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## UNLAWFUL APPROPRIATION OF VEHICLES AS A FACTOR IN CRIMINAL OFFENSES IN THE SPHERE OF ROAD TRAFFIC

*This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the significant impact of unlawful vehicle circulation on the overall criminogenic situation and road safety indicators in Ukraine. The research is based on a thorough examination of current statistical data obtained from law enforcement agencies, customs services, and national road traffic accident statistics from 2020 to 2025, supplemented by elements of prognostic assessment. The applied retrospective and prognostic analysis unequivocally demonstrates a stable increase in the volume of illegal cross-border movement of vehicles and their subsequent operation within the national legal framework. It has been revealed that unregistered vehicles, imported bypassing established procedures, demonstrate a significantly higher probability of involvement in road traffic accidents than officially registered ones, approximately 2.5 times increasing their risk of being involved. This tendency is primarily explained by their often inadequate technical condition, lack of proper official registration, and failure to undergo mandatory technical inspections. The paper comprehensively examines the key mechanisms and schemes of illegal car importation and the wide range of socio-economic and criminogenic consequences of this phenomenon. These include significant revenue shortfalls for the state budget, disruption of fair competition principles in the market, and an increased threat to the life and health of road users. The research results demonstrate a direct correlation between the intensity of smuggling activities and the rise in road accident rates. The scientific novelty of the work lies in developing a comprehensive approach to assessing the causal impact of vehicle smuggling, which organically integrates legal, economic, and social aspects of the problem, as well as in presenting specific quantitative indicators of its scale. The practical value of this study lies in formulating substantiated, empirically confirmed recommendations aimed at improving mechanisms for countering vehicle smuggling and systematically enhancing road safety levels in Ukraine, which includes proposals for improving the legislative framework, strengthening international and inter-agency cooperation, and implementing innovative control technologies.*

**Keywords:** vehicle smuggling, road safety, criminogenic situation, road traffic accidents, retrospective analysis, prognostic analysis, legal aspects, international cooperation, socio-economic consequences, law enforcement agencies, customs services, illegal movement, legislative framework

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, particularly from 2020 to 2025, the problem of illegal vehicle circulation, often underestimated previously, has transformed into a serious challenge for the national security and stability of Ukrainian society. Its negative impact extends beyond purely economic losses, measured in billions of revenues lost to the state budget due to unpaid taxes and customs duties. This phenomenon creates systemic risks for road safety and significantly deteriorates the overall criminogenic situation.

This problem has become particularly acute amid increased geopolitical tensions and, specifically, with the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These circumstances have led to the activation of illegal channels for vehicle movement, which are often used to commit criminal acts. Therefore, effective countermeasures against this phenomenon require strengthening existing law enforcement mechanisms and a deep scientific analysis of all factors determining its scale, implementation mechanisms, and criminogenic consequences. Our previous research has revealed an empirical fact: illegally imported vehicles are approximately 2.5 times more likely to be involved in road traffic accidents than vehicles registered under current legislation, necessitating thorough scientific substantiation.

An analysis of contemporary scientific research and publications demonstrates that certain aspects of vehicle smuggling have already been the subject of attention for researchers. For instance, in the works of O.M. Dzhuzha, the criminological peculiarities of criminal organizations involved in smuggling activities and their connections with corrupt schemes were studied. The issues of economic losses

to the state budget caused by the volume of unreceived revenues and the impact on the domestic automobile market were thoroughly analyzed by D.V. Pryimachenko. At the same time, V.A. Tymoshenko paid attention to the legal qualification of smuggling and possibilities for improving the legislative framework. I.V. Kovalenko, in turn, focused on the problems of ensuring road safety and factors affecting accident rates.

However, despite significant scientific achievements, the complex interrelationship between vehicle smuggling and its direct deterministic impact on the criminogenic situation in road safety remains insufficiently studied. Current research lacks a systematic analysis of how the specifics of technical condition (often due to the absence of proper technical inspections), lack of official registration, falsification of identification numbers (VIN codes), and abuse of the temporary import regime of smuggled cars lead to an increase in road traffic accidents. Mechanisms of interaction between organized criminal groups involved in smuggling and other types of illegal activities, such as the sale of stolen spare parts, fraud, and other criminal acts in the field of road safety, also remain unexplored. This circumstance underscores the need for further, deeper study of this issue, especially considering the new challenges due to weakened control in certain sections of the state border after the full-scale aggression.

The **PURPOSE** of the paper is to comprehensively study the decisive impact of vehicle smuggling on the criminogenic situation in Ukraine's road safety. To achieve this goal, the following tasks are envisaged: a thorough analysis of current statistical data concerning smuggling

and road traffic accidents for the period 2020-2025; identification of key mechanisms and schemes of illegal vehicle import, including the use of forged documentation and so-called "double schemes"; establishment of an empirical link between the fact of contraband import and the increased probability of such vehicles being involved in accidents, as well as clarification of causal relationships (particularly due to their technical condition and lack of control); development of substantiated recommendations aimed at improving existing measures to counter this negative phenomenon and enhance the overall level of road safety.

The main objective of the paper is to conduct a thorough analysis of the direct impact of illegal vehicle importation on the criminogenic situation in the field of road safety in Ukraine, as well as to develop a system of scientifically sound recommendations aimed at optimizing mechanisms to counteract this negative phenomenon.

### **Research Methods**

1. Retrospective analysis of statistical data on vehicle smuggling and road traffic accidents for 2020-2025 to identify the dynamics and trends of the phenomenon.

2. Prognostic analysis to assess possible scenarios for developing the situation and the effectiveness of proposed countermeasures.

3. Comparative legal method for analyzing the national legislation of Ukraine and international experience in combating vehicle smuggling.

4. Criminological analysis to establish deterministic links between vehicle smuggling and offenses in the field of road safety.

5. Statistical analysis processes quantitative data and identifies correlational links between the phenomena under study.

6. Sociological method, including expert interviews with law enforcement officials, to obtain practical assessments and recommendations.

### **Research Objectives**

1. Conduct a systematic analysis of the theoretical aspects of vehicle smuggling as a criminal act and identify key methods of illicit vehicle movement across the state border of Ukraine.

2. Examine the dynamics of statistical indicators characterizing vehicle smuggling during 2020-2025 and identify its geographical features.

3. Establish deterministic links between instances of contraband vehicle importation and criminal offenses in road safety.

4. Assess the effectiveness of the current regulatory framework and its enforcement practices in combating vehicle smuggling in Ukraine.

5. Study advanced international experience in combating illegal vehicle trafficking and determine possibilities for its implementation in Ukrainian realities.

6. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the socio-economic consequences caused by vehicle smuggling for the state and society.

7. Formulate and substantiate practical recommendations to increase the effectiveness of measures to combat vehicle smuggling and minimize its destructive impact on road safety.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The methodological basis of the study is a complex of

general scientific and special methods that ensured a comprehensive analysis of vehicle smuggling as a determinant of criminal offenses in the field of road safety.

### **Research Stages**

The study was conducted in several consecutive stages:

1. *Theoretical analysis*: Study of scientific literature, legislative acts, and international documents to form the conceptual basis of the study, define terminology, and identify key approaches to the study of vehicle smuggling and its impact on road safety.

2. *Empirical data collection*: Systematization of statistical data, judicial practice materials, analytical reports, and results of expert interviews.

3. *Data analysis*: Application of statistical, comparative legal, and criminological methods for processing and interpreting the collected data, identifying trends, regularities, and causal relationships.

4. *Assessment of counteraction effectiveness*: Analysis of the current regulatory framework and practical activities of entities counteracting vehicle smuggling, considering international experience.

5. *Formulation of recommendations*: Development of practical and scientifically sound recommendations aimed at optimizing the system of counteracting vehicle smuggling and minimizing its negative impact on road safety.

### **Justification for Method Selection**

The choice of methods is due to the necessity of a comprehensive and systematic approach to studying vehicle smuggling and its determining influence on the criminogenic situation in road safety.

### **General Scientific Methods**

*Dialectical method* applied to understand vehicle smuggling as a dynamic phenomenon in constant development and interaction with other socio-legal processes. It allowed the phenomenon of smuggling in its contradictions and interrelation with economic, social, and legal aspects to be considered.

*Systematic approach* used to study vehicle smuggling as an element of the overall system of transnational crime and its impact on the road safety system. It provided the opportunity to study the object of research as a holistic set of interconnected elements.

*Structural-functional analysis* allowed for identifying structural elements of smuggling schemes (subjects, objects, means, methods) and their functional interconnections with other types of offenses, particularly in road safety. This method contributed to understanding the role of each element in the functioning of criminal mechanisms.

### **Special Methods**

*Statistical analysis* applied to process quantitative data on the dynamics of vehicle smuggling for the period 2020-2025, identify trends, regularities, and correlational links with other indicators of criminal offenses. It allowed for an objective assessment of the phenomenon's scale.

*Comparative legal method* used to analyze the national legislation of Ukraine and international experience in combating vehicle smuggling. It contributed to identifying effective legal mechanisms and possibilities for their implementation in the Ukrainian legal system.

*Sociological method* to study the social consequences

of vehicle smuggling and their impact on public consciousness, and collect expert assessments and opinions from specialists. It included conducting expert interviews.

*Criminological analysis* allowed for establishing deterministic links between vehicle smuggling and offenses in road safety, identifying criminogenic factors and conditions that contribute to the spread of this phenomenon. It contributed to the development of preventive measures.

### **Materials**

The empirical base of the study was formed from various sources to ensure the comprehensiveness and reliability of the results obtained. It includes:

Official statistical data from the State Customs Service of Ukraine, the National Police of Ukraine, and the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine for 2020-2025, reflecting the dynamics and structure of smuggling offenses and road safety indicators.

Materials from judicial practice concerning cases of vehicle smuggling, including verdicts and decisions of courts of various instances, which allowed for studying the implementation of legal norms in practice.

Analytical reports from international organizations (Europol, UNODC) dedicated to the problem of transnational crime and vehicle smuggling provided a global context for the study.

Results of expert interviews with law enforcement officers (customs, border services, National Police) with direct experience combating vehicle smuggling.

Data from monitoring studies by public organizations that highlight road safety issues and the shadow circulation of vehicles.

### **Chronological Framework and Data Collection Procedures**

The study covers the period from 2020 to 2025, which allows for tracking current trends and the dynamics of the phenomenon. Data was collected by sending requests to official state bodies, analyzing open sources of information, publications in scientific journals, and periodicals. Expert interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires.

### **Criteria for Information Selection and Analysis**

Information selection was carried out according to relevance, reliability, and completeness criteria. Only data related to vehicle smuggling, its impact on road safety, and counter-action measures were subject to research. Information analysis was conducted considering modern scientific approaches and methodologies, ensuring objectivity and impartiality of conclusions.

## **RESULTS**

In scientific and legal literature, the smuggling of vehicles (V) is defined as the illegal movement of cars and other transport across the customs border outside customs control or by concealment from it. According to Article 201 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine [1], the smuggling of goods on a large scale, including vehicles, is a criminal offense, and their high value determines their particular significance. Document falsification is often an integral element of such smuggling schemes.

Professor O.M. Dzhuzha [3] characterizes vehicle smuggling as a transnational crime that threatens the state's economic security and creates conditions for other offenses, particularly in road safety. D.V. Prymachenko [4] emphasizes that car

smuggling is one of the most organized types of customs crime, requiring an extensive network of criminal ties in Ukraine and abroad.

### **Central schemes of illegal car movement:**

*Theft:* illegal seizure of vehicles in EU countries with subsequent movement across the border using forged documents.

*Documentary manipulation:* import of vehicles under a temporary import regime with subsequent violation of stay terms and customs rules.

*Disassembly:* Dismantling vehicles into parts to avoid customs duties, with subsequent reassembly in Ukraine, which complicates their identification and accounting.

*Fictitious transit:* registration of a car as transit through the territory of Ukraine with subsequent sale on the domestic market without proper customs clearance.

Particular attention should be paid to the connection between vehicle smuggling and other criminal offenses. According to the National Police of Ukraine [8], approximately 65% of smuggled cars were stolen in European Union countries. In addition, in almost 90% of vehicle smuggling cases, facts of document forgery are recorded, including registration certificates, identification numbers, and customs declarations.

Corrupt acts, including bribery of customs and law enforcement officials, often accompany vehicle smuggling. According to the State Bureau of Investigation [8], over 120 corruption cases related to facilitating the illegal movement of vehicles across the state border of Ukraine were identified between 2020 and 2023.

An analysis of the theoretical foundations of vehicle smuggling indicates the systemic nature of this phenomenon, its high level of organization, and a significant threat to the economic security of the state and road safety. This is because smuggling creates preconditions for the operation of technically faulty and uncertified vehicles.

### **Statistical Analysis of Vehicle Smuggling**

A thorough statistical analysis of vehicle smuggling over the period 2020-2025 reveals key trends and patterns of this phenomenon. According to official data from the State Customs Service of Ukraine, the State Border Guard Service, and the National Police [7, 8], there is a steady trend of increasing detected cases of illegal movement of vehicles across the state border of Ukraine. Specifically 2020, 1250 such cases were recorded; in 2021, their number increased to 1678, in 2022 – to 2105, and in 2023 – to 2870. Projected data for 2024 and 2025 (based on the analysis of the first two quarters) are 3420 and 3850 cases, respectively.

Thus, over the period under review, the number of detected vehicle smuggling cases more than tripled. The acceleration of this growth has been particularly noticeable since 2022. This phenomenon can be explained both by the intensification of law enforcement efforts in detecting such offenses and by a real increase in the scale of smuggling activities, which likely correlates with the complex socio-economic situation in the country.

### **Geographical Distribution of Smuggling Cases: Identifying "Hot Spots"**

An analysis of the geographical distribution of detected vehicle smuggling cases allows for identifying the most

problematic sections of the state border of Ukraine. According to available data, the largest share of illegal vehicle movement falls in the following border regions:

*Polish-Ukrainian border*: 38% of the total detected cases. This is explained by the significant volume of passenger and cargo traffic and the operation of extensive criminal groups specializing in vehicle theft in EU countries, followed by their illegal movement through Poland to Ukraine.

*Romanian-Ukrainian border*: 27% of detected cases.

*Slovakian-Ukrainian border*: 19% of detected cases.

*Hungarian-Ukrainian border*: 16% of detected cases.

A comparative analysis of the scale of vehicle smuggling with other types of smuggling activities indicates that, in terms of value, vehicle smuggling is second only to drug and arms smuggling. According to the State Customs Service of Ukraine [7], the average value of one seized smuggled vehicle is approximately 25 thousand Euros. Thus, the total value of seized vehicles in 2023 alone amounted to over 71.75 million Euros.

It is worth emphasizing that the official statistics reflect only detected smuggling cases. According to expert estimates, the absolute scale of this criminal phenomenon may exceed official data by 5-7 times, which indicates a high level of latency of this type of offense. This underscores the urgent need for further improvement in detecting, documenting, and combating vehicle smuggling methods.

According to the National Police of Ukraine for 2020-2025 [8], over 12 thousand vehicles imported in violation of customs legislation were involved in road traffic accidents (RTA). In 42% of these RTAs, the cause was a technical malfunction of the vehicles. This is due to the lack of proper state registration and timely technical inspection, which is a consequence of their illegal status.

A particular threat is posed by "twin cars" – vehicles operated with falsified identification numbers and registration documents. Statistical data show that such vehicles are involved in RTAs 2.5 times more frequently than legally registered ones. This trend is explained not only by their potentially unsatisfactory technical condition but also by the increased propensity of owners for risky behavior on the road, as avoiding official identification reduces the fear of accountability.

An analysis of the criminogenic situation and judicial practice reveals a clear correlation between the illegal import of vehicles and increased road traffic crime. Drivers of illegally imported vehicles statistically violate traffic rules more often. It has been recorded that in 42% of RTAs involving contraband cars, the primary cause was technical malfunctions, indicating their low level of technical maintenance and lack of control.

Furthermore, according to the analysis, drivers of illegal vehicles are 75% more likely to leave the scene of an RTA, attempting to evade responsibility due to the impossibility of legal identification of the car and, presumably, their person. Owners of contraband vehicles are 3.2 times more likely to become subjects of criminal proceedings under Article 286 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, which pertains to violations of road safety rules or vehicle operation. This correlation is due to both objective factors, such as the technical condition of the vehicles, and subjective aspects, particularly the psychological readiness of owners to violate established rules.

Using contraband vehicles for committing other criminal

offenses deserves separate scientific and practical interest. According to the Security Service of Ukraine [8], over 950 cases of using vehicles imported in violation of customs legislation for transporting narcotic drugs, weapons, contraband goods, and other illegal actions were documented during 2020-2024. The attractiveness of such vehicles to criminal elements is explained by law enforcement agencies' difficulty identifying and tracking them.

*"Contraband vehicles have become a catalyst for road traffic crime in Ukraine, creating a basis for a whole range of offenses in the field of traffic safety,"* as Professor V.A. Tymoshenko notes, a leading expert on transport safety, in his research [5].

Thus, vehicle contraband is a significant determinant of criminal offenses in road traffic safety, creating prerequisites for increasing accident rates on roads and using vehicles for illegal purposes. The identified trends require strengthening interdepartmental cooperation and developing comprehensive measures to counter this phenomenon.

The legal regulation of countering vehicle smuggling in Ukraine is based on a system of national regulatory legal acts. Key regulatory documents include the Criminal Code of Ukraine, the Customs Code of Ukraine, and the Code of Ukraine on Administrative Offenses, which are supplemented by special laws and by-laws detailing issues of customs control, vehicle registration, and liability for violations of established procedures.

Specifically, Article 201 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine [1] provides for criminal liability for smuggling. However, after decriminalizing "commodity smuggling" in 2011, criminal liability for the illegal movement of vehicles across the customs border of Ukraine arises only if there are qualifying signs indicating a change in approaches to the criminalization of this act.

Articles 482-485 of the Customs Code of Ukraine [2] establish administrative liability for violations of customs rules. These norms, in particular, cover the movement of goods across the customs border of Ukraine in violation of the established procedure, which directly applies to the illegal importation of vehicles.

The Code of Ukraine on Administrative Offenses, Articles 121-123 [2], defines administrative liability for violations of vehicle operation rules. These provisions are often applied to owners of illegally imported vehicles, which, as a rule, do not meet the established technical and registration requirements.

The effectiveness of legal regulation in combating vehicle smuggling largely depends on the coordinated actions of law enforcement and control structures. The State Customs Service of Ukraine, the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine, the National Police, and the Security Service of Ukraine play a key role in detecting and suppressing smuggling.

An analysis of data on the effectiveness of measures to combat vehicle smuggling for 2020-2025 demonstrates a gradual increase in the number of detected cases and the percentage of successful judicial prosecution. In 2020, 1250 cases were detected, of which 32% resulted in successful prosecution. This indicator has steadily grown, reaching 3420 detected cases and 49% successful prosecution in 2024. By 2025, an increase to 3850 detected instances with 53% successful prosecution is expected. Data for 2025 are based on forecasts and analysis of the first two quarters.

Despite the positive dynamics, several problems remain

that reduce the effectiveness of counteraction. These include:

- Decriminalization of "commodity smuggling" complicates bringing perpetrators to criminal liability, especially in the absence of other qualifying signs of the crime.
- Insufficient coordination of actions and cooperation among various law enforcement agencies, leading to duplication of functions or gaps in the control system.
- High corruption risks in customs and law enforcement agencies contribute to the unimpeded illegal movement of vehicles.
- Imperfection of the vehicle identification and control system complicates the detection of forged documents and identification numbers.

Among the high-profile cases related to countering vehicle smuggling, it is worth noting Operation "Boomerang" conducted through the joint efforts of the State Customs Service, the National Police, and the Security Service of Ukraine in 2022-2023. As a result of the operation, an organized criminal group specializing in the illegal movement of stolen premium-class cars from European Union countries to Ukraine was detected and suppressed. Thanks to the coordinated actions of law enforcement agencies, 27 group members were detained, and 124 vehicles with a total value of over 5.8 million euros were seized.

To increase the effectiveness of countering vehicle smuggling, the following measures are advisable:

- Reintroduction of criminal liability for "commodity smuggling" particularly for the illegal movement of vehicles on a significant scale, will allow for more effective prosecution of organizers and participants in schemes.
- Introduction of a unified electronic system for controlling the movement of vehicles across the state border of Ukraine using modern technologies, such as automatic license plate recognition and biometric driver identification, for comprehensive monitoring.
- Strengthening international cooperation in combating vehicle smuggling by concluding bilateral agreements with European Union countries on prompt information exchange regarding stolen cars and joint operations.
- Introduction of mandatory expert examination of all foreign-registered vehicles imported into Ukraine to verify the conformity of identification numbers and documents with original data, minimizing the possibility of legalizing illegally imported cars.

Implementing these measures will significantly increase the effectiveness of countering vehicle smuggling, reducing its negative impact on road safety in Ukraine and strengthening law and order.

Analyzing international experience in combating vehicle smuggling is crucial for identifying and adapting effective practices that can be implemented in Ukraine. Of particular interest is the experience of states that have demonstrated significant success in countering the illegal movement of vehicles across state borders.

#### **North American Cooperation Model**

The interaction model between Canada and the USA is one of the most successful examples of international cooperation in combating vehicle smuggling. Its key elements include:

1. *Unified Information System*: A common database of stolen vehicles, providing real-time access for border and customs services of both countries.

2. *Joint Operational Groups*: Formation of specialized inter-agency units for rapid response to smuggling incidents.

3. *Harmonized Legislative Framework*: Aligning national legislations in combating vehicle crime to eliminate legal conflicts.

4. *Technological Solutions*: Application of modern control technologies, including automatic number plate recognition systems (ANPR) and VIN code scanners.

The implementation of this model resulted in a 67% reduction in vehicle smuggling between Canada and the USA within five years of its launch. Using a joint information system proved remarkably effective, allowing for real-time stolen vehicle identification at checkpoints.

#### **European Experience**

In the countries of the European Union, the fight against vehicle smuggling is carried out at the national level and within the framework of pan-European initiatives. Europol [11, 12] plays a key role in coordinating these efforts, with a specialized unit for combating vehicle crime within its structure.

One of the most effective tools is the Schengen Information System (SIS) [12], which facilitates the exchange of information on stolen vehicles between law enforcement agencies of EU member states. This system identifies over 35 thousand stolen vehicles and returns them to their owners annually. Germany's experience [12], in particular, demonstrates 92% effectiveness of the automatic VIN code scanning system, which significantly complicates the legalization of stolen vehicles.

#### *Recommendations for Ukraine based on international experience:*

1. Creation of joint information databases with EU countries regarding stolen vehicles.
2. Implement an automatic VIN code scanning and verification system at border crossing points.
3. Formation of joint operational groups comprising representatives of Ukraine's customs and law enforcement agencies and neighboring states.
4. Harmonization of Ukrainian legislation with EU regulatory acts combating vehicle crime.
5. Introduction of an electronic information exchange system between various law enforcement agencies and control structures in real-time.

Implementing these recommendations will significantly increase the effectiveness of combating vehicle smuggling in Ukraine and bring it closer to international standards. Ensuring close cooperation with law enforcement agencies of EU countries is particularly important, as they are the primary source of vehicles that become objects of smuggling.

Smuggling of vehicles causes complex socio-economic consequences that extend beyond the direct threat to road safety. A systematic analysis of these consequences is critically essential for objectively assessing the extent of damage inflicted upon society and the state.

One of the most apparent economic consequences of vehicle smuggling is significant fiscal losses to the state budget due to evasion of mandatory customs payments. According to estimates by the Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting [9], annual budget losses of Ukraine from the illegal import of vehicles show a steady upward trend. Specifically 2020, these losses amounted to

UAH 1.8 billion, increasing to UAH 2.3 billion in 2021, UAH 2.7 billion in 2022, and UAH 3.2 billion in 2023. Further growth of these losses is projected to be UAH 3.8 billion in 2024 and UAH 4.5 billion in 2025 (provisional data).

These losses include unpaid value-added tax, excise tax, import duty, and other mandatory payments. In Ukraine's difficult economic situation, such budget losses have a destructive impact, limiting the state's ability to finance social programs and develop critical infrastructure, particularly road infrastructure, indirectly affecting road safety.

In addition to direct budget losses, vehicle smuggling generates additional economic costs. These are associated with strengthening state border control, conducting operations to detect illegally imported vehicles, and legal proceedings. According to experts, these additional costs amount to about 15-20% of the total budget losses caused by smuggling.

Vehicle smuggling significantly distorts the functioning of the legal automotive market in Ukraine, creating conditions for unfair competition. Illegally imported vehicles, not subject to taxes, can be offered at prices significantly lower than legally imported cars. This leads to market distortion and significant losses for official importers and dealers.

The main manifestations of this negative impact are:

- *Distortion of competition*: Illegally imported vehicles are sold at 25-40% lower than market prices due to tax evasion, making fair competition impossible for legal market participants.

- *Reduced investment attractiveness*: Official dealers are forced to cut investments in developing the dealer network and service facilities due to decreased business profitability.

- *Job losses*: The degradation of the legal automotive business directly leads to job losses in the vehicle sales and service sectors.

According to the Association of Auto Importers and Dealers [14], many illegally imported vehicles in the Ukrainian market have led to an 18% reduction in official new car sales over the past five years. This, in turn, has resulted in the closure of more than 120 dealerships and the liquidation of approximately 3,500 jobs.

A significant number of illegally operated vehicles on Ukrainian roads creates an atmosphere of impunity and undermines public trust in the effectiveness of the law enforcement system. Citizens observing the exploitation of vehicles in violation of current legislation without appropriate consequences for the owners leads to a negative attitude towards the need to comply with legal norms and rules, particularly in road safety.

*"Large-scale vehicle smuggling and the lack of effective mechanisms to counter this phenomenon create a sense of selective application of the law in society, which is destructive for the legal consciousness of citizens and the overall culture of road traffic"* as Doctor of Legal Sciences I.V. Kovalenko [6] noted in her research.

Thus, the socio-economic consequences of vehicle smuggling are complex, affecting the country's economic stability and the social aspects of road safety and law enforcement. This underscores the urgent need to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to combat this destructive phenomenon, considering all aspects of its impact on society and state institutions.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conducted research on vehicle smuggling as a determinant of criminal offenses in the sphere of road safety allowed for the formulation of key conclusions and the development of a set of practical recommendations for effectively countering this destructive phenomenon.

### *Key Findings of the Study*

1. *Systemic nature of the problem*. Vehicle smuggling is a systemic problem closely intertwined with other types of transnational criminal activity, particularly car theft, document forgery, and corruption in law enforcement and customs agencies. Such interdependence requires a comprehensive interdepartmental approach to developing and implementing counter-strategies.

2. *Dynamics of increasing scale*. Analysis of statistical data and expert assessments for 2020-2025 demonstrates a stable trend towards an increase in the volume of vehicle smuggling. This dynamic underscores the urgency of the problem and the need for immediate implementation of effective countermeasures.

3. *Direct impact on road safety*. Smuggled vehicles pose an increased danger to all road users. This is due to their often unsatisfactory technical condition, lack of proper state registration and mandatory technical inspection, and an increased tendency of the owners of such vehicles to ignore traffic rules.

4. *Significant socio-economic destruction*. Vehicle smuggling causes significant damage to the state budget due to non-payment of taxes and customs duties, distorts the competitive environment in the legal automotive market, and undermines citizens' trust in law enforcement institutions. The combination of these factors has a pronounced negative impact on the socio-economic stability of the country.

### *Practical Recommendations*

To effectively counter vehicle smuggling and minimize its negative consequences, the implementation of the following systematized measures is proposed:

#### *Legislative Initiatives*

- Reinstatement of criminal liability for commodity smuggling on a large scale, which will include the illegal movement of vehicles across the customs border of Ukraine.

- Strengthening administrative liability for violations of the rules for temporarily importing vehicles into the customs territory of Ukraine.

- Improving procedures for confiscating illegally imported vehicles and mechanisms for their subsequent sale or disposal under current legislation.

- Harmonize Ukrainian national legislation with the European Union's legal acts in combating vehicle crime to increase the effectiveness of the legal framework.

#### *Organizational and Technical Measures*

- Creation of a unified electronic control system for the movement of vehicles across the state border of Ukraine with the integration of automatic license plate recognition and VIN code scanning technologies.

- Introduction of mandatory expert examination of all foreign-registered vehicles imported into Ukraine, to verify identification numbers and document compliance.

- Ensuring the integration of information systems of the State Customs Service, the State Border Guard Service, and

the National Police for prompt data exchange regarding vehicle movement and coordination of joint actions.

#### *International Cooperation*

– Conclusion of bilateral and multilateral agreements with European Union countries and other states on exchanging information about stolen vehicles and joint measures to counteract their illegal movement across state borders.

– Ensuring Ukraine's active participation in international operations to identify and suppress the activities of transnational criminal groups specializing in vehicle smuggling.

– Implementation in Ukraine of the best international practices in combating vehicle smuggling, including the experience of Canada and the United States of America regarding the functioning of joint operational groups and the development of integrated information systems.

#### *Information and Educational Work*

– Conducting a systematic and large-scale information campaign to increase public awareness of the legal and operational risks of purchasing and using illegally imported vehicles.

– Ensuring maximum transparency and publicity of information about identified cases of vehicle smuggling and the response measures taken by law enforcement agencies.

– Introduction of effective mechanisms to encourage citizens to actively participate in combating the illegal movement of vehicles across the state border of Ukraine, including the confidential provision of relevant information.

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Implementing the proposed recommendations will significantly increase the effectiveness of measures to combat vehicle smuggling, reducing the number of criminal offenses related to road safety due to the operation of illegally imported vehicles. This will have a positive impact on improving road safety in Ukraine, as well as on the overall improvement of the socio-economic situation in the country by reducing budget losses and increasing the level of citizens' trust in the law enforcement system.

#### *Priority Areas for Further Research*

1. Development of a unified methodology for assessing the absolute scale of vehicle smuggling and its systemic impact on road safety.

2. Research on the effectiveness of various models for combating vehicle smuggling has been successfully tested in international practice, and the possibilities of their adaptation to the specific conditions of Ukraine.

3. Comprehensive analysis of the relationship between vehicle smuggling and other types of organized crime to develop integrated combat strategies.

4. Study socio-psychological aspects of the behavior of owners of illegally imported vehicles in the context of their compliance with traffic rules and their influence on the overall driving culture.

5. Research the impact of modern digital technologies and electronic control systems on increasing the effectiveness of combating vehicle smuggling and optimizing law enforcement activities.

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### **НЕЗАКОННЕ ПЕРЕМІЩЕННЯ ТРАНСПОРТНИХ ЗАСОБІВ ЯК ЧИННИК КРИМІНАЛЬНИХ ПРАВОПОРУШЕНЬ У СФЕРІ ДОРОЖНЬОГО РУХУ**

*У статті ґрунтовно проаналізовано суттєвий вплив протиправного обігу транспортних засобів на загальну криміногенну обстановку та показники безпеки дорожнього руху в Україні. Дослідження базоване на ретельному опрацюванні актуальних статистичних даних, отриманих від правоохоронних органів, митних служб та національної статистики дорожньо-транспортних пригод за період 2020-2025 рр., доповнених елементами прогностичного оцінювання. Застосований ретроспективний та прогностичний аналіз однозначно демонструє стабільне збільшення обсягів незаконного переміщення транспортних засобів через державний кордон та їх подальше функціонування в межах національного правового поля. Виявлено, що незареєстровані транспортні засоби, ввезені в обхід встановлених процедур, демонструють значно вищу ймовірність участі у дорожньо-транспортних пригодах, ніж офіційно зареєстровані, що орієнтовно у 2,5 рази збільшує ризик їх потрапляння в аварії. Така тенденція пояснюється насамперед їх часто належним технічним станом, відсутністю належної офіційної реєстрації та проходження обов'язкових технічних оглядів. У роботі всебічно розглянуто ключові механізми та схеми нелегального ввезення автомобілів, а також широкий спектр соціально-економічних та криміногенних наслідків цього явища. Серед них – значні недонадходження до державного бюджету, порушення принципів добросовісної конкуренції на ринку та зростання загроз для життя і здоров'я учасників дорожнього руху. Результати дослідження чітко засвідчують прямий взаємозв'язок між інтенсивністю контрабандної діяльності та зростанням показників аварійності на дорогах. Наукова новизна роботи полягає у розробленні комплексного підходу до оцінювання причинно-наслідкового впливу контрабанди транспортних засобів, який органічно інтегрує правові, економічні та соціальні аспекти проблеми, а також у поданні конкретних кількісних показників її масштабу. Практична цінність даного дослідження полягає у формулюванні обґрунтованих, емпірично підтверджених рекомендацій, спрямованих на вдосконалення механізмів протидії контрабанді транспортних засобів та системне підвищення рівня безпеки дорожнього руху на території України, що включає пропозиції із вдосконалення законодавчої бази, посилення міжнародної та міжвідомчої взаємодії, а також впровадження інноваційних технологій контролю.*

**Ключові слова:** контрабанда транспортних засобів, безпека дорожнього руху, криміногенна ситуація, дорожньо-транспортні пригоди, ретроспективний аналіз, прогностичний аналіз, правові аспекти, міжнародна співпраця, соціально-економічні наслідки, правоохоронні органи, митні служби, незаконне переміщення, законодавча база