

The Ethical Values of Soldiers Preparing for a Career as Military Professionals Before the War in Ukraine and after the Start of the War 2022

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Abstract

The paper examines the development of the ethical values of student soldiers preparing for service through university studies before the 2022 war in Ukraine and following the initiation of Russia's war against Ukraine in 2024. The research problem focused on verifying the hypothesis of whether Russia's aggression against Ukraine influenced a change in the ethical values of 280 respondents from several countries. The ethical values of soldiers preparing for service through studies at the University of Defence in the Czech Republic were analyzed. Furthermore, selected ethical values were analyzed among student soldiers from Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Austria, and Lithuania who completed a one-semester study stay at the University of Defence in the Czech Republic. Given the established research objectives, a quantitatively oriented empirical survey was employed. Data collection was conducted through questionnaire-based inquiries. The research indicates that ethical values gain significance during times of conflict and that there is no substantial difference in preferences among respondents from the selected countries.

KEY WORDS: *ethical values, soldiers, students, bravery, courage, virtue, human resource management*

Citation: Davidová, M.; Kubínyi, Ľ.; Krč, M. The Ethical Values of Soldiers Preparing for a Career as Military Professionals Before the War in Ukraine and after the Start of the War 2022. In Proceedings of the Challenges to National Defence in Contemporary Geopolitical Situation, Brno, Czech Republic, 7-10 September 2026. ISSN 2538-8959, <https://doi.org/10.47459/cndcgs.2026.38>

1. Introduction

Current social and economic developments worldwide are undergoing a complex period. In the long term, a new quality of mutual relations between countries is being formed; value systems are changing in connection with fundamental shifts in their social composition and their domestic and international orientation. New values are forcing their way into life with difficulty, as their practical implementation is accompanied by obstacles of both an objective and subjective nature. These changes fundamentally reshape the content of and demands on the ethics of a military professional. Ethics is not an immutable set of principles but is a competence of the soldier that responds to social changes and shifts in the relationship between the armed forces and society.

Ethics is an important component of human resource management. Firstly, it concerns the approach and behavior toward people according to labor law standards. Secondly, it involves an approach more closely related to the profession performed by the employee. In this second approach, professional competencies are also taken into account. The military declares itself a profession in the form of the military professional, claiming moral authorization to carry out acts of extreme violence and destruction. Unlike most professionals, military personnel are permitted to kill, destroy the infrastructure of enemy states, and endanger the lives of military personnel under their command. Given that it is a vocation, a military professional can be expected to meet high moral standards. Professional status brings with it special moral authorizations but also imposes moral constraints: professionals must guide their actions by the regulatory ideal of their profession and must respect important, broadly-based moral norms. The special moral authorizations of professionals are justifiable only if the profession truly serves an important human need. Since the military claims special moral authorizations of a very serious nature, we certainly require it to be a profession governed by high

professional standards and professional responsibility. Ethical values serve as a formalized basis for a more accessible and verifiable assessment of sudden actions under combat conditions.

Moral values form the basis of the identity of a professional army soldier; they are a prerequisite for the effective management of military activities and mutual cooperation. Conducting contemporary operations to maintain and support peace is demanding even from the perspective of adhering to ethical principles. Moral values permeate the entire element of war, and they more readily and closely align and merge with the will that sets in motion and directs the entire mass of forces, because will is a moral quantity. It follows that the main moral forces are:

1. The talents of the commander.
2. The military virtue of the army.
3. Patriotic spirit.

Which of these forces holds greater value cannot be generally determined, for it is difficult in itself to say anything at all about their magnitude, let alone to weigh the magnitude of one by comparison with the other. It is best not to underestimate any of them. Ethics is the foundation of primordial law. Ethics should be able to answer whether what we do—in our case, as a military professional—is good or bad. Ethics is a normative science and defines the scope of ethical laws, which in turn influence value orientation. Value orientation represents only a morally binding norm and is usually formally expressed in the moral codes of armies [1-3]. In the presented research, we deal with a range of categories essential for the military professional. We analyzed the categories that we have defined:

1. The military virtue of the army – bravery. Military virtue differs from mere bravery, and even more so from enthusiasm for the cause of war. Bravery is, of course, its necessary component, but just as it is innate to some people, it can also arise in a warrior or a part of the army through habit and practice. It must rid itself of the instinct for the unrestrained and must submit to requirements of a higher order: obedience, order, rule, and method.

2. Boldness – courage. Boldness is a creative force. Whenever boldness encounters hesitancy, the probability of success is necessarily on its side, because hesitancy already signifies a loss of balance. The higher the command functions, the more the necessity arises for boldness to be joined by a deliberate spirit, so that it is not a purposeless, blind rush of passion; for the higher the position, the less it is about one's own dedication, and the more the preservation of others and the welfare of the greater whole gain importance. Boldness does not consist of courage against the nature of things, but rather in the fact that it substantially supports that higher estimation, which must be carried out by keen judgment and semi-consciously when making a decision.

3. Tenacity – valor. In war, more than anywhere else in the world, things proceed differently than we imagined, and they look different from up close than from afar. A physician, although far more exposed to inscrutable effects and chance, knows precisely the effects and forms of their remedies. In contrast, in war, the commander of a large unit is constantly tossed by a surge of false and true reports; by errors committed by people out of fear, negligence, or haste; by manifestations of defiance driven by right or wrong opinions, ill will, a right or wrong sense of duty, laziness, or exhaustion; and by accidents that no one even considered. Here, a quality such as valor comes to the fore.

4. Moral sentiment – honor. This illustrates how and when an individual can internalize the general interest within their conscience and transform it into their own conviction. Moral sentiment should be able to establish certain desirable boundaries for the behavior of a military professional. A situation arises where the military must define its own ethical values necessary for its functioning. It follows that ethical values are evident in all professional armies.

5. Military duty. The duty of a military professional is an activity through which individuals must fulfill tasks within the state's armed forces, including submitting to laws and internal regulations governing the obligation to perform active military service or fulfill other duties both in peacetime and during war.

2. Current status of the issue under study

As early as 1957, Huntington published the concept of military professionalism, of which ethics is a fundamental component according to the author. The author perceives the moral values of a soldier as a significant part of professional identity [4]. A considerable number of countries recognize the necessity of cultivating military professional ethics and the value orientation of military professionals. According to research results, NATO states possess a sophisticated system of education for the development of military professional competencies, including value orientation [1]. Findings have shown that the effective development of military careers is not possible without the development of military-professional ethics [5]. The Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic considers military-professional ethics to be one of the decisive areas in forming the competencies of military professionals. This fact is also expressed in the basic conceptual documents of the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. According to the White Paper on Defence, people constitute the highest value, and the education of quality soldiers and civilian personnel, along with their care, comes first [6]. The Personnel Training Concept classifies professional ethics within the spheres of education and states that

the primary bearers of soldiers' education are commanders, managers at all levels of command and control, the teaching staff, and training instructors at all levels of the educational process [7].

The conceptual document formulating the strategy for achieving the required state of the development of the Czech Armed Forces by 2035 also addresses the issue of education, in the context of which it states that "education towards traditions and patriotism, military ethos, and the determination to defend one's country will be strengthened. The internal culture of the organization, emphasizing the superiority of collective interests over personal ones, will be developed." In the strategic documents of the Ministry of Defence, competent and motivated people are a priority, especially the recruitment of new military professionals, their careers, the area of education and development, and stabilization [6, 7]. Over the last five years, studies have been produced focusing on the recruitment of applicants and candidates for the Czech Armed Forces. They primarily mapped the macroeconomic context of recruitment in the Czech Armed Forces [8], the motivational reasons of applicants and candidates for entering the Czech Armed Forces [9], the motivation for entry of men and women with the aim of determining whether differences exist between the motivational aspects of men and women [10], military expenditures and unemployment [11], the education of soldiers in the context of development and career management [5], through to ethical codes and their place in the new security environment [12].

Given that the development of ethical values is assessed in terms of how they are influenced by the ongoing war in Ukraine, we also present the research findings of authors from the University of Defence. Binková and Štěpánková examined the influence of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict on the submission of applications for study at the Faculty of Military Leadership in their research. According to the authors, the majority of the 179 respondents agreed that the current global security situation supported their decision to become professional soldiers with the goal of participating in the capability to defend their homeland. When considering whether to apply for active duty service, their primary sources of support were parents, extended family, partners, and friends [13].

3. Methods and Data

The objective of the conducted research was to monitor the development of the ethical values of soldiers preparing for a career as professional soldiers through their studies, and to identify differences between respondents from individual countries during the monitored period before the onset of the armed conflict and during its course. The research was conducted in two stages: during 2022 and during 2024. The results of the respondents' statements in the individual stages are presented in the following text.

Given the established research objectives, a quantitatively oriented empirical survey was employed. Data collection was conducted through questionnaire-based inquiries. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions, and the evaluation was performed using a ten-point scale. In 2022, the questionnaire was sent to 20 students of military studies at the University of Defence and 20 military students studying within the Erasmus program at the University of Defence from Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania, and Austria. The same procedure was followed in 2024. The total sample consisted of 280 students preparing for a career as military professionals.

The response rate for the questionnaire was 100%. For the purposes of data analysis from the questionnaire survey, methods of descriptive statistics, frequency distribution tables, appropriate charts, and descriptive characteristics were utilized.

The following research questions were established:

- Research **Question 1**: How is the value orientation of military professionals evolving as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine from 2022 to 2024?
- Research **Question 2**: Are there differences in the development of the value orientation of military professionals from the Visegrád Group (V4) countries compared to the other examined countries?

The following hypotheses were formulated for the research:

- **Hypothesis 1**: The value orientation of the military professional shows an increasing trend as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.
- **Hypothesis 2**: There are no significant differences in the development of value orientation among the countries.

4. Results and Discussion

The interpretation of selected findings is further presented in connection with the research objectives and the established research questions and hypotheses.

The results of the investigation indicate that there are no significant differences in the evaluation of the ethical values of the military professional. We proceed from the premise that the social responsibility of a military professional is closely linked to ethics, even though ethical responsibility is not codified by law. Figure 1 displays the most highly perceived ethical values among military students at the University of Defence and students from military universities studying at the University of Defence within the ERASMUS program.

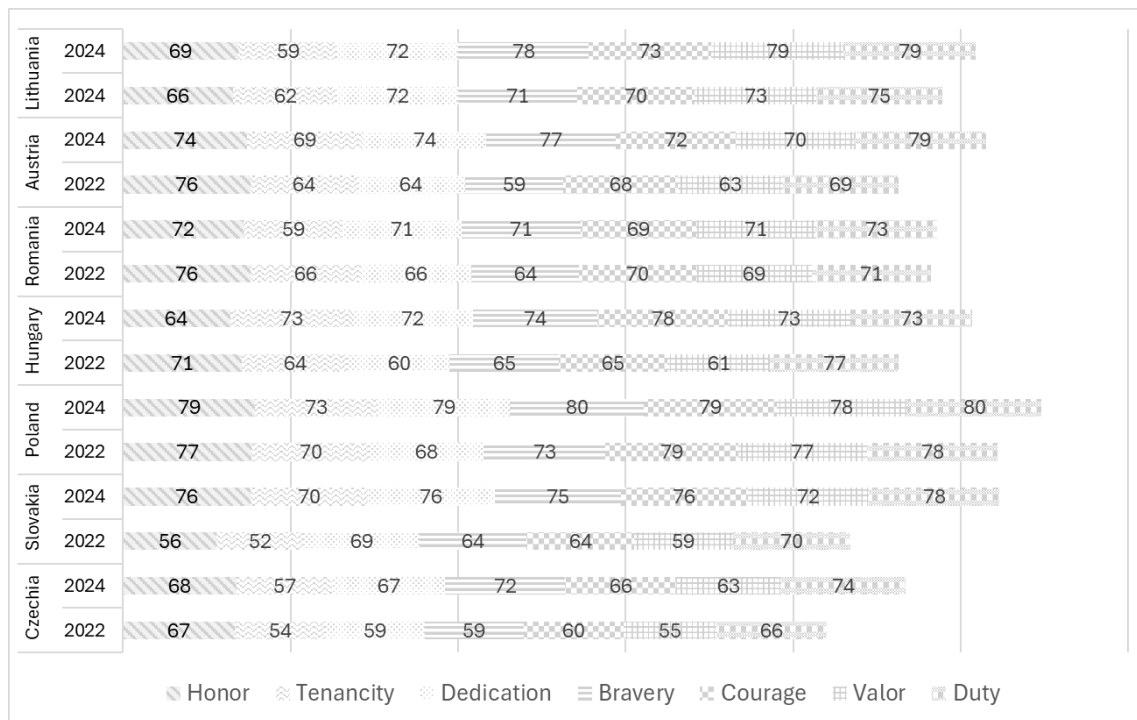


Fig. 1. Development of accepted ethical values of soldiers from selected countries in years 2022 and 2024

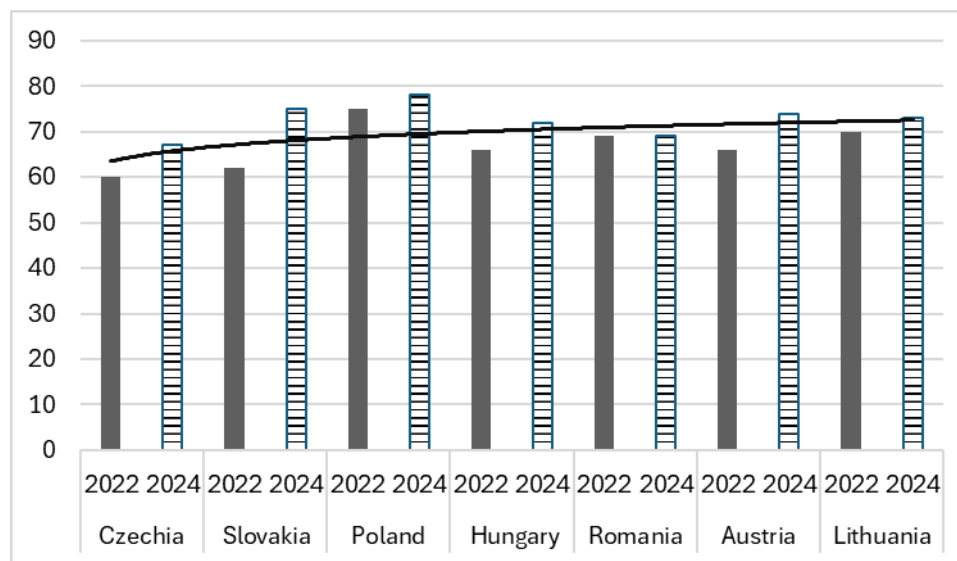


Fig. 2. Average of accepted ethical values among soldiers in years 2022 and 2024 (Trendline)

Table1. Ranking of respondents' highest perceived ethical values

Military University Students (Armed Forces)	Core Military Values
Czech Armed Forces	Military duty, courage, honor, dedication, bravery, valor, tenacity
Slovak Armed Forces	Loyalty, military duty, dedication, responsibility, justice, courage, bravery, diligence.
Polish Armed Forces	Loyalty, courage, dedication, pride, integrity, duty, bravery, valor.
Hungarian Armed Forces	Military duty, honor, empathy, pride in traditions, courage, bravery, tenacity
Romanian Armed Forces	Honor, military duty, bravery, valor, tenacity, dedication, empathy, courage
Austrian Armed Forces	Honor, military duty, bravery, valor, tenacity, dedication, empathy, courage.
Lithuanian Armed Forces	Valor, military duty, courage, bravery, dedication, honor, responsibility.

Note: Fifteen categories were examined – honor, tenacity, dedication, courage, bravery, valor, military duty, empathy, pride in traditions, loyalty, responsibility, honesty, diligence, compassion, and justice.

It is evident from both the table and the figure that military professionals, as well as students of the University of Defence, perceive military duty, dedication, and courage in the same way. Similarly, it can be stated that military professionals from the selected countries perceive courage and dedication identically. These results correspond with previous research [12].

5. Conclusions

Answer to Research Question 1: How is the value orientation of military professionals evolving within the group of countries as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine? It can be stated that the value orientation of the military professional shows an increasing trend in the new security environment. The rising value orientation of military professionals, measured on a 10-point scale, increased on average for University of Defence students from 60 to 67 points over the monitored period; for Slovakia from 62 to 75, Poland from 75 to 78, Hungary from 66 to 72, Austria from 66 to 74, and Lithuania from 72 to 73. Only in the case of Romania did the average remain the same in both periods. Among respondents from countries neighboring aggressive Russia, average ethical values show the highest scores for Slovakia and Poland.

Answer to Research Question 2: Are there differences in the development of the value orientation of military professionals from the V4 countries compared to the other examined countries? Based on the statistical data processing, it was proven that there are no significant differences.

From the perspective of the verification/falsification of the established hypotheses, we can state:

Hypothesis 1: The value orientation of the military professional shows an increasing trend as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Hypothesis confirmed. The value orientation of the military professional shows an increasing trend as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. In 2022, the value orientation of military professionals reached an average of 66.9 points across 7 countries, rising to 71.7 points in 2024.

Hypothesis 2: There are no significant differences in the development of value orientation among the countries. Hypothesis confirmed. There are no significant differences in the development of value orientation among the countries. Differences exist in the perception of ethical values among individual respondents. Military professionals from the Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak and Austrian armies are significantly at the forefront in their perception of value orientation. A closer study of the value orientation of military professionals in our research showed that military professionals are strengthening the qualities required for the proper performance of military service during the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. In the practice of the selected countries, military professionals perceive ethical values such as dedication, courage, and bravery as the most significant. Among respondents from countries neighboring aggressive Russia, ethical values show the greatest increase.

Acknowledgements. The research has been supported by the team and budget of the long-term institutional research project Conduct of Land Operations (DZRO-FVL22-LANDOPS).

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