

Deployment of Armed Soldiers in European Cities as a Source of Insecurity among Czech Population

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Abstract : In the last ten years, there are growing numbers of troops with machine guns serving on streets of European cities. We can see them around government buildings, major transport hubs, synagogues, galleries and main tourist landmarks. As the main purpose of armed soldier's presence in European cities authorities declare the prevention of terrorist attacks and psychological support for tourists and domestic population. The main objective of the following study is to find out whether the deployment of armed soldiers in European cities has a calming and reassuring effect on Czech citizens (if the presence at armed soldiers make the Czech population feel more secure) or rather becomes a stress factor (the presence of soldiers standing guard in full military fatigues recalls serious criminality and terrorist attacks which are reflected in the fears and insecurity of Czech population). The initial hypothesis of this study is connected with the priming theory, the idea that when we are exposed to an image (armed soldier), it makes us unconsciously focus on a topic connected with this image (terrorism). This paper is based on a quantitative public survey, which was carried out in the form of electronic questioning among the citizens of the Czech Republic. Respondents answered 14 questions about two European cities - London and Paris. Besides general questions investigating the respondents' awareness of these cities, some of the questions focused on the fear that the respondents had when picturing themselves leaving next Monday for the given city (London or Paris). The questions asking about respondent's travel fears and concerns were accompanied by different photos. When answering the question about fear some respondents have been presented with a photo of Westminster Palace and the Eiffel with ordinary citizens while other respondents have been presented with a picture of the Westminster Palace, the and Eiffel's tower not only with ordinary citizens, but also with one soldier holding a machine gun. The main goal of this paper is to analyse and compare data about concerns for these two groups of respondents (presented with different pictures) and find out if and how an armed soldier with a machine gun in front of the Westminster Palace or the Eiffel Tower affects the public's concerns about visiting the site. In other words, the aim of this paper is to confirm or rebut the hypothesis that the look at a soldier with a machine gun in front of the Eiffel Tower or the Westminster Palace automatically triggers the association with a terrorist attack leading to an increase in fear and insecurity among Czech population.

Keywords : terrorism, security measures, priming, risk perception

Conference Title : ICESIR 2018 : International Conference on Economic Sociology, Interests and Rationality

Conference Location : Prague, Czechia

Conference Dates : March 22-23, 2018