

## Bulgaria Human Security Chronicle 7 – June 2015

### **Road accidents as a threat to human security**

Bulgaria reported a consistent trend of decrease of deaths in car accidents during the last 5 years. The victims in 2006 were 11,258 while those in 2014 were 8 635.<sup>1</sup> However, only for the first three months of 2015 fatalities have increased by 25%. The reasons are complex and each of them should be considered a factor for the deterioration of the statistics. The increased number of road accidents that ended with deaths directly affects the personal security of Bulgarians, since reckless driving and the bad conditions of roadways directly threaten the lives of all participants in the traffic. Therefore, the topic of the war on the roads is a major issue that needs to be studied in order to investigate the causes and to draw conclusions by which to change the statistics.

The death of a 4-year-old on June 2, 2014, by a driver who was driving too fast, led to mass protests in Stara Zagora. The society appealed for tolerance on the road, strict control and more adequate punishments for the offenders.<sup>2</sup> Several dozen people blocked a street in Burgas on April 25, 2015<sup>3</sup>. The reason was the initiative of the association SOS-accident "Do not put our lives at risk". The procession was supported by partners from the club "Safe Streets" in the person of Maria Dimitrova, mother of a 12-year-old student Valia, who was killed while crossing a walkway. The protesters wore placards with slogans such as "Are you tolerant?", "If you have a child - consider it.". Similar protests in many other cities indicate that Bulgarians fear for their lives and the lives of their children: they don't feel safe on the road, which is the reason why this HS Chronicle is dedicated to the victims of car accidents.

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1 <http://dokkpbdp.mvr.bg/Statistics/default.htm>

2 [http://dariknews.bg/view\\_article.php?article\\_id=1274646](http://dariknews.bg/view_article.php?article_id=1274646)

3 <http://burgas.topnovini.bg/node/599830>

Examining the reasons behind this problem, several factors that are prerequisites for accidents stand out.

### I. **Bad conditions of the roads and highways in Bulgaria**

The contracts for the construction of roads in Bulgaria are not always won by the most qualified companies. As a result roads are built quickly and with poor quality. There is not adequate control of the used materials, so cheap materials are widely used. There are many potholes, the pavement is uneven and uncertain during rain and snow falling<sup>4</sup>. This is a precondition that the roads will not stand for very long time and will soon need to be rebuilt. Also, roads are often blocked due to landslides or flooded roadways, which leads to tension and wrath. The citizens of Zlataritsa recently blocked the exits of the city for few hours in protest against bad roads in the region<sup>5</sup>. The condition of the highways is absolutely unsatisfactory – they are repaired almost every year, but this is also done quickly and poorly executed. As a result, there are constantly potholes on the highways.<sup>6</sup> In fact, it is often unsafe to drive with the permitted motorway speed of 140 km per hour as defects of the road lead to crashes.<sup>7</sup>

### II. **Intolerant drivers**

Another reason for frequent accidents and casualties on the road is the intolerant and aggressive drivers. A recent example from April 11, 2015 is a driver who deliberately pushed off the road a car and motorbike riders in the Kresna Gorge.<sup>8</sup> This is a failure of the whole society which tolerates such actions. The legal framework also defines the behavior of

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4 <http://novanews.novatv.bg/news/view/2014/10/23/90345/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%89%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B5-%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D1%81-%D0%BB%D0%BE%D1%88%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D1%8A%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%89%D0%B0-%D0%B2-%D0%BF%D0%BE-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%8F%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D1%87%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82-%D0%BE%D1%82-%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0/>

5 <http://bnt.bg/news/obshtestvo/v-zlataritsa-protestirat-sreshtu-loshi-pa-tishta>

6 <http://www.vesti.bg/bulgaria/s-90-kmchas-po-magistralite-trakiia-i-hemus-ot-dnes-6033911>

7 <http://btvnovinite.bg/article/bulgaria/incidenti/kola-propadna-v-dupka-na-magistrala-trakiya.html>

8 <http://www.168chasa.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=4715921>

people behind the wheel. If the measures against violators on the road were more severe and there were tighter controls and harsher penalties, the statistics would probably be different.

### III. **Corruption**

A major problem that contributes to the high number of accidents is the illegally acquired driving licenses. For 2010, every seventh driver's license in Bulgaria was illegal - from a total of 70 000 driving licenses, at least 10-15 thousand were from the black market.<sup>9</sup> This directly puts in danger the lives of other drivers and pedestrians because drivers with illegal driver's licenses are not safe for the others and do not always have adequate driving skills.

Another aspect of corruption is the corrupted traffic policemen that detect offenders and do not take appropriate measures. Instead, they take bribes. So those drivers, who were not sanctioned, continue to perform the same offenses, being dangerous to the others.

### IV. **Use of old and unsafe cars**

Many Bulgarians buy old and unsafe cars because it is much cheaper than buying a new one. In some countries the government introduced tax exemptions for citizens who buy new cars to encourage them not to use old cars, which in addition to greater air pollution, are more dangerous. This is good practice because the new cars are much safer for drivers as car companies are constantly developing new ways for maximum protection of the passengers in accidents. Many old cars have no airbag or sensor for wearing a seat belt, which may be fatal.

In conclusion, the condition of the roads and safety cars could indeed save lives. However, it is essential that the legal framework would be changed to impose more severe penalties on offenders, and especially, to change the behavior on the road towards more tolerance.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.mediapool.bg/godishno-se-kupuvat-pone-17-ot-shofyorskite-knizhki-news170687.html>

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