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**Research Into Correlations Between Deformations of
Political Awareness and the Increase
of Political Extremism
Among Secondary School Students
in the Košice Self-governing Region
and the Prešov Self-governing Region**

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Professional publication

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of political extremism has a relatively long research period, and it should be emphasised that, especially in the recent period, it has received increased attention in the political science community not just in Slovakia but also abroad. Given the specifics of this anti-democratic form of political discourse, which has not only explicit forms, but also highly sophisticated manifestations against democracy (extremism of the centre, or centrist extremism), it is also addressed by experts of other humanities and social disciplines: history, psychology, anthropology, sociology, etc. The common interest of this professional community is both to analyse different forms of extremist discourses and narratives, to search for national specificities of extremism that are anchored in their historical, social and cultural contexts, but at the same time to reveal transnational extremist influences within a globalizing world and to propose evidence-based strategies to counter extremist discourses.

The issue of extremism, including extremist ideology and the spread of political extremism in the school environment is also addressed by the staff of the Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. In the latest professional book publication with monographic character, which is published under the title *Research Into Correlations Between Deformations of Political Awareness and the Increase of Political Extremism Among Secondary School Students in the Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing Region.*, they present the results of the research carried out within the VEGA project No. 1/0321/21 *Research Into Correlations Between Deformations of Political Awareness and the Increase of Political Extremism Among Secondary School Students in the Košice Self-governing Region (hereinafter also as the "KSR") and the Prešov Self-governing Region (hereinafter also as the "PSR").*

The novelty of this research is in the opening of a space for correlations between the distortions of political awareness and their impact on the increase of political extremism among students of selected secondary grammar schools in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions. Political awareness as a highly specified and specialised component of social awareness is not given due attention in the Slovak professional discourse, although it is a part of the overall social system in society. Its specificity is due to the fact that we may define its content and form, which are sufficiently distinguished from the content and form of other parts of social awareness. Of the team of authors of this publication, only the authoress of this introduction analyses it in detail. She defines it theoretically and methodologically. Since this type of awareness is an individual characteristic of an individual citizen, she brings to professional attention the characteristics of the four stages of political awareness. The first stage is the *naive, spontaneous, mass* political awareness characterised by stereotyping of judging and evaluating political phenomena and events. She characterises the second stage (*insightful*) as the everyday, experiential activity of the citizen, which already has the characteristics of a more deliberate perception and evaluation of political phenomena. The third level of political awareness may be described as *professional* political awareness. Its bearers are usually active participants in political life, therefore they are usually the bearers of distinct political attitudes, opinions and interests, which they seek to promote in real party-political life. The *theoretical* political awareness is the highest level of political awareness. It belongs primarily to specialists, political theorists, political scientists, experts in the field of research into political phenomena; its bearers are also some active politicians who have come from an academic background.

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Ján Ruman explores the theory, methodology, and practice of political extremism in this volume. He pays special attention to the typology and classification of political extremism, and based on the dominant research task of the project, he pays special attention to the relationship between youth and political extremism and the methodology of research through a questionnaire method.

The last part of this book publication processes the results of a questionnaire that measured the correlations between the distortions of political awareness and their impact on the increase of political extremism among students of selected secondary grammar schools in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions. The authoress of the Introduction focused on the perception of the phenomenon of democracy among these students, Daniel Dobiaš investigated the phenomenon of human rights, Jana Šutajová investigated the perception of attitudes towards nativism, Tomáš Dvorský investigated the phenomenon of media, and Gabriel Eštok investigated the perception of European integration.

The results presented in this publication are novel not merely from a theoretical-methodological point of view, but also from the perspective of examining political extremism in school practice. It is to be hoped that it will serve not just the professional public, but also political practice in finding ways to eliminate and remove possible causes of the development of extremist manifestations in the public space and to create effective barriers to it.

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1 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL AWARENESS AND POLITICAL EXTREMISM (Marcela GBÚROVÁ, Ján RUMAN)

1.1 Terminological and theoretical-methodological contexts of political awareness

1.1.1 Terminological definitions of awareness, politics, social awareness, political awareness

1.1.1.1 Awareness

There are many open issues around awareness research in the scientific, especially philosophical, psychological, and medical communities. Evidence is provided not just by national and international dictionary and textbook sources, in which the concept of awareness has multiple interpretations, but also by monographic and journal publications that confirm this finding. In particular, a common issue in interpreting the concept of awareness is how to address the connection between the mental (causal) and physical (phenomenal) nature of awareness. The issue is also in the apparent paradox of having to explain something that is also an explanatory tool¹. There are also open questions related to awareness or mind: How to define more precisely the overlapping terms derived from the concept of awareness (realisation, thinking, experiencing, etc.)? To classify states of awareness into conscious, subconscious, aware, and unconscious? What is the purpose of awareness, what is its evolutionary function? Can awareness be attributed to other animals or non-living systems? Will the development of computer technology mean a dramatic change in relation to the study

¹ WILKES, K. Yishi, Spirit, Mind and Consciousness. In. al. *Consciousness in Contemporary Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. DAVIDSON, D. Mentálne udalosti. (Mental Events). In. *Čin, myseľ, jazyk*. Bratislava: Archa, 1997. DENNET, D. *Záhada ľudského vedomia. (Mystery of Human Consciousness)*. Bratislava: Európa, 2007. ECCLES, J. *Evolution of the Brain: Creation of the Self*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

of the structure and function of states of awareness in normal and pathological brains? What is the nature and function of the self? Where does the soul make its home? Who are we as human beings...?¹ In this context, I would like to recall the vision of exploring and explaining the mind or awareness and its contexts presented by the well-known Slovak philosopher Silvia Gáliková, who has long been concerned with these issues: *'The fear or apprehension that the scientific investigation of the nature of the human mind and soul will deprive human beings of their "essence", "identity" "spirituality", or "inner world" is fabricated. Not only does no one take anything from anyone, but neither can they take anything away - whether it is the object of belief, the quality of experience or the depth of feeling. And whether and how one accepts the findings of scientific inquiry is for one to decide. Have we been impoverished, for example, by the replacement of the geocentric view by the heliocentric view? Can new knowledge and theory perhaps take "something" away from our experience of the beauty of sunrises and sunsets? Hardly so. The inability to appreciate the significance of scientific inquiry or to "imagine" a certain state of affairs, such as "how matter might think," is not about the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, but about the qualities of the knower. In the case of the investigation and understanding of human awareness, this is doubly true.'*²

1.1.1.2 Politics

Politics has many definitions, and even more attributes. Broadly defined, politics is the process and method of decision-making by a group of people with diverse interests and opinions

¹ GÁLIKOVÁ, S. and E. GÁL. *Antológia filozofie mysle. (Anthology of Philosophy of Mind.)* Bratislava: Kalligram, 2003. KOUKOLÍK, F. *Já: O vztahu mozgu, vědomí a sebevědomování. (I: On the relation of the brain, consciousness and self-awareness.)* Prague: Karolinum, 2003. GOLDBERG, E. *Jak nás mozek civilizuje. (How the brain civilizes us.)* Prague: Karolinum, 2004. BARTOŠ, A. et. A. al. *Diagnostika poruch vědomí v klinické praxi. (Diagnostics of disorders of consciousness in clinical practice.)* Prague: Karolinum, 2004. TURING, A. *Computing Machinery and Intelligence. Mind.* 1950, vol. LIX, No. 236, pp. 433-460.

² GÁLIKOVÁ, S. *Úvod do filozofie vědomia. (Introduction to the Philosophy of Consciousness.)* Trnava: University of Trnava, 2009, p. 106.

who are trying to achieve a common goal. In a narrower definition, it is collective decision-making aimed at achieving or maintaining state or public power. One liberal definition of it, which I consider a rational contribution to defining future forms of political activity, emphasises that it is the wise pursuit of the common good¹.

The notion of the *common good* can be characterised as a social consensus of a political society determined by congruent or similar value orientations. If it works, it is a sign that we are dealing with the legitimacy of democracy. The contexts of legitimacy of choice, democracy and open society are revealed in detail by K. R. Popper in his theoretical concept². The notion of *wise endeavour* has a highly ephemeral content, but in principle it can mean either an orientation towards a Platonic personalist solution to the issue of democratic politics, that is, "*Who is to govern*", or a Popperian shift of emphasis to the institutional preconditions of a well-governed political society, that is, "*How is it to be governed*". Another solution could be directed towards bridging this dilemma of governance in terms of the complementarity of essential features from both ideas³. From Platonic personalism, we could single out an ethical level of political action given by the value-determined character type of the politician, who can resist not only the lobbyocratic trappings of business interests, but also, for example, the party-minded rules of holding political office. From the Popperian principle of well-managed social

¹ SUTOR, B. *Politická etika. (Political ethics.)* Prague: Oikúméné, 1996, p. 47.

² For more details see DOBIAŠ, D. *Voľby, demokracia a idea otvorenej spoločnosti K. R. Poppera. (Elections, Democracy and the Idea of an Open Society by K. R. Popper.)* In: GBŮROVÁ, M. et. al. *Voľby 2006 v štátoch V4. (Elections 2006 in the V4 countries.)* Prešov: Slovacontact, 2006, pp. 3-12. DOBIAŠ, D. *Kritický racionalizmus a idea otvorenej spoločnosti K. R. Poppera. (Critical Rationalism and the Idea of Open Society by K. R. Popper.)* Košice: FF UPJŠ, 2012.

³ For more details see CEHELNÍK, M. *Platónovsko-popperovská dilema vládnutia: „Kto alebo ako?“* (The Platonic-Popperian dilemma of governance: "Who or how?") In: GBŮROVÁ, M. et. al. *Voľby 1998 v Slovenskej republike (stav - kontexty - perspektíva). (Elections 1998 in the Slovak Republic (status - contexts - perspective).* Prešov: University of Prešov, 1998, pp. 7-15.

and political institutions, it would be possible to develop, in particular, the level of professionalism in the administration of the political role. This implies that the dominant features of responsible party-political work of a politician should be *character* and *professionalism*, not material scarcity or material sufficiency tied to the performance of the political role. Party politics should be, metaphorically speaking, a 'hatchery' of politicians with the above-mentioned values, whose role in real political activity should be to *fulfil* the words of democracy, truth, and freedom with positive deeds and examples.

1.1.1.3 Social awareness

While the issue of philosophical or psychological perception of the content of the concept of awareness or mind is open to further professional discourses, the issue of the so-called social concept of awareness in the sense of collective awareness connected with the knowledge of a certain community of people or with the ethnic, cultural, historical, political and other identity of this community, has much clearer identifying contours. Each person is the bearer not only of an individual awareness but also of a civil public awareness. On the basis of the above knowledge, we can distinguish different forms of common, or collective, or public awareness. These forms of awareness include, for example, historical awareness, ethnic awareness, class awareness, philosophical awareness, political awareness, environmental awareness, literary awareness, linguistic awareness, legal awareness, moral awareness, religious awareness, aesthetic awareness, etc. Together, they can be subsumed under the more universal concept of social awareness. Each of these forms of social awareness should have its own particular form of scientific reflection.

To this observation, one historical fact should be mentioned, which is related to the perception of awareness and its forms in the

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socialist period of Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989, in which they were developed under the pressure of Marx's thesis of awareness as a conscious being.¹ According to him, awareness does not exist in an immaterial form as the ideal antipole of matter, but can only exist in a materialised form. In this sense, all manifestations of awareness were evaluated as reflections and echoes of conscious being. This led to the fact that awareness began to be "separated" from the individual as a subject of social and practical action, ontologised and interpreted as a self-sufficient entity.

On this principle, a theory of social awareness developed, which became the basis for the interpretation of the various forms of social awareness. The content of this awareness became a "useful" abstraction, which in Soviet-type societies, including Slovak society, was tied to certain ideological goals related to the theory and practice of socialism. On that basis, a "textbook" theory of social awareness was developed in Slovakia², which fixed abstract schemes through which it was impossible to "see" the real spiritual reality, let alone the fragile spiritual world of the people. In the 1980s, research was carried out on some forms of socialist social awareness - political³ , nationalist⁴ , national⁵ ,

¹ MARX, K. and F. ENGELS. *Vybrané spisy v piatich zväzkoch. (Selected writings in five volumes.)* Bratislava: Pravda, 1977, p. 224.

² REMIŠOVÁ, A. Dialektika spoločenského, kolektívneho a individuálneho vedomia. (Dialectics of social, collective and individual awareness.) *Philosophy*. 1973, vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 85-92. ULEDOV, A. K. *Struktúra spoločenského vedomí. (The structure of social awareness.)* Prague: SNPL, 1973. MUŽIK, J. et. al. *Dialektika formovania socialistického vedomí. (Dialectics of the formation of socialist awareness.)* Prague: SNPL, 1981. HOLATA, L. Dva prístupy k skúmaniu spoločenského vedomia. (Two approaches to the investigation of social awareness.) *Philosophy*. 1986, vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 39-405.

³ ŠKODÁČEK, J. O komponentoch a štruktúre politického vedomia. (On the components and structure of political awareness.) *Filozofia* 1986, vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 132-141.

⁴ ŠKODÁČEK, J. *Ideológia nacionalizmu a jej prekonávanie. (The ideology of nationalism and its overcoming.)* Bratislava: Pravda, 1982.

⁵ ZVARA, J. *Národ a národné vedomie. (Nation and national awareness.)* Bratislava: Pravda, 1982.

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patriotic, and internationalist¹, aesthetic², cultural³, historical⁴, literary⁵, etc. Although the above research has begun to raise critical questions focusing on the practical implementation of the various forms of social awareness, it has not questioned Marx's initial qualification of social awareness as a conscious being. In terms of content, all forms of social awareness were considered to be gnoseological reflections of certain conditions in the economic base of socialist society and differed from each other only in what they reflected and how. The theoretical elaboration of the functional forms of that awareness was not an end in itself. Its aim was the creation of a form of identity of the socialist citizen in which the attachment to the individual was reduced, the emotional and volitional dimensions of his awareness were minimised, and the concrete form of the way of life, spiritual equality, and the unity of socialist society as a whole were strengthened.

1.1.1.4 Political awareness

Political awareness is a specified, specialised component of social awareness. Its specificity is due to the fact that we can define its content and form, which are sufficiently distinguished from the content and form of other parts of social awareness. Political awareness began to emerge at a time when the foundations of the political system were being laid in human society as part of the overall social system in society. That is, when society stratified into social groups, which formed various social

¹ ZVARA, J. and J. VÁGAI. *Formovanie vlasteneckého a internacionalistického vedomia pracujúcich. (Formation of patriotic and internationalist awareness of workers.)* Bratislava: Pravda, 1986.

² BROŽÍK, V. *Hodnoty a významy. (Values and meanings.)* Bratislava: Pravda, 1984.

³ PASKA, P. et. al. *Dejinné poučenie KSČ a kultúra. (Historical lessons of the Communist Party and culture.)* Bratislava: Pravda, 1983.

⁴ FILO, O. *K historickému vedomiu. (Towards historical awareness.) Literárny týždenník. (Literary Weekly.)* 1989, p. 3.

⁵ BILÍK, R. *Historické vedomie a umelecká literatúra. (Historical awareness and artistic literature.) Romboid.* 1984, vol. 24, No. 8, pp. 18-22.

groups such as families, clans, tribes, later nations, and states. These social groups developed a certain hierarchy of values, as well as institutions and authorities, while the relations that emerged among individuals, social groups, authorities, and institutions were regulated by a system of social norms (moral, religious, social, economic, legal, etc.). The development of individual production and the emergence of private ownership of the means of production gradually brought about a crisis of clan and tribal primordial societies. After its disintegration, a new political-power organisation of society was formed - the state. With the emergence of the state, social structures in society began to change. Within the social organisation, the citizens of the state began to unite according to their needs and interests into organisations and associations. The most important form of social organisation became the political party as a mediator of individual, but especially group will. The political system now encompasses a system of relations in the field of politics between state authorities, political organisations, interest institutions, pressure groups, and other political and socially-oriented groups.

The above system of political relations and information about politics enters the political awareness of the individual and society in the public space through various channels: government and private information and media policy, school education, print and electronic media, information infrastructure (the Internet, telephone system, broadcasting, schools, libraries, etc.), through legislative regulations, judicial decisions, political analysis, expertise on political-party agendas, instructions, guidelines and recommendations on electoral acts, political memoranda, lectures by political scientists and political actors (government, opposition, civil, non-systemic ones), press releases from political science conferences, organisational guidelines for political events, political agreements, political causes, manipulative partisan politics, political debates, and other means of information policy

of the state and other actors of party and public politics. This landmark network of communication actors about politics enters the focus of civil society to improve the political awareness of the civil public. That network is seen as the intellectual or cognitive engagement of citizens in public affairs. However, it should be added that each citizen may or may not create, enrich, and improve his or her political awareness. They may or may not adopt certain political values, ideologies, and policies. From this it is evident that there are many conceptualisations of political awareness. Here it should be noted that individual political awareness is formed in an inherent relationship with the political awareness of others. These issues are debated not just in the Slovak political science community but also abroad, as evidenced by the studies cited¹ in political-science books and journals.

1.1.2 Levels of political awareness

If we consider that political awareness is an individual characteristic of the individual citizen, then it is quite logical to consider and characterise the degrees of political awareness. In the contacts between politics and society, political awareness performs an important function as a "tool" for organising people's interaction through the exchange of information about a set of political value orientations. It is a communication-value process in which, on the one hand, there is a set of empirical, theoretical and ideological knowledge about the world of practical politics

¹ SOLHAUG, T., DENK, T., OLSON, M. and N. N. KRISTENSEN. *Political Awareness, Concept and Measurement*. Hamburg: 2018. [Paper presented at the ECPR GENERAL CONFERENCE]. ABDO-KATSIPSIS, C. B. Women, political participation, and the Arab spring: Political awareness and participation in democratizing Tunisia. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*. 2017, vol. 38, No. 4, pp. 413-429. AMER, M. Political awareness and its implications on participatory behaviour-a study of Naga women voters in Nagaland. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*. 2009, vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 359-374. ARNOLD, J. R. Political awareness, corruption perception and democratic accountability in Latin America. *Acta Politica*. 2012, vol. 47, No. 1, pp. 67-90. MONDAK, J. J. Newspapers and political awareness. *American Journal of Political Science*. 1995, vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 513-527. C and H. Y. WOO. Political Awareness, microtargeting of voters, and negative electoral campaigning. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*. 2019, vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 41-88.

and political science and, on the other hand, people's active orientations in the relationship between society and politics. It is difficult to decide which is more important, the cognitive component or the value component. Rather, it is the quality of the cognitive, volitional, and value aspects in the process. From the above point of view, it is possible to consider the stages of development of political awareness¹.

The first stage can be described as *mass, naive, spontaneous, simplistic*² political awareness. The above stage of political awareness may be regarded as the real political attitudes, viewpoints, and beliefs of people, their political opinions and ideas, values, norms, principles, sentiments, etc., which are widely held and massively accepted in the society. These political principles, norms, tenets, etc. become the content of their political awareness, on the basis of which they regulate their concrete political activities. The bearer of this degree of political awareness adopts socio-political phenomena unconsciously, unintentionally. His/her political thinking as a part of political awareness is characterised by stereotyping of judging and evaluating political phenomena and events. It is obtained mostly from "ordinary" information, from life experiences, but also on the basis of personal assumptions and intellectual endowments of their bearers. For these reasons, the bearer of this level of awareness is easily manipulated and controlled by targeted political marketing and media manipulations. Intuitively, or only on the basis of partial information obtained from unverified sources or from

¹ GBÚROVÁ, M. Politické vedomie ako axiologický problém. (Political awareness as an axiological problem.) In: *Systém hodnôt v podmienkach vlastného demokratického štátu. Rodina - škola - masmédiá. Zborník príspevkov zo sympózia. (Family - school - mass media. Proceedings of the symposium.)* Bratislava: Stála konferencia slovenskej inteligencie Slovakia plus (Permanent Conference of Slovak Intelligentsia Slovakia plus), 1993, pp. 71-75. Also GBÚROVÁ, M. Politické vedomie ako hodnotový proces. (Political awareness as a value process.) In: Prešov: *Náuka*, 2000, pp. 127-129.

² Ján Horecký also considers the lowest - intuitive, or naive - level for language awareness: HORECKÝ, J. Jazykové vedomie. *Jazykovedný časopis. (Language awareness. Journal of Linguistics.* 1991, vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 81-88.

the tabloid press, he or she comes to know with whom or against whom from the current political scene he or she should act in order to achieve the fulfilment of his or her personal interests. Usually this is a citizen whose life is influenced by 'consumer values'. Consequently, s/he shows no interest in activities towards values that intellectually transcend him/her. A system of simple solutions to a complex reality is easily "rooted" in his/her awareness; s/he adopts various forms of myth-making and taboo behaviour and action without much difficulty.

The second level of political awareness may be termed *enlightened*¹ political awareness. Although it is influenced by the means of mass communication, the results of public opinion polls, sociological surveys of the electoral preferences of political parties and party actors, and leadership-type politicians, its bearer develops a clearer idea of the political contexts of public life in which he or she finds himself or herself, and of his or her own position in this space, under the influence of being instructed in the theory of democracy and the management of public and party politics. This is an everyday, empirical activity that already has the hallmarks of a more deliberate perception and evaluation of political phenomena. Its bearer is not sufficiently oriented in party-political life, in its value and ideological orientations. Therefore, he or she can also become a target of party-political manipulations of the 'higher' order, which are characterised by the use of various sophisticated marketing strategies, especially in the pre-election period.

The third stage of political awareness, in which the object of politics is a deliberate act, may be termed *professional* political awareness. Its bearers are mostly active participants in political life. As a result of their professional work as active politicians, they

¹ Horecký refers to this degree of linguistic consciousness as ordinary, everyday. HORECKÝ, J. Jazykové vedomie. *Jazykovedný časopis*. (Language awareness. *Linguistic Journal*.) 1991, vol. 42, No. 2, p. 87.

are usually the bearers of distinct political attitudes, opinions and interests, which they seek to promote in real party-political life. It should be emphasised that the political awareness of these people has a considerably developed value orientation, they work creatively with the language of politics, their political culture, and their political thinking is of high quality. The reality – the Slovak one is a bit more complex in this respect. The problem is mainly that many of those who have established themselves on the governmental and parliamentary political scene as professional politicians have brought with them much of the taboo awareness and value system of the pre-November period. The quality of their political awareness and value system is often determined not by which political entity they represent, but by how they think politically and what positions they take in dealing with the issues of our democratisation process. The level of political awareness of its holders largely determines the level of quality of democracy in the Slovak Republic.

The fourth level of political awareness is considered to be the most value-advanced political awareness. We call it *theoretical* political awareness. It belongs primarily to specialists, political theorists, political scientists, experts in the field of research into political phenomena; some active politicians who have come from a scientific background are also its bearers. Theoretical political awareness tends to encompass the broadest possible knowledge base about politics. It includes not just the normative but especially the evaluative component about politics in the broadest sense.

These levels of political awareness are the methodological basis for the study of political life in the Slovak Republic, which includes a wide range of institutions of state and public administration, but also the political system and its party-political actors, and the broader civil society, including institutions dealing with political science and sociological issues of evaluation

of the political system and the performance of the actors of this system. We have summarised our findings from the range of topics outlined in a number of questions and attempted to answer them. The outline of the stages of political awareness does not capture all the characteristics of the above-mentioned issues, but it gives methodological guidance on how to proceed in the study of the state and development of political awareness by individuals or selected social groups of the civil public. At the same time, it should be emphasised that the results of these sociologically oriented researches can help schools and civic associations in particular to find ways to further develop the civic potential and political awareness of young people in particular.

1.2 Political extremism

1.2.1 Brief characteristics of political extremism

Czech theorist Štefan Danics characterises the concept of extremism as a confusing or "nebulous" one, whose universal characterisation can be difficult to grasp¹, as there is considerable fragmentation of opinion in academia and the public about its nature and content. The history and evolution of the term of extremism document that the term has always represented an extreme, ending, or liminal position. In any case, it could generally be said that extremism in its content embodies a form of anti-position.² As early as in the 1950s and 1960s, the political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset wrote about extremism as an antithetical concept to liberal democracy and pluralism. German theorists Uwe Backes and Eckhard Jesse define extremism

¹ For example, according to Jan Charvát, there is no universally valid definition of extremism and the concept is problematic to use in the social sciences, although he believes it has merit in the context of ordinary communication. See CHARVÁT, J. *Současný politický extremismus a radikalismus. (Contemporary political extremism and radicalism.)* Prague: Portál, 2007, pp. 9-11.

² DANICS, Š. and L. TEJCHMANOVÁ. *Extremismus, radikalismus, populismus a euroskepticismus. (Extremism, Radicalism, Populism and Euroscepticism.)* Prague: J. A. Comenius University, 2017, pp. 15-16.

as antithetical to a democratic constitutional state. Since the nature of political extremism can be described as anti-democratic (antipathy to democracy), it represents an actual or potential threat to the democratic basis of the state, the constitutional order and democratic values.¹ Barbora Vegrachtová describes extremism as "*determined, uncompromising political attitudes aimed explicitly at the modification or outright elimination of the democratic order, and to this end all available means are used, including those that go beyond the rule of law.*"² An exhaustive definition of political extremism is offered by Astrid Boetticher who believes that extremist political parties and movements understand politics as a struggle for domination rather than a peaceful competition to achieve the common good. Extremism is situated at the periphery and seeks to occupy the core of society through fear-mongering and the construction of the enemy as a differentiating category. In the extremist world, there is no diversity of opinions and lifestyles, but reluctance and intolerance. Extremism makes zero-sum politics through various means such as aggression, militancy or violence. Its goal is a homogenised society without proper social diversity based on an ideological foundation. This means that it seeks to take power by force and establish an authoritarian or totalitarian regime in which human rights for all or democracy based on the will of the majority do not apply.³

¹ DANICS, Š. and L. TEJCHMANOVÁ. *Extremismus, radikalismus, populismus a euroskepticismus. (Extremism, Radicalism, Populism and Euroscepticism.)* Prague: J. A. Comenius University, 2017, pp. 59-61.

In this context, the authors Nikolai Demyanchuk and Lucia Drotárová point out the weakness of the claim (a kind of structural flaw in the definition of the concept of extremism) that extremism is an anti-democratic form of attitude (an anti-attitude towards democracy), because it is in fact only a construct agreed upon by most theorists. They consider this consensus to be situational, which by its very nature is itself subject to debate and testing and cannot be formally defined. For more on this, see DEMJANČUK, N. and L. DROTÁROVÁ. *Vzdělání a extremismus. (Education and extremism.)* Prague: Epoque, 2005, p. 16.

² VEGRICHTOVÁ, B. *Extremismus a společnost. (Extremism and society.)* Prague: Aleš Čeněk, 2017, pp. 14-15.

³ BOETTICHEROVÁ, A. Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism. *Perspectives on Terrorism* [online]. 2017, vol. 11, No. 4 [cited 2023-11-29].

According to Jan Charvat, extremism may be defined as any ideology or activity whose aim or goal is to eliminate the present democratic political system and replace it with an alternative system that is undemocratic or dictatorial, with a disrespect for the exercise of human rights and freedoms.¹

1.2.2 Typology and classification of political extremism

According to political theories, political extremism is divided into left-wing and right-wing extremism. These are the end (extreme) poles of the political-value scale, with left-wing extremism being defined as thinking and acting based on the ideologies of communism² and anarchism. Conversely, for right-wing extremism, the ideologies of fascism/neofascism and Nazism/neo-Nazism play a major role. Charvat believes that the left-wing type of extremism is more differentiated and deserves a different methodological and analytical approach than the right-wing type. While the right-wing one refers to the legacy of Nazism and fascism, which have not undergone conversion in the course of history and have remained ideologically preserved, the left-wing branches of political extremism (at least in the form of communism) have been forced to revise their attitudes. Indeed, today's communist parties have been co-opted by democratic standards, or have conformed to them, and on more than one occasion have become part of governing coalitions within nation-states. In many cases, there

Available from: https://pt.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-06/research%20note%202_3.pdf

¹ CHARVÁT, J. *Současný politický extremismus a radikalismus. (Contemporary political extremism and radicalism.)* Prague: Portál, 2007, pp. 9-10.

² By communism is meant the ideology of communism in concrete-historical practice and its revival, or attempted revival, primarily based on and referring to the Leninist source of Marxism. The real sub-ideologies of communism so understood with the appellation then include Stalinism, Maoism, or orthodox Bolshevik Leninism. The European continent had experience of left-wing extremism in the 1960s and 1970s in the West, when these sub-ideologies of communism developed in practice into terrorism (e.g. in the Federal Republic of Germany).

has been successful cultivation on the path to the status of relevant political parties. Even some anarchists do not proclaim a rejection of democracy; rather, they call for the maximum extension of freedom and the possibility to participate more directly and substantially in governance. Charvat argues that a similar change has not occurred among right-extremist actors because its forms have not degenerated or been sufficiently discredited, such as realistic socialism. Thus, right-wing extremism often insists on the use of indiscriminate violence against minorities and political enemies or camouflages itself in right-wing populism¹, while far-right symbolism and the content of non-public discourses enriched with xenophobia and racism remain (e.g., the Greek Golden Dawn, the Slovak ĽSNS, or the Republika movement).

Figure 1: *Typology of political extremism by R. Stöss*

Ultra-left - far left			Ultra-right - far right	
Left-wing extremism	Left-wing radicalism	Democratic centre	Right-wing radicalism	Right-wing extremism
The constitutional-conformist spectrum (defined by the democratic order)				

The space between the extreme poles is referred to as the democratic centre (moderate left, centrism and moderate right). However, the extreme positions of the political-ideological-value spectrum include not just extremism, but also left-wing and right-wing radicalism, although the latter is considered democratically permissible as it is part of the constitutional-conformist spectrum defining the democratic order. Radicalism thus implies 'radical' changes within the democratic order, but not the abolition of democracy per se. In sum, not everything that bears a critique of the democratic system must automatically be

¹ CHARVÁT, J. *Současný politický extremismus a radikalismus. (Contemporary political extremism and radicalism.)* Prague: Portál, 2007, pp. 169-172.

categorised as extremist, otherwise it would no longer be a democracy that would not allow for self-revision, correction, and constructive change of its framework. This is aptly documented graphically by the German political scientist R. Stöss - see Figure 1¹.

Some of the literature on political extremism adds a type of centrist extremism to the left-wing extremism and the right-wing extremism.² Historian and columnist Eduard Chmelár says that "*extreme centrism, which calls for the exclusion of an ever wider range of views from public debate, for bans, restrictions and punishment, is the opposite of the ideal of a liberal society based on dialogue and tolerance. Rather, it bears the characteristics common to all the extremist movements, whether far-right or far-left.*" (...) "*Extreme centrists do not know alternatives, but only variants of the same system, which is why they are mentally closer to totalitarian movements than to democracy. They are not even willing to discuss their decisions, for them these are natural steps of history that cannot be changed and whoever resists them must be scandalised and eliminated.*"³ With this statement, Chmelár criticises today's progressivist current, which tries to normalise the failing liberalism in practice also with the help of undemocratic means. In doing so, he shows that extremist thinking, traits and attitudes may spring up at the very centre of the political-value scale and not just at their edges, as political theory has hitherto assumed.

¹ STÖSS, R. *Rechtsextremismus im vereinten Deutschland*. Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2000, p. 18.

² The extremism of the centre is partly discussed in Lipset's *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. The term was expanded and updated in content half a century later by Tariq Ali in *The Extreme Center: A Warning*. Ali's analysis focuses more on the economic side of the issue, and thus on the dictatorship of capital and neoliberalism in practice, which pushes almost all the political forces to the centre of the political-value scale of political decision-making and manoeuvring.

³ CHMELÁR, E. Najväčším nepriateľom demokracie je dnes extrémny centrismus. (The greatest enemy of democracy today is extreme centrism.) In: *Argument* [online]. 2021 [cited 2023-11-26]. Available from: <https://casopisargument.cz/?p=35816>

In this chapter, we will further focus on the characteristics of political extremism adapted to the structure of our empirical research, describing the specific characteristics and manifestations of extremists and extremist groups in relation to the selected attributes (human rights, democracy, nativism, media and European integration - see the individual following subchapters).

1.2.3 Political extremism in relation to human rights and freedoms

The mindset of political extremism as a phenomenon or ideological aggregate is built to grasp the category of human rights in an exclusivist manner, i.e., to allow a certain set of selected human rights freedoms to certain selected individuals or collectives. One may be inclined to assume that political extremism is in its content in strict contradiction with the liberal understanding of human individual freedom (anti-liberalism) and collective property freedom (anti-communism). In terms of the three-generation articulation of fundamental human rights and freedoms, we include in the first generation of human rights, for example, the right to life, liberty and security of the person, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to protection against discrimination, and the right to freedom of expression within the limits of the law. The right to life in the extremist sense is most often differentiated through racism. In racism, skin colour or cultural specificities are differentiated, with a performative ideological-value hierarchisation (in the sense of superiority and inferiority). With the right to freedom and belief and religion, the same ideological-value differentiation occurs through religious fundamentalism (religious extremism - classical established religions taken to extremes or sects). Both can also be spoken of as manifestations of anti-humanism in the natural law sense of human rights, potentially culminating in non plus ultra

terrorist acts as justified violence. Value exclusivity is also evident in the non-acceptance of the right to protection against discrimination, where it is necessary to distinguish between hate crimes and extremist crimes based on ideological grounds.¹ The right to freedom of expression within the limits of the law and its non-observance is nowadays no longer the prerogative of left-wing or right-wing extremism alone, but also of centrist extremism in practice, which politically correctly 'regulates' alternative views, despite the fact that these do not carry hateful or extremist content.

1.2.4 Political extremism in relation to democracy

As mentioned above, the concept of political extremism is often defined as the antithesis of democracy. Its relationship is thus explicitly antagonistic to democratic normative procedures and established democratic values. Stefan Danics defines the following parameters of the democratic order - constitutional definition, which are questioned and rejected by the immanence of political extremism:

- acceptance of the modern understanding of the concept of human rights and freedoms (see subsection above),
- the sovereignty of the power of the people - the people, in the extremist understanding, are too broad and insufficiently differentiated a subject to claim power,
- the horizontal separation of powers and the related independence of the judiciary - seen through an extremist prism - is proving to be unnecessary and in some cases undesirable,

¹ The distinction between hate crimes and extremist crimes is mentioned by several authors. See e.g. BERGER, J. M. *Extremism*. London: MIT Press, 2018. Or DANICS, Š. and L. TEJCHMANOVÁ. *Extremismus, radikalismus, populismus a euroskepticismus. (Extremism, radicalism, populism and Euroscepticism.)* Prague: J. A. Comenius University, 2017, p. 36.

- accountability and controllability of government with the presumption of acceptance and tolerance of free opposition within the confines of the law - extremism tends to destroy any form of political opposition,
- legality and transparency of state administration - extremism assumes a high degree of centralisation and control of state and public bodies, with some institutions, in its view, operating 'in secret' under the direct authority of the leader or ruling party apparatus,
- pluralism of political parties - within the extremist view, any form of political pluralism is considered harmful and useless, because by the logic of the setting there is no need for realistic and fair political competition.

Danics adds that the impact of political extremism on the democratic order also touches on aspects of democracy outside its constitutional definition, namely democracy in its normative form, assuming the representation of its civic, political, and social attributes or the economic and cultural conditions that shape democracy in a given state. Other constitutive features of extremism that Danics takes from theorist Pavel Koltán are as follows:

- political style without constraints - mainly related to the enforcement of a certain ideology in political life, whereby political rules gradually become mere backdrops in the game as they are circumvented or lose their validity according to need and order,
- political action led directly from the centre - there is no debate in decision-making and decisions are generally not taken by simple or qualified majority, but directly,
- friend-enemy dichotomy - an important part of this is the differentiation of society into those who are "with us" and identify with "our" social order and those who stand on

the opposite side - this reinforces inclusivity, integrity, and unity within the group, but exclusivity externally,

- leadership principle - emphasis is placed on the vertical structure of the division of power and strict hierarchy - the leader represents an authority embodying virtue and infallibility.¹

This makes it clear that what is intrinsic and original about democracy is devalued. One might add that political extremism tends to be a default failure to respect and preserve the principle of majority with the presumption of respecting and listening to the needs and views of the minority; questioning the need for and legitimacy of elections; and the absence of debate - there is no space for dialogue, as this is deemed undue.

1.2.5 Political extremism and nativist attitudes

Nativism is understood as the need to preserve the original status quo of thinking, acting, habits, traditions, stereotypes, and symbols that constitute the unity of identity. Directly related to this is the tendency to think not just in national/patriotic terms, but to push the boundary of constructed collective identity to the threshold and beyond the threshold of nationalism² and ethnocentrism, when space is opened for ultra-nationalism

¹ DANICS, Š. and T. KAMÍN: *Extremismus, rasismus a antisemitismus. (Extremism, racism and antisemitism.)* Prague: Police Academy of the Czech Republic, Faculty of Security Management, Department of Social Sciences, 2008, pp. 30-31.

² Josef Smolík argues that the political character of nationalism is quite ambivalent. On the one hand, nationalism can act as a force with a progressive and liberating charge that is ultimately cementing; on the other hand, it can become an irrational and reactionary political current that serves to exacerbate positions and postures leading to imperialist expansion (particular nationalism) and wars. As the author himself writes: "*Indeed, nationalism shows signs of a kind of equivalent of the personality breakdown syndrome. At different times it has been progressive and reactionary, democratic and authoritarian, liberating and alarming, left-wing and right-wing. It is perhaps better, therefore, not to understand nationalism as a unified and uncontradictory phenomenon, but rather as a kind of series of "nationalisms," i.e., as a certain complex of traditions that have only one thing in common: each, in its own way, recognises the fundamental political significance of the nation.*" See BASTL, M., MAREŠ, M., SMOLÍK, J. and P. VEJVODOVÁ. *Krajní pravice a krajní levice v ČR. (The Far Right and the Far Left in the Czech Republic.)* Prague: Grada, 2011, p. 201.

and chauvinism. These constitute the field in which far-right ideologies such as Nazism/neo-Nazism or fascism/neo-Fascism operate. Often the way of governing or fulfilling an ideology in practice is based on the so-called national populism, where the main role is played by a common will that is clearly defined and inviolable. Interest groups as part of civil society are suspected of acting against this 'common' will, which is usually carried by the leader as a representative of the ruling party. The leader acquires legitimacy for a dedicated struggle against corrupt elites, and only the leader best understands the need of the masses, i.e. the people he represents.¹ The Manichean world of good and evil translates into a rejection of the claims and even rejection of the existence of minorities in a given territory as well as a multiracial society. Right-wing extremism involves, among other things, manifestations of anti-Semitism or anti-Gypsyism (the suppression of the rights of the Roma and their recognition) as well as discrimination against other ethnicities or ethnicities present in a given state. In principle, the rule of thumb is that one state is made up of one nation, others may fall victim to ostracisation and exclusion. This also applies to migrants (especially those from outside Europe), who pose a real threat to racist and xenophobic extremists. The latter often tend to escalate problems and get into confrontations with coercive branches of State power.

1.2.6 Political extremism and the media environment

Social networks, alternative websites and forums, are already among the standard means for disseminating extremist content, often providing an unregulated space in which extremists can fully express themselves. It is the media world that may be identified as a place in which other aspects of extremism, such as claims

¹ On populism and its characteristics, see, for example, Jan-Werner Müller's essay *Co je to populismus?*

to absolute and therefore final solutions and explanations - axiomatics in thinking and argumentation - are unfolding. This type of dogmatism can be accompanied by a utopian narrative associated with the search for the new man¹. Danics, among other things, also talks about group ethics - group members know, are convinced of what is right and fight for that truth at any cost. The manifestations of the "us versus them" dichotomy remain as much in place as in the physical world, moreover in the virtual-media sphere, through anonymity, more exacerbated and brutal, as well as more criminally difficult to trace and legally prove. It is the media means that many times facilitate the dissemination of the messianic message, i.e. extremist actors as the bearers of the salvation legacy of a society from a declining or decadent culture that is in a moral crisis without moral values and needs. The media can thus be a place for political extremists to conspire endlessly, to spread myths and legends in a simple to primitive language, without any reasoning or evidence that history has refuted or that are often mere figments of the imagination. Also, the axiom that democratic media generally manipulate public opinion confirms the dogmatic belief that this is always the case, regardless of the assumption to the contrary. A survey of the features of thinking and acting in extremists in the context of the media can be expanded to include the following:

- there is just one "right" doctrine, that which is determined to be "right" - pluralism of political and social thought is absent and undesirable - there is an inherent intolerance of other views,

¹ The search for or creation of a new man is very much related to the myth and rebirth (palingenesis). The historian Juraj Drábik writes about palingenesis in his work *Fascism*. According to him, palingenesis is only effective if it is linked to revolutionary nationalism and the essentialist construction or birth of a new man, which will be cleansed of the deposits of a decadent and acculturated society. For more details see DRÁBIK, J. *Fascism*. Bratislava: Premedia, 2019, p. 69.

- fundamentalist deification of truth, which is understood as absolute, with a personal claim to know this truth,
- discursive mobilisation of the environment, linked to a critique of everything contemporary as inadequate.¹

1.2.7 Euroscepticism as a potentiality for political extremism?

Quite a frequently discussed topic in the political science community today is the issue of Euroscepticism as a political tool and its negative impact on the European Union in terms of democratic standards and whether there is a direct correlation between Eurosceptic attitudes and political extremism. This topic is widely debated and only time will tell to what extent Euroscepticism has any performative potential. Danics believes that Eurosceptic parties have a higher tendency towards opinion extremes², which in a way confirms a certain degree of correlation. Personally, however, we believe that more empirical findings are needed to confirm the hypothesis assuming a clear correlation, which would allow the assumption to be generalised. What is certain, however, is that Euroscepticism, as a powerful partisan attribute of far-right groupings also based on nationalism and populism, serves as a tool to radicalise the political-partisan situation in the supranational space. And it is safe to say that it tends to undermine the performance of European democratic structures in terms of their effectiveness and relevance. That is to say, Euroscepticism, especially the hard type, devalues (delegitimises) the democratic supranational order of the European Union) in order to strengthen the national one

¹ DANICS, Š. and T. KAMÍN. *Extremismus, radikalismus, populismus a euroskepticismus. (Extremism, racism and antisemitism.)* Prague: Police Academy of the Czech Republic, Faculty of Security Management, Department of Social Sciences, 2008, pp. 31-32. Or MAREŠ, M. *Pravicový extremismus a radikalismus v ČR. (Right-wing extremism and radicalism in the Czech Republic.)* Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2003, p. 21.

² DANICS, Š. - TEJCHMANOVÁ, L.: *Extremismus, radikalismus, populismus a euroskepticismus. (Extremism, Radicalism, Populism and Euroscepticism.)* Prague: J. A. Comenius University, 2017, p. 149

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(within the framework of democratic order and standards). It is only questionable whether, in time, this disintegrative feature will or will not turn into an instrument for the establishment of autonomous far-right autocracies in Europe.

1.2.8 Youth and political extremism

In the context of political extremism, youth emerges as a formative age category that can be vulnerable to narratives and in some aspects easily manipulated due to a lack of life experience. Particularly in the case of Slovakia, young people are the ones who have not experienced past regimes and thus lack memory and a kind of historical immunity to authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies. Political scientist Radoslav Štefančík lists the most common factors that can lead susceptible young people to extremist tendencies:

- social exclusion experienced during childhood or formative years,
- a style of education that is characterised by conflict and inconsistency,
- experience and acceptance of violence,
- the burden of free time (what to do with free time),
- pressure from outside, or from the group in which the adolescent is situated and by which s/he is surrounded,
- truancy,
- fear of personal failure (poor school grades, inability to find employment) and the resulting frustration,
- an uncritical view of oneself and low self-esteem.¹

There are a number of reasons why young people in particular are sympathetic or inclined to extremism. Examining the issue

¹ ŠTEFANČÍK, R. Teoretická východiská výskumu politického extrémizmu. (Theoretical bases for research into political extremism.) In. *Right-wing extremism and youth in Slovakia*. Brno: Tribun EU, 2013, p. 29.

through a psychological prism, adolescence and the associated rebelliousness and defiance of parental or teacher authority emerges as key. The sensitivity arising from adolescence represents a vulnerability that is offset by the need to criticise, evaluate, reform or fit in. Aggression is another psychological phenomenon as part of the human personality and the consequent potential propensity to commit violence. The latter can be influenced by a film, a book, a computer game, but also by viral videos on mobile device apps. Last but not least, the expression of extremism can be a mere "dude thing" and thus a need to impress - to be the centre of attention, either consciously (the individual is aware of what they sympathise with and what they are doing for it) or unconsciously. ¹

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2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

(Ján RUMAN)

2.1 Focus of the empirical analysis, research objectives and hypotheses

We have addressed the issue of researching the correlations between the deformations of political awareness and the increase of political extremism among secondary-school students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions from theoretical and methodological bases and from empirical-analytical positions. Specifically, we participated in the implementation of empirical quantitative research. Within it, we focused on the univariate analysis of variance as well as on the correlation analysis of the items of political awareness and political extremism - detecting the differences between the measured values of political awareness as the actual predisposition of the respondents and the values of potential tendencies to political extremism.

The empirical analysis addressed the following research issues:

Issue 1: What is the level and nature of political awareness among students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions?

Issue 2: What is the level and nature of political extremism among students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions?

Issue 3: What is the degree of dependence between political awareness and political extremism among students of the Košice and the Prešov regions?

In the empirical analysis, the following research objectives were set in relation to the research problems:

Objective 1: To determine the level and nature of political awareness among students of the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions.

Objective 2: To determine the extent and nature of political extremism among students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions.

Objective 3: To determine the degree of dependence between political awareness and political extremism among students of the Košice and the Prešov regions.

Following the research objectives, the following hypotheses were established:

Hypothesis 1: We hypothesise that the level and nature of political awareness among students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions are differentiated with respect to their demographic characteristics.

Hypothesis 2: We hypothesise that the degree and nature of political extremism among students in the Košice and the Prešov regions are differentiated with respect to their demographic characteristics.

Hypothesis 3: We hypothesise that there is a degree of dependence between political awareness and political extremism among students of the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions.

2.2 Research method, research sample, and methodology design

The survey was conducted using a standardised questionnaire called the KOREL-PVaPE-1 METHODOLOGY (see Appendix A). Data collection was administered in September 2023 by physical collection in selected secondary grammar schools in the municipalities of Košice and Prešov (random selection). Secondary grammar schools and secondary vocational schools were contacted. The final sample, after elimination of incorrectly completed questionnaires, consists of 500 respondents, based on the maintained proportional key: 125 respondents for each type of school (a total of 250 respondents for both types of secondary schools) and in the region in question. The respondents were students aged 16 to 20 in the third and fourth grades of secondary school.

The design of the KOREL-PVaPE-1 methodology consists of an introduction explaining the purpose of the research and instructions for completing each item in the questionnaire (respondents were asked to circle their answers). This is followed by demographic characteristics ascertaining the gender of the respondent; the type of school attended; the region in which the school is located; the age of the respondent, indicated by a specific number; and the ethnicity of the respondent. The core of the questionnaire consists of two tests: TEST A and TEST B. Test A is made up of five items - headings (human rights, democracy, nativism, media and European integration) - which are related in content to the political awareness being acquired. These items/circuits included:

- Human rights are a fundamental, decisive, and inalienable principle of a citizen of a civil society - the circuit of human rights.
- Democracy is the highest and most advanced form of organisation of power and state in the development of human society - the circuit of democracy.
- The national principle is a natural part of the civic principle and does not stand alone in a democratic system or regime - the circuit of nativism.
- In a democratic political system, the media are free, objective and not subject to any economic or political pressures - the media circuit.
- The European Union is the best form of organisation and cooperation between European states and there is currently no alternative - European integration.

Test B, which is aimed at measuring the degree of political extremism or the degree of inclination towards political extremism, also consists of five circuits/item sets, each consisting of four items. In the *Human Rights* item set, the items represented include the following ones:

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- Every human being, regardless of race, must have the right to life.
- Every person must be treated equally, even those who look different.
- Everyone must have the right to express his or her opinion in accordance with the rule of law.
- Everyone must have the right to adequate material security, regardless of age or disability.

The Democracy item set is saturated with items:

- At the head of a functioning state there must be one wise, strong, and capable leader.
- Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic ones.
- Every vote in an election must be equal.
- Political parties are useless.

The Nativism item set consists of the items:

- A Slovak must be preferred to a migrant in Slovakia.
- Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups.
- The state must be made up of just one nation.
- The state must be built just on national values and traditions.

The Media item set consists of the items:

- There is just one truth, and that is the one that only I will acknowledge to be true.
- I can always tell truth from manipulation.
- All the media is used to manipulate the masses by the elites.
- Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can post whatever I want on social media).

And the last set of items *European integration* is divided into items:

- The fate of the citizens of Slovakia is decided only abroad.
- Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union.
- European Parliament elections are pointless.

- Membership in the European Union leads to the disappearance of everything Slovak.

The ambition of the authors of the individual items in the questionnaire was not to exhaustively saturate the battery and exhaust the entire content of the subject matter, but rather just to select some elements that are relevant to the subject matter. For the items in the item sets in Test B, it is necessary to add that some items do not fully indicate explicit manifestation of political extremism in their content, which was also the intention of the authors. Thus, some of the items have rather a hint or potential tendency to extremist thinking.

2.3 Data processing methods and variable specification

The data obtained were processed using reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha), one-way analysis of variance (Oneway ANOVA), and linear correlation analysis. For the purpose of attaining the research objectives, the variables listed below were determined and specified.

In pursuit of research Objective 1, the independent variable was determined to be the results of the demographic characteristics - male, school type, region, age, and ethnicity of the respondents and the dependent variable was the results of the extent and nature of acquired political awareness in Test A. One-way ANOVA, a univariate analysis of variance, was used to ascertain the results. The permissible statistical significance of the differences was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

In pursuit of research Objective 2, the results of the demographic characteristics - male, school type, region, age and ethnicity of the respondents were again set as the independent variable and the dependent variable was the results of the degree and nature in the inclination towards political extremism in Test B. As with research Objective 1, a univariate analysis of variance - Oneway ANOVA was used to determine the results. As with

research Objective 1, the allowable statistical significance of differences was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

In pursuit of research Objective 3, two random variables were set to vary with each other. Namely, the outcome variable of the respondents' degree of acquired political awareness and the outcome variable of the degree of inclination towards political extremism. Since this was a matter of ascertaining the results of the tightness of statistical dependence, a simple linear correlation analysis was used, examining the statistical significance ($p \leq 0.05$) of Pearson's correlation coefficient (r).

2.4 Reliability test results and descriptive statistics

Table. No. 1: Reliability test results - reliability coefficient values in Test A (Cronbach's alpha)

Political awareness - Test A	Cronbach's alpha
Political awareness items (human rights, democracy, nativism, media, and European integration)	$\alpha = 0.85$

Table. No. 2: Reliability test results - reliability coefficient values in Test B (Cronbach's alpha)

Political Extremism - Test B	Cronbach's alpha
Items - political extremism (summary of item sets)	$\alpha = 0.84$
Items - set of items of human rights	$\alpha = 0.86$
Items - set of items of democracy	$\alpha = 0.82$
Items - set of items of nativism	$\alpha = 0.87$
Items - set of media items	$\alpha = 0.84$
Items - set of items of European integration	$\alpha = 0.81$

Reliability tests were used to establish the reliability of both tests (Test A and Test B). Table 1 and Table 2 show the Cronbach's alpha reliability values for Test A and Test B, respectively. From the above tables, it can be concluded that all items have

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$\alpha > 0.80$ (Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient) values. The sets of test items in Test A and Test B show relatively high consistency and are suitable for further statistical analysis.

As mentioned earlier, the research sample consists of 500 cases (N=500), with male to female representation in the two municipalities tested being in the ratio of male students N=208 and female students N=292. For each region, 104 males and 146 females are represented. A total of 250 respondents. This shows that the male to female ratio in each local government region is 41.6% to 58.4% (see Tables 3 and 4). From Table 5, it can be seen that equal proportions of males and females were divided for school type and local government area. This means that 52 males and 73 females completed the questionnaires in secondary grammar schools and secondary vocational schools in the Košice and the Prešov regions.

Table. No. 3: *Structure of the research sample by gender and type of secondary school in % representation and frequency*

Gender	Secondary grammar schools		Secondary vocational schools	
	% representation	count	% representation	count
men	41.6 %	104	41.6 %	104
women	58.4 %	146	58.4 %	146
total	100.0 %	250	100.0 %	250

Table. No. 4: *Structure of the research sample by gender and municipality in % representation and count*

Gender	Košice Self-governing Region		Prešov Self-governing Region	
	% representation	count	% representation	count
men	41.6 %	104	41.6 %	104
women	58.4 %	146	58.4 %	146
total	100.0 %	250	100.0 %	250

Table. No. 5: *Structure of the research sample by gender, type of school and municipality*

Gender	Košice Self-governing Region (N=250)		Prešov Self-governing Region (N=250)	
	Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools ¹	Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools
men	52	52	52	52
women	73	73	73	73
total	125	125	125	125

Regarding the frequency of age of respondents in relation to gender, the following results were obtained: the most respondents were 18-year-olds (N=245), which accounted for 49.0% of the total number of respondents. The second most frequent respondents were 17-year-olds (N=211), accounting for 42.2%. The 20 and 16 year olds are the least represented, with only two and three respondents respectively completing the questionnaires (N=2 and N=3), representing 0.4% and 0.6% of the total number of respondents (N=500 - see Table 6).

Table. No. 6: *Structure of the research sample by gender and age in terms of number and % representation*

Gender	Age categories					total N
	16-year-olds	17-year-olds	18-year-olds	19-year-olds	20-year-olds	
men	2	88	97	21	0	208
women	1	123	148	18	2	292
total	3 (0.6 %)	211 (42.2 %)	245 (49.0 %)	39 (7.8 %)	2 (0.4 %)	500 (100 %)

From Table 7 it can be stated that among the respondents there were also those whose ethnicity is not Slovak (N=21), but other. We assume the Ruthenian, Hungarian, Ukrainian, etc.

¹ Vocational secondary schools

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This number represents 4.2% of the total number of respondents (N=500). The distribution of students of ethnicities other than Slovak is almost even. There is only one more respondent for males (N=11) than for females (N=10). The number of students declaring Slovak ethnicity is 479, which means 95.8% of the total number.

Table. No. 7: *Structure of the research sample by gender and ethnicity in terms of number and % representation*

Gender	Ethnicity		
	Slovak	Other	total N
men	197	11	208
women	282	10	292
total	479 (95.8 %)	21 (4.2 %)	500 (100 %)

3 PERCEPTION OF THE PHENOMENON OF HUMAN RIGHTS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS OF THE KOŠICE AND THE PREŠOV SELF-GOVERNING REGIONS (Daniel DOBIAŠ)

The tendency of man to recognise his/her own value, or the value of the people, things and ideas in which s/he places it, is an inherent part of the evolutionary dynamics of humanity. In the intellectual tradition of Europe, the desire to be recognised as a human being, endowed with dignity and freedom, may be seen as one of the many symbols of the evolution of the search for a better world. At the same time, the explicit thematization of the notion of human dignity on a metaphysical plane constitutes the basis for a systematic conceptualisation of the idea of human rights, respecting dignity and freedom as the essence of humanity. In the context of the ancient-Biblical tradition of the universal validity and binding force of moral laws for all people without distinction, this is an important methodological premise for legitimising the idea of the reality and universality of human rights on the basis of its constitutive relation to values, in particular the universal validity of the philosophical-moral purpose of human existence as such. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948, was of decisive importance for a systematic grasp of the foundations of human rights and freedoms, based on the eternal and inviolable rights of man. Its opening provisions (Preamble, Article 1) state not just that "the *inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family*"

are the basis of freedom, justice and peace in the world, but also that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights".¹

In the search for a criterion by which to distinguish what human rights are and what they should be, or whether what they require is also good, we encounter the idea of their inalienability (no one can be deprived of rights), their non-limitation (they are not subject to prescription, their duration is unlimited during a person's lifetime), and their universality (they belong to every person), in close correlation with the category of human nature. However, an important condition here is also the practical competence of institutions to exercise their effective protection, which makes it possible to conceive of the phenomenon of human rights as an exclusive virtue, the exercise of which depends on power relations. The above synthesis in the language of political, philosophical, or legal science results in a wide range of the main correctives of the human ambition to identify the universal nature and ideological character of human rights as a constantly evolving complex of ideas into many culturally and geographically conditioned forms. For example, under the influence of the aforementioned *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the concept of human rights has gradually become legislatively anchored in the constitutions of most states of the world, as well as in other international legal documents. Examples include the *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, and the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*.

¹ *Všeobecná deklarácia ľudských práv. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights.)* [online]. [cited 2023-08-06]. Available from: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/slo.pdf

It is precisely the variability in reflection on crucial moral, cultural, political, legal, or philosophical elements that translates into specific forms of both defending and denying arguments about the universality of human rights. By adopting an alternative reflecting the hypothesis of inalienable, non-negotiable features of human nature, which are the precondition of human dignity, the basis of equality and the right of each individual to free self-determination, one of the key paradoxes has developed in the lines of modern political science and practice, when on the one hand, man stands endowed with a set of rights that even the highest political power cannot touch without his/her consent (life, liberty, property), but at the same time we cannot explain why history and the present are oversaturated with examples of extreme violations of these rights. Since the mid-20th century, the seriousness of this issue has been exacerbated by legal requirements of a socio-economic nature, relating to citizens' social security claims on the part of the state, or the claims of employees in relation to their working conditions. It is therefore not just a matter of the seeds of fundamental controversy arising from the fact that different people attach different degrees of importance and significance to different values, but of the realisation that there are different interpretations of them, and also our different internal preferences in favour of or against one of them. The aspiration of any interpretation to be universally applicable in all cases, in all places and at all times is therefore only hypothetical; there are, in principle, concepts and arguments in favour or against any explanation which must be seen in certain historical, political and economic contexts. Above all, there is the ideological context, expressed in the idea of the human right to change one's ideas of what human rights are.

In the form of the universal undeniability of the value of human life and the necessity of its protection, the effort to protect humanity more effectively against totalitarianism, world wars,

genocide, and exploitation, we must also consider the fact that the concept of human rights can be a manipulative mechanism for those who impose its content according to their own intentions. Authentic belief in the fundamental human rights, dignity and worth of every human being is therefore not necessarily a universal experience of discovering that others are different, but may contain a totalising element of silencing dissent in the 'unquestioning' defence of human rights in the name of human rights. In response to this ambivalence, the Spanish scholar R. Pannikar, for example, writes: "*To say that human rights are not universal would be to declare that they are not human. They would cease to be Human rights*"¹... The very fact of birth fulfils the role of a universal symbol on which human rights are based, but on the other hand, the concept of human rights cannot be considered universal because each culture expresses the human experience of reality in its own unique means: "*We have to accept what our interlocutor (in dialogue) tells us... Such is human life, and I would not consider it a deficiency. It is a question of plurality.*"² It is constructive, then, to examine human rights in parallel with various forms of violations.

In the light of the reflections on the asymmetries in the content of the human rights phenomenon, even from the perspective of today, we encounter a number of contradictory facts. In the context of the logic of life experience in liberal democracies of the modern type, they result not only in an intensification of citizens' faith in the ideal of human rights, democracy, liberal virtues or authentic citizenship, but also in a profound disillusionment with the dysfunction of political and power

¹ PANIKKAR, R. Je pojem lidská práva součástí výhradně západní kultury? (Is the concept of human rights part of exclusively Western culture?) In: *Teologický sborník*. Brno: Centre for the Study of Democracy and Culture, 1997, vol. 1997, No. 3, pp. 13-14.

² PANIKKAR, R. Je pojem lidská práva součástí výhradně západní kultury? (Is the concept of human rights part of exclusively Western culture?) In: *Teologický sborník*. In. Brno: Centre for the Study of Democracy and Culture, 1997, vol. 1997, No. 3, pp. 13-14.

structures, increasingly shifting the perception of the content and scope of politics into the position of a failed caricature. As a result of the relativisation of their axiological core, the pursuit of the universal idea of globalisation, ever-increasing social inequalities and recurrent manifestations of intolerance, racism, and extremism, we are bringing the object of our collective devotion to a gradual shifting of ideological boundaries towards extreme forms.

The educational process plays a special role in eliminating extremes. The specificity in question is linked not only to the proclaimed ideal of an educated, knowledge-based society, which is a flexible human being, learning throughout life and making his/her cognitive power available to rapidly changing markets, but in particular to the projection of a certain synthesising, normative idea of education, with an emphasis on the humanities, where education should not only be a means of getting a job, but a goal that makes us full members of the community, including the acquisition of political literacy. That is why the substantive core of our research is the issue of differences in the perception of human rights among secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions with regard to demographic characteristics. Its essential ambition is to conceptualise the relationship between individual items of students' political awareness in the area of respect for individual human rights and political extremism.

3.1 Intergender differences in the perception of human rights among secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions

Table 8 shows the differences in the importance of individual items of political awareness of secondary school students of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, focusing on the preferences of this group of society for different selected

categories of political awareness. The overall result indicates that the criterion of statistical significance ($p \leq 0.05$) is met by four sets of items *Human Rights* ($p=0.01$; $F=7.45$), *Democracy* ($p=0.04$; $F=4.22$), *Nativism* ($p=0.05$; $F=3.96$) and *European Integration* ($p=0.00$; $F=8.65$). One political awareness item, namely *Media* ($p=0.32$; $F=0.99$), does not meet the criterion of a statistically significant difference. In the context of the presented values of statistically significant data, it can be concluded that in three of the four statistically significant items *Human Rights*, *Democracy* and *European Integration*, women tend to be more likely than men to have their substantive attributes. This implies that, compared to males, females have a significantly more predominant inclination towards insightful political awareness in the three aforementioned items. The difference can be discerned only for the item *Nativism*, where the inclination is slightly higher for men than for women. Therefore, in the *Nativism* category, the inclination towards insightful political awareness is significantly more prevalent for men than for women. At the same time, it is very interesting to note that the quantitative differences in the aforementioned item are the lowest between the two genders (males $M=3.69$; females $M=3.61$). If we focus on the conceptualisation of the highest level of political awareness for both men and women, the latter is noticeable for the item *Human Rights* ($M=4.52$); ($M=4.66$). When comparing the individual items of the political awareness attribute for males and females, we also found that the only item that was higher than $M=4$ for males was the *Human Rights* item ($M=4.52$). On the contrary, the two items for females were *Human Rights* ($M=4.66$) and *Democracy* ($M=4.21$). Based on the above findings, we concluded that male and female secondary school students possess the highest level of political awareness or knowledge of issues that fall under the *Human Rights* item.

3.2 ANOVA - univariate analysis of variance

In the context of interpreting intergender differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to *Human Rights*, all four items emerge as relevant (see Table 9). It can also be stated that we do not find a position of inclination towards political extremism among students for any of these statistically significant items.

Table 8 : *Intergender differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items¹*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			men	women
Human rights	7,45	0,01	4,52	4,66
Democracy	4,22	0,04	3,97	4,21
Nativism	3,96	0,05	3,69	3,61
Media	0,99	0,32	3,10	3,39
European integration	8,65	0,00	3,83	4,00

The rate of identification with each statement is almost identical for both genders, with a slightly higher rate of inclination for each for males. Specifically, for the item *Every person, regardless of race, must have the right to life* (F=27.32; p=0.00), the rate of inclination is (M=4.74) for males and (M=4.90) for females, and for the item *Every person must be treated equally, even those who look different* (F=55.99; p=0.00) the ratio of scores in the degree of inclination is (M=4.64) for men and (M=4.89) for women, the third item *Every person must have the right to express his or her opinion in accordance with the law* (F=29.41; p=0.00) yields a ratio of inclination (M=4.62) for men and (M=4.83) for women, and finally, for the item *Everyone must have the right to adequate material security regardless of his or her age or health or mental handicap* (F=34.48; p=0.00) yields a ratio of inclination (M=4.46) for men and (M=4.74) for women. The obtained results confirm that in the studied sample

¹ Statistically significant values are shown in grey.

of secondary school students, both genders show a strong tendency towards an insightful political awareness in respecting individual human rights. On the basis of the empirical analysis carried out, in the outlined context, it is possible to express a fully legitimate opinion that in none of the examined items do we find positions preferring a leaning towards political extremism.

Table 9: *Intergender differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to human rights*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				men	women
HUMAN RIGHTS	Every human being, regardless of race, must have the right to life.	27,32	0,00	4,74	4,90
	Every person must be treated equally, even those who look different.	55,99	0,00	4,64	4,89
	Everyone must have the right to express his or her opinion in accordance with the rule of law.	29,41	0,00	4,62	4,83
	Everyone must have the right to adequate material security, regardless of age or disability.	34,48	0,00	4,46	4,74

When examining the inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items with respect to *human rights*, the level of the measured values ($F=12.54$; $p=0.00$) shows statistical significance (see Table 10). The tendency of inclination towards the statement that *Human Rights are a fundamental, decisive and inalienable principle of a citizen of a civil society* is slightly higher among respondents attending secondary

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grammar schools (M=4.67) than among students of secondary vocational schools (M=4.53).

Table 10: *Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items with respect to human rights*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools
Human rights	12,54	0,00	4,67	4,53
Democracy	6,88	0,01	4,28	3,94
Nativism	2,23	0,14	3,75	3,54
Media	1,32	0,25	3,61	2,93
European integration	19,80	0,00	4,12	3,74

Table 11: *Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with regard to human rights*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools
HUMAN RIGHTS	Every human being, regardless of race, must have the right to life.	0,29	0,59	4,84	4,83
	Every person must be treated equally, even those who look different.	1,30	0,26	4,77	4,81
	Everyone must have the right to express his or her opinion in accordance with the rule of law.	0,16	0,69	4,74	4,75
	Everyone must have the right to adequate material security, regardless of age or disability.	4,36	0,04	4,65	4,59

The values of the individual items in Table 11 confirm the fact that the inter-institutional-educational differences of the items of political extremism with respect to *human rights* are statistically significant in one out of four cases. In particular, the item *Every person must have the right to adequate material security regardless of his/her age or health or mental handicap* ($F=4.36$; $p=0.04$), for which the attitudes of students of secondary grammar schools ($M=4.65$) and secondary vocational schools ($M=4.59$) were almost compatible in terms of positive content projection. The analysis of the examined values for the given item also confirmed the absence of tendencies towards political extremism in both groups of students.

Table 12: *Interregional differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items with respect to human rights*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			KSR ¹	PSR ²
Human rights	30,88	0,00	4,48	4,72
Democracy	5,46	0,02	4,00	4,21
Nativism	0,00	0,98	3,54	3,74
Media	0,55	0,46	3,15	3,39
European integration	5,95	0,02	3,81	4,05

Table 12 shows the statistical significance ($F=30.88$; $p=0.00$) across inter-regional differences for a set of political awareness items with respect to *human rights*. Compared to students of Secondary grammar schools and secondary vocational schools of the Košice Self-governing Region ($M=4.48$), students of Secondary grammar schools and secondary vocational schools of the Prešov Self-governing Region ($M=4.72$) show a higher degree of identification with the content of the item *Human rights*

¹ Košice Self-governing Region

² Prešov Self-governing Region

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are a fundamental, decisive and inalienable principle of a citizen of civil society.

Table 13: Interregional differences in the importance of a set of political extremism items with respect to human rights

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				KSR	PSR
HUMAN RIGHTS	Every human being, regardless of race, must have the right to life.	12,29	0,00	4,78	4,89
	Every person must be treated equally, even those who look different.	0,18	0,67	4,80	4,78
	Everyone must have the right to express his or her opinion in accordance with the rule of law.	8,52	0,00	4,69	4,80
	Everyone must have the right to adequate material security, regardless of age or disability.	0,00	0,95	4,62	4,62

Statistical significance of interregional differences for the set of items on political extremism with respect to *human rights* (see Table 13) can be identified for the items *Every person, regardless of race, must have the right to life* ($F=12.29$; $p=0.00$) and *Every person must have the right to express his or her opinion in accordance with the rule of law* ($F=8.52$; $p=0.00$). The values of the former show a slightly higher tendency towards anti-extremist attitudes in relation to the racially conditioned right to life among students from the PSR ($M=4.89$) than among students from the KSR ($M=4.78$). We find similar predictive relevance in the case of the second item mentioned above, where, in contrast

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to the values of the KSR students (M=4.69), the PSR students achieve values of (M=4.80).

Age differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items with respect to *human rights* are shown in Table 14. The table shows that the political awareness item *Human Rights* does not meet statistical significance (F=1.56; p=0.18). The above fact does not allow the realization of generalization of the individual values of the age-differentiated respondents.

Table 14: Age differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items with regard to human rights

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN				
			16-year-olds	17-year-olds	18-year-olds	19-year-olds	20-year-olds
Human rights	1,56	0,18	3,33	4,57	4,65	4,51	5,00
Democracy	0,61	0,66	3,00	4,09	4,17	3,92	3,50
Nativism	1,51	0,20	3,00	3,64	3,69	3,46	4,00
Media	1,53	0,19	2,33	3,27	3,34	2,87	2,50
European integration	1,27	0,28	4,00	3,91	3,98	3,74	3,00

For the political extremism items examined through the prism of age differences with respect to *human rights* (see Table 15), two statistically significant items can be found. For the item *Every human being, regardless of race, must have the right to life* (F=2.66; p=0.03), the level of agreement with the statement is relatively strong for all age groups recorded, with a slight increase in intensity in relation to older age. Differences are especially evident among students who have reached the age of 16 (M=4.67), followed by 17 year olds (M=4.83), at the age of 18 (M=4.87), the growth curve stops and returns to the starting position at 19 year olds (M=4.67), and finally reaches the maximum value of the agreement scale at 20 year olds (M=5.00).

Table 15: Age differences in the importance of a set of political extremism items with regard to human rights

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN				
				16- year- olds	17- year- olds	18- year- olds	19- year- olds	20- year- olds
HUMAN RIGHTS	Every human being, regardless of race, must have the right to life.	2,66	0,03	4,67	4,83	4,87	4,67	5,00
	Every person must be treated equally, even those who look different.	5,10	0,00	4,00	4,73	4,84	4,79	5,00
	Everyone must have the right to express his or her opinion in accordance with the rule of law.	2,02	0,09	4,33	4,71	4,78	4,69	5,00
	Everyone must have the right to adequate material security, regardless of age or disability.	0,82	0,51	4,33	4,61	4,64	4,56	5,00

The second item *Everyone must be treated equally, even those who look different* (F=5.10; p=0.00) shows a similar trajectory when it yields an inclination ratio (M=4.00) for 16 year olds, 17 year old students present a higher (M=4.73) level of inclination, similarly (M=4.84) as 18 year old students and students (M=4.79) who have reached the age of 19. As with the first item, age 20 years showed the highest (M=5.00) level of agreement. Thus, the largest difference for this item is represented by the results obtained between 16 year old students and students of higher age groups, which can be attributed to certain specific tendencies in relation to quick, clear-cut solutions at the level of (not only) political awareness in terms of the content of their life experience in the area of respect for individual human rights. However, even at this

point, we can express the opinion that we do not find positions favouring a leaning towards political extremism in any of the examined items among the different age groups of students.

In the context of examining the national differences of the item *Human rights* in relation to political awareness (see Table 16), it can be concluded that this fulfils the character of statistical significance ($F=19.83$; $p=0.00$). The comparison of the degree of identification with the content of the item *Human rights are a basic, decisive and inalienable principle of a citizen of civil society* among students of secondary grammar schools and secondary vocational schools of Slovak ethnicity ($M=4.64$) and other ethnicity ($M=3.67$) shows its greater saturation among students of Slovak ethnicity.

Table 16: *Ethnic differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items with regard to human rights*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			Slovak	Other
Human rights	19,83	0,00	4,64	3,67
Democracy	3,14	0,08	4,13	3,52
Nativism	0,18	0,67	3,66	3,33
Media	6,81	0,01	3,28	3,10
European integration	0,28	0,60	3,95	3,48

Based on the data in Table 17, the conclusion that all items are statistically significant can be conceptualised in the intent of interpreting the national differences of the set of items on political extremism in relation to *human rights*. In terms of specific results for the first item *Every person, regardless of race, must have the right to life* ($F=36.80$; $p=0.00$), the ratio between students of Slovak ($M=4.86$) and non-Slovak ($M=4.33$) ethnicity scores in favour of an anti-extremist stance among students claiming Slovak ethnicity. For the item *Everyone must be treated equally, even those who look different* ($F=49.06$; $p=0.00$), the degree of identification with its content again reaches a higher value

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among students of Slovak ethnicity (M=4.81) than among students of other ethnicity (M=4.19).

Table 17: *Ethnic differences in the importance of a set of political extremism items with regard to human rights*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				Slovak	Other
HUMAN RIGHTS	Every human being, regardless of race, must have the right to life.	36,80	0,00	4,86	4,33
	Every person must be treated equally, even those who look different.	49,06	0,00	4,81	4,19
	Everyone must have the right to express his or her opinion in accordance with the rule of law.	15,51	0,00	4,76	4,38
	Everyone must have the right to adequate material security, regardless of age or disability.	4,24	0,04	4,65	4,10

Similar conclusions can be reached for the third item *Every person must have the right to express his/her opinion in accordance with the legal order* (F=15.51; p=0.00), where the tendency towards anti-extremist attitudes is higher among students of Slovak ethnicity (M=4.76) than among students of other ethnicities (M=4.38). The proclaimed trend is fully confirmed by the values for the last item *Everyone must have the right to adequate material*

security regardless of his/her age or health or mental disadvantage ($F=4.24$; $p=0.04$) with a ratio of ($M=4.65$) for students declaring Slovak ethnicity and ($M=4.10$) for students declaring other ethnicity. In principle, however, these slight asymmetries do not change anything on the conclusions already proclaimed so far from other items, that we do not find positions preferring inclination to political extremism in any of the examined items of ethnicity differences among students.

3.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 18, which examines the correlations of the political awareness item *Human rights are a fundamental, crucial, and inalienable principle of a citizen of a civil society* and the set of political extremism items, shows that all four values of Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) are statistically significant ($p=0.00$). For the first item of political extremism entitled *Every person regardless of race must have the right to life*, we observe a value of $r=0.5419$, indicating that this is a positive measure of mean to high correlation. This means that with a positive change in political awareness with respect to human rights, there will be a positive change in attitude towards political extremism (respondents will not be inclined towards it). The second item *Everyone must be treated equally, even those who look different*, offers a similar picture, with the positive change in the relationship of political awareness towards political extremism being of mean correlation with $r=0.4639$. A very close Pearson correlation coefficient value ($r=0.4457$) is provided by the third item *Everyone must have the right to express his or her opinion in accordance with the rule of law*, which also results in the conclusion of a positive mean correlation between political awareness and the relationship to political extremism. The fourth item on political extremism entitled *Every person must have the right to adequate material security regardless of his/her age or health or mental handicap* has a value

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of $r=0.4276$, so this is again a positive measure of mean correlation, which means that with a positive change in political awareness with respect to human rights, respondents will not be inclined to political extremism.

Table 18: *Correlations in the significance of the political awareness item and the set of political extremism items with respect to human rights*

		POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEM - HUMAN RIGHTS	
		p	r
HUMAN RIGHTS	Every human being, regardless of race, must have the right to life.	0,00	0,5419
	Every person must be treated equally, even those who look different.	0,00	0,4639
	Everyone must have the right to express his or her opinion in accordance with the rule of law.	0,00	0,4457
	Everyone must have the right to adequate material security, regardless of age or disability.	0,00	0,4276

Conclusion

Investigating the differences in the evaluation of *human rights* in the importance of individual items of political awareness of secondary school students of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions offered us the identification of a wide range of opinions. Presentation of specific results indicates that students of the above-mentioned secondary grammar schools possess the highest level of political awareness or knowledge of the issues that fall under the *Human Rights* item. The results obtained also confirm that in the studied sample of secondary school students, both genders show a strong tendency towards the substantive attributes of insightful political awareness in the area of respect for individual human rights. On the basis of the empirical analysis carried out, in the outlined context, it is possible to express a fully legitimate opinion that we do not find positions favouring a leaning towards political extremism in any of the items studied.

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4 PERCEPTION OF THE PHENOMENON OF DEMOCRACY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS OF THE KOŠICE AND THE PREŠOV SELF-GOVERNING REGIONS (Marcela GBÚROVÁ)

4.1 Participatory democracy as a prerequisite for active citizenship

Participatory democracy has the advantage of an active citizenry that participates not only in the public scrutiny of political power, but also in its creation. This model of democratic governance is based on the conviction that democracy is not just a matter of the way government and politics are conducted, but also of the quality of civic life in all its variety and diversity. Achieving that quality means opening up the public space to innovative citizens who have social and emotional intelligence and a well-developed critical mind. In this process of opening up to participatory democracy, it is important to improve all the components of citizenship, especially the educational component. The development of the educational dimension of citizenship has been verbally declared at various levels of professional and especially political discourse in the Slovak Republic for several years, but the result of these discussions has not been significantly translated into real educational practice. It should be emphasised that the positive effects resulting from the potential development of this component of citizenship are enormous. The basic advantage is generally considered to be a synergistic or multiplier effect, which manifests itself - in the short and long term - in a positive change in the quality of all three dimensions and potentials of citizenship (civic,

political, social¹), or a change in the quality of life of society in all its aspects and manifestations. For this reason, government priorities should be directed more strongly than hitherto towards the development of the educational level of society, which should be seen as part of the strategy for addressing the development priorities of a participatory civil society in the Slovak Republic. The political science community should not be absent in this educational setting, but especially in improving the quality of political awareness of Slovak society and in increasing the level of critical civic sensitivity in the public sphere and in the school environment.

The specific targeting of projects on participatory democracy education, especially for young people, has significant positive effects in the long term. As a country, we are lagging behind in educating primary school pupils and secondary school students on civic skills and values. We had the expectation that the amendment to the Education Law Act, which was approved by the Slovak Parliament in May 2023, would strengthen teaching towards modern citizenship. Unfortunately, this hasn't happened. Instead, from September this year, primary school pupils will be required to have three hours of physical education a week and secondary school students two hours. It should be added to this that physical exercise for our pupils and secondary school students is very necessary from the point of view of their physical health, but education for citizenship skills has much more positive consequences for the development of their civic potential and political awareness. There is one important observation to be made. The Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice carried out research into the levels of political awareness on a selected sample of secondary school students in the Košice and the Prešov regions. One of the

¹ MARSHALL, T. H. Citizenship and Social Class. In: *Class, Citizenship and Social Development*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

conclusions of this research confirmed that in the studied four levels of political awareness¹, the knowledge of the above-mentioned students in the field of theory and practice of politics was at the level of the first and partly at the level of the second level². This is a very unfavourable result in terms of the quality of their civic and political readiness to deal with the major issues of public life.

Alarming are also the results of sociological surveys focusing on broader challenges that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have recently faced. The latest opinion poll (26 May 2023) conducted by GLOBSEC in eight CEE countries on the attitudes of the region's citizens towards key narratives in the public space is very unfavourable for Slovakia. It is assumed that the above result will also motivate the political science community to reflect on whether there is too much one-sidedness in the public and media space, whether the mentality of Slovak citizens, in which the proverbial distrustfulness and doubtfulness is rooted, is not lacking more pluralistic, objective criticism and diversity of opinion.

4.2 Correlations of political awareness with political extremism among secondary school students in the Košice and the Prešov regions

The research project VEGA 1/0321/21 *Research on the correlations between the distortions of political awareness and the increase of political extremism among secondary school*

¹ GBÚROVÁ, M. Politické vedomie ako hodnotový problém. (Political awareness as a value issue. In. Prešov: Náuka, 2000, pp. 127-129.

² GBÚROVÁ, M. K problematike formovania politického vedomia občanov Slovenskej republiky v súčasnosti. (On the issue of the formation of political awareness of the citizens of the Slovak Republic at present.) In. M., M. GBÚROVÁ, M. et al. *Sekundárny analfabetizmus, alebo o príčinách a dôsledkoch nízkeho záujmu verejnosti o politiku na Slovensku. (Secondary illiteracy, or on the causes and consequences of low public interest in politics in Slovakia.)* Košice: Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Faculty of Arts, 2018, pp. 38-44.

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students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions is a continuation of the research into secondary illiteracy in the Slovak Republic carried out within the VEGA project No. 1/0658/16 (2016-2018), which addressed the issue of political awareness and its levels (naive, insightful, professional, and theoretical). Within its framework, theoretical-methodological bases for the research of the above-mentioned stages of political awareness were developed. The research project VEGA 1/0321/21 (2021-2023) is a continuation of the above theoretical-methodological basis of research on the individual stages of political awareness, while its basic task was to search for correlations between the distortions in the stages of political awareness and the increase in political extremism among secondary school students in the Košice and the Prešov regions through quantitative analysis.

Despite the fact that in theoretical reflection the phenomenon of extremism receives quite a lot of attention both in Slovakia and abroad, the actual practice of life in Slovak, but not only Slovak civil society shows that a significant number of manifestations of extremism appear in it every year¹. In particular, a group of young people who are not interested in political life and do not have a sufficiently value-based opinion

¹ For more on this concept, its content, as well as the diversity of its perception in political, social, journalistic, official, criminal, scientific and lay contexts, see: NANICS, Š. *Extremismus – hrozba demokracie. (Extremism - a threat to democracy.)* Prague: Police history, 2002. CHARVÁT, J. *Současný politický extremismus a radikalismus.* Prague: Portál, 2007. JASCHKE, H. *Politischer Extremismus.* Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006. MAREŠ, M. *Pravicový extrémismus a radikalismus v ČR v současnosti. (Right-wing extremism and radicalism in the Czech Republic today.)* Prague: Ministerstvo vnitra ČR (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic), 2003. NOCIAR, T. *Demokracia a tieň totalitarizmu a populizmu. (Democracy and the shadows of totalitarianism and populism.)* In: *Mládež a spoločnosť. (Youth and Society.)* 2011, No. 4, pp. 6-72. SMOLÍK, J. *Krajně pravicové politické strany v zemích V4: historie a současnost. (Far-right political parties in the V4 countries: history and present.)* In: *Sociologija.* 2013, vol. 45, No. 4, pp. 385-410. ŠTEFANČÍK, R. *Teoretické východiská výskumu politického extrémizmu. (Theoretical bases of research on political extremism.)* In: *Pravicový extrémismus a mládež na Slovensku. (Right-wing extremism and youth in Slovakia.)* Brno: Tribun EU, 2013.

on the issues of democracy and individual and political freedom and responsibility, often succumb to the ideas of political extremism in its various forms. It is political extremism that is generally regarded as the antithesis to a democratic state. This type of extremism has not arisen in the present day. It was born in Germany in the mid-19th century in socialist and conservative political groups¹.

Our task in this sociological research was to formulate questionnaire questions related to the relationship between political awareness and political extremism, specifically looking at how this relationship might translate into the quality of perceptions of democracy among the actors in the questionnaire research.

In this investigation, we assumed that increasing political awareness in relation to the understanding of democracy reduces the propensity to political extremism.

The concept of democracy is a complex and ambiguous concept and there are several different definitions, depending on the historical context, philosophical approach, and political values of individuals. We have opted for the definition according to which *democracy is the highest and most advanced form of organisation of power and the state in the development of human society*.

This definition is an extended characterisation of the most familiar content of the concept of democracy as a government of the people (the degree of participation of the people in state power). This characterisation is also given in the secondary school textbook *Náuka o spoločnosti (Doctrine of Society)*², which is a source of information for secondary school students in the Slovak

¹ ŠTEFANČÍK, R. Teoretické východiská výskumu politického extrémizmu. (Theoretical bases for research on political extremism.) In: Brno: Tribun EU, 2013, p. 13.

² Demokracia. (Democracy.) In: *Zones* [online]. 2013 [cit. 2023-11-26]. Available from: <https://www.zones.sk/studentske-prace/nauka-o-spolocnosti/6429-demokracia/>

Republic in the field of political science. The content of the concept of democracy in this textbook is enriched by the ten pillars of democracy and its two forms: direct and indirect democracy. It should be added that the essence of democracy is not only specific outcomes in the form of a free society or the protection of human rights, but above all the processes it guarantees. These are first and foremost to ensure the transfer of power from citizens to the trustees of democracy and, consequently, the accountability of the trustees of democracy to the citizens¹. Thanks to this text, a secondary school student with a first or second level of political awareness will receive basic information about this concept, which refers to a political principle based on popular participation in the governance of society ref. Secondary school students who have a need to broaden their knowledge of the democratic form of social and political organisation, and thus to consolidate a second level of insightful political awareness and open the way to professional political awareness, will find a wealth of professional political science literature on the subject in print and electronic form. The study of this literature will open the way for the student to explore and understand various aspects of democratic political systems, institutions and processes, as well as theories, values and principles. One of the most important political democratic processes, which has had a significant impact on the lives of the citizens of the Slovak Republic, was the creation of the European Union. It is quite natural that a significant number of these citizens compare the state of democracy before and after the Slovak Republic joined the European Union. It is precisely this kind of constant comparison with democracy and legitimacy in nation states that the European Union suffers from. Its imperfect institutional structure is also an issue. However, much more fundamental with regard to the concept of the separation

¹ For more details see HURRELMANN, A. Democracy beyond the State: Insights from the European Union. *Political Science Quarterly*. 2014, vol. 129, s. 87.

of powers are the institutional relations themselves and the mutual non-interference in defined institutional competences.¹ All these and other ills in the democratic governance of the European Union² reach the citizens of the Slovak Republic through various media channels, with the exception of secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions.

Respondents in our sociological research answered the question whether *Democracy is the highest and most advanced form of organisation of power and state in the development of human society*. The results confirmed (Table 19) that secondary school students of the Prešov Self-governing Region identify more with the content of the item (M=4.21) than respondents of the Košice Self-governing Region (M=4.00). The statistical significance of this result is (F=5.46; p=0.02). The close difference between the results achieved by secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions is confirmed by two facts: 1. Similar information sources (secondary school civics textbooks), 2. Positive perception of the concept of democracy among the young generation, which, despite various negative information about democratic development in the Slovak Republic or the European Union, is dominated in its evaluation by positive features of democratic governance. These respondents are among those citizens of the Slovak Republic (74%) for whom living in a democratically governed country is very important. According to a 2018 sociological survey conducted by the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava, the most basic characteristics of democracy include free elections (69%), equal rights for men and women (67%), unemployment benefits (61%), and civil rights

¹ Cf. MÖLLERS, CH. *The Three Branches: A Comparative Model of Separation of Powers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 48-50.

² BARANIK, K. *Demokracia a jej budúcnosť v Európskej únii*. (Democracy and its future in the European Union.) *Lawyer*. 2017, No. 3, pp. 235-256.

that protect against state oppression (59%).¹ Table 20 shows one more important statistic concerning intergender differentials (men's and women's perspectives) on the above issue about democracy in the surveyed sample of respondents.

Table 19: *Interregional differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items with respect to democracy*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			KSR ²	PSR ³
Human rights	30,88	0,00	4,48	4,72
Democracy	5,46	0,02	4,00	4,21
Nativism	0,00	0,98	3,54	3,74
Media	0,55	0,46	3,15	3,39
European integration	5,95	0,02	3,81	4,05

Table 20: *Intergender differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items⁴*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			men	women
Human rights	7,45	0,01	4,52	4,66
Democracy	4,22	0,04	3,97	4,21
Nativism	3,96	0,05	3,69	3,61
Media	0,99	0,32	3,10	3,39
European integration	8,65	0,00	3,83	4,00

The political awareness item (*Democracy is the highest and most advanced form of organisation of power and the state in the development of human society*) was linked to a set of four political extremism items (1. A functional state must be headed by a single wise,

¹ Slovensko a demokracia. (Slovakia and democracy.) In: SAV [online]. 2018 [cit. 2023-11-26]. Available from: https://www.sav.sk/index.php?doc=services-news&source_no=20&news_no=7949#:~:text=%C5%BDi%C5%A5%20v%20demokraticky%20spravovanej%20krajine%20je%20d%C3%B4le%C5%BEit%C3%A9%20pre,pr%C3%A1va%2C%20ktor%C3%A9%20chr%C3%A1nia%20pre%20%C3%BAtlakom%20%C5%A1t%C3%A1tu%20%2859%20%25%29

² Košice Self-governing Region

³ Prešov Self-governing Region

⁴ Statistically significant values are shown in grey.

strong, and capable leader, 2. Non-democratic state regimes are better than democratic ones, 3. Every vote in elections must be equal, and 4. Political parties are useless). The correlation matrix is supplemented with Pearson's correlation coefficient r . (Table 21).

Table 21: *Correlations in the significance of the political awareness item and the set of political extremism items with respect to democracy*

		POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEM - DEMOCRACY	
			Democracy is the highest and most advanced form of organisation of power and state in the evolution of human society.
		SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	p
			r
DEMOCRACY	At the head of a functioning state there must be one wise, strong and capable leader.	0,00	-0,1476
	Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic ones.	0,00	-0,4804
	Every vote in an election must be equal.	0,00	0,3166
	Political parties are useless.	0,00	-0,2751

The first of the four items (*There must be one wise, strong, and capable leader at the head of a functional state*) is a statement that may be perceived differently by a student with an insider's, i.e., primitive, political awareness, and differently by a student instructed by political history. It can be interpreted positively in the sense of a political leader with significant influence on political decision-making within a state or nation. He may be

a respected president, prime minister, general who has unique abilities to persuade and mobilise a population, a nation, an army, and so on. Wise and capable leaders are usually characterised by moral values, empathy, and the ability to make decisions in difficult times in the interest of the majority and bring about positive change for society. They are characterised by their unique approach to dealing with societal issues, their distinctive management style, personal charisma, good oratory skills, the power of their intellect and their ability to mobilise the public. On the other hand, the semantics of the term leader may complicate the positive connotations of the above statement. It may conjure up negative associations that are associated with personalities with a strong authoritarian attitude. A transparent example of this type of leadership is Adolf Hitler, whose political influence and leadership led to the outbreak of the Second World War and the genocide known as the Holocaust. His strong political influence and undemocratic decisions meant that he had unlimited political power, which steered Germany towards an autocratic regime. This issue, in particular the delineation of basic traditional and modern theories of leadership, the different types and styles of governing a country and society through evolutionary stages, as well as the debate on the need for a strong leader in modern nation-states, respectively. The characteristics of good and bad leaders are discussed in detail in a publication by J. Mihálik and M. Vrábek, *Politické líderstvo: Kontext, koncepcie a výskum mládeže na Slovensku (Political Leadership: Context, Concepts and Youth Research in Slovakia)*, which, among other things, examines in an innovative way the performance of Slovak political elites in the context of the independent Slovak Republic¹. A similar question (*Does Slovakia need a strong and decisive authoritarian leader,*

¹ MIHÁLIK, J., VRÁBEL, M. *Politické líderstvo: Kontext, koncepcie a výskum mládeže na Slovensku. (Political leadership: context, concepts and research on youth in Slovakia.)* Trnava: UCM in Trnava, 2016.

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even at the cost of being on the border of democratic principles) as was asked in our research to students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions was also asked by the Slovak research agency AKO for the show *Na hrane* TV Joj in the period 8 September 2022 - 14 September 2022, by telephone to a representative sample of 1000 respondents. The majority of respondents chose the option that our country definitely needs this type of leader. The tendency to desire such a leader was higher the older the respondents were. The opposite view, that the country does not need an autocrat at the head, was held by only 35 percent of respondents. Voters of the Slovak National Party (48%), the Smer-SD party (49%), the Voice-SD party (48%) and the Republika political party (35%) were most inclined to the so-called "hard hand" of a political leader. Voters of the coalition party Sme rodina (33%) also want a strong leader. Voters of the political party Sloboda a Solidarita (55%), together with supporters of the Progressive Slovakia party (63%), are among those who think that Slovakia does not need a strong political hand more than it needs a government. Absolute support for an authoritarian ruler was strongest among voters of the Slovak National Party, where up to 80 (combined "definitely needs", "rather needs") percent of respondents wanted it. The importance of living in a democratically governed society is more often emphasised by people with higher education, but democratic governance is also important for 69% of respondents with primary education. People with higher education are the most likely to reject the system of government by a strong leader, but even among them there are 17% who consider it to be quite good.¹

¹ DEDÁK, P. Poll: Prieskum: Slováci očakávajú rozpad Hegerovej menšinovej vlády a konanie predčasných volieb. (Slovaks expect Heger's minority government to collapse and early elections to be held.) In: *nocomment.sk* [online]. 2022 [cit. 2023-11-26]. Available from: <https://nocomment.sk/2022/09/30/prieskum-slovaci-ocakavaju-rozpad-hegerovej-menšinovej-vlady-a-konanie-predcasnych-volieb/>

Table 22: *Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items with respect to democracy*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools
Human rights	12,54	0,00	4,67	4,53
Democracy	6,88	0,01	4,28	3,94
Nativism	2,23	0,14	3,75	3,54
Media	1,32	0,25	3,61	2,93
European integration	19,80	0,00	4,12	3,74

When examining the inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items with respect to democracy, the measured values reach statistical significance ($F=6.88$; $p=0.01$) - Table 22. It turns out that respondents attending secondary grammar schools are more inclined to the statement that *Democracy is the highest and most advanced form of organisation of power and state in the development of human society* ($M=4.28$) than students attending secondary vocational schools ($M=3.94$). To this result, it should be added that secondary grammar schools are more dedicated to developing knowledge and skills for democratic civic participation compared to secondary vocational schools. In addition, secondary grammar schools produce well-educated and flexible graduates who will be successful in any type of university, including humanities and social science majors dedicated to the study of history, political science, and sociology. Secondary vocational schools are primarily geared towards direct vocational and professional activities. In the secondary grammar schools that participated in our research, various additional educational forms are associated with the educational standard: discussions with political science experts from university and third sector backgrounds dealing with participatory democracy, quizzes

on democratic skills, participation of selected students in civic education Olympiads.

Political extremism¹, which was part of the research, can be characterised as an extreme political trend that aims to problematise, even destroy, political pluralism. This trend is not interested in compromise in politics, on the contrary, it reaches for undemocratic means. It can have various characteristics, which include ideological, social and behavioural components. These components form the basic characteristics of extremist political parties and movements. The ideological component of political extremism is dominant in the formation of extremist views and attitudes. Its most exposed component is opinion radicalism, which manifests itself in the attitudes of individuals and groups towards various phenomena in the political, social and economic system of the state. The social component of political extremism manifests itself mainly in the area of social relations. We often see that it is this component that plays a key role in the formation and consolidation of extremist views and attitudes of individuals and groups. The threat of social extremism is the emergence of group identities, that is, groups of citizens who are united by social, cultural, ethnic or religious contexts. The behavioural component of political extremism refers to the extreme political views and attitudes of individuals or groups of citizens. The most well-known components of this type of political extremism are violence (physical, emotional, psychological, verbal) and terrorism (this is mostly a form of violence influenced by political decision-making, usually directed against civilians to create a sense of fear

¹ For more details see CHARVÁT, J. *Současný politický extremismus a radikalismus. (Contemporary political extremism and radicalism.)* Prague: Portál, 2007. BACKES, U. Meaning and Forms of Political Extremism. *Central European Political Studies*. 2007, vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 242-262. DANICS, Š. and L. *Extremismus, radikalismus, populismus a euroskepticismus. (Extremism, Radicalism, Populism and Euroscepticism.)* Prague: J. A. Comenius University, 2017. HARRIS-HOGAN, S., BARRELLE, K. and A. ZAMMIT. What is countering violent extremism? Exploring CVE policy and practice in Australia. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*. 2016, vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 6-24.

and panic). It is thus, diplomatically speaking, 'non-standard behaviour' by individuals or groups of citizens that differs from generally accepted and established behaviour. The problem, also in Slovakia, is the moral decline of society, especially of political leaders. The problem is also the legitimisation of these politicians, i.e. the communication and cooperation of a part of standard politicians and the public with them. The reason for this cooperation is an attempt to win them over to their side on the grounds that they have a strong influence on the electoral base with their well-marketed political, social, nationalistic and other arguments. Any attack on them by the mainstream political and media scene is perceived in the minds of their supporters as an attack on them, on their outsider position. This information is disseminated through various channels. Social media, in particular, allow the rapid and widespread dissemination of false news, which can have far-reaching consequences. They are often tailored to create tensions or conflicts in society. This can lead to polarisation and a weakening of social cohesion in particular.

Nowadays, when access to information is much easier than a few years ago, it is essential that society's attention is focused on raising awareness among certain easily influenced groups of the dangers posed by extremism, especially political extremism.

Combating the spread of false information requires efforts from multiple parties, including the media, governments, technology companies and the public. It is therefore a complex and coordinated task from these institutions, including civil society, educational institutions and other actors. We consider it important to educate citizens on how to recognise misinformation and to promote transparent reporting. In addition, programmes that strengthen critical thinking, tolerance, understanding between different cultures and national minorities, informing the public about the risks of extremism and its consequences

should be supported. Promoting social interaction and inclusive policies is also important. Monitoring and restricting extremist websites and social media should not be forgotten. Last but not least, legal action must be taken against individuals and political actors who incite violence or commit extremist acts¹.

Table 23: *Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to democracy*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools
DEMOCRACY	At the head of a functioning state there must be one wise, strong and capable leader.	11,83	0,00	3,18	4,14
	Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic ones.	6,12	0,01	1,76	2,20
	Every vote in an election must be equal.	0,14	0,70	4,61	4,59
	Political parties are useless.	10,36	0,00	2,10	2,66

¹ For more details see PAJTINKOVÁ, L. *Prevenencia rasizmu, extrémizmu a radikalizmu na školách (Prevention of racism, extremism and radicalism in schools)* [online]. 2016 [cit. 2023-11-26]. Available from: <https://www.skolaefektivne.sk/33/prevenencia-rasizmuextremizmu-a-radikalizmu-na-skolach-uniqueiduchxzASYZnbZPkswr5xNIBBYTZkaarPV7kS2esh-1c/> MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC. *Koncepcia boja proti extrémizmu na roky 2015-2019 (Concept of countering extremism for 2015-2019)* [online]. 2015 [cited 2023-11-26]. Available from: https://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/policia/naka_opr/nptj/koncepcia%20extremizmu%202015-2019.pdf DANDURAND, Y. Social inclusion programmes for youth and the prevention of violent extremism. In: *Countering radicalisation and violent extremism among youth to prevent terrorism*. 2015, pp. 22-36.

Table 23 documents that the inter-item differences of the political extremism items with respect to democracy are statistically significant in three of the four cases. In particular, both secondary grammar school and secondary vocational school students ($M=1.76$ and $M=2.20$, respectively) disagreed with the content of the item *Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic regimes* ($F=6.12$; $p=0.01$). A more pronounced negative attitude is noticeable among students of secondary grammar schools ($M=1.76$).

This entry raises the topic of the confrontation between democratic and non-democratic political regimes. Senior citizens of the Slovak Republic who have lived part of their lives in a socialist political regime considered to be non-democratic can compare the two types of political systems. The young generation, which is the focus of our research, was born into a democratic environment. They experience this environment in all its positive and negative aspects. It is natural that they seek the cause of the negative aspects of public life and for this reason they are not only interested in correcting them, but also ask questions about how politicians from non-democratic systems would solve these problems. Since there are also a number of undemocratic or semi-democratic regimes today, particularly in Asia, Africa, Europe, South America and the Middle East, they are interested in the lives of the citizens there and the ways in which these states are governed politically. There is quite a lot of literature on the subject, the Internet sources, but also personal accounts of travellers who have visited the countries mentioned above. Let us recall the basic knowledge of non-democratic regimes. The interest of professional, political, and other publics in non-democratic regimes arose between the First and Second World Wars, in which new totalitarian models of non-democratic governments emerged, namely in Italy and in National Socialist Germany. Today, there are other models of non-democratic governance. They can be

defined by a number of features: Political power is concentrated in the hands of one person, group or political party without adequate citizen participation, pluralistic politics respecting basic civil rights and freedoms; in a state with such a political set-up there is one official state ideology and one mass hierarchically organised political party headed by a leader; dominance of police control of society; directive management of the national economy and control of the economy; monopoly of control over the means of mass communication; monopoly over the armed forces; the leaders of this regime are not dependent on elections but on personal relationships and popularity; opponents of the regime are persecuted and imprisoned¹.

Our research confirms the assumption that secondary school students have a stronger awareness of the virtues of democratic regimes, which are important for the creation of civil society, transparency of government, legal equality, freedom of speech, and respect for human rights. Their political awareness is more developed compared to secondary school students, which is due to their more highly endowed knowledge of democratic governance and of the political and civic realities of non-democratic regimes.

In interpreting the intergender differences of the set of political extremism items with respect to democracy (Table 24), it can be argued that the value of one item out of three is statistically significant, namely *Every vote in the election must be equal* ($F=4.08$; $p=0.04$). Respondents agreed with the statement almost equally irrespective of gender as the score for males ($M=4.54$) was very similar to that of females ($M=4.64$). The above values confirm the fact that respondents, irrespective of gender differences, positively evaluated the principle of equality of votes (irrespective

¹ Nedemokratické režimy. (Non-democratic regimes.) In. [cit. 2023-11-26]. Available from: <https://polit.fss.muni.cz/projekty-na-katedre/onlinepodporavyuky/pol/demokracie/nedemokraticke-rezimy>

of social status, race, gender, religion or other characteristics), which is a key element of democratic elections. This principle means that every vote has equal weight and importance in the decision-making process. Equality of votes also means that the political system reflects the will of the entire population and not just certain groups.

Table 24: *Intergender differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to democracy*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				men	women
DEMOCRACY	At the head of a functioning state there must be one wise, strong and capable leader.	1,53	0,22	3,60	3,70
	Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic ones.	0,32	0,57	2,13	1,88
	Every vote in an election must be equal.	4,08	0,04	4,54	4,64
	Political parties are useless.	0,01	0,91	2,29	2,44

Statistical significance can be observed for the items of political extremism with regard to democracy, namely for the items *Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic ones* (F=6.95; p=0.01) and *Every vote in elections must be equal* (F=69.14; p=0.00) in relation to the tendencies of respondents of the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions (Table 25). The first mentioned item shows that students from the Prešov Self-governing Region maintain more pronounced anti-extremist attitudes (M=1.88) than students from the Košice Self-governing Region (M=2.08). In the case of the second mentioned item it is the same - students of the Prešov Self-governing Region achieve

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values $M=4.78$ in contrast to the values of students of the Košice Self-governing Region ($M=4.42$).

Table 25: *Interregional differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to democracy*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	P	MEAN	
				KSR	PSR
DEMOCRACY	At the head of a functioning state there must be one wise, strong and capable leader.	0,00	0,94	3,80	3,52
	Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic ones.	6,95	0,01	2,08	1,88
	Every vote in an election must be equal.	69,14	0,00	4,42	4,78
	Political parties are useless.	0,91	0,34	2,44	2,32

Table 26: *Age differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items with respect to democracy*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	P	MEAN				
			16-year-olds	17-year-olds	18-year-olds	19-year-olds	20-year-olds
Human rights	1,56	0,18	3,33	4,57	4,65	4,51	5,00
Democracy	0,61	0,66	3,00	4,09	4,17	3,92	3,50
Nativism	1,51	0,20	3,00	3,64	3,69	3,46	4,00
Media	1,53	0,19	2,33	3,27	3,34	2,87	2,50
European integration	1,27	0,28	4,00	3,91	3,98	3,74	3,00

Age differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items with respect to democracy are shown in Table 26. The table shows that the political awareness item Democracy does not meet statistical significance ($F=0.61$; $p=0.66$) and thus it is not possible to generalise the individual scores of age-differentiated respondents.

Even for the political extremism items examined through the prism of age differences with respect to democracy (see Table 27), not a single item can be found statistically significant.

Table 27: *Age differences in the significance of a set of items on political extremism with respect to democracy*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN				
				16-year-olds	17-year-olds	18-year-olds	19-year-olds	20-year-olds
DEMOCRACY	At the head of a functioning state there must be one wise, strong and capable leader.	0,85	0,50	4,00	3,75	3,55	3,85	3,50
	Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic ones.	0,83	0,50	2,67	2,03	1,91	2,05	2,50
	Every vote in an election must be equal.	0,12	0,98	4,00	4,60	4,62	4,56	4,50
	Political parties are useless.	1,74	0,14	4,00	2,45	2,31	2,28	3,50

In the context of examining the national differences of the item Democracy in relation to political awareness (see Table 28), it can be stated that it does not meet the character of statistical significance ($F=3.14$; $p=0.08$).

Table 28: Ethnic differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items with respect to democracy

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			Slovak	Other
Human rights	19,83	0,00	4,64	3,67
Democracy	3,14	0,08	4,13	3,52
Nativism	0,18	0,67	3,66	3,33
Media	6,81	0,01	3,28	3,10
European integration	0,28	0,60	3,95	3,48

Table 29: Ethnic differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to democracy

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				Slovak	Other
DEMOCRACY	At the head of a functioning state there must be one wise, strong and capable leader.	1,22	0,27	3,66	3,67
	Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic ones.	0,04	0,84	1,95	2,62
	Every vote in an election must be equal.	8,00	0,00	4,63	3,86
	Political parties are useless.	1,93	0,17	2,35	2,95

In interpreting the national differences of the set of items on political extremism in relation to democracy (Table 29), it can be concluded that only the item entitled *Every vote in elections must be equal* is statistically significant ($F=8.00$; $p=0.00$). Specifically, the scores indicate that students claiming Slovak ethnicity have a significantly anti-extremist attitude ($M=4.63$), in contrast to students claiming ethnicity other than Slovak ($M=3.86$).

4.3 Correlation analysis

Table 30: Correlations in the significance of the political awareness item and the set of political extremism items with respect to democracy

		POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEM - DEMOCRACY	
		Democracy is the highest and most advanced form of organisation of power and state in the evolution of human society.	
SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS		p	r
DEMOCRACY	At the head of a functioning state there must be one wise, strong and capable leader.	0,00	-0,1476
	Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic ones.	0,00	-0,4804
	Every vote in an election must be equal.	0,00	0,3166
	Political parties are useless.	0,00	-0,2751

Table 30 examining the correlations of the Political Awareness - Democracy item and the set of Political Extremism items shows that all Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) values are statistically significant ($p=0.00$). The political extremism item titled *There must be one wise, strong and capable leader at the head of a functional state* records a value of $r=-0.1476$, indicating that it is a negative measure of low correlation. This means that with a positive change in political awareness with respect to democracy, there will be a negative change in attitude towards political extremism

(respondents will not be inclined towards political extremism). The item *Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic regimes* achieves a moderate negative correlation of $r=-0.4804$, which leads to the same conclusion as the first item. The same can be characterised for the last fourth statistically significant item *Political parties are useless*, where the negative correlation value is $r=-0.2751$. The statistically significant item *Every vote in elections must be equal* reaches a positive correlation value of $r=0.3166$ (mean level), which implies that increasing political awareness in relation to the understanding of democracy reduces the level of inclination to political extremism.

Conclusion

We have been exploring the correlations of the political awareness item *Democracy* and a set of political extremism items. Political awareness has received considerable attention in the foreign literature, which cannot be said about the Slovak professional environment. For this reason, we have first focused our attention on the content of the above-mentioned concept. We argue that it is a complex term that refers to the political awareness of individuals and groups of citizens, encompassing the understanding of political systems, values, ideologies and participation in the political process. It is a specialised component of social awareness. It is shaped by a variety of factors, including culture, education, experience of political and public life, and social environment. It can vary from individual to individual. Considering that political awareness is an individual characteristic of an individual citizen, then it is possible to consider and characterise the stages of political awareness. We have distinguished 4 stages of political awareness (*insider, insightful, professional, theoretical*), characterizing each stage. We correlated these stages with a set of political extremism items. For this correlation, we used secondary school students (secondary

vocational schools and secondary grammar schools) in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions. The research confirmed our basic assumption that the more developed the political awareness of citizens, the less likely they are to be subject to any form of political extremism. It turned out that students at secondary grammar schools in the aforementioned Self-governing Regions had, in comparison to students at secondary vocational schools, greater prerequisites and conditions for the development of their political awareness, as well as for the elimination of various manifestations of political extremism. The above results are a confirmation of the fact that secondary grammar schools pay more comprehensive attention to citizenship education, which plays an important role in shaping and educating students to understand the principles of democracy, the structure of government, and the ways in which they can influence the political process. In addition, it has an impact on the development of political awareness and, within this, on the development of critical thinking and the ability to read political events with understanding. These students are better able to understand complex political issues and have insightful opinions. They are also able to evaluate negative phenomena in Slovak democracy in the context of topics on democracy, and this openness and criticality in communication is a suitable platform for preventing political extremism in its various forms.

Resources

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5 PERCEPTION OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS NATIVISM AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS OF THE KOŠICE AND THE PREŠOV SELF-GOVERNING REGIONS

(Jana ŠUTAJOVÁ)

The term nativism is defined by C. Mudde as "*the ideology that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of a domestic group - 'the nation' - and that elements, persons or ideas that do not originate in the country fundamentally threaten the homogeneous nation-state.*" Mudde sees nativism, along with authoritarianism and populism, as key elements of the populist far right.¹ Nativism combines aspects of nationalism and xenophobia. The goal of nationalists is to achieve a monocultural state (state-nation consensus) in which the society in the state would be made up only of people from "one's own" nation. Xenophobia manifests itself mainly in the form of anti-immigrant attitudes, but in the CEE region also in hostility towards ethnic minorities, especially the Roma.²

"*Slovak society is characterised by a pronounced and long-lasting social distance towards national minorities, foreigners and any "otherness" in general.*"³ These tendencies can also be observed in children and youth in Slovakia. As part of the 2016 survey aimed at finding out the opinions and personal experiences of primary and secondary school students with manifestations of extremism, the questionnaire also included a question aimed at

¹ DE MEERE, F. and L. LENSINK. *Riešenia proti radikalizácii mládeže (Solutions to youth radicalization)* [online]. Utrecht: Verwey Jonker Instituut, 2015 [cited 2023-10-09], p. 41. Available from: <https://www.ycare.eu/files/YCARE%20Guidelines%20SK.pdf>

² KLUKNAVSKÁ, A. Od Štúra k parazitom: Tematická adaptácia krajnej pravice v parlamentných voľbách na Slovensku. (From Štúr to parasites: Thematic adaptation of the far right in the Slovak parliamentary elections.) In: *Politologický časopis/ Czech journal of political science*. 2013, No. 3, pp. 259-263.

³ MESEŽNIKOV, G. and O. GYÁRFÁŠOVÁ. *Súčasný pravicový extrémizmus a ultranacionalizmus na Slovensku: Stav, trendy, podpora. (Contemporary right-wing extremism and ultra-nationalism in Slovakia.)* Bratislava: IVO, 2016, pp. 39-41.

identifying groups of people who, according to primary and secondary school students, pose a certain threat to Slovakia. Almost half of the respondents believed that there are groups of people in Slovakia who are a threat to others. A specific threat was mentioned by 44.1% of respondents. As many as 19.2% mentioned Roma as the most threatening persons, 15.2% perceived migrants as the most threatening persons, 13.4% mentioned supporters of Islam and the Islamic State as a threat and 10.3% mentioned terrorists.¹ Thus, Roma and migrants were perceived by students as the greatest threat to Slovakia.

The results of the 9th round of the European Social Survey also show that respondents from Slovakia, together with respondents from Hungary, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, are among those who have the most negative attitudes towards the arrival of migrants. Negative attitudes were held by respondents from these countries, including Slovakia, not only towards the arrival of migrants, but also towards the consequences of migration.²

5.1 Differences in the level of nativism tendency among secondary school students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions with regard to demographic characteristics (gender, type of secondary school, region, age, ethnicity)

Detecting differences in the degree of inclination to nativism among secondary school students in the Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing Region with regard

¹ In more detail: PÉTIOVÁ, M. *Názory a skúsenosti žiakov základných a stredných škôl s prejavmi extrémizmu. (Opinions and experiences of primary and secondary school pupils with manifestations of extremism.)* [online]. [cited 2023-08-28]. Available from: https://www.cvtisr.sk/buxus/docs/prevenicia/texty/Preveniciab_-_extremizmus_ziaci_2017_MP.pdf

² BOZOGÁŇOVÁ, M.; PITEROVÁ, I. Postoje k migrácii na Slovensku v kontexte Európy a krajín Vyšehradskej štvorky. (Attitudes towards migration in Slovakia in the context of Europe and the Visegrad Four countries. In: *European Social Survey Round 9 in Slovakia.*) Košice: Institute of Social Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2020, p. 92.

to demographic characteristics allows to recognise views from the position of both sexes, type of secondary school attended, specified age categories or belonging to an ethnicity. The specific results are the output of the statistical processing of the data through a univariate analysis of variance (Oneway ANOVA).

5.1.1 Intergender differences in the level of nativism tendency among secondary school students in the Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing Region

Table 31: *Intergender differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items*¹

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	P	MEAN	
			men	women
Human rights	7,45	0,01	4,52	4,66
Democracy	4,22	0,04	3,97	4,21
Nativism	3,96	0,05	3,69	3,61
Media	0,99	0,32	3,10	3,39
European integration	8,65	0,00	3,83	4,00

Table 31, which shows the inter-gender differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items, reveals statistically significant differences for the following sets of items: HUMAN RIGHTS ($p=0.01$; $F=7.45$); DEMOCRACY ($p=0.04$; $F=4.22$); NATIVISM ($p=0.05$; $F=3.96$); EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ($p=0.00$; $F=8.65$). The MEANS item set does not meet the criteria for statistical significance ($p \leq 0.05$). Based on the statistically significant data, it can be concluded that both males and females tend to have an insightful awareness. For most of the significant items, this inclination is stronger for females. The exception is the item NATIVISM, where higher values were recorded by males than females. The highest level of inclination towards insightful political awareness is noticeable for the set

¹ Statistically significant values are shown in grey.

of item HUMAN RIGHTS for males (M=4.52) and also for females (M=4.66). The lowest level of inclination towards insightful political awareness in statistically significant data is found for the NATIVISM item set for males (M=3.69) as well as females (M=3.61).

Table 32: *Intergender differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to nativism*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				men	women
NATIVISM	A Slovak must be preferred to a migrant in Slovakia.	9,27	0,00	3,50	3,32
	Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups.	8,31	0,00	2,48	2,27
	The state must be made up of only one nation.	16,01	0,00	2,19	1,74
	The state must be built only on national values and traditions.	11,63	0,00	2,69	2,30

Of the intergender differences in the significance of specific attributes of the NATIVISM item set, all four items emerge as significant (see Table 32). A slight tendency towards agreement can be observed for males (M=3.50) for the item *Slovak must be preferred to migrant in Slovakia* (F=9.27; p=0.00). For women, attitudes are slightly closer to neutral (M=3.32). This statement has a higher level of support among both men and women than the other three items. The lowest level of agreement for both males (M=2.19) and females (M=1.74) is associated with the statement, *The state must be made up of only one nation* (F=16.01; p=0.00). Both men (M=2.48) and women (M=2.27) were more likely to disagree

with the statement, *Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups* ($F=8.31$; $p=0.00$). Similarly, both male ($M=2.69$) and female ($M=2.30$) respondents were more likely to disagree with the statement, *The state must be built only on national values and traditions* ($F=11.63$; $p=0.00$). However, men's attitudes were closer to centre neutral values for this statement.

5.1.2 Inter-institutional differences in the level of nativism tendency among secondary school students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions

Table 33, which displays the inter-institutional differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items, reveals statistically significant differences for the following sets of items: HUMAN RIGHTS ($p=0.01$; $F=12.54$); DEMOCRACY ($p=0.01$; $F=6.88$); EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ($p=0.00$; $F=19.80$). The item sets NATIVISM and MEDIA do not meet the criteria for statistical significance ($p\leq 0.05$). Based on the statistically significant data, it can be concluded that both secondary grammar school students and secondary vocational school students tend to have an insightful awareness. For all significant items, this inclination is stronger for female and male students of secondary grammar schools. This tendency is also noticeable for the non-significant item NATIVISM, where higher values were also recorded by students of secondary grammar schools. The highest level of inclination towards insightful political awareness is noticeable for the set of items HUMAN RIGHTS among male and female students of secondary grammar schools ($M=4.67$) and also among male and female students of secondary vocational schools ($M=4.53$). The lowest level of inclination towards insightful political awareness with statistically significant data is for the set of items EUROPEAN INTEGRATION for male and female students of secondary grammar schools ($M=4.12$), as well

as for male and female students of secondary vocational schools (M=3.74).

Table 33: *Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools
Human rights	12,54	0,00	4,67	4,53
Democracy	6,88	0,01	4,28	3,94
Nativism	2,23	0,14	3,75	3,54
Media	1,32	0,25	3,61	2,93
European integration	19,80	0,00	4,12	3,74

Of the inter-institutional differences in the significance of specific attributes of the NATIVISM item set, two of the four items emerge as significant (see Table 34). The lowest level of agreement for the items that emerged as significant was among male and female secondary school students (M=1.69) associated with the statement, *The state must be made up of only one nation* (F=12.66; p=0.00). Male and female students of secondary vocational schools were also more likely to disagree with the statement (M=2.17). Students of secondary grammar schools (M=2.00) and students of secondary vocational schools (M=2.71) rather disagreed with the statement, *Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups* (F=32.87; p=0.00), but the attitudes of students of secondary vocational schools were closer to the central neutral values for this statement. Slight tendencies towards agreement can be observed among male and female students of secondary vocational schools (M=3.66) for the non-significant item *Slovak must be preferred to migrant in Slovakia* (F=0.04; p=0.84). For male and female students of secondary grammar schools (M=3.13) the attitudes are

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neutral. This statement has a higher level of support than the other three items. For another non-significant item, male and female students of secondary grammar schools ($M=2.24$) were more likely to disagree with the statement, *The state must be built only on national values and traditions* ($F=1.08$; $p=0.30$). However, the attitudes of male and female secondary vocational school students ($M=2.68$) were closer to the central neutral values for this statement.

Table 34: *Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to nativism*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools
NATIVISM	A Slovak must be preferred to a migrant in Slovakia.	0,04	0,84	3,13	3,66
	Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups.	32,87	0,00	2,00	2,71
	The state must be made up of only one nation.	12,66	0,00	1,69	2,17
	The state must be built only on national values and traditions.	1,08	0,30	2,24	2,68

5.1.3 Interregional differences in the level of nativism among secondary school students in the Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing Region

Table 35, which shows the interregional differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items, reveals statistically significant differences for the following sets of items: HUMAN RIGHTS ($p=0.00$; $F=30.88$); DEMOCRACY ($p=0.02$; $F=5.46$); EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ($p=0.02$; $F=5.95$). The item sets NATIVISM and MEDIA do not meet the criteria for statistical significance ($p \leq 0.05$).

Table 35: *Interregional differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			KSR ¹	PSR ²
Human rights	30,88	0,00	4,48	4,72
Democracy	5,46	0,02	4,00	4,21
Nativism	0,00	0,98	3,54	3,74
Media	0,55	0,46	3,15	3,39
European integration	5,95	0,02	3,81	4,05

On the basis of statistically significant data, it can be concluded that students from the Košice Self-governing Region and students from the Prešov Self-governing Region tend to have an insightful awareness. For all significant items, this tendency is stronger for female and male students from the Prešov Self-governing Region. This tendency is also noticeable for the non-significant item NATIVISM, where also higher values were recorded by students from the Prešov Self-governing Region. The highest level of inclination towards insightful political awareness is for the set of items HUMAN RIGHTS among male and female students from the Prešov Self-governing Region ($M=4.72$) and also

¹ Košice Self-governing Region

² Prešov Self-governing Region

among male and female students from the Košice Self-governing Region (M=4.48). The lowest level of inclination towards insightful political awareness in statistically significant data is for the set of items EUROPEAN INTEGRATION among male and female students from the Prešov Self-governing Region (M=4.05), as well as among male and female students from the Košice Self-governing Region (M=3.81).

Table 36: *Interregional differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to nativism*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				KSR	PSR
NATIVISM	A Slovak must be preferred to a migrant in Slovakia.	0,00	1,0	3,53	3,26
	Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups.	5,65	0,02	2,44	2,28
	The state must be made up of only one nation.	4,73	0,03	2,03	1,83
	The state must be built only on national values and traditions.	0,95	0,33	2,52	2,41

Of the inter-regional differences in the significance of specific attributes of the NATIVISM item set, two of the four items emerge as statistically significant (see Table 36). The lowest level of agreement for the items that emerged as significant was among male and female students from the Prešov Self-governing Region (M=1.83) associated with the statement, *The state must be made up of only one ethnicity* (F=4.73; p=0.03). Students from the Košice Self-governing Region (M=2.03) were also more likely to disagree with the statement. Students from the Prešov Self-governing Region (M=2.28) and students from the Košice Self-governing

Region (M=2.44) disagreed with the statement, *Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups* (F=5.65; p=0.02). A slight tendency to agree with the statement can be observed among male and female students from the Košice Self-governing Region (M=3.53) for the non-significant item *Slovaks must be preferred to migrants in Slovakia* (F=0.00; p=1.00). For male and female students from the Prešov Self-governing Region (M=3.26), attitudes for this statement were closer to the mean neutral values. This statement has a higher level of support than the other three items. For another non-significant item, students from the Prešov Self-governing Region (M=2.41) and students from the Košice Self-governing Region (M=2.52) were more likely to disagree with the statement, *The state must be built only on national values and traditions* (F=0.95; p=0.33).

5.1.4 Age differences in the level of nativism tendency among secondary school students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions

Table 37: *Age differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN				
			16-year-olds	17-year-olds	18-year-olds	19-year-olds	20-year-olds
Human rights	1,56	0,18	3,33	4,57	4,65	4,51	5,00
Democracy	0,61	0,66	3,00	4,09	4,17	3,92	3,50
Nativism	1,51	0,20	3,00	3,64	3,69	3,46	4,00
Media	1,53	0,19	2,33	3,27	3,34	2,87	2,50
European integration	1,27	0,28	4,00	3,91	3,98	3,74	3,00

Table 37, which shows age differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items, reveals no statistically significant

differences. The item sets HUMAN RIGHTS; DEMOCRACY; NATIVISM; MEDIA; EUROPEAN INTEGRATION do not meet the criteria of statistical significance ($p \leq 0.05$). The lowest values and inclination towards insider political awareness were found among 16-year-old male and female students in the MEDIA set ($M=2.33$). The highest level of inclination towards insightful political awareness is found in the HUMAN RIGHTS item set among 20-year-old male and female students ($M=5.00$). For the NATIVISM item set, the highest values were recorded by 20-year-old male and female students ($M=4.00$). The lowest values for political awareness for the NATIVISM set of items were for 16-year-old male and female students ($M=3.00$), which showed intermediate values.

Of the age differences in the significance of specific attributes of the NATIVISM item set, none of the four items appear statistically significant (see Table 38). The lowest level of agreement among 20-year-old male and female students ($M=1.50$) was associated with the statements, *The state must be made up of only one ethnicity* ($F=0.29$; $p=0.89$) and *Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups* ($F=1.11$; $p=0.35$). The highest level of agreement with the statement can be observed among 16-year-old male and female students ($M=4.67$) for the item *Slovaks must be given preference over migrants in Slovakia* ($F=1.91$; $p=0.11$). For all other age categories, attitudes for this statement were closer to the mean neutral values. However, this statement has a higher level of support than the other three items at all ages. For the next non-significant item, students, with the exception of 16-year-olds ($M=3.34$), were more likely to disagree with the statement, *The state must be built only on national values and traditions* ($F=1.84$; $p=0.12$).

Table 38: Age differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to nativism

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN				
				16-year-olds	17-year-olds	18-year-olds	19-year-olds	20-year-olds
NATIVISM	A Slovak must be preferred to a migrant in Slovakia.	1,91	0,11	4,67	3,47	3,32	3,36	3,50
	Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups.	1,11	0,35	2,67	2,40	2,34	2,23	1,50
	The state must be made up of only one nation.	0,29	0,89	4,34	1,82	1,96	2,18	1,50
	The state must be built only on national values and traditions.	1,84	0,12	3,34	2,46	2,45	2,51	2,00

5.1.5 Ethnic differences in the level of nativism among secondary school students in the Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing Region

Table 39, which displays ethnic differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items, reveals statistically significant differences for the following sets of items: HUMAN RIGHTS ($p=0.00$; $F=19.83$); MEDIA ($p=0.01$; $F=6.81$). The item sets DEMOCRACY, NATIVISM and EUROPEAN INTEGRATION do not meet the criteria for statistical significance ($p\leq 0.05$). On the basis of statistically significant data, it can be concluded that both Slovak students and students of other ethnicities tend

to be insightful awareness. This tendency is noticeable even for non-significant items. The highest level of inclination towards insightful political awareness is for the set of items HUMAN RIGHTS among students of Slovak ethnicity (M=4.64) and also among students of other ethnicities (M=3.67). The lowest level of inclination towards insightful political awareness for statistically significant data (but also for all data in general) is for the set of items MEDIA for male and female students of Slovak ethnicity (M=3.28), as well as for male and female students of other ethnicity (M=3.10).

Table 39: *Ethnic differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			Slovak	Other
Human rights	19,83	0,00	4,64	3,67
Democracy	3,14	0,08	4,13	3,52
Nativism	0,18	0,67	3,66	3,33
Media	6,81	0,01	3,28	3,10
European integration	0,28	0,60	3,95	3,48

Of the ethnic differences in the significance of specific attributes of the NATIVISM item set, none of the four items appear to be statistically significant (see Table 40). The lowest level of agreement among male and female students of Slovak ethnicity (M=1.92) was associated with the statement, *The state must be made up of only one ethnicity* (F=0.26; p=0.61). Students of other ethnicities also disagreed the most with this statement (M=2.05). Students of Slovak ethnicity (M=2.37) and students of other ethnicities (M=2.19) were more likely to disagree with the statement that *Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups* (F=1.15; p=0.28). The highest level of agreement with the statement can be observed among male and female students of other ethnicities (M=3.52) for the item

Slovak must be preferred to migrant in Slovakia ($F=0.20$; $p=0.65$). For students of Slovak ethnicity, attitudes for this statement were closer to the mean neutral values ($M=3.39$), but this statement has a higher level of support in both groups than the other three items. For another non-significant item, both students of Slovak ethnicity ($M=2.46$) and other ethnicity ($M=2.52$) were more likely to disagree with the statement, *The state must be built only on national values and traditions* ($F=1.43$; $p=0.23$).

Table 40: *Ethnic differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to nativism*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	P	MEAN	
				Slovak	Other
NATIVISM	A Slovak must be preferred to a migrant in Slovakia.	0,20	0,65	3,39	3,52
	Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups.	1,15	0,28	2,37	2,19
	The state must be made up of only one nation.	0,26	0,61	1,92	2,05
	The state must be built only on national values and traditions.	1,43	0,23	2,46	2,52

5.2 Correlation analysis

Table 41 examining the correlations of the political awareness item NATIVISM (*National principle is a natural part of civic principle and does not stand alone in a democratic system or regime*) and the set of political extremism items shows that the two values of Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) are statistically significant ($p=0.00$ and $p=0.02$, respectively). The political extremism item entitled "*Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national*

Research Into Correlations Between Deformations of Political Awareness and the Increase of Political Extremism Among Secondary School Students in the Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing Region minorities and ethnic groups" registers a value of $r = -0.1495$, indicating that it is a negative measure of low correlation. This means that with a positive change in political awareness with regard to nativism, the attitude towards political extremism will change negatively (respondents will not tend to political extremism). The item, *The state must be made up of only one nation* achieves small values of negative correlation $r = -0.1012$, which leads to the same conclusion as for the first item. The other two items are not statistically significant.

Table 41: Correlations in the significance of the political awareness item and the set of political extremism items with respect to nativism

		POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEM - NATIVISM	
			The national principle is a natural part of the civic principle and does not stand alone in a democratic system or regime.
		p	R
SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS			
NATIVISM	A Slovak must be preferred to a migrant in Slovakia.	0,07	- 0,0817
	Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups.	0,00	- 0,1495
	The state must be made up of only one nation.	0,02	- 0,1012
	The state must be built only on national values and traditions.	0,19	- 0,0590

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the multiethnic composition of the Slovak population, the complicated relations between the Slovak majority and various minorities, the migration crisis and the persistence of racial prejudices and nationalist stereotypes create a favourable environment for the existence and political profiling of radical nationalism in Slovakia,¹ empirical analysis of the value preferences of secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions towards nativism did not yield data in which we found extreme attitudes. On the basis of the obtained data, we can conclude that the students of secondary grammar schools in the Košice and the Prešov regions do not show attitudes that would lead to tendencies towards extremist attitudes in any of the studied aspects. Students of secondary grammar schools in the Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing Region tended to disagree or completely disagree with the statements tending towards anti-minority attitudes and statements tending towards radical nationalism. It can be stated that the attitudes of male and female students were the furthest away from the democratic pole in the statement directed towards an anti-immigrant stance. The statement, *Slovak must be preferred to migrant* had a higher level of support than the other three items when surveyed across all selected standard demographic lines. We can consider it a significant finding that, overall, the attitudes of male and female secondary school students from the Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing Region are slightly behind the midline closer to agreement with the statement. However, only the data for intergender differences were statistically significant, where males tended slightly towards agreement with the statement (M=3.50) and females' attitudes were slightly closer to neutral

¹ VELŠIC, M.: *Mladí a riziká extrémizmu. (Young people and the risks of extremism.)* Bratislava : Institute for Public Issues, 2017, pp. 4-5.

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(M=3.32). The highest level of agreement with the statement (M=4.67) emerged across age differentials for 16-year-old respondents. However, this item was not statistically significant. It can be assumed that the result was influenced by the lower representation of respondents in the 16-year-old category (and 20-year-olds) in the secondary school classes studied, but also by their less knowledge and experience compared to their older classmates. The differences between the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions were not statistically significant for this question. This result is not surprising if we look at the results of the 9th round of the European Social Survey, where, when looking at attitudes towards migration within individual Self-governing Regions, respondents from all Self-governing Regions in Slovakia had rather negative attitudes towards the consequences of migration in the European Social Survey.¹

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6 PERCEPTION OF THE MEDIA PHENOMENON AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS OF THE KOŠICE AND THE PREŠOV SELF-GOVERNING REGIONS (Tomáš DVORSKÝ)

6.1 The role of the media and the issue of declining trust

A free and independent media is an essential part of a democratic society. However, today's world is characterised by an intense flow of information reaching individuals through a wide range of diverse information channels. Navigating such an information environment is more difficult with the increasing dynamics of information transmission and the growing number of information platforms. This has implications for the status and importance of the so-called standard media, which historically have been important as a contributing factor to the quality of democracy. This importance is due to the role of such media, which is to provide the general public with information about what is happening in the state and the world, as well as to provide a critical check on public power. This role is correctly fulfilled as long as the work of the media is in line with journalistic standards and ethical norms. In Slovakia, the principles of media behaviour are summarised in the *Code of Ethics for Journalists issued by the Slovak Syndicate of Journalists*. The elementary principles of journalistic work include, for example, striving for objectivity and truthfulness, verifying information from at least two sources independent of each other, citing sources of information, using facts without distorting objective reality, not manipulating content, clearly distinguishing commentary from reporting, rejecting hatred and intolerance, and respecting the basic

principles of a democratic and rule of law state.¹ The media thus ideally provide citizens with up-to-date, relevant and balanced coverage. At the same time, they monitor and evaluate the activities of the government and other public institutions of the state. Through investigative reporting, they expose possible abuses of power and contribute to the transparent functioning of institutions. They are thus an actor not only influencing public officials, but also influencing public opinion with an impact on citizens' political decision-making. In order to fulfil this societal role of providing critical and objective information, it is essential that the media are free and independent and not subject to political or economic pressure.

The topic of the importance and role of the media in Slovakia gained importance in 2018 after the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak, when the issue of the importance of journalism in defending the public interest took centre stage. Historically, the issue of media has been a frequent subject of political battles. In particular, the role, management, and funding of the public service media have been recurrent issues of political discourse in Slovakia. With the rise of the influence of social networks and the disinformation ecosystem, questioning the standard media or outright verbal attacks by politicians on journalists has also become a popular topic among parts of the political spectrum. Such behaviour influences the mood in society, which is confirmed by the results of research conducted by the Ján Kuciak Investigative Centre in cooperation with the AKO agency, according to which more than two thirds of journalists have experienced an incident (attack or threat) in the past 12 months, and up to 47% think that the number

¹ Etický kódex novinára. (Code of ethics for journalists.) In. *Slovenský syndikát novinárov*. [cit. 2023-11-12]. Available at: <https://www.ssn.sk/eticky-kodex-novinara/>

of incidents has increased in the 5 years since the murder.¹ This too is an indicator of a general trend of declining trust in the media in society. Thus, even adequate functioning of the media may not be sufficient in meeting the objective of contributing to the level of quality of democracy. Trust in the media as a legitimate actor in a democratic society is an important factor. Commenting on the issue of declining trust in the media, journalist F. Struhárik says: "*This trend is noticeable all over the world. The cause of this phenomenon is not only the (possible) decline in the quality of journalistic work. It is part of more serious social problems. In addition to the media, other institutions - governments, courts, business and NGOs - are also losing trust. A number of studies suggest that the loss of trust in the media is due to the polarisation of society and the politicians who provoke it.*"² The long-term trend of declining trust in the media is also highlighted in regular research by the Oxford University Digital News Report and the Reuters Institute. In the 2023 results, the countries with the highest levels of trust in the media in Europe were Finland (69%), Portugal (58%), Denmark, the Netherlands (both 57%) Norway (53%), and Sweden (50%). In contrast, Slovakia's level of trust in the media (27%) is the third lowest among the European countries measured, after Greece (19%) and Hungary (25%). Out of the 46 countries measured, Slovakia thus ranks 44th.³ In 2022, Slovakia finished in last place with the USA.

The level of media literacy has a great influence on the level of trust in the media or the ability to distinguish relevant content from manipulation. The State Pedagogical Institute of the Slovak Republic defines media literacy as a set of essential competences

¹ Výskum: Čítia sa slovenskí novinári bezpečne? (Research: do Slovak journalists feel safe?) In: *Investigative Centre of Ján Kuciak* [online]. 2023-02-20 [2023-09-29]. Available from: <https://www.icjk.sk/229/Vyskum-Citia-sa-slovenski-novinari-bezpecne>

² STRUHÁRIK, F. *What's new in the media*. Prague: Nová beseda, 2022.

³ REUTERS INSTITUTE. *Digital News Report 2023* [online] [cited 2023-11-02]. Available from: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital_News_Report_2023.pdf

necessary for active and conscious participation in contemporary media society. The ten basic competences include:

1. Understanding how the media's influence on society is growing;
2. understanding how media are constructed;
3. understanding how the media portray reality;
4. control and use of equipment, software and applications;
5. control and use of orientation in the media environment;
6. communication, such as information retrieval and processing;
7. communication, such as content creation;
8. communication, such as participation in social networks;
9. A strategy with the intention of awareness/reflection on own media use;
10. A strategy with the intention of awareness/reflection on own media use.¹

Research in 2018 showed that people with lower levels of media literacy trust the media less. The media is considered unreliable at a higher rate by people who have a weaker ability to distinguish fictional headlines from real ones, or a weaker ability to distinguish whether an article is news, commentary, or advertising.² The problem with the low level of media literacy in Slovakia is illustrated by the results of a 2019 survey conducted by Focus, according to which more than half of second-grade primary school teachers would describe disinformation media

¹ ŠTÁTNY PEDAGOGICKÝ ÚSTAV. *10 kompetencií mediálnej gramotnosti* (STATE INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. *10 media literacy competencies*) [online] [cited 2023-11-05]. Available from: <https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/ucebnice-metodiky-publikacie/10-kompetencii-medialnej-gramotnosti.pdf>

² MASSULO, G.M., MURRAY, C., JOMINI STROUD, N. *How the Public, News Sources, and Journalists Think about News in Three Communities* [online] [cited 2023-11-05]. Available from: <https://mediaengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/How-the-Public-News-Sources-and-Journalists.pdf>

such as Hlavné správy or Zem a Vek as trustworthy and would recommend them to their students to follow.¹

6.2 The disinformation ecosystem and its impact on increasing extremism

The general trend of declining trust in the so-called traditional media, confirmed by research, is an indicator that in recent years people have turned more and more to other sources of information, which can also include the so-called disinformation ecosystem. This includes, in particular, disinformation media operating on websites and social networks, or profiles, pages and groups on social networks managed by actors and political entities provably disseminating problematic content. They operate in a poorly regulated online space, exploit the weak effectiveness of the application of the state's legislative framework for media and do not subscribe to journalistic codes of ethics. For this reason, they are an ideal channel for disseminating content that is problematic in terms of objectivity, criticality or legitimacy. These actors thus form a monitored communication ecosystem in Slovakia, which is also characterised by the publication of disinformation, manipulative and sometimes extremist or otherwise problematic content. Such problematic content can be divided into illegal and harmful. Illegal content is that which violates the legislation of the state. In the context of the Slovak Republic, it is content that violates criminal law. This includes, for example, speeches against peace, against humanity, crimes of terrorism, extremism, spreading alarmist messages, or denying and endorsing the Holocaust and the crimes of political regimes. Harmful content does not always have to be an explicit violation of the law. In the case

¹ *Alarmujúci prieskum: Hlavné správy a Zem a vek zaradili učitelia medzi najdôveryhodnejšie médiá (Alarming survey: mainstream news and Earth and Age ranked by teachers as most trusted media)* [online] [cited 2023-12-02]. Available from: <https://www.omediach.com/hoaxy/16175-prieskum-hlavne-spravy-a-zem-a-vek-zaradili-ucitelia-medzi-najdoveryhodnejšie-media>

of harmful content, it is information which, by its nature, threatens national security, public health, or is against the principles of democracy, freedom, respect for human rights. The issue of regulating such content thus becomes important. The only legitimate actor in this regard is the state, whose role is to defend itself against ideologies and disinformation that threaten the pluralistic nature of a democratic society. However, the sensitive nature of this issue, oscillating on the borderline of restricting freedom of expression, makes the adoption of any legislation in this area problematic.

In addition to state institutions, civil society is active in this respect, and there are several initiatives working to detect problematic content online. Among the most well-known initiatives in the Slovak environment are the fact-checker platform Demagog.sk, the system for collecting and evaluating data from extremist and manipulative Facebook profiles Blbec.online, and the Infosecurity.sk project, aimed at controlling the information space and detecting dangerous and untrue content. The most notorious public database of websites with unserious, deceptive, fraudulent, conspiratorial or propagandistic content is offered by the Konspiratori.sk initiative. In its methodology for evaluating websites, it takes into account criteria such as compliance with journalistic ethics, transparency of the media and their editorial offices, clear separation of news from commentary, relevance of content in terms of objective and scientific knowledge, and extremist nature of the content shared on websites in terms of spreading alarmist messages, defamation of minorities, races, ethnicities, and religious groups.¹ The Konspiratori.sk initiative faced a lawsuit from one of the most visited Slovak disinformation websites, Hlavné správy (Main News). The latter sued the Konspiratori.sk project for allegedly

¹ KONSPIRATORI.SK. *Kritériá na zaradenie stránky do databázy* (Criteria for inclusion in the database) [online] [cit. 2023-11-04]. Available from: <https://konspiratori.sk/kriteria>

damaging its reputation by putting it on a list of problematic sites. This case was one of the turning points in the Slovak context in the matter of defining the boundaries between freedom of speech and the defence against disinformation. The court dismissed the Hlavné správy's claim in its entirety and found in its verdict that Konspiratori.sk's criticism of Hlavné správy was legitimate and factual and did not constitute an interference with its reputation, and that such criticism was also within the bounds of freedom of speech and in the public interest. In the case of Hlavné správy, the Supreme Court's judgment, which finally convicted the collaborator of this disinformation website, B. Garbár, of espionage for the Russian Federation, also resonated.¹ This case thus shows that the disinformation ecosystem can also serve as a tool for foreign powers in their subversive activities in the context of the broader hybrid threat framework.

Another alternative means of disseminating information today is social networks themselves. They are a space for the rapid and unregulated dissemination of content and have become the primary source of information intake for a significant proportion of the population. They are often a powerful tool for shaping individuals' opinions, not least because their algorithms offer readers personalised content that is tailored to the preferences of the recipient. However, this leads to the fact that the information provided by social networks is selective and the recipient is thus only exposed to a narrow slice of social reality that distorts the broader context. This weakens the ability of individuals to critically evaluate and contextualise the information they receive, which increases the risk of becoming

¹ TASR: TASR: Garbár z kauzy vyzvedačstva pre Rusko musí splatiť peňažný trest (Garbar in Russia espionage case must pay a fine) [online] [cited 2023-11-04]. Available from: <https://www.teraz.sk/spravy/garbar-z-kauzy-vyzvedacstva-pre-rusko/759103-clanok.html>

locked in opinion bubbles or echo chambers. These are isolated social groups in which people who share similar beliefs, values or opinions come together. This aspect is related to the natural characteristic of people to seek out news that corresponds primarily to their views and beliefs, referred to as the concept of selective exposure. Its roots go back to the 1960s, when it was defined as the demonstrable tendency of people to expose themselves to news consistent with their existing views and interests and to avoid material with which they are inconsistent.¹ In this way, social networks offer users content that is consistent with their view of the world, ignoring differing perspectives. In the context of social networking, the term information bubble is also used, which the Cambridge Dictionary defines as a situation in which a person receives messages and information that support what they already believe and like. It is a situation that arises on the Internet as a result of algorithms working to filter information so that it corresponds to the reader's opinion.² The negative aspect of such bubbles is that they do not offer the recipient the space to open up to new information, opinions and topics, thus making the recipient feel that only their own attitudes are relevant, making the individual and society easier to manipulate.³ The most widely used and influential platform in this context is Facebook. Research by members of the Stanford and New York Universities has confirmed the theses on the influence of Facebook on political polarisation. The research showed that people who stopped using Facebook for a certain period of time had a reduced level of awareness, but at the same time a reduced level of political polarisation.⁴

¹ KLAPPER, J.T. *The effects of mass communication*. Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960, pp. 19-20.

² Filter bubble. In: *Cambridge Dictionary* [online]. [cited 2023-10-23]. Available from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/filter-bubble>

³ PARISER, E. *The filter bubble: what the Internet is hiding from you*. New York: Penguin Press, 2011.

⁴ ALLCOTT, H. et al. *The Welfare Effects of Social Media* [online] [cited 2023-11-05]. Available from: <https://web.stanford.edu/~gentzkow/research/facebook.pdf>

The potentially negative impact of Facebook on society was acknowledged by Facebook product manager S. Chakrabarti, who in 2018 said: *"If there is any fundamental truth about the impact of social media on democracy, it is that it intensifies human intentions - both the good and the bad. At their best, they allow us to express ourselves and take action. At worst, they allow people to spread misinformation and subvert democracy."*¹ The Oxford University and Reuters Institute's 2023 Digital News Report research showed that the online space (including social networks) is the primary source of information for up to 74% of Slovaks, and social media alone is the primary source of information for 51% of people in Slovakia.² Such high numbers only increase the risk of such negative impacts on society.

It can also be assumed that one of the reasons for the low level of trust in the media is the above-mentioned polarisation of society and the fact that the media is often the subject of political fights and the target of attacks from a certain part of the political spectrum. The latter offers narratives to its part of the electorate that aim to delegitimise the importance of the standard media. This is confirmed by a survey conducted by the 2muse agency in 2021. The question "Is it difficult for me to find a credible news media in Slovakia" was answered "definitely agree" and "rather agree" together most by supporters of the far-right parties Republika and ĽS Naše Slovensko. Similarly, supporters of the Republic and ĽS Naše Slovensko, together with supporters of Smer-SD and Sme rodina, answered the question "You are more likely to get true information about domestic or world politics from friends and acquaintances rather than from Slovak media"

¹ META. *Hard Questions: What Effect Does Social Media Have on Democracy?* [online] [cited 2023-11-05.11]. Available from: <https://about.fb.com/news/2018/01/effect-social-media-democracy/>

² REUTERS INSTITUTE, *Digital News Report 2023* [online] [cited 2023-11-02]. Available from: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital_News_Report_2023.pdf

in the highest affirmative range.¹ These results indicate that the level of trust in the media is lower among supporters of political entities that are characterised by populist rhetoric, spreading disinformation and conspiracy narratives, or outright inclination towards political radicalism or extremism. Such political actors try to feed society with narratives that all media are merely a power tool in the hands of certain elites, serving to mislead society. Such narratives fit into the framework of conspiracy theories, which can be defined as '*unsubstantiated, unverified or officially unaccepted information that warns of a dangerous conspiracy. They highlight the role of conspiracy(s) in relation to significant historical events and disbelieve official justifications*'.² Conspiracy theories thus create an image of an enemy who wants to harm a particular group. By creating a threat in this way, conspiracy theories reinforce a group identity against the enemy, which is why they are often associated with nationalism.³ This in turn leads to tendencies of defining oneself against other groups and a more positive perception of one's own group and its social identity.⁴ In this way, conspiracy theories divide the world into two antagonistic poles within which the consumers of conspiracy theories perceive the world around them. As Š. Ižák states, "*Conspiracy theories are a useful tool of political propaganda, as they simplify reality and offer an image of the enemy in order to mobilise*

¹ AGENTÚRA 2MUSE. *Dezinformácie a regulácia sociálnych sietí* (AGENCY 2MUSE. *Disinformation and the regulation of social networks*) [online] [cited 2023-11-02]. Available from: https://europske.noviny.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Prieskum_2muse_Bilcik.pdf

² PANCOVÁ, Z. *KONŠPIRAČNÉ TEÓRIE: témy, historické kontexty a argumentačné stratégie*. (CONSPIRACY THEORIES: themes, historical contexts and argumentative strategies.) Bratislava: Veda, p. 16.

³ CAMPION-VINCENT, V. From Evil Others to Evil Elites. A Dominant Rumor Pattern in Conspiracy Theories. In: FINE, G. A., CAMPIONVINCENT, V., HEATH, CH. (eds.) *Rumor Mills. The Social Impact of Rumor an Legend*. Piscataway NJ: Transaction-Aldine, 2005.

⁴ TAJFEL, H. and J. TURNER. The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. In: JOST, J. T. and J. SIDANIUS (eds.). *Political Psychology: Key Readings*. New York: Psychology press, 2004.

Research Into Correlations Between Deformations of Political Awareness and the Increase of Political Extremism Among Secondary School Students in the Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing Region people."¹ Sociologist R. Klobucký already pointed out in his 2015 research that adherents of conspiracy theories reject liberal democracy as a political regime. As he states in his study, "An interesting finding is the fact that adherents of conspiracy explanations simultaneously reject liberal democracy as a political regime. In fact, we found an extremely strong and statistically significant correlation between support for the statement, 'The world may be complex, but we know the essentials' and support for the statement, 'It would be best to develop and improve liberal democracy in Slovakia' or, conversely, support for the statement, 'Reality is mostly different, than we are led to believe, the world is run by powerful secret groups according to a secret script" and "In Slovakia, it would be best to move to a different political system that would ensure greater order, equality and social justice in the country - even if it comes at the cost of limiting some freedoms." As many as 59.1% of respondents among those who believe in concealed reality, powerful groups and hidden scenarios also advocate a regime alternative to liberal democracy. A possible interpretation of such a strong correlation between support for an alternative political regime that, according to our question, would not emphasise freedom and separation of powers as much as liberal democracy and conspiratorial beliefs is that adherents of conspiratorial explanations simply do not believe very much in freedom and separation of powers in a liberal democratic political regime. Conspiratorial explanations usually downplay or question the possibility of influencing major events by the free expression of the voters' opinion. This is also why adherents of conspiratorial explanations may be inclined to prefer an alternative political regime which, according to the wording of our reply, should guarantee greater order, equality and social justice, while not considering the restriction of certain freedoms as a significant loss."² The above-

¹ IŽÁK, Š. CONSPIRACY THEORY AS A WORKING METHOD OF POLITICAL PROPAGANDA. In: *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences*. 2020, vol. 20, č. 1.

² KLOBUCKÝ, R. *Konšpiračné presvedčenia a geopolitické preferencie (Conspiratorial beliefs and geopolitical preferences)* [online]. Available from: https://sociologia.sav.sk/cms/uploaded/2172_attach_3_konspiracie_a_geopoliticke_preferencie.pdf

average susceptibility of Slovaks to conspiratorial thinking is also confirmed by the results of a 2022 survey conducted by the University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava in cooperation with the Focus agency. The survey measured the so-called conspiracy index, which is the average of positive answers to standard conspiracy questions. In Slovakia, the index reached 30.27, which is a record value in the countries surveyed. By comparison, the highest value of this index was measured in Turkey, with a value of 25.23, and the lowest in Denmark, with a value of 6.29. The researchers thus assessed in a press release that Slovakia is not only the Eastern and Central European record holder in the acceptance of conspiracy theories, but even the world record holder in the acceptance of conspiracy theories.¹

Anonymised social networking groups are also often a hub for the dissemination and sharing of extremist content, which is easy to disseminate through such channels, thanks to minimal regulation by their founder. Richard Kuchta's 2022 study, *Extremism in Online Space in Slovakia*, monitored 375 sites on the social networking sites Facebook, Instagram and Telegram, examining the extremist and polarising activities of actors spreading hateful, intolerant and extremist rhetoric. She categorised the content analysed as anti-Hungarian, anti-Semitic, anti-Roma, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-media, pro-totalitarian, nationalist, racist, anti-democratic/anti-systemic. The most common narratives within these communities included nationalism, anti-LGBTQ+ hate speech, anti-Semitism, anti-media, and anti-democracy rhetoric. The research also highlighted a trend of a softening of the language used by these actors, resulting from efforts not

¹ SÝKORA, P. CELOSVETOVO EXTRÉMNE VYSOKÝ KONŠPIRAČNÝ INDEX NA SLOVENSKU (WORLDWIDE EXTREMELY HIGH CONSPIRACY INDEX IN SLOVAKIA) (Press release) [online]. Available at: <https://centreforbioethics.sk/sk/novinky/detail/28/celosvetovo-extremne-vysoky-konspiracny-index-na-slovensku/>

to violate the terms of use of these social networks. The author also pointed to the fact that the language of extremists is becoming more sophisticated, thus reducing the scope for detection and punishment.¹ Such content, which does not explicitly violate the law or the rules of social networking sites, but comes close to doing so, is referred to as 'borderline content'. These are often various provocative and sensational texts, images or videos that polarise society and spread well on the networks.² Such content, which oscillates on the line of what is permissible, attracts more attention on average, as confirmed by the head of Facebook himself.³

Based on the above theoretical framework, a set of items of political extremism with regard to the media was designed to identify inclinations towards undemocratic or extremist tendencies among male and female secondary school students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions. The questions focused on aspects related to the way of obtaining information, manipulability, tendencies to incline towards simple solutions to complex facts or inclinations towards various forms of myth-making and taboo behaviour. Questions focused on the degree of trust in the media and tendencies towards conspiratorial thinking or perception or overestimation of one's own judgment in recognizing manipulations. Through the questions, we also explored students' attitudes toward perceptions of truth, which may suggest individuals' attitudes toward plurality of opinion and social polarisation. Finally, we asked about freedom of speech, and thus awareness of the limits

¹ KUCHTA, R. *Extrémizmus v online priestore na Slovensku: Aktéri, témy, platformy a stratégie (Extremism in the online space in Slovakia: actors, themes, platforms and strategies)* [online] [cit. 2023-11-04]. Available from: <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Extre%CC%81mizmus-v-online-priestore-na-Slovensku.pdf>

² STRUHÁRIK, What's New in the Media, p. 70.

³ ZUCKERBERG, M. *A Blueprint for Content Governance and Enforcement* [online] [cited 2023-11-05]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/751449002072082/>

of freedom of speech as a regulator of the functioning of a democratic society.

6.3 Empirical analysis of value preferences of secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions towards the European Union

With respect to the group under study, we work primarily in the categories of insider political awareness and insightful political awareness. The theoretical starting point is their definition by Professor M. Gbúrová:

The first stage can be described as naive political awareness. In it, socio-political phenomena are acquired unconsciously, unintentionally. They are acquired mostly from "ordinary" information from life experience, but also on the basis of the personal assumptions and intellectual endowments of their bearers. For these reasons, this type of awareness is easily manipulated and controlled by targeted political marketing and media manipulations. Its bearer intuitively, or only on the basis of partial information obtained from unverified sources or the tabloid press, comes to know with whom or against whom from the current political scene he or she should act in order to achieve the fulfilment of his or her personal interests. Usually this is a citizen whose life is influenced by 'consumer values'. Consequently, he shows no interest in activities towards values that intellectually and value-wise transcend him. A system of simple solutions to a complex reality is easily "rooted" in his awareness; he adopts various forms of myth-making and taboo behaviour and action without much difficulty.

The second stage of political attitudes, opinions and actions can be described as insightful political awareness. Although it is influenced by the means of mass communication, the results of public opinion polls, sociological surveys of the electoral preferences of political parties and party actors by leadership-type politicians, its bearer, under the influence of being instructed

in the theory of democracy and the management of public and party politics, develops a clearer idea of the political contexts of public life in which he or she finds himself or herself, and of his or her own position in this space. This is an activity that already has the hallmarks of a deliberate, conscious evaluation of political phenomena. Nevertheless, its bearer is not sufficiently oriented in party-political life, in its value and ideological orientations. Therefore, he or she can also become a target of party-political manipulations of the 'higher' order, which are characterised by the use of various sophisticated marketing strategies, especially in the pre-election period.¹

Thus, our perception of the world around us is highly influenced by how we receive information and how we evaluate it. The rejection of traditional media can be an indicator of many negative tendencies. The question, "*In a democratic political system, the mass media are free, objective, and not subject to any economic and political pressures*" measures the extent to which the importance of the standard media is recognised as an essential part of a democratic society. An affirmative answer is thus seen as an indicator of a higher degree of political awareness.

The set of political extremism items with respect to MEDIA was composed of the following questions:

1. "*Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can write whatever I want on social networks).*"

Freedom of speech is part of the fundamental rights and freedoms in a democracy, essential to the functioning of a free society. No right or freedom is absolute. It is limited by the rights and freedoms of others. The question reveals the respondent's perception of the limits of freedom of speech

¹ GBÚROVÁ, M. K problematike formovania politického vedomia občanov Slovenskej republiky v súčasnosti. (On the issue of the formation of political consciousness of the citizens of the Slovak Republic at present.) In. M., M. GBÚROVÁ, M.a.l. *Secondary illiteracy (or on the causes and consequences of low public interest in politics in Slovakia)*. Košice: SafárikPress, 2018, pp. 25-26.

in a democratic political system. A person with a higher degree of political awareness is aware that freedom of speech has, or should have, its limits, both in a regulated media system and in the space of social networks. Challenging these regulators is a frequent tool of anti-system and extremist actors who thus seek justification for disseminating their content, often incompatible with the rule of law and democratic society.

2. *"There is only one truth, and that is the truth that only I will acknowledge to be true."*

The question reveals the respondent's attitude towards the degree of acceptance of plurality of opinions. This attitude also suggests the respondent's tendency towards social or political polarisation. Agreeing with the thesis that only what I accept is true can also serve as an indicator of the absence of a critical view of one's own beliefs. It points to the degree of willingness to discuss or transform one's views as a prerequisite in preventing political polarisation and the acquisition of extremist tendencies.

3. *"All media are used to manipulate the masses by the elites."*

The question gauges the level of trust in the media. It also asks about the popular conspiracy narrative about elites behind the scenes who are sophisticatedly manipulating the world around us. An affirmative answer to this question thus suggests both trust in the media and the respondent's tendency to seek information from misinformation sources, which foster cognitive vulnerability and susceptibility to conspiratorial thinking and are a frequent source of political radicalization.

4. *"I can always tell truth from manipulation."*

The finding on this question is structurally related to the previous questions. Agreeing with the thesis that I can always tell truth from manipulation suggests a tendency to overestimate one's own judgement, which is often an indicator of unconscious low media literacy, lack of critical thinking or various cognitive

distortions related to selective perception of information, where one becomes more easily manipulated and more prone to political polarisation or radicalisation. An important point in this question was to observe possible deviations from the mean. Responses towards the extremes would indicate either a poor level of media literacy reflected in an admitted inability to identify manipulative content or an overconfidence in separating facts from untruths and identifying manipulations, indicating an overestimation of one's own judgement. Thus, the mean values of the measure suggest both an awareness of one's own limitations and students' caution in detecting manipulations, which may indicate their awareness of the risks and pitfalls of today's complex information environment.

6.3.1 Differences in media perception with respect to demographic characteristics (gender, type of educational institution attended, region, age, ethnicity) (ANOVA)

6.3.1.1 Intergender differences in media perception among secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions

Table 42, showing the differences in the significance of individual items of political awareness of male and female students of secondary grammar schools of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, focusing on the preferences of this group of society on various selected categories of political awareness, reveals statistically significant differences for four out of five items. The item MEDIA ($F=0.99$; $p=0.32$) does not meet the condition of statistical significance.

However, the results indicate that both men and women tend to be more likely to have an insightful political awareness. This inclination is more evident in women ($M=3.39$) than in men ($M=3.10$). However, the rate of inclination towards insightful political awareness for this item is lower for both genders than for the other items examined.

Table 42: Intergender differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items¹

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			men	women
Human rights	7,45	0,01	4,52	4,66
Democracy	4,22	0,04	3,97	4,21
Nativism	3,96	0,05	3,69	3,61
Media	0,99	0,32	3,10	3,39
European integration	8,65	0,00	3,83	4,00

Table 43: Intergender differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to the media

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				men	women
MEDIA	There is only one truth, and that is the one that only I will acknowledge to be true.	8,43	0,00	2,09	1,71
	I can always tell truth from manipulation.	3,05	0,08	3,34	3,19
	All media is used to manipulate the masses by the elites.	6,98	0,01	2,93	2,73
	Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can post whatever I want on social media).	9,03	0,00	3,12	2,66

Of the intergender differences in the significance of the set of political extremism items with respect to MEDIA, three items show statistical significance. (see Table 43)

For the item, "There is only one truth, and it is the one that only I will accept as true" (F=8.43; p=0.00), the results of the investigation indicate statistically significant findings that both males (M=2.09)

¹ Statistically significant values are shown in grey.

and females ($M=1.71$) tend to disagree with the answer to this question. This indicates that the tendency towards opinion polarisation is not high and students are aware of the importance of plurality of opinion in society or that their own beliefs may also be wrong. Women show a higher level of awareness on this issue than men.

For the item, "*All media are used to manipulate the masses by the elites*" ($F=6.95$; $p=0.01$), the results show statistically significant findings that in response to this item, females tended to have a disagreeing opinion ($M=2.73$), while the responses of males were closer to neutral ($M=2.93$) indicating a higher level of distrust of the media and a higher vulnerability to conspiratorial thinking among the male gender.

In the response to the item, "*Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can post whatever I want on social networks)*" ($F=9.03$; $p=0.00$), a more pronounced intergender difference is visible, with women's responses tending towards the disagreeing position ($M=2.66$), while men's responses tend slightly towards the agreeing position ($M=3.12$). This suggests a higher degree of awareness of the limits of free speech among women and a higher tendency for the male population to take a more radical stance on free speech. This recognition of some need for content regulation among women may also be due to the fact that women are more likely to be victims of online attacks.

The item, "*I can always tell truth from manipulation*" ($F=3.05$; $p=0.08$) does not show statistical significance. Measured values for both males ($M=3.34$) and females ($M=3.19$) oscillated around the mean value and did not show a bias towards the extremes indicating negative phenomena of selective perception or overestimation of one's own judgment.

6.3.1.2 Inter-institutional-educational differences in the perception of media among secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions

Table 44, which shows the differences in the significance of individual items of political awareness of male and female students of secondary grammar schools in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, focusing on the preferences of this group of society on various selected categories of political awareness, reveals statistically significant differences for three out of five items. The item MEDIA (F=1.32; p=0.25) is among those that do not meet the criterion of statistical significance.

Table 44: *Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools
Human rights	12,54	0,00	4,67	4,53
Democracy	6,88	0,01	4,28	3,94
Nativism	2,23	0,14	3,75	3,54
Media	1,32	0,25	3,61	2,93
European integration	19,80	0,00	4,12	3,74

However, the MEDIA item is the only one in which the Inter-Institutional-Educational Difference between secondary grammar school and the secondary vocational school students is noticeable. While the responses of male and female secondary grammar school students tend towards insightful political awareness (M=3.61), the responses of male and female secondary vocational school students tend slightly towards insightful political awareness (M=2.93). This is the only case within this type of differential where a tendency towards insightful political awareness was noted. This result only adds to the findings

for the other items, which support the thesis that the presence of humanities and social science education increases the level of political awareness among male and female students.

Table 45: *Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to the media*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools
MEDIA	There is only one truth, and that is the one that only I will acknowledge to be true.	0,12	0,73	1,75	1,99
	I can always tell truth from manipulation.	0,44	0,51	3,25	3,25
	All media is used to manipulate the masses by the elites.	3,39	0,07	2,54	3,08
	Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can post whatever I want on social media).	9,30	0,00	2,78	2,92

Of the inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of the set of political extremism items with respect to the MEDIA, one of the four items appears statistically significant. (See Table 45). For the responses to the item ,*"Freedom of speech must be unlimited (I can post whatever I want on social media)"* (F=9.30; p=0.00), we can generalise that secondary grammar school students (M=2.78) show a higher level

of awareness of the limits of freedom of speech than secondary vocational school students (M=2.92).

The other sets of items relating to this question do not meet the criteria for statistical significance. However, their results for the item, "*There is only one truth, and it is the one that only I will accept as true*" (F=0.12; p=0.73) indicate a difference between secondary grammar school (M=1.75) and the secondary vocational school (M=1.99) students, with secondary grammar school students being more sceptical about their beliefs and more open to other opinions. This may suggest positive outcomes of humanities and social science education at the secondary grammar school level, which leads their students to be more critical in evaluating their own beliefs.

Responses for the item, "*I can always tell truth from manipulation*" (F=0.44; p=0.51) oscillated around the midpoint, i.e., the "don't know" response, with this response being identical for both secondary grammar school (M=3.25) and secondary vocational school (M=3.25) students. An important point for this question was to observe possible deviations from the mean value. Responses towards the extremes would indicate either a poor level of media literacy or overconfidence in detecting manipulation, indicating an overestimation of one's own judgement. Thus, the mean values of the measure suggest both an awareness of one's own limitations and students' caution in the matter of detecting manipulations, which may indicate their awareness of the risks and pitfalls of today's complicated information environment.

For the item, "*All media are used to manipulate the masses by the elites*" (F=3.39; p=0.07), there is a much higher distrust of the media and inclination towards the conspiracy narrative among male and female students of secondary vocational schools (M=3.08) than among male and female students of secondary grammar schools (M=2.54). This only adds to the findings for the other items and suggests a higher level of cognitive vulnerability

and susceptibility to manipulation among male and female secondary vocational students.

1.3.1.3 Interregional differences in media perception of secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions

Table 46, which shows the differences in the significance of individual items of political awareness of male and female students of secondary grammar schools in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, focusing on the preferences of this group of society on various selected categories of political awareness, reveals statistically significant differences for three out of five items. The item MEDIA ($F=0.55$; $p=0.46$) is among those that do not meet the criterion of statistical significance.

Table 46: *Interregional differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items with respect to the media*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			KSR ¹	PSR ²
Human rights	30,88	0,00	4,48	4,72
Democracy	5,46	0,02	4,00	4,21
Nativism	0,00	0,98	3,54	3,74
Media	0,55	0,46	3,15	3,39
European integration	5,95	0,02	3,81	4,05

However, the results indicate that students in both the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions tend to be more politically aware. This inclination is more evident among male and female students of the Prešov Self-governing Region ($M=3.39$) than among male and female students of the Košice Self-governing Region ($M=3.15$). However, the degree of inclination towards insightful political awareness for this item is lower for both

¹ Košice Self-governing Region

² Prešov Self-governing Region

measured Self-governing Regions than for the other examined items.

Table 47: *Interregional differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to the media*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				KSR	PSR
MEDIA	There is only one truth, and that is the one that only I will acknowledge to be true.	0,77	0,38	1,94	1,80
	I can always tell truth from manipulation.	5,56	0,02	3,40	3,10
	All media is used to manipulate the masses by the elites.	1,95	0,16	2,91	2,72
	Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can post whatever I want on social media).	0,66	0,42	2,83	2,87

In the case of interregional differences in the significance of the set of items of political extremism with regard to the MEDIA, the item, "*I can always tell the truth from manipulation*" (F=5.56; p=0.02) meets the requirement of statistical significance, where a higher value for the agreeing opinion was found among male and female students in the Košice Self-governing Region. (see Table 47). In both cases, the result oscillates around the mean value and does not deviate to extreme values.

Similarly, for items with an unfulfilled condition of statistical significance such as, "*There is only one truth, and it is the one that only I recognise as the truth*" (F=0.77; p=0.38) or "*All media serve to manipulate the masses by the elites*" (F=1.95; p=0.16), we can observe a slightly higher degree of inclination towards opinions

tending to more radical attitudes among male and female students in the Košice Self-governing Region. These differences may be due to the demographic characteristics of the region, where a stronger representation of national minorities may lead to a slightly higher degree of political polarisation. However, these are negligible differences. At the same time, it should be added that the answers of male and female students of both the Prešov Self-governing Region and the Košice Self-governing Region did not move in the extremes and did not show an inclination towards extremist positions.

6.3.1.4 Age differences in media perception of secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice Regions

Table 48, which shows the differences in the significance of individual items of political awareness of male and female students of secondary schools in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, focusing on various selected categories of political awareness, does not reveal statistically significant differences for even one item out of five. Thus, the item MEDIA ($F=1.53$; $p=0.19$) is also among those that do not meet the criterion of statistical significance.

Table 48: *Age differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN				
			16- year- olds	17- year- olds	18- year- olds	19- year- olds	20- year- olds
Human rights	1,56	0,18	3,33	4,57	4,65	4,51	5,00
Democracy	0,61	0,66	3,00	4,09	4,17	3,92	3,50
Nativism	1,51	0,20	3,00	3,64	3,69	3,46	4,00
Media	1,53	0,19	2,33	3,27	3,34	2,87	2,50
European integration	1,27	0,28	4,00	3,91	3,98	3,74	3,00

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It is worth noting that for almost all items examined, male and female students tend to have higher levels of insightful political awareness. The only exception is the age category of 16-year-old male and female students, who tend to have more insightful political awareness (M=2.33) for the item MEDIA (F=1.53; p=0.19). This may be related to less life experience, experience with the role of the media and socio-political processes.

Table 49: Age differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to the media

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN				
				16-year-olds	17-year-olds	18-year-olds	19-year-olds	20-year-olds
MEDIA	There is only one truth, and that is the one that only I will acknowledge to be true.	1,33	0,26	2,33	2,02	1,73	1,87	1,50
	I can always tell truth from manipulation.	0,61	0,66	3,67	3,27	3,22	3,33	3,50
	All media is used to manipulate the masses by the elites.	0,24	0,92	3,67	2,87	2,75	2,87	3,00
	Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can post whatever I want on social media).	1,43	0,22	3,33	2,80	2,90	2,79	2,00

Of the age differences in the significance of the set of political extremism items with respect to the media, none of the items were statistically significant (see Table 49). However, for three

of the four items there was a significant difference or opinion shift between the ages of 16 and 20.

For the item, "*There is only one truth, and it is the one that only I accept as true*" ($F=1.33$; $p=0.26$), significantly more agreement was measured in the 16-year-old category ($M=2.33$) than in the 20-year-old category ($M=1.50$). Thus, as age and educational attainment increase, the risk of such polarisation decreases and the degree of recognition of plurality of opinion increases.

The results for the item, "*All media are used to manipulate the masses by the elites*" ($F=0.24$; $p=0.92$) show a shift from the category of 16 year olds ($M=3.67$) to 20 year olds ($M=3.00$), indicating that as age and educational attainment increases, trust in the media increases and the inclination towards conspiratorial thinking and anti-systemic tendencies decreases.

The measured item, "*Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can post whatever I want on social media)*" ($F=1.43$; $p=0.22$) shows a difference between 16-year-olds ($M=3.33$) and 20-year-olds ($M=2.00$). For this response, the most obvious difference is in the responses of male and female students aged 16 and 20, when a significant shift towards a higher level of awareness of the limits of freedom of speech can be identified.

For the item, "*I can always tell truth from manipulation*" ($F=0.61$; $p=0.66$), the difference between the measured values between 16-year-olds ($M=3.67$) and 20-year-olds ($M=3.50$) is minimal. The measured value across all age categories oscillated at the mean level and did not significantly skew towards outliers indicating that students have only a low tendency to overestimate their own judgement and are cautious about their ability to discriminate manipulative content in the current complex information environment.

6.3.1.5 Ethnic differences in media perception of secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions

Table 50, which shows the differences in the significance of individual items of political awareness of male and female students of secondary grammar schools in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, focusing on the preferences of this group of society on various selected categories of political awareness, reveals statistically significant differences for two items out of five. The item MEDIA (F=6.81; p=0.01) is among those that meet the criterion of statistical significance.

On the basis of statistically significant data, it can be concluded that for both statistically significant items, students of Slovak ethnicity tend to have a higher level of insightful political awareness than students of other ethnicities. However, in this case too, the values measured for the MEDIA item are at the lowest level among all the categories examined.

Table 50: *Ethnic differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	P	MEAN	
			Slovak	Other
Human rights	19,83	0,00	4,64	3,67
Democracy	3,14	0,08	4,13	3,52
Nativism	0,18	0,67	3,66	3,33
Media	6,81	0,01	3,28	3,10
European integration	0,28	0,60	3,95	3,48

Among the national differences in the significance of the set of items of political extremism with regard to the MEDIA, one item meets the criterion of statistical significance. (See Table 51) We can conclude that we do not find a position inclined to radicalism or extremism among the students for any of the items. For the item, "*Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can write whatever I want on social networks)*" (F=3.73; p=0.05), we

can state that students of Slovak ethnicity (M=2.84) showed a higher level of recognition of the limits of freedom of speech than students of other ethnicities (M=3.10).

Table 51: *Ethnic differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to the media*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				Slovak	Other
MEDIA	There is only one truth, and that is the one that only I will acknowledge to be true.	1,26	0,26	1,85	2,24
	I can always tell truth from manipulation.	1,31	0,25	3,24	3,57
	All media is used to manipulate the masses by the elites.	0,28	0,60	2,78	3,48
	Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can post whatever I want on social media).	3,73	0,05	2,84	3,10

For other items that did not meet the criterion of statistical significance, a slightly higher tendency towards more radical attitudes can be noted among students of other than Slovak ethnicity. For the items, "*There is only one truth, and it is the one that only I recognise as the truth*" (F=1.26; p=0.26; difference=0.39); "*I can always recognise truth from manipulation*" (F=1.31; p=0.25; difference=0.33), there is a minimal difference. The most significant difference is visible in the item, "*All media serve to manipulate the masses by the elites*" (F=0.28; p=0.60; difference=0.70), in which the attitudes of male and female students of Slovak ethnicity tend more towards a disagreeing opinion (M=2.78), while the attitudes of male and female students of other ethnicities tend more towards an agreeing opinion

($M=3.48$). Such distrust of the media by students of non-Slovak ethnicity and a higher level of inclination towards alternative sources of information may be due, among other things, to a perceived lack of reflection of the national agenda in the traditional media or a lack of political representation at the national level, which may serve as a motivating factor to seek alternatives. This may be represented by the national media in Slovakia or by foreign media, which have a considerable reach in regions with minority populations.

6.3.2 Correlations between political awareness and political extremism with respect to the media

Table 52, which shows the correlations in the significance of political awareness focusing on the item MEDIA and the individual items of political extremism of secondary school students of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions focusing on the preferences of this group of society to the media are statistically significant for the two examined correlations.

The first correlation meeting the criterion of statistical significance was observed between the item of the political awareness of EXTREMISM, *There is only one truth, and it is the one that only I recognise as truth*, and the item of the political awareness of MEDIA. The latter shows a small degree of correlation ($p=0.00$, $r=-0.1208$), and it is a correlation showing inverse proportionality. This implies that there is only a small degree of correlation between the political awareness of male and female secondary school students, which showed values tending towards an insightful political awareness, and the perceptions of this group of citizens on the issue of plurality of opinions and critical views of their beliefs. The correlation confirms the relationship between the level of political awareness and the openness to discuss and transform one's views. This suggests that increasing levels

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of political awareness do have an impact, but only to a small extent, on increasing acceptance and appreciation of other views or openness to debate. It also indicates the ability of male and female students to critically re-evaluate their own beliefs, thus reducing the risk of social and political polarisation or radicalisation leading to extremist tendencies.

Table 52: *Correlations in the significance of the political awareness item and the set of political extremism items with respect to the media*

		POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEM - MEDIA	
SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS		p	
MEDIA	There is only one truth, and that is the one that only I will acknowledge to be true.	0,01	-0,1208
	I can always tell truth from manipulation.	0,76	-0,0138
	All media is used to manipulate the masses by the elites.	0,00	-0,3245
	Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can post whatever I want on social media).	0,33	-0,0440

The criterion of statistical significance is also met by the correlation between the item POLITICAL EXTREMISM, *All media serve to manipulate the masses by elites* and the item of the political awareness of MEDIA. It shows a mean correlation ($p=0.00$, $r=-0.3245$), being a correlation showing inverse

proportionality. This result indicates that increasing political awareness is one of the tools to increase the level of students' critical thinking. Critical thinking is one of the main competencies that help to prevent negative phenomena leading to a loss of trust in standard media or democratic institutions, which results in a tendency to sources from the misinformation ecosystem or vulnerability to conspiratorial thinking. Such vulnerability is a prerequisite for possible political radicalisation and the emergence of extremist attitudes.

Conclusion

Based on the empirical analysis of the value preferences of secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions towards the media, we can state several findings.

The obtained data show that the level of political awareness of male and female students of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions in the issue of media tends slightly towards an insightful political awareness.

However, the degree of inclination towards insightful political awareness is lower for the media item than for the other surveyed items Human Rights, Democracy, Nativism, or European Integration. Measured values for the media item, compared to the others, were closest to the median value. The ability to navigate in the information environment, to evaluate information as well as resistance to manipulation are indicators of the level of political awareness. The lower level of political awareness in this area may therefore be due to the complexity of the current information environment. The increasing number of information platforms, combined with the current risks of hybrid threats and disinformation influence activities, significantly complicate the ability to correctly assess the intense flow of information and the ability to navigate in such an environment.

In terms of intergender differences, a higher level of political awareness was measured among the female gender, and in terms of the regions surveyed, among male and female students of the Prešov Self-governing Region. A more pronounced differentiation was found between students of secondary grammar schools and secondary vocational schools when the recorded level of political awareness among male and female students of secondary grammar schools tended to be more pronounced towards insightful political awareness, while among students of secondary vocational schools the mean value was measured with a minimal deviation towards insightful political awareness. A more pronounced inclination towards insightful political awareness was measured when age differences were ascertained, namely in the age category of sixteen year olds. However, these measured values did not meet the condition of statistical significance. Thus, the measured data indicate a trend where the level of political awareness shifts from insightful to instructed as age increases. The statistical significance requirement was fulfilled by the finding indicating that political awareness tends towards being insightful to a greater extent among students of Slovak ethnicity than among students of non-Slovak ethnicity.

No values indicating tendencies towards extremist attitudes were found in questions related to freedom of speech, plurality of opinion, critical evaluation of one's own judgement or susceptibility to conspiratorial thinking.

Based on the items that meet the criterion of statistical significance, it can be concluded that with intergender difference in the examined items, men show a higher tendency towards more radical attitudes. This difference was most pronounced for the item examining attitudes towards freedom of speech. For the item on freedom of speech, it is also possible to generalise the finding that students of secondary grammar schools have

a greater degree of awareness of the limits of freedom of speech than students of secondary vocational schools. Statistical significance is also met by the finding that more moderate attitudes were shown by students of secondary grammar schools in the Prešov Self-governing Region. However, the measured values, which do not meet the criterion of statistical significance, confirm the trends of more moderate attitudes of women compared to men. They also indicate that the risk of an increase in extremist tendencies decreases with increasing age and educational attainment, and that tendencies towards more radical attitudes are more noticeable among male and female students of secondary vocational schools or students of national minorities.

The correlation analysis subsequently provided us with data in which the correlations in the significance of political awareness with a focus on the item MEDIA and the individual items of political extremism of secondary school students of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions with a focus on the preferences of this group of society on issues related to freedom of speech, pluralism of opinion, critical evaluation of one's own judgment or susceptibility to conspiratorial thinking were statistically significant in two of the four correlations examined.

A small degree of correlation was observed for the item, "*There is only one truth, and it is the one that only I recognise as the truth*", a mean degree of correlation was observed for the item, "*All media serve to manipulate the masses by the elites*". This points to the fact that increasing the level of political awareness influences, although only to a limited extent, openness to pluralism of opinions or susceptibility to conspiratorial thinking among secondary school students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions. Also correlations that did not meet the criterion of statistical significance indicate a positive impact of increasing

the level of political awareness on the suppression of tendencies leading to political radicalisation or extremism.

Education in media literacy, the recognition of disinformation and hybrid threats or cognitive security can thus be seen as legitimate tools for raising political awareness. Cultivating these skills increases students' resistance to manipulation, their ability to think critically, and their understanding of the principles of freedom of expression and pluralism of opinion as essential attributes of a democratic society and the rule of law. At the same time, it has the potential to act as a factor eliminating the risks of the growth of political extremism among male and female secondary school students in the Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing Region.

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7 PERCEPTION OF THE PHENOMENON OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS OF THE KOŠICE AND THE PREŠOV SELF-GOVERNING REGIONS

(Gabriel EŠTOK)

7.1 The European Union's approach to youth

The European Union's approach to youth is based on the principles of solidarity, inclusion and the active participation of young people in society. There are a number of key areas that the European Union is addressing in its efforts to support young people:

- Mobility and education programmes: the European Union is working to promote youth mobility through programmes such as *Erasmus+*, which enables students, young professionals and volunteers to gain international experience. These programmes aim to enhance learning, develop skills and promote cultural exchange.¹
- Employment and economic integration: the European Union is trying to focus on improving young people's access to the labour market and thus increasing employment. Programmes such as the *Youth Guarantee* aim to help young people find a job or develop job skills through traineeships or vocational training within six months of leaving school.²
- Social inclusion and the fight against poverty: the European Union is working to ensure that young people are not left behind and that they have equal opportunities. Programmes such as the *European Social Fund* support projects aimed

¹ See *Erasmus+: EU programme for education, training, youth and sport*. [online]. [cit. 2023-08-18]. Available from: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>

² For more details see *The Reinforced Youth Guarantee*. [online]. [cited 2023-08-18]. Available from: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=en>

at social inclusion and the fight against poverty, with an emphasis on young people.¹

- Health and well-being: the European Union has long sought to focus on the health and well-being of young people in many of its policies and programmes. Various initiatives focus on addiction prevention, mental health and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.
- Participation and democracy: The European Union seeks to promote the active participation of young people in the democratic process. Programmes such as the *European Voluntary Service* and the *European Civic Dialogue* provide opportunities for young people to express their views and gain experience in civic engagement.

It can therefore be concluded that the European Union recognises the importance of investing in youth and seeks to create an environment where young people can reach their full potential and actively contribute to society. These policies and programmes reflect the EU's efforts to build a sustainable and inclusive society for all citizens, including young people.

7.1.2 European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027

In 2018, the European Union adopted the *EU Youth Strategy*, the last one so far, by *Resolution of the Council of the European Union*². The Strategy seeks to increase youth participation in democratic processes. It seeks to provide resources and tools to all young people in the EU to increase civic and political participation. The resolution itself refers to the principle of "*active participation*

¹ For more information see *European Social Fund*. [online]. [cit. 2023-08-18]. Available from: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&newsId=9118>

² *Resolution of the Council of the European Union and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: a European Union strategy for youth 2019-2027 (2018/C 456/01)*. [online]. [cited 2023-08-23]. Available from: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SK/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_2018.456.01.0001.01.SLK

and equal access to opportunities"¹, which was already present in previous youth strategies. The resolution also identifies challenges that hinder greater participation of young people, such as changes in their personal lives and in the external environment. It highlights the impact of social and socio-economic problems, various types of marginalisation and discrimination, as well as the impact of globalisation and technological processes. The document even sees the failure to remove these barriers to youth participation as a waste of talent.

However, youth involvement requires that this group is also involved in EU policy-making. Otherwise, it will be unacceptable to young people. The Strategy also therefore builds on the 6th cycle of the 2018 Structured Dialogue "*Youth in Europe: what next*", which involved more than 50,000 young people. These dialogues take place in 18 monthly cycles and seek to involve the youth group concerned in policy-making. The outcomes of the 6th cycle, to which the strategy responds, were 11 youth objectives:

- 1) Connecting the EU with youth;
- 2) Equality of all genders;
- 3) Inclusive companies;
- 4) Information and constructive dialogue;
- 5) Mental health and well-being;
- 6) Supporting rural youth;
- 7) Quality jobs for all;
- 8) Quality education;
- 9) Space and participation for all;
- 10) A sustainable green Europe;
- 11) Youth organisations and European programmes.²

¹ *Resolution of the Council of the European Union and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: a European Union strategy for youth 2019-2027 (2018/C 456/01)*. [online]. [cited 2023-08-23]. Available from: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SK/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2018.456.01.0001.01.SLK

² *Youth Goals*. [online]. [cited 2023-08-23]. Available from: <https://youth-goals.eu/>

It is important that the *Council* reflected on the outcomes of the dialogue and took them on board by incorporating them into the Strategy. Even before it, these conclusions were accepted by the *Commission*, which issued a statement entitled "*Engaging, connecting and empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy*" in May 2018.¹ *The Council* built its strategy on principles that identify not only the objectives to be achieved but also the barriers to increased youth participation. These are the 5 principles of the strategy itself:

- 1) Equality and non-discrimination - combating all forms of discrimination;
- 2) Inclusion - accepting the heterogeneity of the group uniformly referred to as young people and involving representatives of all;
- 3) Participation - involving young people in the preparation and implementation of European policies, accepting the specific space where communication between young people takes place, i.e. with an emphasis on digital forms of communication;
- 4) Global, European, national, regional and local dimension - referring to the principle of subsidiarity to link youth participation and the achievement of the strategy's objectives across the different levels at which decision-making processes are implemented;
- 5) A two-pronged approach - youth-oriented policies also affect other groups, so the strategy needs to accommodate them.²

¹ *Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy* [online]. [cited 2023-08-23]. Available from: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9264-2018-ADD-1/en/pdf>

² *Resolution of the Council of the European Union and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: a European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 (2018/C 456/01)*. [online].

The main instruments identified in the Strategy for Increasing Youth Participation include the following ones:

- 1) Involving - Democracy cannot be a true democracy without the involvement of the various sectors of the population, not least the youth. The necessity of involving young people is specific in comparison to others, in particular in that their representation at the various levels of decision-making processes is very low;
- 2) Bringing together - promoting the interconnection of not only regionally, but also culturally or socio-economically distant youth groups in the European Union, but also in nearby border areas, such as candidate countries, is essential for building a functional and tolerant community. This is why 33 countries are currently involved in the Strategy;
- 3) Strengthening - experience so far suggests that young people's involvement in political processes is not sufficient. The strategy therefore envisages that the educational process, as well as raising the awareness and self-esteem of young populations, can lead to an increased interest in European processes.

In order to share information on the implementation of the Strategy, the EU institutions have set up a separate website, the online encyclopaedia YouthWiki (<https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki>), which provides information on individual activities not only at European but also at national level. The *Commission* will evaluate the effectiveness of the instruments set and the ongoing evaluation of the objectives achieved, and, where appropriate, proposals for adjusting them

in order to make them more effective, by means of an evaluation report at the end of 2023.

The European institutions are thus interested in strengthening democracy in the European Union and involving a group of young people in decision-making processes. They are also aware that, in order to achieve these objectives, it is necessary to break down a number of barriers that prevent young people from participating in the processes taking place in the European Union, or lead to a lack of interest in these processes in general. The strategy is followed up by the *European Youth Dialogue* to follow up its implementation in practice.¹

7.2 Young people's perception of the European Union

Young people's attitudes towards the European Union are currently quite divided. On the one hand, young people generally have more positive attitudes towards the European Union and the values it presents and upholds. We are thinking in particular of the issues of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and equality. On the other hand, a group of young people are critical of selected aspects and policies of the European Union. For example, they are critical of the excessive bureaucratisation of the European institutions, criticism of the lack of interest in young people's issues, the lack of representation of this population group in decision-making processes at European level, and the lack of addressing Europe-wide issues that this group considers to be the most important challenges of the day, such as climate change, youth unemployment, and social inequality.

According to the 2023 Eurobarometer survey (Standard Eurobarometer 99 - Spring 2023), up to 86% of young people aged

¹ For more information see: *Európsky portál pre mládež*. (European Youth Portal.) [online]. [cited 2023-08-23]. Available from: https://youth.europa.eu/get-involved/eu-youth-dialogue/what-eu-youth-dialogue_sk

15-24 say they are completely satisfied with the life they lead (Standard Eurobarometer 99 - D70).

Table 53: *Inter-age differences in satisfaction with the life led by European Union citizens (D70. Are you overall very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the life you lead?)*

Age group	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Don't know
15-24 years old	92%	8%	0%
25-39 years old	88%	12%	0%
40-54 years old	83%	17%	0%
50+ years old	81%	19%	0%

Table 54: *Socio-professional differences in satisfaction with the life led by European Union citizens (D70. Are you overall very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the life you lead?)*

Socio-professional group	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Don't know
Self-employed	86%	13%	1%
Managers	91%	9%	0%
Other white collars	87%	12%	0%
Manual workers	82%	18%	0%
House persons	78%	22%	0%
Unemployed	67%	33%	0%
Retired	79%	21%	0%
Students	95%	5%	0%

The differences between the different age groups can be seen in Table 53. Positive evaluations among European citizens decreased with increasing age. This figure indicates positive evaluations of quality of life increasing for the younger age groups. The same trend was observed for socio-professional groups, with students (95% satisfied with their life) being the most satisfied with their current life among all European Union citizens, as can be seen in Table 54. Also in other assessments of current quality of life, the 15-24 age group and the socio-professional

group of students have more sub-optimistic attitudes compared to other groups (quality of life, expectations in the next 12 months, etc.).¹

Table 55: *Inter-age differences in European citizens' affinity with the European Union and Europe (QD1.3 Please express how much you feel affinity with the European Union/Europe.)*

Age group	affiliated to the EU	affiliated to Europe
15-24 years old	64%	72%
25-39 years old	60%	67%
40-54 years old	58%	67%
50+ years old	56%	63%

Table 56: *Socio-professional differences in European citizens' affinity with the European Union and Europe (QD1.3 Please express how much you feel affinity with the European Union/Europe.)*

Socio-professional group	affiliated to the EU	affiliated to Europe
Self-employed	61%	70%
Managers	68%	76%
Other white collars	60%	68%
Manual workers	55%	63%
House persons	50%	55%
Unemployed	45%	53%
Retired	55%	62%
Students	68%	74%

It is therefore not surprising that these two groups, the age group of European citizens aged 15-24 and the socio-professional group of students, have significantly the most positive evaluations on issues related to the European Union itself, compared to other groups of European Union citizens. As shown in Table 55, up

¹ *Standard Eurobarometer 99 Spring 2023: Public opinion in the European Union.* [online]. [cited 2023-08-28]. Available from: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=88080>

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to 64% of citizens aged 15-24 feel an affinity with the European Union and up to 72% feel an affinity with Europe as a whole. This is the most positive attitude of all the age groups surveyed. A similar trend is found for the socio-professional group of Union citizens, namely the group of students, as described in Table 56. Positive perceptions of European identity are thus most pronounced among young people aged 15-24 and among the socio-occupational group of students compared to other groups. Similar trends for these groups are also found for other aspects related to the European integration process, such as positive perceptions of the free movement of people, goods, and services, the single EURO currency, solidarity between Member States, the economic strength of the European Union, educational opportunities, etc. ¹

Table 57: Preferred values of European citizens in the age group 15-24 and socio-professional group students (QD6 From the following list, which values are most important to you personally? (MAX 3 ANSWERS))

Group	Preferred values												
15-24 years old	Peace	Human rights	Democracy	Respect for human life	Equality	Individual freedom	Solidarity	Respect for the planet	Tolerance	Respect for other cultures	Self-development	Rule of Law	Religion
	38%	37%	27%	26%	24%	22%	19%	19%	16%	15%	15%	13%	6%
Students	Human rights	Peace	Democracy	Respect for human life	Individual freedom	Equality	Respect for the planet	Solidarity	Tolerance	Respect for other cultures	Self-development	Rule of Law	Religion
	41%	37%	29%	25%	22%	22%	20%	19%	16%	15%	15%	14%	5%

¹ Standard Eurobarometer 99 Spring 2023: European citizenship. [online]. [cit. 2023-08-28].

Available from:

<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=88077>

For the degree of political extremism in the group of youth and secondary school students, we consider it important to mention the inclination towards the values that this group prioritises for the citizens of the European Union. As can be seen in Table 57, within both groups surveyed, even in the last Eurobarometer from mid-2023, the values of human rights, peace, and democracy dominated the top three places. These are values that are in direct contrast to those characteristic of extremist attitudes.¹

Young people in the 15-24 age group and the socio-professional group of students consider their country's membership of the European Union as the best chance to face the challenges of the future. Both of these groups are also the most optimistic and least confident that individual Member States would be able to face these challenges in the latest Eurobarometer mid-2023. The differences can be seen in Table 58 and Table 59. Similar trends in attitudes are also found among these groups on questions relating to confidence in the individual institutions of the European Union and in confidence in the Union as a whole and in the single European currency, the EURO.²

From the above it can be concluded that a higher degree of positive evaluation of the European integration process and its related aspects is among the group of EU citizens from the age category 15-24 years and from the socio-professional group of students. In the Eurobarometer question on optimistic expectations about the future of the European Union, these two groups clearly dominate compared to other groups. At the same time, this group is the least concerned about the negative impact

¹ *Standard Eurobarometer 99 Spring 2023: European citizenship*. [online]. [cit. 2023-08-28]. Available from:

<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=88077>

² *Standard Eurobarometer 99 Spring 2023: Public opinion in the European Union*. [online]. [cited 2023-08-28]. Available from:

<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=88080>

of European policies on the everyday lives of these citizens and the negative impact on threats to the subjectively perceived identity of the individual. As a result, we can thus argue that the expectation for a resistant response to European policies in these very groups also by manifestations of extremism is the lowest compared to other groups.

Table 58: *Inter-age differences in beliefs about the chances of the European Union and Member States to face future challenges (QA12.2 To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements – Your country is better able to face future challenges outside the European Union.)*

Age group	Completely agree (the state will be better able to face future challenges outside the EU)	Completely disagree (the state will be better able to face future challenges in the EU)	Don't know
15-24 years old	25%	67%	8%
25-39 years old	30%	63%	7%
40-54 years old	32%	63%	5%
50+ years old	30%	61%	9%

However, this does not mean that a group of young people and students are not critical of the processes taking place in the European Union. Regular Eurobarometer surveys prove this. The critical moments identified by young people as those that should become priorities for the European Union were mainly environmental protection and the fight against climate change (67% of respondents) in the March 2019 Eurobarometer on the attitudes of young people aged 15-30 in the European Union (Flash Eurobarometer 513), improving education (56% of respondents), fighting poverty and economic and social inequalities (56% of respondents), tackling unemployment (49% of respondents), improving health and well-being

(44% of respondents) and promoting human rights, democracy, and shared values (44% of respondents).¹ In a 2022 Eurobarometer survey (Flash Eurobarometer 502) targeting young citizens of the European Union (15-30 years old) in the very year declared as the European Year of Youth, a group of young people in the Union expressed that they have increased expectations from a European Union targeting this group of citizens on issues such as protecting the environment and combating climate change (31% of respondents), increasing job opportunities for young people (33% of respondents) and combating power, economic, and social inequalities (32% of respondents).²

Table 59: *Socio-professional differences in beliefs about the chances of the European Union and Member States to face future challenges (QA12.2 To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements – Your country is better able to face future challenges outside the European Union.)*

Socio-professional group	Completely agree (the state will be better able to face future challenges outside the EU)	Completely disagree (the state will be better able to face future challenges in the EU)	Don't know
Self-employed	30%	64%	6%
Managers	26%	71%	3%
Other white collars	31%	63%	6%
Manual workers	36%	57%	7%
House persons	34%	54%	12%
Unemployed	34%	57%	9%
Retired	29%	62%	9%
Students	20%	72%	8%

¹ *Flash Eurobarometer 513: Social entrepreneurship and youth.* [online]. [cited 2023-05-14]. Available from:

<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=86276>

² *Flash Eurobarometer 502: Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth.* [online]. [cited 2023-05-16]. Available from: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2282>

In terms of knowledge and awareness of the European Union and what is happening in it, these groups of European citizens are performing positively. Eurobarometer results have long shown high levels of awareness of the European Union among both young people aged 15-25 and the socio-professional group of students. This was also confirmed by the latest Eurobarometer 99 in 2023. The socio-professional group of students performed among the best compared to other groups in questions on their feelings about their knowledge but also in questions on factual data about the European Union.¹ Young people are also critical of the European Union. Criticism is directed, for example, at the excessive bureaucratisation of the Union, they feel that the European Union does not deal sufficiently with young people's issues, or that it is not effective enough in tackling a challenge such as climate change. These critical attitudes are probably due to a number of factors. One of them is that young people are often well informed about Europe's problems. They have access to information from a variety of sources, including the Internet and social media. This enables them to form their own opinions on various issues concerning the European Union.

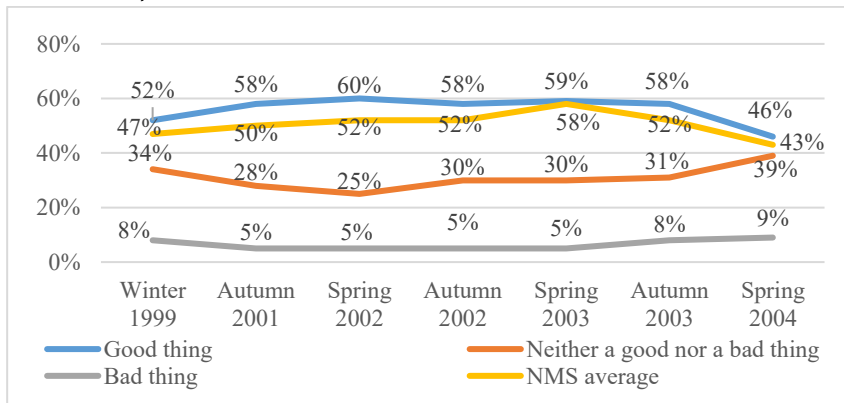
Another factor is that young people are often open to new ideas and change. They are less willing to accept the status quo than older generations. This can lead them to be critical of the European Union, which can be seen as inflexible and slow. Despite their critical attitudes, young people are still an important part of the European Union. They are the future of Europe and their voice is important. That is also why the European Union, through its policies, is trying to be more accessible to young people and to respond to their needs and concerns.

¹ *Standard Eurobarometer 99 Spring 2023: Public opinion in the European Union*. [online]. [cited 2023-08-28]. Available from: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=88080>

7.3 Perception of the position of the Slovak Republic in the European Union

The perception of the European Union in Slovakia is quite varied. On the one hand, there is relatively strong support for EU membership. On the other hand, there is a high number of people in the Slovak Republic who have a negative or sceptical attitude towards the European Union. Support for Slovakia's EU membership has been high from the beginning.

Chart 1: Support for the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union in the period before the accession to the European Union (Question: In general, do you think that Slovakia's membership in the European Union will be...?)



In a Eurobarometer survey in the first half of 2004, a few months before Slovakia joined the European Union, support for Slovakia's membership ranked third out of all 10 acceding Member States with 46% support. Only 9% of the Slovak population considered Slovakia's membership of the European Union to be a bad idea. The support of Slovak citizens for membership was even higher in the previous periods before

accession and was always above the average of the new Member States, as shown in Chart 1.¹

Table 60: *Inter-age differences in support for Slovak membership in the European Union in 2004 (Question: In general, do you think that Slovakia's membership in the European Union will be...?)*

Age Group	Good thing	Neither a good nor a bad thing	Bad thing
15-24 years old	59%	34%	4%
25-39 years old	57%	36%	3%
40-54 years old	39%	44%	12%
50+ years old	31%	42%	16%

Table 61: *Interregional differences in support for Slovak membership in the European Union in 2004 (Question: In general, do you think that Slovakia's membership in the European Union will be...?)*

Region	Good thing	Neither a good nor a bad thing	Bad thing
Eastern Slovakia	45%	43%	8%
Central Slovakia	44%	38%	11%
Other western Slovakia	45%	39%	10%
Bratislava region	56%	32%	6%

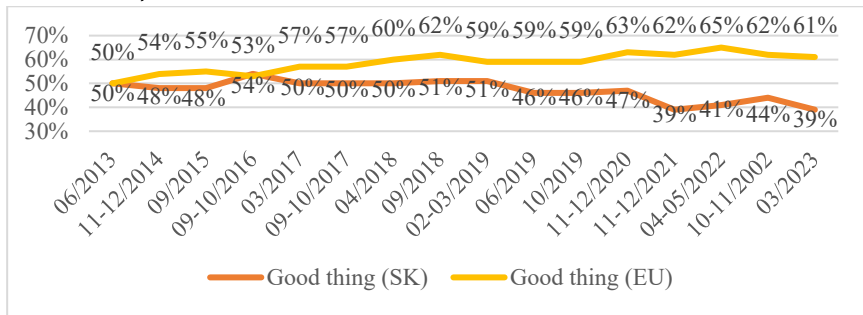
Even in 2004, the level of support for Slovak membership of the European Union declined with age. In the Slovak Republic, support for membership was highest among Slovak citizens aged 15-24, as shown in Table 60. In this context, we consider it appropriate to add that, with the exception of the Bratislava region, support for Slovakia's membership of the European Union was around 45% and thus there are no differences between western, central, and eastern Slovakia, which includes the current Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing

¹ EUROBAROMETER 2004.1 (NATIONAL REPORT: SLOVAK REPUBLIC) [online]. [cited 2023-01-12]. Available from: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=45512>

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Region. However, as can be seen in Table 61, the residents of Eastern Slovakia had the lowest rate of evaluations claiming that the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union is a bad idea compared to other regions (with the exception of the capital Bratislava).¹

Chart 2: Support for the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union and the European average support for membership in the European Union in the period before accession to the European Union (QA8: In general, do you think that your country's membership in the European Union is ...?)

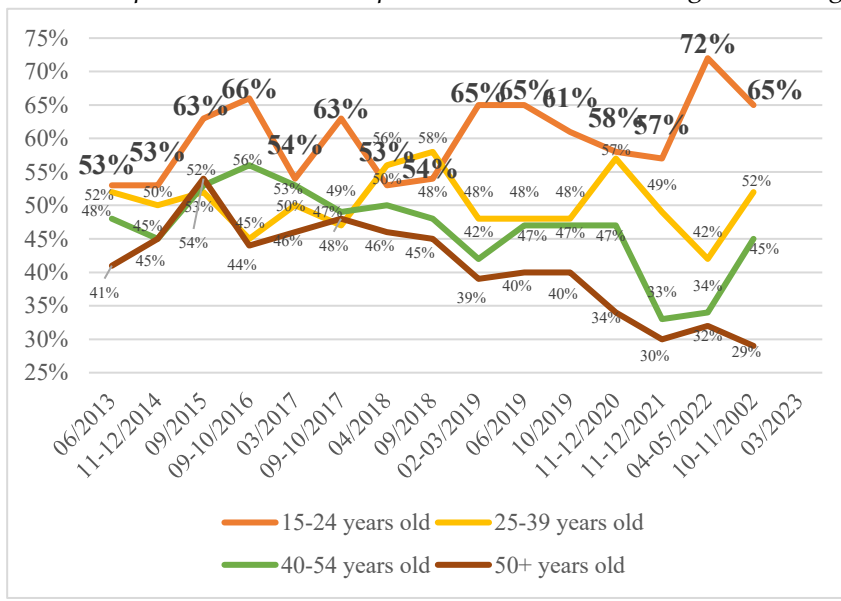


Support for Slovak membership continued to grow steadily until 2010, when it reached its highest level (68%) and then declined to a stable level below 50%. The evolution of the support for the Slovak Republic's membership with the average support for the membership in the European Union can be seen in Chart 2. As the table shows, over the last decade the attitudes of Slovaks towards European Union membership have gradually deteriorated. Compared to the EU average, Slovaks' attitudes towards EU membership are slightly more negative. In the last Eurobarometer of 2023, the Slovak Republic even recorded

¹ EUROBAROMETER 2004.1 (NATIONAL REPORT: SLOVAK REPUBLIC) [online]. [cited 2023-01-12]. Available from: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=45512>

the lowest support among all Member States at 39%.¹ One of the reasons for the worsening of Slovaks' attitudes towards EU membership may be the economic crisis that hit the European Union in 2008. This crisis led to an increase in unemployment and a reduction in the standard of living in Slovakia. Another reason may be Slovaks' dissatisfaction with some of the European Union's policies, such as migration policy or environmental policy.

Chart 3: *Inter-age differences in support for Slovak membership in the European Union (QA8: In general, do you think your country's membership in the European Union is a good thing.)*



A similar trend as we have observed in the approach to the European Union at the pan-European level, i.e. a more positive attitude towards the European integration process and its aspects among young people, is also visible in Slovakia. This

¹ *Plenary Insights September 2023*. [online]. [cited 2023-10-28]. Available from: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2023/en-plenary-insights-september-2023.pdf>

phenomenon is evident in a number of indicators, including support for Slovak membership of the European Union. As can be seen from Chart 3, support among young people has always been higher in Slovakia compared to other age groups. Relatively recently, in 2022, support for Slovakia's membership of the Union reached a record high value of 72% in the 15-24 age group. From this we can conclude that although the pro-EU attitudes of the Slovak public have been declining from the pre-accession period to the present day, support among young people has remained at significantly more positive values and has also been able to increase significantly at different stages. On the contrary, there has been a significant shift away from the 50+ age group in particular.

Compared to the European Union average, Slovak citizens are currently more sceptical and critical than the European average. This is shown by several indicators also in the latest Eurobarometer (Eurobarometer 99), such as trust in the European Union (QA6: trust - SR=44%; EU=47) or perception of the European Union (D78: positive - SR=36%; EU=45%).¹ Other opinion polls conducted by various third sector institutions such as GLOBSEC² or the initiative *(ne)want to stay here*³ also confirm the pro-European sentiment of young Slovak citizens.

With regard to interregional differences in support for the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union, support for membership is higher in the Prešov Self-governing

¹ *Spring Eurobarometer 2023: Slovakia*. [online]. [cit. 2023-08-28]. Available from: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=88133>

² For more details see MILO, D. and D. HAJDU. *SLOVAKIA: A PRO-EUROPEAN ISLAND IN CENTRAL EUROPE?* Bratislava: GLOBSEC Policy Institute, 2018. [online]. [cited 2023-06-13]. Available from: https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Slovakia_Pro-European-Island-in-Central-Europe.pdf

³ See *VÄČŠINA MLADÝCH CHCE ZOSTAŤ V EÚ A NATO, V NÁZORE NA VOJNU NA UKRAJINE SÚ ROZDELENÍ. (MOST YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO STAY IN THE EU AND NATO, THEY ARE DIVIDED ON THE WAR IN UKRAINE.)* [online]. [cited 2023-10-28]. Available from: <https://pretovolim.sk/vaccina-mladych-chce-zostat-v-eu-a-nato/>

Region and the Košice Self-governing Region compared to other regions. In both regions of the eastern part of Slovakia the support for membership is up to 56%. More significant differences in negative opinion about Slovakia's membership in the Union are not so visible. More detailed regional differences between the individual regions can be seen in Table 62.¹ There may be several reasons for the higher support for Slovakia's membership in the European Union in the Prešov Self-governing Region and the Košice Self-governing Region. Traditionally, the regions of eastern Slovakia are less developed than other regions of the Slovak Republic. Membership of the European Union has brought, and may yet bring, an influx of European investment to these regions, which can contribute to the development of the economy and the improvement of living standards. The Prešov and the Košice regions are closer to Slovakia's eastern neighbours, which are Russia and Ukraine. EU membership provides these regions with greater security and stability.

Table 62: *Interregional differences in support for Slovak membership in the European Union (Question: In general, do you think that Slovakia's membership in the European Union is...?)*

Region	Good thing	Bad thing
Prešov region	56%	9%
Košice region	56%	9%
Banská Bystrica region	38%	10%
Žilina region	38%	10%
Trenčín region	32%	10%
Nitra region	32%	10%
Trnava region	32%	10%
Bratislava region	22%	12%

¹ ZMUŠKOVÁ, B. *Slovensko má najnižšiu podporu členstva v Únii. (Slovakia has the lowest support for membership in the Union.)* [online]. [cit. 2023-03-28]. Available from: <https://euractiv.sk/section/buducnost-eu/news/slovensko-ma-najnizsiu-podporu-clenstva-v-unii/>

The perception of the European Union in Slovakia is a complex issue that is influenced by various factors such as the economic situation, political preferences, and personal experiences. This perception is likely to evolve further in the future depending on current events and political processes.

7.4 Civic and political participation of young people in Slovakia

The civic and political participation of young people is essential for sustainable democracy. Young people are the future of society, and their voice is important in deciding what society will look like. Despite this, surveys suggest that young people in Slovakia feel that their voice is not being heard enough. This was also the conclusion of the *Slovak Youth Institute's IUVETA* research from 2021.

Table 63: *Perceptions of young people's acceptance of adults' opinions according to the Slovak Youth Institute IUVENTA's research from 2021 (Question: What is your opinion on how young people are perceived by adults in our society?)*

The following statement is:	Completely true	Rather true	Rather false	Completely false	Don't know
<i>In our society, young people are not listened to enough.</i>	3,1%	25,5%	49,7%	19,8%	2%
<i>Adults think the young are immature to make decisions.</i>	31,1%	47,5%	17%	3,4%	1%
<i>It doesn't matter what opinion young people have, adults will usually have their way regardless.</i>	32,4%	50,4%	14,6%	2,1%	0,5%
<i>Adults are sufficiently interested in young people's views and ideas about how society should work.</i>	5,2%	26%	48,7%	18,4%	1,8%

The perception of the position of young Slovak citizens is visible in Table 63 from this research. According to this research, the feeling of not being listened to by young people is felt the most by young people in the Košice Self-governing Region (voice sufficiently listened to=21%, voice not sufficiently listened to=77.3%). Young people from the Prešov Self-governing Region, on the contrary, feel the greatest degree of hearing and participation among all regions of the Slovak Republic (voice sufficiently heard=38.7%, voice insufficiently heard=60.2%).¹

The civic and political participation of young people can have many benefits. It can help young people to learn about politics and social issues, raising their political awareness and helping them to build civic skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. Equally, by involving them in public affairs, this group of citizens also gains a sense of having an impact on society. Last but not least, building relationships with other young people can be an advantage. Involving young people in social and political life also significantly reduces the risk of young people becoming prone to extremist tendencies. Higher political participation of young people is of course no guarantee that extremism will be sufficiently suppressed in this group of citizens. However, it is important for young people to be involved in the political process so that they can make a difference in the world they want to see.

In focusing on the European Union, an interesting finding is that young people and students have long dominated in the level of identification with European citizenship. This is evidenced by trends in Eurobarometer surveys as well as the latest Eurobarometer from early 2023. It was participants from the European Citizens group who answered the question "Do

¹ KRIGLEROVÁ, E. G. and A. H. CHUDŽÍKOVÁ. *Čo si myslia mladi? (What do young people think?)* [online]. [cited 2023-03-13]. Available from: https://www.iuventa.sk/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2021/07/Co-si-myslia-mladi_analyza-gjinxe.pdf

you feel that you are a citizen of the European Union?" when asked by a group of 15-24 year olds. up to 80% answered in the affirmative.

Table 64: *Inter-age differences in identification with European Union citizenship (QD2.1 Do you feel that you are a citizen of the European Union?)*

Age group	Yes	No	Don't know
15-24 years old	80%	19%	1%
25-39 years old	75%	24%	1%
40-54 years old	72%	27%	1%
50+ years old	68%	31%	1%

Table 65: *Socio-professional differences in identification with European Union citizenship (QD2.1 Do you feel that you are a citizen of the European Union?)*

Socio-professional group	Yes	No	Don't know
Self-employed	75%	25%	0%
Managers	83%	17%	0%
Other white collars	74%	25%	1%
Manual workers	71%	28%	1%
House persons	63%	36%	1%
Unemployed	60%	39%	1%
Retired	67%	32%	1%
Students	83%	15%	2%

As can be seen in Table 64, this is the highest achieved level of identification with European Union citizenship compared to other groups. As can be seen in Table 65, the highest identification is also found in the comparison of the different socio-professional groups among the student group. It is interesting to note that the aspects that create this sense of belonging to European citizenship were identified by the group of young people aged 15-24, as well as by the socio-professional group

of students, as being mainly culture (26%/29%), European values (24%/26%), followed by the economy (23%/23%).¹

There are several opportunities for political participation arising from European citizenship. These include active and passive suffrage in European Parliament elections. They can also vote in national parliaments, which have the power to determine how European law is applied in their countries. They can also get involved in election campaigns to help promote candidates and their issues. They can volunteer or promote ideas and movements they consider important. Youth organisations, many of which are part of wider European partnerships, are also an important tool for youth participation. Young people also have the right to participate in the European Union Citizens' Initiative and European petitions. Civic and political participation at European level is important because it allows EU citizens to participate in decision-making processes on European issues.

7.5 Empirical analysis of value preferences of secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions towards the European Union

7.5.1 Differences in perceptions of the European Union with respect to demographic characteristics (gender, type of educational institution attended, region, age, ethnicity) (ANOVA)

Detecting differences in the evaluation of secondary school students in the Prešov Self-governing Region and the Košice Self-governing Region with regard to demographic characteristics allows one to recognise the views on the positions of both genders, the positions of representatives of students of two basic types of secondary grammar schools (secondary grammar school or secondary vocational school), the positions of secondary school

¹ *Standard Eurobarometer 99 Spring 2023: European citizenship*. [online]. [cit. 2023-08-28].

Available from:

<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=88077>

students by region, in which they attend secondary school (Prešov and Košice Self-governing Regions), the positions of different age groups of students attending their final year of secondary school and the year before graduation from secondary school, and the positions of students by ethnicity, i.e. belonging to Slovak ethnicity or to other ethnicities. The specific results are the output of the statistical processing of the data through univariate analysis of variance (Oneway ANOVA).

7.5.1.1 Intergender differences in the perception of the European Union among secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions

Table 66, which shows the differences in the significance of individual items of political awareness of secondary school students of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, focusing on the preferences of this group of society on various selected categories of political awareness, reveals statistically significant differences for four out of five items. The item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ($F=8.65$; $p=0.00$) is among those that meet the criterion of statistical significance. Based on the statistically significant data, it can be concluded that for most items, namely three out of four statistically significant items, females tend to have a higher level of insightful political awareness than males. These items include the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. Only for the NATIVISM item is the propensity on this attribute slightly higher for men than for women. This shows that women are more dominated by an inclination towards insightful political awareness than men in the three items mentioned above, including the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. Only in the NATIVISM item is the inclination towards insightful political awareness more dominant for men than for women. In terms of the five items (four statistically significant), the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION is among

the items with average values compared to the other items. Among the statistically significant items, the highest level of political awareness is evident in both males (M=4.52) and females (M=4.66) for the item HUMAN RIGHTS and the lowest level of political awareness is evident in both males (M=3.69) and females (M=3.61) for the item NATIVISM. The level of political awareness for the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION reached the values of M=3.83 for men and M=4.00 for women. Based on this, it can be concluded that male and female students of secondary grammar schools possess the highest level of political awareness and therefore knowledge of the issues falling under the item HUMAN RIGHTS, but for the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION they reach values indicating a leaning towards an insightful political awareness. However, since the differences in the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION between the two genders did not show significant differences compared to other items (males M=3.83; females M=4.00; difference=0.17), we can conclude that intergender differences in the importance of the set of items of political awareness in the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, although noted, cannot be considered significant.

Table 66: *Intergender differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items¹*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			men	women
Human rights	7,45	0,01	4,52	4,66
Democracy	4,22	0,04	3,97	4,21
Nativism	3,96	0,05	3,69	3,61
Media	0,99	0,32	3,10	3,39
European integration	8,65	0,00	3,83	4,00

Intergender differences in the significance of the set of political extremism items with respect to the EUROPEAN UNION are

¹ Statistically significant values are shown in grey.

shown in two out of four (see Table 67). We do not find a position inclining towards political extremism for any of the statistically significant items among male and female students. For the item *Membership in the European Union leads to the extinction of all things Slovak* ($F=7.02$; $p=0.01$), a relatively high level of inclination can be observed. For women ($M=1.89$) the inclination is slightly higher than for men ($M=2.03$). Thus, it can be concluded that men have a slightly higher concern about the influence of the European Union on Slovak national specifics. This is probably related to a stronger perception of Slovak identity and a stronger sense of national pride among the male population. It may also be related to the presentation of rather male personalities from Slovak national emancipation and cultural backgrounds in the educational process at secondary grammar schools. Consequently, this may lead to society-wide expectations of the protection of national traditions from the male part of the population. Thus, secondary school students learn about female role models in various fields, be it science or culture, in the educational process from a broader European environment, which leads to fewer concerns about the impact of the European Union on Slovak identity among women in particular. However, the results suggest that among secondary school students, there is no significant concern about the loss of Slovak specificities due to membership in the European Union.

Students' concerns about the position of the Slovak Republic in the European Union are more pronounced in the item *Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union* ($F=13.12$; $p=0.00$). However, even here we do not find students' inclination towards extremist positions. However, intergender differences are more pronounced than in the previous item. We again find higher levels of inclination for this item among females ($M=3.47$) than among males ($M=3.25$). The more pronounced shift towards the mean positions for both genders compared to the previous

item is probably related to a more specific idea and a higher level of information in the public space about the position of states, namely the Slovak Republic, in the European Union. Women, compared to men, perceive the position of the Slovak Republic more as equal to other actors. The male part of students perceives this position slightly more critically. This is probably related to the stronger positions of the male population on issues of national sovereignty.

Table 67: *Intergender differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to the European Union*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				men	women
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION	The fate of the citizens of Slovakia is decided only abroad.	2,29	0,13	2,08	1,88
	Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union.	13,12	0,00	3,25	3,47
	European Parliament elections are pointless.	0,79	0,37	1,9	1,8
	Membership of the European Union leads to the disappearance of everything Slovak.	7,02	0,01	2,03	1,89

For both statistically significant items, this confirms the assumption of a stronger perception of national identity among men and, consequently, a higher concern about threats to these positions arising from membership of the European Union. The same trends are found for the remaining two items, which were not statistically significant. For the item, *The fate of Slovak citizens is decided only abroad* ($F=2.29$; $p=0.13$), men ($M=2.08$) were more concerned about the impact of decision-making abroad on the fate of Slovak citizens than women

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(M=1.88), and similarly, for the item, *Elections to the European Parliament are useless* (F=0.79; p=0.37), the tendency to perceive less impact of elections to the European Parliament on the lives of citizens was more pronounced for men (M=1.9) than for women (M=1.8). However, even here we do not find positions indicating an inclination towards extremist positions.

7.5.1.2 Inter-institutional-educational differences in the perception of the European Union among secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions

Table 68: *Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
			Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools ¹
Human rights	12,54	0,00	4,67	4,53
Democracy	6,88	0,01	4,28	3,94
Nativism	2,23	0,14	3,75	3,54
Media	1,32	0,25	3,61	2,93
European integration	19,80	0,00	4,12	3,74

Table 68, which shows the differences in the significance of individual items of political awareness of secondary school students of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, focusing on the preferences of this group of society on various selected categories of political awareness, reveals statistically significant differences for three out of five items. The item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION (F=19.80; p=0.00) is among those that meet the criterion of statistical significance. Based on the statistically significant data, it can be concluded that for all three statistically significant items, students of secondary grammar schools tend to have a higher level of insightful political

¹Secondary Vocational School

awareness than students of secondary vocational schools. The same trends can be seen for the remaining two items, but they are not statistically significant. Thus, the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION shows a higher tendency towards insightful political awareness among male and female students of secondary grammar schools ($M=4.12$) than among male and female students of secondary vocational schools ($M=3.74$).

The most significant differences between male and female students of different types of secondary education providers were observed for the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION (difference=0.38). The lowest differences were observed for the item HUMAN RIGHTS (difference=0.14). Based on this, it can be concluded that among the items studied, for the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION there are no major differences between male and female students of different educational institutions in their attitude towards the European Union and in their perception of this institution. All statistically significant items for both types of secondary grammar schools tend to be insightful political awareness. At the same time, the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, compared to the other statistically significant items, shows the lowest tendency towards insightful political awareness among the statistically significant items for both male and female students at secondary grammar schools and for male and female students in secondary vocational schools. Students of secondary grammar schools possess the highest level of political awareness and, therefore, knowledge of issues falling under the item HUMAN RIGHTS (secondary grammar school $M=4.67$; secondary vocational schools $M=4.53$). Thus, it can be concluded that the inter-institutional-educational differences were most significant precisely for the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, both in the degree of inclination towards insightful political awareness and in the difference between the two types of educational institutions under study.

Table 69: *Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to the European Union*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				Secondary grammar schools	Secondary vocational schools
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION	The fate of the citizens of Slovakia is decided only abroad.	0,38	0,54	1,9	2,04
	Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union.	2,13	0,15	3,44	3,32
	European Parliament elections are pointless.	4,1	0,04	1,67	2,01
	Membership of the European Union leads to the disappearance of everything Slovak.	19,91	0,00	1,65	2,25

Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of items on political extremism with respect to the EUROPEAN UNION emerge in two out of four (see Table 69). For none of the statistically significant items do we find a position inclining towards political extremism among students. For the item, *Membership in the European Union leads to the extinction of everything Slovak* ($F=19.91$; $p=0.00$), a relatively high level of inclination can be observed. Differences between male and female students of different types of educational

institutions are most pronounced for this item. Students of secondary grammar schools ($M=1.65$) have a significantly higher tendency than students of secondary vocational schools ($M=2.25$). Thus, the type of secondary school attended has a more pronounced impact on the attitude of secondary school students towards the European Union, especially in terms of possible fear of a threat to Slovak identity resulting from membership in the European Union. This is probably related to the different focus and curriculum content of the types of secondary grammar schools surveyed. General education at secondary grammar schools with a higher proportion of social sciences and humanities subjects, which also include more intensive education about aspects of the European integration process, and mostly more intensive teaching of other European languages, leads to a reduction of fears about the impact of the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union and its impact on the specificities of Slovak culture and Slovak identity. We consider it necessary to emphasise that in neither type of schools do we find a high level of concern about the loss of Slovak specificities due to membership in the European Union.

Statistically significant is also the item, *Elections to the European Parliament are useless* ($F=4.1$; $p=0.04$). Here too we do not find students' inclination towards extremist positions. Inter-institutional-educational differences for this item show a lower level of inclination compared to the previous one. The inclination is higher for male and female students of secondary grammar schools ($M=1.67$) than for male and female students of secondary vocational schools ($M=2.01$). As with the previous item, this is probably related to the content and scope of the curriculum and the range of content in the humanities and social sciences. In addition to perceptions of the European Union, this item also focuses on the issue of political participation. The emphasis on education in citizenship education, history

and political science, which is more prominent in secondary grammar schools, leads to a higher level of confidence in the tools of political participation among students in this type of secondary school. However, the difference (difference=0.34) between the attributes is lower than for the previous item (difference=0.6). From this it can be concluded that also education in secondary vocational schools strengthens to a sufficient extent the confidence of male and female students of this type of educational institution towards the electoral process at the European level as one of the important tools of political participation. The low turnout in the European Parliament elections, even among a group of young people, mostly first-time voters, is thus not related to a feeling that these elections are useless, or to a lack of confidence in the power of this instrument of participation, but for other reasons.

For both statistically significant items, this confirms the assumption that trust in the European institutions and in the instruments of political participation at the European level is higher among students at secondary grammar schools with general education. Students of secondary vocational schools are more concerned about the ineffectiveness of elections to the European Parliament to influence the processes taking place at different levels of political life, as well as more concerned about the threat to Slovak identity due to the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union. The same trends are found for the remaining two items which were not statistically significant. For the item *The fate of Slovak citizens is decided only abroad* ($F=0.38$; $p=0.54$), students of secondary vocational schools ($M=2.04$) were more worried about the impact of decision-making abroad on the fate of Slovak citizens than students of secondary grammar schools ($M=1.9$), and the same was true for the item, *Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union* ($F=2.13$; $p=0.15$), the tendency to perceive the equilibrium

position of the Slovak Republic in comparison with other actors and partners in the European Union was more pronounced among male and female students of secondary grammar schools ($M=3.44$) than among male and female students of secondary vocational schools ($M=3.32$). However, even here we do not find positions indicating a leaning towards extremist positions.

7.5.1.3 Interregional differences in the perception of the European Union among secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice Regions

Table 70, which shows the differences in the significance of individual items of political awareness of secondary school students of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, focusing on the preferences of this group of society on various selected categories of political awareness, reveals statistically significant differences for three out of five items. The item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ($F=5.95$; $p=0.02$) is among those that meet the criterion of statistical significance. Based on the statistically significant data, it can be concluded that for all three items, students of the Prešov Self-governing Region tend to have a higher level of insightful political awareness than students of the Košice Self-governing Region. The same trends can be seen for the remaining two items, but they are not statistically significant. Among the statistically significant items, EUROPEAN INTEGRATION is the item with the lowest tendency to insightful political awareness. This is the case for students of the Košice Self-governing Region ($M=3.81$) as well as for students of the Prešov Self-governing Region ($M=4.05$). Among the statistically significant items, the highest level of political awareness is noticeable among male and female students of the Košice Self-governing Region ($M=4.72$) and among male and female students of the Prešov Self-governing Region ($M=4.72$) for the item HUMAN RIGHTS ($F=30.88$; $p=0.00$). Based on this, it can be

concluded that students of secondary grammar schools have the highest level of political awareness and therefore knowledge of issues falling under the item HUMAN RIGHTS, but for the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION they reach the lowest values indicating a tendency towards an insightful political awareness. However, since the differences in the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION between the two regions did not show significant differences compared to other items (difference=0.24), we can conclude that interregional differences in the importance of the set of items of political awareness in the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION was noted, but it cannot be considered significant.

Table 70: *Interregional differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	P	MEAN	
			KSR ¹	PSR ²
Human rights	30,88	0,00	4,48	4,72
Democracy	5,46	0,02	4,00	4,21
Nativism	0,00	0,98	3,54	3,74
Media	0,55	0,46	3,15	3,39
European integration	5,95	0,02	3,81	4,05

Among the interregional differences in the significance of the set of items on political extremism with respect to the EUROPEAN UNION, one of four emerges (see Table 71). We do not find a position inclining towards political extremism for any of the items, either statistically significant or statistically insignificant for male and female students. For the item, *Membership in the European Union leads to the extinction of everything Slovak* (F=17.68; p=0.00), a relatively high level of inclination can be observed. Students of the Prešov Self-governing Region (M=1.72) have a slightly higher inclination than students

¹ Košice Self-governing Region

² Prešov Self-governing Region

of the Košice Self-governing Region (M=2.19). Thus, it can be concluded that students of the Košice Self-governing Region are slightly more concerned about the influence of the European Union on Slovak national specifics. However, the obtained results indicate that among secondary school students there is no significant concern about the loss of Slovak specificities due to membership in the European Union.

Table 71: *Interregional differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to the European Union*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				KSR	PSR
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION	The fate of the citizens of Slovakia is decided only abroad.	0,42	0,51	2,06	1,86
	Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union.	0,33	0,57	3,34	3,41
	European Parliament elections are pointless.	1,13	0,23	1,96	1,72
	Membership of the European Union leads to the disappearance of everything Slovak.	17,68	0,00	2,19	1,72

The differences between the two regions are relatively high (difference=0.47). This may be due to the stronger representation of minorities in the territory of the Košice Self-governing Region and their more active political and social anchorage. Such an environment may lead to strengthening of stereotypes about national minorities and strengthening of conflict lines between majority and minority population. Consequently, this can lead to a sense of increased threat to national identities among members of both the majority nation and national minorities. The recent direct experience of the inhabitants of both regions

of the migration crisis caused by the invasion of the territory of Ukraine by the Russian Federation may also have an impact on increased regional differences.

We also find a higher propensity for the other three items, but these were not statistically significant. This means higher inclinations of pro-European attitudes among male and female students from the Prešov Self-governing Region than among male and female students from the Košice Self-governing Region. However, the differences for the remaining, statistically insignificant items were not so significant. Therefore, interregional differences in the remaining items can be considered insignificant. Moreover, for none of the items do we find positions indicating a leaning towards extremist positions.

7.5.1.4 Age differences in the perception of the European Union among secondary school students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions

Table 72, which shows the differences in the significance of individual items of political awareness of students of secondary grammar schools of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, focusing on various selected categories of political awareness, does not reveal statistically significant differences for even one item out of five. The item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ($F=1.27$; $p=0.28$) is also among those that do not meet the criterion of statistical significance. It is worth noting that for all items examined, male and female students tend to have higher levels of insightful political awareness. The only exception is the age category of 16-year-old male and female students, who tend to have more insightful political awareness for the item MEDIA ($F=1.53$; $p=0.19$). This may be related to less life experience, experience with the role of the media and socio-political processes. Thus, the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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shows a higher inclination towards insightful political awareness among male and female students of all ages.

Table 72: Age differences in the significance of a set of political awareness items

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	p	MEAN				
			16-year-olds	17-year-olds	18-year-olds	19-year-olds	20-year-olds
Human rights	1,56	0,18	3,33	4,57	4,65	4,51	5,00
Democracy	0,61	0,66	3,00	4,09	4,17	3,92	3,50
Nativism	1,51	0,20	3,00	3,64	3,69	3,46	4,00
Media	1,53	0,19	2,33	3,27	3,34	2,87	2,50
European integration	1,27	0,28	4,00	3,91	3,98	3,74	3,00

Less significant differences between male and female students of different ages were observed for the item HUMAN RIGHTS (16-year-olds $M=3.33$; 20-year-olds $M=5.00$; difference=1.67). For the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, the differences between the different age categories are average compared to other items (16-year-olds $M=4.00$; 20-year-olds $M=3.00$; difference=1.00). We find the most stable tendencies towards insightful political awareness in the age categories of 17-year-olds, 18-year-olds and 19-year-olds. The lower representation of the age categories of 16-year-old and 20-year-old male and female students in the surveyed secondary school years, and thus lower representation in the questionnaire data collection, led to higher instability in the outcomes for these two age categories. The highest inclinations towards insightful political awareness were achieved by students in the 18-year-old age group for all items, including the EUROPEAN INTEGRATION item. This may be related to a combination of two main factors. On the one hand,

compared to the younger age groups, they have sufficient knowledge and experience of social and political processes; on the other hand, they experience a more intense sense of belonging to society just after crossing the age of 18, which is also reflected in the legal system. They are now in a position of full responsibility, with the direct impact of the resulting rights and obligations, which are complemented by the increased pressure of their own expectations as well as those of the external environment. The high level of inclination for male and female students in the 18-year age group is also reflected under the heading of EUROPEAN INTEGRATION.

None of the age differences in the significance of the set of political extremism items with respect to the EUROPEAN UNION are shown in any of the four ones (see Table 73). Although neither item was statistically significant we may conclude that we do not find a position inclining towards political extremism among students for any of the items. We find the highest number of inclinations towards positive evaluations of the European integration process among male and female students in the age group of 18-year-olds. The highest inclinations of all the age groups represented were achieved by this group of male and female students in two out of four items, namely in the items, *Elections to the European Parliament are useless* ($F=0.55$; $p=0.7$; $M=1.73$) and *Membership in the European Union leads to the extinction of everything Slovak* ($F=0.55$; $p=0.7$; $M=1.9$), while in the remaining two items they achieved consistently high inclinations. This is probably related to the interplay of a number of factors, in particular, the amount of knowledge and experience compared to the lower age groups on the one hand and the expectations resulting from crossing the so-called adulthood threshold. However, the same stable values and attitudes are also found for the 17- and 18-year-old male and female students. For the item, *The fate of Slovak citizens is decided only abroad* ($F=1.1$; $p=0.36$),

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students in the age category of 16-year-olds ($M=1.67$) have a significantly higher inclination than students in the other four age categories (17-year-olds $M=2.00$; 18-year-olds $M=1.91$; 19-year-olds $M=2.1$; 20-year-olds $M=2.00$). Thus, younger age has a more pronounced effect on less concern about the impact of decision-making abroad on the fate of Slovak citizens.

Table 73: Age differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to the European Union

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN				
				16- year- olds	17- year- olds	18- year- olds	19- year- olds	20- year- olds
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION	The fate of the citizens of Slovakia is decided only abroad.	1,1	0,36	1,67	2,0	1,91	2,1	2,0
	Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union.	0,45	0,77	3,0	3,38	3,38	3,36	3,5
	European Parliament elections are pointless.	0,55	0,7	2,33	1,92	1,73	2,03	2,5
	Membership of the European Union leads to the disappearance of everything Slovak.	0,55	0,7	3,0	1,94	1,9	2,21	2,5

On the contrary, for the items, *Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union* ($F=0.45$; $p=0.77$) and *Membership in the European Union leads to the disappearance of everything Slovak* ($F=0.55$; $p=0.7$), students in the lowest represented age category, i.e. the category of 16-year-olds, expressed concern about

the position of the Slovak Republic in the European Union and the possible loss of Slovak identity resulting from membership in the European Union. For the item, *Elections to the European Parliament are useless* ($F=0.55$; $p=0.7$), students in the age group of 20-year-olds ($M=2.5$) had the highest feeling of the ineffectiveness of this instrument of political participation at the European level. The highest age differences are found in the comparison of the groups of 16-year-olds and 20-year-olds in contrast to the groups of 17-year-old, 18-year-old, and 20-year-old male and female students. However, for none of the items do we find positions indicating a leaning towards extremist positions.

7.5.1.5 National Differences in the Perception of the European Union among Secondary School Students in the Prešov and the Košice regions

Table 74, which shows the differences in the significance of individual items of political awareness of secondary school students of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, focusing on the preferences of this group of society on various selected categories of political awareness, reveals statistically significant differences for two items out of five. The item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ($F=0.28$; $p=0.60$) is among those that do not meet the criterion of statistical significance. Based on the statistically significant data, it can be concluded that for both statistically significant items, students of Slovak ethnicity tend to have a higher level of insightful political awareness than students of other ethnicities. The same trends can be seen for the remaining three items, which are not statistically significant. Among the statistically significant items, the highest level of political awareness is noticeable among male and female students of Slovak ethnicity ($M=4.64$) and among male and female students of other ethnicities ($M=3.67$) for the item, HUMAN RIGHTS ($F=19.83$; $p=0.00$). Based on the significant difference

between the two groups, it can be concluded that students of Slovak ethnicity have the highest level of political awareness and therefore knowledge of the issues falling under the item HUMAN RIGHTS. For the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, which was not statistically significant, they reach significantly lower values (Slovak ethnicity M=3.95; other ethnicity M=3.48), but still indicating a tendency towards insightful political awareness. The differences in the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION between the group of male and female students of Slovak ethnicity and the group of male and female students of other ethnicity recorded an interesting difference (difference=0.47), from which we can conclude that national differences in the significance of the set of items of political awareness in the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION were noted.

Table 74: *Ethnic differences in the importance of a set of political awareness items*

SET OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEMS	F	P	MEAN	
			Slovak	Other
Human rights	19,83	0,00	4,64	3,67
Democracy	3,14	0,08	4,13	3,52
Nativism	0,18	0,67	3,66	3,33
Media	6,81	0,01	3,28	3,10
European integration	0,28	0,60	3,95	3,48

None of the four national differences in the significance of the set of items on political extremism with respect to the EUROPEAN UNION are shown (see Table 75). Although not a single item was statistically significant we can conclude that we do not find a position inclining towards political extremism among students for any of the items. For all items, the inclination of students of Slovak ethnicity is higher than it was for students of other ethnicities. This means a higher inclination of pro-European attitudes among male and female students of Slovak

ethnicity than among male and female students of non-Slovak ethnicity. Significant differences between the inclinations of the group of students of Slovak ethnicity and the group of students of other ethnicity were found for the items, *Elections to the European Parliament are useless* ($F=0.35$; $p=0.55$; difference=0.9) and *Membership in the European Union leads to the extinction of everything Slovak* ($F=1.0$; $p=0.32$; difference=0.96). From this we can conclude that students of ethnicities other than Slovak, who attend secondary grammar schools in the territory of the Prešov Self-governing Region and the Košice Self-governing Region, have more critical attitudes towards the European integration process and the European Union itself. This is probably related to the more intense fear of members of national minorities about the loss of their own national identity, whereas members of the majority population feel this fear to a much lesser extent. In addition, students of Slovak ethnicity have less fear of losing their Slovak identity as a result of the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union, or they have a higher degree of trust in the institutions and instruments through which European policies are implemented or can be influenced, compared to other ethnicities. This is probably related to the easier identification of majority members with representatives who are directly elected to these institutions or are nominated to the European Union bodies by the institutions, and most of the time citizens of Slovak ethnicity are more successful in this competition, or they are presented to the public or perceived by the citizens in this way. For both groups, we find indications of increased concern only for the item, *Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union* ($F=3.2$; $p=0.07$). For this item, students of non-Slovak ethnicity are in the central value position ($M=3.0$) and students of Slovak ethnicity are close to this central value position ($M=3.39$). Moreover, we observed the smallest ethnicity differences in this item, focusing on the item

EUROPEAN UNION (difference=0.39). Neutral or rather neutral attitude towards the balance position of the Slovak Republic towards other actors of the European integration process is thus held by both groups under observation. However, for none of the items do we find positions indicating an inclination towards extremist positions.

Table 75: *Ethnic differences in the significance of a set of political extremism items with respect to the European Union*

	SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS	F	p	MEAN	
				Slovak	Other
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION	The fate of the citizens of Slovakia is decided only abroad.	0,02	0,9	1,93	2,7
	Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union.	3,2	0,07	3,39	3,0
	European Parliament elections are pointless.	0,35	0,55	1,8	2,7
	Membership of the European Union leads to the disappearance of everything Slovak.	1,0	0,32	1,99	2,95

7.5.2 Correlations between political awareness and political extremism with respect to the European Union

Table 75, which shows the correlations in the significance of political awareness focusing on the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION and the individual items of political extremism of secondary school students of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions focusing on the preferences of this group of society on the European Union, are statistically significant for all four examined correlations.

The lowest level of correlation among the items studied was observed between the item POLITICAL EXTREMISM *The fate*

of Slovak citizens is decided only abroad and the item of political awareness EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. The correlation of these items is statistically significant, but shows a small degree of correlation ($p=0.00$, $r=-0.2730$), while it is a correlation showing inverse proportionality. This implies that there is only a small degree of correlation between the political awareness of male and female secondary school students, which showed values clearly tending towards insightful political awareness, and the perception of this group of citizens about the possibilities to influence decision-making processes that affect the lives of citizens of the Slovak Republic through the tools available at the national or sub-national level. Trust in the European Union as a space for cooperation thus has little impact on assessments of European decision-making processes at the various levels of decision-making. It can be concluded that the level of political awareness of secondary school students only to a small extent increases the acceptance of decision-making processes taking place at the national and supranational level as those carried out freely and in the public interest of the citizens of the Slovak Republic, and only to a small extent can it lead to the suppression of extremist attitudes among secondary school students of the Prešov Self-governing Region and the Košice Self-governing Region on issues related to the European Union.

For the other three items examined, the correlations were higher, specifically reaching the level of a mean correlation between the items examined. There is a statistically significant correlation between the item POLITICAL EXTREMISM *Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union* and the item of political awareness of EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. It shows a mean correlation ($p=0.00$, $r=-0.3240$), while it is a correlation showing direct proportionality. It follows that there is a mean correlation between the political awareness of male and female secondary school students and the perception of the Slovak

Republic as a partner to other actors influencing processes in the European Union area. From this it can be concluded that raising political awareness is one of the tools to prevent negative attitudes towards the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union. The perception of Slovakia as an equal and accepted partner in the European Union can also lead to support for membership. This also implies that raising political awareness about Slovakia's position in the European Union may to some extent lead to the suppression of extremist attitudes among students of secondary grammar schools in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions on the issue of the European Union. Increasing the education of male and female students about the European integration process and its benefits and consequences may also influence the perception of the position of the Slovak Republic in the wider European area. However, it cannot be seen as the only instrument leading to support for Slovakia's membership of the European Union.

There is a statistically significant correlation between the item POLITICAL EXTREMISM European Parliament *elections are useless* and the item of political awareness of EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. It shows a mean correlation ($p=0.00$, $r=-0.3989$), with the correlation showing inverse proportionality. This shows that there is a moderate correlation between the political awareness of male and female secondary school students and the perceived importance of one of the most important instruments of political participation of European citizens, i.e. the elections to the European Parliament. Positive evaluations of the European Union and a tendency towards insightful awareness among secondary school students have a partial influence on the perception of the European Parliament elections as an instrument through which European Union citizens have the opportunity to influence events at European level. At the same

time, insightful political awareness is only partly able to increase the confidence of secondary school students in the regions studied in this instrument of representative democracy. The repeatedly low voter turnout of Slovak citizens in elections to the European Parliament suggests that the greater reluctance to participate actively in this type of election has other causes than a lower level of political awareness. This also suggests that increasing political awareness of the European Parliament elections may to some extent lead to the suppression of extremist attitudes among students of secondary grammar schools in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions on the issue of the European Union.

The highest level of correlation was observed between the item *POLITICAL EXTREMISM Membership in the European Union leads to the disappearance of everything Slovak* and the item of political awareness *EUROPEAN INTEGRATION*. This is a correlation that is statistically significant ($p=0.00$, $r=-0.4910$) and shows a correlation on the borderline between mean ($r=0.3-0.5$) and high correlation ($r=0.5-0.7$). This is a correlation showing inverse proportionality. This shows that there is a mean to high correlation between the political awareness of male and female secondary school students and the students' fear of losing Slovak specificities, with the concern that membership in the European Union may affect the perception of Slovak identity. Positive evaluations of the European Union and the inclination towards insightful awareness among male and female secondary school students, compared to previous correlations, have a stronger impact on the perception of a sense of loss or preservation of national Slovak specificities reacting to our membership in the Union. It can be concluded that insightful political awareness may reduce the fear of female and male secondary school students in the studied regions that our participation in the European integration environment must inevitably lead to the suppression

of national specificities. This also implies that raising political awareness about European Union membership and its implications for the Slovak Republic and Slovak citizens may lead to the suppression of extremist attitudes among male and female secondary school students in the Prešov Self-governing Region and the Košice Self-governing Region on the issue of the European Union.

Table 76: *Correlations in the significance of the political awareness item and the set of political extremism items with respect to the European Union*

		POLITICAL AWARENESS ITEM - EUROPEAN INTEGRATION	
			The European Union is the best form of organisation and cooperation between European states, and there is no alternative at present.
		p	r
SET OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM ITEMS			
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION	The fate of the citizens of Slovakia is decided only abroad.	0,00	-0,2730
	Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union.	0,00	0,3240
	European Parliament elections are pointless.	0,00	-0,3989
	Membership pf the European Union leads to the disappearance of everything Slovak.	0,00	-0,4910

Conclusion

The empirical analysis of the value preferences of secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice regions towards the European Union has yielded a number of interesting findings. On the basis of the obtained data, we can conclude that in issues related to the European Union and the impact of the European integration process on the lives of male and female secondary school students in the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions, none of the observed aspects show attitudes that would lead to tendencies towards extremist attitudes. In terms of demographic differences, only for some items with regard to the European Union do we find a certain degree of differences in the attitudes of the groups studied. However, groups of male and female students in the regions studied, broken down along standard demographic lines, show minimal or only small differences in inclinations. More pronounced differences were observed, for example, in intergender differences, where higher levels of political awareness in the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION among female students were subsequently reflected in more Euro-optimistic attitudes among female students than among students of the regions studied in all statistically significant items of political extremism with respect to the European Union. In this context, fears of loss of Slovak identity or less confidence in the validity of the European Parliament elections were more prevalent among students. Differences were also evident in the political awareness in the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, when students from the Prešov Self-governing Region showed a slightly higher level of political awareness in the issues of the European integration process. These differences were subsequently reflected in the statistically significant item concerning membership in the European Union, in which students of the Prešov Self-governing Region showed a lower level of concern about the loss of Slovak specifics resulting

from the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union. Differences were also evident in political awareness in the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. We also found more pronounced differences in the inter-institutional-educational differences for the items with regard to the European Union. The level of political awareness was higher for the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION among male and female students of secondary grammar schools compared to secondary vocational schools. Inter-institutional-educational differences in the significance of a set of items of political extremism with regard to the European Union were evident in our findings for the statistically significant items focusing on the question of the importance of the European Parliament elections and the fear of losing Slovak specificities under the influence of the European integration process. The lower level of political awareness among male and female students of secondary vocational schools may have influenced their lower confidence in the benefits and power of European elections and increased level of concern about the loss of Slovak identity resulting from the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union. The correlation analysis subsequently provided us with data in which the correlations in the significance of political awareness focusing on the item EUROPEAN INTEGRATION and the individual items of political extremism of secondary school students of the Prešov and the Košice Self-governing Regions focusing on the preferences of this group of society on the European Union were statistically significant for all four correlations examined. We recorded a small degree of correlation for one item out of four (*The fate of Slovak citizens is decided only abroad*), a mean degree of correlation for two items (*Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union; Elections to the European Parliament are useless*), and a correlation on the borderline between a mean and a large degree of correlation for one item (*Membership in the European Union leads to the extinction*

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of everything Slovak). This suggests that raising the level of political awareness to the level of insightful political awareness may have only a minor impact on confidence in the power and freedom of decision-making processes at the national and sub-national level; to some extent, a higher level of political awareness may have an impact in the attitudes of secondary school students towards the position of the Slovak Republic in the European Union as a relevant and accepted partner and in confidence in the importance of elections to the European Parliament. The highest level of correlation was observed in the relationship between the level of political awareness and concerns about the threat to Slovak identity. From this we can conclude that increasing the level of political awareness, at least to the level of insightful awareness, can lead to suppression of fears about the loss of Slovak specificity and Slovak culture under the influence of the European Union among secondary school students. Increasing education and raising awareness of the European integration process is thus not the dominant tool for curbing the rise of political extremism and anti-European attitudes, but it is not an insignificant tool. From this it can be concluded that education about the European Union, the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union and the benefits and impacts of European citizenship also have their place in efforts to prevent the rise of political extremism among secondary school students in the Košice Self-governing Region and the Prešov Self-governing Region.

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CONCLUSION

It turns out that the issue of exploring political awareness and political extremism is still highly topical today, given today's ever-changing social and political trends. Education and the related political and social literacy play a key role in the acquisition of political awareness, not only for adult citizens, but also for young, emerging members of society. The same is true in the elimination of political extremism, where education for citizenship is one of the basic principles of building a civic coherent and mature society as an effective prerequisite in the fight against extremist tendencies, although the causes of the increase in political extremism do not stem only from the lack of education of individuals in society, or insufficiently educated people. There appear to be many more causes, some of which, by their objective-material nature, often seem to be complicated to solve in the short term, as they are systemic ills and defects of post-industrial society. Signs and manifestations of political extremism have been noticeable in Slovakia since the mid-1990s, when civic associations inclined towards this branch were founded. Their growth and increased level of authenticity have been evident at least since 2016, when the People's Party Our Slovakia was elected to parliament with considerable support from citizens (almost 210 thousand voters - 8.04% of the vote). Although today there is probably not a single latent supporter symbolically/mentally or non-verbally inclined to political extremism sitting in the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic, it is radical right-wing populism that saturates the needs of a politically radicalising society. Although it still belongs to the democratically constitutional-conformist zone of the political-value spectrum, for political scientists it certainly means the recognition that the political attributes associated with protest and anti-systemicity

have not disappeared in Slovak society, but have only been transformed into a more acceptable form. By the way, nowhere is it written that the election years of 2016 and 2020 cannot be repeated in the future. We believe that it is in this context that the conducted empirical research aimed at investigating the correlation between the distortions of political awareness and the growth of political extremism among students of the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions acts as necessary, desirable and valuable in relation to the knowledge of the current state of political awareness of secondary school students in the selected Self-governing Regions and their potential inclinations towards political extremism.

In addressing the research problems, we believe that these have been (re)addressed, and we have acquired quantitative data that allow us to evaluate, interpret and generalise the results. In summary, we have recognised the degree and nature of political awareness as well as political extremism among students attending secondary grammar schools in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions. As well as we recognised the degree of dependence between political awareness and political extremism in the same tested sample.

In the context of fulfilling the set research objectives stated in the chapter Research Methodology, we believe that we have succeeded in fulfilling all three set objectives, i.e. the level and nature of political awareness and political extremism among secondary school students in the Košice and the Prešov Self-governing Regions was determined through univariate analysis of variance, which revealed some statistically significant differences. Through linear correlation analysis, we found the degree of dependence between the measured values of political awareness and the measured values of political extremism (some cases).

In relation to the established research hypotheses, we concluded that in some cases they were confirmed, i.e. that the level and nature of political awareness and political extremism among secondary school students in the Košice and the Prešov regions were differentiated with respect to their demographic characteristics. We can also conclude that in some cases there is a degree of dependence between political awareness and political extremism in the aforementioned secondary school students.

By conducting quantitative empirical research, we arrived at the following analytically interesting findings and generalised conclusions. Based on statistically significant data ($p \leq 0.05$), we found that the theoretically-normatively expected assumption was confirmed, namely that the more developed the political awareness, the lower the level of inclination towards political extremism and vice versa. This was confirmed by the resulting findings of the correlation analysis based on all the five strands under study - Human Rights, Democracy, Nativism, Media and European Integration. These results demonstrate that knowledge/literacy in the form of political awareness underpins political and civic awareness and decision-making. Low values of this indicator result in more exacerbated attitudes that negatively affect established and standardised democratic principles and order. Conversely, high values are a certain prerequisite for maturity and consequent guarantee of consolidation and cultivation of democracy and its attributes.

It turned out that the level of acquired political awareness is relatively high among the tested students - students from both regions (in some circuits the Prešov region prevailed) as well as both types of educational institutions (in some cases secondary grammar schools prevailed) in their attitudes (differentials) in statistically significant cases belong to the insightful type of political awareness and in general are not inclined to political extremism (no attitudes leading to tendencies towards extremist

attitudes are found). This means that in the Košice and the Prešov regions there is currently relatively sufficient educational activity in selected secondary grammar schools and selected types of secondary vocational schools from a qualitative point of view, which pays more comprehensive attention to education for citizenship, which plays an important role in shaping education in relation to the understanding of democracy, its principles, status and ideal. Similarly, the level of education and awareness-raising about the European integration process.

We believe that the presented professional book publication of a monographic nature can be inspiring as well as helpful in its form, but also in the content of the results found in the implementation of other similar empirical research that will be conducted in the future in Slovakia, or its regions, whether on a sample of male and female students or a wider age range of respondents.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

**UPJŠ in Košice
Faculty of Arts
Department of Political Science**

Methodology KOREL-PVaPE-1

Dear students,

this methodology is part of a scientific research project and all the data obtained will be used as a basis for fair work and will not affect your personal life in any way.

Please read all the questions carefully and do not think about your answers for long. When filling in the demographic characteristics, please tick - circuit the options that apply to you or fill in specific details. When answering the actual questions in the questionnaire, circle a number from a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Please work independently, without interruption, and do not return to answers already completed. The methodology is anonymous, please do not sign.

Collective of the scientific research project

Demographic characteristics

1. My gender:
 - man
 - Woman

2. I attend:
 - Secondary grammar school
 - secondary vocational school

3. The region in which I attend school:
 - Košice Region
 - Prešov Region

4. My age:..... (specify by number)

5. My ethnicity:
 - Slovak
 - Other

TEST A

Using the following statements (answer in each row), please indicate (circle) the extent to which you agree that:

	<i>1 - completely disagree</i>				<i>5 - completely agree</i>
- Human rights are a fundamental, decisive and inalienable principle of a citizen in a civil society.	1	2	3	4	5
- Democracy is the highest and most advanced form of organisation of power and state in the evolution of human society.	1	2	3	4	5
- The national principle is a natural part of the civic principle and does not stand alone in a democratic system or regime.	1	2	3	4	5
- In a democratic political system, the mass media are free, objective and not subject to any economic or political pressures.	1	2	3	4	5
- The European Union is the best form of organisation and cooperation between European states, and there is no alternative at present.	1	2	3	4	5

TEST B

Using the following statements (answer in each row), please indicate (circle) the extent to which you agree that:

HUMAN RIGHTS

1 - completely disagree 5 - completely agree

- Every human being, regardless of race, must have the right to life .	1	2	3	4	5
- Every person must be treated equally, even those who look different .	1	2	3	4	5
- Everyone must have the right to express his or her opinion in accordance with the rule of law.	1	2	3	4	5
- Everyone must have the right to adequate material security, regardless of age or disability.	1	2	3	4	5

DEMOCRACY

1 - completely disagree 5 - completely agree

- At the head of a functioning state there must be one wise, strong and capable leader .	1	2	3	4	5
- Non-democratic regimes of states are better than democratic ones.	1	2	3	4	5
- Every vote in an election must be equal.	1	2	3	4	5
- Political parties are useless.	1	2	3	4	5

NATIVISM

1 - completely disagree 5 - completely agree

- A Slovak must be preferred to a migrant in Slovakia.	1	2	3	4	5
- Slovaks must have more rights in Slovakia than members of national minorities and ethnic groups .	1	2	3	4	5
- The state must be made up of only one nation .	1	2	3	4	5
- The state must be built only on national values and traditions .	1	2	3	4	5

MEDIA

1 - completely disagree 5 - completely agree

- There is only one truth , and that is the one that only I will acknowledge to be true.	1	2	3	4	5
- I can always tell truth from manipulation .	1	2	3	4	5
- All media is used to manipulate the masses by the elites.	1	2	3	4	5
- Freedom of speech must be unrestricted (I can post whatever I want on social media).	1	2	3	4	5

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

1 - completely disagree

5 - completely agree

- The fate of the citizens of Slovakia is decided only abroad .	1	2	3	4	5
- Slovakia is respected as an equal partner in the European Union.	1	2	3	4	5
- European Parliament elections are pointless.	1	2	3	4	5
- Membership pf the European Union leads to the disappearance of everything Slovak.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.

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DEFORMATIONS OF POLITICAL AWARENESS
AND THE INCREASE OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM AMONG
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE KOŠICE
SELF-GOVERNING REGION AND THE PREŠOV
SELF-GOVERNING REGION**

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