



Weekly Briefing

Croatia social briefing:
The Car Meet that Turned into a Disaster:
The Issue of Public Safety and the Role of Police Authorities
Valentino Petrović

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.

Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Ju Weiwei

Kiadásért felelős személy: Feng Zhongping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

 +36 1 5858 690

 office@china-cee.eu

 china-cee.eu

The Car Meet that Turned into a Disaster: The Issue of Public Safety and the Role of Police Authorities

Summary

This article will provide an overview of the accident that happened at the parking lot in Zagreb, which saw a 23-year-old driver colliding with a group of pedestrians and parked cars. Luckily, there were no fatal casualties, however, three people were seriously injured, and the video of the incident went viral, but was soon removed from the portals. During the police investigation, it was revealed that the driver was not under the influence of alcohol or drugs, while his father commented that the boy had often participated in various events which included high-speed cars. Eventually, the public's attention turned to the police authorities, asking what measures should be introduced to stop such incidents from happening.

Introduction

An incident happened at a parking lot in front of a shopping center in Buzin, Zagreb, where a 23-year-old driver crashed with his Mercedes AMG into a group of pedestrians and parked vehicles, seriously injuring 3 people, with an additional 2 sustaining minor injuries. The accident took place during the alleged car meet, an event that usually gathers car enthusiasts, street racers, or those who would like to feel that way. It is unknown whether the injured people and those in their proximity were also at the parking lot for a car meet or whether were they merely "civilians" who just found themselves at the wrong place at the wrong time. The video of the accident became viral within an hour after the unfortunate event happened, while the next day the part of the video which showcases the moment of the collision was removed from the websites of every major news portal. The driver tested negative for alcohol and drug abuse, but the police investigation is still underway. The incident raised concerns about young people driving high-speed cars and events like this happening close to shopping centers.

The Details of the Accident

On Friday, 16 June, at approximately 10 PM, a young man, 23 years old of age, collided with his Mercedes into a group of people at a parking lot in front of a shopping center on the outskirts of Zagreb, in Buzin. A young man was apparently participating in what can be

described as a car meet, an event that usually takes place in the Croatian capital, but up until now did not provoke any controversy among the public or media. However, this time the situation went wrong after the young man, while showcasing his driving skills and maneuvers, lost control of the vehicle and crashed into several other parked cars, thus, injuring five people and putting the rest into shock and disbelief. As reported by the Zagreb police, the young man behind the Mercedes wheels was driving at an inappropriate speed during his exit from the roundabout which caused the loss of control and eventual collision. Apart from the police and emergency service, the fire brigades were also at the scene of the incident, helping to clean the area and get to the people who were trapped underneath the crashed vehicles. Eventually, five people were injured, with 3 of them in critical condition, while one person fighting for his life. The collision was filmed by people who were at the scene and went viral, but due to the disturbing content, it was not shown in the media.

How Should the Police React?

After the public expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of police control during such events, the head of the traffic police department within the Ministry of Interior, Josip Mataija, and the court expert for road traffic, Goran Husinec, stood behind the police arguing that the Zagreb police department receives over 300 reports during the weekend and is unable to be at the scene right after an incident happens. Likewise, both men said that the car meet is an event that never resulted in a tragedy; therefore, there was no reason to believe that the one in Buzin should be considered an exception¹. However, the question that was raised in public was how the police should act to prevent such incidents. Whether it should introduce stricter controls, higher penalties, or put restrictions on young drivers that use high-power cars. Unfortunately, the traffic police too often tend to tolerate carelessness and speed limit violations done by young drivers, especially those whose families hold positions in local politics or businesses and are considered untouchable. Until the country reaches a point where the party membership or the amount of power generated by the local businesses becomes irrelevant when it comes to the law implementation, young people will still feel safe to misbehave without any danger to be punished by police authorities.

¹ Index.hr. 2023. Vještak o nesreći u Buzinu: Bio je u skupom autu. Morao je dokazati da je moćan <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/policijski-sef-o-nesreci-u-buzinu-dobivamo-stotine-prijava-ne-mozemo-biti-svugdje/2472960.aspx>.

The Profile of the 23-Year-Old Driver

As for the 23-year-old driver, the toxicological findings showed that he was not under the influence of alcohol or drugs during the unfortunate night. A day after the accident happened, the driver's father told the media that his son never had issues with the law or the police; however, he did have several penalties due to high-speed violations. Furthermore, the father revealed that his son is heavily involved in the car resale business and that he would often meet with his friends at parking lots where they would test the speed of their cars². As reported by several witnesses, the driver was fully aware of the accident, but was in a state of disbelief, taking into account the magnitude of the situation. The police investigation is still underway and it is yet to be known what will be the fate of the 23-year-old. Thus, apart from the questions raised in the above paragraph about the police reaction, the question about public safety can also be discussed, for example, whether such gatherings should be organized at parking lots of shopping centers, regardless of the fact that during the time of the incident, the shopping center was closed. Here, the authorities could cooperate with the shopping center's management "to discourage the organization of [such] events on their premises"³.

Conclusion

All in all, the accident that happened in Buzin could be explained by the well-known dichotomy between freedom and security. Young people, such as the 23-year-old driver, in their search for as much freedom as possible, show reckless behavior, while authorities, such as the police, are apparently having trouble in searching for methods to ensure public safety. The social issues that raise concerns about public safety have unfortunately become frequent in Croatia. Only a few months ago, the country witnessed a physical conflict at the ski resort and a mass shootout at a nightclub in the capital. The case discussed in this article falls in the same category and does not put faith that things may change in the not-too-distanced future.

² Ilotić Šuvalić, Maša. 2023. Otac vozača Mercedes: Znao je s ekipom ići na brze vožnje. Šokiran sam, žao mi je zbog svega. Večernji.hr <https://www.vecernji.hr/zagreb/otac-vozaca-mercedesa-znao-je-s-ekipom-ici-na-brze-voznje-sokiran-sam-zao-mi-je-zbog-svega-1688434>.

³ Haider, Mudassir. 2023. Illegal Racing Incident Leaves Five Injured in Zagreb Shopping Center Parking Lot. Bnn.network <https://bnn.network/breaking-news/illegal-racing-incident-leaves-five-injured-in-zagreb-shopping-center-parking-lot/>.