

**About modern crime. Criminological characteristics**

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**Abstract**

The current publication aims to analyze the current crime phenomenon from a criminological perspective, by analyzing the main factors that contribute to its emergence and expansion in the Republic of Moldova and Romania. Particular attention is paid to criminological factors, highlighting the evolution of current crime and the persistent difficulties in the effective enforcement of rules against it. The criminological approach focuses on identifying a methodology for assessing institutional deficiencies and the responses of state authorities to the detection, investigation, and combating of contemporary crime. At the same time, the scientific message analyzes the nature of this phenomenon, its forms of manifestation, the criminological challenges it generates and the implications for current criminal policy.

**Keywords:** criminology, criminological approach, modern crime, crime fighting, crime investigations, criminal law, motive, cause, social danger, criminal liability, prevention, respect for human rights, freedoms and dignity, criminological strategies.

**Introduction**

Crime and its manifestation as an activity aimed at illegally satisfying the needs of a certain segment of society, to the detriment of the interests of the majority of its members, have always been specific and unique, reflecting the state and level of development. Modern crime, a product of the transitional period of development, is incomparable in its qualitative and quantitative characteristics with previous crime. Criminal activity, an integral part of our economy, has become a business [1, p. 3; 2, p. 9].

The key to modern crime lies not in its quantitative changes, but in its qualitative transformations, expressed in the emergence of new types of crime, the increase in the scale of previously rare crimes, in the audacity and brutality of criminals' actions, the penetration of crime into all structures of society and the state, the level of its organization

and international "cooperation" - that is, the concentrated expression of what threatens the free and independent existence of the state. Therefore, eliminating such a threat solely through the efforts of law enforcement agencies is impossible [3, p. 6; 4, p. 25]. Thus, the "National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Program" rightly emphasizes that the main principle of combating this phenomenon is "creating political and socio-economic conditions aimed at facilitating a successful fight" [5, p.5].

Modern crime is characterized as professional, organized, corrupt, transnational, general criminal, economic, etc. Each of these characteristics reflects an aspect of crime, which is generally very diverse and multifaceted. Some indicators reflect changes in crime as a whole (an increase in selfish motives and cruelty of criminals, an increase in professionalism), while others reflect only certain components (organized, international). Some indicators clearly delineate crime into its component parts (professional – non-professional), while others are interconnected, characterising the same phenomenon from different perspectives (organised, transnational, etc.).

### **Applied methods and materials**

In the development of this publication, theoretical, normative and empirical material was used. Considering the specifics and complex nature of the investigated topic, the research on the current subject was conducted using several scientific methods specific to the theory of Special Investigation Activity: logical method, comparative analysis method, systemic and statistical analysis, etc.

**Research purpose.** It consists of: a deep analysis, both theoretically and practically, of criminological, criminal procedure and special investigative regulations regarding the prevention and combating of current crime, highlighting common trends and the specifics of different countries in this field; of the shortcomings in the legislation and the problems that have arisen in the judicial practice of the Republic of Moldova and Romania, proposing solutions for optimizing collaborative relations between states to counteract this phenomenon and improve their legislation.

### **Results obtained and discussions**

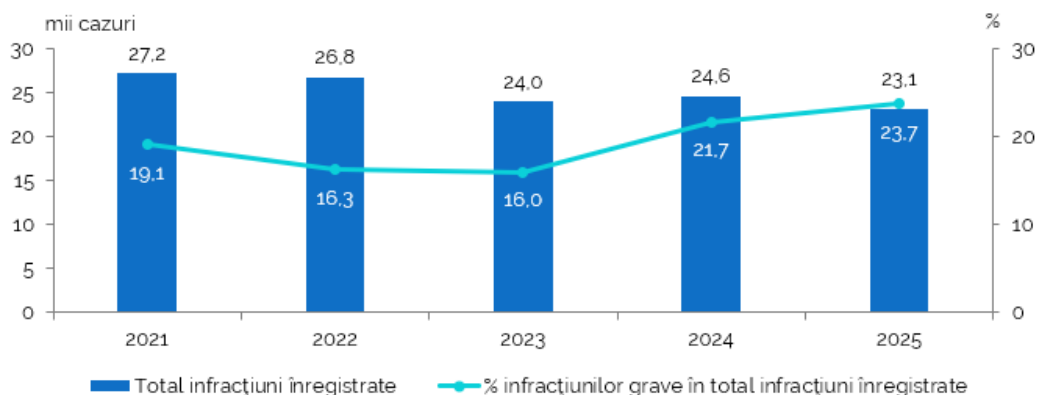
Nowadays, crime is becoming increasingly professional. In the classification of criminals, the professional type was identified in 1897 at the congress of the International Union of Criminologists in Heidelberg, which was characterized by signs of persistence and reluctance to abandon criminal activity, using certain criminal skills. The term "professional" means not only belonging to a profession, but also "doing something as a profession."

With regard to criminal activity, professionalism must be considered from two points of view:

- a) as a high level of execution of criminal operations, ensuring the achievement of practically all declared objectives;
- b) as a way to live off the results of criminal activity [6, p.73-76].

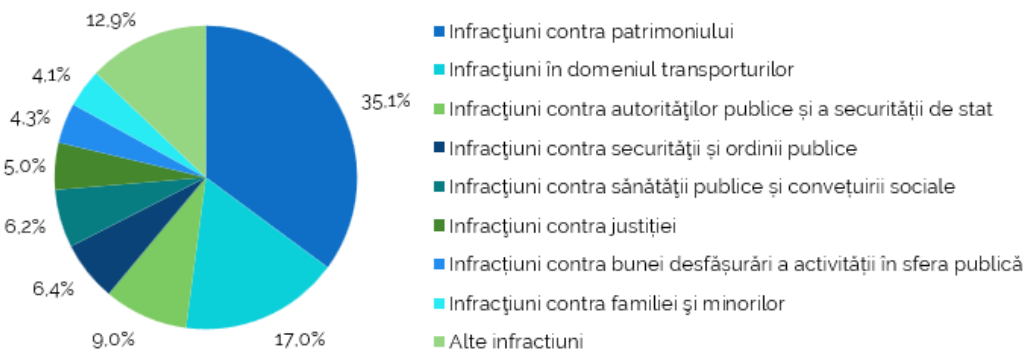
According to data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs [7], in 2025, 23.1 thousand crimes were registered on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, down by 6.0% from 2024 and by 14.9% from 2021 (Figure 1). The crime rate in 2025 was 97 crimes per 10,000 inhabitants, compared to 103 in 2024.

Figure 1. Share of serious crimes in total recorded crimes



In the structure of crimes [8], more than a third were crimes against property (35.1%), 17.0% were crimes in the field of transport, crimes against public authorities and state security constituted 9.0%, and those against public security and order – 6.4% (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Structure of registered crimes by category, 2025



Speaking about modern crime, G.A. Zorin notes: “The time has come to consider criminal acts as a form of criminal art, as a manifestation of criminal talent, as a product of criminal genius” [9, p.20]. The criminal (even at the level of a solitary "criminal") has become significantly smarter, better informed (including in terms of techniques and methods of operational search activities), and at the level of a group and a criminal community, he can no longer successfully carry out his criminal activity without the ability to overcome the barriers erected by society against criminal attacks, without finding ways and means to take possession of intellectually and technically protected property, without the ability to psychologically deceive his opponents. In the 1950s, there was a notorious burglar named Wingrover who committed over 150 burglaries before being caught. The large number of burglaries seems to indicate his professionalism, but today we would no longer call him a professional, since he had numerous cases in which, breaking into an apartment, he found

nothing to steal. Today, it is difficult to imagine a professional carrying out his work without first knowing his client's true situation and circumstances.

A unique way to ensure the safety of organized crime activities is to select low-risk and difficult-to-prove actions, for example, "providing assistance in civil litigation" [10, p.22; 11, p.13; 12, p.39].

The growing role of professionalism in the formation of criminal groups is highlighted, in particular, by the fact that the presence of professional skills has surpassed (by over 50%) family and friendship ties as a factor taken into account when selecting "personnel" [13, p.70]. Most of the interviewed practitioners indicated that modern criminals who commit crimes in the form of trade are becoming more sophisticated and inventive. This is due to the increased level of education among criminals; the "schooling" of criminal experience in a criminal environment; the use of "assistance" from former law enforcement officers who went to "serve" in criminal structures; and the high level of technical equipment among professional criminals.

Professional crime is a type of crime characterized by its persistence, the main source of income for its participants, and the need for specialized knowledge and skills. [14, p.180]. This type of crime cannot be equated with recidivism, because not every recidivist or person who has repeatedly committed a crime is a professional.

Signs of professionalism include:

- persistence of criminal activity;
- the existence of criminal specialization;
- availability of a certain qualification;
- using the results of criminal activity as the main source of income;
- belonging to the criminal environment with its special subculture [15, p.77-79].

Professional criminal activity develops in a person the necessary practical skills and capabilities, often bringing them to the point of automatism and ensuring optimal achievement of the goal with minimal risk. This is the reason for the diversity of specializations in criminal activity and the constant improvement of its methods and means. Currently, there are over 100 criminal specialities among criminals alone, which is almost twice as many as there were in the last century. Almost all types of specializations from the past are preserved and completely new ones are developing, generated by modern socio-economic and other factors [16, p.99-101]. For example, car thieves have about 20 different criminal profiles. Their skill level determines the intensity of their criminal activity. A professional pickpocket commits up to 25 thefts per month, and only one in twenty cases results in the victim reporting the incident.

Crime knowledge and skills are acquired through direct instruction by experienced professionals or through trial and error. For example, approximately 40% of burglars and pickpockets were "trained" in prisons, where lessons were structured around stories and demonstrations, introductions, practice in a "training center," and consultations. A key element of this training is the analysis of "failures" committed "in the wild."

One means of disguising criminal activity is to use some form of legal activity as a cover. Nowadays, a fairly common cover is working in security services, most often on the principle: we guard during the day and rob at night. However, among certain categories of criminals, the proportion of those who have been unemployed for a long time is quite high: among those who commit robberies with housebreaking – half, among apartment burglars – two-fifths.

A significant feature of professional crime is its rejuvenation; according to Russian researchers, the average age of "thieves in law" now does not exceed 35 years.

The increasing professionalization of crime requires that the "aces" of criminal activity be opposed by experienced masters, who are perfectly familiar with the "laws" and conditions of their life and criminal activity. However, in recent years, staff turnover has led to a drastic reduction in the professional core of criminal investigation and investigation. Most workers in these categories have 2.5-4 years of work experience. Along with experienced employees, knowledge of the criminal environment, proven forms and methods of combatting it are becoming a thing of the past. The lack of a stable core of qualified police personnel is today one of the significant reasons for the low level of professional crime control.

The highest form of professionalism in modern crime is organized crime, the essence of which lies in adapting to survival and ensuring the greatest possible efficiency of activities. Organized crime accounts for the bulk of economic crimes, illegal arms trafficking and drug trafficking.

Organized crime is a socio-economic process of circulation of criminal capital, in which the underground economy acts as infrastructure.

In social terms, "organized crime represents an alternative society with its own economy, social and spiritual spheres, its own systems of government and politics" [17, p.453]. It is even defined as a "criminally ordered and functional system of public authority" because "for the first time in the history of human civilization, they have a real opportunity to economically secure a criminal dictatorship (government) not only for their colleagues in the criminal trade, but also for the mass of law-abiding citizens" [18, p.6-8; 11, p.11].

A clear and unambiguous definition of organized crime has not yet been developed (19, p.86-95). UN documents note that it is impossible to define the types of organized crime with a single formulation [20, p.8].

This phenomenon is called the "peak of crime", "one of the highest stages in the evolution of crime", "the pinnacle of criminal perfection", "the most dangerous form of crime", etc. [21, p.394-395] and is interpreted as "a stable association of individuals organized for joint criminal activity for selfish purposes and to obtain control (power) in a certain environment, in a certain territory" [22, p.27]. In foreign literature it is defined as follows: "Organized crime is a conscious and voluntary joint activity, over the long term, of several individuals, based on the division of labor, aimed at committing criminally punishable acts for the fastest possible extraction of large financial income" [23, p.52; 10, p.25-26]. Principalele caracteristici care caracterizează crima organizată includ [24, p.311-312; 25, p.48-53]:

- Organization;
- Hierarchy;
- Systematicity (duration and continuity);
- Wide range of application.

The goal of organized criminal groups is always to obtain maximum profits and to enrich themselves on a particularly large scale. Therefore, small and random "sources of income" are usually of no interest to organized communities [20, p.10]. Organized crime is characterized by a clear definition of promising directions for the development of economic sectors, business structures and the speed of reaction to changes in the economic, social and political situation [21, p.407].

The condition for the success and scale of organized crime, as well as its characteristic feature, is the use of the assistance and capabilities of a corrupt state apparatus. This allows organized criminal groups not only to possess the information necessary to carry out their activities and provide assistance to the firms and organizations they control and to receive assistance in counteracting the activities of law enforcement agencies, but also to influence the legislative, executive and judicial spheres of state life. Organized crime takes full advantage of this and contributes significantly to the transformation of corruption “from the past into a social pathology today” [26, p.32]. To achieve this, organized crime spends up to 50% of its criminal income on bribing officials [27, p.66].

It is extremely important for organizing the fight against crime to clarify the concept of "corruption" and determine its relationship with the concept of "organized crime", because "without understanding the essence of corruption, it is impossible to determine the real goals of the fight and the appropriate means of achieving them" [28, p.5]. Corruption, in the exact translation of Latin, is “the decomposition of the body”, the process of decomposition and putrefaction. But this term is not a legal one and certainly not a criminal one, although it quite figuratively reflects the essence of the phenomenon [29, p.270]. The absence of a clear scientific and legal concept of “corruption”, according to the survey data, is “reinforced” by the large differences in the interpretation of this phenomenon by the population: 56.7% define corruption as bribery, venality and bribery of officials and politicians, 54% - as abuse of power, abuse of official duties for personal enrichment, 42.4% - as a unification of power and criminal structures, as a mafia in power [34].

Corruption is often mentioned as an essential element of organized crime, and in publications on anti-corruption issues, its integral feature is the presence of the characteristics of organized crime. In other words, these phenomena are not considered independent social phenomena, but rather components of each other. The consequence of this is the combination of the functions of combating organized crime and corruption in the same apparatuses, which stimulates them to give priority to areas that do not require the development and implementation of fundamentally new means and methods of combating crime and can be ensured by using familiar means and methods, including by reducing the fight against corruption to the identification and exposure of extortion and bribery by officials of state authorities [30, p.106-107].

Formalism in the organization of the fight against corruption is highlighted, in particular, by assigning the function of identifying corruption acts on a voluntary basis to representatives of the civil service. First, these duties are entrusted to those who themselves may be corrupt (employees of the state property fund, customs, banks, etc.). Third, there is practically no scientific or methodological support for their activities. Organized crime is characterized by the presence of a specialized security function, which, along with special attention paid to secrecy, involves the creation of counterintelligence and security structures, the development of scenarios regarding the behavior of community members in the event of detention and criminal prosecution, to ensure that the organization and its leaders are not harmed, etc. American police experts estimate that the risk that active participants in large organized crime groups will be held criminally liable for criminal activities related to these structures is a maximum of 10%, and the risk of being convicted of this charge is a maximum of 1%. Thus, the “protective function” of organized crime is characterized by its systematic nature and, as in everything else, by its level of

organization and reliability. “The higher the degree of organization, the stricter the secrecy” [9, p.27].

A special form of organized crime is represented by transnational groups that include territories outside their country of origin in their sphere of activity. At the same time, they take advantage of more favorable conditions (legal, economic, social) of other countries for their activities, with the aim of supplying illegal goods and services to markets where they can obtain maximum profit. Data show that the ratio of organized criminal groups with international connections to groups without such connections is 1:6 [31, p.81]. The activities of transnational groups require coordinating their actions with criminal organizations in the country in which they operate, providing channels for the transportation of goods, etc.

Based on the analysis of the noted characteristics of organized crime, criminologists define it as "a type of crime, a set of crimes committed by participants in stable, hierarchical, systematically functioning criminal organizations (groups, communities, associations), whose activities are mutually consolidated and directly or indirectly coordinated, aiming to extract maximum profit from criminal activities in a certain territory or in a certain area taken under control" [32, p.297-298].

### **In conclusion**

In our opinion, A.I. Butenko and A.P. Kalinin correctly note that “criminal manifestations of corruption are only one of its forms”. Many of its other forms, for example, lobbying, regionalism, nepotism, family ties, etc., long and well known to the state mechanism of any socio-economic formation, have never been considered crimes and, with rare exceptions (for example, the prohibition of subordination of members in an organization or institution), have not been subjected to legal assessment at all. Therefore, “purely forensic means and methods... will not allow for an effective influence on its spread” [31, p.108].

Each of the features included in this or that definition, which, in the opinion of the authors, characterizes organized crime, can manifest itself, to some extent, in other forms of crime (first of all, group crime). Therefore, in our opinion, we should not try to include all possible features in the definition but rather indicate those that are defining for it. These are the two that we see: the hierarchical system of organization and the scale of activity. Given this, organized crime can be defined as a form of hierarchical structure of a criminal community, the scale of whose activities has an impact on the socio-economic structure of the state. From the perspective of the latter, it seems worthy of attention to characterize organized crime as a special, highly developed form of group crime, the purpose of which is the creation and activation of a system (structures, mechanisms, favorable conditions, etc.) of hidden subordination of law-abiding society to the illegal corporate interests of the criminal environment [18, p.9]. Therefore, it seems correct to state that the fight against organized crime is not a purely legal issue and takes on a political character [33, p. 29].

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