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VIDEO RECORDING OF STATEMENTS VERIFICATION  
AT THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

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*Summary*

*In the elaborated article, the authors examine the role and use of video recording methods in verifying statements at the scene of the crime, from the perspective of procedural law. The author highlights the importance of legal norms in the tactics of conducting these verifications and provides tactical recommendations for the application of technical means in this regard.*

*Following the analysis of various interpretative approaches to procedural law norms and relying on general scientific recommendations regarding criminal prosecution actions, the author structures the necessary activities to be carried out by the person responsible for verifying statements at the scene of the crime. These recommendations aim to improve the quality of recordings and the efficiency of investigation procedures.*

*Therefore, the article serves as a useful guide for professionals involved in judicial processes, providing them with the necessary tools to properly use technical recording means for the purpose of verifying and clarifying statements of witnesses, victims, aggrieved parties, suspects, or accused individuals about the events of the crime committed in a specific location.*

*Keywords: video recording, statement verification at the crime scene, tactical recommendations, criminal case, statements.*

**Introduction.** An offensive way to reflect objective reality is to verify statements at the scene of the crime. According to procedural law, “for verifying or clarifying the statements of the witness, the aggrieved party, the suspect, the accused regarding the events of the offense committed in a specific place, the representative of the criminal prosecution body is entitled to go to the scene of the offense together with the person interviewed and, if necessary, with the defender, interpreter, specialist, legal representative and to propose to the interviewed person to describe the circumstances and objects about which he has made or can make statements [1, Art.114 para.(1)].

This probative procedure represents an independent criminal prosecution action. The main criterion that allows the attribution of verifying statements at the scene of the crime to independent actions is the discovery and reflection by this action of data that cannot be obtained otherwise. This feature is highlighted in the complex structure of the action – when the information obtained orally is compared with the data that characterize the particularities of the crime scene. This criminal prosecution action is carried out in case:

- The interviewed person finds it difficult to describe, with small details, the place of the offense, the access and exit routes, the objects existing at the time of the offense, but is able to show and describe all these if he is at the scene of the crime;

- There are divergences in the statements of the participants regarding certain circumstances, objects, access and exit routes from the scene of the crime (to verify the scripted statements, which often cannot take into account objective reality, especially in the case of offenses committed by multiple persons). In other words, verifying statements at the crime scene is carried out to discover new evidence, verify existing ones, identify and eliminate the causes that have led to the appearance of divergences in people's statements, ascertain the circumstances that facilitated the commission of the offense. Moreover, the statement made must be one of those statements which, according to the law or circumstances, lead to a legal consequence. In other words, it is required that the statement has, according to the law or circumstances, probative value and legal effectiveness, being capable of serving, by the mere fact of its making, in bringing about the legal consequence intended by the perpetrator [6, p.183].

Verifying statements at the crime scene allows solving the following tasks, which are of major importance for the investigation of the specific case, namely:

- Discovering the place where the offense was committed, about which the interviewed person made ambiguous statements. This did not allow the criminal prosecution officer to independently identify this place;

- Establishing the itinerary, unknown to the criminal prosecution officer, through which the interviewed person entered or left the scene of the crime;

- Discovering traces of the commission of the offense or material evidence that were not previously identified or known to the criminal prosecution officer;

- Establishing the aggrieved parties and witnesses about whom there was no previous knowledge;

- Determining the participants in the offense;

- Ascertaining the existence or absence of divergences in the statements of witnesses, suspects, etc. Witness statements refer to the accounts provided before legal authorities by individuals who have knowledge capable of aiding in the discovery of truth in a criminal proceeding, knowingly, a term which is equivalent to consciously, having full awareness of the facts. Considering the provisions of Article 312 of the Penal Code of the Republic of Moldova regarding false statements, false conclusions, or incorrect translations, we can say that a person who submits statements does so knowingly or in good faith [5, p.285];

- Establishing and specifying circumstances related to the person's activity at the scene of the crime or the access and exit routes, in case these circumstances are important for the case and cannot be established and specified by other means;

- Determining the circumstances that existed at the time of the commission of the offense;

- Establishing the level of information of the person regarding the scene of the crime, objects, itinerary, actions of the participants;

- Verifying criminal prosecution and investigation versions;

- Ascertaining the causes and conditions that favored the commission of the offense. According to S.Gh. Doraș's opinion, "this probative procedure can also be ordered and carried out for specific purposes such as: unmasking the staged self-incrimination, revealing false witnesses, establishing the circumstances that favored the commission of the offense, other circumstances necessary for the fair settlement of the case" [2, p.157; 8, p.219-227]. We underline this statement, because it is essential to understand that people who were not directly involved in the commission of the offense will often display incompetence, especially regarding the *modus operandi* at the scene of the crime.

**The purpose of the article** consists in reporting the tactical-criminalistic aspects of video

recording of the process of verifying or specifying the statements, from the perspective of procedural law.

**Methods and materials applied.** To achieve the proposed purpose, given the specificity and complex nature of the investigated theme, the following research methods were used: logical, systematic, and comparative. The research undertaken is based on the study of doctrine and procedural criminal law.

**Discussions and results obtained.** Verifying statements at the crime scene represents a means of investigating the issue concerning the events of the offense. The interviewed person is proposed to describe the circumstances and objects about which he has made or can make statements.

“Although the tactic of the probative procedure in question differs from case to case, depending on the nature of the offense, the procedural status of the person whose statements are to be verified, theory, and criminalistic practice have specified the substantive elements of the algorithm of the respective procedural activity” [2, p.409]. “As in the case of applying other probative procedures in criminal prosecution, in verifying statements at the scene of the crime, all three forms of fixation are applied: respectively verbal, expressive-demonstrative, and graphic. The verbal form consists of drawing up a report on the verification of statements at the scene of the crime, in which the situation and conditions in which the verification of statements of one or another person was carried out, the order in which the respective activity took place and its results are fixed. If traces of the offense or other objects with probative value were found at the scene of the crime or in its surroundings, this fact will be recorded in the report, and the traces and objects found will be collected and fixed in the order provided for in the legislation in force and criminalistic tactics. Finally, the questions asked by the criminal prosecution officer and the answers of the person whose statements are being verified will be recorded here” [2, p.411].

The expressive-demonstrative form provides for the application of judicial photography and video recording to fix the process of verification and the results revealed. “Video recording is the preferred means of fixation of verification” [7, p.233], because it allows:

– „The simultaneous recording of the image and (sound) of speech on the same material support.

– The recording and playback with a high degree of objectivity of the statements and actions performed by the person at the scene of the crime, the intonation, the emotions, the person’s reaction.

– Ensuring the possibility of delimiting and demonstrating the role and contribution of each participant in the commission of the offense, an important fact if the offense was committed by a criminal group or organization.

– Recording the conditions in which the verification activity took place, the logic of the actions, the order of its conduct, the legality, and the effectiveness of the tactical measures taken.

– Ensuring respect for the rights of those involved in the verification activity, preventing the use of illegal forms such as inducement, psychological or physical coercion, misleading, instilling the direction of movement, etc.

Video recording is recommended to be used in situations where it is assumed that the person whose statements are being verified will present little-known routes (especially when the accuracy of these statements is crucial) or will perform complex actions, etc.” [4, p.66-67].

It is incorrect to assume that if the verification of statements at the scene of the crime is done correctly, it will not be difficult to accurately reflect through video recordings what happened at the crime scene. Although it is true that the verification of statements can sometimes take several hours and that it is not feasible to continuously film throughout this time, the assertion that it is sufficient to record only “the main and most relevant moments” [11], is debatable. This approach can lead to the loss of important details and the undervaluation of aspects that may

seem less significant at first glance, but may have important consequences in the conduct of the investigation or in the subsequent evaluation of the video evidence [12, p.204]. Additionally, the subjective selection of moments for recording can lead to accusations of bias or challenges to the objectivity of the video evidence. Therefore, it is important for the investigation to be recorded as comprehensively as possible, and the decision on what to record should be made based on the specifics of each case and the legal and ethical requirements.

Taking breaks in video recording is not a recommended practice. This is justified only if the person whose statements are being verified has finished narrating and demonstrating in one location and declares the need to move to another location, and the recording of the movement process is irrelevant to the criminal case. In this case, the video recording should document the cause and duration of the break.

To understand what needs to be recorded on video, the on-site investigation report and its annexes (photographic chart, sketch) and other relevant materials will be studied. The results of the crime scene investigation are compared with the information obtained during the interview of the person whose statements are to be verified.

As is known, a fundamental aspect in planning an investigative action is the identification of the so-called “reference points”, which will serve as reference frames in the process of verifying statements at the scene of the crime.

“The nature of these ‘reference points’ can be very diverse: the place where the participants met before the commission of the offense, the place where traces were discovered, the routes of movement of certain persons, the points where relevant objects were or are located, etc.” [10, p.368].

Based on the case materials, the investigator identifies these “reference points” and plans the methods of investigation and recording of these points.

After the criminal prosecution officer has established what and in what order should be filmed during the verification of statements, he must thoroughly instruct the specialist who will perform the video recordings about the general objectives of the future filming and about the specific tasks for each “reference point” during filming.

As mentioned earlier, neither the comprehensiveness of the collected materials nor the obvious clarity of the objective of the future filming should influence the decision of the criminal prosecution officer to inspect preventively, together with the specialist, the place where the criminal prosecution action will take place (of course, if this place is known).

“As for verifying statements at the scene of the crime, this rule is of particular importance, as the essence of this action consists in comparing the different statements of the person with the objective reality” [8].

Thus, the more attentively the criminal prosecution officer and the specialist study the real environment, the easier it will be for them to fix it through video recording. Being at the scene of the crime, it will be easier for them to imagine under what conditions the filming will take place, what objects need to be filmed and from what angles, what needs to be filmed in the foreground, in which case an orientation or detail shot will be necessary.

Special emphasis should be placed on selecting the filming points. The choice of filming locations depends primarily on how intensively and from which direction the objects and areas of the terrain – space proposed for filming – will be illuminated.

In general, the aspect regarding the desirability of preparing a written plan for the future video recording, mentioned earlier, has a certain specificity in preparing for statement verification, determined by the nature of this criminal prosecution action. It can be recommended to prepare at least one plan (sketch) of the terrain for the planned action, even in the most primitive way. On the plan, it is convenient to mark the objects to be filmed, the filming points, etc.

Sometimes, the criminal prosecution officer does not have detailed information about the

location where the statement verification will take place. It is clear that in this case, the planning possibilities are limited. For example, from the defendant's statements, it appears that he committed a theft from an apartment in a house, the address of which he does not remember. The defendant cannot provide details about the location of the crime, but when he gets there, he hopes to find the house and remember the circumstances of the theft. Thus, it is impossible to examine the location of the statement verification in advance and plan the video recording process. In the presented case, for the specialist to better understand his task and to accurately perform the video recording, he must be explained what needs to be captured: the route indicated by the defendant to the house and the reference points along this route; the moment when the defendant points out the house where the theft took place, how he entered the room; the defendant's indication of specific places from where the goods and valuables were taken, and so on.

Once the objectives and specific tasks of the video recording have been established, certain organizational aspects need to be addressed.

The criminal prosecution officer and the specialist need to establish a signaling system in advance, which will allow them to communicate. During the video recording, the specialist may often be at a significant distance from the other participants in the statement verification, and it may be difficult, sometimes even impossible, for the criminal prosecution officer to give instructions. Therefore, it is important to establish in advance signals (expressed through gestures), which indicate, for example, the start of filming, changing the filming location, etc. In turn, the specialist also needs to have the possibility to signal the criminal prosecution officer.

Since statement verification at the scene of the crime can take time, it is advisable to start as early as possible to take full advantage of the daylight suitable for filming. In the same context, it is recommended to carry out the action only during those hours when there is little crowding at the location where the statement verification will take place or along the route to it.

Outdoor video recordings are also influenced by weather conditions, so if bad weather is expected, this action should not be organized. Similarly, there may be situations that require statement verification indoors, where artificial lighting is necessary. In such cases, to avoid slowing down the pace of statement verification, it is necessary to engage an assistant who, at the direction of the person filming, will move and set up the lighting equipment.

Participants in the criminal prosecution action must be notified in advance that the process will be video recorded, as some individuals whose statements are being examined may refuse to participate, citing that they do not want to be filmed. In these circumstances, detailed and pre-prepared information is indispensable to communicate to the participants that the procedure is mandatory and essential for the smooth conduct of the investigation.

Video recording during statement verification at the crime scene requires adherence to some recommendations. At the beginning of the video recording, after the criminal prosecution officer has explained the rights and obligations of all participants in the action, they will inform them that it is being recorded (mentioning the camera model, the recording medium, and other technical details), and it is mandatory to clarify whether the person whose statements are being verified is prepared to make statements.

Then, the criminal prosecution officer explains in detail the course of the investigation action and informs all participants about their tasks and responsibilities. The introductory part of the recording ends when the starting point is brought to the attention of the person whose statements are being verified.

The pace of statement verification at the scene of the crime should not be too fast so that the specialist has time to familiarize themselves with the environment and record everything that is necessary. However, it is not recommended to excessively prolong statement verification due to video recordings, as this could disrupt the natural flow of the action, and the attention of the participants could be distracted.

To achieve more efficient recording and, especially, to choose filming points, the criminal prosecution officer must obtain information from the person whose statements are being verified, about the location they are supposed to advance further towards, some time beforehand.

It is crucial to clarify the possibility of repeating the verification of statements at the scene of the crime. We consider it inappropriate to reiterate certain activities already performed by the person whose statements are being verified, especially in situations where an episode related to the recognition of objects, areas of terrain, or premises needs to be filmed. Repeating these actions for the purpose of video recording is completely unacceptable, as the moment of recognition has already passed.

In addition to organizational elements that need to be recorded on video (legitimization of the criminal investigation officer, presentation of participants, consent of those being interviewed, date and time of commencement, etc.), when conducting the verification of statements at the scene of the crime, it is necessary to establish:

- *the route taken to the scene of the crime* – if the statements being verified are related to the investigation of a certain route of a certain length and transportation was used for this purpose, it is necessary to record the conditions under which the verification of statements took place. The filming must be done in such a way that, upon viewing the final video recording, it is clear what mode of transport was used, where the person whose statements are being verified was located, if the route is visible from that location, where the criminal investigation officer and other participants in the action were located. It is mandatory to record the landmarks mentioned in the statements, as well as the clearly visible objects whose individual characteristics do not present difficulties (for example, a movie theater, a bus stop, a distinctive building, an intersection).

In case the verification of statements at the scene of the crime begins from the office of the criminal investigation officer and transportation to the scene of the crime is done by vehicle, the cameraman will be positioned behind the driver and the person whose statements are being verified, so that the itinerary on which the vehicle is traveling is visible through the window.

In case of transportation by vehicle, the driver is obliged to follow all the instructions of the person regarding the direction of travel (within the limits of traffic regulations). The driver must be informed of this in advance. The person whose statements are being verified will be placed on the front seat of the vehicle involved in the action. In this case, as a means of protection, the suspect, defendant may be handcuffed to prevent escape. It will be more convenient for them to orient themselves, give explanations, and direct from the front seat. It is not excluded that the suspect, defendant may also be in the back seat during the verification of statements at the scene of the crime. Although positioning the handcuffed person in the back seat is more acceptable and effective, it should not be forgotten that they may influence the driver or intentionally cause a traffic accident to escape.

If the participants in the criminal investigation action travel the investigated route on foot, according to the rules for conducting the verification of statements at the scene of the crime, the person whose statements are being verified walks ahead of the other participants in the action. This must be periodically recorded through video filming to visually present the progress of the criminal investigation action later on. In the case of walking, the cameraman must position themselves laterally to the trajectory of the participants in the criminal investigation action. The dynamics of what is happening at the scene of the verification of statements are reproduced by creating diagonal image compositions. Movements within the frame should proceed in a straight line, connecting the opposite corners of the frame (for example, the top left and bottom right). In one corner, the person whose statements are being verified is positioned, while in the other corner is the object towards which they are moving. It is rational for the video recording at the scene of the verification of statements to be carried out from the same points from which the on-site investigation was filmed, for better comparison of circumstances and conditions.

“The person whose statements are being verified is granted full independence and initiative in choosing the itinerary, direction of travel, and description of objects and circumstances. The criminal investigation officer is obliged to create conditions to ensure the independence of the actions carried out by the person whose statements are being verified during the journey. Creating these conditions allows the criminal investigation officer to assess the knowledge that the person whose statements are being verified has regarding the scene of the crime. During the verification of statements at the scene of the crime, no participant has the right to interfere with the statements made by the person, correct them, or whisper. In case if such situations arise at the crime scene, the verification of statements loses its probative character” [3].

• *positioning of participants* – “the optimal placement of participants generally represents a tactical recommendation that serves as a background not only for obtaining objective results but also for avoiding procedural errors. When deciding on the placement of participants in the verification of statements at the scene of the crime, the criminal investigation officer must be guided by the following:

a) the placement of participants should not intimidate the actions of the person whose statements are being verified, because there may be situations when the suspect, defendant will refuse the statements made during the verification of statements at the scene of the crime, and the argument used by them can be that they were constantly handcuffed alongside a police officer. Specifically, the police officer escorted them on the itinerary and especially at the scene of the crime;

b) to exclude escape or attempts on the lives and health of participants (especially those armed);

c) to provide all conditions for fixing the results of the verification of statements at the scene of the crime. The person technically recording the action is not recommended to move ahead of the person whose statements are being verified. This fact can be interpreted as suggesting the itinerary” [7, p.227];

• the circumstances and objects about which the person makes statements;  
• the questions asked – “if the person provides vague or unclear statements, the criminal investigation officer may suggest that certain elements of the statements, which are important for finding the truth, be detailed and specified. The criminal investigation officer must strive to obtain detailed statements to correctly understand and appreciate the actions committed at the scene of the crime” [7];

• the objects and documents discovered that may serve as evidence in the criminal case – during the verification of statements at the scene of the crime, the cameraman, at the direction of the criminal investigation officer, must continuously monitor the person whose statements are being verified. This allows conclusions to be drawn regarding whether:

- the person is firm in their actions;
- the emotional state in general and at certain moments of the verification;
- what caused the emotional change.

The introductory part ends when the criminal investigation officer instructs the person whose statements are being verified, where to proceed along with all participants [9].

*Video recording at the scene of verifying statements.* Upon arrival at the scene of verifying statements, it is advisable to first film a general view (orientation shots) of the territory or the room where the verification of statements will take place. This will allow, upon later viewing of the video recording in court, a better understanding of the direction of movement of the participants in the action, the location of certain objects explained, the exact place where objects and documents that may serve as evidence in the criminal case were discovered, etc.

In the opinion of author Novikova L., „during the video recording of verifying statements at the scene of the crime, the following rules must be followed:

- Each „reference point” must be filmed in such a way that, when viewing the video recording, there is no confusion between „reference points”;
- The recorded material must clarify what each „reference point” consists of;
- The entire recording must be edited to easily follow the relationship between the „reference points”;
- The video recording must allow the evaluation of the conditions under which the criminal investigation action took place;
- If the verification of statements was conducted in the same location with multiple persons, the video recording must facilitate the objective comparison of the information obtained from these persons. Comparing the information from different persons, captured in separate video recordings, is easier if the same landmarks are captured in these recordings” [11].

Concluding the points mentioned earlier, we emphasize that the working stage of verifying statements at the scene of the crime will always achieve its stated purpose if, in addition to proper preparation, video recording of the following elements is used each time:

*Respect for the continuity of actions in conducting the verification of statements at the scene of the crime.* „Respecting a certain continuity in the actions performed during the verification of statements is done only if the action is directed by the prepared criminal investigation officer. The action begins with the proposal to describe or indicate the itinerary traveled during the commission of the crime, the landmarks. Arriving at the indicated location, the criminal investigation officer specifies whether the actions were observed from there or whether the crime took place there. In case of an affirmative answer, usually, it is specified which features were recognized at the location and if they have changed. Obtaining answers to the questions asked, the criminal investigation officer proposes to the person to describe, explain the actions committed. The criminal investigation officer must control that the person whose statements are being verified moves ahead of the operational group for recording and explains their own actions or those witnessed, indicating the objects they are orienting towards, specifying the direction of movement in advance; to make stops to explain certain facts that are important for the criminal investigation” [7, p. 229-230].

*Combining the process of showing the way to the crime scene with the description of circumstances and objects.* Combining the person’s statements with the circumstances at the scene of the crime is a mandatory action in conducting the verification of statements at the scene of the crime. The person must provide statements both during the journey along the route and during intentionally made stops. By describing and demonstrating, attention will be drawn to the participants about the circumstances of the scene of the crime, which were previously mentioned in their statements. The criminal investigation officer may ask verification, clarification, or specification questions.

Giving statements at the end of the action and recording them is not rational, as in this case, the purpose of the action is lost. Combining statements with the ambiance of the scene of the crime allows the person to recall some details, thus complementing previous statements.

*Detailing statements.* “If the person provides vague, unclear statements, the criminal investigation officer may propose that certain elements of the statements, which are important for finding the truth, be detailed and specified. The criminal investigation officer must strive to obtain detailed statements to correctly understand and appreciate the actions committed at the scene of the crime. Thus, it is advisable to establish the positioning of perpetrators, the nature of the actions performed to understand the role of each in the commission of the crime” [3].

At the end of the planned actions, the participants return to the premises of the criminal investigation authority for drafting documents. During this time, according to the announcement made by the criminal investigation officer, video recording is interrupted and resumed after the minutes are drawn up and the filmed materials are reviewed.

The final part of the video recording must include confirmation from the participants regarding the correctness of the recordings, if applicable, comments, objections regarding the action they took part in.

**Conclusions.** The application of video recording in verifying statements at the scene of the crime is essential for ensuring effective and impartial criminal prosecution. Respect for the continuity of actions and the proper integration of statements with the circumstances at the crime scene are key elements in the investigation process. Detailing statements and their subsequent confirmation are necessary to obtain a complete and accurate picture of events. By applying these practices and relevant legal norms, the process of verifying statements at the crime scene becomes more transparent and reliable, contributing to ensuring justice and protecting the fundamental rights of the parties involved in the judicial process.

Although video recording is recognized as an additional technical means of recording the verification of statements at the crime scene, in our opinion, based on the provisions of Art. 114 para. (1) and Art. 115 para. (1) of the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Moldova, a video recording represents a mandatory means of recording the verification of statements at the scene of the crime. In this regard, the provision of Art.114 is expected to expressly regulate that video recording will be applied in the process of verifying or specifying statements.

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