

CONCEPTUALIZATION, FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE MILITARY PROFESSION*

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Abstrakt: The aim of this paper is to present the conceptualization of the military profession — from traditional concepts identifying the profession with the officer corps, through the development of the concept based on the application of the general systems (complexity) theory and the integration of profession and organization into a single whole, characterized by elements of a complex system and strong internal and environmental interactions, to the integral comprehension of the profession encompassing the entire composition of the armed forces. Despite the evolution and diversity of these concepts, the foundation of the military profession rests on distinct expertise, responsibility towards the organization and the state as its client, and institutional cohesion within the respective organization. The responsibility of the military profession arises from laws, regulations, and organizational ethical codes, while it also inherently includes the jurisdiction of society over the profession due to its necessity and essential social importance. By possessing specific knowledge and skills and forming its own organization — the army as an institution — the military profession establishes exclusive jurisdiction over its domain thus attaining institutional autonomy. However, increased involvement and growing influence of civilian personnel in the military sphere, redistribution of military tasks to private security companies, the use of military potential instead of diplomatic means, financial restrictions, the expansion of non-military demands, and similar negative influences have led to a loss of control over its domain, reduction of autonomy, and de-professionalization. On the other hand, due to the changing nature of modern warfare, the military profession is expected

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to acquire a range of new knowledge and skills, which has led to the delegation of certain military activities to private companies..

Keywords: military profession, traditional concept, complexity theory, expertise, responsibility, institutional cohesion, morality, state, physiognomy of modern warfare, transformation of the profession

Introduction

Based on an analysis of the existing literature and official documents of various states, this paper consists of interconnected and logically structured sections: the conceptualization and fundamental characteristics of the profession and the military profession, and the trends in changes affecting the military profession in contemporary conditions. The profession, as a sociological category according to the traditional concept developed in the second half of the twentieth century, is characterized by social closure, authority, monopoly, legitimacy, and dominance — meaning it must possess corresponding specific knowledge acquired through higher education, which ensures its jurisdiction over the professional domain; it must exhibit a certain level of responsibility toward the profession and the state; and it must maintain a high degree of institutional cohesion within the community the profession establishes, sustains, and improves (Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960; Harries&Jenkins, 1990; Alagappa, 2001). With the development of the general systems theory (complexity theory), the profession is analyzed as an integral element of its respective community (organization) as a system, where system complexity arises from a large number of nonlinear interactions within the system and with its changing environment. This allows the profession to be decomposed into variants and analyzed in relation to society and other professions, that is, as a subsystem of the state (Abbott, 1988; Burk, 2002; Đukić & Andrejić, 2022; Snider & Watkins, 2002; U.S. Department of the Army, 2015; Pekkola et al., 2018; Lacquement & Galvin, 2022; Monahov, 2022).

Starting from the general characteristics of the profession according to different concepts, the second part of the paper elaborates on approaches to the conceptualization of the military profession. The discussion covers concepts ranging from those that define the military profession as composed of officers associated with armed forces, to the integral consideration of the military profession and the organization — the army as a whole (Snider & Watkins, 2002; U.S. Department of the Army, 2015). A new concept of the military profession, although not universally accepted, refers to the total defense system of Sweden, in which all members of the armed forces directly or indirectly connected to armed forces are regarded as belonging to the military profession, regardless of whether they are employed in the defense system (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016; Berndtsson, 2019). The third part of the paper examines changes within society and the military as causes of the partial loss of the military profession's exclusive jurisdiction and autonomy, as well as its de-professionalization under the influence of the state apparatus, greater civilian involvement in the military sphere, and the strengthening of private security companies. Since the development of mili-

tary educational institutions also unfolds within and under the influence of society and power structures, changes have occurred in models of military education. Traditional military colleges, which used to create the military profession, have been replaced by universities of defense or security, where future members of a new profession — that of national security — are educated. This trend weakens professionalism and the military profession as a sociological category (Karlova, 2015; Libel, 2019; Lacquement & Galvin, 2022).

Profession – The concept and fundamental characteristics

The sociology of professions, sometimes referred to as the theory of professions, is well established in the literature. Although the roots of studies on professions can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, the key development of the sociology of professions occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. The early classical studies examined professions in the context of occupations, while later research shifted its focus to the relationships between professions and their clients, emphasizing analyses of professional power and monopoly. The concept employed was that a profession is characterized by social closure, authority, monopoly, legitimacy, and dominance. Samuel Huntington (1957) defined a profession as a specific type of functional group with highly specialized characteristics, among which three are particularly significant: (a) there are defined requirements and criteria for unique expertise in a given field; (b) there exists a degree of responsibility for the performance of professional duties; and c) there is a high level of corporateness, or a unifying sense of belonging among practitioners within the field (Huntington, 1957, p. 49).

Professional knowledge or expertise consists of broad education acquired in general educational institutions of society, as well as specialized knowledge and skills obtained exclusively within professional institutions. Acquiring expertise requires constant interaction between theory and practice, that is, long-term education and experience. By introducing responsibility as an essential characteristic of a profession, the jurisdiction of society over the profession is established. In other words, a profession performs its functions for the benefit of society or the state, holds significant social importance, and is necessary for the functioning of society. The third characteristic of a profession is corporateness—the unity and awareness among its members that they belong to a distinct body, that is, an organization with formal standards of professional competence, authority, and mechanisms for their implementation (Alagappa, 2001, p. 3).

With the development of general systems theory (complexity theory), when the state is viewed as a multilayered and multisectoral complex system composed of numerous subsystems that are hierarchically and/or horizontally connected, the profession is considered within its organizational context and in relation to the state. In this sense, both the profession and the organization are viewed integrally and are linked with the dynamic environment with which they engage in nonlinear interactions and by which they are influenced—whether this environment is the state, its subsystems, or the broader regional or global context. From this standpoint, Andrew Abbott's (1988)

holistic framework encompasses the analysis of organizations and professions within the broader social system (the state) and examines the dynamic relationships among various groups and professions and their jurisdictions. Constantly changing environments—technology, social relations, and cultural trends—exert strong influences on areas of expertise, that is, on their acquisition, maintenance, and development over time. Unlike traditional studies, the profession is viewed as an exclusive occupation that applies somewhat abstract knowledge to individual cases. It is characterized by the possession of a body of expert knowledge by individuals, forming the basis of an occupation that enables its members to claim and exercise exclusive control over certain work activities (Abbott, 1988, p. 8). Similarly, James Burk defined a profession as an occupation of relatively high status whose members apply abstract knowledge to solve problems in a specific domain of activity. According to Burk, a profession comprises three interdependent constitutive elements: (a) abstract knowledge acquired through higher education; (b) jurisdictional authority—control over the domain of activities in which this knowledge or expertise is applied; and (c) legitimacy—the correspondence between forms of professional knowledge, firmly held beliefs, and perceptions of credibility relative to other professions or occupations. The presence of these three elements within a given field constitutes the source of professional status—defining a profession and distinguishing it from a mere occupation (Burk, 2002, pp. 40–44). For an occupation to attain the status of a profession, according to Borislav Grozdić (2010, pp. 280–281), the following conditions must be met: (a) a developed fundamental theory and techniques forming the basis for professional practice (possession of higher education); (b) monopoly over professional expertise; (c) public recognition; (d) professional organization; (e) established professional ethics; and (f) a distinct professional jargon. Evaluating or assessing the existence of these conditions (the parameters of a profession) allows for a comprehensive understanding of the nature and level of professionalization. It is evident that these parameters represent only more developed and elaborated versions of Burk's constitutive elements of a profession. Therefore, they are easier to identify and evaluate as indicators of the existence and strength of a profession as a social category.

Established and enduring professions are characterized by a unique and cohesive professional identity; they possess and continuously develop specialized knowledge essential to societal needs; they engage in the creation and management of organizations (including the administration of bureaucratic structures within them); they ensure the development of future professionals; and they responsibly use societal resources—personnel, finances, and time. For professions in the public sector, it is also essential to maintain the trust of the general population, which is particularly characteristic of the military profession (Lacquement & Galvin, 2022, pp. 7–8). Thus, an ideal type of profession can be conceptualized as a relatively homogeneous group whose members share a common identity, values, roles, and interests, and whose behavior is governed by widely accepted norms and codes of conduct (Harries-Jenkins, 1990, p. 119). A profession differs from an occupation in that it possesses a theoretical body of knowledge that serves as the foundation for practitioners' practical skills. By possessing knowledge and skills unique to their field and forming their own organization (community), an effective professional monopoly is established (Libel, 2019, p. 63).

Members of a profession seek to maintain this monopolistic status within society or the state through various means, such as controlling recruitment and selection processes and adhering to established criteria for advancement along the hierarchical structure within the organization. Professions are valuable to the state because they provide services in areas essential to society—services that the free market cannot easily supply—which grants them a certain degree of autonomy.

The U.S. Army defines a profession as a trusted, disciplined, and relatively autonomous occupation (calling) whose members: provide a unique and vital service to society by developing and applying expert knowledge, often in new and unpredictable situations; ensure public trust through ethical, efficient, and effective practice—where the ethics of the profession establish moral principles for conducting specific activities on behalf of society and reflect laws, values, and beliefs deeply rooted in the profession's culture; establish and maintain discipline and standards of their skills and science, including responsibility for their own professional development; and possess significant autonomy and freedom of judgment in performing their professional duties on behalf of society (U.S. Department of the Army, 2015, ch. 1, pp. 1–2). In the works of Russian scholars, the concept of profession is systematized along several lines: it represents a type of labor activity that carries social significance and arises from the division of labor; it requires the development of specific qualities among individuals who belong to it; and it implies the affiliation of individuals with a distinct group. Professional activity is understood as the principal form of social existence, self-expression, and personal development (Monahov, 2022, pp. 11–12).

In the legislation of the Republic of Serbia, the meaning of the term profession of special interest to the Republic of Serbia is defined (without specifying particular professions, the lists of which are determined by the Government). However, this definition may be considered authoritative for defining the concept of a profession in general. A profession of special interest is a professional activity or a set of professional activities established by law, for which access to and performance of the activity, as well as the manner of its execution, are conditioned upon the possession of specific professional qualifications prescribed by law and by-laws. In relation to the professional competence of members of a profession, the law also defines professional competence as an integrated set of knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes that enable an individual to perform activities within a given profession effectively (Law on Professions, 2018, Art. 2, items 1–5). In the broadest sense, competence represents an individual's ability to meet the requirements of a given job position and to successfully perform specific work tasks. The competency profile of a particular profession constitutes an extension of the qualification framework and is based on identifying the type and level of competencies required for performing certain tasks or on determining the level of knowledge and abilities that an individual must possess (Campion et al., 2011, p. 228).

Conceptualization of the Military Profession

The origins of the military profession are considered to be directly connected to the emergence of national standing armies, which were based on the compulsory military training of able-bodied citizens. Through this model, national armies became more extensive and included trained personnel who formed a reserve force in times of war. During the nineteenth century, European states—following the model of the national standing army developed during the French bourgeois revolution (1789–1799) and the Napoleonic Wars (1804–1815)—undertook reforms of their national armies despite the unsuccessful campaigns of both French military epochs and the defeats suffered. The armies abandoned the system of employing professional mercenaries, which had previously been predominant, and established a new model founded on compulsory military service for able-bodied citizens over a specified period of time. The duration of service within the status *militaris* depended on the time required for military training as well as on the designed organizational structure and the desired size of the active armed forces. To form large wartime armies, an active military core (professional officers and non-commissioned officers) was maintained, supported by a number of soldiers in temporary military status (training or unit readiness maintenance), while the reserve component was activated through the mobilization process. Such a personnel organization combined professionalism—embodied in officers and non-commissioned officers who secured state salaries and social prestige—with the training of citizens for military service, which was also regarded as a civic duty (Starčević & Blagojević, 2020, pp. 86–87).

The definition of the military profession, which is today regarded as a traditional concept, is associated with the works of Huntington (1957), Morris Janowitz (1960), and other scholars of the sociology of the military profession, produced at the beginning of the Cold War period, when the overall geopolitical situation became increasingly complex due to the confrontation between the USSR and the United States. The analysis of the military profession was focused on the emergence of the officer corps as a professional body during the nineteenth century, a period in which states increasingly relied on the citizen-soldier, who was called to arms in times of crisis. This development created a growing need for experienced and capable leaders to replace officers drawn from the aristocracy. The subsequent removal of class-based criteria and the introduction of educational and professional requirements for service led to the establishment of the professional status of the officer.

From Huntington's definition of a profession as a functional group characterized by expertise, responsibility, and corporateness, the characteristics of the military profession have also been derived: expertise—the special skill of military officers is the management, functioning, and control of a human organization whose primary function is the application of violence (coercion), and it can be acquired only through prolonged education and experience; social responsibility—the military security of its client—society (the state), where the military profession is monopolized by the state; corporateness—the members of the profession are part of a unified community. The military as a community shares a collective sense of responsibility, mutual educational experiences, and togetherness in work, which requires officers to master a body of

abstract professional knowledge and to understand the moral, ethical, political, and social contexts in which military actions take place, as well as to be proficient in leadership, morality, and the maintenance of physical fitness. Only those officers who manage military force (coercion) belong to the military profession, while other members of the organization (non-commissioned officers, soldiers) must be specialists in the application of means of coercion (Huntington, 1957, pp. 8–15). The orientation toward practitioners led to the view that only that part of the officer corps directly engaged in the execution of combat tasks belongs to the military profession, because expertise is equated with the management of military force, thereby neglecting those officers who are not involved in combat tasks. In the context of the relationship between the state and military professionalism, the importance of political influence on the military profession is emphasized through its creation and control over the armed forces (Huntington, 1957, p. 84). With such positions, the military profession is placed under the jurisdiction of the state, which creates it (as well as the entire military) and, through control, directs it toward functions within the legal framework and toward the preservation of national values and the realization of national interests. In this way, the military's excessive influence on political events is simultaneously limited and, ultimately, the violent seizure of power in the state by carrying out a coup is prevented.

In the works of Huntington and Janowitz, the concept of the military profession is identified with the professionalism of officers as a vital component of the armed forces: officers are trained in leadership, in possessing and transferring professional expertise, in adopting a military way of thinking, and in developing military ethics. Thus, the military profession was established as a unique profession in which the professional soldier is an expert in warfare and in the organized use of coercion (Janowitz, 1960, p. 15). Due to technological advancement and democratic processes that make the military organization more open to society, Janowitz includes in the military elite not only officers with combat competence but also managerial officers and officers who serve as a link with civilian society. Among most researchers of this period, the officer corps was regarded as the only typical representative of the military profession. Some scholars attempted to broaden the conceptual foundation and avoid a narrow approach, starting from the premise that the military is not merely a profession but represents a unique example of the merging of a profession and an organization—a notion that forms the basis of the concepts proposed by Burk and Abbott. This conceptualization extends the focus of research to the entire composition or establishment, thereby combining two themes—profession and organization—and identifying the armed forces as highly structured, purposeful, and powerful bureaucratic organizations with a well-developed system of rules and regulations (Harries-Jenkins, 1990, pp. 121–124).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, interest in studying the military profession within the broader framework of research on the military organization increased. Research on the military profession in the United States, particularly after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is based on traditional concepts and the research works developed from them, yet it has been significantly expanded. Building on Abbott's holistic approach to the military, four categories of military professional expertise have been identified: military-technical, moral-ethical, humanistic, and political-cultural. According to the type of expertise, the military profession is divided into three branches—land,

air, and naval—while other auxiliary services, agencies, and communities within the armed forces are not considered (Snider & Watkins, 2002, pp. 6–14). Later, in 2015, the U.S. Army defined the military profession as encompassing the entire composition of the armed forces, including veterans, viewing it as a single vocation (occupation) of certified experts dedicated to the ethical creation, generation, support, and application of military force, serving under civilian authority and entrusted with the defense of the Constitution, as well as the rights and interests of the American people. The essential characteristics of the military profession were defined as: trust, honorable service, military expertise, stewardship of the profession (loyalty, responsibility, advancement, and strengthening of the profession), and esprit de corps (unity, common interest, and collective commitment) (U.S. Department of the Army, 2015, ch. 1, p. 1). In addition to the United States, other countries—such as Canada and Sweden—have adopted official policies defining the military profession. Despite the evident differences among these definitions, descriptions of the military profession share three key parameters: professional expertise, jurisdiction, and legitimacy. Sweden considers members of the military profession to include both military and civilian personnel employed within the armed forces and, more broadly, beyond them, whereas Canada includes only uniformed personnel (Berndtsson, 2019, p. 193).

The broadest concept of the military profession is represented in the Swedish Armed Forces, where the foundation for its definition is based on the defense function of society and the conduct of armed forces as its essential content. In Sweden, the military profession encompasses all members of the armed forces who are directly or indirectly connected with armed forces: “All members of the Armed Forces—military and civilian employees, part-time employees, reservists, members of the Home Guard, and volunteers—are not only connected by a common goal or activity but are also members of our military profession” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016, p. 4). This definition includes significantly broader structures of the armed forces than those established in the U.S. Army, since the organization of the defense system is based on the concept of total defense (which has not been changed even after Sweden’s accession to NATO). The military profession is understood as a unifying factor around which collective identity and unity in fulfilling the defense function are built. Within this framework, the officer profession is specifically distinguished, along with a narrower focus on its particular expertise (rooted in the management of military force), jurisdiction (the conduct of military operations), and legitimacy (the fulfillment of society’s professional normative expectations). Furthermore, emphasis is placed on the importance of formal theoretical—scientific and practical—knowledge of officers and their responsibility for the development of the profession (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016, pp. 4–28). Through such a concept, a de-professionalization of the military profession, as defined by traditional concepts (the officer profession), takes place, aiming to align the concept of the profession with that of the total defense organization. This concept is new and can be interpreted as a reflection of the total defense policy and a renewal of the understanding of the importance of territorial defense units (alongside operational units), which are engaged at the regional level—representing an effort toward the mass mobilization of defense and the strengthening of its cohesion (Đukić & Vuletić, 2023, pp. 630–631).

In Russian literature, the characteristics of the military profession are based on general views regarding the concept of a profession: the performance of socially significant activity, the possession of specific qualities and expertise, and belonging to a professional group (organization). Nevertheless, there are significant differences in the interpretation of the military profession. Most researchers begin from the basic function of the armed forces—the preparation for defense and the execution of the defense of the state—whereby the military profession encompasses a large set of rather diverse official duties. It is generally held that the military profession represents a specific type of professional activity and constitutes a vital form of social activity directed toward socio-political, military-legal, spiritual, and military-professional spheres. Military professionalism requires particular knowledge, skills, and abilities in order to perform organizational and managerial, military-technical, communicative, and military-pedagogical functions (Monahov, 2022, pp. 12–13). Most researchers in Russia, unlike the views prevalent in the armed forces of the United States, Sweden, and Canada, hold that the military profession consists of officers, with an implicit division based on education and type of activity into: true officers—those who have graduated from military academies and are directly involved in combat training, weapons handling, and command (the traditional ideal of the military profession)—and other officers, who have attained rank on the basis of university degrees from civilian institutions (physicians, economists, psychologists, engineers, and technical specialists) (Karlova, 2015, pp. 69–72). However, in public proclamations and official documents of the Armed Forces of Russia, there is a growing tendency to generalize the concept of the military profession and to view it as encompassing the entire professional personnel of the armed forces (officers, non-commissioned officers, professional soldiers, and civilian employees). This represents a shift away from the traditional concept of the military profession, linking it more closely with the organization itself—the armed forces.

Based on the analysis of the concepts of the military profession and contemporary trends in its understanding, the military profession in Serbia possesses the essential characteristics of a profession according to the traditional concept, but with a strong connection to the organization (the Armed Forces and the Ministry), and, within the state, with other professions and state institutions. The Law on the Serbian Armed Forces defines professional members of the Serbian Armed Forces as professional military personnel (officers, non-commissioned officers, and professional soldiers) and civilian personnel serving in the Serbian Armed Forces (military officials and military employees), that is, individuals employed in the Serbian Armed Forces (Law on the Serbian Armed Forces, 2007, Arts. 8–10). However, the same law distinguishes between the concepts of professional military service, which applies to professional military personnel (Arts. 39–119), and service of civilian personnel in the Serbian Armed Forces, which applies to civilian employees (Arts. 120–134). Membership in the military profession in Serbia should encompass professional military personnel (officers, non-commissioned officers, and professional soldiers) employed in both the Serbian Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defense.

Transformation of the Military Profession

The armies of Western European states underwent dramatic changes in the 1990s, following the end of the Cold War. These changes primarily involved reductions in personnel and restrictions on funding, resulting from reliance on the collective security system—NATO—and from the assessment that the threat of armed conflict with a weakened Russia had ceased. After the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine, several states sought to accelerate reforms of their armed forces, accompanied by a significant increase in funding for defense capabilities and the military industry. Concurrently, with the abolition of conscription as a system of recruitment and the transition to voluntary military training, along with reductions in defense funding caused by lower taxes and the partial redirection of financial resources toward other social needs and welfare programs (the so-called “peace dividends”), the social status of the armed forces also declined. As a result of changes in military missions and the growing orientation toward international peacekeeping operations, the armed forces of Western European states increasingly relied on private security forces (private military companies). A general trend in civil-military relations has also been the weakening of the military component's influence and the strengthening of the political component in decision-making within the military sphere. Changes of government can lead to shifts in defense policy in individual states, which in turn cause disruptions within their defense systems.

It is considered that the profession, as a category denoting the affiliation of individuals with specific characteristics, has entered a state of crisis in post-industrial society as a result of various forms of competition, which also applies to the military profession. Private military and security companies are increasingly emerging as providers of security and military services. This trend, and the creation of a market for force, is partly the result of the growing demand for such services that the armed forces are unable to meet, leading a large number of security and military personnel to find their way into the globalized private security industry. At the same time, military organizations are increasingly applying the principles of outsourcing—delegating specific tasks to others or using external resources. The military profession views competition as a consequence of the globalization of society, since new occupations strive to gain legitimacy over areas of professional work previously performed by military personnel (Berndtsson, 2019, pp. 190–191). The inclusion of an increasing number of actors in military operations undermines the unique expertise traditionally possessed by the military profession, thereby diminishing its professional status and transforming the perception of the military as an institution holding the monopoly on the use of armed force.

Certain sociological studies that analyze specific aspects of the military profession introduce the term sociology of security expertise instead of the term sociology of the military profession as their analytical framework (Libel, 2019, pp. 62–63). Although these terms share a common foundation based on professional knowledge, they also possess distinctive features due to the comprehensive changes in the relationships between experts and the societies in which they perform their functions. These transformations have also led to changes within military education institutions across Euro-

pean countries. There have been shifts in the models of military education: traditional military colleges, which once produced the military profession, have been replaced by universities of defense or security, where the focus of education is placed on the professional expertise of future personnel, while not neglecting the domain of general academic education. The development of military educational institutions occurs within broader societal spheres and structures of power, which implies that the social transformation of the military profession and professionalism cannot be analyzed solely within the framework of the military organization—through aspects such as expertise, patriotism, command, and soldier training—but must also take into account the fact that the armed forces themselves are being reshaped within broader social transformations.

The engagement of private military companies represents a continuation of the trend toward outsourcing and the demilitarization of military functions, a phenomenon characteristic of both Russian and Western armed forces, particularly the American and British ones (Karlova, 2015, pp. 74–75). Despite this, the armed forces of Western European states have not lost their monopoly on the use of force, yet their educational systems are increasingly adapting to broader social interests and partially sharing roles in the field of security with other social actors. As the security policies of NATO member states move away from an exclusive reliance on military power, the spectrum of actors and professions exercising jurisdiction in the field of security expands. This results in a reduction of the influence of the military profession, with the potential emergence of a new profession of national security. This new profession is expected to possess a critical and creative approach to security issues, the ability to plan and manage interagency operations, the capacity to lead security teams, communication skills, and other similar competencies (Libel, 2019, p. 80).

The Study on the Future of the U.S. Military Profession (Lacquement & Galvin, 2022), which equates the composition of the armed forces with the military profession, identifies a lack of a clear stance on the essence or character of the military profession—its professional knowledge, human expertise, and practical jurisdiction. The authors argue that public trust in the military has been undermined by ongoing scandals (sexual harassment and assaults), the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the misuse of the profession, the inadequate allocation of national resources, unprofessional conduct, persistent civil-military tensions, and other strategic failures. As a result, both the competence and responsibility of the U.S. Armed Forces have been called into question. The main issues confronting the military profession in the United States include: changes in the character of war (including new technologies and the cyber domain); the broad applicability of military capabilities (instead of diplomatic activities), which can lead to the militarization of foreign policy and the inappropriate use of military forces; questions regarding the (in)effectiveness of recent military conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria (despite the strong operational and tactical performance of the U.S. Army); pressures to adapt to and align with new social norms such as diversity and inclusion; the risks of politicization of the armed forces and the growing public rejection of professionalism, which has accelerated since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Lacquement & Galvin, 2022, pp. 1–5). Due to the complexity of the organization of the U.S. Armed Forces and the participation of military per-

sonnel in a wide range of activities—both military and non-military—the requirements for professional expertise within the military profession have expanded into domains that traditionally lie outside the military sphere. Therefore, the military is increasingly assessing which activities should remain within its purview and which should be delegated to other organizations, in order to keep the military profession focused on its core missions and to prevent the accumulation of demands for expertise across diverse areas (Lacquement & Galvin, 2022, pp. vii–viii).

The expansion of a market-based approach to assessing the effectiveness of military activities, the reduction of competencies among the military elite at the top of the hierarchical structure of the armed forces, the decreasing number of autonomous decisions it can make, and the influx of civilian values into the traditional military-patriotic ethos of the military profession (character, expertise, reliability, and reputation) all indicate a general trend of the weakening of the social influence of the military profession. In the past, military leaders independently determined the size, structure, and armament of their units, whereas today this is impossible in any modern army. Defense systems are negatively affected by the various defense policies of political parties that periodically alternate in power, where, for example, in some Western European countries, even membership in NATO is questioned. Negative effects on the preservation of the military profession are also manifested through: the intrusion of civilian authorities into the sphere of expertise and activities of the military profession; the strengthening of the influence of civilian personnel and military personnel with civilian education within the armed forces; the redistribution of military tasks to companies outside the military organization, leading to the weakening of the autonomy of the military profession; the limitation of necessary resources for organizational and professional development by the state; the expansion of demands to include non-military activities in society (security, natural disasters, accidents, etc.); and other similar external negative influences. Within the military sphere, due to the inclusion of the private sector, a new division of military tasks between military and other structures is taking place, causing the military profession to lose control over its own domain of activity. The development and strengthening of the bureaucratic apparatus within the military organization, and the related approaches to ensuring loyalty to the authorities, diminish the significance and values of the military profession—whether understood according to the traditional concept (the officer corps) or in line with newer concepts that integrate the profession with the military as an organization, identifying it with military service itself.

Conclusion

The military profession, like any other established profession—regardless of whether its definition is based on the classical concept or on the theory of complexity—is fundamentally characterized by specific expertise within its field, responsibility toward the society in which it operates, and corporateness, understood as a shared sense of belonging among its members within the military organization. As stated in sources from the United States, the essential characteristics of the mil-

itary profession are trust, honorable service, military expertise, stewardship of the profession (loyalty, responsibility, improvement, and strengthening of the profession), and esprit de corps (unity, common interest, and collective commitment). Based on a holistic approach and the significance of the military profession for the state, four categories of military professional expertise can be identified: military-technical, moral-ethical, humanistic, and political-cultural expertise. Similar perspectives on the military profession can be found in Russian literature, where the definition of the military profession is derived from the fundamental function of the armed forces—the preparation for and execution of the defense of the state—whereby the military profession encompasses a broad range of activities within the socio-political, military-legal, spiritual, and military-professional domains. In contemporary conditions, characterized by the general decline of professionalism, most definitions of the military profession are no longer based primarily on the professionalism of officers. Instead, these concepts are broadened and directed toward the organization—the military itself, with members of the profession generally considered to be active (employed) military personnel—officers, non-commissioned officers, and professional soldiers. In accordance with legal provisions and the aforementioned foreign concepts, members of the military profession in Serbia should be considered to include professional military personnel (officers, non-commissioned officers, and professional soldiers) employed in the Serbian Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defense, including those employed in enterprises that are part of the Defense Industry Group.

Contemporary trends in the understanding of the military profession are oriented toward the concept of management within the armed forces, or more broadly, management within the field of security. This trend differs from the views established in the early works of researchers of the military profession, when the officer corps was distinguished as a separate group connected by professional activity and expertise. This shift has been influenced, among other factors, by significant changes in Western European armies following the end of the Cold War and the weakening of the Russian economy and military—indeed, of Russia itself as a potential adversary—as well as by internal social transformations and changes within security sectors, marked by the growing influence of private security companies. With the increasing number of actors involved in military operations, the unique professional expertise traditionally held by the military profession has been undermined, thereby diminishing its status as a profession and altering the understanding of the military as an institution possessing a monopoly on the use of armed force. The strengthening of the influence of the civilian state sector in the sphere of military activities, the weakening of monopoly and autonomy in key military domains, the recruitment of personnel into active military service who possess civilian education and insufficient military expertise, limited funding and the reduction of other resources—primarily material and human—and the broadening of demands for the performance of non-military activities are only some of the factors contributing to the de-professionalization and weakening of the status of the military profession in most European armies. The military profession in the Republic of Serbia is not immune to many of these influencing factors, which negatively affects the preservation of its status as a profession of exceptional importance to the state.

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S u m m a r y

Based on the analysis of existing literature and official documents of certain states, this paper examines three interrelated and logical units: the conceptualization and fundamental characteristics of the profession and the military profession, as well as the trends in the transformation of the military profession under contemporary conditions and under the influence of the state apparatus. A separate section of the paper is devoted to a general discussion of professions as sociological categories, followed by an examination of different conceptual approaches to the military profession. Professions are created and maintained within a state to perform activities that are essential to society, as they provide services in areas that are necessary for the functioning of society and that the free market can hardly secure. This gives professions a certain degree of monopoly and autonomy.

The traditional concept of the military profession, which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, is based on the professionalism of officers educated in military institutions, whose core expertise lies in the “management of military force” (i.e., the command and control of military force). These are officers directly engaged in armed forces. According to this concept, the military profession is characterized by social closure, authority, monopoly, legitimacy, and dominance—it must possess specific, specialized knowledge that ensures jurisdiction over its professional domain, a certain degree of responsibility toward the profession and the state, and a high level of corporateness within the community (the military) that the profession builds, maintains, and advances. For most researchers of that period, the officer corps was considered the only representative form of the military profession. Further development of this concept was grounded in research on military organization, where the army (as an institution) and military professionalism were merged into an integrated whole. Over the past three decades, interest in studying the military profession within the context of military organization research has grown, relying on general systems theory (com-

plexity theory) and applying a holistic approach to understanding the profession and its role within the armed forces and the state. Membership in the military profession is now understood more broadly—it may include all employed military personnel within a defense system (as in Canada or Serbia), or both military and civilian personnel (as in the United States), up to the most recent concepts (such as in Sweden) where all members of the defense system—those directly or indirectly involved in armed forces—are considered part of the military profession. In Russian scholarship, the prevailing view remains that the military profession is composed primarily of officers, although in public proclamations of the state and armed forces the concept has been expanded to include the entirety of the professional personnel within the armed forces.

The market-based approach to assessing the effectiveness of military activities and the dependence on decisions of civilian authorities regarding the funding of the military have reduced the competence and autonomy of the military elite, even in decisions of a purely military nature. The increased involvement and growing influence of civilian personnel in military matters, the redistribution of military tasks to private security companies, the use of military capabilities instead of diplomatic means, budget restrictions, and the expansion of non-military demands and activities have all led to a loss of control by the military profession over its domain, a reduction of autonomy, and the de-professionalization of the field. At the same time, due to the changing nature of modern warfare, the military profession is now required to possess a broader range of new knowledge and skills, which has resulted in the delegation of certain military activities to private companies. This transformation has also affected models of military education: traditional military colleges, which once served as the foundation for developing the military profession, have been replaced by universities of defense or security, where the focus of education is placed on the professional expertise of future personnel. Contemporary trends in understanding the military profession are increasingly directed toward the concept of management within the armed forces—or, more generally, management within the field of security. The engagement of private military companies represents a continuation of the trend toward outsourcing and the demilitarization of military functions, a process characteristic of both Russian and Western armed forces.

Keywords: military profession, traditional concept, complexity theory, expertise, responsibility, institutional cohesion, morality, state, physiognomy of modern warfare, transformation of the profession.

