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Extremism in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic



Abstract: - The main aim of this paper is to statistically evaluate the level of knowledge of extremism and the personal inclination toward it among professional soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. While establishing recommendations for its elimination, the authors examined individual factors that affect manifestations of extremism. These recommendations allow us to focus on the education and education of professional soldiers of the armed forces in order to prevent radicalization of their attitudes. The aim of the research was to determine, on the basis of a questionnaire, the group of professional soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic with the greatest intolerant beliefs in relation to minorities in society and the group with the lowest awareness of extremism. The subject of the research was the professional soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic and their knowledge of extremism and intolerant beliefs towards minorities in society. Based on the analysis conducted on a representative sample of professional soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, at the end of the article, the authors identify four groups of these soldiers with the highest potential extremist behaviour. These are groups created from views based on rank, education, age, and type of civil service.

Keywords: Armed forces of the Slovak Republic, extremism, radicalism, statistical evaluation

I. INTRODUCTION

Extremism represents a current and relatively serious security threat in the security environment of the Slovak Republic. The high level of interest in this threat, on the part of various entities, as well as levels of investigation, fully corresponds to the stated statement. Extremism, whether accepted or not, is also significantly influenced by information dissemination mechanisms in society. As a result, the more correct information society has on extremism; the more correct awareness it can create about it.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS AND THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PROBLEM

One common universally acceptable concept of extremism is difficult to find. The main cause is the dynamics of the development of extremist philosophies related to the dynamics of social relationships.

However, the acceptable concept of extremism currently appears to be that enshrined in the Concept of Combating Extremism for the years 2015–2019. It defines extremism as ‘acts and expressions based on the attitudes of an extreme ideology hostile to the democratic system’. Directly or in a certain time horizon, they have a destructive effect on the existing democratic system and its basic attributes [1]. In the case of extremism, these are actions and expressions that attack the system of fundamental rights and freedoms. These are guaranteed by the legal environment of the Slovak Republic and international human rights documents or attempts to make the application of these rights difficult or impossible. A further definition is given in the Report on extremism in the Territoria of the Czech Republic from 2012. It states that extremism is represented by strong ideological positions that deviate from constitutional and legal norms. These are characterised by elements of intolerance and attack basic democratic constitutional principles as defined in the Czech legal environment [2].

A significant problem arises in the case of an attempt to define radicalisation or radicalism as a term clearly separated from the term extremism. The concept of radicalism lacks a very clear definition of its features. These would allow their monosemantic concept into a single comprehensive definition, which would distinguish this concept from the concept of extremism [3]. The political plane is probably the most obvious distinction between extremism and radicalism. In the sense of the available professional literature, radicalism refers to political attitudes. They are on the edge of the democratic political and legal system, but they are not aimed at eliminating it. Political extremism rejects the democratic rule of law and attempts to significantly modify or eliminate it [4]. Radicalism is thus understood as a set of political opinions, whose realisation would lead to extensive changes, but not to the liquidation of democracy as such [5].

The legality of the action is the key difference between extremism and radicalism. Radicals determine their

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activities within the legal framework, but do not exceed the legal limits and respect the applicable legal legislation. In the case of a radical, this refers to a person who demands a thorough, fundamental, uncompromising solution to the problem. Such radical attitudes can be exemplified, for example, in the demand for the re-introduction of the death penalty, the imposition of life imprisonment for drug dealers, or the ban on abortion [6]. This distinction consists in distinguishing ideologies, attitudes, opinions, or actions influenced by them. This difference is a criterion to which objections are difficult to find. Due to the legal environment of the Slovak Republic, we could consider all other extreme views as radical. These views are not so anti-socially serious that they are reasonable to label them criminal in the form of extremist crimes.

III. AIM AND METHODOLOGY

The main aim of the paper is a statistical evaluation of the level of knowledge about extremism and the personal inclination toward it among professional soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. To achieve this aim, the authors applied basic and specific scientific research methods. Various aspects of the work, such as analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, comparistics, abstraction, and the questionnaire method, were employed across parts of the work.

The analysis was used mainly in processing of the obtained partial knowledge and conclusions.

From the point of view of the tendency to extremism, the synthesis of conclusions enabled the identification of individual risk groups in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. The synthesis was also used in the postulation of the causes of radicalism and extremism and recommendations for their destruction in the processing of data from available expert documents.

The induction method was used mainly in the case of receiving conclusions necessary for systemic recommendations for the elimination of radicalism and extremism based on the data obtained. Induction was also used in the case of postulating the concepts of extremism and radicalism and in the evaluation of the level of the legal environment in the field of extremism in the Slovak Republic.

Deduction was used in the formulation of tasks for the individual phases of dismantling extremism and radicalism. Due to the breadth of the researched issue, the abstraction method was necessary to separate essential and important parts of the researched issue.

The comparison was used to compare the recommendations and causes for the elimination of extremism. These were obtained from available expert documents. The conclusions of the research carried out on an available sample of professional soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic were subsequently compared with those of the research committee.

The questionnaire method was used to obtain data on the state of awareness of extremism in the environment of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, as well as on the inclination to intolerant beliefs in this environment.

To determine the state of extremism in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, the authors conducted research using a questionnaire on an available sample of professional soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. The latter aimed at identifying the level of knowledge about extremism and the level of inclination towards intolerance, radicalism, and extremism.

Data obtained from the questionnaire were subjected to analysis. On the basis of this analysis, the most qualified ignorance and the most intolerant attitude towards minorities were identified as the following questions. The questions requiring the most demanding knowledge of extremism and questions identifying the most tolerant attitude of the respondents were also identified. Answers to these questions were evaluated in terms of education, age, rank, and type of civil service of the respondents.

As a result of the data obtained in this way, subsequently it was possible to identify two groups of professional soldiers in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. The first group was represented by soldiers with the most qualified deficiencies in the level of knowledge about extremism. The second group consisted of soldiers with the most intolerant attitude towards minorities in society.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey conducted by questionnaire included a total of 183 respondents. They represented professional soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. Of them, 47 represented members of the Officer Course of university graduates. 35 respondents were cadets of the Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik. 21 respondents work in the Land Forces. 19 respondents work in the Air Force. The 18 respondents work in the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. 12 respondents work in the General Staff. 10 respondents work at the Joint Operational Command and 10 respondents work at the Personnel Office of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. 4 respondents work at the Logistics Security Office. 2 respondents work at the Office of the Chief Medical Officer and the Special Operations Forces, and finally one respondent at the Bratislava Garrison

Headquarters. 1 respondent works in the President's Honour Guard and 1 at the Stationary Communication and Information Technology Base.

Almost half (48.1%) of the respondents perform permanent civil service, 44.8% preparatory civil service and 7.1% temporary civil service (Fig. 1).

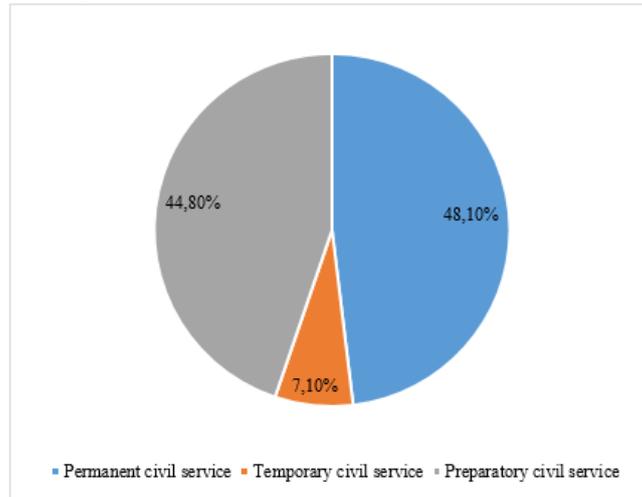


Fig. 1: Respondents Civil Service

Approximately half of the respondents were officers (52.5%), 44.8% of respondents belonged to the team and 2.2% to non-commissioned officers (Fig. 2).

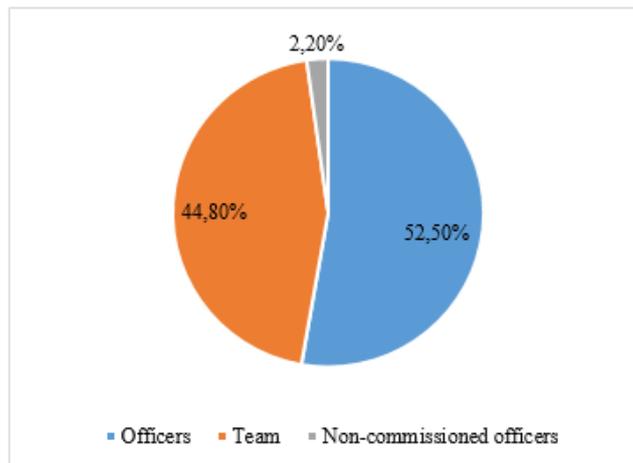


Fig. 2: Rank corps of the respondents

The largest group of respondents (37.2%) consisted of respondents aged 36-44 years. 31.1% of the respondents were in the age range of the 18-26 years, 16.9% of respondents between the ages of 27-35 and 14.2% between the ages of 45-53. 1 of the respondents was over 53 years old, representing 0.5% (Fig. 3).

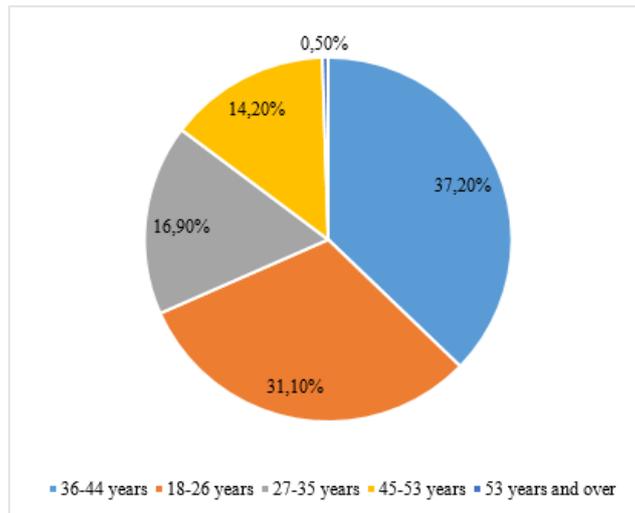


Fig. 3: Age composition of respondents

Three-quarters of respondents (75.4%) had a 2nd degree university education as their highest education. A tenth (10.4%) had a 1st-level university education, 12.6% of the respondents had a complete secondary education with a high school diploma, 1 respondent had a secondary education and 2 respondents had a 3rd-level university education (Fig. 4).

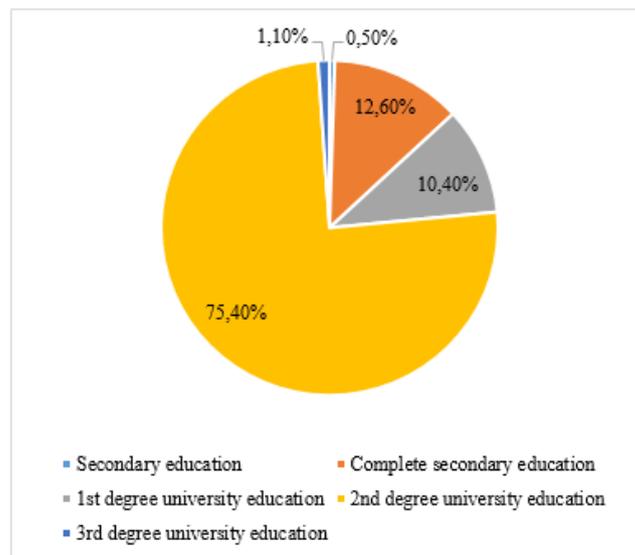


Fig. 4: The respondents' highest level of education

When asked which of the adjectives can be correctly attributed to extremism, less than a third of the respondents (29.1%) were able to correctly label ecological extremism. About 40% of the respondents attributed the incorrect adjective 'neoliberal' to extremism. The adjective 'democratic' was incorrectly assigned to extremism by 8 respondents. 79.7% of the respondents were able to identify 'right-wing extremism' (Fig. 5).

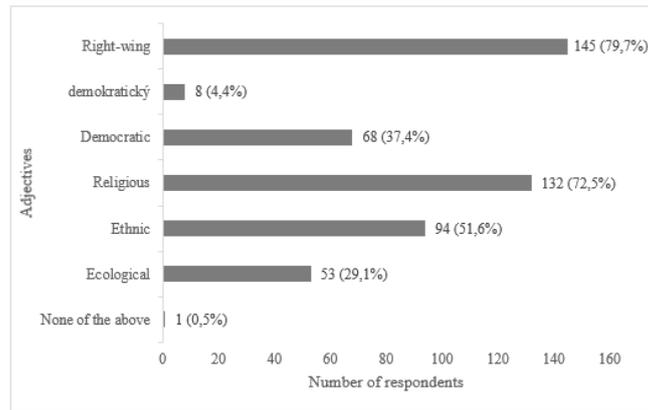


Fig. 5: Respondents' answers to the question: Which adjectives can be correctly attributed to extremism?

Almost all respondents (97.8%) were able to correctly label an athlete with a raised right hand as a manifestation of extremism. Nearly 90 % of the respondents were able to correctly identify a member of the Ku Klux Klan as a manifestation of extremism. Only every second respondent (54.1%) considers Slovak conscripts to be extremists, and even 10% of respondents were able to correctly identify the manifestation of ecological extremism. One fifth of the respondents consider the appearance of Conchita Wurst to be a manifestation of extremism. It seems almost identical to their share (19.1%) who consider transgender toilets to be such a manifestation. Nearly 30 respondents (15.8%) perceive two men kissing each other as an extremist expression (Fig. 6).

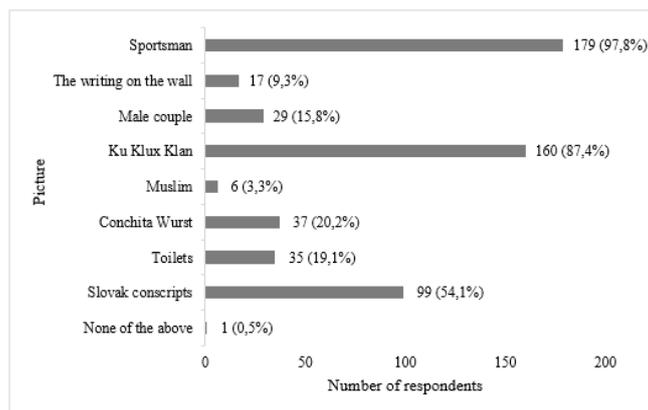


Fig. 6: Respondents' answers to the question: Which behavior can be described as extremist?

Respondents were asked to mark on the catalog of signs those of them that are correctly considered extremist. More than a third of the respondents did not mark the so-called extremist sign as the wolf hook used by the Hlinka Guards SS division (39.5%) and the guard flag (36.8%). Only every second respondent (48.4%) knew the extremist code in the number "18" and the hidden behind the number "28" was not known by 95.1% of all respondents. 6% of the respondents did not consider any of the signs presented to be extremist. Among the respondents, only 12.6% were able to identify the logo of ecological extremists (Animal Liberation Front) as extremist (Fig. 7).

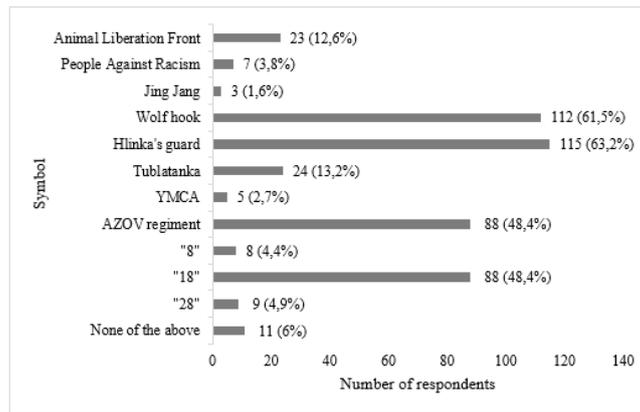


Fig. 7: Respondents' answers to the question: Which symbols can be correctly considered extremist?

Public questioning of fascism crimes was considered by almost 80% of respondents to be an extremist crime. Public questioning of the crimes of communism was viewed by only 41% of respondents as an extremist crime. Almost 60% of respondents did not classify publicly questioning communism crimes as an extremist crime. The percentage of respondents who marked them as crimes of fascist ideology was 20.2%. Almost 23.5% of the respondents viewed the application of apartheid as not considered a crime of extremism. Only about half of the respondents were able to identify the public denigration of the language of a nation (48.1%) or the application of apartheid (45.9%) as a crime of extremism. Almost half (48.1%) of the respondents wrongly considered displaying extremist material for collecting purposes and use as a crime of extremism (Fig. 8).

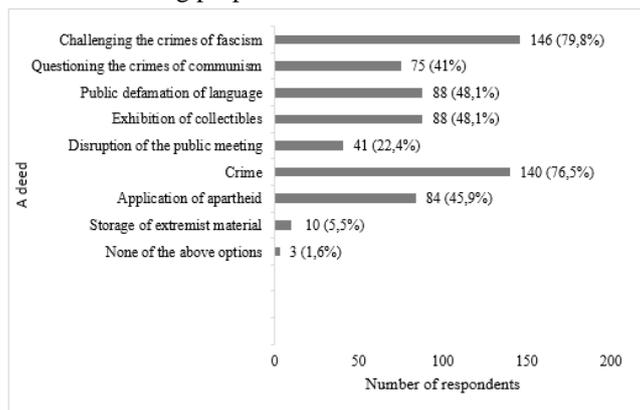


Fig. 8: Respondents' answers to the question: Which action is a criminal act of extremism in the Slovak Republic?

65.7% of respondents correctly identified Criminal Law No. 300/2005 Coll. as a legal regulation in which a sign of extremist illegal activity can be found. The right option in the form of Act of the Slovak National Council on Offenses No. 372/1990 Coll. Only 11.6% of the respondents were able to mark correctly (Fig. 9).

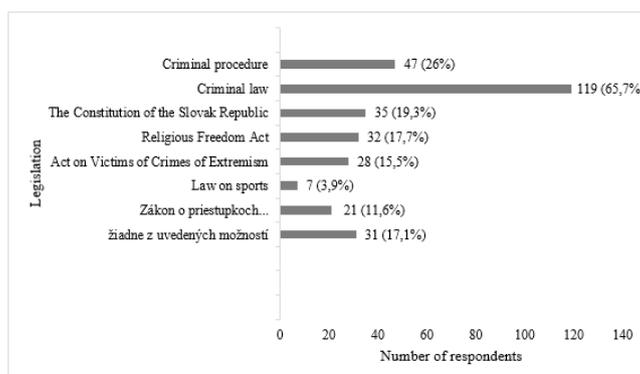


Fig. 9: Respondents' answers to the question: In which legal regulation can one find signs of extremist illegal activity?

To the question of whether the respondent would be bothered if he witnessed negative views on Islam from a person who takes a negative attitude towards refugees fleeing to the European Union, 26.4% of the respondents answered 'definitely yes'. As such, 33.5% of respondents would rather be bothered by it, and 25.8% of respondents could not take a position on this issue. Such opinions would definitely not hinder, or rather would not hinder, 14.2% of the respondents (Figure 10). Such opinions would certainly not hinder, or rather would not hinder, 14.2% of respondents (Fig. 10).

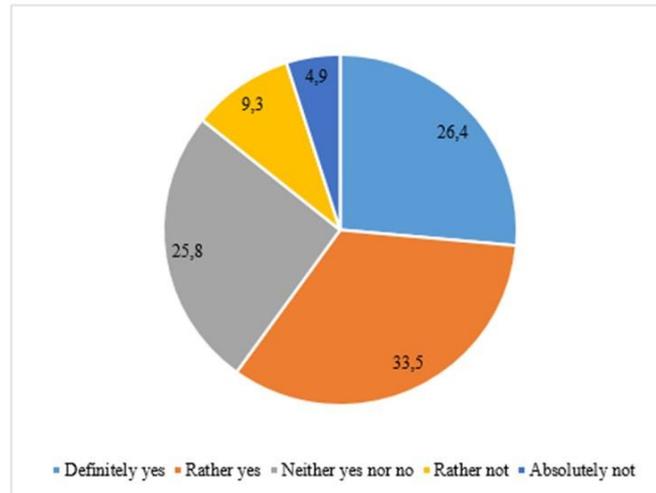


Fig. 10: Respondents' answers to the question: Would a person with a negative attitude towards Islam and refugees bother the respondent?

In the case of a question concerning homosexuals in the ranks of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, 22% of respondents answered that they definitely accept such a presence. Almost 30% of the respondents prefer to accept the presence of homosexuals. The survey data indicate that 22.5% of the respondents were unable to comment on the question. One quarter (26.4%) of the respondents is definitely bothered by this presence or rather do not accept it (Fig. 11).

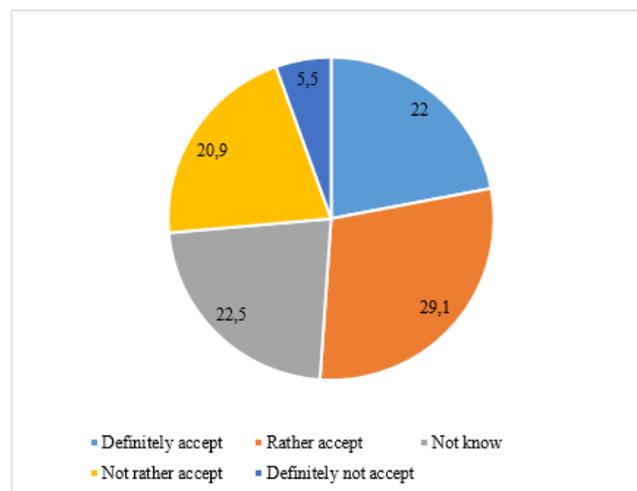


Fig. 11: Respondents' answers to the question: Would the presence of homosexuals in the ranks of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic bother the respondent?

In the case of respondents who were asked whether it would bother them if their superior was a Roma, 43.2% answered 'definitely no' and 28.4% answered rather no. In the above figure, almost 72% of respondents are thus able to accept a Roma as their superior. Despite the fact that 3 respondents (1.6%) would absolutely oppose a Roma as a superior, 13 respondents (7.1%) would prefer to rather say yes. Almost 20% of the respondents could not answer the question (Fig. 12).

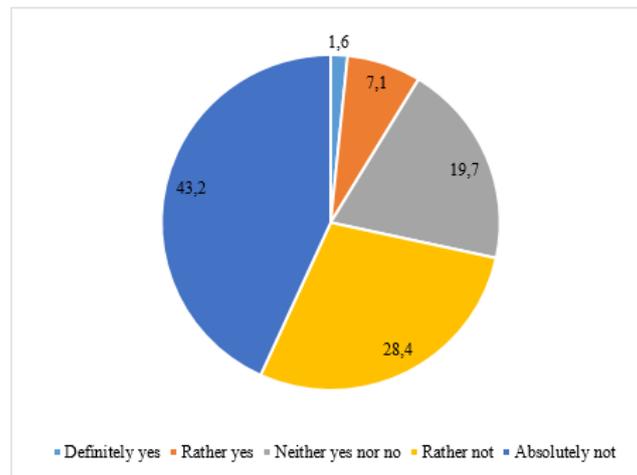


Fig. 12: Respondents' answers to the question: Would it bother the respondent if his superior was a Roma?

Among all respondents, 36.6% of them would definitely interfere or would rather interfere than not if their closest family member chose a person belonging to the LGBTI+ community as their life partner. This fact would certainly not bother almost 20% of the respondents, but rather it did not bother 27.3% of the respondents. 16.4% of the respondents were unable to take a position (Fig. 13).

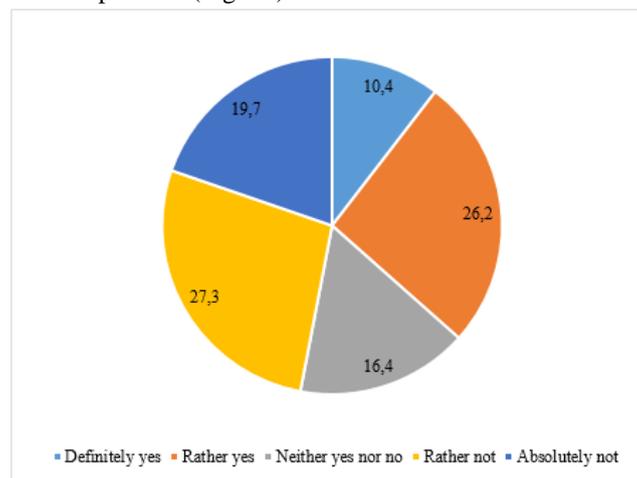


Fig. 13: Respondents' answers to the question: Would it bother the respondent if his closest family member chose a person belonging to the LGBTI+ community as his partner of life?

62.1% of the respondents answered 'definitely yes' to the question of whether it would bother the respondents if their family member chose a person who subscribes to an extremist movement as their partner of life. This fact would be more hindering to 28.6% of respondents. Almost 91% of respondents would be bothered by an extremist among their closest people. Its presence would certainly not bother only 1 respondent (0.5%) and 6 respondents (3.3%) would not bother rather than bother. The respondents, who were only 5.5% of the total, were unable to take a position on the question (Fig. 14).

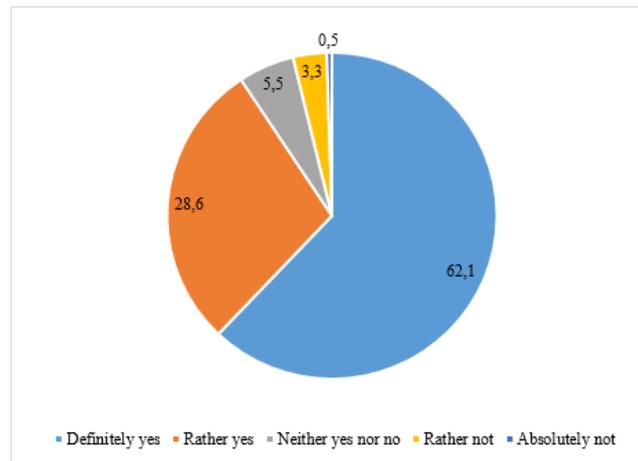


Fig. 14: Respondents' answers to the question: Would it bother the respondent if his closest family member chose as his life partner a person who subscribes to an extremist movement?

The last question focused on the respondent's willingness to choose his closest family member a person belonging to the Jewish minority in Slovakia as his life partner. For 75.9% of respondents, this fact did not, or rather did not bother them, bother them. The respondents indicated that they did not indicate a mark of response in the sense that this circumstance would certainly hinder them. In this circumstance, the 6% of the respondents would have the opportunity to hinder rather than not hinder the situation. 18% could not comment on the question (Figure 15).

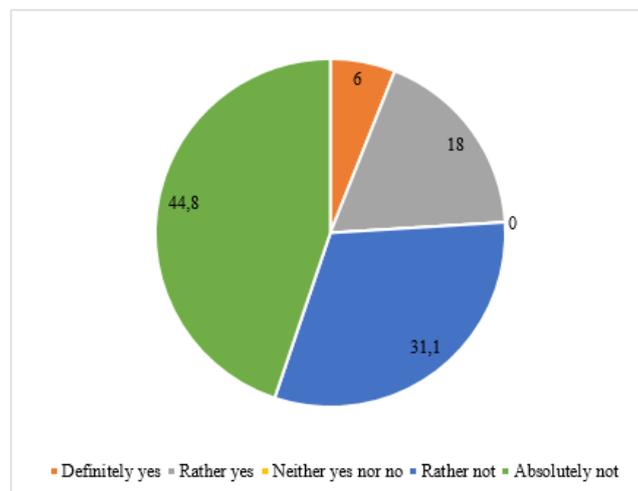


Fig. 15: Respondents' answers to the question: Would it bother the respondent if his closest family member chose a person belonging to the Jewish minority in the Slovak Republic as his life partner?

As part of the evaluation of the survey, a selected range of answers was analysed in detail depending on the age, rank, education, and type of civil service of the respondents. The data obtained in this manner about the individual groups were later divided into two categories. And this is for data related to data on the knowledge of extremism (obtained by analysing 18 responses) and data on respondents' intolerant or tolerant beliefs of respondents' respondents in relation to minorities in society (14 monitored responses).

The data category on the composition of the respondents who answered questions of knowledge nature was divided into two groups. For the first group, the highest number from correct answers of individual groups of respondents to the most demanding questions about extremism was monitored. Among them were questions focused on all possible adjectives of extremism, questions about Slovak conscripts, identification of environmental extremism or extremist symbolism in number 28.

The highest knowledge of extremism has with the 36-44-year-old survey group, the group of university graduates, officers, and cadets of the Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik. Furthermore, this group included professional soldiers in the temporary civil service and the permanent civil service (Table I).

In case of the second group, the highest number of qualified errors, which each group committed with the most easily identifiable incorrect or correct answer about extremism, was monitored. These were answers in which

extremism was inadvertently associated with the adjective democratic or neoliberal and answers in which the public display of a collector's collection was considered a crime of extremism. Specifically, this group also included responses deemed extremist and qualifying attacks on Jews, Islam, and women as such. Answers that identified the Penal Code as the source of law governing extremism or answers that considered the public approval of the crimes of fascism and communism as a criminal offence and were also included in this category.

In the case of the monitored range of questions, the group of youngest respondents aged 18-26 years, the group of secondary school graduates, and the group of staff and cadets of the Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik had qualified ignorance about extremism (Table II).

Table I: The number of times a given group of respondents received the highest number of correct answers in the selected range of qualified knowledge questions about extremism

Category	The number of times the group got the highest number of correct answers
Age	
18-26 years	0
27-35 years	1
36-44 years	3
45-53 years	1
53 years and over	1
Education	
Higher education	5
Secondary education	1
Corps rank	
Generals	1
Officers	3
Non-commissioned officers	1
Team	2
Type of civil service	
Permanent	2
Temporary	2
Preparatory	2

Table II: The number of times a given group of respondents received the highest number of wrong answers in the selected range of the simplest knowledge questions about extremism

Category	The number of times the group got the highest number of correct answers
Age	
18-26 years	6
27-35 years	4
36-44 years	1
45-53 years	2
53 years and over	3
Education	
Higher education	4
Secondary education	9
Corps rank	
Generals	3
Officers	1
Non-commissioned officers	5
Team	6
Type of civil service	
Permanent	7
Temporary	4
Preparatory	1

In the case of the second category of data on intolerant or tolerant beliefs of respondents in relation to minorities in society, they were divided into two groups. The first group consisted of data on the most numerous groups of respondents who identified as extremism the appearance of Conchita Wurst, the designation of toilets for transgender persons, or a male homosexual couple. This group also included data on the most numerous groups of respondents who would definitely not be bothered if they witnessed negative views of Islam or if a member of their family was an extremist, and who, on the contrary, would definitely be bothered by homosexuals in the armed forces, Roma as a superior, or a member of the LGBTI+ community as the life partner of their family member.

On the other hand, the second group consisted of data on the most numerous groups of respondents who would definitely not be bothered by homosexuals in the armed forces, a Roma as their superior, a person from the LGBTI+ community or from the Jewish minority as a partner of their family member, and who would definitely be bothered by an extremist in the family.

In the case of the second group, the responses testifying to a tolerant view of minorities in society were analysed. Based on the answers, it can be concluded that the most tolerant group of respondents was represented by groups of respondents aged 18 to 44 years, a group of university graduates, officers, and cadets from the Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik, together with professional soldiers in the temporary and permanent civil service (Table III).

In the case of the first group of data, we were interested in respondents who had the most intolerant attitude toward minorities. Based on the answers, the most intolerant group of the respondents can be concluded to be represented by the group of respondents aged 45 to 53 years. In this case, as well, a swarm of officers and a group of university-educated and professional soldiers are also in temporary civil service (Table IV).

Table III: The number of times a given group of respondents received the highest number of answers demonstrating the respondents' tolerance of minorities in society

Category	The number of times the group got the highest number of correct answers
Age	
18-26 years	2
27-35 years	2
36-44 years	2
45-53 years	0
53 years and over	0
Education	
Higher education	4
Secondary education	2
Corps rank	
Generals	0
Officers	3
Non-commissioned officers	0
Team	4
Type of civil service	
Permanent	4
Temporary	1
Preparatory	1

Table IV: The number of times a given group of respondents received the highest number of answers demonstrating the respondents' intolerance towards minorities in society

Category	The number of times the group got the highest number of correct answers
Age	
18-26 years	1
27-35 years	1
36-44 years	1
45-53 years	5
53 years and over	0
Education	
Higher education	5
Secondary education	3
Corps rank	
Generals	0
Officers	6
Non-commissioned officers	1
Team	1
Type of civil service	
Permanent	2
Temporary	5
Preparatory	1

CONCLUSION

The findings of the research conducted on a sample of professional soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic yielded remarkable findings. The groups of university graduates and officers represent the group with the largest share of professional soldiers with qualified knowledge about extremism and with the most tolerant attitude towards minorities in society. However, the same groups also represented the groups with the highest

proportion of respondents with an intolerant attitude toward minorities in society. From the above, it can be concluded that increasing knowledge about extremism alone is not capable of eliminating extremism itself.

Equally interesting is the qualified number of data on the intolerant attitude toward minorities in the case of the same age group, namely the group of respondents 45 to 53 years of age. In the process of acquiring values, a systemic failure must have been evident in the identified age group of professional soldiers.

The analysis of the basic factors influencing extremism was equally interesting as part of the research. Age was mentioned as one of the most mentioned factors in the case of the young generation, which is supposed to represent the riskiest group prone to extremism. However, this factor was refuted in the case of research carried out by questionnaire on a sample of professional soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic.

Notable was also the placement of training sessions focused on tolerance education as a method of eliminating extremism. It was ranked first among the most recommended methods with qualified distance from the other methods.

Consequently, the conclusions resulting from the conducted research can serve as an impetus for further scientific research leading to the verification of their conclusions. They can also lead to more detailed analysis research.

It is important to pay attention to building such a society that can objectively and empathetically approach the solution of current social issues without personal radicalization of its attitudes. In the case of eliminating extremism, however, detection of extremist acts is difficult. This represents a very lengthy and demanding process requiring a special approach in securing evidence of this type of crime. For the reasons mentioned above, it will be extremely timely to pay attention to the correct terminology in the case of defining extremism, its classification as well as possible ways of detecting it or ways in which it can be effectively fought.

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