PERSONAL SAFETY IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPEAN CAPITALS

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***Abstract*:** This *article presents the results of the analysis of the way in which local authorities from the capitals of some South-East European countries are involved in preventing criminality activities. More precisely, I analyzed the way in which local authorities (city halls) and the police of the analyzed capitals understand to prevent criminality by communicating some prevention measures. The information analyzed was that posted on the official websites (English version) of the city halls and police of capitals from Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Slovenia and Moldavian Republic. The content analysis was made with an analysis chart which had as purpose identifying the presence/ absence of information regarding the criminality prevention: information regarding institutions of intervention in the case of committing a violent act, prevention programs, concrete measures of prevention focused on some types of victimization, target groups of prevention, relationship between public authorities, citizens and police. The results of the analysis emphasized the lack of information regarding the criminality prevention on most websites of the city halls of the analyzed capitals. The website of the city hall of Athens (Greece) is the only one to contain information about the prevention activity and concrete measures for protecting children, women, and migrants.*

Keywords: *communication crime prevention, South East of Europe, personal safety*

Introduction

The development of new communication technologies has made possible new ways to communicate preventive messages designed to help increase the safety of urban citizens. Recent studies have analyzed how the police used "web-based communication channels" to communicate with citizens (Crump, 2011; Lieberman et al 2013; Voight et al, 2013; McIntee 2016). Gradually, these studies stayed at the basis of a new research direction focused on the identification of "The Police's web presence" and of the peculiarities for the messages promoted by the police through social media. Most of the studies were conducted mainly in USA (Brainard & Edlins 2014; Aiello, 2017; Meijer & Thaens, 2013), Canada (Kudla & Parnaby, 2018; Schneider 2016), or in the developed European countries (Meijer & Torenvlied, 2016; Bullock, 2016; Fernez et al 2014) and less in countries in South-Eastern Europe. The communication between citizens and Police has become necessary in the European space, especially in the present European context (which is facing the terrorist attacks). Police had been forced to use online communication to "inform citizens" about how they can be protected, but also in order "to be informed by citizens" when it needed support in identifying the offenders (Jensen et al, 2018: 2). The present article aims to

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answer at the question of how preventive messages are promoted through City Hall's web-sites and Police Departments in several capitals located in South Eastern Europe.

Method

This article presents the results of the analysis of the way in which local authorities from the capitals of some South-East European countries are involved in preventing criminality activities. More precisely, I analyzed the way in which local authorities (city halls) and the police of the analyzed capitals understand to prevent criminality by informing citizens and visitors about the prevention measures of their victimization in the urban space. Whereas the communication of such information could be made via more means of communication (TV, radio, online media, social media etc.), I decided to limit myself only to analyzing the websites of some institutions. I decided to analyze the information posted on the official websites (English version) of city halls and police of some capitals situated in South-East Europe. Only in the case of two capitals (Bucharest and Chișinău) I analyzed the websites in the Romanian language as there were no English versions. The information posted for these two capitals was accessible due to the fact that Romanian is the author's mother tongue. The comparative analysis included five capitals from: Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Slovenia and Moldavian Republic.

The used methodology included the content analysis with a chart structured in such a way that it could allow the identification of the presence/ absence of information regarding criminality prevention. The analysis chart had more sections: prevention programs, concrete measures of prevention focused on some types of victimization, target groups of prevention activities, information regarding institutions of assistance and protection of victims in the event of a violent act. I also included in the structure of the chart a section through which I tried to identify the existence of some concrete ways of collaboration between public authorities, citizens and police in order to increase the citizens' safety. The websites mentioned in Table 1 were analyzed between 25th of November and 10th of December 2018.

Results

ATHENS

Athens is a special case as information regarding prevention activities could be identified in more sections and subsections of the website of Athens City Hall (English version). Local authorities decided to make public the local initiatives regarding the safety of citizens, tourists and international migrants who are in this city. The analysis of the information posted on the website of Athens City Hall (English version) emphasized the existence of a section "Citizens**"** which has a subsection *Safety* destined to information regarding ways of intervention in order to protect some vulnerable categories of citizens. Some special importance is given to children protection. They created the "Volunteer School Crossing Guard Program" (from 1999) for children's safety. Citizens and tourists are also informed that, at the level of each city sector there is a Local Crime Prevention Council

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(LCPC) whose purpose is to initiate some activities of criminality prevention. Set up in 1999, these councils could be found in all the cities with more than 3000 inhabitants (Law 2713/1999, art. 16). The purpose of making these councils was to increase the citizens' safety via some activities meant to protect the vulnerable persons by informing them about criminality from every area and methods of preventing victimization. Improving the relationship with citizens is a priority of authorities and due to this reason LCPCSs maintain the connection with the representatives of the community and collaborate with volunteers for implementing the actions (visits and activities in schools, local centers and clubs, publishing some informative articles and newsletters). On the other hand, LCPCs are some sort of intermediary that facilitates the relationship between citizens and police because it maintains their relation and helps them collaborate with the prevention activities.

LCPCs are in contact with Athens Municipal Police and Police station and they run prevention activities together. LCPCs run information activities in the domains: "driving behavior, unlawful behavior, violence in and out of school, drug use, abuse and exploitation of minors, abuse and exploitation of women" (Crime Prevention https://www.cityofathens.gr/en/crime-prevention-0). Moreover, the same Citizens section has also some subsections which include information regarding criminality prevention or victims' protection and support. I am talking about the subsections: *Children*, *Women*, and *Foreign Nationals – Migrants.*

These sections contain concrete advice regarding prevention of victimization of Greek women and children, but also regarding victimization of women and children of international migrants who settled here or are just crossing this area. Preventing and treating drug consumption is the subject of two sections of the website of the Athens City Hall: *Social Disadvantaged Groups and Municipal Agencies*. In these sections the ones who are interested can find information about the activity of the prevention and treatment centers, as well as contact details (https://www.cityofathens.gr/en/node/7509).

BUCHAREST

The analysis of the website of Bucharest City Hall emphasized the fact that it has no English version. The Romanian version had, at the moment of the analysis, 1,363,924 vizitors (between 1.01.2018-10.12.2018). Although this website seems to be quite often accessed, it does not contain information regarding the way in which various categories of vulnerable people could be supported in the event of a felony. This website does not contain information regarding campaigns of criminality prevention (as I identified in the case of Athens or Ljubljana). There is no direct connection with the website of Bucharest Police. There is also not a Publications section where we could see brochures or informative articles posted.

Alternatively, the website of the General Directorate of Bucharest Police includes a special section named *Prevention* that mentions all the prevention campaigns initiated by The Analyzing and Preventing Criminality Service and all the informative materials meant to prevent some types of felonies. The information is well structured on types of victims and felonies. We can find here information about the prevention campaigns for children: "Safety Olympics", "Bully-ing – phenomenon or whim", "Where there is law, there is no bargain.

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Manual of juridic education", "What is bully-ing and how can it be prevented?" (https://b.politiaromana.ro/ro/prevenirea-criminalitatii/pagina-copiilor). Some special attention was given to preventing: robberies, fraudulencies, shoplifting or car thefts, felonies committed in commercial societies. The prevention section also contains a subcategory named Preventing family violence. Unlike the other subcategories meant to prevent some types of felonies, the one referring to family violence contains more information about the activities run by police and by centers of victim assistance. Unfortunately, this subcategory does not contain concrete advice for women who are exposed to some acts of violence (for instance what measures she should take for her and her children's protection). The website of The General Directorate of Bucharest Police contains, by far, most of the information about prevention activities. However, this information was accessible only to the Romanian language speakers. The website of Bucharest City Hall and the one of The General Directorate of Bucharest Police have no English versions. I did not identify as well, on the website of The General Directorate of Bucharest Police information meant to prevent victimization of tourists or foreign citizens (as I identified in the case of Ljubljana and Athens).

CHIȘINĂU

The analysis of the website of Chișinău City Hall and of the website of "Police Department of Chișinău County" (Romanian version) emphaiszed the fact that these two institutions are less preocupied in informing the citizens about some criminality prevention strategies meant to increase personal safety in Chișinău. The website of the City Hall contains only information regarding the activities run by this institution in order to prevent corruption and fraud.

The website of "Police Department of Chișinău County" includes in its structure a section named Crime Prevention where we can find only information regarding: a) campaigns of preventing children victimization (visits in children camps where they were informed about the risks to which they can be exposed and means of avoiding them and contacting police stations), b) campaigns of preventing thefts from houses and c) campaigns of preventing shoplifting. The website of this institution contains also news regarding the police activity, statements about some actions (e.g. catching a shoplifter) together with concrete recommendations of preventing shoplifting. I identified information about activities of preventing drug consumption and increasing children safety ("Protective grand-parents" Project) in the section "Socially useful" – what happens in the city. In the Partnerships section there are actions meant to prevent violence against women from Chișinău. We can also find here a press release regarding the partnership between The General Inspectorate of Police and The Center of Women's Rights.

SOFIA

The website of Sofia City Hall (English version) contains only the emergency number 112.

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Table 1 Information about criminality prevention posted on the websites of city halls and police from the analyzed capitals

City (Population)*	Analyzed websites	Information about criminality prevention
Athens (3.75 million)	https://www.cityofathens.gr/en	Information about crime prevention, children, women and international migrants vitimization prevention. Local Crime Prevention Councils (1999) prevention activities collaborate with Athens Municipal Police and Police station and the community.
Bucharest (1,877,155)	http://www.pmb.ro/	
	https://b.politiaromana.ro/	The website includes a section named Prevention which has a lot of informative materials with concrete advice for preventing: bully-ing, robberies, fraudulencies, shoplifting and car thefts, family violence, felonies committed in comercial societies. The website does not have an English version.
Chișinău (723,000)	https://www.chisinau.md/	Only information regarding the anti-corruption and anti-fraud policy.
	http://politiacapitalei.md/	A Crime Prevention Section where I included only information regarding the campaigns of preventing children victimization, campaigns of preventing shop lifting and home thefts. Preventing the drug consomption and children victimization – section Soccially useful - what happens in the city. Preventing violence against women – Partnerships section.
Sofia (1.26 million)	https://www.sofia.bg/web/sofia-municipality	Information regarding the emergency number 112.
Ljubljana (275,000)	https://www.ljubljana.si/en/	Information about the unique emergency number 112 and police telephone numbers 113 and police number for reporting offenders. In the Publications section, I inlcuded publications for preventing violece against women and preventing addictions (alcohool, cigarettes and drugs).
	https://www.policija.si/eng/index.php/policedirectorates/policedirectorateljubljana	The website of Ljubljana Police does not have an English version, but it links to the English version of the website of Slovenian Police.

* World Population Review, Greece, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Moldova, Albania available at: http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/

LJUBLJANA

Known especially as *European Green Capital* (2016) Ljubljana is also a European capital which wants to offer its visitors and inhabitants information about the initiatives

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taken in the personal safety domain. The website of Ljubljana City Hall contains information regarding the projects initiated by the city hall and its counselors focused on identifying some strategies of improving life quality in this city. The analysis of the English version of the City Hall website emphasizes the fact that domestic violence (2006) and addictions (alcohol, tobacco, drugs) (2017) are among the problems that the City Hall and the experts from this town want to solve. These two issues benefited from the support of police, academic environment and non-governmental organizations which united their forces under the co-ordination of the City Hall and made campaigns of preventing domestic violence (City of Ljubljana, 2010) and drug consumption (City of Ljubljana, 2017). Some online publications (in English and Slavonian) offered those who visit the City Hall website information about these two types of issues (general information, information regarding types of services for victims, rehabilitation and assistance centers).

Tourists and inhabitants found in emergency situations have the possibility to obtain information regarding the telephone numbers useful for solving some difficult situations by dialing the emergency unique number 112, the police number 113 or the special number of police for reporting offenders.

The website of Ljubljana Police does not contain information in English, but it easily links to the website of Slovenian Police which contains useful information in English. Thus, on the website of Slovenian Police, in the section *Prevention*, there is information for tourists and citizens who risk to become victims or who had become victims. Tourists are advised how to protect themselves or how to contact police. There is also information for the victims of family violence (women and children) (https://www.policija.si/eng/index.php/prevention/1691-domestic-violence-police-procedure). Some concrete advice was also included in some publications for criminality victims (Štirn,2004), owners of cars and other categories of vulnerable people (https://www.policija.si/images/stories/Publikacije/PDF/Policija_Svetuje_EN_2016.pdf) or women who were victims of human traffick. (https://www.policija.si/eng/images/stories/Publications/prostitution.pdf).

Conclusion

The results of the analysis emphasized the lack of information regarding criminality prevention on most websites of the city halls of the analyzed capitals. The website of the city hall of Athens (Greece) and of Ljubljana (Slovenia) contain information about the prevention activity and concrete measures for protecting children, women, and international migrants. The interest of authorities from Athens for increasing the personal safety in this capital was emphasized also by 2017 Safe Cities Index. The results of the analysis made for 60 cities of the world indicated the fact that Athens (new entry in the top 60 cities) is on the 33rd place regarding safety (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017:7). Athens is situated on different positions in the case of digital security (35th place), health security (21st place), infrastructure security (29th place) and personal security (41st place) (Idem, pp-28-30). The 41st place obtained for personal security might change next year due to the concrete implemented measures and, especially due to the improvement of the information level regarding the victimization prevention of some vulnerable groups.

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Preventing women victimization in the family space seems to be of interest for the police of Bucharest, Chișinău, Ljubljana and Athens. The police units from these cities have prevention campaigns mentioned on their websites. However, there are differences in the way in which they address to the potential visitors of the websites. Although the website of The General Directorate of Bucharest Police has a section meant for preventing family violence and the website of Chișinău Police includes information regarding campaigns of preventing family violence, these websites do not include concrete advice for victims as I identified in the case of Slovenian Police. The Slovenian Police describes the prcedure to which the victim of family violene can be exposed in the event in which she wants to contact police (in order to inform the victim about the way in which police and its services can work). In addition to that, the website of Slovenian Police contains also concrete advice for victims and their children, advice that can be helpful for them until the police arrives in the case in which they are exposed to violent acts (https://www.policija.si/eng/index.php/prevention/1703-what-can-i-do-as-a-victim-).

Tourists are a category of people frequently exposed to victimization. The analysis of the websites of city halls and police of the five capitals situated in South-East Europe showed that there is little interest for protetcing this category of persons. Only Athens and Ljubljana mentions concrete advice for preventing tourist victimization. The measures of preventing tourist victimization identified in the case of the two cities are still far from the ones that I identified in our previous studies made at the level of some European capitals such as Paris or London (Balica, 2017).

"Police Department of Chișinău County"

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