An approach at formulating a precise definition of the phenomenon of extremism in David Easton’s theory of the political system

The article constitutes an attempt to formulate the concept of political extremism precisely and to grasp the role it performs in a political system, as well as to define the fundamental, resultant consequences for a system wherein this phenomenon arises. The considerations begin with an introduction to the theory of the political system developed by David Easton as an approach which has by now become almost classic in respect of these issues. The author also familiarises the reader with the key mechanisms and operating principles of a political system based on the concept in question. The drive emphasised in Easton’s theory, a drive manifested by a political system as a dynamic set, with its specific components in an incessant interaction aimed at attaining stabilisation, is stressed by the author as well. This tendency is juxtaposed with the outline sketched by the author of the theory as regards the objective of the operation of the very political system itself, consisting, as it does, in an “authoritative allocation of value” within a society and thus a distribution of certain socially desired and, at one and the same time, scarce objects of value (privileges). The social subjects and structures interested in these objects and privileges are involved in a game of interests for access to them. Politics understood in this way is a potentially destabilising factor. The elements which ‘pacify’ its conduct include metavales, which is to say, the fundamental values constituting the axiological basis and operating framework of the political system. It is from them that the norms which both pertain to the allocations being effected and determine their objectives and principles, are derived. At the same time, they create an arrangement of interpenetrating metarules specific to a given system, on the basis of which, political institutions make decisions on the allocation of values, where the said decisions are intended to serve those metarules. The metavales are not identical to the principles of the system, because the latter only determine the formal and substantive methods of exercising power. At the same time, they point to the abstract ideas which are to be implemented in the process.

The concept of political extremism is described against the backdrop of considerations regarding the fundamental ideas, the metavales. The description takes into account an outline of the reasons for the occurrence of this extremism, as well as the key threats it bears for a
political system. Its presence is attributed to specific features of a democratic system. The axiological position occupied by extremism with regard to the metavales constitutive for the system is defined. The analysis includes the issues of the occurrence and acceptance of the overdrawing of political concepts in a given system, as well as those pertaining to views which are not approved in it at all. The article also defines a description of the dysfunctionality of extremism in respect of a system where the former is parasitic with regard to the latter, as well as its location in relation to a political community. Referring to theoretical legacy of Willmore Kendall, the author posits that political extremism is one method of establishing a revolutionary founding act for a new political system.

**Tags:** political system, political extremism, political community, David Easton, Willmoore Kendall, value allocation, extremism, democracy, political conflict, violence.