

Criminological analysis of the causes of mercenary activity

Igor Soroceanu*

PhD Student

Ștefan cel Mare Academy

MD-2009, 21 Gheorghe Asachi Str., Chișinău, Republic of Moldova

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0879-8186>

Abstract. The purpose of the study was to analyse the causes of mercenary, as it was used in different contexts, and the peculiarities of the legal control of this phenomenon. It was analysed causes of mercenary activity, which involved a complex examination of the social, economic, political and legal factors that favour the emergence and proliferation of the mercenary phenomenon. Also, it was identified factors such as political instability, regional armed conflicts, poverty, unemployment or lack of professional opportunities, that determined individuals to engage in paid military activities outside the legal framework. Criminological analysis was conducted that also explored the influence of transnational criminal networks, geopolitical interests, and legislative loopholes that allowed the recruitment, financing, and use of mercenaries. In addition to financial motivation, some individuals may be attracted by the desire for adventure, belonging to a group, personal affirmation or perpetuation of an identity built around military experience. In the absence of effective mechanisms for social reintegration, former combatants may become vulnerable to recruitment into mercenary structures. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms of recruitment, motivation and operation of mercenaries involved correlating macro-social factors with individual and organisational ones. The analysis was researched to allow the foundation of effective public policies, oriented both towards preventing structural causes and directly combating mercenary recruitment and financing networks. Only through an integrated approach, based on international cooperation and the consistent application of legal norms, can the scale and impact of the mercenary phenomenon on security and international legal order be limited. The results obtained from studying the causes of mercenary activity are mainly of a practical and strategic nature, contributing to better management of this phenomenon

Keywords: violent actions; curiosity; vulnerable childhood; paramilitary organisations; criminal antecedents; defective socialisation

Introduction

Crime is not an accidental or sporadic phenomenon, but represents the expression of a complex social reality, determined by the continuous interaction between the individual and his environment of existence. Applying this approach to the phenomenon of mercenarism, a broad and systematic examination of all the determining factors that contributed to its emergence, development and perpetuation was necessary, including by analysing the causes of mercenary activity. A considerable contribution to the field of mercenary activity research had been made by numerous researchers. The authors' Ye. Hryhorenko *et al.* (2023) examined the characteristics and essence of illegal paramilitary and armed formations in Ukraine, identifying their differences from legal military and paramilitary structures. Researchers highlighted a number of defining features, such as the absence of legal regulation, an independent organisational structure, combat readiness, discipline, and the capacity to conduct military operations, which allow them to be classified as illegal formations. O. Bontea (2022) noted that the activity of mercenaries was illegal, and mercenaries were not protected, although

they take part in the armed conflict. In authors opinion, mercenaries do not benefit from the legal status granted to legitimate combatants and were not protected by the rules of international humanitarian law to the same extent as members of regular armed forces. R. Grecu (2022) supported the idea that increased attention needs to be paid to the prevention of crimes against public security and public order. Scientist emphasised the danger posed by crimes such as war propaganda and mercenary activity, which can destabilise the climate of peace and fuel internal or international tensions. War propaganda contributed to the spread of violent ideas and attitudes, influencing public opinion and justifying the use of force, while mercenary activity involved illegal participation in armed conflicts and connections with transnational networks. N. Savescu (2022) was of the opinion that mercenaries do not have a stable origin, they can be recruited from all provinces. M. Gherman (2023) noted that the activity of mercenaries was illegal, which was recognised by most global leaders and international organisations. K. Rękawek (2023) noted that the purpose of mercenaries was to fight continuously.

Suggested Citation ————— **Article's History:** Received: 28.01.2026 Revised: 22.04.2026 Accepted: 27.05.2026 Published: 01.06.2026

Soroceanu, I. (2026). Criminological analysis of the causes of mercenary activity. *Social & Legal Studios*, 9(2), 30-42. doi: 10.32518/sals2.2026.30.

*Corresponding author (soroceanu94igor@gmail.com)



Z. Lippai *et al.* (2024) emphasised that the presence of Hungarian mercenaries in contemporary armed conflicts raised sensitive issues related to the legal qualification of their status, the applicability of international criminal law norms and the respect for fundamental principles of human rights. Reserachers also highlighted that mercenaries may be involved in committing acts that fell under international crimes, but establishing their legal responsibility was hampered by the lack of a uniform regulatory framework, the difficulties in collecting evidence and the transnational nature of their activity. V. Jitariuc & A. Secrier (2024) noted that mercenary groups can be part of groups involved in committing acts of terrorism. The authors emphasised that the integration of mercenaries into such structures can take place both directly, through formal recruitment, and indirectly, through occasional or contractual collaborations. This association amplified the degree of social danger, as it combined the financial motivation specific to mercenaries with the ideological or political objectives of terrorist groups, generating violent actions with a major impact on international security. A. Schmidt (2024) pointed out that the activity of mercenaries brought only negative examples, such as the mercenaries in Mali, who seriously worsened relations between France and Mali. S. Cebotari & V. Lungu (2025) believed that mercenaries represented a direct threat to the territorial integrity of the state. Mercenaries may be involved in military actions aimed at supporting separatist movements, unrecognised entities or other non-state actors, which directly affected the sovereignty and control of the state over its own territory. Through their interventions, they can influence the balance of power in internal or international conflicts, prolonging hostilities and complicating peaceful settlement processes. The authors also drew attention to the difficult nature of mercenary activities to control, given that they often operated outside the legal framework. V. Kostiuk & I. Yefimenko (2025) noted that mercenaries resorted to war crimes out of the desire to obtain personal gain or to achieve other forms of individual benefits. The aim of the study was to analyse the reasons underlying the emergence and use of mercenaries in various historical and contemporary contexts, and to highlight the determining causes that favour the use of such forces, such as armed conflicts, periods of political instability or the economic interests of the actors involved.

Materials and methods

Methodological approach of this research was based on the use of a complex and coherent set of scientific research methods. Analysis method was applied, through which the key concepts, the legal norms and the particularities of the studied phenomenon were dissected and examined in detail, as well as the synthesis method, which allowed the integration of information obtained from various sources into a unified and systematised theoretical framework. Also, the historical method was used to highlight the evolution of relevant regulations and practices, providing a perspective on how the analysed phenomenon took shape and evolved in different historical stages. In addition, the comparative method facilitated the identification of similarities and differences between various legal regulations, doctrines or criminological approaches, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the specifics of the subject in a national and international context. The theoretical and legal basis

of the work was constituted by an international normative framework, such as: Additional Protocol I to the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I) (1977), OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977), and International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries (1989). At the same time, the legal basis was also formed by the national legal framework of the Republic of Moldova, represented mainly by Article 130 and Article 141 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 985 (2002), which provided the essential legal references for the legal classification of the facts and for the delimitation of criminal liability. This normative foundation was completed by an extensive analysis of the specialised literature, which included valuable doctrinal contributions and studies in the field of criminal law and criminology. In this context, the works of the authors S. Noshadha & M. Duka (2023) as important for the study because it provided grounds for examining mercenarism as a component of contemporary hybrid conflicts and for analysing the role of non-state armed actors in the transformation of the nature of war. The study by N. Savescu (2022) was important for this research due to its highlighting of the socio-economic and criminogenic factors that contributed to the recruitment of individuals into mercenary activity. The work of K. Rękawek (2023) was used to explain the psychological and behavioural characteristics of mercenaries, as well as the motivational mechanisms underlying their continuous participation in armed conflicts. These doctrinal sources contributed to the solid theoretical foundation of the research, offering varied perspectives on the interpretation of legal norms, on the legal-criminal qualification of the facts and on criminological approaches regarding the causes and conditions that favour the occurrence of the phenomenon studied. At the same time, the comparative analysis of these contributions allowed highlighting doctrinal divergences and convergences, as well as outlining an argued and coherent position in relation to the issue addressed.

Results and discussion

Mercenaryism was a practice with a long history in the history of armed conflicts, having been used, at different times, as an instrument to supplement regular military forces. From the perspective of international humanitarian law, mercenaryism was subject to restrictive regulation, designed to limit and eliminate the use of such practices. The main international legal instruments prohibited not only the participation of mercenaries in hostilities, but also related activities, such as their recruitment, use, financing and training. This prohibition applied both to the state's public authorities and institutions, and to natural and legal persons acting on its territory or under its jurisdiction. States therefore had a positive obligation to prevent, criminalise and punish any form of involvement in mercenary activities. In response to the expansion of this phenomenon, the United Nations, through the General Assembly, adopted a series of resolutions designed to create a coherent legal framework for combating mercenaryism. These normative steps led to the adoption of the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries (1989). The Convention was of particular importance, as it provided a legal definition of the notion of mercenary and qualified mercenaryism

as an international crime. Another relevant example in this regard was the OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977), which reflected the concern of African states regarding the destabilising impact of mercenaries on sovereignty, territorial integrity and self-determination processes. These regional initiatives emphasised the need for a coordinated and multilateral approach in combating mercenaryism, given its cross-border nature and serious implications for the international legal order. Therefore, it can be stated that mercenaryism represented a complex phenomenon, located at the intersection of international humanitarian law, international criminal law, contemporary criminology and collective security.

M. Bîrgău (2010) supported the idea that the cause represented the phenomenon that specified and determined or generated another phenomenon, called effect, acting in circumstances that favour or prevent the production of the effect. These circumstances were called conditions and represented the circumstances that influenced the cause through their presence, favouring it, enhancing it or slowing it down to the stage of producing the effect. At the same time, a similar position regarding the concept of causality of the criminal environment was found in the work of I. Lari (2004). The author supported the idea that the causes of crime were social phenomena and processes that generated and maintained the existence of crime or cause its increase or decrease. Criminal act represented the concrete expression of a set of actions and conducted that strongly contrasted with the criminal norms, through which the most important social values relating to the life and integrity of the individual, family, society and the state were protected (Bujor & Pop, 2002). Researchers D. Banciu *et al.* (2002) noted that identifying the causes of crime consisted in researching the social contexts of life, in locating the general and particular circumstances that accompanied or preceded the concrete situation, in which the crime was committed. Often, comparing these different situations allowed for a more adequate identification of these causes. This is why a particular task of criminological research consisted in determining, on a statistical or casuistic basis, the main variables that characterised the life of various social groups with antisocial orientations, certain categories of individuals with problems, and the life contexts in which these individuals were placed. Therefore, taking into account the four mentioned perspectives of criminology specialists regarding the interpretation of the content and essence of the “cause of crime”, it can be concluded that these represented the set of social, economic, psychological, cultural and individual factors that favour the emergence, maintenance and development of the criminal phenomenon in society. Crime does not occur by chance, but was the result of the complex interaction between the individual and the environment, in which he lives. Criminology, as a science that studied the criminal phenomenon, started from the idea that no criminal act had a single cause, but was determined by a set of conditions and influences. The causes for the crime of “participation” of a mercenary in armed conflict, military actions, or violent acts aimed at undermining the constitutional order or violating territorial integrity may include those that transform the possibility into reality or always favour this antisocial activity. S. Noshadha & M. Duka (2023) provided essential theoretical and conceptual benchmarks for the analysis of mercenarism as a constitutive element of contemporary hybrid conflicts, as well

as for examining the role of non-state armed actors in the process of redefining and transforming the nature of modern warfare. Researchers study highlighted the fact that, in the current context of international relations, wars are no longer fought exclusively between states and regular armies, but increasingly involve paramilitary structures, private military companies and other categories of non-state combatants acting outside the traditional military framework.

For example, one of the reasons could be the person's need to lead a decent life. Some people resorted to practicing mercenary activity because they came from socially vulnerable families and their family situation cannot provide them with some minimum living conditions, such as: food, clothing, payment of monthly services, possession of strictly necessary computing equipment, founding a family or, if one already exists, ensuring a prosperous future for children. Thus, by practicing this illegal activity in an armed conflict, in military actions or other violent actions and obtaining remuneration for the actions performed, mercenaries can satisfy their needs. Mercenary work can be analysed, from a legal and criminological perspective, as a marginal option that occurred in unfavourable socio-economic contexts, especially for people, who failed to integrate into the civilian labour market, or who faced social exclusion. In criminological terms, this option was not just an individual choice, but the result of the complex interaction between structural, economic, psychological and cultural factors, which contributed to the orientation of some individuals towards activities located on the border or beyond legality. The lack of employment opportunities, precarious jobs, social inequalities and difficulties in accessing education and vocational training can generate an environment conducive to the adoption of deviant behaviours. In such conditions, individuals may perceive participation as mercenaries as a quick solution to obtain significant income, even if this activity involved major risks and was located in an area of ambiguity or even illegality, depending on the applicable legal regulations.

The involvement of mercenaries was regulated and restricted by the rules of international humanitarian law. Instruments such as Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I) (1977) defined and limited the status of mercenaries, excluding them from the protection granted to lawful combatants and highlighting their problematic nature from the perspective of the legality of participation in armed conflicts. Many states also provided for sanctions in their domestic legislation for the recruitment, financing or participation as a mercenary, which underlined the legal risk nature of this activity. Participation as a mercenary can be explained by the theory of multifactorial causality of crime, which highlighted the cumulative role of environmental, individual and social context factors. Thus, people in situations of economic vulnerability, social exclusion or lack of perspective may be more susceptible to external influences, including recruitment into groups or organisations involved in armed conflicts. In addition, factors such as the desire for affirmation, the need for recognition, group influence or even radicalisation processes may intervene. Psychological motivations, which may include the search for identity, social status or a form of personal validation, as well as situational factors, such as proximity to conflict zones or exposure to recruitment networks, should not be neglected. In

some cases, the choice to become a mercenary may be determined by a combination of economic constraints and opportunity factors, which highlighted the complex and dynamic nature of the phenomenon. Mercenary involvement must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, situated at the intersection of socio-economic vulnerabilities, individual motivations and legal constraints. This raised serious problems both from the perspective of legality and compliance with international law, and from a criminological point of view, through its implications for individual and collective security and social stability.

The need for a decent living was one of the most important causes of people engaging in mercenary activities. This need should not be understood only as a desire for material well-being or comfort, but as a fundamental condition of human existence, linked to the satisfaction of basic needs and the assurance of a dignified life. When these needs cannot be met through legal and stable means, some people ended up resorting to extreme solutions, such as mercenary work. In many regions of the world (Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola, Syria and Iraq, Latin America), these conditions were not guaranteed due to poverty, unemployment, economic instability, armed conflicts or poor economic development. In such contexts, people were faced with a lack of future prospects and the impossibility of improving their social situation through legal work. Mercenary work appeared as an economic alternative for people, who had military skills or experience in the security field, but who failed to integrate into the labour market. The “salaries” offered to mercenaries were higher than those obtained in the civilian occupations available to these people. For this reason, mercenary activity was perceived as an opportunity to quickly obtain sufficient income to ensure a decent living. Family responsibilities also played an important role in this decision. Many feel the pressure to support their children, parents or other dependents. In the absence of a stable income, this responsibility became a burden that was difficult to bear. People, who failed to ensure an acceptable standard of living, may be determined to seek alternative sources of income, even if these involved major risks. Mercenary activity, which usually offered salaries much higher than those in civilian life, thus became an apparently quick and efficient solution for obtaining the resources necessary for survival. In many regions affected by poverty, economic crisis or political instability, well-paid jobs were rare. Even skilled professions do not guarantee a sufficient income to cover daily expenses. This was not necessarily a desirable choice, but a consequence of economic and social constraints. Frustration generated by the lack of money, the feeling of social inadequacy or comparison with those, who made a better living can lead the person to seek risky solutions. In this context, mercenary work was perceived as a temporary escape from poverty, a means of gaining social respect or achieving financial independence. Conflict-affected and poverty-stricken communities also tend to normalise the idea that money can be obtained through risky means, which can further encourage involvement in mercenary work. The need to earn a decent living not only driven involvement in mercenary work, but also perpetuated it. Those involved can become part of a cycle of violence, dependent on income from illegal or dangerous activities. This situation showed how important economic equity and access to real opportunities were to prevent people from being pushed into such risky solutions.

The second reason for the mercenary activities was curiosity. For a significant number of people, the routine of daily life can be perceived as lacking stimulation, characterised by repetitiveness and a certain lack of existential meaning. From this perspective, some individuals developed a tendency to seek intense, out-of-the-ordinary experiences that provided them with a sense of adrenaline, challenge and overcoming personal limits. This need for strong sensations can constitute a vulnerability factor, leading to the assumption of significant risks and the involvement in dangerous or socially contested activities. In this context, participation in mercenary activities can be interpreted as an extreme form of stimulation seeking, in which the individual satisfied his need for emotional intensity, but also the desire to experience borderline situations, often associated with armed conflicts or unstable environments. At the same time, this choice usually involved a reassessment of the risk-benefit ratio, in which the potential gains – material, symbolic or related to personal identity – were perceived as outweighing the negative consequences, including legal, ethical or related to physical integrity. Thus, mercenaryism became not only an economic option, but also a manifestation of the desire to escape from the mundane everyday life and access an environment perceived as more intense, more challenging and more meaningful, even at the cost of exposure to considerable risks. Curiosity can also include the desire to test one's own physical, mental, or strategic abilities. Participation in illegal mercenary activities, such as in: the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the 1960s-1965, the Angolan civil war in the 1970s-1980s, private military security companies in the Middle East from the 2000s to 2026, private military expeditions in West Africa in the 1990s-2000s, allowed individuals to test their limits in situations of extreme stress, developed military skills, and faced real challenges. For some, this experience can be more valuable than money or social recognition, as it gave them a sense of self-improvement and competence. Curiosity can be influenced by social environment, peer pressure, and the desire to experience something out of the ordinary. Young people were often attracted to risks and challenges, and the desire to experience “adventure” can be stronger than the fear of danger. In this sense, curiosity became a psychological factor that complemented economic or material motivations, explaining why some people chosen mercenary work even without an urgent need for money.

An important example of curiosity as a motivating factor for recruitment into mercenary activities was the scenario, in which a young person with no military experience was fascinated by the subject of armed conflicts. Young adult constantly watched documentaries, reports and online materials about contemporary wars, being attracted by the complexity of combat situations, military strategies and the idea of life in extreme conditions. Simple information was no longer enough for him, and his curiosity evolved into a strong desire to directly experience the reality he had read about and seen only from the outside. Against the backdrop of a daily life perceived as monotonous and lacking in challenges, the individual began to seek experiences that will provide him with adrenaline and a sense of existential intensity. In this context, he came into contact, through the online environment, with people or groups that promoted opportunities to participate in conflict zones, sometimes presented in an attractive manner, emphasising financial gains and “unique”

experiences. His curiosity was amplified by this information, and real risks, such as danger to life, psychological trauma or legal consequences, were minimised or ignored. The decision to go to such an area was not determined exclusively by the need for money, but especially by the desire to answer a personal question: what was it really like there? Thus, curiosity became the trigger for action. Once in the conflict environment, the individual gradually got involved in activities specific to mercenaries, initially perhaps in secondary roles, but later even in direct actions. Only at this point does he begin to fully realise the seriousness of the situation, the difference between the initial perception and reality being significant. This example illustrated the fact that curiosity, although apparently harmless, can become a factor of vulnerability, especially when combined with the desire for adventure, lack of experience and the influence of the information environment. In such cases, involvement in mercenary activities does not occur as a result of a well-evaluated rational decision, but as a consequence of the desire to experience the unknown and live in unusual situations. At the end of the analysis of curiosity as a cause of the manifestation and spread of the mercenary phenomenon, that the desire for adventure and curiosity can attract inexperienced people to conflict situations, which can lead to high risk for the individual and for those around them. However, it explained, why mercenary work was not exclusively an economic choice: some people were motivated by lived experience, the unknown and the desire to test their limits.

Another reason for mercenarism was accident (at the initiative of the recruiter). This cause generally referred to, when the person was misled. That was, the individual ended up as a mercenary in the first place without his initial will and without knowing what activities he was going to carry out. The person ended up in such circumstances, because he entrusted too much to either another person or a group of people, for vast reasons, such as: going to a job abroad, travelling for rest, and as a result, the "initiator" of these trips through deception brought the individual to the obstacle to the location, where the mercenary activities were to be carried out, and not having the ability/knowledge to return, the person practices the mercenary activities. Activity of mercenaries was not always determined by economic, ambitious or psychological factors, such as the desire for a decent living, the desire for luxury or curiosity. Sometimes, unexpected circumstances or chance can be the decisive factor that led a person to become a mercenary. By chance in this context those situations, in which the individual: did not actively seek to become a mercenary; was in a place and at a suitable time, but without prior intention to participate in the conflict; was exposed to the influence of unexpected external factors, such as meeting with recruiters or emergency situations in conflict zones. Basically, the person ended up participating in war or military actions by chance, and his activity was not determined by planned desires or clear objectives. Some examples in this regard would be the civil war in Sierra Leone from the 1990s-2000s, when many volunteers or former foreign soldiers unexpectedly became involved, having already been present in the country for other reasons and being recruited by armed groups or security companies; or in the case of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo around 1960, when some people became mercenaries simply because they were in the region for other reasons (civilian work, business, exploration)

and were contacted by armed or government groups. This case showed that mercenaryism was not always the result of deliberate motivation. Chance can attract inexperienced people into dangerous situations, which increased the risk for them and for those around them. At the same time, it emphasised the role of chance and external circumstances in human decisions, demonstrating that the activity of mercenaries cannot always be explained by economic needs, desires for luxury or curiosity. Similarly, that some random situations that attract people to mercenary activities can also be the following: being in a conflict zone – an individual can travel or work temporarily in a country affected by war and got involved in fighting or was recruited by armed groups. Acceptance of this offer was determined more by opportunity than by premeditated desire; the existence or emergence at the moment of external pressures or social circumstances – coincidences of life, such as the loss of a job, friends or acquaintances, who were already participating in military activities, or the need to remain in an unstable area, can lead a person to become a mercenary without initial plans.

The fourth reason for mercenary activity was defective socialisation (at the request of the person in need). Online communication on various social media platforms was widespread, many people had acquaintances, friends, former colleagues, who were abroad, and upon returning to the country, some of them tend to demonstrate their income through vast, fabulous "stories". Under these conditions individual out of the desire to also had major financial rewards, was liable to fall into the trap of mercenarism. Therefore, due to the lack of details provided and poor communication, the citizen ventured into the chase for income and insisted on the person with fabulous "stories" to help him in order to get a job abroad, in a well-paid job. In such a situation, the experienced person promised the individual major benefits and convinced the latter to accompany him to work, on the battlefield, without the latter initially knowing about this fact, and in the end, finding himself at his destination being forced to practice mercenary activities. In such situations, mercenary activity, i.e. the involvement of individuals in armed conflicts in exchange for sums of money, can also be explained by psychosocial factors. One such factor was poor socialisation, i.e. inadequate education and social environment that do not provide the individual with moral values, social norms or healthy behavioural models. People with poor socialisation may be more likely to accept major risks or to get involved in illegal or dangerous activities, such as mercenary work.

Poor socialisation can create a risk-prone psychological profile, in which the individual was not perceived the danger associated with involvement in armed conflicts, sought membership in groups that provided structure and meaning, or was more easily attracted by financial promises or adventure, without analysing the morality or consequences of actions. Thus, people who had not been taught to respect social rules and norms may be more willing to accept dangerous or immoral activities, such as mercenary work, because there were no solid references in their psychological baggage to stop them. Some examples in this regard would be the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia in the early 1990s, the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the 1960s-1965s. Defective socialisation as a cause of mercenary activity also had some specific characteristics, such as: the lack of strong moral values that was, people who had not

learned the clear difference between good and evil, between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, may consider violence or involvement in armed conflicts to be a normal or justifiable option; the influence of a negative environment, which manifested itself through the growth and development of the “needy” in a disorganised, violent or emotionally unsupportive family environment, which can lead people to seek meaning and belonging in alternative groups, such as private military organisations or armed groups; the absence of positive social models that was, living together without mentors, teachers or responsible adults to guide behaviour and provide moral guidance, young people can adopt risky or illegal behaviours, without being aware of the consequences; difficulties in social integration – poorly socialised people may have problems adapting to rules, norms and societal values. These difficulties can make them vulnerable to the influence of external groups or to recruitment into paramilitary groups. Therefore, a final line to the mercenary cause of defective socialisation as being an important psychosocial cause of mercenary activity. The lack of solid moral benchmarks, the negative influence of the family or community environment, the absence of positive role models and difficulties in social integration cause the “needy” to become more prone to accept dangerous activities, such as mercenaryism. This cause highlighted that education and the social environment played a decisive role in shaping behaviour and in choosing risky activities.

Another reason, why people choose to work as mercenaries was lack of qualified studies and lack of a job. Various categories of people can be found in society. Some of them had a well-secured future and at the same time work daily for it, other people came from a more vulnerable environment, which unfortunately ensured their daily survival. There were various circumstances that determined the human personality to ensure their living only on a daily basis, among these the lack of a job, which was the result of the absence of a professional qualification, which was not offer the individual the possibility of a stable salary with a profitable income. The caused that favoured the lack of qualified studies and the lack of a job were various, namely: people did not learn at school, their lack of intellectual capacities, unfavourable family situation, lack of motivation/support/encouragement to study, lack of financial sources to obtain a qualified job. In such cases, people who were a part of the respective category were always looking for a “better” job with a financial remuneration within the limits of spiritual satisfaction, which would give them the opportunity to realise their vast dreams and accomplishments. In the absence of adequate educational training and recognised professional skills, the individual may face marginalisation, social exclusion and restricted access to the labour market. This situation can generate economic instability, financial insecurity and increased pressure on personal coping mechanisms. In such conditions, some individuals may become more susceptible to external influences or to opportunities that involved high risks, but promised quick financial benefits. These factors were frequently associated with an increased level of vulnerability to deviant or illegal phenomena, including involvement in mercenary activities. Such activities can be perceived as an alternative to the lack of legitimate employment opportunities, offering attractive material rewards, but at the same time involving major legal, physical and ethical risks. Therefore, deficiencies in education and the lack of a

stable job were not only individual problems, but also reflected societal dysfunctions, contributing to the creation of an environment conducive to the emergence and perpetuation of risky behaviours.

Education played a key role in the social and professional integration of each individual. The lack of solid training can have wide and diverse consequences, including: reduced employment opportunities that was, people without higher education or professional qualifications had difficulty finding a well-paid or stable job; dependence on temporary or low-paid jobs – this can led to financial instability and frustration; vulnerability to recruitment – therefore, the lack of training made the individual more susceptible to the influence of mercenary groups, which promised attractive salaries, adventure and status. Even people with some secondary or technical education can be affected by unemployment or economic instability. The lack of a job had direct effects on the decisions of each individual, by creating the need to find alternative sources of income even under risky conditions, amplified frustration and the feeling of social futility, causing people to accept dangerous or illegal offers or made the material benefits offered by mercenaries seem tempting, regardless of the risks that may arise later (loss of life on the battlefield, “obtaining” the degree of disability, being subject to legal liability for practicing mercenary activity). Mercenary work offered an apparently quick solution to the lack of studies and a job. People in this situation saw in this activity the opportunity to earn quickly and consistently much higher than the salaries legally available in their countries of origin, the feeling of belonging and status especially if they came from marginalised backgrounds, the possibility of acquiring new experiences and military skills that can compensate for the lack of professional qualifications in other fields. Thus, the lack of studies and a job became a cause that reduced legitimate earning options and increased the attractiveness mercenaryism. A real and objective example of mercenary activity due to the lack of qualified education and the lack of employment was the activity of mercenaries in Mali. In Republic of Mali, a combination of poverty, unemployment and low educational levels had created an environment, in which young people were very vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and mercenaries. Lack of long-term schooling. This meant that young people do not develop skills for stable or well-paid jobs, which made it difficult for them to integrate into the local labour market. In conflict-affected regions, young people not only lacked qualifications, but also cannot find suitable jobs to support their families or to have a stable income. I. Soroceanu (2022) showed that a low level of education was correlated with recruitment into armed groups, and unemployed young people were perceived by these groups as “easy targets” for recruitment, as they have few other economic options. This was an indirect form of economic motivation that intersected with the phenomenon of paid mercenaries, in the sense that money and survival became the main reasons for accepting involvement in war.

Vulnerability was manifested by difficulties in securing the resources necessary for daily living, by the lack of financial security and by exposure to situations of economic risk. In the absence of viable employment alternatives in the formal economy, some people may be tempted to resort to alternative activities, including some that are risky or borderline legal. This type of vulnerability may constitute a favourable factor for involvement in activities such as mercenary work,

which offered rapid and significant financial rewards, but at the same time involved major legal, physical and moral risks. Thus, the decision to participate in such activities can be influenced by economic constraints, lack of legitimate opportunities and pressure to obtain material resources in a context of precariousness. The relationship between lack of education, economic vulnerability and involvement in mercenary activities highlighted the importance of investing in education and vocational training as essential means of preventing social marginalisation and high-risk behaviours. By strengthening access to education and employment opportunities, the likelihood that individuals will be drawn to dangerous or illegal activities as a solution to economic difficulties can be significantly reduced.

The sixth reason for mercenary activity was greed. This state of mind determined the individual to carry out any activity to fulfill his dreams, including resorting to illegal actions. Therefore, his tendency to possess various movable and immovable property, determined even more in the antisocial direction, until finally he knowingly admits to a criminal activity of the mercenary order. And as a result of practicing mercenary activity and obtaining financial remuneration according to expectations, individuals fulfill their dreams by purchasing the desired goods, including by travelling to “exotic” places in various locations around the world. From a criminological perspective, this conduct can be analysed through the lens of motivational theories, which highlighted the role of material incentives and opportunities in determining criminal or deviant behaviour. Mercenary activity was frequently regulated and sanctioned by the norms of international law, International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries (1989) and national legislation, Article 141 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 985 (2002), being considered incompatible with the fundamental principles of the law of armed conflict. Involvement in such activities may attract criminal liability, depending on the applicable legal framework, as mercenaryism was often associated with the violation of norms regarding neutrality, state sovereignty and the legitimate monopoly on the use of force.

Mercenary activity, the involvement of individuals in armed conflicts in exchange for large sums of money, is not always driven by patriotic, political or ideological ideals. A common motive was the desire to live in luxury, the need or ambition to achieve a standard of living well above that which was usual or necessary for survival. This desire represented a material and ambitious cause that can push some individuals to accept major risks in order to satisfy their aspirations for wealth and social status. Unlike the need to live a decent life, which was related to survival and meeting basic needs, the desire for luxury involves aspirations above the average standard of living, such as: the purchase of expensive cars, large houses, state-of-the-art electronics, exotic holidays or other material privileges. This motivation reflected the individual's desire to differentiate themselves socially and to achieve prestige and recognition through wealth. Under these conditions, mercenary work became attractive to such individuals because it offered significantly higher remuneration than regular work, and the associated risks, such as involvement in armed conflicts, were perceived as an investment to quickly obtain the desired luxury.

People motivated by the desire for luxury were not necessarily looking for survival, but to improve their lifestyle.

This can also be influenced by the social environment, where comparison with others or the pressure to display material success led the individual to seek quick sources of income. The lack of legal and well-paid alternatives can make mercenary work a tempting option, even if the activity involved major risks. For example, young former soldiers or people with military training (from regions such as: the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola, the Middle East, Latin America, etc.), who aspired to a luxurious lifestyle and cannot achieve these standards through regular wages, may be attracted by the offers of paramilitary groups or private security companies, which offered salaries considerably higher than in civilian life. At the same time, it was notable that the desire for luxury can influence the psychology of the individual, making him more willing to accept high risks. The feeling of inadequacy, comparison with others, who led a better life, the desire for social status and recognition contributed to the decision to become a mercenary. In addition, the social and cultural environment can normalise the idea that money obtained quickly and through risky methods was acceptable to achieve the desired luxury. Case demonstrated how psychological and social factors combined with the need for money, generating decisions that can have negative effects on individuals and communities affected by conflicts. Mercenaryism thus became an option to quickly obtain the desired luxury, highlighting the social imbalances and aspirations of members of society that can lead people to dangerous activities. Therefore, a final idea at this stage of research represented a material and ambitious cause of the activity of mercenaries. This does not refer to survival, but to obtaining an above-average standard of living, to accumulating wealth and to acquiring a high social status. People motivated by luxury were willing to accept major risks, and mercenaryism offered them a quick and efficient way to achieve these goals. The phenomenon reflected both economic inequalities and social and psychological pressures, which determined people to choose risky ways (modalities) to satisfy their material desires. Embarking on the pursuit of wealth, especially to have more than someone else, people were always looking for activities that will bring them a “decent income”. And the activity in the field of mercenary work, being a paid one, can become attractive to the type of people, who want more and more income. So, they mercenaries for the highest payer, not for just causes; they do not care about the suffering of people or the destruction caused, as long as they receive money or sometimes change their loyalty even during the war, if they receive more advantageous offers. Therefore, greed becomes the driving force that pushed them to participate in conflicts and accept major risks (Table 1).

So, greed was the main cause of mercenary activity because: it determined the acceptance of dangerous conflicts without moral conviction; it determined mercenaries to prioritise material gain over any other principle; or it can destabilise societies and prolong wars. Vulnerable childhood – every human being came from different families, where they grew up and developed differently. In the situation of a family, where the phenomenon of domestic violence (Pădure *et al.*, 2024), parental alcoholism (Tănăsescu, 2007), sleeping on the street/with relatives persisted, children can suffer various physical, psychological, bodily and/or behavioral consequences. The behaviour of children as a result of these gloomy circumstances can manifest itself through school dropout, violence, substance use,

suicide or attempted suicide, so that, in adulthood, such human beings were prone to participate in armed conflicts, military actions or other violent actions aimed at overthrowing or undermining the constitutional order or violating the territorial integrity of any state, regardless of the place and time of such activities. In the context of the initiation of mercenary activity or wars, vulnerable children

were easy to recruit because the lack of protection and education made them manipulated or forced to become soldiers, or the appearance of a promise of survival or money for poor or orphaned children can lead them to join armed groups, and the lack of alternative – that is, if there was no access to school, family or social support, people become a “resource” for mercenary recruitment (Table 2).

Table 1. Consequences of greed as a cause of mercenary activity

Cause	Consequence	Explanation
Greed	Instability and protracted wars	Mercenaries participate in conflicts solely for financial gain, which can fuel and prolong wars, maintaining instability in conflict zones
	Disrespect for laws and civil rights	Motivated by money, mercenaries may ignore legal and moral norms, which can lead to violations of international law and the commission of atrocities
	Betrayals and changes of allegiance	Loyalty becomes unstable, with mercenaries being able to quickly change sides depending on the material advantage offered

Source: developed by the author

Table 2. Consequences of involving children in mercenary activities

Category	Consequences	Explanation
Children	Physical and psychological trauma	Children are exposed to violence, extreme stress, and traumatic experiences
	Loss of education	Recruitment or involvement in criminal activities prevents access to school and normal development
	Risk of death	Participation in armed conflict significantly increases the risk of death
Society	Perpetuation of conflicts	The involvement of minors contributes to the maintenance and expansion of violence
	Political instability	The use of children in conflict weakens social and political structures
	Difficulties in rebuilding communities	Affected communities have difficulty recovering from protracted conflicts
Mercenaries/armed groups	Exploitation of vulnerable children	Children are easy to manipulate and recruit
	Low recruitment costs	Children are a cheaper labour force than adults
	Easily controlled loyalty	Children can be influenced and controlled more easily through manipulation

Source: developed by the author

Vulnerable childhood was a direct cause of mercenary activity, because it created an easily manipulated “resource”, made children accept dangerous conditions for survival; and contributed to the perpetuation of wars and instability. Human trafficking – victims of human trafficking can often be victims of domestic violence (Pădure *et al.*, 2024), who once arrived in the destination country, were liable to be subjected to various types of activity, including in order to practice mercenary activity. Human trafficking can be seen as one of the main causes of mercenary activity, because it can provide labour and military personnel (i.e. armed groups or mercenaries recruit trafficked persons to fight, carry weapons or carry out dangerous missions, or these people were often vulnerable and accepted orders without opposition, being manipulated or forced), it can reduce costs and increase profits (which meant that victims of trafficking do not receive real wages or compensation, which made the activity of mercenaries more profitable for those who hire the force), it can exploit social vulnerability (i.e. trafficked persons often come from poor backgrounds, conflict zones or vulnerable childhoods, or the lack of education and protection made them easy to manipulate and control), it can perpetuate instability and conflicts/military aggression. Human trafficking fueled

mercenary activity by providing a vulnerable, exploitable and easily controlled human force, which made conflicts cheaper, longer and more devastating. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as in Ukraine, human trafficking had not always taken the classic form of kidnapping, but often took the form of exploitation of refugees and displaced persons, recruitment through fraud and manipulation, and taking advantage of post-conflict or war chaos. These conditions had favoured the involvement of mercenaries and foreign fighters, contributing to the prolongation of violence that can be characterised “by impulsiveness and unpredictability of actions” (Bujor & Bejan, 2016). In areas with frozen conflicts, ethnic tensions or strategic competition, human trafficking became an indirect, but effective mechanism to support the activity of mercenaries, by exploiting human vulnerability.

A comparative analysis of different regions affected by armed conflicts – Central and West Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and emerging strategic areas – highlighted the fact that human trafficking was one of the major causes that fueled and sustained the activity of mercenaries. Regardless of the geographical or political context, the exploitation of vulnerable people appeared as a common element in all these situations.

Human trafficking offered mercenaries and armed groups a constant source of cheap, easily controlled and easily replaceable human force, reducing the costs of military operations and increasing their efficiency. Trafficked persons – children, young people, refugees, displaced persons or vulnerable workers – were recruited through force, manipulation or false promises, deprived of fundamental rights and transformed into mere instruments of armed violence. In all these regions, human trafficking fueled mercenary activity by providing a vulnerable human force, reduced the costs of military operations, allowed for rapid recruitment and contributed to the prolongation of conflicts and/or the destruction of local societies. At the same time, the use of human trafficking in support of mercenary activity perpetuated armed conflicts and social instability. By continuously feeding the fighting force, wars became longer, more difficult to resolve and more devastating for the civilian population. Affected communities suffered profound losses: the destruction of social structures, the loss of younger generations, collective trauma and major difficulties in the post-conflict reconstruction process. The analysis also showed that human trafficking was not limited to classic war zones, but also occurred in frozen conflicts, regional crises or contexts of strategic competition, where mercenaries and private military companies exploited human vulnerability in less visible but equally harmful forms. Finally, it was worth noting that human trafficking and mercenary activity were deeply interconnected phenomena that supported each other. Combating one without addressing the other was insufficient. Only by protecting vulnerable people, strengthening state institutions, respecting human rights and international cooperation can the devastating impact of these practices on global peace and security be reduced.

Criminal record – the reintegration into society of a person after serving a sentence, who was convicted of committing a serious or particularly serious crime, was very difficult and required a long period of time. It often happened that, during the execution of the sentence for committing a crime from the category of those listed, the perpetrator remained without family support, possible divorces may occur if the person was married, friendships with other people became distant, and other consequences may arise as a result of the conviction. Thus, after serving the sentence, the person encountered difficulties in the process of socialisation and integration into the human community, but taking advantage of the fact that person possessed a behaviour specific to detention institutions, he can easily accept “a new criminal adventure”. In certain circumstances, the person with a criminal record for committing a serious or particularly serious crime may find himself in a new position, carrying out activity in an armed conflict, or other types of violent actions as a mercenary. It was also worth mentioning that criminal records represented the totality of criminal acts committed by a person in the past, for which he/she was convicted. These can be an important cause of involvement in mercenary activity, as they influenced both the social situation and the individual's mentality and behaviour.

Firstly, people with criminal records often faced social marginalisation and serious difficulties in reintegrating into society. After serving a sentence, their access to legal and stable employment was limited, as employers showed distrust. In the absence of legal opportunities for a living, these people may be tempted to resort to illegal or dangerous

activities, such as mercenary work, which promised quick profits. Secondly, many of those with criminal records already have experience in the use of violence, weapons or illegal activities, which made them easier to recruit by mercenary groups. Familiarity with risk, forced discipline or harsh living conditions reduced the moral and psychological barriers that would prevent other people from engaging in such activities. Criminal records can also contribute to the formation of an attitude of rejection of legal and moral norms. People who have broken the law in the past may show increased tolerance for illegality and may perceive mercenary work not as a serious crime, but as an opportunity for survival or enrichment. Last but not least, the lack of future prospects, stigma and economic pressure can lead these people to accept mercenary contracts, even if they involve major risks and violations of international law. For some, mercenary work became an alternative to social exclusion and poverty. Therefore, criminal records can be a cause of mercenary activity through their effects on social integration, access to legal work, the mentality and behaviour of the individual. The combination of economic difficulties, criminal experience and lack of other options favours the involvement of these people in mercenary activities.

Tolerating the participation of mercenaries – essentially, by the concept of tolerance the action of directly or indirectly allowing a person or a group of people to carry out a specific activity. Therefore, the phenomenon of “tolerating the activity of mercenaries” may also have the support of the political situation or “decision makers” or other people interested in this subject, who pursue certain goals and interests. Thus, this activity being *de jure* illegal but *de facto* convenient for a certain person or for a certain group of people, it was tolerated and mercenaries can easily participate in illegal activities. Moreover, by “tolerance of mercenary participation” the tacit acceptance or lack of firm reaction on the part of states, authorities or the international community towards the involvement of mercenaries in armed conflicts. This tolerance can be an important cause of the development and maintenance of mercenary activity. When mercenaryism was not clearly or effectively sanctioned, a climate of impunity was created. Mercenaries came to believe that they can act without serious legal consequences, which encouraged the recruitment and expansion of these groups. The lack of firm punishments reduced the risks perceived by those involved.

Tolerance can come from political, economic or military interests of some states or power groups. Some authorities choose to ignore the participation of mercenaries because they can be used as an additional armed force, without officially assuming responsibility. Thus, mercenaries became a convenient tool in conflicts, which increased their demand and importance. Also, the weakness of state institutions, the lack of control over the territory or corruption can lead to the tolerance of mercenary participation. In fragile or conflict-affected states, authorities lack the necessary means to prevent or sanction mercenary activity, thus allowing it to continue. Another important aspect was the lack of international cooperation. Even if mercenary activity was prohibited by international law, enforcement was difficult, when states do not collaborate effectively. This lack of coordination favours the mobility of mercenaries across borders and the continuation of their activities. Finally, it was noteworthy that tolerating the participation of mercenaries – whether through inaction,

hidden interests or lack of capacity on the part of states – directly contributed to the expansion of mercenary activity. When the phenomenon was not firmly combated, mercenary activity was consolidated and becomes an increasingly widespread practice in armed conflicts.

The existence of paramilitary organisations – the existence of these entities sometimes led to the prevalence of their members in relation to the regular armed military forces of some states. Under the given conditions, the large number of members of paramilitary organisations was due to the fact that they were meant to carry out the service for the achievement of the goals of the states that established them, on the territory of other states. At the same time, paramilitary organisations can also served in support of international institutions or non-governmental organisations that pursue some well-defined goals on a certain administrative territory. These organisations can be an important cause of mercenary activity, as they created a favourable framework for their recruitment, organisation and use. Paramilitary organisations often operated outside the strict control of state authorities. This legal gray area allows illegal activities, including the recruitment of mercenaries, to be carried out without being promptly sanctioned. The lack of effective control favours the transformation of these groups into mercenary-type structures. These organisations represented a training and selection environment for mercenaries. Their members gained military experience, get used to the use of weapons and specific discipline, which made them ideal candidates for mercenary service. Some of them ended up participating in armed conflicts in exchange for material benefits. Also, paramilitary organisations may have their own sources of funding, including illegal ones, which allowed the payment of fighters. The promise of financial gains attracts people motivated by profit, and mercenary work became an organised and constant activity, not an occasional one. Likewise, bring to the attention of the interested public that some paramilitary organisations were tolerated or indirectly supported by certain states or interest groups. This tolerance facilitated their transformation into mercenary forces used in internal or external conflicts, without officially assuming responsibility. Following the description of this cause, that the existence of paramilitary organisations favours the activity of mercenaries through the lack of state control, the military training provided, the financing possibilities and political tolerance. These groups created a favourable environment for the development of mercenary work and its involvement in armed conflicts.

The existence of private military companies – private military companies were established by individuals, who had certain goals to achieve. The activity of these companies was carried out according to an unofficial “custom”, manifested by a long-standing practice of participation in armed conflicts, military actions or other types of violent actions aimed at overthrowing or undermining the constitutional order or violating the territorial integrity of third states, that was, states whose members of private military companies were not citizens. The place and role of employees of private military and security companies in contemporary armed conflicts is omnipresent. The services and the share of participation of these persons both at the level of preparation of hostilities and directly in them is different (Zacon, 2002). Thus, these companies, being in existence, can ensure the participation of their members in armed conflicts, military actions or other

violent actions aimed at overthrowing or undermining the constitutional order or violating the territorial integrity of any state. The existence of these companies can be an important cause of the development of mercenary activity, because they create an organised and apparently legal framework for carrying out activities close to mercenaryism. Private military companies institutionalised the use of armed force for commercial purposes. Even if they present themselves as security providers, in practice they can hire people with military experience to operate in conflict zones, in exchange for high remuneration. This practice reduced the difference between the regular soldier and the mercenary, facilitating the involvement of financially motivated fighters.

These companies represented an efficient recruitment mechanism for former soldiers, people with experience in conflicts or socially marginalised people. Once integrated into such structures, they can be involved in missions that exceed the legal limits of private security and approach mercenaryism itself. Also, the insufficient regulation of private military companies at the international level allowed their activities to be carried out in areas where state control was weak. The lack of clear rules and effective control favours abused and the use of mercenaries under the cover of commercial contracts. Another important aspect was that states or non-state actors can turn to private military companies to avoid political and legal responsibility for the use of armed force. Thus, mercenaries can be used indirectly in armed conflicts, without the state officially assuming its involvement. Finally, the fact that the existence of private military companies contributed to the expansion of mercenary activity by commercialising military services, facilitating recruitment, poor regulation and their use as alternative instruments in armed conflicts. These companies can transform mercenaryism into an organised activity, masked by the appearance of legality.

Time of war, armed conflict, military actions or other violent actions. By the concept of wartime it represented the “interval from the date of the declaration of mobilisation or the start of war operations until the date of the army’s transition to a state of peace” (Bujor & Pop, 2002). At the same time, the meaning of this terminology can also be associated with the other causes, only by substituting, “wartime” with “time of armed conflict”, “time of military actions” and “time of other violent actions”, all of which in turn had a negative and substantial contribution to the overthrow or undermining of the constitutional order or the violation of the territorial integrity of one or more states. Therefore, the group of causes listed represented the target stage of determining and favouring the development of mercenary activity, or, as long as peace prevailed in society, the commission of the crime of mercenary activity was not find its place in objective reality. During wars and armed conflicts, the need for military personnel increased rapidly. Regular armies may become insufficient, poorly trained or exhausted, and the states or groups involved seek alternative solutions to complete their forces. In this context, mercenaries were used as an additional fighting force, being appreciated for their military experience and immediate availability. Armed conflicts often led to the degradation of state institutions and the weakening of law enforcement. In areas affected by war, the control of the authorities was limited or non-existent, which created a favourable space for the conduct of illegal activities. Under these conditions, mercenaries can act with a high degree of freedom, making it difficult to identify and

sanction. War transformed violence into an everyday reality. The use of weapons, armed confrontations and the loss of human lives became common phenomena. This normalisation reduced the moral and psychological barriers of people, making it easier to accept participation in violent activities, including mercenary work. Armed conflicts destroyed the economy, infrastructure and jobs. The increase in poverty, unemployment and insecurity led many people to seek alternative sources of income. In this context, mercenary work appeared as an economic option, offering attractive financial gains for people in difficulty.

During times of conflict, borders became more permeable and the movement of people was more difficult to control. Mercenaries can be recruited from different states and quickly transported to conflict zones. This international mobility favours the transformation of mercenary work into a transnational phenomenon. Modern wars often involved irregular armed groups, paramilitary organisations, or private actors. These actors frequently resorted to mercenaries to bolster their military strength, which increased demand and indirectly legitimised mercenary activity. Times of war, armed conflict, military action, or other violent action constituted one of the most important causes of mercenary activity. By increasing the demand for fighters, weakening state control, normalising violence, worsening economic problems, and facilitating international mobility, these contexts created an extremely favourable environment for the development of mercenaryism.

Social maladjustment of military personnel – military personnel were the type of persons, who had spent their entire lives or most of their time wearing their service uniform, carrying a weapon in their hands and ensuring their presence in some armed conflicts, military actions or other violent actions produced in objective reality. At the same time, military personnel were also the categories of persons, who were permanently and continuously involved in various exercises and/or tactical training applications. Thus, once they reached retirement age or upon dismissal from military service, the respective persons may encounter some difficulties in the re-profiling process. Under the given conditions (Cioclei, 1999), former military personnel were liable to be subject to the crime of mercenary activity, because the respective activity was analogous to the legitimate one of the military. Many former soldiers faced problems such as lack of employment, difficulty adapting to social rules and rhythms different from those of the military, and the loss of the status or respect they enjoyed in the army. This difficulty in reintegration can lead to the search for activities that allowed them to use the experience and skills acquired in the army, even if these were illegal or dangerous, such as mercenary work.

Former soldiers possessed military training, skills in the use of weapons, strategy and discipline, all of which were very valuable for groups that hire mercenaries. Paramilitary organisations or private military companies were interested in such people because they can be quickly integrated into combat or security structures. Participation in armed conflicts can lead to trauma, post-traumatic stress, or difficulties in managing emotions and social situations. This psychological instability can make former soldiers feel more comfortable in violent or strictly hierarchical environments, specific to mercenary activity, than in ordinary civilian life. Social maladjustment and associated economic difficulties

led many former soldiers to accept mercenary contracts for higher financial gains than those available in the civilian sector. Immediate payment and material rewards were a strong incentive for people in difficulty. In many countries, military reintegration programmes were insufficient or ineffective. The lack of professional, psychological, and social support can push former soldiers towards alternative solutions, including employment as mercenaries, where their experience was sought and rewarded.

So, former soldiers face difficulties in reintegration, lack of economic opportunities, psychological problems and material needs that made them vulnerable to recruitment by paramilitary organisations or private military companies. The category of economic causes included: poverty and lack of jobs (in some regions of the world, those pursuing various interests determine civilians to accept fighting against payment), large financial gains (these can be offered by groups or states that can afford to pay mercenaries) and economic inequalities (which exist between states or regions). The list of political causes that favour the emergence and development of mercenaries was formed by political instability (often manifested through coups d'état, civil wars, incitement to hatred in society), the weakness of the state (i.e. fragile institutions, insufficient army) and the desire of some political actors to avoid the direct involvement of the national army. Regarding the social causes of the spread of mercenary activities, that these contributed negatively to the decline in life prospects for young people, the radicalisation or normalisation of violence in conflict areas that “endanger the very existence of the social system, introducing elements that disorganise and unbalance it, overthrowing the most important conditions of existence of society” (Bujor & Bejan, 2016). Also, the lack of trained military personnel in a state, the need for specialised military experience (special operations, security) and prolonged conflicts that exceeded the capacity of the regular army were directly part of the category of military causes that contributed to the manifestation of mercenary activity.

Conclusions

Mercenarism was a complex criminal phenomenon, with a multifactorial determination, which reflected the dynamic interaction between social structures and the individual characteristics of the person. The phenomenon fell within the paradigm of relative social determinism, according to which crime was conditioned by structural factors – economic, political, institutional – without excluding the role of individual will and responsibility. Thus, economic precariousness, unemployment, accentuated social inequalities and the lack of opportunities for social mobility can constitute factors generating orientation towards mercenary activities, especially in the case of people with military training or experience in the security field. At the same time, political instability, the existence of armed conflicts, the weakness of state institutions and the diminishing efficiency of social control mechanisms created the structural premises for the recruitment and use of mercenaries in various theaters of operations. At the individual level, involvement in mercenaryism can be influenced by traits such as risk-taking, the need for affirmation, the search for social status or difficulties in reintegration after the end of military activity, and knowledge of the causes of this illegal phenomenon was essential. Previous socialisation

experiences in violent or militarised environments can contribute to the normalisation of the use of force as a means of achieving personal goals. Cultural and ideological factors can also reinforce this orientation, by valorising violence, military heroism or quick gain, generating an informal normative framework that reduced the perception of the seriousness of the acts. Consequently, mercenarism must be understood as the result of the accumulation and interdependence between causes (generating factors) and conditions (favouring factors), which facilitated the adoption and maintenance of criminal behaviours. Prospects for further research lie in the analysis of the identity of the criminal mercenary, the

characteristics of the mercenaries, the war crimes committed by the mercenaries and the study of statistical data on the participation of mercenaries in theaters of war.

Acknowledgements

None.

Funding

None.

Conflict of interest

None.

References

- [1] Banciu, D., Rădulescu, S.M., & Teodorescu, V. (2002). *Current trends in crime and criminality in Romania*. Bushey: Lex Light.
- [2] Bîrgău, M. (2010). *Criminology*. Chişinău: The Institute of International Relations of Moldova.
- [3] Bontea, O. (2022). Persons protected by international humanitarian law in armed conflicts. *Law and Life*, 9-10, 108-115. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.7184965.
- [4] Bujor, V., & Bejan, O. (2016). *Elementary criminology course*. Chişinău: Tipogr. "Bora grup".
- [5] Bujor, V., & Pop, O. (2002). *Causality in criminology*. Timişoara: Mirton.
- [6] Cebotari, S., & Lungu, V. (2025). The Transnistrian segment of the border of the Republic of Moldova – vulnerability of the state. *Law and Life*, 1, 80-101. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.15552429.
- [7] Cioclei, V. (1999). *The motive in criminal conduct*. Bucharest: Buc.ALL Beck.
- [8] Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 985. (2002, April). Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=153355&lang=ro#.
- [9] Gherman M. (2023). *Anti-European and anti-democratic narratives about Ukraine promoted by the Russian press*. In *International scientific and practical conference: "Human and social security in a democratic state"* (pp. 91-101). Chişinău: Moldova State University.
- [10] Grecu, R. (2022). *Current issues of state criminal policy at the current stage*. In *Proceedings of the international scientific conference "Research, development and innovation from the perspective of the global ethics"* (pp. 111-112). Chişinău: "Tehnica-UTM" Publishing House.
- [11] Hryhorenko, Ye., Perederii, O., & Chaliy, M. (2023). The essence and characteristics of paramilitary and armed formations not provided for by law in terms of criminal liability for their creation (Article 260 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine). *The Journal of V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Series Law*, 35, 185-192. doi: 10.26565/2075-1834-2023-35-21.
- [12] International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. (1989, December). Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unga/1989/35888>.
- [13] Jitariuc, V., & Secrier, A. (2024). Terrorist types and forms – determining factors in the investigation of terrorist acts. *Scientific Bulletin of the "Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu" State University of Cahul: Social Sciences*, 18(1), 75-88. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.13309892.
- [14] Kostiuk, V., & Yefimenko, I. (2025). Forensic characteristics of exceeding authority or official powers by a military official, committed under martial law or in a combat situation. *Law Journal of the National Academy of Internal Affairs*, 15(2), 76-88. doi: 10.63341/naiachasopis/2.2025.76.
- [15] Larii, I. (2004). *Criminology* (Vol. 1). Bacău: Tipografia "Elena V.I".
- [16] Lippai, Z., Kardos, P., & Arpas, B. (2024). War as a business. Thoughts on the operation of private military companies. *Internal Security*, 16(2), 103-118. doi: 10.5604/01.3001.0055.0884.
- [17] Noshadha, S., & Duka, M. (2023). Sport sanctions in war situations under international law. *Ukrainian Journal of International Law*, 1, 44-52. doi: 10.36952/uail.2023.1.44-52.
- [18] OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa. (1977, July). Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/oau/1977/91347>.
- [19] Pădure, A., Glavan, P., Bondarev, A., Arnaut, O., & Cazacu, D. (2024). *Identification of adult victims of domestic violence based on social profile and lesional pattern*. Chişinău: Print-Caro.
- [20] Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I). (1977, July). Retrieved from <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/apii-1977>.
- [21] Rekawek, K. (2023). *Foreign fighters in Ukraine. The brown-red cocktail* (1st ed.) London: Routledge.
- [22] Savescu, N. (2022). *Romanian words of sanskrit origin*. In *The 17th international symposium "Cucuteni – 5000 redivivus: Exact and less exact sciences"* (pp. 48-57). Chişinău: "BonsOffices" Publishing House.
- [23] Schmidt, A. (2024). *Russian disinformation in Africa: Threat to democracy and reinforcement of authoritarianism and corruption*. (Master's thesis, Catholic University of Louvain, Louvain, Belgium).
- [24] Soroceanu, I. (2022). *The activity of mercenaries in the state of Mali – a negative factor on regional and international security*. *EIRP Proceedings*, 17(1), 299-304.
- [25] Tănăsescu, I. (2007). *Legal studies. Criminogenic typologies*. Munich: C.H. Beck
- [26] Zacon, C. (2022). *Legal status of private military and security companies in contemporary armed conflicts*. (Doctoral thesis, Free International University of Moldova, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova).

Кримінологічний аналіз причин найманства

Ігор Сорочану

Докторант

Академія «Штефан чел Маре»

MD-2009, вул. Георгіє Асакі, 12, м. Кишинів, Республіка Молдова

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0879-8186>

Анотація. Метою дослідження було проаналізувати причини діяльності найманців у різних контекстах та особливості правового контролю цього явища. Було проаналізовано причини найманської діяльності, що передбачало комплексне вивчення соціальних, економічних, політичних та правових факторів, які сприяють виникненню та поширенню явища найманства. Також було виділено фактори, такі як політична нестабільність, регіональні збройні конфлікти, бідність, безробіття або відсутність професійних можливостей, які зумовлювали залучення осіб до оплачуваної військової діяльності поза межами правового поля. Кримінологічний аналіз також досліджував вплив транснаціональних злочинних мереж, геополітичних інтересів та законодавчих прогалин, що дозволяли вербування, фінансування та використання найманців. Окрім фінансової мотивації, деякі особи могли бути приваблені бажанням пригод, приналежністю до групи, самоствердженням або підтриманням ідентичності, пов'язаної з військовим досвідом. У разі відсутності ефективних механізмів соціальної реінтеграції колишні бойовики могли стати вразливими до вербування у структури найманців. Таким чином, розуміння механізмів вербування, мотивації та діяльності найманців передбачало кореляцію макросоціальних факторів з індивідуальними та організаційними. Проведений аналіз дозволив обґрунтувати ефективну державну політику, спрямовану як на запобігання структурним причинам, так і на пряме протидіяння мережам вербування та фінансування найманців. Лише інтегрований підхід, заснований на міжнародній співпраці та послідовному застосуванні правових норм, був здатен обмежити масштаби та вплив явища найманства на безпеку та міжнародний правовий порядок. Отримані результати дослідження причин найманської діяльності мають переважно практичний та стратегічний характер і сприяють ефективнішому управлінню цим явищем.

Ключові слова: насильницькі дії; цікавість; вразливе дитинство; парамілітарні організації; кримінальні передумови; дефектна соціалізація