

**CRIME TENDENCIES IN LATVIA AND PROBLEMS OF CRIME
PREVENTION ON THE VERGE OF THE CENTURIES**

Andrej Vilks, Dr.

Director of Criminological Researchs Centre
Ministry of Justice
10 Meistaru St.
LV-1050 Riga
Latvia
Tel/Fax: 371 721 6781
E-mail: an-vilks@com.latnet.lv

Dainis Bergmanis

Researcher
Criminological Research Centre
Ministry of Justice
10 Meistaru St.
LV-1050 Riga
Latvia
Tel/Fax: 371 7216781
E-mail: an-vilks@com.latnev.lv

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S u m m a r y

Bearing in mind that crime tendencies are changing both qualitatively and quantitatively, it is necessary to improve law, organisational, and tactical basis for crime eradication. The approach that is appropriate for the spirit of our time defines the necessity to intensify the work of scientifically research institutions in the area of criminology, as well as complex and qualified co-operation of different branches of all institutions.

Once again, the world finds itself on the verge of the centuries. How will we enter the new millennium? What accomplishments and what faults will we take with us? What can we still do in order to lessen our faults, including crime, so that it does not spoil the event? What assessment or "balance" can we present in the field of criminology?

In fact, crime tendencies in the world, in Europe and in the Baltic countries, including Latvia, have more in common and count more analogies than any differences and contrasts.

Characteristically, in the last period of time, crime trends show not only quantitative, but also qualitative changes, and this feature tends to persist distinctly. Crime becomes more dangerous for the society, and damage it causes, produces increasingly negative effects. Commitment of crime involves more and more advanced technology and sophisticated equipment which are not even available for law enforcement.

New forms of crime are developing: the sphere of finance and economics, electronic communications systems experience different kinds of criminal manipulations, so does also public opinion – making use of absence of stable values and ideals, new non-traditional anti-

social religious movements, cult religions and sects gain ground, posing threat to human lives and the integrity of society.

On the whole, the crime becomes extra-territorial, i.e., transnational. Unfortunately, crime prevention mostly focuses on national aspects. The most essential development to be considered for crime prevention in particular, is the fact that criminally and anti-socially directed structures tend increasingly and more and more distinctly to squeeze into the legal and official spheres (economics, financial system, politics, social sphere etc.). So, what are current crime trends in Latvia? Crime statistics of 1997 allow to come to concrete conclusions. To start with positive trends, we can mention the improving rate of crime detection. In 1997, 18 940 crimes of the current year have been detected, plus 5932 crimes committed in the previous years. This is the best indicator since 1990, in Latvia and also compared to our neighbours Lithuania and Estonia.

It refers in particular to grave crimes. Due to the satisfactory police performance, especially in Riga, there is a significant decrease of publicly committed crimes (crimes in public places): hooliganism and infliction of bodily injuries. Speaking about police performance, among negative tendencies we have to mention the poor quality of their work on the place of crime. It could be improved, notably involving more advanced scientific and technical resources and means.

However, there exist such social processes whose negative development affects crime level, but is beyond the influence of the police. Here the main concern is over the crimes committed under alcoholic or narcotic intoxication, by persons out of education system and jobless persons (problems of unemployment), as well as juveniles. The proportion of crimes committed by persons, who neither work nor attend educational establishments, in some districts of Latvia amounts to 60%, but in some particular districts – even to 90%. During the last year, 36 865 crimes have been registered. Compared with 1996, the number of crimes fell by 3,5%. The tendency of the decrease continues, but very slightly. Now we could talk of a period of stability. However, some types of crimes continue to experience steady increase.

Particular concern is caused by the increase of violent crimes. Last year, there was a rise in number of registered homicides (+3), intentional serious bodily injuries (+30), aggravated injuries (+33), aggravated injuries leading to death (+18). If we sum up the cases of homicides and aggravated injuries leading to death, the number of these serious crimes will exceed 400. For such a small country as Latvia is, this number is very high.

Total number of registered grave crimes in Latvia is 18 791 (-4,3%). This decrease mostly happened due to the fall in registered robberies (202 cases less). There is also a decrease in large scale thefts and rapes. At the same time, the number of thefts from cars and trading places increased. A surprising development is the considerable decrease of crimes involving guns (+164 cases less). It has to be linked with better police performance and larger numbers of confiscated arms and explosives. Although the number of crimes involving explosives increased by 4 cases, this year the police has been more successful in their detection than last year – in 1996 only 2 such cases were cleared, in 1997 – 18. Given that to detect these crimes is rather a complicated task, this indicator is rather remarkable.

If previously great concern was evoked by the crimes related to excessive alcohol consumption, now, in addition to this problem we have also crimes involving narcotic and psychotropic substances. The registered number of crimes related to different types of drugs last year amounted to 428 cases (plus 67 cases). This number doesn't include crimes committed under narcotic intoxication. Of course, the most part of these crimes are committed in Riga city and Riga district, however, narkobusiness tends to spread all over the country. Another growing problem and source of concern is juvenile delinquency. In 1997 juveniles were responsible for 3634 committed crimes (plus 609) making 19,2% of all registered crimes. It actually is a threatening problem, if we consider the age of young perpetrators – 15-23 years. Children are our future, but instead of studies or military service they chose committing crimes and find themselves deprived of freedom, serving their sentence in prison. And we all know what "education" they acquire in prison. Unfortunately, we have no grounds to anticipate the improvement of the situation in the nearest future, as

there is no government response nor any national programme aimed at eliminations of this problem.

It is typical that in places where the young have the opportunities and offer of education or work, they do not involve themselves in crime. The number of crimes committed by those studying in higher educational establishments is extremely small. At present it is the only positive trend about the youth, however, here, too, we have a concern – the growing trend of drug use either in schools and in universities.

As an acute problem still remains the prevalence of crimes committed under alcoholic intoxication. In 1997, 7467 (plus 747) such cases were registered. Here too, there is no measures at national level to combat this phenomenon.

As concerns the economic crimes, we find that the “business thrives” – last year 1549 (plus 262 cases) crimes in economic sphere have been registered. 41,6% of all economic crimes makes up money counterfeiting. A big proportion belongs also to the different types of fraud and embezzlement and appropriation.

Frankly speaking, the beginning of the 1998 does not inspire any hope. There have been cases of extremely horrifying murders and aggravated bodily injuries, the catalizator of horrors being alcohol. Obviously, this already exceeds the competence of the police.

There is a need for co-ordinated efforts of either police, and social workers, and the medical workers. The attitude and involvement of the society on the whole has to be considered as well.

When we complain and feel horrified about violent crimes, we should consider the promotion of violence that prevails in our society. It is enough to look at a TV programme to make sure about the extent which violence dominates in our every day life. No surprise then about inclinations and behavior patterns of our children...

It is our own responsibility and involvement that should be considered and reviewed. It concerns not only the violence, but also the other spheres, for example, corruption.

So generally, judging from the current crime tendencies, we can conclude that in the future we are to expect:

1) the increasingly fast consolidation of criminal structures. Criminal groups will tend to join each other, to unite in order to achieve their criminal goals and increase their illegal profit;

2) criminal structures will increasingly merge with legal economic and political structure. The border between legal and illegal business will become imperceptible. The proof of this can be traced in the statement of the Interior Minister of the Russian Federation Anatoly Kulikov (BNS/INTERFAX, 20.02.98.) who said that Russian organized crime currently controls approximately 40 000 enterprises, including 580 banks, 1500 public sector enterprises, 4000 joint stock companies. In their turn, the criminal financial means are being employed not only for “private” needs, but also in order to achieve political power;

3) the public danger posed by crime is increasing, and this trend will continue;

4) the effects of crime will be more and more negative;

5) financial and economic sector will be increasingly saturated by criminal activities, given the ultimate aim of crime – the profit. None of the 3 Baltic States possesses an effective system to face economic crime which is especially dangerous for our states given our geo-political, social and economic situation.

On the contrary, there is a view in public maintaining that all means are good and acceptable to enrich oneself (sort of wild capitalism). Under such circumstances, the elimination of economic crime is beyond our ability. We can only discuss maintaining it

within the limits of social acceptability.

6) the beginning of the 21st century possibly will witness the trend of new divisions in the influence spheres and the renewed clashes between criminal structures;

7) the new types of crimes will appear and spread rapidly (for instance, computer crimes).

As concerns crime prevention, the attention should be paid to:

1) elaboration and development of legislation related to the EU standards;

2) interintegrity of legislation;

3) organizational problems related to the development of informative and consultative structures in crime prevention area;

4) development of electronic information channels;

5) liquidation of crime damages and effects, related to returning of illegally gained means to the victims;

6) increase of prevention potential by specifying prevention objects.

Conclusions

1. Despite tendencies of crime decrease in the last few years, felony quantitative are becoming more negative, crime becomes more organised for society, so conclusions are much unfavourable.
2. Material and financial resources of law protection institutions for crime eradication has decreased in connection with increase of numbers of functions and work volume in these institutions, but the supply of finance for these institutions remains the same.
3. The base of crime eradication forms should be scientific and constructive approach. There is necessity for international co-operation in crime prevention and research.

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Nusikalstamumo tendencijos įžengiant į trečią tūkstantmetį ir nusikalstamumo prevencijos problemos

Dr. A. Vilks

*Kriminologinių tyrimų centras
Latvijos teisingumo ministerija*

D. Bergmanis

*Kriminologinių tyrimų centras
Latvijos teisingumo ministerija*

SANTRAUKA

Nusikalstamumas keičiasi tiek kiekybiškai, tiek kokybiškai, todėl svarbu tobulinti teisinę, organizacinę ir taktinę kovos su nusikalstamumu bazę. Mūsų laikmečiui tinkantis metodas – intensyvinti mokslinių tyrimų institucijų veiklą kriminologijos srityje ir glaudžiai bei kokybiškai bendradarbiauti su įvairiomis institucijomis.