

# YOUTH EMBASSY

**ČASOVÁ OS  
ČESKOSLOVENSKO**

**2. SVETOVÁ VOJNA**

**10. september 1938**

**Mníchovská dohoda**  
Na jeseň 1938 bola v Mníchove bez účasti českých zástupcov podpísaná dohoda, podľa ktorej muselo Československo odstúpiť Sudety Nemecku. Táto udalosť vyvolala pocit zrady a krivdy, oslabil krajinu a otvorila Hitlerovi cestu k jej úplnému zničeniu.

**14.-15. marec 1939**

**Rozpad Československa**  
V marci 1939 sa Československo rozpadlo - na Slovensku vznikol samostatný štát pod vedením Jozefa Tisa a české územie obsadili Nemeč, ktorí vytvorili Protektorát Čechy a Morava. Tento okamih znamenal koniec Československa, začiatok nacistickej nadvlády a temné obdobie neslobody pre Čechov aj Slovákov.

**1. september 1939**

**Slovensko vstupuje do vojny proti Poľsku**  
1. septembra 1939 sa Slovenský štát zapojil po boku nacistického Nemecka do útoku na Poľsko, čím sa stal jeho spojencom. Hoci išlo len o menšie boje, tento krok znamenal začiatok účasti Slovenska na 2. svetovej vojne a začiatok rokov utrpenia a neslobody.

**23. jún 1941**

**Slovensko vyhlasuje vojnu ZSSR**  
23. júna 1941 vyhlásil Slovenský štát vojnu Sovietskemu zväzu a poslal svoje jednotky na východný front po boku nemeckej armády. Tvrdé boje, utrpenie vojakov a rastúce pochybnosti obyvateľov ukázali, že Slovensko je len závislým spojencom Hitlera a vojna mu prináša len obeť a utrpenie.

**12. december 1941**

**Začiatok útoku na Francúzsko, Belgicko a Holandsko**  
12. decembra 1941 vyhlásil Slovenský štát vojnu USA a Veľkej Británii, čo bolo len prejavom lojality k Hitlerovi, nie reálnym vojenským krokom. Tento čin potvrdil úplnú závislosť Slovenska od Nemecka a priniesol obyvateľom obavy z predĺžujúcej sa vojny a ďalších obetí.

**NA NESPRÁVNEJ STRANE**

**The importance of  
historical  
awareness in  
developing  
students' critical  
thinking**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, we have faced increasing challenges associated with the impact of disinformation, the polarization of society and the spread of extremist and radicalizing attitudes, which significantly affect the younger generation in particular. Young people grow up in an information-saturated environment, in which social networks, online media and peer groups play a dominant role. In this context, the ability to think critically, verify information and reflect on social phenomena becomes a key competence for their personal, civic and professional lives.

Schools play an irreplaceable role in this process. They are not only a place for imparting knowledge, but also a space for the formation of values, attitudes and democratic thinking. It is necessary to realize that the systematic development of critical thinking, media literacy and historical awareness is one of the most effective tools for preventing extremism and radicalization of youth. Of particular importance is the creation of a safe environment for discussion, in which students can express themselves openly, ask questions and confront different opinions without fear of condemnation.

The aim of the work is to analyze the current state of development of critical thinking and occurrence of risk attitudes among students, to identify strengths and weaknesses of preventive action of schools and, based on the obtained findings, to propose systematic and long-term sustainable solutions. The work is based on a combination of theoretical foundations, empirical research and practical experience from implemented educational and preventive activities.

In the theoretical part, we will define the basic terms and concepts that form the professional framework of the work. We will focus on defining critical thinking, its importance in the context of education and key competencies for the 21st century. At the same time, we will deal with the terms extremism, radicalization and polarization, their causes, manifestations and specifics in the environment of children and youth. We will pay special attention to the role of school as a preventive and educational environment, the importance of systematic prevention, cooperation with the family and external experts and creating a safe space for value education and discussion.

In the analytical part, we present and interpret the results of surveys conducted on the level of critical thinking, value attitudes and the occurrence of manifestations of extremism and radicalization among primary and secondary school students. We will analyze the

attitudes of students, their ability to work with information, perception of disinformation, hate speech and democratic values, as well as the schools' view of the implemented preventive activities. This part will also include a SWOT analysis, which will allow us to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks in the area of developing critical thinking and preventing extremism in the school environment.

In the design part, based on theoretical foundations and analytical findings, we will formulate specific recommendations and a draft strategy for schools in the field of developing critical thinking and preventing extremism and radicalization. We will focus on proposing goals, measures and tools that can be implemented in the school curriculum, prevention plans and everyday pedagogical practice. This part will also include a description of specific educational, experiential and project activities that will support historical awareness, media literacy, a culture of dialogue and democratic values among students.

## **2 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF WORK**

The main objective of the work is to analyze the level of critical thinking and value attitudes of students in the context of preventing extremism and radicalization and, based on the theoretical and empirical findings obtained, to propose systematic and long-term sustainable measures for schools.

### **Specific objectives of the work**

In line with the main goal, we will set the following specific goals:

- analyze the theoretical foundations of critical thinking, media literacy, extremism, radicalization and polarization in the context of education,
- identify the level of critical thinking, value attitudes and the occurrence of risk behaviors among students based on questionnaire surveys,
- evaluate schools' approach to preventing extremism and developing critical thinking, including implemented activities, capacities and methods of impact assessment,
- identify the strengths and weaknesses of current preventive practice through analytical tools,
- to formulate recommendations and a draft program aimed at the systematic development of critical thinking and the prevention of extremism and radicalization in the school environment.

### **Working methods used**

In the processing of the work, we will use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The basic method of data collection will be a questionnaire survey, carried out in the form of anonymous online questionnaires among students and professional school employees. The obtained data will be processed using descriptive statistics and content analysis, focusing on identifying trends, risk areas and behavioral patterns.

In the analytical part, we will use comparative analysis and SWOT analysis, which will allow us to comprehensively assess the state of development of critical thinking and prevention of extremism in the school environment. The methodology will also include analysis of documents, especially school conceptual materials, prevention programs and strategic documents.

### **Working with resources**

When preparing the work, we will base our work on professional sources that deal with the issues of critical thinking, media literacy, extremism, radicalization, and prevention of risky behavior. We will use scientific publications, professional articles, methodological guides, strategic documents, and materials from relevant institutions.

We will pay special attention to verifying the timeliness and credibility of the sources used and their critical assessment. We will process the sources in accordance with the valid citation standards and emphasize their connection with the empirical findings and the design part of the thesis.

## 3 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

### 3.1 Critical thinking in the context of contemporary society

By 2015, critical thinking was ranked 4th among the world's most sought-after human qualities. According to the latest World Economic Forum (WEF, 2018) reports, critical thinking is the second most needed skill of the future among the top ten.

The concept of critical thinking is derived from ancient Greek roots:

- kriticos (meaning in every judgment),
- kriteion (meaning norm),
- Etymologically, the word means making critical judgments based on norms.<sup>1</sup>

Critical thinking is also called “good thinking” by experts. It is considered a process that where an individual thinks systematically, logically and objectively. He can make thoughtful decisions, solve problems and develop new thought operations. A person does not only follow a certain situation superficially, but is able to go deeper. He has an open mind and tries to look at a given issue from multiple angles.

Thanks to this, he is much better able to lead arguments and communicate logically with others. A critical thinker is able to carefully examine the surroundings and the thought processes of other people. His expression is clear and understandable. He does not jump from one topic to another and is very easy to listen to.

The importance of critical thinking:

- helps in decision-making, argumentation and evaluation of the argument,
- helps to form one's own opinions on a given topic and develop personality,
- supports personality development and self-confidence,
- allows you to collaborate with others on a deeper and more intellectual level,
- helps improve and strengthen working relationships,
- allows you to evaluate your own work in order to identify ways to improve its quality and efficiency,
- supports the development of comprehension skills.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>[https://edu.nivam.sk/pages/projects/teachers/nops3\\_kolo/Rovna.pdf](https://edu.nivam.sk/pages/projects/teachers/nops3_kolo/Rovna.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><https://msg-life.sk/clanky/lifestyle/kriticke-myslenie/>

### 3.2 Key Competencies for the 21st Century – 4C

The international network of educational organizations Partnership for the 21st Century defines 4 key competencies for learning, referred to as the 4Cs (according to the first letter of the respective words, in Slovak 4K):

- *Critical thinking*(critical thinking, i.e. the ability to critically, rationally analyze and evaluate knowledge and information and put them into context).
- *Creativity*(creativity, i.e. the ability to approach identifying and solving problems in a creative and innovative way).
- *Collaboration*(collaboration, i.e. the ability to work as a team in solving problems).
- *Communication*(communication, i.e. the ability to express ideas and exchange them with other people in different social and cultural contexts).<sup>3</sup>

### 3.3 Extremism and youth radicalization

**Extremism** refers to expressions and actions based on attitudes of an ideology extremely hostile to the principles of a democratic state under the rule of law, which directly or over a certain period of time, through deliberate verbal or physical actions, have a destructive effect on the existing democratic system and its basic attributes, with the aim of promoting one's own ideological goals.

The characteristic features of extremism include its attack on the system of fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the constitution and international human rights documents, as well as its effort to limit, suppress, or otherwise prevent the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms for certain groups of the population defined by their real or perceived affiliation to a certain race, nation, nationality, ethnic group, or by their real or perceived origin, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, political beliefs, or religious beliefs.

Behind a specific type of extremism (e.g. political, religious, ecological, etc.) there may be various ideologies, their mutual intersections and currents of thought influenced by, for example, conspiracy thinking, as conspiracy narratives constantly appear on extremist scenes, which indicates that they can play an important ideological role and contribute to radicalization towards some form of extremism.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.skolademokracie.sk/kompetencie-pre-demokraciu/klucove-kompetencie-pre-21-storicoie/>

**Radicalization** refers to the process of acquiring, adopting and increasing acceptance of an ideology that is contrary to democratic principles and their attributes, which include a system of fundamental rights and freedoms for all citizens without distinction. During this process, an individual, under the influence of some form of extremism, adopts a new system of "values", within which the individual "departs" from democratic principles, rights and freedoms, thereby gradually increasing the level of identification with a certain form of extremist ideology.

Adopting an extremist ideology increases the risk that an individual will become determined to implement a given form of extremism and promote their views in practice, including through the use of violence, or in the final phase of radicalization, through the use of terrorist means.<sup>4</sup>

Extremism can be divided according to various criteria. We most often divide extremism into right-wing extremism (based on the ideas of racism, fascism, Nazism and neo-Nazism, often nationalism) and left-wing extremism (based on the ideas of communism, Marxism and anarchism). In our social conditions, we can also encounter religious extremism and ecological extremism.

Right-wing extremism represents "a collection of attitudes, behaviors and actions, either organized or not, that are based on racially or ethnically conditioned social inequality of people, demand ethnic homogeneity of the nation and reject the principle of equality enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, justify the priority of the community over the individual, reject the pluralism of the values of liberal democracy and want to define democracy as reactionary"

Left-wing extremism It is ideologically based on anarchist, anti-globalist, anti-capitalist and Marxist theories, rejecting external authority and promoting the ideas of the so-called "free" individual. It is also characterized by social and class prejudices, sympathizing with historical communism and anarchism.

For religious extremism What is particularly significant is that it intolerantly promotes the sovereignty of a religious society or organization over the principles and values of a democratic state.

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.minv.sk/?zakladne-informacie-1>

Ecological or environmental Extremism is directed against the sovereignty and values of a democratic constitutional state by significantly intolerantly promoting the subjectively defined interests of nature or its essential non-human components.<sup>5</sup>

One of the key features of extremist propaganda is the arousal of strong emotions – particularly fear of societal decline or uncertainty about the future. This emotional content also increases the popularity of posts, which violent radical influencers use to gain the attention of young people. The content on such platforms often divides the world into “us” and “them”, with “them” presented as a threat that causes chaos and decline.

Signs of extremist propaganda:

- Hatred towards certain groups (LGBTQ, migrants, women experiencing violence, Roma).
- Anti-systemicism – rejection of democratic means of solving problems.
- Conspiracy theories, such as global conspiracies blaming the Jewish community for social problems.
- The cult of strength – dividing the world into the strong and the weak, while emphasizing strength as a prerequisite for success.
- Social pessimism and mysticism – the belief that society is in decline and that supernatural forces control human actions.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.4 School as a preventive and educational environment**

Adolescence is a period of rebellion against adult authorities and the existing social system, an identity crisis occurs and the resulting need to belong somewhere. Young people long for adventure or to gain adult status, which can be risky due to the threat of radicalization and extremism. Young people at risk of radicalization and extremism can be divided into three groups and they are ideological activists or leaders who join radical groups for purely ideological and intellectual reasons - they have a very strongly developed sense of justice. Then there are followers who are looking for the opportunity to belong somewhere, to be accepted by the group or leader. Or they are socially frustrated young people who live in a certain type of social deprivation and experience the so-called. social injustice.

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<sup>5</sup>[https://www.minv.sk/swift\\_data/source/verejna\\_sprava/osza/aktuality/31082016c.pdf](https://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/verejna_sprava/osza/aktuality/31082016c.pdf)

<sup>6</sup><https://nks.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/infografika-ako-sa-spravat-v-digitalnom-prostredi-.pdf-2-1.pdf.pdf>

It is important to monitor the behavior of young people during this period and implement activities aimed at preventing and reducing the incidence of extremism.

The basic principles include:

- preventing extremism instead of fighting extremism,
- building a relationship of trust, creating a safe space for communication, at the same time it is important to perceive students as people with multiple social roles, to be interested in their everyday lives and the problems they solve,
- Unmet emotional needs - radicalization and extremism are not about ideology per se, but rather about the unmet basic emotional needs of young people. Radical and extremist groups exploit this "demand" for emotional needs and create an attractive offer to satisfy these needs.
- differentiated approach - the process begins with an individual diagnosis, which is a predisposition for appropriate intervention. It is necessary to determine the degree of radicalization a young person exhibits and also what emotional needs they satisfy through radicalized behavior.
- cooperation with the family of young people, especially with regard to "followers" in the radicalization process, who have a very strongly developed sense of responsibility towards their loved ones
- narrative approach - it is important to let the young person tell their story associated with radicalization and hateful views.<sup>7</sup>

Young people should be informed about the risks of violent radicalization and extremist acts, which include:

- Self-harm: physical injuries, psychological trauma, remorse.
- harm to others: injuries or psychological harm to others.
- legal consequences: imprisonment.
- negative impact on the future: limited opportunities for education, work or relationships.
- Irreversible actions: changing opinions over the years can lead to regret for irreversible actions.
- Involvement in groups: leaving groups can be difficult if one's worldview changes.

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<sup>7</sup><https://vudpap.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Prejav-y-radikalizacie-a-extremizmu-v-edukacnom-aj-poradenskom-procese.pdf>

- Betrayal by friends: in a critical situation, false friends may abandon or betray.

Every school should have a prevention plan that also includes the topic of radicalization and violent extremism. This plan should include various steps to ensure the positive development of children and young people. In the lower grades, the topic of radicalization is not addressed directly, but rather basic skills are strengthened, such as respect for others, the ability to discuss politely and resolve conflicts without using violence. Developing critical thinking and media literacy helps young people to recognize harmful content and make decisions based on correct information. It is important to support children in building their value, which does not depend on whether they are accepted by the group, but on their own abilities and self-confidence. There should also be practical steps in schools to improve the mental health of children and young people.

- Access to support services: Schools should have professionals, such as school psychologists and social workers, available for students who need help.
- Providing a safe environment: School should be a place where children feel safe, can express themselves, and work to develop relationships with friends and adults.
- Procedures for working with radicalised pupils: It is important to have a clearly defined procedure for working with young people who show signs of radicalisation or violent extremist behaviour.

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<sup>8</sup>-[https://nks.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/infografika-ako-sa-spravat-v-digitalnom-prostredi-.pdf-2-1.pdf.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://nks.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/infografika-ako-sa-spravat-v-digitalnom-prostredi-.pdf-2-1.pdf.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

## **4 ANALYTICAL PART**

### **4.1 Survey of extremism and critical thinking in school**

We conducted a survey in schools in Detva focused on extremism and critical thinking. 4 primary schools and 1 secondary school in Detva participated in the survey, as well as the director of the Prevention and Counseling Center based in Detva. The results provide an insight into prevention across the system, from primary education to professional support. The responses were provided by educational counselors (67%), a social pedagogue (17%) and a psychologist from the Prevention and Counseling Center (17%).

#### **4.1.1 Survey results**

In the first part of the questionnaire, we focused on the overall assessment of students' critical thinking. Schools assess students' ability to distinguish between facts and opinions as predominantly moderately developed. Students have a basic ability to distinguish between facts and opinions, but they may fail when it comes to emotionally or ideologically strong topics.

The ability to verify information from multiple sources is the lowest rated area of critical thinking. Most schools perceive that students do not systematically verify information, which significantly increases their vulnerability to disinformation and manipulative content.

Schools perceive students' resistance to manipulation as insufficient to average. Students often react emotionally and lack the tools to critically process content, especially in the online space.

Regarding the ability to conduct substantive discussions and respect other opinions, a discussion culture exists among students, but it is unstable and dependent on the environment. Polarization or personal attacks quickly appear when dealing with sensitive topics.

The area of critical thinking about sensitive social issues is perceived by schools as problematic and difficult to grasp. Students tend to accept ready-made opinions without deeper analysis and without historical or value context.

School is not the main source of information for students. Social networks (100%) and the peer environment (67%) have a dominant influence, which increases the importance of the school in the area of correction and prevention, not as a primary source. News media and family were not mentioned by any school as the main source of opinion formation.

In the next part, we dealt with the occurrence of selected attitudes among students. The results of the questionnaire indicate that manifestations associated with extremist and radicalizing thinking do not occur on a large scale or openly in the school environment, but they are clearly present in a subtle form. These are mainly attitudes and forms of behavior that can be easily overlooked or trivialized, but in the long term represent a significant risk factor.

Attitudes based on a black-and-white view of reality (“us vs. them”, “good vs. bad”) and on the search for simple culprits for social problems appear among students, especially occasionally to often. Although they do not occur with extreme intensity, their presence in most respondents indicates a tendency to simplify complex social phenomena, which is a typical entry point into radicalizing thinking. This type of thinking creates space for the acceptance of manipulative narratives and disinformation.

A worrying finding is the occurrence of sympathy for authoritarian leaders and the so-called "strong hand", which appears occasionally to frequently among some students. This signals a weakened trust in democratic processes and a higher susceptibility to simple, forceful solutions to social problems.

Attitudes that consider some groups of people to be of lesser value are mostly rare to occasional. The same is true for generalizing and stigmatizing statements about groups of people. Although these manifestations do not occur often, their very existence indicates the presence of stereotypes and prejudices, which can escalate into open discrimination or hatred in certain situations.

A particularly sensitive finding is the trivialization of hate speech through statements such as "it was just a joke". This phenomenon occurs occasionally to very often among some respondents. Hate speech is not always perceived as a problem, but rather as humor or an expression of freedom of speech, which significantly reduces the ability of students to recognize the boundary between opinion and unacceptable behavior.

The use of derogatory terms for minorities is largely rare. Similarly, verbal aggression justified by “freedom of speech” is present mainly at low to moderate levels. These results suggest that overt aggressive expressions are not yet a dominant problem, but combined

with previous findings, they may represent a potential for escalation if not systematically addressed.

In the third part, we investigated what manifestations and at what intensity were recorded in the students. The results suggest that overt and visible manifestations of extremism are infrequent or only limited in the school environment. However, the data also point to the presence of subtle, subtle signals that, when combined with other factors, may represent a potential risk for the future.

The use or drawing of extremist symbols was recorded mostly not at all or only rarely. Likewise, the wearing of clothing, stickers or graphics with extremist overtones was not recorded, which can be considered a positive protective factor.

**Spreading hateful content online.** According to respondents, this phenomenon occurs rarely, with some schools not noticing it at all. However, it is also important to take into account that students' online behavior is only partially visible to the school and some manifestations may occur outside of its direct supervision.

**Celebrating violence as a legitimate solution to conflict** was identified mainly as a phenomenon that does not occur or occurs only rarely. Similarly, trivializing or denying historical crimes was not assessed as a frequent behavior. These findings indicate that the glorification of violence and historical extremism is not yet widespread among students, which creates favorable conditions for preventive work focused on historical references and democratic values.

**Belief in conspiracy theories** occurs mostly not at all or rarely, but some respondents reported occasional presence of this phenomenon. This is an important finding, as conspiratorial thinking often functions as a gateway to radicalizing attitudes.

Social isolation associated with radical views was not recorded at all, which can be assessed as a very positive signal. Similarly, the need to "belong somewhere", which students would fulfill through radical groups, appears only rarely. Conflicts with authorities accompanied by ideological arguments were identified only to a low extent. These findings indicate that radicalization among students does not yet have a significant social or organizational dimension.

The results of the questionnaire show that all participating schools implement preventive activities, with discussions with experts being the most common form, which was mentioned by all schools. Peer programs are also significantly represented (83%), which represents a strong preventive element supporting belonging and positive relationships between students. Half of the schools use interactive workshops, discussions

on current topics and work with a story or film, while project, simulation and experiential activities are implemented only to a limited extent.

In terms of content, activities focus mainly on the prevention of hate speech (100%), the development of critical thinking (83%), and democratic values and human rights (67%). The prevention of extremism is often addressed indirectly and media literacy is only marginally represented, despite its importance in the context of disinformation.

The most involved in the implementation of prevention are classroom teachers (100%), supplemented by educational counselors, school psychologists and external experts. Cooperation with non-governmental organizations is minimal so far. All schools report that they have rather sufficient capacities to implement prevention and the majority assess the competences of teaching staff as rather sufficient, although with the need for further methodological support.

A positive finding is the active interest of school management in this area. The biggest shortcoming remains monitoring the impact of activities, which most schools implement only informally (67%), without systematic evaluation tools.

#### **4.1.2 SWOT analysis**

##### **Strengths**

- Schools perceive the risk of student radicalization as real, and extremist manifestations have been recorded in all schools involved. This means that the problem is neither denied nor trivialized.
- Skills such as distinguishing facts from opinions or the ability to lead a discussion are assessed mostly at the intermediate level. The school does not have to start "from scratch", but can systematically develop the existing foundations.
- The staff has at least basic experience with the topic and there is openness to collaboration with external experts.
- The participation of CPP and professional staff signals the potential for professional anchoring of prevention, not just pedagogical.

##### **Weaknesses**

- High vulnerability to manipulation, hoaxes and radicalization narratives.
- Only 16.7% of schools implement prevention systematically, the rest rely on occasional or one-off activities.

- As many as 66.7% of schools monitor the impact of prevention activities only informally. Without data, it is impossible to purposefully improve the quality of prevention.
- Only 2 out of 6 schools cited school as a significant source of shaping students' opinions. School has a weak influence compared to social networks and peers.

### **Opportunities**

- The survey results create a strong foundation for implementing a long-term strategy for developing critical thinking and preventing extremism.
- Schools can use historical context as a safe and didactically effective tool to combat disinformation.
- There is a wide network of professional partners (media literacy, history, psychology, human rights).
- Prevention of extremism, media literacy, and critical thinking are priority topics of grant calls.

### **Threats:**

- Social media is a dominant source of information and operates on the principles of polarization and emotion. School competes with fast, easy, and often manipulative content.
- Radicalization can occur without early identification.
- Overload of teaching staff. Without methodological support, there is a risk that prevention will be perceived as another burden.
- Family environments and online communities can work against the values promoted by the school.

### **4.1.3 Impact of survey findings on schools**

The survey results show that schools operate in an environment where students are chronically exposed to disinformation, manipulative narratives and polarized opinions, particularly through social media and peer groups. Although students have a basic awareness of extremism, human rights and the risks of hate speech, this awareness is not sufficiently translated into practical critical thinking skills.

A positive finding is that schools are perceived by students as a tool for prevention and that there is a significant interest in discussion-based, experiential and interactive forms

of education. This means that schools have real potential to influence students' attitudes, values and behaviour if they act systematically and in the long term.

#### **4.1.4 School strategy proposal**

##### **Strategic goal**

To create a school environment that systematically develops students' critical thinking, strengthens their resilience against disinformation, hate speech and radicalization, and promotes democratic values, respect and a culture of dialogue.

##### **Sub-goals**

- develop students' ability to critically evaluate information, sources and arguments,
- improve the ability to recognize manipulation, propaganda and hate speech,
- to strengthen a safe discussion environment and a cultured exchange of views,
- connect the historical context with current social issues,
- to increase the competences of pedagogical and professional staff in the field of prevention.

##### **Measures**

- systematic inclusion of the development of critical thinking in several subjects (history, civics, Slovak language, ethical education, professional subjects),
- regular discussion, experiential and project activities (workshops, discussions, simulations, excursions),
- using historical examples and disinformation as a preventive tool,
- clear procedures for identifying risky behavior and manifestations of radicalization,
- active involvement of a school psychologist, educational counselor and external experts.

##### **Implementation tools**

The school can implement the strategy through:

- methodological sheets and worksheets focused on critical thinking,
- cooperation with external organizations (media literacy, history, psychology, human rights),
- peer programs and peer education,
- regular monitoring and impact assessment (questionnaires, feedback, risk analysis),
- incorporating the strategy into the Special Education Program, the preventive program, and the school development plan.

## **4.2 Survey of value attitudes and critical thinking among students**

We conducted a survey on the values and critical thinking of high school students, focusing on the topics of human rights, historical context, information work, and attitudes towards social issues. The aim of the survey was to gain insight into how students perceive these topics, to what extent they understand them, and how they relate them to their daily lives.

The survey was conducted in the form of an anonymous online questionnaire (Google Forms) among 120 high school students - Gymnasium, Business Academy and Detva Technical Secondary Vocational School.

### **4.2.1 Survey results**

As many as 65% of students show at least a basic interest in 20th century history. However, 35% of students have little or no interest, which indicates the need to find more attractive and connected forms of teaching (stories, excursions, discussions).

Up to 80% of students perceive history as relevant to understanding the present. This creates a very good basis for connecting history with the topics of disinformation, extremism, and democracy.

The majority of students (85%) have a basic awareness of the concept of human rights. However, the extent to which this awareness is deep and practical remains questionable, as confirmed by other survey questions.

Only 30% of students are completely confident in their understanding. A total of 30% have poor or no understanding, which highlights the need for more practical examples and discussion, not just definitions.

On the positive side, 80% of students perceive human rights as personally relevant. This creates space for values and civic education.

Up to 70% of students have experienced hate speech. This is a serious finding that confirms the need for systematic prevention and work with class groups.

Only 30% of students are completely confident in recognizing hate. This means that some hate speech may be normalized or trivialized.

Most students (75%) understand the need for limits to freedom of speech. However, it is important to develop an understanding of the difference between opinion and hate speech.

Up to 75% of students encounter disinformation, confirming the acute need for media and critical education.

Only 25% of students systematically verify information, leaving most students vulnerable to manipulation.

It is positive that 80% of students perceive extremism as a risk. However, at the same time, 20% of students underestimate this risk.

Up to 85% of students expect that the school will focus on preventing extremism, which is a positive signal for creating a strategy in this area.

Up to 40% of students do not feel that critical thinking is sufficiently supported, which is a significant challenge for the school.

Approximately 30% of students do not feel a safe enough space to express their opinions, which can lead to frustration and radicalization.

Up to 80% of students are interested in experiential and discussion-based forms of education (such as talks, excursions, or discussions).

Although 60% of students perceive the importance of these topics, 40% of students do not yet connect them with their future lives - space for a better connection with reality.

#### **4.2.2 SWOT analyses**

##### **Strengths**

##### **1. High awareness of core values**

- Most students are familiar with the concept of human rights and perceive them as personally relevant.
- Up to 80% of students consider extreme views dangerous.
- The school has a solid foundation of values on which to systematically build

##### **2. Pupils' interest in topics and activities**

- 80% of students showed interest in talks, discussions and excursions.
- Students perceive history as a tool for understanding the present.
- There is a natural intrinsic motivation that does not need to be created, only developed

### 3. Acceptance of the school's role

- 85% of students expects the school to focus on preventing extremism.
- The school is perceived as a legitimate and trustworthy actor.
- Preventive activities have a high acceptance rate and a low risk of resistance.

### 4. Potential for discussion

- Most students feel at least some space to express their opinions.
- Openness to dialogue is a good starting point for cultivated discussions.

## Weaknesses

### 1. Insufficient critical processing of information

- Only 25% of students systematically verify information from multiple sources.
- 75% of students encounters disinformation, but is not sufficiently prepared to evaluate it.
- High exposure to information without adequate skills

### 2. Normalization of hate speech

- 70% of students has experience with hate speech.
- Only 30% of students are completely sure that they can recognize hate speech.
- The risk of trivialization and "getting used to" hatred

### 3. Uncertainty in expressing opinions

- Up to 30% of students do not feel safe expressing their opinions.
- This can lead to frustration, withdrawal, or moving discussions online.
- Silent opinions are more prone to radicalization than open discussion

### 4. Insufficient connection of topics with the future of students

- 40% of students he does not see a clear connection between these topics and his own life.
- A stronger connection to reality, practice and personal experience is needed

## Opportunities

### 1. Systematic introduction of critical thinking

- The survey results clearly demonstrate the need for project-based teaching, media literacy, and discussion formats.
- The school can act as an example of good practice

### 2. Cooperation with external experts

- There is a wide network of organizations and experts (media literacy, history, psychology).
  - Students are very interested in these forms.
  - External experts increase the credibility and expertise of prevention
3. Connecting history with the present
- A powerful opportunity to work with historical propaganda, totalitarian regimes, and the memory of a nation.
  - The past as a tool to combat disinformation today
4. Support from grants and public policies
- Prevention of extremism and development of critical thinking are priority topics of grant calls, national and European strategies.
  - Possibility of long-term financial and methodological stability

### **Threats**

1. The growing influence of social networks and algorithms
- Students are exposed to content that reinforces emotions, promotes polarization, and simplifies reality.
  - School competes with fast-paced, engaging, but often manipulative content
2. Radicalization outside the school environment
- Online space, family environment, and peer groups can work against school efforts.
  - Prevention must be long-term, not a one-time thing
3. The risk of formality
- Without a systematic approach, there is a risk of "checking off" mandatory topics and one-off activities without impact.
  - Formal prevention is almost as ineffective as none at all
4. Teacher Overload
- Time and capacity limits can hinder the implementation of quality activities.
  - Without methodological and organizational support, there is a risk of burnout

#### **4.2.3 Impact of findings on the school**

The survey results clearly confirm that schools are in an environment where students are intensely exposed to disinformation, hate speech and polarized opinions, especially

through online space and social networks. While most students have a basic awareness of human rights, extremism and the risks of extreme attitudes, this awareness is not sufficiently translated into practical critical thinking skills.

A serious finding is the low level of systematic verification of information – only a minority of students actively compare information from multiple sources. This, combined with frequent contact with disinformation, creates significant vulnerability to manipulation, conspiracy narratives and radicalizing content. Another risk factor is the fact that some students have difficulty recognizing hate speech or consider it a legitimate opinion, which can lead to its gradual normalization in school and online environments.

The survey also shows that schools have a strong potential to act preventively. Students largely expect schools to address topics of critical thinking and the prevention of extremism, and at the same time show a strong interest in discussion-based, experiential and interactive forms of education. These findings confirm that preventive and developmental activities will not be perceived as imposed, but as a relevant part of education.

On the contrary, the absence of a systematic response would mean deepening existing risks and shifting radicalization processes beyond the reach of schools.

#### **4.2.4 School strategy proposal**

##### **1. Strategic goal**

To create a school environment that systematically develops students' critical thinking, strengthens their resilience against disinformation, hate speech and radicalization, and promotes democratic values, respect and a culture of dialogue.

##### **2. Sub-goals**

- develop students' ability to critically evaluate information and sources,
- improve students' ability to recognize manipulation, propaganda and hate speech,
- to strengthen a safe space for expressing opinions and civilized discussion,
- connect the historical context with current social challenges,
- to strengthen the competences of teaching staff in this area.

##### **3. Measures**

The school will implement a systematic and ongoing approach that will include:

- regular inclusion of critical thinking and media literacy topics in several subjects (history, civics, Slovak language, ethical education),

- implementation of discussion and experiential activities (workshops, discussions, simulations, excursions),
- using historical examples of propaganda and totalitarian regimes as a tool for prevention,
- creating clear procedures for identifying risky behavior and radicalization manifestations,
- involving a school psychologist and educational counselor in preventive activities.

#### **4. Implementation tools**

To implement the strategy, the school will use:

- method sheets and worksheets to develop critical thinking,
- external experts and organizations (media literacy, history, psychology),
- project-based and experiential learning,
- peer programs involving students in prevention,
- regular monitoring and impact assessment through questionnaires and feedback.

#### **5. Expected long-term impact of the strategy**

By implementing the strategy, the school will achieve:

- increased resistance of students to disinformation and extremist narratives,
- reducing the incidence of hate speech in the school environment,
- strengthening active citizenship and democratic values,
- a better school climate and a sense of safety,
- increasing the prestige of the school as a responsible and prevention-oriented institution.

## **5 DESIGN PART**

### **5.1 Implementation of a project aimed at promoting critical thinking**

The Detva High School, Business Academy and Technical Secondary School implemented a project in the period August - December 2025 within the framework of the call of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic for a subsidy for the promotion, support and protection of human rights and freedoms and for the prevention of all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other manifestations of intolerance - LP 2025

#### **5.1.1 Main goal**

Promoting historical awareness, critical thinking and civic responsibility of students through interactive education about World War II and human rights with an emphasis on the prevention of radicalism and extremism. The aim is to provide young people with authentic historical experiences, strengthen their ability to distinguish disinformation and support cooperation between schools, professional institutions and monuments in the protection of democratic values. The aim is also to strengthen the education of young people in the field of human rights with the aim of their knowledge and increasing mutual protection.

#### **5.1.2 Target group**

##### **1. Elementary school students**

**Age:**10 – 14 years

**Number:**300

##### **Needs:**

- Students in primary schools are routinely exposed to history lessons, but often have limited space for interactive and experiential forms of learning.
- At this age, they need simpler, more visual explanations and engaging activities that stimulate their curiosity.

- At the same time, they require a safe space where they can ask questions and receive motivation to develop critical thinking.

**Form of connection:**

- **Peer education:**Our students visited elementary schools and carried out activities that brought historical events closer in a playful way (quizzes, workshops, short presentations)
- **Wall and teaching materials:**Schools received teaching materials with clear information about World War II (online and in the form of posters).

**2. High school students**

**Age:**15 -19 years old

**Number:**500 – direct participation

**Indirect participation:**40 schools within the founding jurisdiction of BBSK, with which we share teaching materials

**Needs:**

- High school students already have a broader knowledge of history, but they often need practical and experiential forms of education that will deepen their interest in history.
- They are at an age when they form their own opinions, so the development of critical thinking, the ability to search for and evaluate information, is very important for them.
- They seek opportunities for self-realization and involvement in meaningful projects in which they can develop their organizational, communication, and presentation skills.

**Form of connection:**

- preparation and leadership of peer education
- preparation of teaching materials
- participation in talks and discussions
- professional excursions

**3. Teachers (primary and secondary schools)**

**Focus:**teachers of history, civics, ethics education

**Number:**10 - 20

**Needs:**

- Teachers are looking for innovative educational methods and materials that they can use in history or civics classes

- They need support in organizing excursions, gatherings, and larger events to combine learning with logistics and security.
- They are interested in how to motivate students to take an active approach, work in teams, and think critically about history.

**Form of connection:**

- **Cooperation in the preparation of the program:**History teachers provided expert feedback to high school students in creating peer education content, compiling learning materials, and planning discussions.
- **Organization and supervision of events:**They helped with the coordination of logistical matters (from selecting students for excursions to contacting monuments and experts).
- **Methodological support:**After the activities are over, they can use the materials and experiences in subsequent years or on similarly focused projects.

**4. Seniors who experienced World War II**

**Number:**20 - 30

**Needs:**

- These people often feel the need to pass on their testimony to future generations so that the horrors of war are not forgotten.
- Appreciation and respect from young people are important to them, as is the opportunity to communicate and feel that their personal story is a valuable part of national memory.
- They require a sensitive approach and respect for their age and health limitations.

**Form of connection:**

- **Discussions and interviews:**They were invited to schools, where they would be given space to speak and answer questions from students.
- **Visits to senior care facilities:**In some cases, high school students came to the seniors to make it easier for them to participate.
- **Sharing personal stories:**In addition to the discussions, they provided photographs, letters and other documents.

**5. Experts on World War II issues (historians, museum workers, academics)**

**Organizations:**Military History Institute, Historical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Holocaust Museum in Sered', SNP Museum, Representatives of foundations and non-profit organizations

**Number:**10

**Needs:**

- As specialists, they are interested in popularizing historical research and bringing it closer to the general public – especially the younger generation.
- They welcome the opportunity to present their work and scientific results within thematic events, thereby contributing to the fight against historical distortion and disinformation.

**Form of connection:**

- talks and lectures
- consulting activity

**6. The wider public (parents, local community)****Needs and characteristics:**

- Parents and community members appreciate having the opportunity to learn about the results of school work and at the same time participate in events with timeless social significance.
- This increases overall social awareness of the dangers of totalitarian and extremist ideologies.

**Form of connection:**

- Media outlets: Articles in local newspapers, posts on school and community social networks, where the community learned about ongoing and completed activities.

**5.1.3 Project partners**

The school collaborated with several partners within the project, who created the conditions for its professional implementation:

- Museum of the Slovak National Uprising (excursions – SNP Museum Banská Bystrica, burned-out village of Kalište, lectures by experts)
- Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (expert lectures)
- Holocaust Museum in Sered' (excursion and expert lectures)
- Post Bellum (expert lectures)
- City of Detva (peer education in primary schools, discussions with monuments and sharing of outputs)
- City of Hriňová (peer education in primary schools, sharing of outcomes)

- Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region (discussions with monuments, peer education, sharing of outputs in secondary schools)
- Slovak National Center for Human Rights (expert lectures)
- Public Defender of Human Rights (lecture)
- Police Force of the Slovak Republic (lecture on extremism)

#### **5.1.4 Activities and outputs**

We implemented a wide range of activities within the project.

##### **1. PEER EDUCATION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS**

As part of peer education, our students implemented interactive educational activities designed for elementary school students. The aim of the activity was to introduce younger students to the topic of World War II through experiential and modern teaching methods, to support their interest in history, and at the same time to develop critical thinking and the ability to cooperate.

##### **Outputs:**

One of the main activities was an interactive timeline, which was prepared by high school students as a large-format visual aid. Elementary school students worked with cards containing the names of historical events of World War II. Their task was to correctly place them on the timeline. The activity supported orientation in historical time and deepened basic factual knowledge.

Another activity was a "living library" of historical figures. High school students studied the lives of selected figures - soldiers, resistance fighters, doctors, volunteers or civilians involved in the fight against fascism. They then acted in their roles and answered questions from elementary school students. This form allowed younger students to perceive history through personal stories and developed empathy.

The historical educational game, which was prepared by high school students in the form of several stations, also aroused interest. Elementary school students solved tasks focused on deciphering messages, working with maps, quiz questions, and recognizing disinformation typical of the Second World War period. The activity developed teamwork, logical thinking, and the ability to work under time pressure.

We have also created educational posters featuring historical events and figures from World War II. A total of 21 posters present World War II through short stories, pictures

and basic facts. They can be used during history lessons or be a permanent part of history classrooms.

Finally, a mini-survey and quiz on disinformation were conducted, in which students assessed the truthfulness of various statements about World War II. The high school students then explained the difference between facts and disinformation and pointed out the importance of verifying sources of information, even in the current media environment.

## **2. CONVERSATIONS SENIORS**

The first year students of the business academy visited the Retirement Home in Detva and Hriňová. The students reminisced about life in the past with our older friends, listened to their life stories, talked about traditions, work, family and life in the post-war period. The older participants happily shared their memories and wisdom, which are a valuable gift for the younger generation.

This intergenerational meeting brought a lot not only to the seniors, but also to the students. Young people realized how important it is to listen and learn from their elders, to value their experiences and the time they spend telling their stories. For the students, the visit was an opportunity to develop communication skills, social empathy and respect for the older generation - values that cannot be learned from textbooks alone.

## **3. PREPARATION OF TEACHING AND WALL MATERIALS**

We have created a set of comprehensive teaching and wall materials designed to support the teaching of history and civics. The aim of the activity was to create high-quality, clear and didactically usable educational tools that would help students better understand the events of World War II, their causes, consequences and value spillovers into the present.

### **1. World War II Timeline**

Two separate timelines have been created:

- timeline of world events of World War II,
- Timeline of events in Czechoslovakia.

The timelines contained a chronological overview of the most important historical events and were supplemented with cards with detailed information, which allowed for their active and interactive use during classes and peer education.

### **2. Posters about important events of World War II**

Thematic posters were created covering the following events and topics:

- Causes of the Second World War

- Slovak National Uprising
- Resistance in Czechoslovakia
- Carpathian-Dukla Operation
- Battle of Stalingrad
- Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the war (on the wrong side of the conflict)
- The Holocaust in Slovakia
- D-Day – Normandy landings
- Allied cooperation
- Liberation of concentration camps
- The emergence of the European Union as a response to military conflicts

The posters served as a visual and content support for teaching history and civics and encouraged discussion about historical contexts and the values of peace, freedom, and cooperation.

### **3. Posters about important personalities**

The outputs also included posters dedicated to significant figures of World War II, the resistance and the rescue of the persecuted. The posters emphasized personal courage, moral decisions and the importance of the individual in the fight against totalitarianism and injustice. The following figures were processed:

- Raoul Wallenberg
- William Zingor
- Nicholas Winton
- Anna Kolesarova
- Witold Pilecki
- Irena Sendlerová
- Joseph Gabcik– Jan Kubis
- Maria Gulovicova
- Jan Golian– Rudolf Viest
- Alfred Wetzler– Rudolf Vrba

### **4. Educational game about World War II**

An educational game, "Truth, Memory and Freedom - World War II," was created, which functioned as a thematic team activity. It connected historical knowledge with critical thinking, working with maps, personal stories, and distinguishing truth from propaganda. The game emphasized that history is not just a collection of dates and battles, but also a story of human decisions and values, especially freedom.

## **5. “Living Books” – Scenarios for Peer Education**

The activity also included the preparation of scenarios for so-called living books, intended for peer education. The scenarios were based on stories and interviews with personalities of World War II and allowed historical events to be conveyed through personal testimonies.

## **6. Misinformation Quiz**

To support media literacy, a quiz on disinformation was created, focused on distinguishing facts, propaganda, and false information associated with World War II, with implications for the current information environment.

## **7. Implementation and sharing of outputs**

The created materials were subsequently printed or processed as large-scale wall posters. The content preparation of the materials was carried out free of charge, while the project funds were used to finance only their printing.

The finished outputs were shared with elementary schools in the founding jurisdiction of the towns of Detva and Hriňová and with secondary schools in the founding jurisdiction of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region, thus ensuring their wide use in the teaching process and supporting quality historical and civic education in the region.

## **4. PROFESSIONAL EXCURSIONS**

### **Goal:**

- To provide students and teachers with the opportunity for experiential learning directly at places associated with World War II to create a concrete idea of historical events
- To deepen the connection between theory and practice and to foster an intense relationship with national history
- Apply professional excursions as a form of education - before each excursion, we will prepare worksheets that students will have to complete during the excursion and then analyze in history lessons

### **Description of activities:**

#### **1. SNP Museum in Banská Bystrica**

- Tour of the exhibition dedicated to the period of the Slovak National Uprising and domestic resistance
- Expert lecture on the causes and course of the Slovak National Uprising, interactive workshops with museum guides
- Conversation with the monument's author Vladimír Strmeň

## 2. Holocaust Museum in Sered'

- An exhibition mapping the tragedy of the Jewish population in Slovakia.
- Discussion about the dangers of racism, extremism and misinformation regarding the Holocaust.

## 3. National Cultural Monument (NCM) – burned-out village of Kalište

- A walk through the remains of the original village, which was destroyed by Nazi troops
- Guided tour with an expert from the SNP Museum

### Method of implementation:

- Before leaving on the excursion, history teachers provided students with basic information and educational objectives that they would follow during the excursion.
- Upon return, a short reflection took place, possibly creating presentations or short video reports, so that the students could consolidate the acquired knowledge.

## **5. DISCUSSIONS WITH EXPERTS ON WORLD WAR II ISSUES**

### **Goal:**

- Deepen students' knowledge through specialized lectures and discussions with historians, university professors, or museum workers
- Provide space for questions and debates on topics that may not be discussed in depth in regular history teaching (e.g. diplomatic connections, lesser-known stories, specific aspects of the resistance, the role of the Allies, critical analysis of propaganda, etc.).

### **Activities:**

**Activity name:** Experiential workshop We were just born

**Implementer:** lecturers of the Post Bellum SK organization

Students of the Business Academy attended an experiential educational workshop called "We Were Just Born", which focused on the modern history of Slovakia during the interwar years, World War II, and the existence of the Slovak state. Through the stories of specific people, especially Jewish fellow citizens, the students became familiar with the historical context and consequences of the decisions of individuals and the entire society.

The workshop was based on interactive and experiential methods. In groups, students created an imaginary Slovak community before World War II, worked with historical facts (e.g. the autonomy of Slovakia, the Munich Agreement, the Vienna Arbitration, the

Nuremberg Laws) and took on various roles – historians, contemporary and contemporary journalists, or ordinary citizens. They gradually followed the development of society up to the present day and reflected on how public opinion, the dissemination of information, and the individual's position in society were changing.

An important part of the activity was working with the topics of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, propaganda and disinformation. The lecturers pointed out the parallels between historical forms of manipulation and today's online environment and social networks. The final discussion created a space for sharing feelings, experiences and connecting the past with current social challenges.

**Activity name:**Lecture with discussion – World War II and disinformation in historical contexts

**Lecturer:**Mgr. Martin Posch, PhD., Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences

The lecturer presented key events and contexts of the Second World War period, emphasizing how propaganda, information manipulation, and purposeful interpretations of history influenced public opinion and societal behavior.

Special attention was paid to the parallels between historical forms of propaganda and contemporary disinformation practices. Students were introduced to the mechanisms of spreading false or misleading information, their social consequences and the importance of critical thinking when working with historical and current sources. The activity included an interactive discussion, during which students had the opportunity to ask questions, discuss and reflect on the presented topics in the context of today's society.

**Activity name:**Lecture and discussion about the Slovak National Uprising

**Lecturers: Mgr. Lucia Sotáková, PhD., head of the Educational Center of the SNP Museum, and Mgr. Lukáš Volentier, PhD., museum educator and curator**

The lecturers introduced the students to the broader historical context that led to the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising, the political and social situation in Slovakia during World War II, as well as the course of the insurgent battles themselves. They emphasized the importance of the SNP as one of the key manifestations of the anti-fascist resistance and its place in the context of European history. The activity also included a discussion in which the students had the opportunity to ask questions and reflect on the topic of the SNP in terms of its historical legacy and impacts on the post-war development

of society. The lecturers also addressed issues of historical memory, the interpretation of history, and the importance of preserving the SNP legacy for the current generation.

## **6. HUMAN RIGHTS DISCUSSIONS**

**Activity name:**Lecture – Gender equality and human rights

**Lecturer:**Mgr. Tomáš Földes (Slovak National Center for Human Rights)

A professional lecture on the topic of Gender Equality and Human Rights was held, the aim of which was to raise students' awareness of the basic principles of gender equality and to highlight its importance in the broader context of human rights protection. The lecturer focused on explaining the connection between gender equality and human rights, pointing out that gender equality is a necessary condition for the full realization of human rights for all individuals without distinction.

The lecture offered students theoretical foundations supplemented with practical examples from social and everyday life. It discussed how inequalities and stereotypes manifest themselves in various areas of life and what impact they have on individuals and society as a whole. The emphasis was placed on personal responsibility, respect for the dignity of each person and the possibilities of an active approach to promoting equality.

**Activity name:**Online lecture – Protection of human rights and prevention of discrimination

**Implementer:**Office of the Public Defender of Rights

**Lecturer:**Mgr. Erika Sarkocyová, Department of Protection of the Right to Judicial and Other Legal Protection and the Right to Protection of the Environment and Cultural Heritage

The students attended an online lecture on the topic of human rights protection and prevention of discrimination, delivered on behalf of the Public Defender of Rights. The lecture aimed to familiarize students with the basic principles of human rights protection in the Slovak Republic and to clarify the role of the Public Defender of Rights in protecting the rights and freedoms of individuals.

The lecturer mainly explained the concepts of human rights, discrimination and equal treatment, as well as practical examples of violations of rights in various areas of life. The explanation also included information on the possibilities of legal protection, who citizens can turn to in case of violation of their rights, and how the Office of the Public Defender of Rights can assist in resolving complaints.

Special emphasis was placed on the prevention of discrimination, the importance of respecting the dignity of every person and the responsibility of the individual in society. The lecture was supplemented by a space for questions, in which students had the opportunity to respond to specific situations and discuss real problems from practice.

**Activity name:**How the EU helps us protect human rights

**Lecturer:**Vladimír Bilčík, EU expert

The topic of the meeting was something that affects every young person - human rights and their protection within the European Union.

The lecturer presented specific mechanisms of the European Union that are supposed to ensure that citizens' rights are not violated. He spoke about the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Court of Justice of the European Union and how member states cooperate in monitoring compliance with democratic rules. The students particularly appreciated the practical examples - from consumer protection to employee rights to online security.

The second part of the lecture focused on practical issues. The expert explained how a person can assert their rights if they feel they have been violated – whether through national institutions, European bodies or citizens' initiatives. There was also a recommendation on where to find relevant information and help.

## **5.2 Proposal for further possible activities to support critical thinking and prevent extremism in students**

In addition to the above-mentioned and already implemented activities, we propose additional activities for the target group of primary and secondary school students.

### **1. Excursions and experiential learning with historical context**

- excursions to museums, memorial sites and historical institutions focused on totalitarian regimes, propaganda and human rights violations,
- educational programs working with authentic historical sources (posters, archival documents, testimonies),
- discussions about how disinformation, propaganda and hateful ideologies have affected society in the past and what parallels can be found in the present.

### **2. Discussions and interactive lectures**

- discussions with experts on media literacy, extremism, human rights and democracy,

- lectures on recognizing disinformation, conspiracy theories and manipulative techniques,
- discussions about the limits of freedom of speech, hate speech and individual responsibility,
- using current examples from social networks and media.

### **3. Working with story, film and memory**

- working with documentary and feature films with subsequent reflection,
- using personal stories or traveling exhibitions (e.g. on the topic of the Holocaust, totalitarian regimes, discrimination),
- connecting historical experiences with today's manifestations of prejudice, hatred and polarization in society.

### **4. Project activities**

- project-based teaching focused on the analysis of social problems, disinformation and extreme narratives,
- involving students in the preparation of exhibitions, presentations or school campaigns against hate.

### **5. Development of a culture of discussion and critical thinking at school**

- regular moderated discussions on current social topics,
- training in argumentation, working with facts and respecting different opinions,
- creating a safe space to express opinions without fear of ridicule.

### **6. Systematic connection and reflection**

- linking the above activities with teaching (history, civics, Slovak language, ethical education),
- preparation of students before activities and subsequent reflection after their implementation,
- monitoring the impact of activities through feedback and simple evaluation tools.

## 5.3 Project budget

### SUBSIDY OF THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE OF THE SR

#### A: PERSONAL EXPENSES

Item	Number of units	Price per unit	Units	Total
Prevention expert's fee	30	€15.00	hour	€450.00

#### B: TRAVEL EXPENSES

Item	Number of units	Price per unit	Units	Total
Using a school bus for peer education	1	€50.00	project	€50.00

#### C: GOODS AND SERVICES

Item	Number of units	Price per unit	Units	Total
Organization of excursions	1	€1,800.00	excursions	€1,800.00
Printing of teaching materials	100	€18.00	pcs	€1,800.00
Expert rewards	3	€200.00	expert	€600.00

#### E: OTHER ELIGIBLE EXPENDITURE

Item	Number of units	Price per unit	Units	Total
Publicity	1	€300.00	project	€300.00

#### TOTAL (subsidy)

**€5,000.00**

#### CO-FINANCING

Item	Number of units	Price per unit	Units	Total
Material support for the project	1	€265.00	project	€265.00

#### TOTAL CO-FINANCING

**€265.00**

#### TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET

**€5,625.00**

### COMMENTS

**Reward-** remuneration of the school prevention coordinator for the implementation of project activities, contacting partner organizations, sharing results, agreement on the performance of the work, the budget indicates the total price of the work (common for the given region)

**Travel reimbursements-** use of school buses for peer education in primary schools

#### Goods and services:

a) Organization of excursions

2 Excursions to Banská Bystrica (travel fare for a shared bus) 2\*400 € 1 excursion to the Holocaust Museum (travel fare for a shared bus, education fee) 1000 €

b) Printing of teaching materials

posters and educational texts about World War II - distributed to primary and secondary schools

c) Remuneration to experts of cooperating organizations, mandate contract

**Other eligible expenses-** advertising in regional newspapers

**Co-financing:**

material costs of project administration and workshops, peer education

## **6 BENEFITS OF WORK**

### **6.1 Contributions of the work to theory**

The work contributes to the deepening of theoretical knowledge in the field of developing critical thinking, media literacy and preventing extremism in the school environment. It systematically connects the theoretical foundations of critical thinking with the concepts of extremism, radicalization and polarization and points out their mutual connections in the context of the education of children and youth. Thus, it expands the existing theoretical frameworks with a perspective that emphasizes the preventive and protective function of the school.

The work also contributes to a better understanding of the mechanisms through which disinformation, hate speech and manipulative narratives are reflected in the attitudes and behaviour of pupils. Based on empirical findings, it points out the importance of critical thinking as a protective factor against radicalisation and normalisation of extreme attitudes. The theoretical contribution also lies in emphasising the importance of historical context, value education and a safe discussion environment as integral parts of the preventive action of the school.

### **6.2 Benefits of work for practice**

The work brings practically usable knowledge for schools and professional staff who are dedicated to the prevention of risky behavior and the development of critical thinking in students. Based on an analysis of the current state, it identifies the strengths and weaknesses of current preventive practice and offers specific recommendations that are applicable in the everyday pedagogical process.

A significant contribution to practice is the proposal of activities for the development of critical thinking and the prevention of extremism, which can be used in the creation of school educational programs, prevention plans and conceptual documents. The work provides schools with inspiration for the implementation of discussion, experiential and project activities that support democratic values, media literacy and a culture of dialogue. The work also reinforces the importance of school-family and external expert collaboration and highlights the need for systematic evaluation of the impact of prevention activities. This supports the implementation of long-term sustainable solutions that contribute to

improving the school climate, increasing the sense of safety, and strengthening students' resilience to disinformation and extremist attitudes.

### **6.3 Contribution of the work to education about historical facts and to support the fight against disinformation**

A significant contribution of the work is also its focus on strengthening education about historical facts and supporting the fight against disinformation in the school environment. In the work, we pointed out that insufficient understanding of historical contexts and simplified interpretations of the past create space for the spread of manipulative narratives, historical revisionism and disinformation, which can contribute to the polarization and radicalization of young people.

We emphasized the importance of working with authentic historical sources, facts, and testimonies as a tool for developing critical thinking. By linking history teaching with current social issues and the media environment, we pointed out that knowledge of historical events and propaganda mechanisms in the past allows students to better understand current forms of disinformation and manipulation. Such an approach strengthens students' ability to compare sources, verify information, and distinguish between facts and ideologically motivated interpretations.

## 7 CONCLUSION

In our work, we focused on the issue of developing critical thinking and value attitudes of students in the context of preventing extremism and radicalization in the school environment. We proceeded from the belief that school plays a key role not only in conveying knowledge, but also in shaping the attitudes, values and civic competences of young people. The aim of the work was to analyze the current state, identify risks and propose systematic solutions that respond to the challenges of contemporary society.

In the theoretical part, we elaborated on the basic concepts and professional foundations related to critical thinking, media literacy, extremism, radicalization and polarization. We paid special attention to the historical context, the mechanisms of propaganda and manipulation in the past and their parallels in the current media environment. We pointed out the importance of knowing historical facts and working with authentic sources as an important tool for developing critical thinking and preventing historical revisionism and disinformation.

In the analytical part, we evaluated the results of questionnaire surveys conducted among students and schools. The findings confirmed that students are significantly exposed to disinformation and polarized opinions, while their ability to systematically verify information and critically evaluate it is unevenly developed. At the same time, it turned out that schools implement several preventive activities, but often unsystematically and without a consistent assessment of their impact. The analysis also pointed to the reserves in connecting historical education with current social issues and the media environment.

Based on theoretical knowledge and analytical findings, we formulated recommendations in the design part and proposed activities aimed at the systematic development of critical thinking and the prevention of extremism and radicalization in the school environment. We emphasized the need for a long-term and coordinated approach, linking preventive activities with teaching and the active involvement of pedagogical and professional staff, as well as external partners. We particularly highlighted the importance of using historical facts, examples of propaganda and working with memory as an effective tool in the fight against disinformation and manipulative narratives.

Our work shows that the systematic development of critical thinking, historical awareness, and media literacy is an effective tool for preventing extremism and radicalization in students.

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## **ATTACHMENTS**

Annex A      Timeline  
Annex B      Posters  
Annex C      Educational game  
Appendix D  
Living Books  
Appendix E      Quiz – Disinformation  
Appendix F  
Worksheets – Extremism