

Innovation of Methodical Sheets for Teachers of Civics from the Need of Prevention of Extremism Manifestation and Education Towards Democratic Society Point of View¹

ABSTRACT

The Department of Political Science of the Alexander Dubček University in Trenčín during 2018 - 2020 aims to solve the project of the Cultural and Educational Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic (known as KEGA project). The KEGA Project The Innovation of Methodical Sheets for Teachers of Civics from the need of Prevention of Extremism and Education for Democratic Citizenship is focused on the analysis of the phenomenon of extremism and the other forms of intolerance towards other members of society in terms of several social sciences (political science, international relations, history, sociology, massmedia studies) with the intention to innovate methodical sheets for civics education teachers. In the final phase of project a synthesis of these views will take place to make curriculums easier to use for teachers within civic education courses and at the same time, to strengthen the acute need to prevent angry demonstrations. This synthesis should create more effective upbringing and education towards democratic citizenship. The aim of the project is to analyze selected aspects related to issues of extremism in theory, the synthesis of which contributes to problem solving, resulting in new methodical sheets in an online available format. The acquired knowledge will be available to the professional public, especially to primary and secondary school teachers in the Slovak Republic, in the framework of workshops, thematic lectures and summer schools.

KEY WORDS

Extremism. Values. Methodical book. Civics. Prevention.

1. Introduction

In spite of the active education in citizenship and democratic values in the Slovak Republic, angry demonstrations in society had grown within the last few years, at the same time started appearing opinions which doubt even the Holocaust and also admire totalitarian regimes and their representatives.

The alarming threat of spreading extremism in schools is highlighted by the results of the 2016 Survey, which was conducted by the State School Inspectorate on a sample of students of the 8th year of elementary schools and of the 2nd year of high school. The majority of elementary and secondary school students met at school with the symbols and manifestations of extremism, whether in the form of t-shirts and other clothing with typical symbols, but also through the propagation of materials that promote extremism. As per the authors of the

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publication „*Current Rightward Extremism and Ultranationalism in Slovakia. Status, Trends, Support*“ Grigorij Mesezníkov and Ol'ga Gyárfášová from the Institute for Public Affairs, the success of rightward extremism in Slovakia is largely based on the failure of standard political parties and institutions to fulfil their expected roles. According to Grigorij Mesezníkov, the co-author of the study, the example of the radicalization of political parties in Slovakia caused the refugee crisis.

Those against the reallocation of refugees on the basis of the so-called „mandatory quotas“ included not only former Prime Minister Robert Fico but also representatives of opposition parties.

The teaching of civic education in Slovak schools is in line with the concept of education reform after 2008. The aim of this concept is activating students in lessons, introducing innovative teaching methods and learning for practical lives. The teaching of civic education is formed by several generally binding legal norms in the education sector. The basic norm is Act no. 245/2008 Z.z. which defines several principles on which education and upbringing are based in the Slovak Republic. (Kredátus, 2013, p. 6) Another norm, resp. the legal norm which regulates the teaching of civic education is the State Educational Program - the education area Humans and society for the 2nd level of elementary school taught in Slovak and of course, the framework teaching plan for grammar schools taught in Slovak, which is valid since 2011. The State Pedagogical Institute, in accordance with the fulfillment of the tasks resulting from the Conception of Combating Extremism for the years 2015-2019, also published an 11 pages brochure on the topic of Prevention of Extremism and Radicalism.

However, the issue of radicalization and extremism is extensive, diverse and difficult, especially for teachers working with youth. In addition, radicalization is a dynamic process influenced by the changing of external conditions and the behavior of key figures. For example, key figures from an extremist environment regularly change strategies to avoid interference from state security forces, while at the same time being able to influence as many potential adherents as possible. On the other hand, students and young people especially often change their unstable attitudes to current social issues. We agree with the views of several experts that it is necessary to work on further updated teaching aids in this area for schools.

Focus and description of the project

The proposed project focuses primarily on the thematic area of the Development Program of Maternal, Primary and Secondary Education (Perspectives), addressing multiple content themes in the thematic area. Based on the analysis of the state of the framework teaching plan and educational norms for the subject of civic education under the State Educational Program in the Education Area of Humans and Society in Regional Education, new methodical sheets for the subject of civic education will be proposed, which will be part of the lifelong education of pedagogical staff at elementary and secondary schools.

The main objective of the present project is to create a concept and content of modern electronic methodological sheets of civic education, reflecting the content of the subject with the requirements and needs of society and practice so as to be able to eliminate extremist demonstrations more effectively, to build natural patriotism, to strengthen teaching of human rights and to improve education and upbringing for democratic citizenship in schools, in society.

In view of the effective fulfilment of the set goal, we have also set partial goals (PGs), which are the following:

- CP1: Draw up a project implementation plan.
- CP2: Analysis of the status of the framework teaching plan and educational norms for the subject of civic education in the framework of the State Educational Program in the Educational Area Humans and society from the current need to prevent stronger

expressions of extremism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, terrorism and other forms of intolerance, from the multidisciplinary perspective of several social sciences (political science, international relations, history, sociology, mass media studies).

- CP3: Implementation of empirical research on extremism and education for democratic citizenship by the teachers of civic education at elementary and secondary schools.
- CP4: Start a new web presentation of the project.
- CP5: Implementation of modern electronic methodical sheets into practice in the context of lifelong education of pedagogical staff at elementary and secondary schools, in the form of organizing and implementing a cycle of workshops and discussions during summer schools as an experience form of education for teachers in elementary and secondary education.
- CP6: Organizing and conducting a professional seminar.
- CP7: Active participation of research team members at scientific and professional events in Slovakia and abroad with a view to presenting on-going tasks of the project.
- CP8: Publishing professional and scientific articles of the members of the research team in books and periodicals in Slovakia and abroad.

Status of the project

The research project is currently in its second phase.

In the first phase of the project, the members of the team conducted empirical research on extremism and education for democratic citizenship at the teachers of civic education at elementary and secondary schools. In the initial phase of the research, they focused on the elaboration of relevant theoretical backgrounds, the conceptual origins of the research, the methodical process and the definition of the research file. The collected data were analyzed, interpreted and created the basis for the processing of methodical sheets.

In the first phase of the project, an analysis of the status of the framework teaching plans and educational norms for the subject of civic education within the framework of the State Educational Program in the Education Area of Humans and Society was also elaborated on the current need to prevent intensifying expressions of extremism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, terrorism and other forms of intolerance from the multidisciplinary point of view of several sociological disciplines (political science, international relations, history, sociology, mass media studies). A new website for the project was launched at <http://stopextremizmu.sk/>.

During the second phase of the project, at the Alexander Dubček University in Trenčín, a summer school for citizenship education for teachers of secondary and elementary schools of civic education was launched. This summer school was organized on the 27th and 28th of August 2018 in Trenčín. This summer school was connected with the discussion of the phenomenon of extremism in Slovakia. The Summer School of Education is also being prepared for the summer months in 2019, where besides lectures and workshops a discussion with publicly known politicians and experts in the area of extremism and education of democracy in schools will also be organized.

At the same time, the team members of the project organized a professional symposium on Education and Upbringing for Democratic Citizenship in the Slovak Republic, which took place on 8th March 2019 in Trenčianske Teplice as part of the Scientific Conference on Policy Issues VIII. Within this event, the ongoing achievements of the set goals of the project were presented. The next part of the second phase is the publishing of professional and scientific articles at domestic and foreign events.

In the third phase, the results will be implemented into the creation of modern electronic methodical sheets of civic education, reflecting in their content the needs of society and practice so as to be able to more effectively eliminate extremist expressions, to build natural patriotism,

to strengthen education for human rights and to overall improve education and upbringing for democratic citizenship in schools and in society. In the final phase of the project, these views will be synthesized in order to make them easier to use for pedagogues in the teaching plans of civic education, while reinforcing the acute need to prevent hate demonstrations and create more effective education for democratic citizenship.

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Marcel Lincényi
Marcela Barčáková

Tackling Misinformation in an Open Society

ABSTRACT

This article explains how to respond to misinformation and disinformation when the cure risks being worse than the disease. It refers also about potential harms and threats to open societies from over-reaction but also urgent actions to protect democracy and elections. It is also important to talk about the building of public resilience and a future-proof response to changing technology..

KEY WORDS

Disinformation. Misinformation. Open Society. Tackling.

Introduction

This article explains the work of Full Fact staff. It is devoted to factchecking in a public debate. The original work gives a unique evidence base about how misinformation arises and spreads. It is divided into several parts. First of all, the paper points out the lack of research about the extent of the harm caused by misinformation and disinformation. The facts of it are well-established, but without evidence of the scale and impact of the problem it is harder to design some proportionate responses. An example should be set internationally. For instance, how open societies should respond. Secondly, the paper argues for two actions to protect the integrity of elections and democracy generally. That is to mandate transparency for political advertising in real time and in machine readable formats and also imprint rules to apply online.