



UDC 343.93/.94
IRSTI 10.81.51

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LEGAL-CRIMINAL ANALYSIS OF CRIMES RELATED TO MERCENARY ACTIVITY, ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO THE CRIMINAL CODE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Abstract. The activity of mercenaries constitutes a serious criminal phenomenon that directly endangers the peace, stability, and security of the international community. Mercenaries are individuals who, by engaging in armed conflict for private gain, acquire a particular legal status that subjects them to criminal liability. Their involvement is prohibited under the legislation of most states, as well as under key international legal instruments, precisely because such actions undermine lawful military structures, fuel conflicts, and jeopardize fundamental human rights.

Given the complexity and gravity of this issue, the present study sets out as its main objective a comprehensive juridical-criminal analysis of offenses connected to mercenary activity. This includes examining the legal definitions, the constitutive elements of such crimes, the forms of participation, as well as the measures adopted at both national and international levels to prevent, sanction, and combat mercenarism.

Keywords: armed conflict; training mercenaries; criminal law; military actions; hiring mercenaries; normative modalities; integrity; financing mercenaries.

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ЖАЛДАМАЛЫЛЫҚҚА ҚАТЫСТЫ ҚЫЛМЫСТАРДЫҢ ҚЫЛМЫСТЫҚ-ҚҰҚЫҚТЫҚ ТАЛДАУЫ: МОЛДОВА РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫ ҚЫЛМЫСТЫҚ КОДЕКСІНІҢ НЕГІЗІНДЕ

Аннотация. Жалдамалылардың қызметі халықаралық қоғамдастықтың бейбітшілігіне, тұрақтылығына және қауіпсіздігіне тікелей қауіп төндіретін ауыр қылмыстық құбылыс болып табылады. Жалдамалылар – жеке пайда табу мақсатында қарулы қақтығыстарға қатысатын және мұндай әрекеттері үшін қылмыстық жауаптылыққа тартылатын ерекше құқықтық мәртебесі бар тұлғалар. Жалдамалылардың қарулы қақтығыстарға қатысуына көптеген мемлекеттердің ұлттық заңнамаларында, сондай-ақ негізгі халықаралық-құқықтық құжаттарда тыйым салынған, себебі мұндай әрекеттер мемлекеттердің заңды әскери институттарының қызметіне нұқсан келтіреді.

Бұл мәселенің күрделілігі мен маңыздылығын ескере отырып, зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты ретінде жалдамалылықпен байланысты қылмыстардың кешенді құқықтық-қылмыстық талдауын белгілейді. Осы мақсатқа қол жеткізу үшін құқықтық анықтамалар, қылмыс құрамының элементтері, қатысу нысандарын, сондай-ақ жалдамалылықтың алдын алу, жазалау және оған қарсы күресу үшін ұлттық және халықаралық деңгейлерде қабылданған шараларды зерттеу кіреді.

Түйінді сөздер: қарулы қақтығыс; жалдамалыларды даярлау; қылмыстық құқық; әскери әрекеттер; жалдамалыларды жалдау; нормативтік әдіс; адалдық; жалдамалы әскерлерді қаржыландыру.

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ПРАВОВОЙ И УГОЛОВНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ПРЕСТУПЛЕНИЙ, СВЯЗАННЫХ С НАЕМНИЧЕСКОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬЮ, АНАЛИЗ В СООТВЕТСТВИИ С УГОЛОВНЫМ КОДЕКСОМ РЕСПУБЛИКИ МОЛДОВА

Аннотация. Деятельность наемников представляет собой серьезное преступное явление, представляющее прямую угрозу миру, стабильности и безопасности международного сообщества. Наемники – это лица, которые,



участвуя в вооруженном конфликте в целях личной выгоды, приобретают особый правовой статус, влекущий за собой уголовную ответственность. Их участие запрещено законодательством большинства государств, а также ключевыми международно-правовыми документами, поскольку такие действия подрывают законные военные структуры, разжигают конфликты и ставят под угрозу основные права человека.

Учитывая сложность и серьезность данного вопроса, настоящее исследование ставит своей основной целью комплексный уголовно-правовой анализ преступлений, связанных с наемничеством. Это включает в себя изучение правовых определений, составов таких преступлений, форм участия, а также мер, принятых как на национальном, так и на международном уровне для предотвращения, наказания и борьбы с наемничеством.

Ключевые слова: вооруженный конфликт; подготовка наемников; уголовное право; военные действия; найм наемников; нормативная норма; честность; финансирование наемников.

DOI: 10.52425/25187252_2026_40_69

Introduction. In accordance with the provisions of Article 2, paragraph (1) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova, we note that the legislator has enunciated a complex of supreme values, which the Criminal Law is intended to defend.

Thus, according to the text of the law, individuals, their rights and freedoms, property, the environment, the constitutional order, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, the peace and security of humanity, as well as the entire legal order are protected (2 art.)¹.

Peace and security constitute fundamental values, indispensable for the existence and harmonious development of society, being recognized and enshrined at both national and international levels. From this perspective, crimes committed in the sphere of war and armed conflict are regarded as serious violations of these essential values. They are not tolerated within the objective reality of the contemporary legal order, as they undermine not only individual interests but also the very foundations of peaceful coexistence among states and peoples. Consequently, the commission of such acts entails criminal liability, since the international community has established clear legal mechanisms for their prevention and punishment, thereby reaffirming the imperative nature of the norms that safeguard the peace and security of humanity.

Materials and methods. In the process of developing the scientific article, we were guided by several and various scientific research methods that made it possible to properly investigate the titular subject, among which we can list: the analysis method, the synthesis method, the deduction method, the historical method, as well as the comparative method.

The theoretical and legal basis of the scientific approach includes the defining material such as the local legal framework, as well as numerous studies of the specialized literature, which directly or indirectly address the essence and content of the subject under research.

Results, discussion. Therefore, within the scientific approach we propose to elucidate from a legal and criminal point of view the essence of the crime *Mercenary activity*, as an illegal act that attacks the value of human society – the peace and security of mankind.

The factors that favor or facilitate individuals with criminal inclinations to commit such illegalities in contemporary society are linked to the obvious political crisis, the existing economic crisis and, consequently, to the psychological crisis of each perpetrator or the desire to obtain some advantages [1].

Recourse to the services of paid individuals to perform military tasks is an old practice, which some states still resort to today. This is sometimes done in violation of international regulations. The activities of mercenaries directly contradict the fundamental principles of international law, which form the foundation of relations between states and of the international legal order. Among these principles are non-interference in the internal affairs of states, respect for territorial integrity, and the safeguarding

¹ Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova no. 985 of 18.04.2002 // Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova no. 72-74 of 14.04.2009, in force according to the latest amendments and additions of 20.04.2021.



of the independence and sovereignty of each state. By their very nature, the actions of mercenaries often involve participation in armed conflicts or the destabilization of internal situations within a state in exchange for material benefits. Such external involvement, driven by private interests, undermines the legitimate authority of states and may generate significant imbalances in their constitutional and political order. Moreover, the use of mercenaries can contribute to the escalation of conflicts, violations of fundamental human rights, and threats to international peace and security. For these reasons, the international community has consistently condemned the phenomenon of mercenarism and has adopted legal instruments aimed at preventing and sanctioning it, thereby reaffirming the importance of respecting the fundamental principles that govern peaceful coexistence among states. These activities create obstacles in the process of self-determination of peoples fighting against colonialism, as well as all other forms of foreign domination. That is why some international legal instruments seek to prohibit the use of mercenaries, condemning both the recourse to their services and their participation in hostilities [2, Pp. 136-137].

According to the text of the law, established in art.141 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova², we note that criminal liability for the activity of mercenaries is set out in the following legislative order:

1) participation of a mercenary in an armed conflict, in military actions or in other violent actions aimed at overthrowing or undermining the constitutional order or violating the territorial integrity of the state (141 art.)³, is punishable by imprisonment from 5 to 10 years;

2) hiring, training, financing or otherwise providing mercenaries, as well as their use in an armed conflict (141 art.)⁴, in military actions or in other violent actions aimed at overthrowing or undermining the constitutional order or violating the territorial integrity of the state. Such an act is also punishable by imprisonment for a term of 10 to 15 years (141 art.)⁵.

The object of the crime is formed by social relations protected by the norms of criminal law [3]. According to Chapter I of the Special Part of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova, Crimes against peace, security of mankind and war crimes, the general legal object of the respective crimes is formed by social relations that are conditioned by the protection of the constitutional order, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, peace and security of mankind, as well as the other values provided for in Article 2 of the criminal law [4].

The specific legal object is the concrete social value that is affected by the crime. This category of object serves to determine the individuality of a crime within a group [5, 109 p.].

At the same time, this opinion regarding the aforementioned is also supported by the authors Alina Șavga and Mariana Grama, who in one of their works mention that „the special object is the concrete social value that is harmed by the commission of the crime” [6, 27 p.].

The special legal object of the crime of mercenary activity is the social relations regarding the non-admission of the participation of the mercenary, the provision in any way of the activity of mercenaries or their use in violent actions aimed at overthrowing or undermining the constitutional order or violating the territorial integrity of the state [2, 137 p.].

All crimes assume the existence of a legal object without which the criminalization of the acts is not possible. Some crimes, in addition to the legal object, are also characterized by the existence of a material object, which should not be confused with the objects that served to commit the act [7, 112 p.].

In the specialized literature, the objective side of a crime is understood as the totality of the conditions required by the incrimination norm regarding the act of conduct for the existence of the crime

² Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova no. 985 of 18.04.2002 // Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova no. 72-74 of 14.04.2009, in force according to the latest amendments and additions of 20.04.2021.

³ In the same place.

⁴ In the same place.

⁵ In the same place.



[8, 132 p.]. The objective side of the crime component constitutes the external aspect of the dangerous attack on objects protected by criminal law, that is, the external aspect of the person's behavior, manifested in the real world and expressed by causing danger to this object or by threatening to endanger it. The objective side is the so-called external aspect of the crime, that is, what we see in reality, what we feel and what unfolds before us [9, 103 p.].

The objective side of the crimes specified in art. 141 paragraph (1) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova includes the following two signs (141 art.)⁶:

1) the harmful act expressed in the action of participation in an armed conflict, in military actions or in other violent actions (141 art.)⁷;

2) the time of the commission of the crime, namely – the time of armed conflict, military actions or the commission of other violent actions (141 art.)⁸.

Participation in an armed conflict, military action or other violent action means the activity, whether organized or not, led or not by other persons, involving the use of violence. This participation can be carried out in various concrete ways, such as: attacking the headquarters of public authorities or communication centers or radio and television stations; attacking military units; occupying the headquarters of public authorities or the headquarters of parties or other legal organizations; resisting the bodies responsible for maintaining public order; disarming the law enforcement agencies, etc.

For the qualification of the act under art. 141 par. (1) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova, it is not important whether the participation in an armed conflict, military actions or other violent actions is active or not. Such a circumstance may be taken into account when individualizing the punishment. In order to establish the degree of participation of the perpetrator in an armed conflict, military actions or violent actions, the following shall be taken into account: the degree of aggression of the perpetrator; his spirit of initiative; the ability to make decisions and execute them; the refusal to spare the victim; recalcitrance in relation to representatives of the authorities, etc. [4].

The objective side of the crime provided for in Article 141 paragraph (2) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova is characterized by a set of constituent elements that define the external manifestation of the incriminated act. Within the normative limits established by criminal law, this objective side includes two essential features, which outline the legal content of the offense and allow it to be distinguished from other acts provided for under criminal legislation. These two features reflect both the specific conduct prohibited by the incriminating norm and the conditions under which such conduct acquires criminal relevance. Their analysis is indispensable for the proper legal classification of the act, since only the cumulative fulfillment of these objective elements may lead to the determination of the existence of the offense in the form provided by the aforementioned legal provision:

1) the harmful act materialized in the action of hiring, training, financing or otherwise providing mercenaries, or of using them in an armed conflict, in military actions or in other violent actions (141 art.)⁹;

2) the time of the commission of the crime, namely – the time of the armed conflict or military actions (in the case of the use of mercenaries in an armed conflict, military actions or other violent actions) (141 art.)¹⁰.

It can be observed that the alternative normative modalities of the prejudicial action examined are:

1) hiring mercenaries;

⁶ Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova no. 985 of 18.04.2002 // Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova no. 72-74 of 14.04.2009, in force according to the latest amendments and additions of 20.04.2021.

⁷ In the same place.

⁸ In the same place.

⁹ In the same place.

¹⁰ In the same place.



- 2) training mercenaries;
- 3) financing mercenaries;
- 4) other provision of mercenaries;
- 5) using mercenaries in an armed conflict, in military actions or in other violent actions.

By “hiring mercenaries” is meant the attraction, hiring, recruitment (by selection) of a person, followed by offering him/her to give his/her consent to participate as a mercenary in an armed conflict, military actions or other violent actions.

“Training mercenaries” encompasses any activity involving the provision of specialized instruction, guidance, or preparation aimed at enabling individuals to participate as mercenaries in armed conflicts, military operations, or other forms of organized violence. This training is not limited to general military skills but specifically targets the enhancement of capacities necessary for engagement in illicit or unlawful violent actions.

“Mercenary financing” refers to the provision, by any means, whether directly or indirectly, of goods, resources, or financial services to a mercenary with the purpose, or with knowledge, that such goods or services will be used, in whole or in part, to facilitate the participation of a person as a mercenary in armed conflicts, military operations, or other acts of violence. This definition encompasses not only monetary transfers but also the provision of equipment, weapons, materials, logistical support, or any other type of tangible or intangible resources that can contribute to the preparation or execution of mercenary activities.

“Other provision of mercenaries” means: the provision of weapons, ammunition, other destructive devices or means, harmful or dangerous substances, other such means or instruments; hosting; facilitating entry into areas with limited access; providing data on target objectives; providing other support, in any form. In the event of other provision of mercenaries, the application of liability in accordance with art. 141 paragraph (2) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova excludes the additional reference to art. 42 paragraph (5) and art. 141 paragraph (1) of the Criminal Law of the Republic of Moldova.

Finally, the „use of a mercenary in an armed conflict, military action or other violent action” means the actual involvement of the mercenary in participating in an armed conflict, military action or other violent action. In the case of the use of a mercenary in an armed conflict, military action or other violent action, the application of liability in accordance with art. 141 paragraph (2) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova excludes the additional reference to art. 42 paragraph (3) and art. 141 paragraph (1) of the Criminal Law of the Republic of Moldova.

In the manner of using mercenaries in an armed conflict, in military actions or in other violent actions, the time of the commission of the crime, namely – the time of the armed conflict, military actions or the commission of other violent actions – is a mandatory secondary sign of the objective side of the crime provided for in art. 141 paragraph (2) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova. In the absence of this sign of the objective side, the use of the mercenary cannot be qualified on the basis of art. 141 paragraph (2) of the Criminal Law of the Republic of Moldova [2, Pp. 139-140].

The criminal acts provided for in art. 141 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova are formal crimes and are consumed from the moment of the commission of the act of participation of the mercenary [10, 42 p.], either in financing, training, hiring mercenaries, or other provision of mercenaries or in their use in armed conflicts, military action or in other violent actions.

Human conduct, from a subjective perspective, represents the support of the way of thinking, decision-making and execution of the objective criminal act, being the basis for its actual commission, implying the adoption of an individual attitude of the offender towards the act and its socially dangerous result [11, 160 p.]. Thus, the content of the subjective side constitutes the external aspect of the crime [12, 59 p.]. The subjective side of the crime of mercenary activity is always committed with guilt,



through direct intent [13, 281 p.].

Motive and purpose, as subjective processes, are intimately linked to the moral element of the crime in which they are integrated. Attempting a definition of the two subjective aspects, we will consider the motive of the crime as an inner impulse that determines the offender to make a criminal decision and to commit it. By the purpose of the crime, we will understand the finality pursued by the perpetrator, the situation he wants to reach by committing the act [7, Pp. 245-246].

The motives for crimes related to mercenary activity may consist of material interest, or the perpetrator's desire to facilitate his criminal activity; the perpetrator's desire to pass on his accumulated criminal experience to the mercenary, etc. [2, 141 p.].

The legal framework of the Republic of Moldova, by recognizing this dual purpose, allows for a comprehensive approach to criminal liability, ensuring that all underlying motivations – whether ideological, political, or economic – are considered in the assessment and prosecution of such offenses. In the absence of either of these two purposes, the act cannot be qualified according to art. 141 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova [2, 138 p.].

The state acts as the guarantor of social values, enforcing compliance among all members of society, while individuals are simultaneously recognized as rights-holders entitled to protection. This conceptualization reinforces the idea that criminal law is both preventive and protective, aiming to maintain social order and stability by deterring harmful conduct and securing the values deemed fundamental by society. It therefore follows that, in principle, all members of society are involved in criminal law relations, either as recipients or as beneficiaries of the criminal law, and thereby they become subjects of criminal law [14, 52 p.]. In the event of the commission of crimes, the members of society – who have disregarded the criminal provision of compliance – enter into a criminal legal relationship of conflict with the state, as the agent of society in organizing social defense, acquiring the quality of criminal law subject of the legal relationship of conflict or contradiction [15, 177 p.]. Therefore, the subject of the crime is the person who committed the crime and who, according to the law, is obliged to bear criminal liability for the act committed [16, 16 p.].

The subject of the offenses incriminated under art. 141 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova is the responsible natural person who at the time of committing this offense has reached the age of 16 [17]. At the same time, under the conditions of art. 141 paragraph (1) of the Criminal Law of the Republic of Moldova, the subject must also possess the special quality of mercenary.

Conclusion. Taking into account the aspects discussed previously, we can firmly conclude that the offense defined in Article 141 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova, known under the generic term mercenary activity, represents a profoundly socially dangerous act that undermines, in a direct and substantial manner, the peace, stability, and security of humanity as a whole.

In recent years, mercenary involvement in various conflict zones has become increasingly visible and widely publicized. Escalating geopolitical tensions, the emergence of private armed groups, and the use of foreign combatants by both state and non-state actors have brought the phenomenon back into the spotlight of international discourse and media coverage. As a result, societies and legal systems worldwide are confronted with new challenges in identifying, regulating, and sanctioning such activities.

Under these circumstances, acquiring a thorough understanding of the constitutive elements of the offense – its objective and subjective components, the specific legal criteria that distinguish a mercenary from other participants in armed conflict, and the forms of criminal liability that may arise – becomes not only relevant but essential. A detailed juridical-criminal analysis is crucial for ensuring the correct qualification of mercenary actions, for preventing misinterpretations in legal practice, and for strengthening the mechanisms through which states counteract this dangerous phenomenon. Ultimately, such an analysis contributes to the more effective protection of international order and the promotion of global peace and security.



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