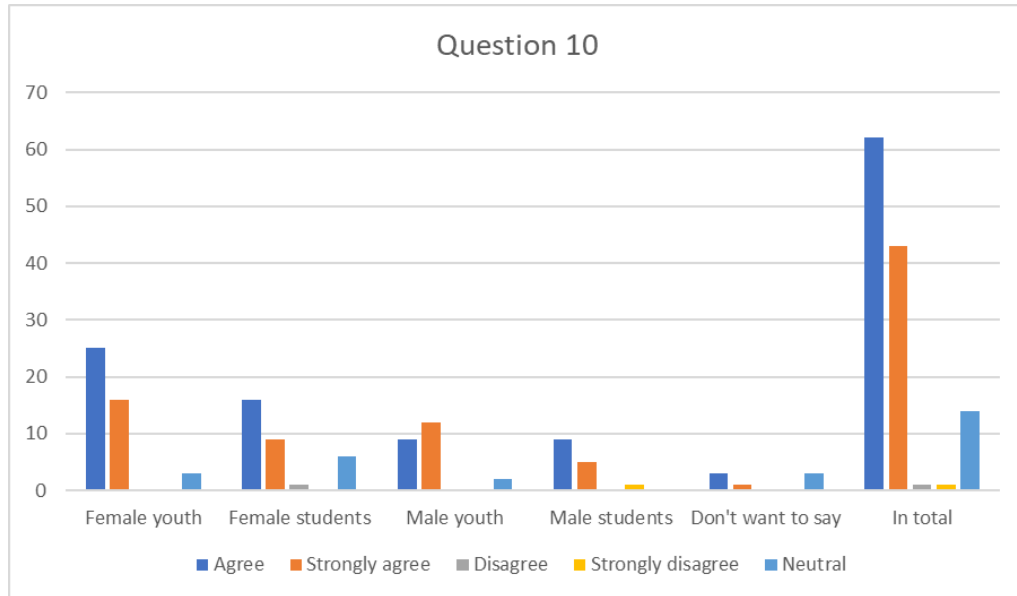


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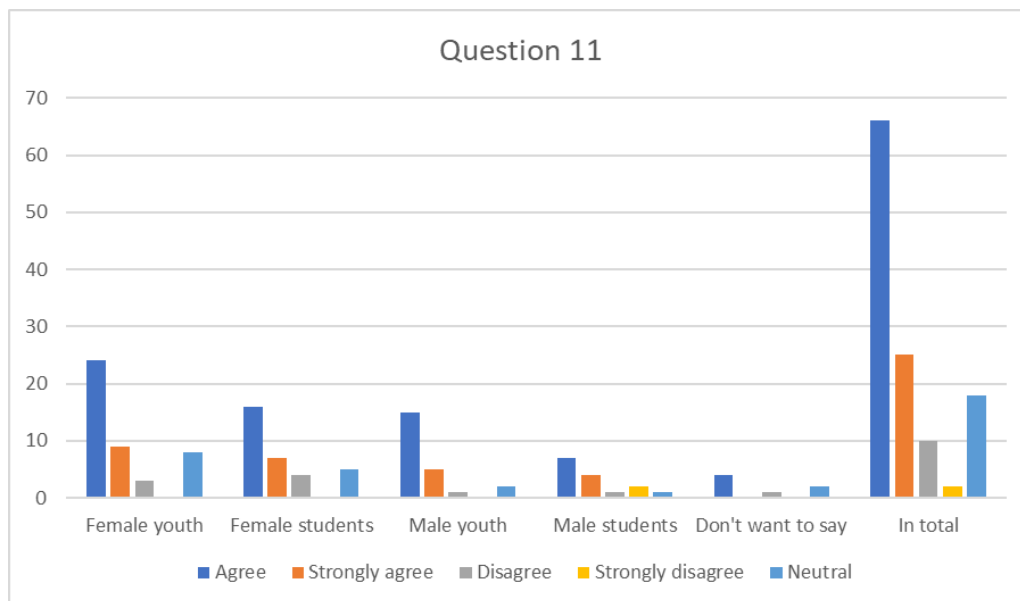


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10. When confronted with cultural differences between Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures, I try to find common ground and appreciate diversity.



11. It is essential to adapt and adjust my communication and behavior when interacting with people from European cultures to communicate and collaborate with them effectively.

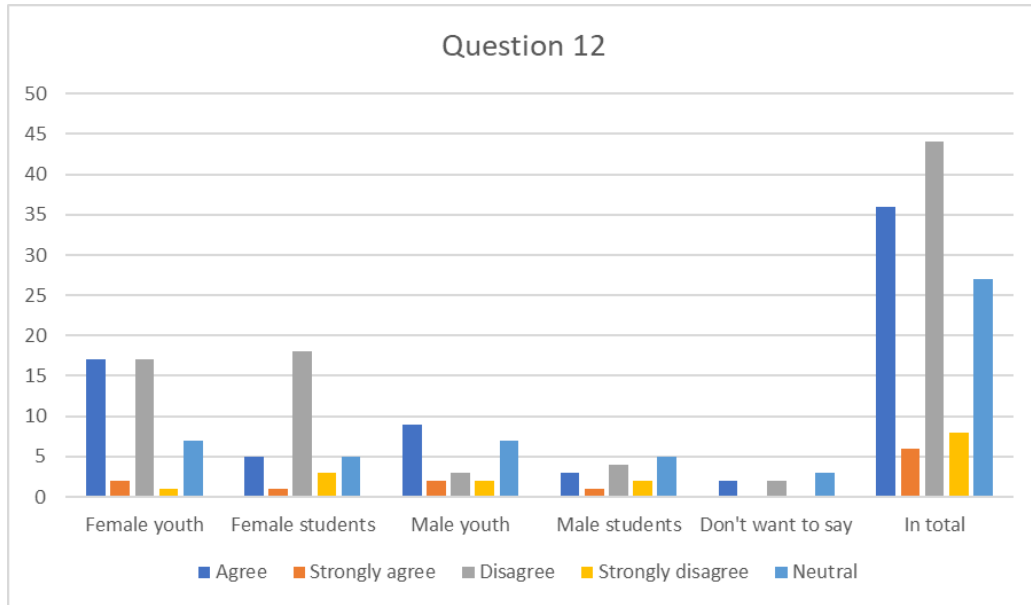




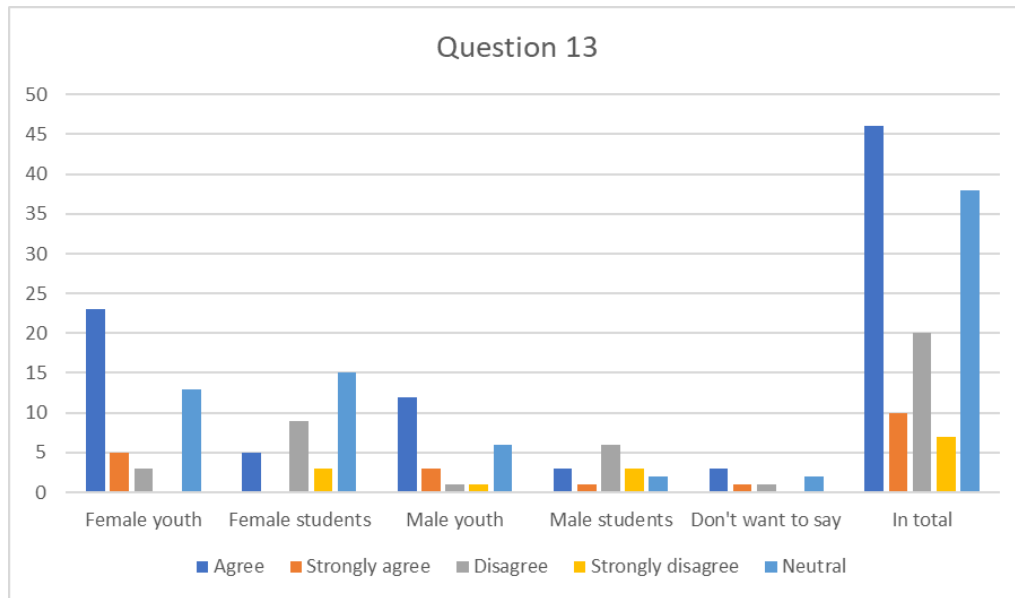
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12. In my interactions with people from Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian and Turkish cultures, I tend to adapt my behavior or communication style to fit in with these cultures by avoiding my cultural practices and expectations.



13. Integrating and incorporating elements from European cultures into my own is crucial to building a more inclusive and diverse community or society.



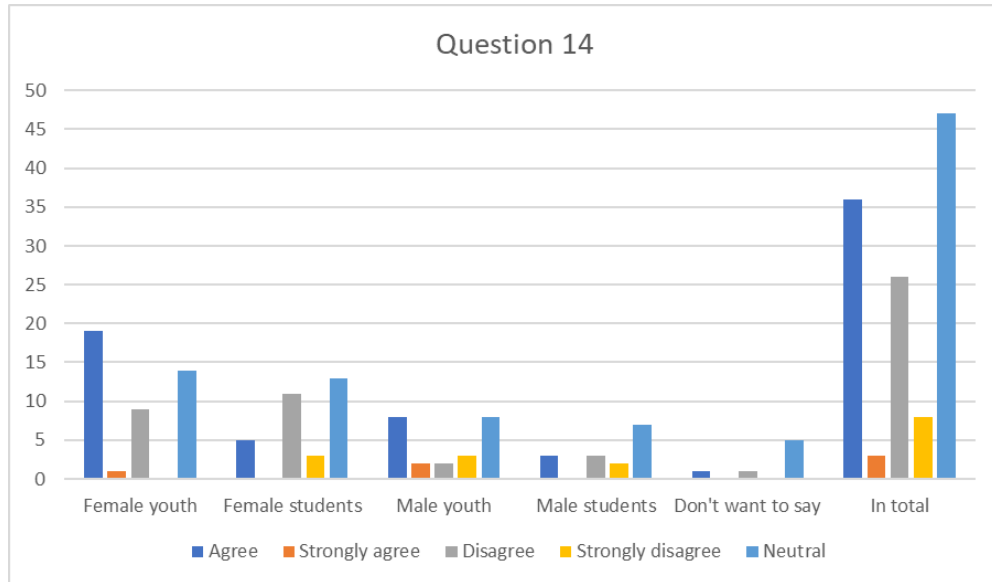


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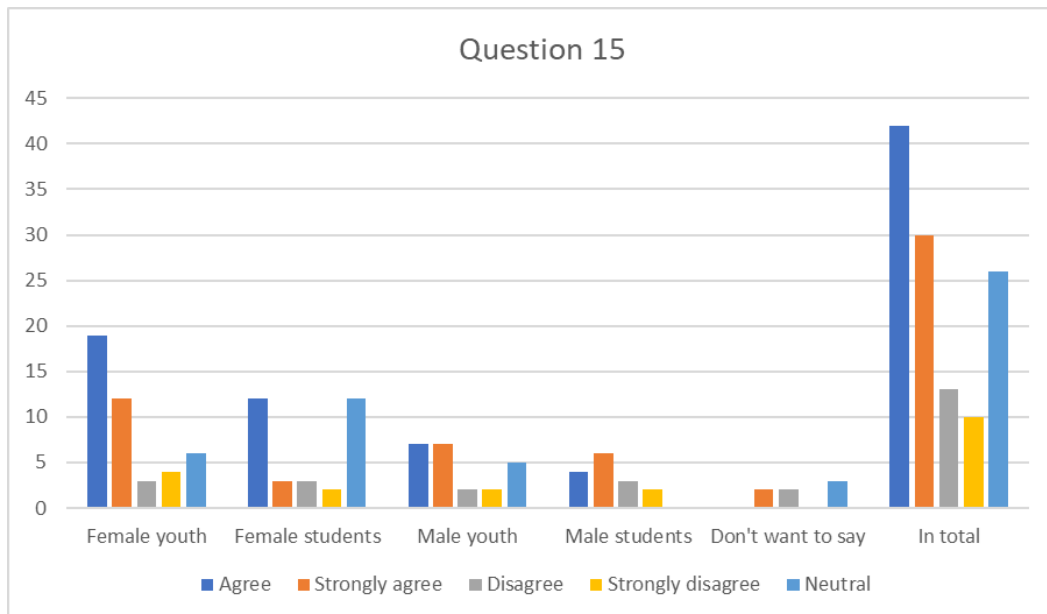


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14. Since Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures intersect and influence each other in terms of language, customs, traditions, and values, I try to integrate aspects of these cultures into my own.



15. I want the EU to expand by accepting new countries from the Balkan Peninsula.



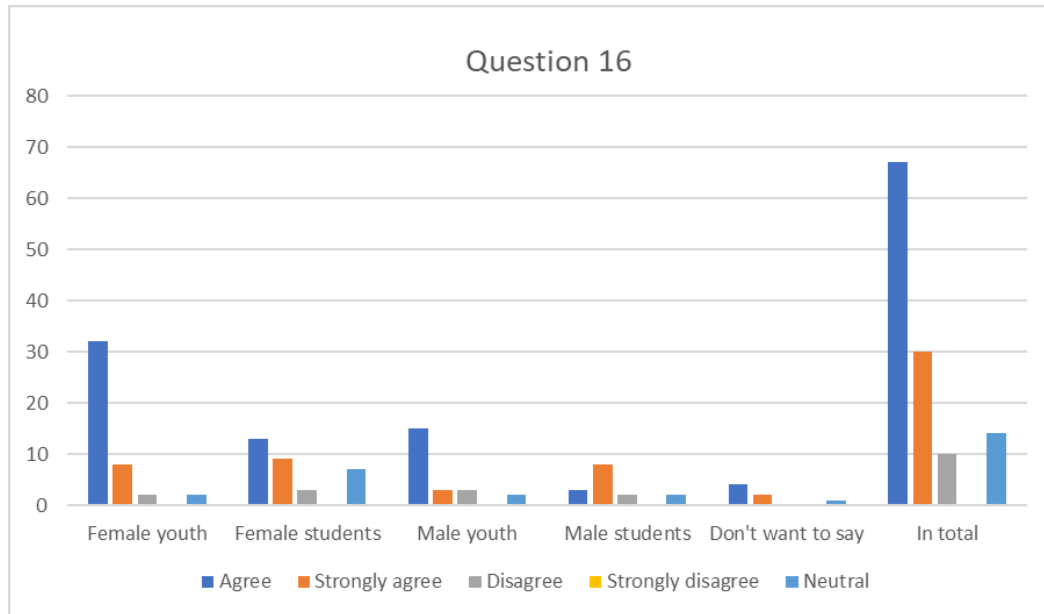


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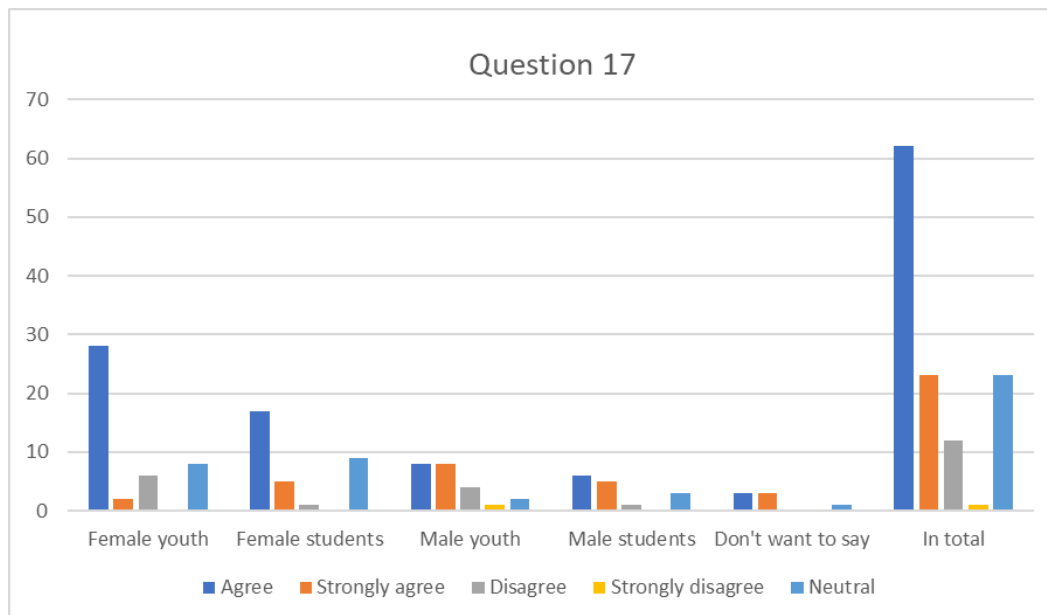


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16. Food serves as a point of connection among Balkan nations.



17. The differences in religion between Balkan nations have contributed to conflicts or divisions between Balkan societies.



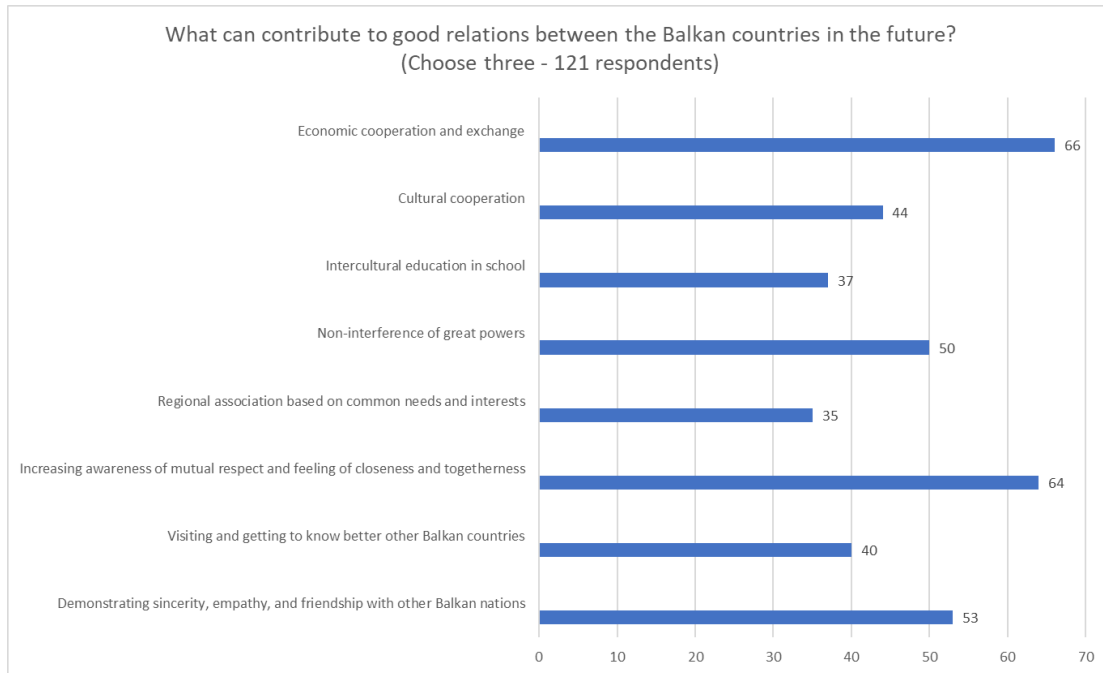


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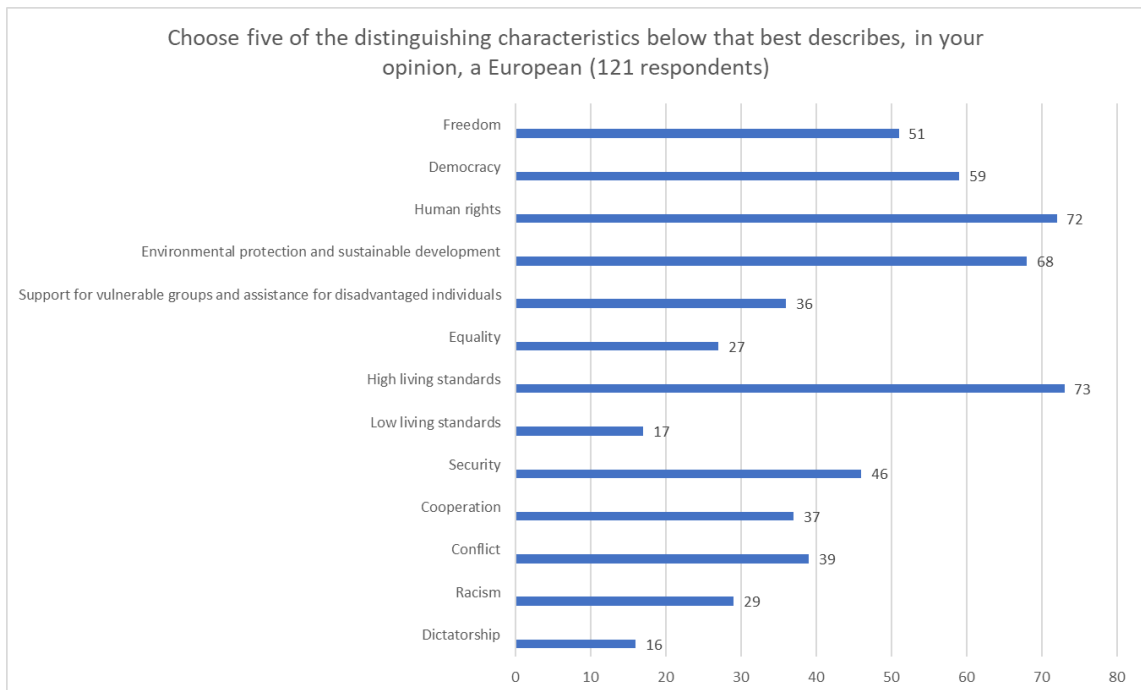


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