

Pressing challenge of countering the extremist ideology

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Abstract. This article is focused on addressing the issues of countering the extremist ideology. At present, the activation of extremist and terrorist sentiments is a real threat to the national security of the Russian Federation. In this context, it is necessary to consolidate the entire civil society in order to effectively counter these phenomena. Against this background, one of the key areas in the fight against terrorist and extremist manifestations is their prevention among students and youth. The problem of countering extremism is a challenging and relevant task, which consists in the continuous interaction and coordination of the efforts of state authorities, law enforcement agencies and various types of public organisations to combat those phenomena. This research identified and substantiated the need for a systematic understanding of the essence and content of the social nature of this problem, trends and forms of manifestation, as well as counteraction and prevention methods. For a long time, the need to combat extremism and its extreme forms of terrorist acts, including those at the international level, as representing a real threat to the national security of the Russian Federation, has been relevant for the Russian state, especially its law enforcement agencies. It is one of the main issues to combat terrorism and extremism in Russia due to the fact that it is the responsibility of the state to observe and protect the rights and freedoms of man and citizen.

Keywords: extremism, social networks, national idea, strategy for countering extremism, civil society, law enforcement agencies

1 Introduction

In recent years, the spread of extremist ideas in the world has been exacerbated with frightening dynamics [1]. There are many reasons for this, both artificial and caused by the nature of man and society. The conditions for the spread of extremist ideas are becoming increasingly favourable. As noted in the Strategy for Countering Extremism in the Russian Federation until 2025, the Internet has become ‘for extremist organisations the main communication means which they use to attract new members to their ranks, organise and coordinate the commission of extremist crimes, and spread of extremist ideology’ [2].

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Young people are the main targeted object of extremist groups on the Internet. This determines the substantive aspects of extremist content, methods of influence and visualisation of materials. Unfortunately, counteraction to this problem by the state can hardly be called effective.

2 Materials and methods

Within the framework of the article, the authors identified the problems of countering the ideology of extremism; measures have been developed to counter extremist ideologies.

3 Results and discussion

The Strategy clearly spells out the key threats, goals and objectives of countering extremism, methods and mechanisms. They are detailed in the plans of the respective subjects of counteraction. Why is extremism not losing strength? It seems that there are problems at all levels of counteraction.

At the federal level, the main trouble lies in the absence of a national idea. The issue of ensuring national security has many aspects [3]. Among them, the unity among the population in determining the goals of their further development within the framework of a common state, the means and methods used to achieve these goals, as well as understanding the need for joint actions and finding social compromises is highly important [4]. The experience of our state in the 1980-1990s of the twentieth century clearly showed how relevant and significant this problem is.

Even Plato, when summing up his reasoning in the dialogue ‘Politician’, writes: ‘So, this is what we call weaving the fabric of state: the royal art with direct weaving connects the mores of courageous and prudent people by uniting their lives with like-mindedness and friendship and thus creating the most splendid and magnificent fabrics. This fabric wraps around all the other people in the state, those free and slaves, keeps them in its bonds and rules and disposes of the state, and never loses sight of anything that can make it happy, as far as it should be’ [5]. Thus, probably for the first time in political philosophy, Plato openly proclaims the key objective of an ideal state to be the creation of a monolithic society, bound, irrespective of the social structure, by the unity of ideas and goals. According to Plato, only when the government consciously gives the people such ideas, the people will be happy, and the state will flourish.

Article 13 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation directly prohibits the existence of a state ideology: ‘1. The Russian Federation recognises ideological diversity. 2. No ideology can be established as a state or mandatory one’ [6]. On this basis, pseudo-democrats declare that it is inadmissible to even think of generating such an idea that unites society. However, the national idea is not a state idea. Its source should be society by giving its consent to the protection of universally significant and accepted by the majority of the population standards of social relations. First of all, the political process stakeholders should be clearly aware that the key aspect in their activities is the prosperity of the nation and not being in power and making use of it. The political process should become regular and responsible, and process actors should develop for these basic hard-and-fast guidelines, which at the same time provide the basis to the national idea. Their typical features on a compulsory basis: 1) Significance for all, without exception, social, national and religious groups that make up the population of Russia; 2) Simplicity and accessibility for understanding the broad masses of the people; 3) Realism and modernity taking into account, at the same time, the historical features of the country; 4) Sovereignty. After that, a concerted joint effort is needed to instil these principles in the consciousness of society over

a relatively long time. Only then it becomes possible to achieve a result similar to the American one, for example, where the stereotypes of the superiority of American democracy, legal protection of the individual and the ‘American dream’ dominate in the public mind for a long time, and which none of the political process actors has ever encroached on. At the same time, the proposals of both the ruling parties and the systemic opposition should be equally taken into account, and adopted on a consensus basis [7]. A close example of such interaction between political parties and other institutions of civil society can be considered discussing amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

Following the generation of such an idea, it is necessary to develop a strategy for educating the personality of a Russian national in the spirit of this idea [8]. Unfortunately, the education reforms pushed the educational component of the educational process into the background, but one of the top priorities should be given to it. The strategy should reflect the role and responsibility of each of the subjects of education, including not only public institutions but also the family, cultural institutions, independent media and non-governmental organisations. The educational process should be systematic, and only in this case, it will be successful.

The second problem at the federal level is that of the relative lack of control and impunity of the subjects responsible for the dissemination of extremist views. In this context, it is necessary to improve the Russian law which is expressly provided for by clause 28 of the Strategy. Recently, such a trend has emerged. Responsibility should be borne by not only the direct source of extremist materials but also those who created unhindered conditions for their distribution (for example, social networks and their owners). This is the only way to ensure the timely response of social network and instant messenger administrators to the appearance of extremist content [9]. Moreover, the penalties should be significant and substantial. The problem is that many of them do not recognise the Russian jurisdiction. This recognition should be effectively ensured, up to the impossibility to carry out activities in the Russian Federation. The tactics of the state’s actions should be ‘aggressive’ in a good sense, be proactive, and not deal with the consequences, which is often more costly and difficult. Law enforcement mechanisms also need to be improved. Due to our slowness and red tape, the perpetrators have the opportunity to not remove negative content for months but only remove it when it is no longer relevant and fulfils its purpose.

A separate problem is youth leisure. Over the past decade, due to national projects in many regions of Russia, a good basis for playing sports and realising the creative abilities of young people has been created. However, most children and adolescents are not torn out of the digital network, they are in virtual reality. Among other things, the consequences of this are cases of mass executions in educational institutions, collective suicide and other manifestations of extremism. In 2020, Russia ranked second in terms of the suicide rate; there are 31 suicides per 100,000 people [10]. In social networks, there are communities that promote suicidal behaviour and persuade people to commit suicide with various psychological manipulations, such as pictures, videos and the stories of ‘idols’. Actors are involved in an environment of destructive communication, depressive and suicidal moods are encouraged, and then a personality ready for suicide is prepared and shaped [11]. Sometimes, the number of subscribers in such groups is several tens of thousands. In the future, from those people, a contingent of activists of extremist and terrorist organisations ready for anything, including becoming a suicide bomber, can be formed. For them, real life has just become a continuation of the virtual one. Why didn’t this huge mass go to sports sections, hobby clubs and other leisure entities? This is a problem of youth policy, lack of incentives, bonuses and thoughtful advertising. In Soviet times, along with the state, these issues were addressed by youth organisations and movements. Unfortunately, at

present their role and authority are extremely insignificant. A significant part of young people are not even aware of their existence. In most cases, the reasons are formalism, excessive ideologymania and the careerism of leaders. In the youth movement it is necessary to change both organisational forms and methods of work with youth. Less slogans, more concrete deeds. An example of success can be a volunteer movement, if it is not organised formally. Religious youth organisations can be used as another example. The cultural and educational organisation *Vozrozhdenie* is successfully operating in the Saratov region; it involves young people through sports and cultural events in the study of the values of traditional Islam, while exposing and preventing extremist influence. There are a lot of such forms, it is necessary to promote them, connect the media, create cells in educational institutions. This is also important because during adolescence, for a child, an example or information from a peer is often more important than that from an adult.

The regional level of countering extremism. Much depends on the characteristics of a particular region. Unfortunately, most of the programmes and plans for the implementation of the Strategy, adopted at the regional level, are quite uniform and vague, which indicates formalism in their preparation. For example, in the Decree of the Rostov Regional Government dated 28 December 2020 No. 403 Approving the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Countering Extremism in the Russian Federation until 2025 no more than ten specific points can be found [12] At the same time, there is no justification for their need and expected results. The situation is similar in most other regions. The Kemerovo region's comprehensive Counteraction to Extremism Programme for 2019-2025 looks more valuable. There is a general analysis of the situation, presented problems and expected results. Most of the activities are specific and understandable. There is something to evaluate and what to ask the performers for. Programmes should be aimed at addressing specific issues in the region. If the key problem is the danger of nationalistic extremism, the programmes should pay more attention to working with national communities and ethno-cultural events [13]. If there is a risk of religious extremism, interaction with confessions. If the main problem is either social or political extremism, integrated measures in the socio-economic area and increase the authority of the authorities [14]. It is inadmissible to scatter forces and means. It is also impossible to achieve a realistic comprehensive programme without a scientific analysis of the situation in a territorial entity of the Russian Federation. In this regard, it seems expedient to involve the potential of the region's scientific and educational institutions on a grant basis with the provision of all the necessary information for research. In addition, comprehensive monitoring is needed not only on the Internet but also through non-governmental organisations, since the information posted on the Internet does not always reflect the real mood in society.

Another problem in arranging for counteraction to extremism at the regional level is the information exchange between the subjects of counteraction. There is a system but the information is not always transmitted on time, and if it is transmitted, it is not always implemented on time. The Kazan and Perm shooting cases clearly flagged the problem. The tragedy could have been prevented. A clear action plan is needed when information about possible extremist actions is received.

At this level, more emphasis should be put on interaction with civil society entities. In many regions, including the Saratov region, this work is carried out quite effectively. It was due to this interaction that it was possible to prevent the expansion and severe consequences of local ethnic conflicts. It is possible to prevent potential manifestations of extremism through ethnic communities, religious organisations and societies with less damage to interethnic relations. Condemnation of the actions of individual extremists by authoritative representatives of their ethnic origin or confession often prevents such actions in the future.

A special role in confronting extremist ideology at the regional level should be assigned to the mass media. A well-run information policy, a large number of stories about the life of representatives of various ethnic groups in the region, confessions and social groups reduces the degree of misunderstanding of certain aspects of life, customs and behaviour, thereby reducing proneness to conflict. In Saratov, there is an ‘ethnic village’, traditions of celebrating Sabantuy and other national holidays with the invitation of all comers through which inter-ethnic communication has been established. It is essential to support such initiatives.

At the local level, the policy of countering extremism depends on the area of activity, the size and characteristics of the organisation’s personnel. It is hardly worth unifying counteraction in the education system. If an educational institution has a small number of students and teachers, this composition is relatively homogeneous in structure, the financial capabilities of the organisation are limited; it is hardly worth keeping a large staff to ensure control over the manifestation of extremism. This can be handled by the staff in charge of education.

An entirely different situation arises in large educational institutions, where students are from different regions gathered, and sometimes countries, represent different ethno-cultural traditions, different levels of material well-being and previously created perception of the surrounding reality. In this context, to prevent extremist manifestations, it is necessary that a large number of employees carry out work regularly, often with the involvement of outside experts. Those are security units, educational work units, psychologists, network technology experts etc. Simple monitoring of social networks requires a huge amount of money. All this requires targeted funding and provision of material needs.

A universal recipe that helps to simplify the solution of these problems is the creation of a trusting atmosphere in the relationship between various levels of the administration of the institution, teaching staff and students. If such an atmosphere is created, information about the occurrence of possible problems becomes available at the earliest stages, when it is much easier to prevent their expansion. A huge role in this process lies with the group supervisors and student activists. This is the most important link in vertical communication. The work of supervisors should not be carried out formally, not for a show; for that purpose, supervisors should be relieved of part of the other workload and provide for both increased pay for their work and funding for the events they carry out together with the administration. This will increase both accountability and work efficiency. In this environment, he/she will be able to fully keep abreast of the student team, maintain authority among students, fully communicate with parents and relatives of students. Regular joint activities allowing the student to reveal his/her inner world and feel like a necessary part of a single whole are also necessary.

Another important aspect is the constant interaction with law enforcement agencies, both to identify extremist manifestations and prevent them [8, p.100]. It is often difficult to assess the degree of danger based on the incomplete information available. A significant result can only be achieved in cooperation with experts and cross-control over potential members of the extremist community.

Finally, the active involvement of students in activities to counter extremist ideologies. There is no need to gloss over problems here. An honest and open dialogue with students will increase their personal motivation to understand the situation and help solve those problems. It is necessary to engage students to monitor networks, which will multiply the coverage area and reveal hidden information that is inaccessible to technical control tools. All these activities will help prevent extremist actions simultaneously shaping a clear civic position and addressing educational problems.

4 Conclusion

Thus, in the research, the theoretical results as follows were obtained:

1. The fight against extremism should be of a comprehensive multi-level nature taking into account the characteristics of the population and changing trends in social relations. It assumes some basic ideological foundations and values approved by society.

2. In the field of countering extremism, the state is obliged to rely on comprehensive cooperation and support from the institutions of civil society and citizens. This is the key to success.

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