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BASIC PROBLEMS OF ROBBERY DETECTION

A total number of crimes (traffic crimes excluded) in Croatia is basically increasing, but not gradually – until 1997 it had been in significant decline, and only after that year it has made significant growth. For example, it ranged from 48.292 in year 1997 to 77.653 in year 2003. Compared to year 1999 it increased in year 2003 for 39%, and compared to year 1994 for 21%.

Just opposite crime acts in total, robbery crimes in Republic of Croatia show tendency of permanent increase. It was twice bigger in year 2003 then it had been in year 1999, and even three time bigger then in year 1994.

This paper tries to reassess ability of Croatian police to meet this challenge. According to our estimation the Croatian police should face formal reorganization and make additional efforts in professional education of police officers at all levels if it wants to respond adequately to dramatic changes in crime structure. Among numerous problems the Croatian police is facing the authors of the paper will focus at two of them: 1) relations between uniforms and crime police and 2) distribution of police forces regarding severity of crimes. In the papers these problems will be analyzed through robbery crimes, but the analyses might apply to other crimes too.

The authors estimate that within the frame of current organization and ways of acting the Croatian police would not be able to respond adequately to these changes.

The authors find that there are many models that might be used as examples of more effective police work and that they should be assessed regarding specific Croatian situation.

SOME STATISTICAL INDICATORS OF ROBBERY CRIMES IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

CRIMINAL ROBBERY ACTS

Statistical indicators presented in this paper refer to crimes of robbery in Croatia registered in period between years 1994 - 2003.

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Just opposite crime acts in total, robbery crimes in Republic of Croatia show tendency of permanent increase. It was twice bigger in year 2003 then it had been in year 1999, and even three time bigger then in year 1994 (Table 1). Average increase for the monitored period is 12.4%. Just to make an comparison, we would like to quote situation in the EU (Barclay, Tavers, 2003:13) where average increase of robbery in the period between 1997 – 2001 is 24% (in Croatia 10.6%), and in the period between 2000 -2001 is 5% (in Croatia 11.6%). According to these indicators Croatia is mostly like Slovakia (Barclay, Tavers, 2003:13).

Table 1. Total number of crime acts and robberies in the Republic of Croatia in the period between years 1994 – 2003

Year	Total number of crime acts*		Robberies		% robberies in total number of crime acts
	Absolutely	Chain index 1997 = 100	Absolutely	Chain index	
1994	64.051	–	383	–	0.6
1995	63.015	98.4	426	111.2	0.7
1996	50.931	80.8	490	115.0	1.0
1997	48.292	94.8	505	103.1	1.0
1998	53.454	110.7	690	136.6	1.3
1999	55.723	104.2	622	90.1	1.1
2000	65.809	118.1	732	117.7	1.1
2001	75.730	115.1	772	105.5	1.0
2002	75.363	99.5	1.085	140.5	1.4
2003	77.653	103.0	1.131	104.2	1.5

*Traffic crimes excluded

Source: MUP RH Statistics on Crimes for period 1994 - 2003

In the period between 1994 – 2003 robbery in Croatia participated in the total number of crime acts by 0.6% (1994) to 1.5% (2003). In just five months at the beginning of 2004 it increased to 1.9%. And UN data for the period 1990 – 1995 show that average participation of robbery in total number of reported crime acts reaches 5 to 6% (United Nations, 2004).

If we compare first five months in 2003 and 2004, we find that it has increased in 2004 by 32% (from 491 acts to 648).

That increase has been especially evident at the territory of the Zagreb Police Management that covers area of the capital and Zagreb County (885.000 inhabitants; 4,300.000 inhabitants for the whole Republic of Croatia). On first five months of year 2004 it has been noted 51% more robberies then in first five months previous year. That shows that territorial distribution of robbery crimes have been significantly changed in Croatia.

Until 2004 robberies made some 50% of total crime acts in Zagreb (Zagreb County), while in only first five months in year 2004 it amounted to 74%.

SCENE AND OBJECT OF ATTACK

Data presented in Table 2 show that robberies performed indoors and out doors in Croatia are relatively equal in number.

Table 2. Scene and object of attack

Robberies	Reported crime acts		Index
	Number of acts		
	2003	2004	
Post Offices	7	6	-14.3
Banks	7	8	+14.3
Exchange Offices	5	15	+200.0
Houses and apartments	19	19	0.0
Stores	104	128	+23.1

Gas stations	30	16	-46.7
Kiosks	36	49	+36.1
Apartment buildings	63	80	+27.0
Out door	220	327	+48.6
Total	491	648	+32.0

Source: Review on crime situation in the Republic of Croatia for the period January –May 2004; MUP RH, Zagreb 2004. p. 18

Number of robberies increased in exchange offices (+200%), kiosks (+36%), apartment buildings (+27%), stores (+23%), and it decreased at gas stations (-47%) and post offices (-14%).

Robbery crimes have become evidently crime acts done in big cities (with only few exceptions). Just bank robberies are done more often in smaller settlements or in big towns suburban areas. (SEE: Review I-V 2004, page 18).

PERPETRATORS

Number of robbery perpetrators against whom the police filled criminal charges varies from 242 (1999) to 290 (1995).

Table 3.
Persons reported on for robbery crimes in the Republic of Croatia

Year	Persons	
	Absolutely	Chain index
1994	272	-
1995	290	106.6
1996	270	93.1
1997	237	87.8
1998	272	114.8
1999	242	89
2000	255	105.4
2001	245	96.1
2002	275	112.2
2003	261	94.9
Total	2619	

Source: MUP RH Statistics on Crimes for period 1994 - 2003

In 10-year time (1994 – 2003) the police reported on 2.824 persons for reasons of suspected robbery. Out of that number 344 persons were registered as re-doers – as persons reported or even convicted for crimes in several occasions. Out of total number of 2.824 persons reported by the police 134 (4.7%) had been reported or convicted for 3 or more crimes.

We can only conclude that number of robbery perpetrators who have been previously reported on for more crime acts is increasing.

CASE SOLVING

Robbery cases are solved in the Republic of Croatia in percentage varying between 42% (2001) to 57% (1997). It has been noticed that in spite of the fact that number of

reported crimes increased by 32% in first five months 2003, number of solved cases reduced in the same period of 2004 by 12.4%.

Description of robbery crime insists on immediate contact between a victim and a perpetrator.

Robbery is classical crime very often reported by victims and eye-witnesses. And they do it very soon – some 2/3 robberies are reported about not later then 30 minutes after the crime actually took place.

Robbery is the crime the police are informed most often. But in 90% of cases perpetrator is not known at the moment of reporting. In 10-year observed period the police reported on 2.619 perpetrators. Out of that total number identity of 283 reported perpetrators was known at the moment of reporting to the police. In 43% of other cases perpetrator was found after one day. Next 121 reported perpetrators were identified in the period lasting from 1 month to 3 months. That makes total of 91% afterwards solved robbery cases. These data show how important is time limit when it comes to solving robberies and identifying perpetrators.

Amount of information, traces and objects found are essential for successful identification of perpetrator. If the police do not have information about crime, if no traces have been found, if, in short, there is information deficit, the police can not investigate.

Table 4. Persons reported on in the period between year 1994 – 2003 according time limit between information about crime done and identification of perpetrator

Year	Total number of reports	Identified afterwards	Perpetrator identified afterwards								Identified in the moment of reporting
			to 1 day	1 - 3 days	4 – 10 days	11 – 30 days	1 – 3 months	3 – 6 months	6 – 12 months	to 12 months	
1994.	272	247	108	31	31	36	15	8	13	5	25
1995.	290	261	108	34	66	20	20	7	2	4	29
1996.	270	248	102	29	42	20	30	8	2	15	22
1997.	237	218	101	16	41	14	25	14	3	4	19
1998.	272	237	95	27	28	45	25	8	3	6	35
1999.	242	210	89	26	26	28	14	5	7	15	32
2000.	255	223	117	10	42	24	19	3	5	3	32
2001.	245	223	91	27	28	33	16	12	11	5	22
2002.	275	238	109	15	33	33	28	13	2	5	37
2003.	261	231	94	17	42	28	23	8	11	8	30
Total	2.619	2.336	1.014	232	379	281	215	86	59	70	283

Source: MUP RH, Table 53 (KD2T053)

But in spite of mentioned increase, number of crime acts in Croatia is not bigger then 2.000 crimes on 100.000 inhabitants. That gives Croatia status of states with low crime risk (it is placed in the last third of the scale). In that respect Croatia can be compared to Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Russian Federation (United Nations: Seventh UN Survey of Crime Trends:1 – 2). In Germany, Denmark and Sweden, for example, number of crimes committed is between 8.000 and 13.000 on 100.000 inhabitants.

These statistics do not indicate disturbing increase of total crime in 10-year period, but they do show drastic increase of robberies. Today robberies make 1.9% of total crime committed in Croatia, and in year 1994 it used to make only 0.6%. Therefore we can consider robbery to be massive in Croatian circumstances.

Next important characteristic of robbery in Croatia refers to significant change in territorial distribution of that specific crime act. While in the area covered by Zagreb Police

Management (Croatian capital and Zagreb County) in 1994 less than 50% of total number of robberies in Croatia was committed, today that percentage is 74%.

These significant changes give us the right to predict that robbery crimes will increase further; there are no data to show the opposite.

The very same quick increase has been noticed in crimes connected to drugs, cars and frauds.

This paper tries to reassess ability of Croatian police to meet this challenge. According to our estimation the Croatian police should face formal reorganization and make additional efforts in professional education of police officers at all levels if it wants to respond adequately to dramatic changes in crime structure. Among numerous problems the Croatian police is facing we will focus at two of them: 1) relations between uniforms and crime police and 2) distribution of police forces regarding severity of crimes. Here we will analyze these two problems through robbery crimes, but the analyses might apply to other crimes too. These two problems, namely, imply the whole range of relevant issues.

The first problem refers to Croatian police organization. In last ten years it has been changed and number of police officers who are directly involved in crime solving has been reduced in local police stations. It means that there are no specialists for different crimes (but for the minor delinquency) at local level. Accordingly, there are no specialists for robbery crimes solving at local level. They only act in big cities and county centers. These specialists are physically dislocated and are included into crime investigation only if needed. The most often criterion for that is crime severity.

We are convinced that current organization of the police results in misunderstandings (to put it mildly) between uniforms (local level) and crime police (specialists) (city and county level) in the field work.

They work together, but it is rather unclear what is the final achievement of the uniforms, who are obviously very quick to appear at the crime scene. What is formally requested in these situations is too general, and the result is that in most cases uniforms, after having done minimum, just wait for specialists to appear. Further crime processing is up to them.

Our opinion is that uniformed police forces should be more professional and focused on more specific tasks. And that means to make more specific professional rules and to provide additional education to uniformed police officers. They might be more efficient in all preliminary actions.

In another words, when talking about robberies, we could say that increase of professional level of uniformed police forces will certainly rise efficiency in solving robberies out doors and opportunity robbery crimes.

Robberies include variety of forms – from inferior to very severe ones. It is questionable if decision of focusing greater part of forces on severe robberies on account of inferior ones is justified.

For ordinary citizens there are no less or more important robberies regardless of caused damage. On the contrary, citizens will probably find frequent inferior street robberies more dangerous and important as they increase possibility they themselves might

become victims. On the other hand, professional approach (Eck:1992:131-154) advocates selection of cases based on supposition that specific case is more likely to be solved due to existing information and traces. According to that strategy, police forces should be engaged in those cases regardless of damage caused by robbery. That approach calls for highly professional and responsible leader who is to design strategy of solving robbery case bearing in mind all mentioned objective priorities. Unfortunately, in Croatian police practice that selective approach has not become really yet. There is still tendency to act on relatively mechanical distribution of cases to police officers and not to behave regarding selection criteria.

CONCLUSION

We can conclude that structure of crime has changed in Croatia and that mild increase of total crime can be noted. But number of robbery crimes, along with crimes connected to drugs, car stealing and frauds, shows drastic increase. We estimate that within the frame of current organization and ways of acting the Croatian police would not be able to respond adequately to these changes. At the moment there is no clear strategy of changes at the Ministry of Interior, which would result in police organization focused on reduction of crime generally, and especially of those crimes that have shown drastic increase.

We find that there are many models (Eck, 1992, Barker, 1993; Burrows, 2003; Goldstein, 1990; Morrison, 1994; Smith, 2003; Meško, 1996) that might be used as examples of more effective police work and that they should be assessed regarding specific Croatian situation.

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