

DIVERGENT OR CONVERGENT TRENDS IN PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION IN SLOVENIA?

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There is a decade long discussion about the professional military education in Slovenia. The country has developed its own military force after the independence in 1991. Since the lack of the professional officers corps there was a decision adopted to have a convergent system of staffing the military with the officers. The future officers have to obtain high school or university degree at civilian education institutions, after that they get the military training and education provided by the Slovenian Armed Forces. However, there have been some insufficiencies in the system and therefore the ideas how to change the system of professional military education in Slovenia have been constantly raised. There are several questions on military education in Slovenia that are presented and discussed in the paper in the framework of divergence and convergence of the military and its parent society.

Key words: *professional military education, military education, officer school, divergence and convergence, Slovenian Armed Forces*

1. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 1990s, when Slovenia, in the process of acquiring its independence, had been gradually building its own military, various kinds of personnel were included in the military (with different levels of education, expertise, military skills and knowledge, career background, etc.). They performed their roles well enough; however, the military was under constant reforms and transformation. The Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) evolved toward a full defense institution, then transformed itself into a small professional military, into a “NATO military,” into a military that actively participates in international missions

and operations, and, recently, also into a military that takes a significant part in civil protection and rescue. In general, a desire to be a modern military has been constant. Demands to clarify the nature of the education system for the military personnel were also constantly raised. Unfortunately, there have been too many and too diverse ideas and suggestions how to do it but not enough will to do anything decisive. Consequently, the system of education of personnel remains an open question for the Slovenian military and a point of never ending discussions among the stakeholders in the defense ministry, Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF), several civilian education

institutions in Slovenia, and also some civil forums. Among the issues and dilemmas that emerge when the military education in Slovenia is discussed are the following: How many new officers per year does the SAF need? What kind of knowledge should they have? Shall a military academy be established or do existing study programs at the universities correspond to the needs of the military? Who shall provide the lectures? Shall the SAF's officers be educated in foreign countries? How shall the staff education be executed? Who shall pay for the education of military officers?

There have been several discussions made (Ministry of Defense 1995, for example), initiatives established and agreements adopted (agreement on cooperation of Ministry of Defense and four Slovenian Universities, signed in September 2011), student works finished (at least 16 bachelor's theses, nine master theses and one doctoral dissertation – Brožič, 2010)¹ and articles published (Jelušič et al., 2007; Svete et al., 2011; Vegič & Zabukovec, 2014; Vegič, 2017; Kladnik, 2017, etc.), and some provisions were put into formal documents; however, the system of professional military education (education of military officers) in Slovenia has not yet been settled.

In this article, some issues and dilemmas will be presented and discussed through the lenses of a divergent-convergent paradigm.

Specifically, as a social institution and as the institution that should provide the external security of the society, the military is often compared with its parent society (see Caforio, 2007, for example). The research question of this study is derived from this approach. I will attempt to answer the question of whether the main reason that we do not have an officially adopted and settled educational system for military officers in Slovenia lies in the gap between the divergence and convergence of Slovenian Armed Forces and Slovenian society and its civilian educational system.

2. PARADIGM OF DIVERGENCE AND CONVERGENCE

According to Bruneau (2012), the concept of military effectiveness and the concept of democratic control shape the discussion on professional military education. Bruneau wanted to show that in the United States democratic control was not an issue (with the exception of the possible beliefs of a few academics) while military effectiveness was. In fact, effectiveness is very important for the military. Furthermore, the professional military education has to bring the military officers to the capabilities to reach the effectiveness of the military. In a similar manner, French (2014) speaks about “operational” versus “non-operational” military. “The

operational military fights and trains to fight wars. The non-operational military runs the government jobs program that is the stateside/peacetime armed forces” (French: 2014, p. 215).

A desire of the military to remain in charge of the education of its personnel (in fact, if we understand the military officership as a profession, such a practice is normal – the professions themselves are in charge of the education and nominations of their members – see Garb, 1995) and some intervening factors complicate the modern professional military education. Specifically, there are requests for the military programs to be officially accredited (and there are many problems due to the non-academic content of curricula and non-academic references of military course holders), to involve a large amount of knowledge that is not purely military in the educational programs (such as contemporary demands of the environments in which the military work), and it also seems – as shown by the RAND Air Force project (Keller et al., 2013) – that the civilian teachers cost less than military teachers. However, while on the one hand there is a critique of military education (Johnson-Freese, 2011), there is a reluctance to accept the military in academics on the other (see Bateman, 2008). The mixture of civilian and military demands, when the modern professional military education is in question, lead us to

think about it in the framework of the convergent and divergent paradigm.

When we talk about divergence and convergence, we talk about trends. In the case of divergence, the military and society are further and further away from each other, the military has its own distinct characteristics, processes, values, habits, structure, knowledge, relations, etc., which are different from social ones. In the case of convergence, the military and society get closer to each other, and they become similar in characteristics, processes, values, habits, structure, knowledge, relations, etc. The issue of divergence and convergence among the military and its parent society has characterized almost all modern military sociology, although these specific terms have not been mentioned. Specifically, military sociology is dedicated to the civil-military relations as well as to relations and structures in the military, which are compared to the social ones or for which the explanations are sought in the society (more in Garb, 2009). The terms divergent and convergent have been used since the end of the 1990s in European military sociology. Sarvaš and Hodny (1998) used the divergent-convergent model for the analysis of motivation for joining the military; Kiss (1999) used it to show the development of modern military organizations; Caforio (2000) used it to analyze trends in military education.

3. ISSUES AND DILEMMAS OF PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION IN SLOVENIA

When the discussion on the military education of Slovenian officers began at the beginning of the 1990s, the basic idea was to consider specific national features, such as the need for a low number of military officers, different historical circumstances, etc. As concluded on the Conference on the Education of the Officers of the Slovenian Armed Forces, which was organized by Ministry of Defense and held on 28th September 1994, the education of future officers should be based on the civil public education system, but the so-called functional education (we could call it “military education and training”) should be carried out by educational institutions in the SAF. In fact, since Slovenian independence in 1992, professional military education in Slovenia has consisted of a bachelor degree, from any civilian faculty, and the Officer Candidate School and later other functional military programs executed by the SAF. Such an arrangement indicates that Slovenia decided for the convergent model of education. Unfortunately, as Vegič (2017, p. 90) also observes, the university degree of the officer candidates is often neglected in the SAF. As part of professional military education, the basic civilian bachelor degree equips future officers with the knowledge of political science,

law and international law, technical engineering, and of sociological, anthropological, leadership and management, economic, psychology, chemistry, physics, etc., which are all vital for military work. Vegič (2017, pp. 90-91) pointed out that the study program behind the degree is not among the criteria for the selection of officer candidates. The military should pay more attention to this and select the candidates with valuable education. At present, more officers with technical degrees would be welcome.

Due to some dissatisfactions with the existing system of professional military education, there are constant debates, proposals, ideas and different solutions present in Slovenia. For many years the debates have included the questions that follow.

3.1. How many new officers per year does the SAF need?

Currently the SAF amount to around 6,900 members. Since there is an inappropriate ratio of privates, NCOs, and officers at approximately 3:2:1 (some would say that almost every private has his/her own officer) and a lack of finances, there are even proposals to omit some generations at the officer candidate school. This is obviously not a proper approach as every military needs young officers. Bearing in mind that the average age of the SAF’s personnel is 40 years and the average age of

officer corps over 40 years, it is urgent to have some newly educated and young officers. Unfortunately, some years ago, many officer candidates entered the military as privates, then they finished School for Non-Commissioned Officers, graduated from technical college or university, and afterwards they applied for Officer Candidate School. Such a career in the military should be only an exception (for few talented persons) and not a kind of normal entry into officer corps.

In the past (when the SAF had more members), there were evaluations that Slovenia would need around 50 new military officers per year (for standing army and reserve forces); today the needs are estimated to be 20 new officers per year (standing and reserve) at maximum. What form of education would be appropriate for a generation of 20 students/cadets?

3.2. What kind of knowledge should they have?

In the last 15 or even more years, two processes have advanced across the world: military schools applied for public accreditations (and they introduced publicly accepted programs in social sciences or other established disciplines), and military organizations recognized needs for knowledge and skills like foreign languages, knowledge of cultures, communication skills, ITC, etc. The traditional fight between advocates

of “core military knowledge” and advocates of broad knowledge and skills of military officers is present also in Slovenia. Here a question can be raised what is a core military knowledge? In Slovenia, there is a strong desire in the military to include courses from the natural sciences and technology into the professional military education. People in the social sciences understand that and encourage these endeavors, but the faculties that held these courses/programs are not very interested in participating in professional military education. The main reason probably derives from their reluctance to incorporate some military and defense studies courses in their curriculum (which would lead to the reduction of the core disciplinary content of the programs), and they argue that it would burden their students.

3.3. Shall a military academy be established or do existing study programs at the universities correspond to the needs of the military?

Some 10-15 years ago, the idea of establishing a military academy in Slovenia was raised. The fact that there had been some cadet schools on Slovenian territory in history was surprising, because most stakeholders were convinced that a convergent system of military education was settled in the early 1990s. Additionally, its curriculum cannot

be much different from that of an already existing program of defense studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Ljubljana University. Moreover, in that period, some military courses were established at other civilian faculties. The idea was also surprising due to trends in other countries (Poland, Czech Republic, and other), where military academies had gradually turned into political sciences schools.

3.4. Who shall provide the lectures?

I observed the question of content providers – military or civilian academics – in professional military education in Slovenia some years ago, when the idea of special programs for future military officers at some civilian faculties was discussed and later also executed to some extent. It was normal to expect that the military part of the program (core military content, such as courses on tactics and weaponry, as well as non-academic parts of the program such as military training) was executed by military experts. However, there are pressures for them to meet the same academic and scientific criteria as the civilian experts who taught in these and other university programs. It turned out that it was extremely difficult for military experts to attain scientific and academic titles and remains so. The reasons were not deeply explored. However, it seems to me that the explanation may

have been in the gap between the bureaucratic nature of the military and academic nature of civilian university. In addition, it is very difficult for a military man/woman to fulfil the academic and scientific criteria through with military work and on military topics. As I read later, the similar gap between military and civilian teaching personnel is also present in professional military education in other states (see Johnson-Freese, 2012; Keller et al., 2013). However, if the military (more practical) content is given to the candidates in the process of internal education, a key question raised here is why they would have to meet civilian academic criteria. Real military expertise and experiences would be probably enough to equip the military candidates with the practical military knowledge. Other kinds of knowledge could be gained in the civilian education system.

3.5. Shall the SAF's officers be educated in foreign countries?

This was a supplemental option in all years. Non-commissioned officers and officers were sent abroad to get a degree (in military schools) or to attend special courses like language courses or courses in civil-military cooperation, etc. International cooperation can be taken as positive in general. However, some would say that attending military school abroad raise a young soldier in a different military culture that could

be problematic after the return in domestic armed forces, while others would say that the knowledge and degrees gained at military schools abroad are not sufficiently utilized by the SAF.

3.6. How to execute the staff education?

There are, of course, some advanced (staff) education programs for the career military officers. These programs in the SAF are not publicly accredited; they are valid solely for a professional career inside the military. There are some cases of attending postgraduate study programs at civilian universities simultaneously with the advance military programs; however, such a solution burdens the students heavily since they have to pass two complete programs (a military one and a university one). In the future, the staff education system also must be improved and settled.

3.7. Who shall pay for the education of military officers?

Professional military education is, of course, the responsibility of the state, as the military is the state's responsibility. Despite this fact, the question of a direct financier has emerged in the years of debates in professional military education in Slovenia. Put concretely: shall the education of military officers be covered by the defense budget or the budget of the ministry of education?

The answer is partly connected to organizational solutions, but partly it depends on negotiations between the defense and educational sectors.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The professional military education in Slovenia consists of two poles – a civilian one, that is part of the civilian educational system in the country, and the military one, that is executed in the military and by the military after the basic high school or university degree is obtained. Despite the relatively good concept of professional military education, there are also constant calls to settle it finally. The reasons are found mostly in the general dissatisfaction with the officer corps of the SAF. The present convergent system of professional military education is questioned in demands to give the future officers more military knowledge and more practical education, as well as to recruit younger officers. These expectations are clearly in favor of a more divergent military education, probably even a more divergent military. In fact, officer candidates must go through a lot of military training even now. I am mostly not familiar with its quality, but can only hope that they get proper military skills and knowledge during their core military education.

If we look at the open questions presented above, the conclusion about

the trends in professional military education in Slovenia (divergent or convergent) is not so clear. Regarding the number of military officers that have to be educated every year, it can be said that it is a divergent issue. We could hardly imagine that there would be educated military officers "in stock." The military educates the number of officers it needs or wants to employ. Compared to the civilian education institutions, which educate in advance, this is quite different. However, there are many discussions on the strategic military reserve in Slovenia that have not yet been fully developed. Specifically, some redundant (not employed by the military) educated military personnel would be serviceable for this military structure. If professional military education became more accessible, it would be a sign of convergence. However, there would always be the entering criteria that the candidates must fulfil, at least the health ones.

The contemporary challenges for the militaries create the needs that the military personnel be equipped with broad knowledge and skills, as well as the competencies to use it. It is obvious that military skills alone are not enough to fulfil the modern military missions and tasks. The convergence of knowledge and skills is a must. Especially for the small armed forces, it is necessary that their members are capable of diverse tasks. Despite that, we can understand the concerns of the advocates of the divergence in

military knowledge and skills. The non-military knowledge and skills should be the addition to the military ones for the military officers and not a replacement.

The question of a military academy in Slovenia comes in waves: every few years, the initiative to establish it surfaces. It could be understood as a measure to improve the military professionalism in the SAF. Alternatively, it could be understood as an attempt to negate all the endeavors that have been made thus far in establishing a modern professional military education system in Slovenia. The establishment of a military academy would undoubtedly be a sign of military divergence.

The conclusion regarding lecture-givers in professional military education is evident. The military lecture-givers show the divergence, while the civilian lecture givers show the convergence. It is also evident that complete divergence is possible (also a case in the history of military education), while complete convergence is not. It would be unprofessional that the military training (which is part of professional military education) would be executed by civilians. Furthermore, the courses that contain military content require a military teaching person or a military retired teacher. All other courses could be taught by civilian experts or even at civilian education institutions.

The education of the SAF's officers abroad means more

divergence than convergence in professional military education. This conclusion is derived from the practice that the Slovenian officers or officer candidates are sent to the military programs abroad (military academies or defense universities). However, as already mentioned, the foreign military education institutions are in the processes of convergence, particularly in the knowledge they offer.

The relatively new half-integration of civilian post-graduate and military staff education is more a convergent than a divergent solution. Compared to the staff education years ago, it is an improvement; however, there are also some intentions to integrate the civilian and military part of staff education. It would be a step toward divergence despite the fact that civilian knowledge would be still part of the curriculum.

Furthermore, what can be said about the financing of the professional military education in Slovenia? Despite many saying that the education of the SAF's officers is divergent, because it is covered by the military budget, we must not forget about civilian degrees, which the majority of the military officers obtain at civilian public universities. Considering that the education of Slovenian military officers is mostly covered by the budget for public education, it is convergent. Some would additionally want the complete financing of the professional military education from the budget for public

education. In such case, I would doubt that a simple transition of financing is possible; I would expect that the diminishing of the defense budget on the expense of educational budget would occur.

To conclude, the divergence of military and society in professional military education is not bad, nor is convergence. They are not completely good either. Not a stretch but a proper ratio of civilian and military education, knowledge and skills, values, role models, etc. would be necessary to attain a professional military education system in Slovenia. The established level of civil-military relations in a state influences the system of professional military education, other factors, such as missions, traditions, existing base of knowledge, also influence it. Looking at the issue from the point of view of a civilian university teacher in defense studies, I would express concern if the military would close itself or be closed inside its walls. However, the fear of the military of losing its military ethos is also legitimate and understandable.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The data on students' theses on Slovenian military education at Slovenian universities and faculties

were obtained on May 16, 2017 through a search of COBISS+, the Slovenian librarian database.

[2] See some concerns and discussions in Micewski (2003), French (2014) and Toronto (2015).

[3] There are interesting data from the RAND study in United States Air Force Academy (Keller et al., 2013) on the impacts of civilian and military teaching staff.

[4] The situation is rather complicated. In the SAF not all advanced military programs are accompanied by the civilian education of candidates. The situation became complex after the reform of high education system in Slovenia (Bologna reform). Because the graduation in “pre-Bologna university programs” is equal to the master-of-arts degree in “Bologna programs”, the candidates for staff military education with a “pre-Bologna” degree are not obliged to attend the civilian programs during staff education.

[5] Staff education should be a normal part of the career of each military officer. It was interesting and also unbelievable for me to read the article of Scales (2010) about the staff education in the American military. He realized that the “Army’s full-term staff college is now attended by fewer and fewer officers. The best and the brightest are avoiding the war colleges in favor of service in Iraq and Afghanistan.” (Scales, 2010).

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