



Weekly Briefing

Bulgaria social briefing:
Drivers under the Influence of Intoxicating Substances are becoming
huge social Issue for Bulgaria
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Drivers under the Influence of Intoxicating Substances are becoming huge social Issue for Bulgaria

Summary

One of the most serious social problems in Bulgaria for many years is the road accidents caused by the use of alcohol or drugs by drivers. Statistical data show that Bulgaria is among the leaders in terms of the number of car accidents and the number of deaths in such accidents. A total of 556 people died and 7,576 were injured in the 6,052 serious accidents that occurred in the country last year 2021. Two weeks ago, another horrific accident took place in Sofia, in which a car moving with a speed nearly 200 km/h crashed and killed two young women. Later it became clear that the driver had used drugs. As a result, the Government decided to launch a specialized national action against drivers who have consumed alcohol or drugs. The results of the action up to that moment are extremely alarming, as they show that nearly 30% of road offenders were under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Statistics show that for years Bulgaria has been one of the leaders in the number of accidents and in the number of people killed and injured in traffic accidents. This is considered a huge social problem, but unfortunately, so far the state is unable to deal with it. The media call it the "war on the roads", which is taking more and more victims.

A total of 556 people died and 7,576 were injured in the 6,052 serious accidents that occurred in Bulgaria in 2021. Compared to the population in Bulgaria, nearly three times more people die on the roads than, for example, in Germany.

Over 34% more people died in road accidents in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period in 2021. This is made clear by a comparative analysis of the Institute for Road Safety on road traffic injuries in Bulgaria at the level of the EU and the Balkans, presented to the attention of Prime Minister Kiril Petkov in April 2022.

Since the beginning of July, 30 people have lost their lives on the country's roads, and another 455 have been injured. Since the beginning of the year, 255 are the victims of the "war on the roads" in Bulgaria, and 3991 have been injured.

Two weeks ago, another terrible accident happened in Sofia. On July 5, an Audi Q7 jeep running with a speed of nearly 200 km per hour, entering the intersection on a red light hit a

taxi car and crashed into the elevator of a nearby subway station. Due to the strong collision, the car split in two and killed two young women who were on the sidewalk at the same time.

It turned out that the driver of the car was convicted of drug distribution, a person with a revoked driving license and nearly 50 violations on the road. Moreover, the blood sample of the arrested driver showed that he was under the use of methamphetamine.

This incident became the occasion for the Government to announce the next day that the Ministry of Internal affairs is launching a national campaign against drugged driving. "Today we decided to declare war on all recidivists, especially those who drive under the influence of narcotic substances." announced the resigned Prime Minister Kiril Petkov to journalists.

Interior Ministry called on people to report inappropriate driver behavior to help the police detect drugged drivers.

In just one week after the start of the special campaign, more than 63,700 motor vehicles were checked in the country and more than 83,600 drivers and passengers were checked. Emphasis in the action is the prohibition of driving by drivers who have consumed alcohol, narcotic substances and/or their analogues, as well as driving of motor vehicles by unlicensed drivers.

For the same period, 17,056 slips and 5,111 acts were drawn up. A total of 253 drivers were found to have driven after using alcohol. Under the influence of narcotics substances or their analogues were detected 73 drivers.

The test that the police use detects 7 types of drugs. Among them are cocaine, amphetamine, methamphetamine, marijuana. The check itself takes about 5 minutes. If the result is positive, a procedure for the initiation of pre-trial proceedings begins.

However, the results are extremely worrying because they show that almost 30% of the drivers who operate motor vehicles do so after being under the influence of intoxicating substances. The head of the Traffic Police Department - Sofia, said this during his hearing in the Sofia Municipal Council. These are young people between 18 and 40 years old. "*The young generation does not comply with anything,*" said Tenev.

The head of the "Traffic Police" - Sofia added that since the beginning of the year, over 110,000 speed violations have been registered in Sofia, 178 drivers have been caught after using drugs, and 298 have been caught driving after using alcohol.

Another alarming statistics show that between 200,000 and 300,000 Bulgarians are chronically addicted to alcohol or drugs. Many abuse experimentally. There are also no accurate statistics for abusers of psychoactive substances, with drugs that are legally prescribed. This is what Pavel Pavlov, creator and head of Therapeutic Center, said in an interview with BTA.

Pavlov was asked to comment on the results of the latest action of the Ministry of the Interior for road safety, in which dozens of drivers who have abused alcohol or drugs are found every day. According to him, the problem for the country is huge. Probably people from all three groups drive, ride scooters, motorcycles, bikes.

Pavlov pointed out that the group of abusers of psychoactive substances, with drugs that are legally prescribed, can hardly be covered. On many of the leaflets of these medicines there are warnings: "*do not operate machines, do not use them while driving*", but users drive and work, and with the available means that law enforcement agencies have, these substances cannot be accounted for, the expert added.

Political forces in parliament have already proposed legislative changes to amend the Penal Code related to the amount of penalties and fines for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The changes provide that anyone who drives a motor vehicle after using from one to three types of narcotic substances or their analogues will be punished with imprisonment from one to three years and a fine from BGN 500 to BGN 1,500. For driving after using more than three narcotic substances - the punishment is from two to five years of imprisonment and a fine from one thousand to two thousand BGN. If the act under the preceding paragraphs is committed again, the punishment is up to six years of imprisonment and the fine - up to BGN 3,000.

It is also provided that whoever drives a motor vehicle with a blood alcohol concentration of 1.2 to 1.9 per thousand, established in due course, will be punished with imprisonment from one to three years and a fine from 400 to 1,000 BGN. If the act is committed by a driver without a license, the punishment is three to six years in prison and a fine of two to three thousand BGN.

The fines stipulated in the Road Traffic Act for drivers without a license are also being increased - in the amount of BGN 1,000 to BGN 1,500, instead of the previous fines of BGN 100 to BGN 300. The proponents of the bill remind that their amount has not been changed since 2002.

Conclusion

The data provided by the "Road Police" department for the period January 1-June 30, 2022 indicate that within the framework of traffic control, during inspections, a total of 679 drivers were found to have driven a motor vehicle after consuming alcohol or under the influence of narcotic substances. Of them, 504 drove after drinking alcohol and 222 - under the influence of narcotic substances.

For the same period of 2021, a total of 692 drivers were caught driving after drinking alcohol or under the influence of drugs. A total of 564 consumed alcohol and 128 - under the influence of narcotic substances.

From the beginning of 2022 to 30/06/2022, 350 persons were convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol and/or narcotic substances on the charge of the Prosecutor's Office. 324 defendants were deprived of the right to drive motor vehicles for a certain period, and some of the convicted persons were also fined in the amount of BGN 28,910.

The Road Safety Institute, as the national coordinator for Bulgaria of the European Road Safety Charter, has prepared a detailed comparative analysis of the situation with the rising levels of road traffic injuries in Bulgaria. According to the analysis, in comparative terms, Bulgaria "*continues to lose the road war*" at a higher rate than the average in the EU and the Balkans. The situation looks more than disturbing at the level of the European Union - despite the restrictions on traffic in the pandemic and the decrease in the levels of dead and injured throughout the EU in 2020, in 2021 Bulgaria stands out in a negative perspective with a 21% increase in the number of dead, in terms of number of deaths per million population.

Official statistics in Bulgaria for the first quarter of 2022 show a sharp and steady increase with over 25 more deaths, 144 more injuries and 110 more serious road accidents, or over 34% more deaths for the first three months of the year, compared to 2021.

Unfortunately, the results of the national police action in the country for the last couple of weeks show that drunk and drugged drivers are among the main causes of serious traffic accidents. These drivers are undoubtedly the most essential threat to all road users, including pedestrians.