

SECURITY PROGRAM

In 2022, the Security Program's efforts were focused on the following areas:

- **Conventional crime and the pandemic.** CSD contributed to a criminological study of the government reactions to Covid-19 and the impact of the pandemic on crime levels in 16 European countries. The Covid-19 pandemic serves as a prime example of how the common norms and values shared by Member States are interpreted differently depending on people's trust in public institutions, governmental control strategies, national crime patterns and law-enforcement priorities.
- **Risks of organised crime.** CSD continued its research on a variety of organised crime markets: vehicle theft, identity theft, trafficking in human beings, and firearms trafficking. CSD analysed the driving factors, enablers, facilitators and possible prevention measures concerning car theft in Bulgaria and contributed to the development of a barrier model to prevent and disrupt organised vehicle crime in the EU. An EU-wide study of online identity theft assessed the nature and scale of the problem, detailing the prevalent criminal schemes and estimating the number of victims and resulting costs. CSD continued to improve judicial cooperation in the recovery of illicit assets by investigating practical obstacles to the implementation of relevant EU primary legislation. The Center also contributed to combatting trafficking in firearms by setting up common minimum standards for firearms registries in the EU and neighbouring countries.
- **Countering radicalisation and right-wing extremism.** CSD also analysed radicalisation and violent extremism among Bulgarian youths from ultra-conservative communities and among football fan groups. The study revealed that the agenda of ultra-conservative communities tends to intertwine with that of far-right, populist parties, and is closely linked to conspiracy theories and Russian propaganda.
- **EU home affairs policies and programs.** CSD contributed to a study on right-wing extremism in the EU. The analysis outlined the distinctive features of right-wing extremism and violent actions perpetrated by right-wing extremists in seven EU Member States.

I. Conventional crime

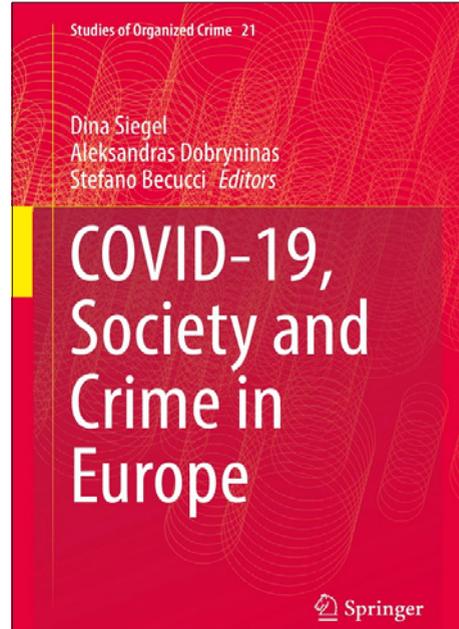
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CSD's analysis for Bulgaria examines the significant socio-economic crises the country witnessed in the last three decades, each triggering an upsurge in crime rates. The Covid-19 pandemic created a new and very different type of crisis, leading to diverse health, social, and economic effects and record low crime levels. Although the government's public health measures initially proved successful, and Bulgaria maintained one of the lowest numbers of registered cases in the EU, the lockdown eventually caused a severe negative impact to the economy, triggering chronic social unrest and protests against the government.

II. Organised crime

Organised crime and corruption in the Balkans

The Balkan region is a crossroad for the trafficking of many illicit commodities, and a geographic hub for the smuggling of migrants attempting to enter Western Europe. The war in Ukraine has increased the opportunities for organised crime in the region, which lacks the necessary toolkit to counter the negative trends related to organised crime and is thus particularly vulnerable. These patterns of organised crime include corruption at seaports, prostitution and human trafficking, drug trafficking, racketeer-



ing, illicit trade, and even football hooliganism, which CSD has linked to politics and violent crime. On 14 July 2022, the Center for the Study of Democracy and the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) held an **international conference** that focused on organised crime and corruption in the Balkan region. The conference brought together experts from government, academia, media, and civil society, who emphasised the need for building a global strategy to fight organised crime.

Organised vehicle crime

Over the last ten years, Europol has considered motor vehicle crime to be a significant criminal market affecting the European Union and its Member States. Organised property crime, particularly motor vehicle theft, has been confirmed as an EU crime priority in the 2nd EU Policy Cycle. CSD contributed to a **study of organised vehicle crime** aimed at developing barriers to prevent the online distribution of stolen vehicles and vehicle

parts in the EU. This research has been implemented in cooperation with the Universiteit Gent in Belgium and Stichting Centrum voor Criminaliteitspreventie en Veiligheid in the Netherlands and covers six EU Member States – Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. CSD analysed the latest developments in the stolen vehicles market in Bulgaria and suggested a barrier model to prevent and disrupt this criminal activity.

Identity theft and identity-related crime

The ever-growing digitalisation of the economy and society heightens the threats of identity theft and misuse of personal data. A significant increase in data theft attacks has been recorded in the EU. At the same time, legislative and non-regulatory initiatives in EU Member States are lagging behind the capacity of cybercriminal groups to take advantage of technological advances at the expense of citizens and businesses.



Within this context, the *Study on Online Identity Theft and Identity Related Crime*, conducted by CSD in collaboration with ICE, the University of Trento and Victim



International conference "Organised Crime and Corruption in the Balkans: Trends and Implications", Sofia, 14 July 2022

Support Europe, aims to broaden and deepen the understanding of the phenomenon of online identity theft and related crimes and their societal and regulatory implications in the EU. The study assesses the nature and scale of the identity theft problem in the EU, describing the prevalent criminal schemes and estimating the number of victims and costs. It also maps and analyses current legislative, regulatory, and non-regulatory measures to combat online identity theft and identity-related crime across the 27 EU Member States. Based on this mapping, the study identifies best practices and gaps in the analysed measures.

Trafficking in human beings

CSD and partner organisations assessed the gaps, challenges, needs and good practices in combating the trafficking in human beings in three EU Member States – Bulgaria, Germany and Greece. This analysis will inform the development of tailored training for law-enforcement practitioners working in the field of trafficking in human beings.

CSD co-organised a hybrid roundtable discussion on 18 November 2022 in Brussels on the preventive role of police authorities and the promotion of cross-sectoral cooperation in combating the trafficking of human beings and child sexual exploitation (prevention, investigation and victim assistance). The EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, Ms. Diane Schmitt, and law-enforcement officers and experts from Bulgaria, Greece, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Israel attended the event.

Migration and human smuggling

The war in Ukraine spurred the largest refugee crisis in Europe in the last 20 years, with more than 5 million Ukrainian citizens fleeing into Europe. Since this crisis preoccupied much of border authorities' efforts and resources, OC networks took advantage of the situation, and the number of undocumented migrants from the Middle East along the Balkan route soared again. In September 2022, CSD experts participated in a discussion of border management and



the migration challenges at EU external borders in Edirne, Turkey, organised by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, along with German MPs, representatives from Turkish municipal authorities, and Turkish and Greek migration experts. Experts from the Security Program presented the Bulgarian perspective on the current migration wave in light of the activities of human smuggling groups operating along the migration routes from the Middle East to Europe.

Furthermore, CSD, in cooperation with GI-TOC, initiated a study on the impact of the war in Ukraine on criminal markets in the Balkan region with a particular focus on the increase in migrant smuggling in 2022. The research maps the contributing factors and drivers of this new worrying trend, aiming to explain how migrant smuggling resurfaced as one of the hottest criminal markets for OC in the Balkan region.

Recovery of illicit assets

In 2022, CSD continued its effort to improve [judicial cooperation in recovering illicit assets](#) by investigating practical obstacles to implementing relevant EU primary legislation. Efforts were concentrated on mitigating the disparities in training by creating comprehensive resources for legal professionals, policy-makers, scholars and the general public.

The CSD team assessed the impact of the latest Regulation in the field and the primary obstacles to its implementation in the Member States. This study will inform the creation of tailored training and common standards for judicial practitioners.

Trafficking in firearms

CSD led [a study on firearms registries in the EU](#) and several neighbouring



countries. Country profiles for 21 target countries were developed, and a report outlining common minimum standards was prepared. The report was shared with DG HOME, the OSCE and UNDP firearms experts and will serve as the basis for a manual of good practices and a policy paper seeking to introduce legislative initiatives for common standards in firearms control and enhance the exchange of information among firearms authorities in Europe.

III. Radicalisation and violent extremism

Radicalisation among Bulgarian youths

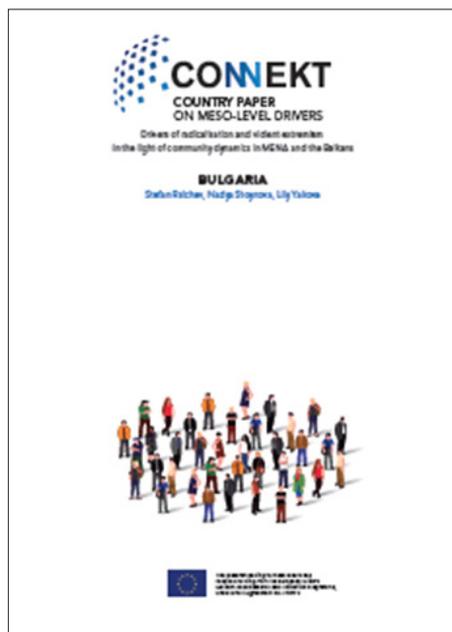
CSD conducted research on radicalisation and violent extremism among Bulgarian youths. The study involved observation of interactions, content analysis of posts and comments in public Facebook groups and pages, and

interviews, all focusing on ultra-conservative communities and football hooligans.

The research outlined how ultra-conservative communities in Bulgaria, online and offline, tend to organise along *ad hoc* issues of interest, most often “in defence of traditional family values” and against Covid-19 restrictions. Their membership and agenda often intertwine with contemporary far-right, populist parties. Facebook is an essential platform for their organisation and motivation, including live protests. Conspiracy theories and Russian propaganda play a substantial role. While these groups do not endorse violence, there is a risk for violent action at any protests organised by them. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that the risks of far-right radicalisation are discernible in the “patriotism” and nationalism cherished by football fans and other related factions, which is frequently shared online. Violence is accepted as a legitimate means to an end, and online communication tends to increase extreme sentiments among football supporters’ groups, resulting in xenophobia and hate speech.

Online hate speech and violent extremism

Online hate speech has seen a sharp rise across Europe and has become an alarming phenomenon. The negative impact of hate speech on public discourse, leading to polarisation in society, along with its tendency to motivate and enable offline violent attacks increased the importance of countering online hatred in P/CVE. In this context, CSD, in cooperation with the research institute RAND, carried out a study commissioned by the Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU to better understand how online hatred manifests itself in Bulgaria and to identify different types of the phenomenon.



The study involved a collection of background data, social media analysis, and a series of interviews that will be presented in an upcoming publication.

IV. Monitoring and evaluation of policies in the field of security and home affairs

Far-right extremism: EU and national perspectives

CSD experts participated in a workshop on far-right extremism in Europe, organised by the Bulgarian Association for Policy Evaluation (BAPE) and the Portuguese organisation Innovative Prison Systems (IPS), presenting the trends and threats of far-right extremism in Bulgaria and evaluating the institutional response to these threats. The workshop targeted prison and probation staff, community organisations, and judicial staff from Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans. Sixty-seven practitioners and researchers representing a

Iceland
Liechtenstein
Norway grants

Norway
grants

HOPE
Holistic Radicalisation Prevention Initiative

Far-right Extremism in Bulgaria

Trends, threats, responses

Mois Faion
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4 February 2022

The HOPE project is funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation. Implemented by:

broad geographical spectrum from 21 countries attended.

CSD, in cooperation with Asterisk Research and Analysis, developed a study of *Right-Wing Extremism in the EU*, commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the LIBE Committee. This study reviews the distinctive features of right-wing extremism and the violent actions perpetrated by right-wing extremists in the EU. It gives an overview and analysis of definitions, recent trends and responses to these actions, and concludes with recommendations. In particular, the study highlights the need to develop a working definition of right wing-extremism to provide a better framework for understanding, studying and measuring the phenomenon.

Study
Requested by the LIBE committee

European Parliament

Right-wing extremism in the EU

Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs
Directorate-General for Internal Policies
PE 700-953 - May 2022

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