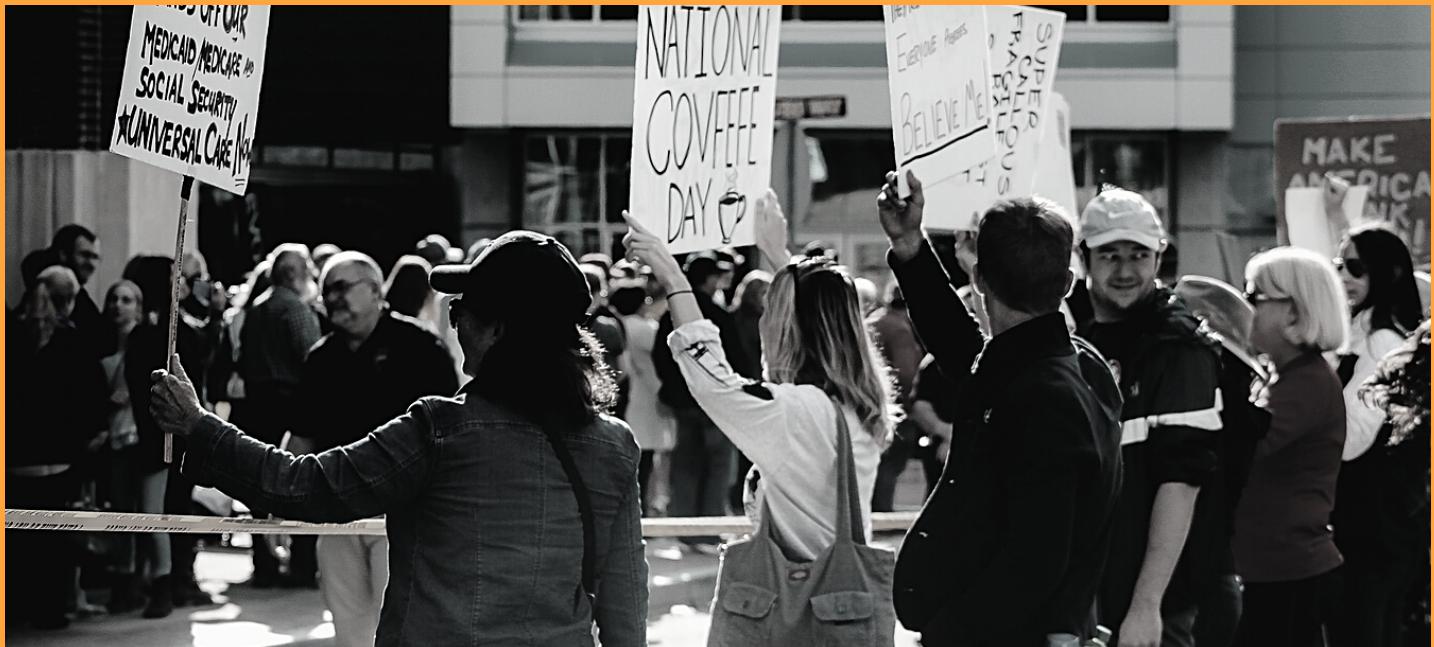


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# REPRESENTATION IN LIMINAL SPACE

SOCIAL ACTION PROJECT UNDER  
THE ESC RESOLVE: VOLUNTEERING FOR PEACE PROJECT



## YOUTH: REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Representation and participation in politics are intrinsically linked. The marginalisation of youth in mainstream media has severed the trust between the younger population and the government. This problem is not unique to the region, affecting many societies across the world. Yet it is an especially acute issue here where it complicates efforts in overcoming harmful legacies and promotes a culture of futility. If policy targeting youth is to be effective, such disconnect must be addressed before proposing steps towards a resolution.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, much of civic life has moved into virtual spaces. Youth are increasingly turning to online media outlets to learn about, participate in and distribute information on a range of significant topics. Social movement and action plans discussed on social media platforms provide entry points into political engagement offline. Involvement in such discussions online can strengthen the feeling of being well-qualified to participate in political or economic conversations.

This is particularly important when considering the voices of groups which are traditionally marginalised in media; virtual environments amplify those voices which may otherwise go unheard. The representation of young people and ethnic minority communities benefit from this emergence of social media as a salient mode of activism. Here, social media provides a space for self-expression where the strength of their voices can be visualised.

Whilst social media can act as an enabler for the political agency of youth, it can also drive polarisation, divisive narratives and disinformation. For many young people there exists few opportunities for exposure to dialogue with people of different backgrounds. Hence, youth in the region find themselves learning about other cultures through informal networks such as their parents and social media. Ensuring information is factual and impartial is a major responsibility which comes with the emergence of utilising online platforms. Social media is important in efforts to amplify peaceful messages, and the role of moderating the transfer of information is a delicate task in order to tackle disinformation whilst remaining impartial.

The 'Bebolucija' protests in 2013 used online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to spread news, initiate discussions and organise logistical support for protestors. In January 2013, a law on identification numbers was suspended due to political indecision on how to amend the law ethnographically. This suspension deprived newborn babies of an identification number required to obtain legal documentation such as medical cards or passports. Initiated by a concerned mother's Facebook post, online protests began to manifest into real life action. The movement used the national identification card acronym, #JMBG, as their rallying cry. Whilst the story was picked up by local media outlets, social media offered a space to overcome ethnographic divisions to reach a larger audience. The protests represent a significant milestone, not just for the use of social media in politics, but also for social mobilisation in Bosnian post-war history. Uniting people of all political and ethnic backgrounds was dependent on impartial media outlets to gain unilateral support.

Today there exists a delicate distinction between moderation and censorship in journalism. Social media offers a platform where the user's contribution imparts the sense that they can participate in unmoderated free speech. It offers a space where ideas, thoughts and emotions can connect globally and forms a large part of today's youth culture. Online social platforms are already serving as bridges for the gaps in the representation of both young people and minority groups. As for future campaigns, the power of social media will be increasingly harnessed as a vital political tool.

