

→ EUROCRIM2024

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# Bucharest, an emerging milestone for criminological research



*„Bucharest, a city under construction. All the old and deserted slums have now metamorphosed into building sites on which monumental blocks are being erected. Our provincial boulevards of yesterday are mobilising at the edges and seeming to shrink in width, are growing vertiginously in height. The number of architects has become far too small. Not only that. Where yesterday there were maze-like streets, today we have huge*

*squares criss-crossed by cars, trams and statues. In just a few years, Bucharest has become a half-western and presentable city.” (Ionescu, 1934, translation using deepL.com)*

## **Criminology goes East. Balkan Criminology**

Definitely the most postponed conference in the history of ESC, the 24th Annual Meeting is finally taking place in Bucharest on September 11-14, 2024! I remember the adventure of applying for organising the conference in Cardiff (2017), where I landed at 10 PM without any luggage due to a storm in Amsterdam (the airport of my connecting flight) and, therefore, only wearing jeans and a t-shirt for my appearance in front of the Board the next day, also missing the flyers of the Faculty I had brought from Bucharest... (the guys were nice however! all the members of Board I've ever met were kind and helpful with an enthusiastic - yet a bit lost - Romanian scholar in the field of criminology). While waiting to meet the Board in the hallway, I was happy to meet the organisers of the conferences in Malaga (2022) and Florence (2023, initially 2021), with whom I have been collaborating ever since. As happy as I was for organising the conference in 2020, the COVID pandemic ruined all the plans and forced the Board to rapidly adapt to an online event (and then to another one...), which determined months of weekly video meetings for planning. Luckily, those times are in the past and here we are, making sure that everything goes as smoothly as possible for our September meeting.

As stated in the general presentation of the conference, Bucharest is the Easternmost city of the conferences organised by the European Society of Criminology (a title previously held by the 2011 ESC conference in Vilnius). Moreover, except for Ljubljana (2009) and Sarajevo (2018), the Balkans, even in a broader sense of the notion (Sundhaussen, 2014), have not played host to the EUROCRIM conferences.

The Balkans are, however, a region which continuously had to adapt to new realities, mixing influences of Western European culture and regional particularities. Criminology did not escape such a need for adaptation, nor was it far from the said influence. Perhaps the most important proof, which included Romania and opened a significant path for criminological research in this country, is the creation, in 2012, of the Max Planck Partner Group for Balkan Criminology – a joint venture between the Max Planck Institute and the University of Zagreb’s Faculty of Law.

The Partner Group conducted a total of 20 research projects, hosted or organised 5 conferences (one of which was in Bucharest) and 5 one-week intensive courses, held 15 panels at ESC conferences with a total of 65 presentations, issued 13 newsletters, and published several volumes in the Balkan Criminology book series. A real model of successful cooperation, the Partner Group was led with enthusiasm and energy by Prof. Dr. Anna-Maria Getoš Kalac, who will be one of the plenary speakers at Bucharest’s EUROCRIM2024.

We will also have the pleasure of hearing the plenary speeches of Sally Simpson (University of Maryland, USA), Thomas Ugelvik (University of Oslo), Marieke Liem (Utrecht University), Nicholas Lord (University of Manchester), Ioan Durnescu (University of Bucharest), together with the opening plenary speech of Josep M. Tamarit Sumalla (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, President of the ESC).

### **Bucharest, Romania**

Certainly, some historical characteristics of Romania could be linked to its general topic and to the ideas previously mentioned regarding the Balkans. For centuries, geography positioned Romania between different civilisations. As such, the constant swing between cultures gave birth to the present day’s mix. One should take the Romanian language, which is

predominantly Latin, but with heavy Slavic influences, as an example. Romanian cuisine has mainly Eastern influences, but, throughout time, borrowed Western habits. The list can go on.

This is also shown by the words of the great Romanian playwright Eugen Ionescu, quoted above, written 90 years ago, at the exact moment when Benjamin Mendelsohn was graduating from the Faculty of Law of the University of Bucharest. As history has a symmetrical way of making its presence felt, Bucharest, Mendelsohn’s hometown, is now trying to bring closer not only Western European criminology but also scholars from around the world to reflect together on current issues related to crime and crime control, whereas victimology and victim protection will be of special interest, in honor of Mendelsohn’s work.

### **The Faculty of Law, University of Bucharest**



Over the course of its 160 years of existence (celebrated this year), generations of students and teachers have managed to make the University of Bucharest the most important institution for higher education, research and culture in Romania;

it nowadays enjoys solid national and international prestige. Under the tutelage of the academic professorial staff, the almost 34.000 students at the University of Bucharest are actively involved in the academic community, partaking in scientific events held yearly within the University. Within the University of Bucharest, there are 19 faculties and 1 department.

With almost 4000 students, the Faculty of Law, established in 1859, is one of the oldest faculties belonging to the University of Bucharest and one of its three founding faculties. Its academic staff includes remarkable legal scholars as well as highly active politicians, working as members of the traditional chairs: the public law chair, the private law chair and the criminal law chair.

One of the (few) positive aspects of postponing the conference was that, during the pandemic, many rooms of the Faculty have been refurbished and equipped with modern electronic devices, which will allow more than 40 parallel sessions to take place in only one building (and, looking at the abstracts received, it looks like we will need all the available space!).

### **Criminological education and research in Romania**

While it was very rarely taught in universities at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, criminology was prohibited in universities like in other countries in Eastern Europe (Simion, 2008). Only in 1969 did criminology become an academic discipline, being taught for only one semester within the law faculties. Nowadays, the Faculty of Law of the University of Bucharest is the only one that still includes criminology as a mandatory discipline; and the main textbook used in law faculties (Cioclei, 2024), aiming to provide a general overview of theories of crime, is written by a professor of the same faculty. Furthermore, criminology is rarely taught in sociology faculties.

Despite this, criminological research has started to emerge in Romania. Over the past years, various scholars in this country took part in some of the major international studies (e.g. the European SourceBook, the International Self-Report Delinquency Study), attended scientific events and published the results of their research in national and international journals.

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Barbara Gualco wrote in her 2023 paper for the ESC Newsletter that she was extremely proud (and afraid!!!) to organise the conference and I can't agree more. I take example of her courage and joy in putting together this great event. I must confess, however, another reason for which I wished – for so many years – that the ESC Conference would come to Bucharest: during my first ESC conference (Budapest, 2013), I met only one Romanian national – Professor Ioan Durnescu, who, as I was saying, will also be Plenary Speaker of the Bucharest Conference. In Florence (2023), there were 15 Romanians. While this reveals the abovementioned emergence of criminology in Romania, I really hope that in 2024 the number will be at least double and that my colleagues will engage in fruitful cooperation with scholars from all over the world. Together with the local organising team, I look forward to receiving you all in six months!

### **References**

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