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## “We will fight for Peace All Over the World until the Last Grenade”. Initial Military Training in Schools of the Lithuanian SSR in the Late Soviet Era

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### Abstract

In the late Soviet period (1960s-1980s), the public policy of the Soviet Union was mainly based on two ideologemes - internationalism and military patriotism. They were also applied in the education system in the formation of the citizen, the so-called New Soviet Man. It was declared that one of the duties of this New Soviet Man was to ensure world peace, which required not only an internationalist mindset but also good military preparation. In 1968 the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted a resolution on the introduction of compulsory initial military training in all schools in the USSR. Based on published historical sources (official resolutions, methodological guidelines, articles in the pedagogical press) and 34 qualitative interviews with former Soviet school pupils, the present article not only analyses the aims and principles, content, and methods of patriotic military upbringing and initial military training (IMT), but also presents the authentic experiences of how IMT was implemented in schools of the Lithuanian SSR. As our research shows, IMT in Soviet Lithuania did not run very efficiently. The biggest problem was the lack of qualified military instructors capable of working with children.

### Keywords

Soviet education, Lithuanian SSR, military patriotism, initial military training, oral history.

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## "Lucharemos por la Paz en Todo el Mundo hasta la Última Granada". Formación Militar inicial en las Escuelas de la RSS de Lituania en la Era Soviética Tardía

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### Resumen

A finales del periodo soviético (décadas de 1960-1980), la política pública de la Unión Soviética se basaba principalmente en dos ideologías: el internacionalismo y el patriotismo militar. También se aplicaron en el sistema educativo en la formación del ciudadano, el llamado Nuevo Hombre Soviético. Se declaró que uno de los deberes de este Nuevo Hombre Soviético era garantizar la paz mundial, lo que requería no sólo una mentalidad internacionalista sino también una buena preparación militar. En 1968, el Consejo de Ministros de la URSS adoptó una resolución sobre la introducción de la formación militar inicial obligatoria en todas las escuelas de la URSS. Basándose en fuentes históricas publicadas (resoluciones oficiales, directrices metodológicas, artículos en la prensa pedagógica) y en 34 entrevistas cualitativas con antiguos alumnos de escuelas soviéticas, el presente artículo no sólo analiza los objetivos y principios, contenidos y métodos de la educación militar patriótica y la formación militar inicial, sino que también presenta las experiencias auténticas de cómo se implantó la formación militar inicial en las escuelas de la RSS de Lituania. Como demuestra nuestra investigación, el IMT en la Lituania soviética no funcionaba de forma muy eficiente. El mayor problema era la falta de instructores militares cualificados capaces de trabajar con niños.

### Palabras clave

Educación soviética, RSS de Lituania, patriotismo militar, formación militar inicial, historia oral.

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The war in Ukraine has been going on since 2014. However, it only received more attention from the world community on 24 February 2022, when Russia launched a large-scale invasion to Ukraine. At the same time, there was a growing interest in the political and social processes that started to occur within Russia. The education system and the subjugation of children to military propaganda have not been left behind. Photos of children standing or even kneeling in the shape of the letter Z went viral on the internet. The song, which was sung by Volgograd children dressed in cadet uniforms together with a deputy of the Russian Duma and became famous in Russia in 2017, was remembered again. The song "Uncle Vova, We Are with You!" refers to the army and the navy as "best friends", presents the greatness and size of Russia - "*From the northern seas all the way/ To the southern reaches/ From the Kurile Islands/ To the Baltic shores*". It promises not only to preserve Crimea for future generations but also to "bring Alaska back to its home port".

But perhaps the most memorable are the last lines of the refrain:

"While there should be peace on earth, but  
If the commander in chief  
Calls us to the last battle  
– Uncle Vova, we are with You!"

Researchers who have studied military patriotism in Russia have already paid attention to this song. Analysing not only the lyrics, but also the clip depicting army parades, pictures of war monuments, visual references to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), as well as the golden cupolas of an Orthodox church, Kratochvíl and Shakhanova (2021) note that "what we are witnessing is not simple grassroots patriotic feelings among Russians, but a multifaceted state policy of instilling military patriotism in the society and particularly in the minds of the young generation" (p.442). Both the lyrics glorifying the "Commander-in-Chief" and the episodes in the video where Uncle Vova, i.e. Putin, is surrounded by children are reminiscent of the images of Lenin and Stalin propagated by the Soviet Union (Kelly, 2004). This is not just a coincidence. Under Putin's presidency, military patriotism made headway into schools, kindergartens, summer camps, cultural events (Kratochvíl & Shakhanova, 2021). However, Bækken (2019) states that "Russia's current president did not invent military patriotism, and his embrace of the policy largely followed a trend started by his predecessor" (p.124). Putin has simply used military patriotism to mobilise the public and distract them from social and economic problems. Particularly when the environment was conducive to doing so. According to Bækken, Russian society has always valued traditional military values such as hierarchy, discipline, collectivism and self-sacrifice, and "soldiers were seen as important role models for young people, and the Armed Forces as a bearer of historical continuity and Russianness." (p.123).

Nostalgia for the Soviet era has also played a significant role (Nikonova, 2010). Unlike in other post-Communist spaces (the former Soviet republics and the Eastern Bloc), where post-Communist nostalgia functions more as a kind of socio-cultural variant of the *Stockholm syndrome* (Čepaitienė, 2007; Stonkuvienė, 2023), and is mainly exploited for commercial purposes (Balcerzak, 2021; Blum, 2000), it has become a part of the constructed myth of the "golden age" in post-Soviet Russia. The USSR is remembered as a superpower, as "one of the

leading countries in the world," with the great people (Rus. *narod*), outstanding leaders and, of course, with a mighty military (Mazur, 2015, p. 234).

There is also a sense of nostalgia for the Soviet education system and the values it developed. For example, in order to strengthen the patriotism of today's Russian youth, it is proposed to look back to the Soviet military training system, among other things by reviving the compulsory initial military training that existed in schools from 1968 until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990 (Omelchenko et. al., 2015).

Soviet military patriotism and compulsory military training have received attention from scholars who have studied Soviet education (Gist, 1977; Cary, 1979; Zajda, 1980; Williams, 1986; Macintyre, 1993; Matthews, 2012). The curriculum, principles, and forms of organisation of military patriotic education in the Soviet general education school are analysed. However, little research has examined how these aspects were implemented in the educational practice and what challenges were encountered. Moreover, Soviet military education is discussed in general terms, without singling out any of the 15 former Soviet republics. This article focuses on the case of the Lithuanian SSR is discussed. Particular attention is paid not only to the official doctrine of military patriotic education but also to the analysis of the experiences of pupils who had compulsory initial military training in general education in the LSSR schools.

### Methodology

The article presents the results of the project *Educating the New Man in Soviet School: the Case of Lithuania* carried out by the Research Council of Lithuania from 2020 to 2022. The research data of the project were mainly obtained through oral history. According to Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2022), it is not just a method, but more of "an umbrella term that integrates history, life history methods, and testimony accounts" (p.4). The method of oral history is frequently applied for the analysis of the Soviet (Socialist) period because it is believed to be suitable "to empirically approach the understanding of important characteristics of totalitarian regimes" (Šimáně, 2023, p. 134). One of the reasons for the popularity of oral history is the lack of reliable sources from the Soviet era. Most sources from that time are not only uninformative but often deliberately misleading, portraying reality through the prism of ideological clichés rather than facts. As Vinogradnaitė et al. (2018) note, while "the Western tradition of oral history tends to focus on the production of sources that reveal the perspective of certain groups or figures, the motive of Soviet oral history is to speak to the whole of society" (p. 9). Of course, the phrase "the whole society" is used as a metaphor to emphasize that informants can be all members of the society who have experiences of interest to researchers. In the case of our research, the main criterion for the selection of the participants was their experience from a Soviet-era school, i.e., the participants were people aged 45-70 who had attended different types of educational institutions (rural, urban, boarding, and special schools) in Lithuania during the late Soviet era (1965-1980).

A total of 34 interviewees with 20 women and 14 men were surveyed. Participants were recruited through convenient and snowball sampling. Most of the participants in the study were

contacted in advance and underwent a pre-interview, which, according to Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2022), "can serve as a warmup session in which the researcher and the participant can size each other up and learn a little about each other that can ease the interview process and lead to a greater comfort in interaction" (p. 34). That was particularly important because due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of the interviews (21) were collected remotely by video chat using the platforms of Zoom, Messenger, MS Teams, while the remaining 13 interviews were conducted face-to-face with the informants. Depending on the situation and the informants, the conversations vacillated between semi-structured and unstructured, in-depth interviews. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the informants and they were later transcribed. The informant data were depersonalised during transcription. Only interview numbers are used in this article, e.g. I1, I2, etc. All interviews were conducted in strict accordance with a research ethics plan agreed with the Research Council of Lithuania.

The triangulation of sources is used to ensure the reliability of the data. In addition to the interviews, a wide range of documents published in the late Soviet era (1964 -1988) are analysed: legislation and resolutions, textbooks, methodological aids for military-patriotic education and initial military training of schoolchildren, articles in the educational press, etc. Analysis of interviews and documents was performed using MAXQDA Analytic Pro 2022.

## Results

### **Between War and Peace, Friendship and Hatred: The Ideology and Aims of Military Patriotic Education**

Analysing the patriotic narrative of contemporary Russia, Kratochvíl and Shakhanova (2021) note that it is built on two paradoxical axioms simultaneously. In constructing its identity, Russia balances between imitating the West and rejecting it as alien and dangerous. Following the researchers, this new political rhetoric is based on the romanticized Soviet past, skilfully combining it with novel anti-Western themes. I would question whether this political rhetoric is so new. Nor is its paradoxical nature. Only the combination of Soviet ideology and religion used to promote patriotic feelings seems paradoxical (Rousselet, 2015; Kratochvíl and Shakhanova, 2021). Given that the Russian Orthodox Church, like other faith communities in the USSR, suffered radical Soviet atheisation (Bezrogov, 2007), one should certainly be puzzled by the portraits of Stalin and icons of the saints placed side-by-side, wherever they are displayed, be it in an Orthodox church or in a parade on 9 May, the day of the victory in the so-called Great Patriotic War. The unifying thread between these images, according to the official Russian discourse, both political and religious, is "the struggle for traditional moral values" and the active defence against the moral corruption of the "rotten West". A more detailed analysis of Soviet sources shows that current discourse is a direct continuation of that time, with almost no differences in the constructs of the words used or in their content.

There is certainly no shortage of contradictions and paradoxes in the materials of the congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, speeches of the functionaries of the

Communist Party and education, which were subsequently used as a basis writing various methodological instructions for schools.

"Internationalism" and "military patriotism", "peace" and "enhancement of combat power" are the concepts that appear in the same text, sometimes even in the same sentence.

During the period in question, proletarian internationalism based on Marxist ideology, with the slogan "Proletarians of all countries, unite!" calling for world revolution and the establishment of communism throughout the world, was eventually replaced by more moderate forms of internationalism. A significant change in the policy of USSR based on the ideology of internationalism had two goals: to function as a "carrot" to bolster Soviet power in an increasingly tumultuous Eastern Europe, and to create an autarkic, transnational, socialist community that would counter the West in the Cold War (Applebaum, 2019, p.128).

The first objective was to promote the ideas of "friendship between peoples" and the USSR as a guarantor of "world peace". As Goedde (2019) notes, the concept of peace was so elastic that it acquired different meanings in different social and political contexts. According to the researcher, the Soviet Union linked the rhetoric of peace to internationalism, often institutionalizing peace activism within the bureaucratic machinery of the Communist Party. The foreign policy of the USSR was dominated by a universalist-humanist meaning of peace that even the fiercest critics of the communist regime could not find fault with. The domestic audience was served by a more ideological-political construct of peace, in which the humanist idea of peace was cleverly obscured by the combination of peace and preparedness for war generated by the same bureaucratic machine. To describe this combination Goedde (2019) uses the Roman adage "Si vis pacem, para bellum"- if you want peace, prepare for war. There was another winged phrase circulating in the Soviet Union, which was also recalled by one of our informants during the interview: "We will fight for world peace until the last grenade". (I33).

Thus, although in all the speeches of the functionaries of education, in all the educational documents, it was first and foremost noted that the main objective of education in the Soviet school system was to educate the younger generation to be committed to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism and to be faithful fighters for peace, it is clear from reading the texts that "peace" is relegated to a back seat in them.

For example, in the methodological recommendations drawn up in Moscow by the Department of Primary Military Training of the USSR Ministry of Education and translated into Lithuanian on the basis of the materials of the XXIV Congress of the CPSU, it is stressed that the Soviet school should "arm the pupils with knowledge about the regularity of the development of society, to teach them how to analyse social phenomena from a class point of view, and to open up to them the power of the teaching of Marxism - Leninism, and the invaluable contribution of the October Motherland to the development of the world communist movement"(Lietuvos TSR Švietimo ministerija, 1971, p.1), etc. However, it is immediately recalled that "the construction of communism is taking place under the threat of war from imperialism, and thus the strengthening of the country's defensive capacity, the raising of the combat power of the Soviet Army and Navy must not be forgotten for a minute." (Lietuvos TSR Švietimo ministerija, 1971, p.1).

The texts of the other methodological guidelines analysed are virtually identical in structure. There is another soundbite about peace, with a simple message behind it: compulsory



reinforcement of military patriotic education at school, concentrating mainly on initial military training.

The objectives of military patriotic education are as follows:

- "Wide propaganda of Marxism-Leninism and internal, foreign, and war politics implemented by the Communist Party among young people <...> revelation of Leninist peace and friendship politics among nations;
- Introduction to various laws and Communist Party resolutions that regulate military duty and state defence;
- Propaganda of the Soviet people, its armed forces, revolution, fight and work <...> planting pride for the heroic acts of the older generation and eagerness to repeat them in the minds of the young people;
- Planting high moral-political and war attributes, which are essential to reach the victory in the modern war, in them [the pupils];
- Developing initial military technical knowledge and practical skills
- Planting high political awareness and constant readiness to defend the homeland; disclosure of the aggressive essence of imperialism and bourgeois ideology". (Lietuvos TSR Švietimo ministerija, 1975, p.5-6).

Different texts have used slightly different words for these objectives, in some cases narrowing them down, in others expanding them even further, but they can be briefly summarised as follows: "planting love for the armed forces of SSSR" and "planting hatred for fascism and imperialism of USA - the meanest enemy of the freedom and independence of the nations" (Lietuvos TSR Švietimo ministerija, 1973, p. 21). It was emphasized that these goals must be pursued systematically, with all possible efforts, even "without sparing lives".

### **Military Patriotic Education and Initial Military Training Lessons at School**

Having analysed Soviet school textbooks, methodological tools, and documents regulating the teaching process, it is necessary to agree with Heller (1988) that military patriotic education begins in the nursery school, continues through kindergarten and school, and constitutes the most important element in the Soviet system of education. It would be difficult even to list all the educational aids aimed at military patriotic education, which were provided for in the activities of Little Octobrists, and later of the Young Pioneers and Komsomol organisations. A separate discussion is needed on military-sporting games known as "The Eaglet" and "Summer Lightning" or Zarnitsa.

We will also give here just a few examples from one of the methodological aids for extracurricular patriotic military education. According to it, in grades 1-2, little Octobrists "listen to stories about the Soviet Armed Forces and their heroes; take part in a contest for the best drawing on a military-patriotic theme; learn about the patriotic deeds of their grandparents or parents", etc. Pupils in grades 3-4 (already Young Pioneers): "meet the soldiers"; take part in "marches of battle glory", etc. Pupils in grades 5-6 not only learn about the heroic deeds of Soviet soldiers, but also prepare a manuscript book on the basis of the collected material, entitled "Participants of the Great Patriotic War Speak"; organise an event entitled "Do the

Russians Want War?"; and visit veterans of the Great Patriotic War. In grades 7-8, pupils, among other things, "learn about the image of the Soviet soldier in the works of fine art" (Lietuvos TSR Švietimo ministerija, 1971, p. 5-7). Since the developers of similar methodological aids did not run out of imagination, the topics and forms of their implementation could be endlessly listed.

Our research shows that teachers, pioneer leaders and other specialists responsible for informal military-patriotic education in the Lithuanian SSR needed to invest more effort. Not every settlement or town had a veteran of the Great Patriotic War, and grandparents and parents did not necessarily have anything "patriotic" to say. According to the informants, parents and grandparents tended to keep the real family stories, marked by deportation, partisan struggles, etc. to themselves.

The situation in formal education was a little easier. Military themes were reflected in the textbooks of almost all subjects (Cary, 1979; Kestere et al., 2020; Kestere & Fernández González, 2021).

However, the culmination of all this variety of military-patriotic education is the introduction of Initial Military Training as a separate study subject at school. In 1967 the amended Universal Military Service Law lowered the age of conscription to 18 and also reduced the terms of service by one year to two years for all the armed. To make up for the lost year a system of compulsory pre-military training was introduced. This consisted of 140 hours of instruction over two years and included basic military skills, weapon training and military indoctrination (Williams, 1986). The Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted a resolution "On Terms and Procedure for the Introduction of Initial Military Training" on 29 April 1968, which set out the main aspects of the introduction of initial military training in schools. This document was accompanied by a series of instructions, methodological tools, etc., both within the Soviet Union and at the level of individual republics. These measures provide guidance on the alignment and integration of all study subjects taught in the school with the thematic plan of IMT. According to the methodological instructions, military instructors had to devise a thematic plan for initial military training for the whole school year (Lietuvos TSR Švietimo ministerija, 1973, p.7). The latter was developed in accordance with a general plan of IMT. Macintyre (1993), in his analysis of initial military training in schools in the USSR, gives an example of a typical lesson plan for initial military training (Table 1). Considering that the curriculum was standardised throughout the Soviet Union, the Lithuanian SSR schools differed only in one aspect: unlike other Soviet republics, secondary schools in the Lithuanian SSR, where the language of instruction was Lithuanian, provided 11 years of education instead of 10. Therefore, the IMT in Lithuania was taught in the last grades 10 and 11.

**Table 1**



*Typical outline for an initial military training course (according to Macintyre, 1993)*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Introduction	1	1	-	-
Weapons Training	20	13	6	6
Tactical Training	4	4	6	-
Drill Training	7	-	4	-
Military Topography	-	-	2	-
Military Medical Training	2	-	-	-
Civil Defence	29	29		
Military Technical Training	-	-	35	35
First Aid	-	16	-	19
Armed Forces Défense	4	4	7	7
Armed Forces Regulations	3	3	7	7
Examination	-	-	3	3

In addition to the plan, the military instructor had to submit lesson plans - outlines - which, according to the methodological requirements, had to be approved by the principal, who had to assess the following aspects: the structure of the lesson, the "depth and quality" of the material to be taught, the methods to be used, which were mainly the narrative, the school lesson, the conversation, the practical exercises, the assessment of the s, and also the ideological "moment of upbringing" in the classroom (Lietuvos TSR Švietimo ministerija, 1973, p.7). The analysis of methodological aids, the Soviet pedagogical press, as well as stories of informants, shows that it was the very "moment of upbringing" that was the most difficult for military instructors to achieve. To support military instructors, methodologists prepared model lesson plans. The exchange of good practice was also encouraged. For example, the book "Military Patriotic Upbringing of Upper School Students" (Aukštesniųjų klasių mokinių karinis patriotinis auklėjimas, 1986), which was translated into Lithuanian and was based on the experience of schools in Moscow, provided material for military instructors to help them improve their work. In fact, this material, which focuses on "the moral political and psychological training of pupils" (p.39), is full of quotations from Lenin's writings, the proceedings of the congresses of the CPSU, and speeches by Soviet generals. What is more surprising are the extremely frequent passages from literary works, especially poetry. For example, when learning the topic "Kalashnikov assault rifles and hand grenades", a military instructor was supposed to first emphasise that "one of the most important traditions of Soviet soldiers is the love for their weapons" and to recite a poem by a female veteran of the Great Patriotic War: "In this patch of earth, in this trench, nothing can replace/ me in the battle. My fellow assault rifle, we have the same part to play:/ My body makes your steel hot" (p. 51). In his analysis of similar works, Heller (1988) notes that "Soviet patriotism" was supposed to arouse erotic feelings among other things.

It is unclear whether any military instructor in a school in the LSSR dared to recite the poems and how Soviet teenagers reacted to them, as our research informants stated that they did not remember "that ideological nonsense". According to them, there were military instructors who tried to use speeches to "instil love for the Motherland and the Soviet Army", but most of them just used to give up. In the lessons of the stricter military instructors, pupils simply sat quietly while others did their "own business", such as copying maths homework from their classmates.

In any case, according to the informants, they knew how to ignore the propaganda things they were taught.

According to the informants, the most interesting and memorable lessons were when military instructors talked about their own experiences in the Soviet army, especially if their service was not only in the USSR but also, for example, in the German Democratic Republic or the Hungarian People's Republic.

Perhaps the most memorable activity was the disassembling of a Kalashnikov assault rifle. It was mentioned by almost all informants, both men and women, who talked about military training lessons:

I still remember: "Avtomat Kalashnikova prednaznachen dlia unichtozhenije zhivoj sili i tozhe dlia barbi protiv protivnika" [a phrase in Russian]. [A Kalashnikov assault rifle designed for the destruction of enemy manpower and for combat against an opponent]. Yes. We had to disassemble the assault rifle in seconds, to assemble it again, run there with gas masks. (I23);

They taught us how to assemble the assault rifle [laughs]. I was good at assembling, I liked it. <...>We even had a chance to shoot. We were sometimes taken to the basement of another school where there was a shooting-range. Our school did not have a cloakroom in the basement so there was no space for such a shooting-range. It was good to go somewhere, so something was slightly different... (I15).

The shooting-ranges were equipped with air rifles. The guys also had opportunities to shoot a Kalashnikov assault rifle:

We were just disassembling that weapon [at school]. And after the 10th grade they took us to an aerodrome, a military one. And to the shooting-range there. When I was firing those assault rifles, my ears were so stuffed up that I got scared there. I'm thinking, gosh, how am I going to serve in that army? (I5);

I also had to attend a military camp. In the summer after the 10th grade. We, the young boys, did everything they do in the army: we fired an assault rifle, threw grenades, and learnt to shoot. We were learning to be "cannon fodder" [laughs]. You run through that field of hummocks and bushes to that "defensive line".<...> But during that first run with the assault rifles, I already suspected that only a few of us would be able to run like that if there was an assault rifle on the other side. (I33)

However, not everyone was allowed to shoot, as it was stipulated that "the training of young people in the use of automatic rifles to fire live ammunition should only be carried out when there is the possibility of using the shooting ranges of the DOSAAF units and organisations that have the necessary equipment to ensure safe firing." (*Sovet ministrov SSSR, 1968*)

Getting out of the classroom and doing something at least a little different from the regular classroom, according to the informants, was what could have been seen as the positive side of IMT. Lessons and extracurricular activities of initial military training were also more valued in places where the choice of non-formal education activities was limited:

All those militarised activities again... It seemed strange, all that marching. But it wasn't terribly boring. And it was a kind of substitute for activities that we didn't have at all. There wasn't a broad range of any kind of after-school clubs, no music school... any other activities were not available either where you could somehow realize yourself in a different way... they were not available. Either you march, or you go to the yard and do nothing. That was the choice...(I2)

Some informants also liked the IMT lessons because they taught something useful: "But I liked the study subject itself. I also liked learning all the first aid things..." (I20). However, for many pupils it was more about the fact that "it was not a serious lesson. I liked it because it was more of relaxation". (I32)

Recommendations to improve pupils' initial military training emphasise that "initial military training lessons are not planned to be the last lessons in the timetable" (*Lietuvos TSR Švietimo ministerija, 1973, p.7*). As the recommendation is not detailed, it can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, assuming that the pupils may be tired during the last lesson, the aim is to improve the quality of the IMT lesson. However, it is likely that this recommendation was aimed at preventing absenteeism of pupils. As mentioned above, the study subject of IMT was not considered "serious", so pupils often ran away, especially if it was the last lesson:

You know, after that, it becomes a matter of prestige to run away from this lesson. Well... At that time we were such... people of collective consciousness. We did everything collectively in the herds. And if someone says, how long can you sit here if it's already lesson 6 or 7, then, well, we decide that we are not going to that lesson. (I5);  
The most important thing is that there are no "traitors" among us. Because already when they [the school administration] asked us why we were running away, we used to repeat like partisans: "Everybody ran and I ran too." And then what? We were showing that the principle of communist education, where the collective is above the individual, is very important to us. (I33)

Such evasions certainly did not protect pupils from punishment (usually public condemnation, shaming, writing notes in the diary and grade book, leaving after school, and sometimes inviting their parents to school), but at the same time, they illustrate perfectly well how the ideology pushed by the teachers could be used against them.

### **"Vojenruks" (military instructors) and Their Pupils**

The Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR "On Terms and Procedure for the Introduction of Initial Military Training" (*Sovet ministrov SSSR, 1968*) provided for "the introduction of the position of military instructor in <...> secondary general education schools". The Resolution also stipulated that "as a general rule, these positions should be filled by reserve officers with a higher or secondary military education". The Resolution shows that military training leaders in general education schools enjoyed certain privileges. They were paid at the level of the salaries of deputy principals for education, i.e. higher than those of ordinary teachers.

The duties of a military instructor included not only the delivery of military training classes, but also organization of extracurricular education, organization of various sport war games, forming the troops of young army and navy friends, consultations for other teachers and etc. Military instructors were also responsible for the room of "War Glory", e.g. a museum and a military class, which according to the authors of the Recommendation, should have become "the combat headquarters and the centre of military patriotic education of pupils" (Lietuvos TSR Švietimo ministerija, 1973, p. 5). Moreover, the above-mentioned Resolution of the USSR Council of Ministers (Sovet ministrov SSSR, 1968) stresses that military instructors should do this work without extra pay. This, as well as rather poor material conditions of some of the schools, probably contributed to the fact that the installation of the museum and the military classroom remained a "problematic issue" for a long time, which was continuously raised in the Soviet pedagogical press.

The relationship between military instructors and pupils was also a "problematic issue". Although the ideal image of the Soviet pupil was constructed on the model of a soldier (Kestere & Fernández González, 2021), the real pupils were not soldiers after all.

Following the example of the Russian SFSR, Barabanščikovas and Mizikovskis (1986), discussing the attitudes of senior pupils towards IMT lessons, identify six groups of young people who attend these lessons. Group 1 includes boys who are medically fit and willing to join the military school. Group 2 consists of boys who are medically suitable for military school but do not express a desire to join the armed forces. The third group consists of boys who are medically unfit for a military school, but who can serve in the Soviet Army. Boys not suitable for service in the Soviet Army due to their medical condition are attributed to Group 4. The fifth group includes girls who think that boys should choose a career as an army officer. And, finally, the sixth group is made up of girls who think that guys should be civilians. Based on their research, Barabanščikovas and Mizikovskis (1986) argue that the rate of typological grouping is more or less the same in all schools. The main group consists of boys who are medically suitable to join the military school. 10-15% of them want to go there. Approximately half of all girls are convinced that the best career for a boyfriend is that of a military officer. Although we do not have any quantitative survey data, some reflections of our informants suggest that this distribution is different in the Lithuanian SSR. The percentage of those who wanted to enrol in military schools or even join the Soviet Army could have been much lower. According to one informant, perhaps the most striking difference in pupils' attitudes towards the army was observed during an "international friendship" trip to Ukrainian SSR:

When we went to a school in Ukraine that our school was friends with just before the [Soviet] Union collapsed, I didn't understand why almost all the boys there dreamed of joining the military. For them, it was prestige. A dream. And only we, Lithuanians, didn't even think about military schools, we didn't want to join the army either. Only one of my classmates may have wanted to be a pilot. But a civilian pilot, not a military one. (I33)

Some military schools were indeed considered prestigious and were less accessible to young people from the provinces without influential relatives among the Soviet nomenklatura. However, service in the Soviet Army was treated as a duty for all boys who were medically fit

for it, and, as we have already discussed, they had heard about its compulsory fulfilment almost from the cradle. Moreover, in the various media, in the education system and even in the family, service in the Soviet Army was considered a school of masculinity. Boys are constantly reminded that if they do not serve in the army, they will not be considered real men. There were even 'Masculinity Lessons' in schools. The methodological aids in question provide a number of examples of such lessons. The main form of such lessons included stories by invited guests. According to the authors of the methodological guidelines, the topics of the stories depend primarily on the personality of the guest speaker. If a veteran of the Great Patriotic War is invited to the lesson, the topic can be "The Battle of Moscow and its significance". If the "veterans" have no experience in battles, they can speak on the topic "There is always a heroic deed to be accomplished in life". A young officer can choose the theme "A military officer as a heroic profession", a sergeant or a soldier - "An honourable duty" (Deminas et al, 1986, p.23). It is hard to say to what extent such stories "developed masculinity". It is likely that the men's domestic conversations over a bottle of vodka and jokes about those who had not served in the army may have had a much greater impact on the young men.

The girls were supposed to join the boys in learning "the basics of military affairs and civil defence", and separately learn first aid, where they were taught by female medics who had undergone a special programme. The Resolution states that "for this purpose, classes shall be divided into separate groups of boys and girls" (Sovet ministrov SSSR, 1968). This may actually raise several questions. One of them is why the boys were not taught even the basics of first aid? Were the two hours of Military Medical Training received at school sufficient in case of injury? Another question refers to the gender equality declared in the Soviet Union. Perhaps it was just "a smoke screen", as a number of studies of Soviet society show (Attwood, 1999; Kestere et al., 2020).

The stories of informants about the participation of girls in IMT lessons of IMT differ. Most of them stated that they did not notice any significant differences. Others said that, although the content of the teaching differed, they evaluated both girls and boys equally:

He assessed everyone equally harshly. During military training lessons, girls were not allowed to participate in shooting exercises. This restriction was due to the impracticality of wearing skirts, as they couldn't easily get on the ground, which would have been inconvenient and required clothing changes. Instead, their main role was to receive medical nurse training. (I7)

However, some stories of informants suggest that girls were singled out because "*they won't achieve anything, they won't join the army anyway*". Due to such an attitude, the "voenruks" were more lenient about girls' participation in IMT lessons:

The informant: For us girls it was just hi, hi, ha, ha. The guys took it more seriously. And we, girls, with jokes. The teacher used to let us go because his nerves couldn't take it.

The researcher: Did you have to take pass or fail?

The informant: No. He would write something himself. We girls just sat there; it was more the boys who did everything. (I27)

However, there were also military instructors who openly insulted or even harassed girls:

I did not like the teacher. Because he was.....Maybe at that time I would have never told t his, but today I can say that..... Firstly, he was a sexist. He would pick on girls more. <...> Various sexist remarks... Various sexist remarks about their figures... (I9)

However, boys also used to get into trouble for their appearance. Especially those who grew their hair longer than allowed:

It was the time that long hair was in fashion. And here military training... Your hair had to be beautiful short. So what? It was particularly important when it started. The lesson would begin with a military line-up. The pupil on duty had to report to the teacher that the whole class is lined up and that all was in order. The teacher tended to mock at us. In a military style. Oh, your hair has climbed the collar, hasn't it? Straight to the barber's! (I12);

Then slightly longer uncut hair was a signal of favour for hippies, who had just marched in the demonstration. This was the reason I was forced to leave the lesson to have a haircut. (I3)

Those who disobeyed and refused to cut their hair were subjected to a variety of measures, such as public ridicule, notes, parents being invited to school and sometimes even violence:

I remember an elder guy having too long hair. He received some remarks, but most probably did not react to them. I saw with my own eyes how they cut him in the back of the head right there with a pair of scissors. They just deliberately ravaged his hair to make him cut it. (I5)

Less athletic and weaker pupils were also bullied:

We went through real.....constant bullying <...> Not all teenagers mature in the same way <...>The teacher kept repeating that if you learnt the subject of military training bad, you were nobody. Practically, you were not a citizen and not a patriot, etc. (I10)

Another problem with the military instructors was that some of them did not know Lithuanian and spoke only Russian:

Once a week, both boys and girls had a military training lesson. It was delivered by a Russian officer. He spoke only Russian. As 48% of the population in Klaipėda were Russians... Those Russians did not bother to speak Lithuanian in principle. (I11)

Of course, the military one was in Russian, there was a specially sent army guy, he was very serious and was drilling everyone. (I15)

Article 34 of the Constitution of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (1978) proclaimed that the rights of the citizens of the LSSR are guaranteed by "the policy of full development of all nations and nationalities of the USSR and the policy of rapprochement, the education of the citizens in the spirit of Soviet patriotism and socialist internationalism, and the possibility of using the mother tongue and the languages of the other nations of the USSR". In practice, the "language of the other nations of the USSR" was exclusively the Russian language, which was



the official language of the Soviet Union. Although in Lithuanian schools, all lessons, except for Russian and foreign languages, had to be taught in Lithuanian, this rule did not seem to apply to the military instructors. And the fact that Russian was the lingua franca seemed self-evident. However, this did not mean equally good Russian language skills all over the country. This was due to a variety of reasons: the flaws in the Soviet bureaucratic system, the lack of competent officials, the shortage of qualified teachers, insufficient funding for school education, etc. Geographic factors also played a role (Silova & Palandjian, 2018). Our study shows that during IMT lessons pupils with poorer Russian language skills faced challenges not only in communication but also in their relationships with military instructors. Some of them viewed such pupils with undisguised contempt.

It was also an open secret, according to the informants, that several "vojenruks" had problems with alcohol consumption. Some of them, plagued by hangovers, were angry "*like beasts, chasing everyone*" (I21), while some others were not ashamed to drink in front of the pupils or even with them:

There were lessons of military training but in the final years of school, the teacher of military training was as simple as three kopecks. The teacher of physical education was the same. So we had some business... They would send me to bring something, I would bring this something and then the three of us would sit down and drink it. Such was life. (I5)

In both cases, the behaviour of the military instructors was unprofessional. Although several informants remembered their military instructors quite warmly as good people and interesting personalities, the following generalisation would be appropriate for most of the "vojenruks":

There were good and bad teachers, but they all had studied some kind of pedagogy.... Teachers of military training were obviously without such education. (I10)

The "lack of pedagogical experience and methodological knowledge" among IMT instructors was officially acknowledged (Svetlavičius, 1968, p.2). According to Macintyre (1993) in the late 1970s, the Soviet Ministry of Education complained that one-third of the military instructors were reserve sergeants and soldiers and some of them had only a school-leaving certificate. To improve the situation, "the Ministry of Defence established short courses to make these instructors reserve officers and the Ministry of Education established short courses to certify them with teacher training. In addition, the long-term solution led to the establishment of actual programmes in pedagogical institutes to train military instructors for this programme in the school systems by the Ministries of Education and Defence" (p. 33-34).

Petronis (1970), Major General of the Military Commissar of the LSSR, who wrote about the achievements and challenges of initial military training at school, pointed out that military instructors need not only knowledge, but also support from the administration of the school and from the other teachers, and the latter, unfortunately, was not always received. The Military Commissioner is annoyed that there are still "pacifist teachers" who are not in favour of either IMT lessons or military instructors. According to Major General, "these pacifist sentiments, although few in number but actually existing, are supported and encouraged in every way by ideological subversives from abroad". In addition, some school principals think that "military

training at school is not based on legal necessity, but only on the wishes of the military instructor". These attitudes, according to Petronis, should be changed: "Those who see military patriotic upbringing as a temporary campaign, or who see elements of militarisation of the school in it, which are supposedly contrary to our struggle for peace, to the policy of peaceful co-existence, are wrong. This view is fundamentally incorrect" (p.1).

From a historical perspective, the USSR Military Commissar was only partially right. IMT was present in schools of the LSSR until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. However, our research shows that its quality was not very good throughout this period. And it was only on various occasions that it became more of a concern: before the commemoration of 23 February (the Day of the Soviet Army and Navy), 9 May (Victory Day), or some other dates, such as the anniversary of the October Socialist Revolution, as well as after the ordinary congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

As Dunstan (1977) notes, while analysing Soviet education, the cognitive and the affective aspects are more than usually difficult to disentwine because "one is continually reminded that the school's task is not only to transmit up-to-date knowledge, but also simultaneously to instil a purposeful attitude to the process of receiving it, both for the present and for the future" (p. 111). This is not an easy objective to achieve when both the knowledge conveyed and the emotional load that accompany it have been contradictory, even paradoxical, throughout the Soviet era. The concept of "patriotism", which combined Soviet internationalism and militarism, contained both love for the "imaginary Soviet homeland" (Bezrogov, 2012) and hatred for the equally "imaginary West", which, due to the Iron Curtain, Soviet pupils had not only not seen but also had not expected to see. Although, as Heller (1988) points out when discussing the formation of the "New Soviet Man", hatred was "cultivated as an essential, obligatory quality in a Soviet person" (p. 128), the official hatred of "US imperialism" in Lithuanian SSR schools was outweighed by young people's interest in Western culture (music, books). A pair of real American jeans was the most coveted item, the most desired thing among Soviet adolescents and young people. Jeans were perceived not only as a luxury item, but also as a symbol of the Western lifestyle and the "spirit of freedom" (Verdery, 1996). As Kešterė and Fernández González (2021), who have analysed the Latvian context as part of the same project, argue, "given how scrupulously the school observed the official Soviet discourse, this discrepancy between propaganda and school practice is striking." (p. 26).

Based on the findings of a study in Lithuania, the "scrupulousness" of schools can be questioned. Practical subjects such as weapons training, tactical training, military topography, first aid, etc., which were included in the content of the IMT and implemented in schools to a smaller or larger extent, and were perceived by the participants of our study as "quite interesting", "brightening up the dullness of the Soviet schools". However, the compulsory theoretical-ideological - part of the IMT was seen as "total nonsense". From some of the answers it appears that this was the opinion not only of the Soviet school pupils themselves but also of some of the teachers, or even of the same military instructors, who would monotonously

read the materials of the CPSU congresses or Lenin's quotations, which were allegedly meant to motivate, "ignite" the pupils, or who would even skip them altogether.

As our research shows, even the formal requirements for the organisation of IMT were not always met in schools in the Lithuanian SSR. Although, according to the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR (1968), it was compulsory to increase the number of lessons by two hours per week in grades 10-11 and to allocate them to initial military training. The informants in our study mentioned having only one initial military training lesson per week. Some of them claim to have had only a short IMT course, because they attended school at the time when vocational guidance and initial practical training were being introduced in schools at a particularly high level. As a result, all pupils in the upper grades were sent not to shooting ranges, but to factories, collective farm workshops and farms.

Both published sources and informants' stories show that the material base for initial military training was also a significant challenge: schools lacked facilities for IMT, or even premises, and many of them were not equipped according to requirements.

However, perhaps the biggest problem facing schools in the LSSR was the lack of qualified military instructors capable of working with children. Most of them did not have pedagogical education or suffered from alcohol abuse problems. The informants also spoke about sexual harassment, psychological and physical violence, and lack of knowledge of the Lithuanian language, which prevented military instructors from communicating effectively with pupils in Lithuanian schools. Understandably, the anti-pedagogical behaviour of the military instructors did not enhance their authority or stimulate interest in the study subject.

Although, as Vaiseta (2014) points out, ideology works even when it is not believed in, we consider that it is limited if it does not find the right resonance in practice. Therefore, we are more inclined to agree with Macintyre (1993) that the success of military-patriotic education programmes is questionable and obviously, IMT "did not develop Soviet patriotism and a desire to defend the socialist motherland in all young people" ( p.5).

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