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Threat, Crisis and Critical Situation – Contemporary Determinants of Modern Man's Living Conditions

Zagrożenie, kryzys i sytuacja kryzysowa – jako uwarunkowania życia współczesnego człowieka

Угроза, кризис и кризисная ситуация – условия жизни современного человека

ABSTRACT

Aim: To deliver an argumentation for supporting the view that danger and crisis are vital factors shaping one's living conditions.
Methods: Thorough examination of Polish and international literature in the field of theory of safety.
Results: Nowadays, every person is delivered a huge amount of information concerning the terrorism, sabotage, crime, epidemics of incurable diseases, extreme weather events, environmental disasters and, recently, armed conflicts, etc. Therefore, it has become a frequent event that one may lose a sense of identity, cope with the demands of mass education, having a sense of an information overload. Hence, although this situation does not lead to capitulation, there often arises a sense of helplessness among such persons.
'Security' and 'risk', 'crisis' and 'critical situation' are concepts being frequent subjects of media information. They in many instances refer to such entities as human being, social organization or its specific form - society. It is a truism to say that the most advantageous mean to avoid the negative consequences is an attempt to prevent their occurrence. In case of emergency, crises or critical situation, this principle seems to be completely confirmed. Responding to emergencies and crises is currently an area of a thorough examination conducted by representatives of scientific disciplines. As a result, there have been created valuable scientific and popular-scientific works concerning mainly: the organization of crisis management, the characteristics of the potential that could be deployed in the same management, interoperability, and the relationships between the elements of a crisis management system.
Abovementioned representatives of science pursue their studies independently and together with those who measure daily problems of crisis management at different scales. Contemporary challenges and threats clearly indicate the growing role of knowledge in the field of preventing, minimizing and eliminating the consequences of their possible occurrence. It is possible by, inter alia, having a knowledge on this subject.
Conclusions: The omnipresence of threats in the field of state security indicates the need to build systems which essence is to prevent such events, and minimize the consequences of their possible occurrence. The situation presented in the article provided the authors with a chance to present their opinions and indicate significant problems. The article provides an overview of the most important definitions and research in the theory of security. Its purpose is to familiarize the reader with the tradition of security research and all its contexts. Mainly in the definition of terms such as 'security', 'crisis' and 'critical situation'. In the course of the presented considerations, the authors identified the relationship between these phenomena and explained their scope and nature.

Keywords: crisis, critical situation, emergency, threat, society, process, safety
Type of article: review article

ABSTRAKT

Cel: Zidentyfikowanie kryteriów decydujących o postrzeganiu kryzysu i sytuacji kryzysowej jako współczesnych uwarunkowań bezpiecznego życia współczesnego człowieka.
Metody: Analiza literatury polskiej i międzynarodowej z zakresu teorii bezpieczeństwa.
Wyniki: Współczesnemu człowiekowi dostarczana jest ogromna ilość informacji dotyczących terroryzmu, sabotażu, przestępczości, epidemii, ekstremalnych warunków pogodowych, katastrof ekologicznych, a ostatnio również konfliktów zbrojnych itp. Między innymi dlatego, zapewnienie bezpieczeństwa wymaga organizacji szeroko zakrojonego procesu edukacji dla bezpieczeństwa, choćby po to, aby nie dopuścić do bezradności w warunkach wystąpienia zagrożeń.
„Bezpieczeństwo" i „zagrożenie", „kryzys" i „sytuacja kryzysowa" to pojęcia często pojawiające się w mediach. Odnoszą się one w wielu przypadkach do takich podmiotów jak człowiek, organizacja społeczna i społeczeństwo. Truizmem jest twierdzenie, że współcześnie nie jest możliwe

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wyeliminowanie zagrożeń, lecz jedynie minimalizowanie skutków ich wystąpienia. Przebieg dotychczas analizowanych sytuacji kryzysowych potwierdza taką opinię. Zarządzanie w sytuacjach kryzysowych jest obecnie obszarem gruntownych badań prowadzonych przez przedstawicieli wielu dyscyplin naukowych. W rezultacie tych badań zostały opracowane wartościowe prace naukowe i popularno-naukowe dotyczące głównie organizacji zarządzania kryzysowego oraz reguł współdziałania i relacji, jakie zachodzą między elementami systemu zarządzania kryzysowego. Jest to tym bardziej cenne, że naukowcy, o których mowa prowadzą badania samodzielnie oraz we współpracy z pracownikami administracji publicznej zajmującymi się na co dzień problematyką zarządzania kryzysowego na różnych poziomach organizacyjnych państwa. Współczesne wyzwania i zagrożenia wyraźnie wskazują na rosnącą rolę wiedzy w zakresie zapobiegania, minimalizacji i likwidacji skutków ich ewentualnego wystąpienia. Jest to możliwe, między innymi, poprzez posiadanie aktualnej wiedzy w zakresie umożliwiającym ich przezwyciężenie.

Wnioski: Wszechobecność zagrożeń w dziedzinie bezpieczeństwa państwa wskazuje na potrzebę budowania systemów, których istotą jest zapobieganie tym zagrożeniom i minimalizowanie skutków ich ewentualnego wystąpienia. Rozważania przedstawione w niniejszym artykule oparto na przeglądzie wartościowych poznawczo definicji i badań w teorii bezpieczeństwa. W przedstawionych rozważaniach, autorzy zidentyfikowali związki między tymi zjawiskami oraz wyjaśnili ich zakres i istotę.

Słowa kluczowe: kryzys, sytuacja kryzysowa, sytuacja awaryjna, zagrożenie, bezpieczeństwo, społeczeństwo
Typ artykułu: artykuł przeglądowy

АННОТАЦИЯ

Цель: Найти критерии, определяющие восприятие кризиса и кризисной ситуации, в качестве современных условий безопасной жизни современного человека.

Методы: Анализ польской и международной литературы в области теории безопасности.

Результаты: Современный человек получает большой объем информации относительно терроризма, саботажа, преступности, эпидемий, экстремальных погодных условий, экологических катастроф, а в последнее время, также вооруженных конфликтов и т.д. В том числе и по этой причине для обеспечения безопасности необходимо организовывать широкомасштабные программы обучения в целях безопасности, хотя бы для предотвращения ситуаций, в которых люди в условиях угрозы становятся беспомощны. „Безопасность" и „угроза", „кризис" и „кризисная ситуация" - это понятия, которые часто используются в средствах массовой информации. Во многих случаях они относятся к такими субъектам как: человек, общественная организация и общество. Утверждение, что сегодня нет возможности устранить угрозы, а только свести к минимуму их последствия, является трюизмом. Течение анализируемых до сих пор кризисных ситуаций только подтверждают это мнение. Управление чрезвычайными ситуациями в настоящее время является предметом исчерпывающих исследований, проводимых представителями многих научных отраслей. В результате этих исследований были созданы ценные научные и научно-популярные работы, касающиеся в частности: организации антикризисного управления и правил взаимодействия элементов системы антикризисного управления. Более ценно то, что эти ученые проводят исследования как самостоятельно, так и в сотрудничестве с работниками государственной службы, которые ежедневно занимаются проблемами антикризисного управления на различных административных уровнях государства. Современные требования и угрозы ясно указывают на важную роль знаний из области профилактики угроз, а также минимизации и ликвидации их последствий. Это становится возможным, в частности, благодаря актуальным знаниям о возможностях преодоления угроз.

Выводы: Повсеместность угроз по отношению к безопасности государства указывает на необходимость создания систем, целью которых будет предотвращение этих угроз и минимизация последствий их возможного возникновения. Идеи, приведенные в данной статье, основаны на анализе ценных когнитивных определений и исследований в области теории безопасности. В представленных идеях авторы выявили связь между этими явлениями и объяснили их объем и суть.

Ключевые слова: кризис, кризисная ситуация, чрезвычайная ситуация, угроза, безопасность, общество
Вид статьи: обзорная статья

1. Introduction

Threat, and therefore security, crisis and critical situation, is an ubiquitous phenomenon in the life of modern societies.

"Within considerations on safety, one of the most sought after and valued by humanity goods, one may distinguish two main strategies. The first of them focuses on preparing activities to prevent threats, while the latter focuses on shaping the environment to space and minimize the possibility of the appearance of these. In both instances, although with a different approach, risk is a category of key importance"[1, p. 8].

S. Korycki notices the duality in threat perception that, on one side, is a purely subjective feeling committed to the evaluation of occurring phenomena. On the other hand there is an objective factor causing uncertainty and concern [2]. Subjectivity in perception of the external world is the result of the functioning of the brain, which always delivers the filtered image of reality [3]. Moreover, the objectivity of the perceiving threats is related to one's knowledge, experience and the application of appropriate research methods [4].

The threat can be seen in two senses – narrow and broad. In the first sense danger arises when "(...) a man feels fear of losing cherished values, with his own life in the first place" [4, p. 65], which leads to the belief that 'threat' is understood as the situation clearly perceived by the subject [4, p. 65]. How-ever, in the broader sense of danger it will be regarded as a situation which is not the subject of one's consciousness [5].

2. Linguistic considerations

In common language, the term 'threat' is intuitively understandable and related to the fear of man losing such qualities as health, life, freedom, liberty or possessions. However, in literature various sources define the term differently.

Little Polish language dictionary defines the term "threat" as much as something threatening, scaring, announcing something under threat; creating a state of danger, dangerous for someone; endangering the health, safety, freedom [5, p. 965]. It shall be noted that 'to threaten' means to scare something, announce something under threat, pose a danger condition, being dangerous for someone [5, p. 439]. Risk means the state of affairs, a situation threatening the position of something, threatening someone [6]. *Glossary of Terms in the field of national security* delivers the definition of 'threat' as a situation of an increased likelihood of an unsafe condition for the environment [7]. The threat is also something that may constitute a danger of someone or something, cause damage or loss [1, p. 10]. B. Hołyst explains the meaning of the term 'threat' referring to the concept of a difficult situation [8] and delivers argumentation for perception of 'threat' as an event "(…) when a man raises concern about the

loss of cherished values with own lives in the first place" [8]. Such approach states that threat is a situation perceived by the subject. On the other hand, F.X. Kaufmann sees the threat as "the possibility of occuring one of the negative phenomena" [9]. The threat is also often defined as any situation that could lead to some form of harm. Usually, considerations on the damage include primarily damages based on the loss of life, health or property, although in reality they are not the only harm that may occur in referrence to the threat [10].

In the context of the above, the following typology of damage can be pointed out [11]:

- physical harm, consisting of present permanent or impermanent harm to health or leading to the health disorder (injury, disease, pain, suffering or discomfort etc.);
- mental harm, for example consisting of the negative self-perception, unpleasant emotional experiences such as fear, shame and guilt, behavioral disorders;
- harm connected with social relations, namely the emergence of negative relationships, such as discrimination, stigmatization, ostracism or loss of reputation;
- legal harm, such as accusation, arrest or trial;
- damage to property related to direct or indirect economical loss;
- harm to personal dignity, involving violations of privacy, habits and behaviors.

Lack of threat is an important but not the only aspect of security. Equally important is the awareness of the possibilities of its assurance. Intuitive understanding of this term leads to the conclusion that it refers to the sphere of awareness of the entity – human, social group, nation or nations. The threat is a mental state caused by the perception of phenomena that are judged to be unfavorable or dangerous [1, p. 10]. Particularly it is important that evaluation done by the subject lies at the basis of actions taken to strengthen its security [12-13].

The reality or the potentiality of emerging adverse situations, phenomena, entanglement events etc., makes us keen to take the effort to venture remedies.

Threats can lead to conflict situations. Possible lack of good will on interested parties to step down from formulated demands and recriminations, consequently, may cause a security risk condition [14].

To sum up, it should be assumed, as R. Zięba states, that 'threat' is "a state of mind or consciousness caused by the perception of phenomena that are judged to be unfavorable or dangerous" [15, p. 4].

The concept of 'security' has been defined by mankind long time ago. In the literature of the subject one can find numerous definitions of the term 'security'. The etymology of the word 'security' in various languages (including Polish) emphasizes the originality of insecurity in relation to the sense of confidence of their collateral 'without care', (that is, without adequate protection) [16, p. 15]. Sources of the concept of security should be sought in the Latin word 'securitas', which ultimately derives from the 'sine cura', literally meaning the state 'without care' [15, p. 3]. Security should be considered in three basic forms: as a state, the process, and a supreme need. According to the *Dictionary of the Polish Language* security is a "state of lack of danger, peace and confidence" [17]. Security perceived as a process means "continuous activity of individuals, communities, countries or international organizations in creating the desired state of security" [18]. Another meaning is "the understanding of security as a vital human as well as social need and value, and at the same time – their most important objective" [16, p. 18].

3. Social dimension

An important feature of human society is the fact that it can operate being based on the principle of compulsory or voluntary interrelations of its members. "Every individual is trying to preserve, as it may, his own assets and protect them from any harm. Nonetheless if it depended on individual's own strength, one would not be able to keep guard over them all the time (...). A man protects his wealth from danger when his action creates a state of affairs that simply cannot destroy this good, nor can adversely effect or even deliberately hostile this state; or that it is seriously hampered" [19].

Enumerating important aspects of security requires mentioning such factors as: no risk and feeling confident, which can be both objective and subjective, and therefore both tangible and intangible [19, p. 18]. Safety takes place "only if it does not occur simultaneously: the real danger (objective factor) and its sense (subjective factor)" [16, p. 17].

Basic and primary meaning of the word 'security' was assigned to the sphere of subjective and meant no fear, concern, fear, and thus the confidence and security [20].

N. Machiavelli specified that 'security' is not only to ensure the physical well-being, but also any other 'satisfaction' that everyone is able to achieve due to his/her own diligence, without danger or harm to the entity. Machiavelli also noted that the function of the power is contained in the purpose for which it was entrusted with the supreme authority, and where is the concern for the safety of the people. Please do note that for safety I understand not only the protection, but also any other satisfaction in this life [21].

The multiplicity of defining the concept of 'security' proves the difficulty to seek one concise definition. J. Stanczyk stated that there is no single, commonly agreed and accepted definition. Most of the efforts define it as "freedom from threats, fear or attack" as formulated by Charles Manning in the period between WWI and WWII [16, p. 16].

According to J. Marczak it is difficult to define the concept because of the "(...) enormous, encompassing category of safety, very difficult and perhaps even impossible to precisely describe and define" [22].

To sum up, it shall be noted that in today's world, security understood only as the absence of threat is not to guarantee only physical survival but also secure the minimum of other social needs. This is the reason why it is so important to have a broad understanding of security.

The ubiquity of crises and critical situations is responsible for great interest in them and, thus, making many attempts to describe them.

They are classified according to certain features and criteria: the location of the source (internal, external), character (politico-military, non-military), the level of prevalence (global, regional, local), duration (incidental, short-term, long-term, permanent), geopolitical range (international, domestic), the frequency of occurrence (single, repeated, cyclic), symptoms of threats (expected and unexpected), the rate of spread (very fast, fast, slow) and risk area (local, local, in the territory of one or more number of countries) [23, p. 5].

Crisis (gr. Krisis) is the time period, solstice, a decisive change, a period of economic downturn [24]. In theory of crisis, the subject of research is institution, organization, including society [25].

The Polish language dictionary lists slightly different referents of the concept of crisis, i.e. [26]:

- breakthrough in relation to the experiences, views of the individual, to the development of culture, science, political events, etc .;
- in the economy – a period of economic downturn;
- critical period of the disease, solstice.

Similarly to each category of security issues, also the crisis can be seen in many aspects. In the sense of the subject crisis is seen as a 'break' for the existing system, the essence of which is to change the structure or function of the system,

or both of these elements together. 'Break' of the system itself is distributed over time and incorporated into the process of the transition from stability – by instability – the stability of a qualitatively different properties [26, p. 10]. On the other hand, ontologically, crisis is the culmination of accumulated conflicts in various areas of social life that are ubiquitous and inherent in the structure of society [27, p. 10].

Abovementioned definitions of the crisis are general terms that contain the essence of the crisis. As a proof, numerous definitions of the term can be delivered. Those presented below should be considered most representative.

Also, the 'crisis', as already cited from *Glossary of national security,* is defined as a situation created by the collapse of the stable development of the process, threatening loss of an initiative and the need to reconcile themselves to accept unfavorable conditions, requiring taking decisive, comprehensive remedies [7, p. 61]. The same dictionary defines the crisis as a consequence of the situation of a threat, leading consequently to a break or significant weakening of social ties and, in the same time, serious disruption to the functioning of public institutions, but to the extent that the used measures necessary to safeguard or restore security do not justify the introduction of any of the states of emergency as provided in the Polish Constitution [7, p. 13]. The dictionary's authors perceive critical situations through the prism of situations, which seems to be highly reflective.

On the other hand, *Glossary of key terms relating to national security* defines crisis as a form (phase) of the conflict, as a result of which there is a sharp increase of tension between the parties that may result in occurence of military conflict [28].

The crisis can be seen as well as the internal state of the entity resulting from the external situation caused by a serious threat to existence of the entity or relevant to the existence of values. If the crisis is described as an internal state, it can only refer to such entities as a person, social organization or society [29, p. 61].

4. Military aspects

Many aspects in relation to which the crisis can be desribed allows to look at its essence from a military point of view. In this context, a crisis can be understood as a situation arising in the course of warfare, threatening the loss of initiative and the possibility of losing the campaign, battle or operation, requiring taking decisive, comprehensive remedies [30].

Z. Andrzejczak took an attempt to look at the problem of the crisis and proposed perceiving the crisis by applying multiple criteria, defined as "a non-military or politico-military situation, effects of which endanger the life or health of a large number of persons, property in large sizes, on large areas of environment, citizens' safety and public order as well as safety and the constitutional structure of the state. Prevention and elimination of their consequences is undertaken by using ordinary or extraordinary measures, in co-operation with various public administration bodies and institutions, and specialized services and formations, including the armed forces, operating under a single leadership" [30].

In the context of the terms mentioned above the crisis, as W. Kitler said, some of its essential characteristics shall be selected, which indicate that the crisis [31]:

- is a particular state or process;
- always means a breakthrough between the two phases of a process;
- may be more or less severe;
- may have a different scope, duration, but always ends the current state of affairs;
- might be a violation of a state of equilibrium;
- might be incomplete at the time of an interruption of the current development cycle.

At this point it should be noted that the diagnosis of the crisis largely depends on the adopted criteria. Each event looks different when one looks at it from a perspective of time, otherwise – when they are seen from the outside during the lifetime, and even contrary, when individuals are its participants or actors [23, p. 5]. In view of the above, it should be noted that the most frequently notations used to specify criteria of the crisis are [32]:

- the location of the source of the crisis (internal and external);
- the nature of the crisis (politico-military, non-military);
- the level of prevalence (global, regional, local);
- duration (incidental, short-term, long-term, permanent);
- geopolitical scope (international, national);
- frequency of occurrence (single, repeated, cyclic);
- symptoms of threats (expected and unexpected);
- the rate of spread (very fast, fast, slow);
- risk area (local, local, in the territory of one or more countries).

Despite appearing at the beginning of this article terms, 'crisis' defined as "a situation ..." which resulted in the past equating the crisis with critical situation crisis, these two concepts visibly differ. W. Kitler said that the differing factors include the following [34]:

- crisis is a part of a critical situation;
- every crisis is a critical situation, but not every critical situation contains an element of the crisis (critical phase);
- in contrast to the crisis, the critical situation at the time of the appearance of its symptoms does not necessarily cause changes in the essence of the organization but is a challenge to its operation.

It should be noted that "it is not necessary for recognizing situation as critical to occur the transition from one stable state to another with qualitatively different properties, as the change is a natural process of development of this system, society and the state held on evolutionary or revolutionary" [34].

E. Nowak indicates that a critical situation involves a certain interval of rather indetermined borders and usually occurs in times of peace, and ends in a period of intensive crisis, when it becomes necessary to introduce a state of emergency [35]. The critical situation includes the reasons for its occurence, its apogee in the form of crisis as well as events that limit the crisis and lead to stability. On principle, the critical situation develops gradually and is a long-term phenomenon, and the crisis as a part of critical situation is characterized by brevity [37]. It is also beneficial to note that the "critical situation is related to the socially acceptable level of danger. An emergency situation occurs if the level of acceptable risks is beyond its borders and pose a threat not accepted in the international law or an internal and public awareness of the situation. The level of threat varies in different critical situations and in each case due to the nature of the hazards of its causes and the expected effects" [27, p. 10].

According to R. Wróblewski, critical situation is a set of internal and external circumstances affecting the system so that it starts and continues the variable process, resulting in an imbalance that is later restored, by reason of taken measures and regulations (emergency operation) [27].

E. Jendraszek and W. Kozłowski defined critical situation in a slightly different manner by connecting the particular situation of critical state of economic, political and social crisis - namely as a "combination of rapidly occurring events that cause presence of the forces destabilizing the overall international state or any of its sub-generally above normal (average) level and results in the increased likelihood of rising negative phenomena existing in the system" [38].

It seems that W. Kitler captures the essence of the critical situation and defines it as a group of internal and external cir-

cumstances affecting the system (the system) so that it starts and continues the process of change and, as a consequence, there is a disequilibrium, afterwards restored because of the undetaken regulatory events (emergency operation) [39].

At this point it should also be noted that each crisis and each critical situation are different, even though all of them are to some extent characterized by the following features:

- surprise;
- insufficient information when one needs them most;
- the organization has not managed to react to events on time;
- events are becoming more and more dangerous;
- loss of control (real or felt);
- threat to significant interest;
- meticulous control from the external subject;
- production of a besieged mentality;
- panic;
- interruption of the normal decision-making processes;
- steering crisis focused on short-term planning / action [40].

In summary, it is noted that "the crisis is a culminative phase of increasing emergency situation, arising from unexpected circumstances. In this phase, of the greatest significance is the real or the perceived loss of control over the developing situation and the lack of concept for its mastery" [34]. "Despite the undoubted advantages of the cited definitions of critical situation, its legal decription, despite many shortcomings, fully reflects the characteristics of a critical situation, understood as that which 'adversely affects the level of people's security, property of significant value, or the environment, producing significant restrictions on the operation of the relevant public administration because of the inadequacy of resources and measures" [41]. It should also be noted that each crisis and each critical situation are different, but have common features, which include: surprise and time pressure, insufficient information and uncertainty, loss of control over the situation, the emergence of panic, the system not being able to react to real or noticeable events, which are becoming more dangerous, decision-makers focus on short-term planning activities.

Therefore, it is decisive to plan action rules to the situation in order to limit the collective, extending the reaction, the development of decision rules [42]. The modern world is characterized by the fact that, due to the rising level of threats, it increases the burden of public administration tasks related to the fulfillment of its mission for the creation of conditions for the safe functioning of society. The basis of the fulfillment of this mission is a realistic assessment of the risks, possible through precise identification of their sources, evaluation of the risk consequences, precise determination of the effects that they can cause, and eventually, development of procedures to enable an effective opposition to the situations in which these risks may occur. These assessments should have scientifical basis, fixed during the implementation of a number of research projects.

5. Conclusions

Threat as a physical or social phenomenon causes uncertainty and fear that violates a sense of security. Since the sense of security applies to all areas of life and human activity, creating a multi-dimensional vector mental welfare of people who feel safe, and hence the same security threats include the whole spectrum of phenomena taking this comfort back in specific areas of life and business or in their various configurations [3].

The crisis and the critical situation, as specific processes or states of affairs, having their sources and causes, can be predicted, detected, identified, analyzed and assessed, and therefore (on basis of the assessments and forecasts) may be

perceived as defined in terms of their remedies (activities). In view of this, crisis and the crisis situation, although to a limited extent, are controllable events [43].

Is should also be noted that both crisis and critical situation are essentially positive phenomena as, in the long run, they mean development, whereas deterring them - stagnation. However, the evaluation of these phenomena largely depends on the point of observation and the effects that it causes for the particular subject. If the subject will survive the crisis (critical situation) one can perceive it as positive effects. If, however, the subcject fails to exist it is difficult to establish positive outcomes. It is just that the decisive nature of the crisis (critical situation) is of a significance. Nonetheless, having looked through the lens of a number of similar subjects, the crisis (critical situation) can be seen as positive, because its effect would eliminate actorsare not adapted to the new situation. There would remain only the strongest, fittest, which means, of course, the development of the entire population. Thus, the assessment of the phenomenon called crisis (critical situation) is not unambiguously negative or positive, as it depends on the point of view [29].

At the end of the presented considerations, it seems justified to state that concern for safety was accompanied, accompanies, and will be accompanied by a man forever. As P. Bilgin noted: "although there is no day on which nobody talks about safety, the meaning of this term is often unclear. This is not due to negligence, but that security is a concept introduced (derivative concept) - what they understand who is discharged (derives) of his views" [44]. This concern is not without disadvantages. Their signs will be continuously emerging threats, crises and emergency situations that may be the causes of adverse conditions in which a modern man operates.

Literature

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