

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

DETAILED STUDY

GUIDE



Agendum- Addressing illicit drug trafficking and transnational organised crime in Eastern Europe, special emphasis on the Balkan Route

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LETTER FROM THE EB

Congratulations, delegate, you have uncovered the secret, extended version of the COE study guide, which will not only assist you in your research and give you direction for committee, but also reveal a very special surprise which will give you an edge in post-orientation meeting discussions and in committee.

We suggest you keep this knowledge to yourself (at the end of the day, it is a competitive committee), and text the chairperson (+91 94323 26953) informing them that you have found this study guide, so we know who's really researching.

If you are not a delegate of COE and have stumbled upon this study guide out of morbid curiosity, we suggest you don't reveal this information to anyone else to help us facilitate fair competition.

As defined by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC): "Organized criminal group" (OCG) shall mean a structured *group of three* or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences...

When you realise this study guide is over two hundred pages long, we would like you to remember this definition. We would also like to remind you of the number of persons on this Executive Board. Luckily, over-explanation is not *yet* defined as a serious crime or offence in the Conventions you will read after this.

Some people, upon seeing this study guide, described it as 'torturous' and 'inhumane'. Sadly, we do not know the meaning of such words (they are not in the study guide after all), but we can only assume they were compliments of the highest order.

Coming to terms with the length for a second, we would advise the newcomers (if any have discovered this guide) and those intimidated by the contents of the following pages: skim through the portions you think are important (but there are some very funny jokes we wrote, we'd be very sad if you didn't read them).

LETTER FROM THE EB

Being a good delegate also means filtering out and extracting the important information from the rest of it. The art of sifting through irrelevant information to find what is actually salient will be extremely important in this committee (especially on Day 2).

Things written in italics in brackets in the earlier abridged study guide as well as this one are stuff we expect you to address in your speeches and deliberations, things to think about while researching.

We wish you all the best.

Executive Board,
Council of Europe, THSMUN 2026

DEFINITIONS & BASIC INFORMATION

Drugs and Substances

The terms “drugs“ and “substances“:

The Dictionary covers the narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances under international control, as defined by the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol, and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971. As such, the expressions “narcotic drug“ and “psychotropic substance“ are legal terms. Currently, there are 118 narcotic drugs, their preparations and 115 psychotropic substances listed in the Schedules of the 1961 and 1971 Convention, respectively. They are determined by the Conventions as follows:

“Drug“ means any of the substances in Schedules I and II, whether natural or synthetic [1961 Convention: DEFINITIONS, article 1, paragraph 1, subparagraph (j)].

“Psychotropic substance“ means any substance, natural or synthetic, or any natural material in Schedule I, II, III or IV [1971 Convention: USE OF TERMS, article 1, paragraph (e)]. Otherwise, when used in a general pharmaceutical sense, the terms “drugs“ and “substances“ – if they stand alone and are not specifically indicated as “narcotic drugs“ and “psychotropic substances“ – are interchangeably used in the Dictionary as generic terms.

“Principal names“ of such substances:

The main denominations used in the Dictionary for the pharmaceutical substances under international control are those most commonly applied to them and are herein referred to as “principal names“. The names were designated in the scheduling decisions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and accordingly applied in the international drug control treaties.

DEFINITIONS & BASIC INFORMATION

In most cases, the “principal names” correspond to those determined by the International Non-proprietary Names (INN) System for Pharmaceutical Substances¹⁰. In cases where INN are not available for controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, other nonproprietary, “generic” or trivial names are used.

An Extremely Short and Lilliputian Note on Organized Crime

The term ‘organised crime’ is not a strictly scientific one. First, the word ‘crime’ is relative – it is a conventional notion, a social construction. Secondly, all intentional crimes are ‘organised’ to a certain extent. Our definition of ‘organised crime’ reflects the ongoing debate in the sciences of criminology or sociology. These increasingly recognise organised crime as a form of business enterprise or as a series of ‘illicit enterprises’

Criminal business arises, exists, and develops according to certain conditions:

- demand for illegal goods (drugs, arms, and so on) and services (e.g. gay sex)
- unsatisfied demand for legal goods and services (for example, the ‘deficit’ in the former Soviet Union)
- unemployment and other sources of exclusion as a basis of social deviance;– deficiencies in tax and customs policies and other government policies.

Since it was first adopted over a century ago, such a wide variety of different meanings have been attributed to the term ‘organised crime’ that we are now left with an ambiguous, conflated concept. In Europe as in the United States, public, political and even scientific debates still oscillate between thinking of organised crime as meaning sets of criminalised activities, and as meaning sets of people engaged in crime.

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In other words, the concept of organised crime inconsistently incorporates the following two notions:

- the provision of illegal goods and services;
- a criminal organisation, understood as a large-scale entity primarily engaged in illegal activities with a well-defined collective identity and subdivision of work among its members.

Criminal associations are a specific type of social organisation consisting of several actors comprising a collective body and violating international agreements and/or the laws of the country in which they operate. The growth of the organisational aspect of crime is a natural process – it is a manifestation of the growth of the organisational aspect of social systems as well as of their sub-systems (the economy, politics, and so on).

Furthermore, it is a worldwide process. Criminal organisations, like other social organisations, strive to exert influence on state power and to exercise control over it through lobbying, bribery or infiltration of their representatives into power structures.

Moreover, organised crime can be said to be ‘organised’ only if it influences government decision-making.

The high degree of adaptability of criminal associations, resulting from such factors as their strict labour discipline, careful selection of staff and high profit margins, ensures their great vital capacity.

It is almost a paradox that, at the same time as organised crime saw a dramatic decline in its political and scientific relevance in the United States, it attracted much media, political and scientific attention in Europe.

DEFINITIONS & BASIC INFORMATION

Only since the shocking events of 11 September 2001 (9/11) has organised crime also begun to lose some of its political and media brisance in Europe and to be subsumed by the topic of terrorism: the real and imagined links between organised criminals and terrorists now occupy a large part of practitioners' and journalists' reflections on the topic.

Notwithstanding the recent emphasis on terrorism, organised crime has, since the early 1980s, become an ambiguous but effective catchphrase in the European public discourse for pointing out the changes affecting the world's illegal markets and simultaneously expressing public anxiety at living in late modernity's increasingly uncertain and insecure world.

Besides analysing semantic and theoretical issues, it is important here to indicate the political uses that have been made of definitions of organised crime and particularly of its frequent identification with mighty mafia-type criminal organisations. Mutatis mutandis, in fact, a similar pattern can be identified since the 1950s, first in the United States and then in Europe.

The spectre of mighty mafia-type criminal organisations – primarily the Italian mafia, but since the early 1990s the Russian and other ethnic mafias as well – has been agitated with varying degrees of good faith by the media, politicians, law enforcement agencies and, more recently, international organisations to increase the power of domestic law enforcement agencies and to enhance international police and judicial cooperation.

Since the early 1990s the transnational dimension of organised crime has also been strongly emphasised, obscuring the fact that most organised crime activities are anchored locally.

Commentators and academics began to make serious efforts to define and discuss organised crime in the 1920s and 1930s, when Prohibition forcefully enhanced the development of North American illegal markets. Several meanings were then attached to the term 'organised crime',

DEFINITIONS & BASIC INFORMATION

Though it was still rarely used to signify separate associations of gangsters. Most often organised crime was made synonymous with racketeering, another loose expression which usually referred to extortion, predatory activities, and the provision of a variety of illegal goods and services, ranging from counterfeit documents to illegal gambling and trafficking in drugs and liquor.

The mafia-centred view of organised crime also continued to dominate public perception of the problem: since the 1960s hundreds of books have been written on the topic, and dozens of movies have been made. Some of these – above all, Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (1969) and Francis Ford Coppola's film adaptation (1972) – have been so successful that they have profoundly shaped the general understanding of organised crime and the mafia in the United States and elsewhere.

For many people the Italian-American mafia, which is de facto identified with organised crime, is and behaves as it is recounted in these romanticised novels and films.

Since the mid-1970s the 'illegal enterprise' approach has acquired a dominant position in the European scientific debate, influencing both a series of studies on the Italian mafia and, even more deeply, the conceptualisation of organised crime in all those European countries that long considered themselves immune to the problem.

An analogous, market-oriented definition has been adopted by the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) in the United Kingdom. In its annual assessment of the threat of organised crime for 2000, the NCIS conceptualised it as ensuring the availability of illicit commodities, providing a criminal or quasi-legitimate infrastructure that facilitates other serious crime. A definition, if further attempted, of organised crime groups, is that they have to satisfy the following criteria:–

DEFINITIONS & BASIC INFORMATION

- They contain at least three people;
- They engage in criminal activity that is prolonged or ongoing;
- Their members are motivated by profit or power
- They commit serious criminal offences

Discourse and actions of major international organisations show the same gap between the dramatic tone of general assessments and the vagueness of official definitions that plagues the domestic debates of most European countries.

On the one hand, the general assessments subscribe to what has previously been called the global pluralist theory of organised crime and emphasise its increased transnational dimension. On the other hand, the definitions proposed by international bodies are so broad that they may include anything from the Italian Cosa Nostra to a gang of thieves, from Al Qaida (AQ) to Jeffrey Epstein's pedophilia ring, a drug-trafficking network to a youth clique. (how do we come to a more coherent definition then?)

The 1994 World Ministerial Conference may be considered the official baptism of the term 'transnational organised crime', which was bound to dominate the international debate for the following ten years. In a resolution approved by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) shortly before the conference, organised crime was equated with transnational organised crime.

In the course of a century-old debate, while criminologists and other social scientists have tried to pin it down and specify its definitions, organised crime has progressively been endowed with a new, legal dimension. It has increasingly been treated as a legal or quasi-legal category, the application of which allows incisive investigative powers and increased sentences to be used.

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It is fair to say that organised crime has not yet fully accomplished this transformation. Its very plurality of meanings, explaining its recent success in world public debate, and making it a catchy label to signify popular anxieties and foster legislative changes, hinders the full transformation of organised crime into a clear-cut legal category.

Despite the definitional efforts made by several domestic governments and international organisations, organised crime is still far from meeting the normative characteristics of legal categories and its definitions usually lack both rigorousness and exhaustiveness. It remains a vague and ambiguous catchphrase, the application of which inevitably entails varying – but usually high – degrees of arbitrariness.

Social relations do not emerge at random, but often follow the laws of social and geographical distance. The closer offenders live together, the more daily activities they have in common, and the less social distance exists between them, the more probable it is that ties emerge between these offenders. This produces a certain kind of clustering, based on factors such as geographical distance, ethnicity, education, age, and so on.

We find the same kind of clustering within criminal networks. However, many parts of criminal networks are very badly connected, due to salient geographical and/or social barriers:

- between different countries;
- between different ethnic groups;

Because of these barriers, there are certain ‘structural holes’ and few people are in a position to bridge these structural holes (how do we use these structural holes to our advantage?). As the illegal character of the activities presupposes a high degree of mutual trust, offenders who are able to bridge ‘structural holes’ have all kinds of strategic opportunities to make a profit.

TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

According to UNODC, transnational organized crime encompasses, inter alia, illicit trafficking of firearms, drugs, protected species, cultural property, or falsified medical products and, among its most severe manifestations, human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants. It also includes the laundering of proceeds of crime and obstruction of justice. Transnational organized crime and organized crime are not defined in the Convention. A precise consensus definition of organized crime is challenging since it involves so many components that may not always be present and may evolve over time. The Convention, on the other hand, defines “an organized criminal group (OCGs).”

Given that the Convention seeks to guide legislation, policy, and practice in the prevention and battle of organized crime, a clear definition is necessary. Under the Convention article 2(a), an "organized criminal group" is defined using four criteria:

- A structured group of three or more persons;
- The group exists for a period of time;
- It acts in concert with the aim of committing at least one serious crime;
- To obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.

Why “transnational“?

It's because these criminal networks operate across borders and geographies. They are active in all countries: rich and poor, North and South, developed and developing. They illegally move people, goods, and money across borders, whether smuggling drugs from one country to another, trafficking people across continents, or laundering money through offshore accounts.

While the activities of transnational organized crime take many forms, the ramifications are often the same: weakened governance, corruption, lawlessness, violence, and ultimately, death and destruction.

INTRODUCTION TO TRAFFICKING

When is the offence 'transnational' in nature?

As specified in article 3(2) of the Organized Crime Convention, the offence is transnational in nature if:

- *It is committed in more than one State;*
- *It is committed in one State but a substantial part of its preparation, planning, direction or control takes place in another State;*
- *It is committed in one State but involves an organized criminal group that engages in criminal activities in more than one State; or*
- *It is committed in one State but has substantial effects in another State.*

Drug Trafficking

In recent years, global drug use has increased, making it one of the most lucrative businesses for transnational organized crime groups.

The latest World Drug Report estimates that almost 300 million people used drugs in 2021, including cocaine, methamphetamine and opium (an increase of more than 20 per cent over the previous decade.) The number of people suffering from drug use disorders soared to nearly 40 million, a 45 per cent increase over ten years.

Today, illicit drug markets continue to expand their reach, fueled by the growing cocaine supply, drug sales on social media platforms, and the dangerous spread of synthetic drugs. Synthetic drugs are cheap and easy to manufacture anywhere in the world, and in the case of fentanyl, for example, deadly even in the smallest doses.

The digital age has revolutionized drug trafficking. Forget back-alley deals; today's drug markets thrive online, operating through darknet marketplaces, social media platforms, and encrypted communication applications.

INTRODUCTION TO TRAFFICKING

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a grave violation of human rights, a form of modern-day slavery. Traffickers prey on vulnerable populations, such as those living in poverty, experiencing conflict or displacement, or lacking social support networks.

Behind the staggering profits of human trafficking lies the immense suffering of millions of victims. The latest Global Report on Trafficking in Persons shows that about 50,000 cases in over 140 countries were reported to UNODC in 2020. Around 60 per cent of all trafficking victims and over 90 per cent of those trafficked for sexual exploitation were women and girls.

Child trafficking has reached a crisis point. In the last 15 years, the proportion of children among victims has tripled. While girls are overwhelmingly subjected to sexual exploitation, boys are increasingly forced into labour.

The International Labour Organization estimates that forced labour generates \$236 billion in illegal profits annually, with each individual exploited for an average of nearly \$10,000. These figures underscore the human cost of this brutal trade.

Traffickers now operate in the digital world, using technology to entrap victims at every step. Children are particularly vulnerable, often targeted on social media platforms where they believe they are safe.

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Smuggling of migrants

The migrant smuggling trade, driven by the movement of people across international borders for financial gain, is a lucrative criminal enterprise. In 2016, it was estimated that at least 2.5 million migrants were smuggled, generating profits of up to \$5.7 billion for smugglers.

A 2018 UNODC study identified 30 major smuggling routes worldwide, highlighting the vast scope of this illicit activity. The demand for smuggling services is particularly pronounced among refugees fleeing conflict or persecution and desperate to reach safety.

Although the majority of smuggled migrants are young men, the vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated children is of particular concern, as they are at increased risk of exploitation and abuse.

The main difference between *smuggling* and *trafficking* is the *consent of the victim*, however sometimes smuggling can lead to human trafficking, rape, theft, kidnapping, extortion, etc.

Arms trafficking

Arms trafficking is extremely complex to track. Firearms are manufactured and traded both licitly and illicitly thus making the identification and tracing of illegally manufactured and trafficked firearms difficult. Most firearms are produced legally and then diverted into the illicit market. Notably, illicit arms are present in most forms of violent crimes and increase the power of organized criminal groups.

The Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunitions (Firearms Protocol) was developed with a view to providing measures to address the transnational nature of the phenomenon and its links to organized crime.

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Wildlife Trafficking

Wildlife trafficking encompasses a wide array of activities, including the capture, trade, import, export, processing, possession, acquisition and consumption of wild flora and fauna, along with items derived from these organisms.

Tackling wildlife trafficking presents a formidable challenge, given the unique wildlife management and protection approaches of each country. Additionally, organized criminal groups exhibit remarkable adaptability, allowing them to easily circumvent regulations and law enforcement efforts to maximize their profits.

The Passenger and Cargo Control Programme (PCCP) delivers specialized training to identify and seize illicitly trafficked wildlife species transported in high-risk containers, air cargo consignments and by air passengers while minimizing disruption to legitimate trade and transportation.

In addition to promoting the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), PCCP enhances coordination with relevant environmental agencies, establishes mechanisms for information and data exchange, and collaborates with national and international stakeholders.

Organ Trafficking

It is a form of trafficking in which individuals are exploited for organs. Although victims often appear to have consented to the removal of their organs, their consent is invalid when deception, fraud or abuse of a position of vulnerability is involved. In such cases, they are considered victims of human trafficking. The traffickers, who are usually part of sophisticated criminal networks, profit by selling these organs to recipients who are unable or unwilling to wait for legal transplants.

The most harvested organs from victims of trafficking in persons are kidneys, followed by parts of the liver. Victims of this form of trafficking are typically from poor, uneducated and vulnerable backgrounds.

INTRODUCTION TO TRAFFICKING

Organized criminal groups specifically target unemployed individuals, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Many are coerced, deceived or see organ selling as a last resort to improve their dire situations.

In 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 5-10 per cent of all transplants worldwide used organs from the black market. However, with a growing and aging global population, the globalization of unhealthy lifestyles, and increased mobility, the actual number could be significantly higher.

The exact scale of this criminal activity remains unknown. Few studies have been conducted, as the crime's clandestine nature makes data collection and verification difficult. Victims may also be hesitant to step forward, as organ selling constitutes a crime in most countries.

Counterfeit goods

Counterfeiting involves the offering for sale of goods which masquerade as the genuine products of Intellectual Property (IP) rights holders. It typically involves the unauthorized use of another's trademarks, industrial designs or patents. It has become a large trade because it's extremely profitable for counterfeiters.

In 1986, when negotiations began for an international agreement to deal with the trade in counterfeit products, its size was estimated to be US \$60 billion per annum. And the most recent estimates are in excess of \$2 trillion US dollars per annum. The principal reason for this growth is the involvement of organized crime groups both within countries and between countries.

Counterfeiting is a hugely profitable business, with criminals relying on the continued high demand for cheap goods coupled with low production costs. By nature of this being an illicit business, the extent of counterfeiting is difficult to calculate and estimations can vary significantly.

INTRODUCTION TO TRAFFICKING

Cultural Property (artefacts, etc)

Organized criminal groups are increasingly involved in trafficking in cultural property, both through legitimate markets, such as auctions and through the Internet, and also in underground illicit markets. Trafficking in cultural property is also becoming an important source for the laundering of the proceeds of crime, and has been recently identified as a possible source of financing for terrorist groups.

Detecting the trafficking of cultural property can be particularly difficult due to the structure of the market, which is characterized by confidentiality and the use of intermediaries.

Cultural property has also traded freely for centuries without requirements for due diligence checks about where such items came from (provenance), meaning many object histories were never recorded or have been lost over time.

The structure of this market means that criminals can fabricate provenance for illicit items and sell them in legal markets through auction houses or dealers. The lack of a global database on trafficked cultural property, together with inconsistent national laws, also makes it difficult to evaluate the scale of the problem and coordinate responses.

OTHER TERMS

Money Laundering

Money laundering (the process of concealing the origins of illegally obtained money, turning “dirty money“ into “clean money“) is a global scourge that facilitates a wide range of criminal activities.

According to a UN report on Financial Integrity, around \$1.6 trillion or 2.7 per cent of the global GDP are estimated to be laundered yearly, distorting economies, hindering development, and eroding trust in the financial system. However, pinpointing the exact amount laundered remains a challenge. Criminals employ a variety of techniques to launder money, including smurfing, using shell companies and offshore accounts, and investing in high-value assets like real estate and art.

The transnational nature of money laundering allows criminals to exploit gaps in international cooperation and differing regulatory frameworks to move their illicit proceeds across borders. The rise of digital currencies, such as cryptocurrencies, online payment platforms, and complex financial instruments, has created new challenges for law enforcement agencies struggling to keep pace with these evolving methods.

Illicit trading of firearms

The growing illicit trade in firearms is fueling conflicts and contributing to a dramatic increase in criminal activity in many parts of the world.

In 2021 alone, 260,000 people were killed by small arms (firearms intended for individual use), amounting to 45 per cent of all violent deaths (more than 700 people a day, or one person dying every two minutes)

Organized crime groups can supply weapons and ammunition to armed groups and governments facing sanctions. Both organized crime groups and non-State armed groups may directly engage in firearms trafficking to secure their own arms and generate revenue.

OTHER TERMS

Crimes against the environment

The trafficking of wildlife and natural resources hampers conservation efforts, damages ecosystems, and undermines our planet's capacity to mitigate climate change

According to the latest World Wildlife Crime Report, from 2015 to 2021, seizures documented the illegal trade of 13 million plants and animals in 162 countries and territories, affecting around 4,000 species. The majority of these species are listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

In 2016, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and INTERPOL estimated that such environmental crimes generate profits between \$91 billion and \$259 billion annually, making it the fourth-largest transnational criminal activity after drugs, counterfeits, and human trafficking.

The trafficked plants and animals are used in a variety of ways: for food, medicine, as exotic pets, and "luxury" goods. Actual wildlife trafficking levels are far greater than the recorded seizures. Moreover, illegal mining, including that of minerals and metals, is increasingly conducted by organized criminal groups. Beyond the environmental damage, these operations fuel corruption and fund criminal networks. The profits often flow into the hands of armed groups, perpetuating cycles of violence and conflict

Cybercrime

The digital age has ushered in unprecedented connectivity, with over 60 per cent of the world's population now online. However, this interconnectedness has also brought with it a surge in cybercrime, impacting individuals, institutions, and countries globally.

Cybercrime encompasses a wide range of offences, from online fraud and data theft to the exploitation of children. Perpetrators range from individual criminals to organized networks, all exploiting the anonymity and accessibility of the digital world.

The methods used are constantly evolving, becoming more sophisticated and harder to detect. Malware is proliferating. AI-enabled cyber operations are amplifying the threat, while the looming potential of quantum computing to break encryption poses a significant risk to cybersecurity infrastructure.

OTHER TERMS

One alarming trend is the rise of ransomware attacks, which cripple vital systems and hold data hostage. In 2023 alone, ransomware payments reached an estimated US\$1.1 billion. These attacks disrupt essential services like healthcare and banking, and erode public trust and safety.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS



ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

Introduction

The Council of Europe is an international organization, which was founded in 1949 by the Treaty of London. It is based in Strasbourg, France and it consists of 46 permanent members and 6 observer states.

The Statute of the Council of Europe has three main goals:

First of all, it advocates the protection of Human Rights, pluralistic democracy and the principles of the Rule of Law.

The second goal concerns the promotion of the cultural identity and diversity between the European states.

As far as the third goal is concerned, the Council makes significant efforts in order to strengthen democratic stability by supporting political, judicial and constitutional reforms.

With the aim of achieving all the above, Member States have to be united through common actions, debates and agreements.

At this point it has to be mentioned that all European states have the opportunity of the enjoyment of the Council, only if they adhere to the principles of the Rule of Law and only if they fully respect Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. This part is considered necessary to present the structure of the Council of Europe.

According to Chapter III, Article 10 of the Statute of the Council of Europe its structure includes two main organs.

The first one is the Committee of Ministers which constitutes the statutory decision-making body and is composed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of each member state. The second one is the Parliamentary Assembly which is the deliberative organ of the Council of Europe and it consists of 324 members of the parliament from the 46 states.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

Last but not least it has to be noted that the Council of Europe has introduced other institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights (created under the European Convention on Human Rights), Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Committee on Crime Problems and others, which are responsible for the safeguarding of the Council of Europe's principles on several and exceptional issues.

To sum up, the Council of Europe has successfully achieved to deal with a majority of issues on human rights violations such as the abolition of the death penalty, the strengthening of human rights law and institutions, the fight against racism, the upholding freedom of expression, the endorsement of gender equality and the protection of children's rights.

History of the Council of Europe

In a speech in 1929, French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand floated the idea of an organisation which would gather European nations together in a 'federal union' to resolve common problems.

The United Kingdom's wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill first publicly suggested the creation of a "Council of Europe" in a BBC radio broadcast on 21 March 1943, while the Second World War was still raging.

In his own words, he tried to "peer through the mists of the future to the end of the war", and think about how to rebuild and maintain peace on a shattered continent. Given that Europe had been at the origin of two world wars, the creation of such a body would be, he suggested, "a stupendous business". He returned to the idea during a well-known speech at the University of Zurich on 19 September 1946, throwing the full weight of his considerable post-war prestige behind it.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

The future structure of the Council of Europe was discussed at the *Congress of Europe*, which brought together several hundred leading politicians, government representatives and members of civil society in The Hague, Netherlands, in 1948. Responding to the conclusions of the Congress of Europe, the Consultative Council of the Treaty of Brussels convened a Committee for the Study of European Unity, which met eight times from November 1948 to January 1949 to draw up the blueprint of a new broad-based European organisation.

There were two competing schools of thought: some favoured a classical international organisation with representatives of governments, while others preferred a political forum with parliamentarians. Both approaches were finally combined through the creation of a Committee of Ministers (in which governments were represented) and a Consultative Assembly (in which parliaments were represented), the two main bodies mentioned in the Statute of the Council of Europe.

This dual intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary structure was later copied for the European Communities, North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The Council of Europe was signed into existence on 5 May 1949 by the Treaty of London, the organisation's founding Statute which set out the three basic values that should guide its work: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

It was signed in London on that day by ten states: Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom, though Turkey and Greece joined three months later.

On 10 August 1949, 100 members of the council's Consultative Assembly, parliamentarians drawn from the twelve member nations, met in Strasbourg for its first plenary session, held over 18 sittings and lasting nearly a month.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

They debated how to reconcile and reconstruct a continent still reeling from war, yet already facing a new East–West divide, launched the radical concept of a trans-national court to protect the basic human rights of every citizen, and took the first steps in a process that would eventually lead to the creation of an offshoot organisation, the European Union. There was huge enthusiasm for the Council of Europe in its early years, as its pioneers set about drafting what was to become the European Convention on Human Rights, a charter of individual rights which – it was hoped – no member government could ever again violate.

They drew, in part, on the tenets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed only a few months earlier in Paris. But crucially, where the Universal Declaration was essentially aspirational, the European Convention from the beginning featured an enforcement mechanism – an international Court – which was to adjudicate on alleged violations of its articles and to hold governments to account, a dramatic leap forward for international justice. Today, this is the European Court of Human Rights, whose rulings are binding on 46 European nations, the most far-reaching system of international justice anywhere in the world.

One of the Council's first acts was to welcome West Germany into its fold on 2 May 1951, setting a pattern of post-war reconciliation that was to become a hallmark of the council, and beginning a long process of "enlargement" which was to see the organisation grow from its original ten founding member states to the 46 nations that make up the Council of Europe today. Iceland had already joined in 1950, followed in 1956 by Austria, Cyprus in 1961, Switzerland in 1963 and Malta in 1965.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

Structure of the Council of Europe

The Secretary General

The head of the CoE is its Secretary General, who leads and represents the organisation. The current Secretary General is Alain Berset, a former member of the Swiss Federal Council. The Secretary General is elected by the Parliamentary Assembly from a shortlist prepared by the Council of Ministers and has a term length of five years.

The Committee of Ministers

The Committee of Ministers (CM) – made up of the foreign ministers of each of the Member States or their deputies serves as the decision-making body of the organization. It is the executive branch, supervising the execution of judgements made by the European Court of Human Rights (this is the committee we're going to be in).

The European Court of Human Rights

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg oversees Member States' implementation of the Council's European Convention on Human Rights. Individuals may bring complaints that a public authority has violated their Convention Rights, and Member States must abide by a final judgment against them. One judge is elected by PACE from each Member State, and judges sit in panels of up to 17.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

The Council's parliamentary assembly, (PACE) is one of the oldest international parliamentary assemblies in the world. It acts as the legislature and also holds the power to elect various dignitaries – including the judges of the European Court of Human Rights. Its 306 members are elected or appointed by each Member State's parliament from among its members as a 'fair representation' of the political parties or groups there. It meets four times a year, while much of its work is done through its nine general committees. It is conducted by a President. The Current President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is Theodoros Roussopolous.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

Congress of Regional and Local Authorities

The CoE's assembly for local politicians, the Congress of Regional and Local Authorities, has 648 members appointed for a two-year term, and monitors compliance with its European Charter of Local Self-Government.

Civil society is also represented in the CoE's Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

Mandate

The Council of Europe is at liberty to discuss the protection of human rights, the rule of law, the promotion of democracy, and cultural issues. It may also discuss issues involving legal enforcement and crime. However, being merely a loose Parliament of European Nations, the Council may not discuss matters of International Security or War.

The Committee of Ministers:]

The Committee of Ministers is the Council of Europe's decision-making body. It is both a governmental body where national approaches to European problems are discussed on an equal footing and a forum to find collective responses to these challenges.

The role and functions of the Committee of Ministers (CM) are described in Chapter IV of the Statute of the Council of Europe.

The CM meets at ministerial level and at Deputy level.

The CM is assisted by a Bureau and by subsidiary groups which meet regularly to consider certain issues in depth before decisions are taken. These subsidiary groups are informal working structures of the Deputies and have no decision-making power. They prepare decisions for the Committee of Ministers for adoption, ideally without debate.

The Secretariat of the CM services the meetings of the Ministers and Ministers' Deputies and of their informal working structures.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

Voting Procedures

Under Chapter IV, Article 20 of the Statute of COE-

Each member shall be entitled to one representative on the Committee of Ministers, and each representative shall be entitled to one vote. Representatives on the Committee shall be the Ministers for Foreign Affairs. When a Minister for Foreign Affairs is unable to be present or in other circumstances where it may be desirable, an alternate may be nominated to act for him, who shall, whenever possible, be a member of his government.

a) Resolutions of the Committee of Ministers relating to the following important matters, namely:

i. recommendations under Article 15.b;

ii. questions under Article 19;

iii. questions under Article 21.a.i and b;

iv. questions under Article 33;

v. recommendations for the amendment of Articles 1.d, 7, 15, 20 and 22; and

vi. any other question which the Committee may, by a resolution passed under d below, decide should be subject to a unanimous vote on account of its importance, require the unanimous vote of the representatives casting a vote, and of a majority of the representatives entitled to sit on the Committee.

b) Questions arising under the rules of procedure or under the financial and administrative regulations may be decided by a simple majority vote of the representatives entitled to sit on the Committee.

c) Resolutions of the Committee under Articles 4 and 5 require a two-thirds majority of all the representatives entitled to sit on the Committee.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

d) All other resolutions of the Committee, including adoption of the budget, of rules of procedure and of financial and administrative regulations, recommendations for the amendment of articles of this Statute, other than those mentioned in paragraph a.v above, and deciding in case of doubt which paragraph of this article applies, require a two-thirds majority of the representatives casting a vote and of a majority of the representatives entitled to sit on the Committee.

Pompidou Group

The Pompidou Group, formally known as the Council of Europe International Cooperation Group on Drugs and Addiction, is an organisation under the Council of Europe that responds to drug use and illicit trafficking in drugs. The brainchild of the late former French President Georges Pompidou, the Pompidou Group was formed in 1971 in an effort to better understand and tackle the growing drug problems in Europe. In 1980 the Group was incorporated into the institutional framework of the Council of Europe as an inter-governmental body.

The Group currently consists of 41 member States, and co-operates with countries all over the world. The Pompidou Group is an Enlarged Partial Agreement that is also open to non-Council of Europe States, including States outside Europe.

What are its functions?

The Group meets at least once a year to share best practices from their country (and you will be expected to do the same) and has now achieved over 50 years of success in promoting drug policy co-operation, combating trafficking and improving prevention of drug use and treatment for substance use disorders.

It maintains a balanced approach between demand reduction—including prevention, treatment, and harm reduction—and supply reduction, by promoting human rights-based and evidence-driven policy development.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

The Pompidou Group's 2026-2029 Work Programme is built around five important areas:

- Prevention
- Harm reduction
- Treatment
- Recovery
- Supply reduction

RELEVANT CONVENTIONS

- *Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (CETS No. 185) (2001)*: Addresses computer-related crime, cross-border cooperation in digital investigations.
- *Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime (Warsaw Convention, CETS No. 198) (2005)*: International cooperation in tracking, seizing, and confiscating criminal assets.
- *Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (CETS No. 173) (1999)*: Measures to criminalize corrupt acts, supervised by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).
- *Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197) (2005)*: Focuses on protecting victims and strengthening prosecution against traffickers.
- *Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property (Nicosia Convention, CETS No. 221) (2017)*: Addresses the trafficking of cultural property, which is often used to fund organized crime.
- *Medicrime Convention (CETS No. 211) (2011)*: Addresses counterfeit medical products and similar crimes involving threats to public health
- *Agreement on Illicit Traffic by Sea (CETS No. 156)*: Implements Article 17 of the 1988 UN Convention, to stop drug trafficking vessels in international waters.
- *Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons (CETS No. 112)*: Allows foreign prisoners, including those convicted of drug trafficking, to serve their sentences in their home country.
- *Convention on the Counterfeiting of Medical Products and Similar Crimes (Medicrime Convention, CETS No. 211)*: Covers the forgery and illegal trafficking of medical product

TRAFFICKING

Drug Trafficking

Narcotics trafficking refers to the illegal cultivation, manufacture, distribution, and sale of drugs that are subject to drug prohibition laws.

This global illicit trade involves substances such as opium, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and synthetic drugs, and is one of the most lucrative and dangerous black-market activities in the world.

Narcotics trafficking not only aids organized crime networks and corruption but also affects public health. The trade takes place through transnational networks and specific routes that include producers, smugglers, middlemen, and street dealers, frequently helped by corrupt officials or guarded by VNSAs (Violent Non-State Actors).

A Note on the Stages of the Drug Trade

Drug Production

Production step involves growing plants used to produce drugs like coca, opium poppy and cannabis or synthesising narcotic drugs and psychotropic materials chemically. The most important international conventions in this step are the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961, as amended in 1972) and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971).

Drug Manufacture

Manufacturing includes chemical processing, refining, or synthesising a raw plant material or precursor chemical into a consumable drug (e.g. cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines, or opioids).

The United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988 Vienna Convention) goes further in the control of precursor chemicals that are essential in this stage and criminalization of illicit manufacturing operations.

TRAFFICKING

Drug Distribution

Distribution encompasses the illegal movement, smuggling and movement of drugs out of the production sites to transit points and finally consumer markets. Organised crime and corruption with violence are common phenomena in distribution networks, which are sometimes transnational. In the international context this requires states to collaborate with each other in areas of interdiction, extradition, to provide mutual legal assistance and to forfeit assets in connection with drug distribution crime.

Sale of Drugs

The sale phase involves illegal commercial handling of the drugs to end users at the street level, wholesale or darknet marketplaces. Sales and possession with intent to distribute are criminalised in criminal statutes.

Penalties are applied by states in accordance with the requirements of the scale of trafficking and participation in organised crime, taking into consideration the requirements of the above-mentioned drug control conventions.

Human Trafficking

There are various forms of human trafficking:

- **Sexual Exploitation:** The victims are forced, mostly by violence or threat of violence, to take part in prostitution, pornography or other commercial sexual activities. This is the most commonly recognized form across the world. Consent should not be of any consideration when there is coercion or abuse.
- **Forced Labour:** People are forced/coerced to do involuntary work in different sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction and service jobs.
- **Removal of Organs:** Victims are trafficked to specifically remove particular organs: kidneys, sometimes liver, or cornea, by force, trickery, or taking advantage of a vulnerable situation. The act of taking out organs and selling them off is also a criminal act of the Palermo Protocol.

TRAFFICKING

● **Smuggling of Migrants:** Smuggling of migrants refers to the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.

It is only considered smuggling if the following are true-

The actions of the facilitator should include the enabling, organisational, or otherwise acquiring an unauthorised cross-boundary entry or irregular residence in a destination State, usually through circumvention of legal migration standards and border inspections. The smuggled person should not be a lawful resident of the immigration laws of the State where he/she arrives, having received no right of residence, making the entry and/or the permanent residence of such a person illegal. The facilitator is required to do so with the aim of getting a direct or indirect pecuniary or material benefit, which needs to be distinguished between criminal smuggling and activities like humanitarian assistance or family reunification without any monetary gain.

Arms Trafficking

The offence includes unauthorised cross-border transfers where at least one State is not doing so either with the proper consent of its domestic law or along with the international commitments, and excludes State-to-State transfers in the sovereign capacity in a national security pursuit under the UN Charter.

The Firearms Protocol (*Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition*) requires States Parties to criminalise acts of illicit trafficking in addition to the illicit manufacturing (production without proper licensing or authorization), falsifying or obliterating the necessary markings and related acts like attempted, participating, organising and directing the acts.

This document addresses government authorization or licensing procedures of lawful firearms dealings under Article 10 of the Firearms Protocol, satisfactory marking and recording procedures to assist in tracing (to be maintained at least 10 years) under Article 7 and 8, seizure and destruction of illegally trafficked firearms under Article 6, and increased collaboration with other countries by exchanging information about organised crime, disguise, trafficking routes, and legislative practises as required by Articles 12 and 13.

TRAFFICKING

The application of the Protocol is expected to regulate legitimate arms flow but stop diversion to the black market and facilitate investigations and prosecution of involved crimes. Other related documents are the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN PoA), the International Tracing Instrument (ITI) and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

Cultural Property Trafficking (Looting)

Looting is the intentional illegal excavation, robbery, seizure or unauthorised removal of cultural, historical, archaeological or ethnological material of a designated heritage site, museum, religious organisation, public monument or a region hit by armed conflict and civil unrest. These activities are grave offences under the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970 Convention) and the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995 Convention).

States facing the obligation to take necessary measures to recover and hand cultural property stolen out of museums, religious or secular public monuments, or other institutions, to which such proper documents were attached in their inventories, are bound under Article 7(b)(ii) of the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. It urges States to ensure effective preventive strategies such as periodical creation of inventories, system of exporting certificates, controls and approval of the art dealers, criminal or administrative penalty for the violation, and education campaigns to create respect of cultural heritage.

Artefacts dug up and illegally shipped, which constitute a major part of the looted material, are directly addressed by Article 3(2) of the UNIDROIT Convention, an important omission since the UNESCO Convention focuses mainly on those that are catalogued.

TRAFFICKING

Illicit Trade of Artifacts

The trade involves the unauthorised procurement, sale, transfer, import or export, or commercial dealing of cultural objects which have been stolen, illegally dug, or illegally exported.

The UNIDROIT Convention stipulates that the buyers of stolen cultural objects should be returned at all costs, irrespective of the situation, accompanied by the fact that buyers who can prove that they have made due diligence when verifying provenance should be compensated fairly and reasonably. States are required to take due diligence criteria, put in place of provenance, put in place time-bar provisions (usually three years after discovery of location and identity of possessor, in some cases, thirty or seventy-five years), and participate in cooperative action in restitution and the return of illicitly trafficked goods.

The proof of due diligence for this type of trafficking lies with the possessor, and he should prove that he acquired the object lawfully, in possession of valid export certificates, and adhered to the cultural property laws of the source country.

Other Types of Trafficking

Illegal trade in Endangered Species

This pertains to the illegal poaching, capturing, trafficking, and trading of the guarded wild fauna and flora that are registered by worldwide treaties like the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), addressing the prohibition of trafficking in specimens, derivatives, and parts (e.g., ivory, rhino horn, tiger skins).

Illegal Trade in Timber

Timber trafficking is the illegal harvesting, transportation, export, and sale of timber and forest products that are against the national environmental law and the international standards, like the United Nations Forests Forum. It causes loss of biodiversity and deforestation.

CONNECTING DRUG TRAFFICKING WITH ORGANIZED CRIME

Corruption:

In order to facilitate the transportation of illicit drugs across borders and their sale on local markets, traffickers will often identify weaknesses in law enforcement. This may involve the paying of bribes or other forms of corruption.

Corruption can occur at different levels, both in the public and the private sectors. A distinction is usually drawn between grand and administrative (petty) corruption, with the former referring to corrupt practices affecting legislative process and policymakers and the latter referring to dealings between individual civil servants and the public. In both of its manifestations, corruption has a devastating impact on the rule of law.

So a simpler way of framing the issue is that the problem of corruption is not one of legislation but rather of implementation. It was rightly pointed out by the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative, “Despite the positive efforts of establishing regulatory and institutional base for fighting corruption, including specialised anti-corruption agencies, which are being introduced in the majority of the countries in the region, significant problems persists, especially with regard to the practical implementation of the existing legal framework and institutional enforcement.”

Connection between Firearms and Drug trafficking:

Cross border firearms trafficking itself can be undertaken in various ways, depending on the quantity of firearms being trafficked and the routes via which and/or region where the trafficking occurs. Generally, larger consignments of firearms are smuggled via sea and ships, and smaller quantities are smuggled using several vehicles on land, or through strategic ‘ant trafficking’ (smaller amounts of firearms, not actual ants, though that is also a form of trafficking).

CONNECTING DRUG TRAFFICKING WITH ORGANIZED CRIME

Both these forms of firearms trafficking have linkages to drug trafficking. The smuggling of larger consignments of arms usually occurs because of a large demand created in countries that have been affected by certain events and/or crises, such as conflict.

The trafficking of smaller amounts of firearms, ('ant-trafficking'), is the most prominent form of firearms trafficking along cross-border land routes. This type of trafficking involves many people transporting small consignments [often only what could be considered a violation of possession regulations] to avoid potential trafficking charges, while still meeting the demand for firearms in the destination region.

Evidence suggests that this method is utilized to transport firearms from the United States to Mexico, while it is also the most prevalent form of firearms trafficking across Europe, and in particular the Balkan route, where firearms are often smuggled alongside other commodities such as drugs.

The crime-terror nexus regarding drugs and firearms can manifest itself in two ways:

- (1) the illicit trafficking in guns and drugs to finance terrorism; and
- (2) the use of drug crime connections to acquire firearms for terrorist purposes.

Terrorists' involvement in crime does not only have a lucrative aspect, but it also enables access to weapons. As the actors in the criminal firearms market may be increasingly reluctant to sell to terrorists, it is important for terrorists to make use of the convergence of social networks and environments to acquire their firearms on the illicit firearms market.

Another example are the 2012 terrorist attacks in Toulouse and Montauban. The perpetrator of these attacks was a so-called 'go-fast' driver for an OCG which operated between France and Spain, smuggling cocaine.

CONNECTING DRUG TRAFFICKING WITH ORGANIZED CRIME

The Uzi submachine gun the perpetrator used during the attack was acquired via a childhood friend, a small criminal who dealt in drugs, cars and other commodities. The pistol used by the perpetrator was part of two crates of firearms and ammunition that were stolen from a professional sports shooter in 2011. During the arrest of other Toulouse-based drug traffickers several other weapons belonging to the same loot of 2011 were retrieved.

The relationship between firearms, drugs and armed conflict is, however, not one-directional. A recent report by UNIDIR and UNODC highlights the interconnected nature of armed conflict, firearms and organized crime.

The conflict is not only a 'destination' in this complex scheme, but it can also be a 'source' since State fragility also provides opportunities for the diversion of firearms and other types of weapons into the illicit market, also allowing criminal groups to prosper.

NARCOTERRORISM

Drug criminals utilized methods from political assailants to influence the politics of the country by causing terror and obstructing justice. In 1985, the phenomenon received much attention, when the Medellin cartel joined forces with the M-19 terrorist group and attacked the Supreme Court in Bogotá, Colombia, to prevent the extradition of several leading cocaine profiteers to the United States. Eleven high judges were killed.

In the late 1980s, American government agencies started using the concept of “narcoterrorism“, to describe inter alia the involvement of the Soviet Union in the drug trade. In the 1990s, it was applied in a number of circumstances, referring to various complexes of illegal trade in drugs, terrorist methods of violence, and ideological superstructures.

Over the course of time, the concept of narcoterrorism has acquired two main usages: One of them focuses on drug gangs using the methods of terrorists in order to protect their own drug operations, e.g. by murdering judges or journalists. Although traditionally a concept connected with Latin America, in contemporary policy, narco-terrorism is increasingly linked to the regions of Central and Southeast Asia, and specifically the narcotics-producing regions of the so-called Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle.

Another determination focuses on narcoterrorism as the involvement by terrorist organizations in drug trafficking in order to finance their ideology-driven operations. In practice, narcoterrorism becomes more of a politically-constructed concept.

EMERGENCE OF OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS (OMG)

Outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) [Omg. Yes, we know you find that funny. We approve.] have strict hierarchies and close personal ties. They follow rigid internal rules and assert their identity publicly through shared symbols and clothing. The first such gangs emerged in the mid-20th century from a group of former members of the US Air Force, the POB (for parliamentary reasons, we cannot give you the full-form, look it up on your own time) of Bloomington, who later changed their name to Hells Angels MC and became the model for all subsequent associations.

There is debate over whether outlaw motorcycle gangs qualify as organized crime groups (OCGs). Many of them operate as legal leisure clubs, with only a small fraction involved in crime. Members of these groups may run legitimate businesses in sectors such as security, prostitution, or tattoo shops. Some gangs engage in violent offences - such as assault, murder or robbery - without fitting the definition of organized crime.

In Australia, outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) are increasingly taking to drug trafficking. In recent years, OMGs have become synonymous with organized crime as they are increasingly involved in crimes such as drug and firearms trafficking. The results of a recent study indicate that OMGs in Australia are moving away from their traditional tribal identity towards the promise of easy money to be made in drug trafficking, stating that “a model of criminal entrepreneurship takes over”.

They retain their violent disposition, but their motives may be shifting, and recent killings seem to be more related to inter-personal relationships rather than to the criminal business. In May 2022, for example, a Comancheros biker boss and his brother were shot at a gym in Sydney's West. The youngest brother had multiple gunshot wounds to his stomach, arms and legs, and died. The Comancheros (nachos flavor?) boss was shot up to ten times, including a gunshot to the head, but survived.

EMERGENCE OF OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS (OMG)

In some cases, individual members participate in organized crime independently of the club. Nonetheless, formal structures and international networks make outlaw motorcycle gangs susceptible to criminal exploitation.

When engaged in activities such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling or extortion, they resemble mafia-style groups due to their rituals and cohesion.

Prominent European gangs include:

- the Outlaws
- Hells Angels
- No Surrender
- El Diablo
- MC Mongols
- Satudarah MC
- the Bandidos

(why are all these names lowkey fire as title tracks)

Despite law enforcement crackdowns, they are active across Europe, including Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Spain. They are often linked to far-right extremist circles and involved in turf wars.

DRUGS

A Brief History of Drugs

The history of drugs is almost as old as the history of human agriculture.

The use of psychosomatic substances began in Ancient Sumeria, where Opium was cultivated as early as 3200 BCE, while the Indian God Shiva is said to prefer Marijuana. The religious connotations that accompanied drug usage in early polytheistic religions gradually filtered out with the advent of the Abrahamic ones.

Our taste for these addictive psychoactive substances is attested to in the earliest human records. Psychoactive substances have been used by priests in religious ceremonies (eg, amanita muscaria), healers for medicinal purposes (eg, opium) and the general population in a socially approved way, similar to alcohol and caffeine.

Our forebears refined more potent compounds and devised faster routes of administration, which contributed to abuse. Pathological use was described as early as classical Antiquity. The issue of loss of control of the substance, heralding today's concept of addiction, was already being discussed in the 17th century, as the transport of these substances underwent a massive boost in popularity.

The modern history of the global drug trade begins, as many stories do, with British imperialism. British trade with China in the early 19th century involved the export of substances, including Opium grown in India, which the comparatively wealthy Chinese took quite fondly to. By 1838, there were around 12 million opium addicts in China.

The shift in the global stance on drugs from trading commodities arose in no small part due to the devastating effects it had on public health and economic effectiveness.

DRUGS

Drugs Today

Around 246 million people, or 5% of the global working population, are or have been illicit drug users. This problem places a heavy burden on public health systems in terms of the prevention, treatment and care of drug use disorders and their health consequences. The annual number of drug-related deaths has remained relatively unchanged. A large number of drug users continue to lose their lives prematurely, often as a result of overdose, even though overdose-related deaths are preventable.

In Europe, these drugs come from various routes, generally originating in Asia or South America.

The entry of Cocaine occurs from:

- South America, through Atlantic shipping lanes landing at ports such as Rotterdam and Antwerp
- West African transit hubs acting as intermediaries if South America's direct routes fail.
- The secondary Balkan Route

The entry of heroin and other opioids, on the other hand, originates from the Golden Crescent or the Golden Triangle, and occurs through:

- Balkan Route
- Southern Caucasus route
- Northern Route (via Central Asia and Russia)
- Maritime heroin trafficking through East Africa and the Mediterranean

For the purposes of this committee, we will primarily be discussing the Balkan entry route, however, discussion on other routes of drugs into Europe is within the ambit of the committee.

Effect of Global Disturbances

It is also pertinent that we mention here that the impact of other global disturbances is also being witnessed in this ever-evolving drug trade.

DRUGS

For example, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is being witnessed in the traditional routes of drug trafficking, but at the same time, it is also fast-tracking the production and distribution of synthetic drugs.

Another example is that of the Russia-Ukraine War, which is impacting the migration patterns and border control strategies in that region.

The Domestic Drug Market:

Since 2011, almost no general population surveys have been conducted in the region with the exception of Croatia. Lack of capacity precludes a complete understanding of the health impacts of illicit drugs on the region.

Moreover, information about the type of data available is not regularly updated and statistics are often reused over several years. Some drug research is conducted in South-Eastern Europe.

Of particular note is that of the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD).

This study uses targeted surveys of schoolchildren between the ages of 15 and 16 to collect comparable data on substance abuse, and is able to highlight new and evolving trends. This was the case in Bulgaria, where a 2011 ESPAD survey highlighted the relatively high level ATS use and ease of access to them for school children.

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

The Northern Route

Most of the consignments cross from Afghanistan into Tajikistan and are then trafficked northwards through Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan before entering Russia. These four Central Asian countries and Russia rank among the top 20 countries seizing the largest quantities of heroin at the global level.

A small proportion of heroin shipped on the Northern route eventually enters the EU's eastern borders in Poland and the Baltic countries. Some of the heroin seized in Ukraine and Belarus in the last few years is linked to have originated from Central Asia, intended for Western European markets.

The northern route supplies opiates, mainly in the form of heroin to the Russian Federation while Central Asian countries constitute smaller markets and transit countries along the route. An estimated 42.5 to 74.5 tons of pure heroin annually entered the northern route from Afghanistan over the period 2011-2015; due to methodological differences, however, this estimate is not comparable with the previous estimate released by UNODC in 2012.

Seizure data suggests that the general trend in opiate trafficking along the northern route over the period 2011-2015 was stable to declining. Opiate seizures in Afghanistan saw a significant decline between 2011 and 2015 while those in Central Asia remained stable over the same period. In the Russian Federation, seizures of heroin grew from 2011 to 2014 before decreasing in 2015. The main heroin trafficking route from Afghanistan to the Russian Federation seems to cross Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan; this route is sometimes called the "north-eastern route". An important though less well used route is the Afghan-Tajik-Uzbek-Kazakh route, also called the "central route".

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

There are a number of variations in these routes, for instance some go directly from Afghanistan to countries in Central Asia without passing through Tajikistan. A third route, the “north-western route” appears to cross from Afghanistan into Turkmenistan; although there is a lack of recent seizure data to support its existence, this route may still be active.

Northern Afghanistan alone is unable to produce the estimated 42.5 to 74.5 tons of pure heroin that entered annually the northern route over the period 2011-2015.

It is therefore likely that part of the northern route is supplied by opiates produced in the rest of the country. However, the lack of reliable information in relation to internal trafficking routes complicates the analysis of the trafficking picture within Afghanistan.

Opiate trafficking along the northern route occurs predominantly over land by private vehicle, truck or train. The larger proportion of significant seizures of heroin made in baggage, vehicles and on the body of couriers in Central Asia is consistent with it being a major opiate transit region along the northern route.

The Russian Federation also reported an increase in the trafficking of opiates by mail 2014-2015, a trend that may continue given the expansion of online market places.

Concealment methods vary along the northern route, from basic in the early stages of the route from Afghanistan into Tajikistan, to increasingly sophisticated methods further along the route. Overall, increasingly professional concealment and trafficking methods have been reported.

Many drug trafficking organisations (DTOs) along the northern route are based on ethnic, clan or family ties, providing a degree of security in what is largely a trust-based business. DTOs along the northern route appear to have become smaller and more professional than in the 1990s and 2000s. DTOs now seem to have the ability to move opiate shipments over greater distances, including beyond national borders, and to do so in fewer stages than in the past.

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

The movement of funds related to opiate trafficking occurs through a combination of three methods: bank or money exchange transfer, using opiates to barter for goods (mainly cars); and informal money transfer systems such as hawala.

Within the countries along the northern route, illicit profits are often laundered through real estate investments, front companies and licit businesses. Illicit profits also enter the international banking system, often via countries well outside the northern route.

The Transatlantic Route

The important role of already established trafficking routes and the overlap of actors in facilitating the trafficking of both firearms and drugs can, for example, be observed throughout West Africa. Prior to the year 2000, the principal form of trafficking in the region of West Africa involved the export of natural resources for cash or weapons - to satisfy the demand for firearms created by conflicts in the region - while drug trafficking amounted to a negligible amount of the overall profits generated by criminals.

This changed in the early 2000s, as South American traffickers redirected their flows of cocaine through West Africa due to the increased demand for cocaine in Europe and the weak governance and fragile political institutions in West Africa.

More recently, the amount of drug seizures in West Africa has reached record breaking levels, despite a very low number of drug seizures occurring from 2013-2019 within the region. Coinciding with this has been the continuing strategic importance of firearms as a trafficked commodity.

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

According to the Small Arms Survey, some of the illicit arms trafficking occurring in West Africa involves the militarization of traditional smuggling routes facilitated by the diversion and shipments of arms, as arms traffickers and non-State armed groups work with high-level connections to acquire military grade weapons more common small to medium sized shipments that increasingly occur together with other illicit and licit commercial flows.

It is also noted that the linkages between weapons trafficking and other illicit flows result mainly from an overlap of the actors involved and the trafficking routes used. Weak and/or contested governance structures amongst the States of West Africa and the Sahel enable traditional trafficking routes to be continuously exploited. The serious deficits in law enforcement capacity in Sahel countries allows militants and criminals to act with a large degree of impunity, fuelling frictions between communities and enabling firearms trafficking, namely through militant control of transportation routes.

Golden Triangle

The Golden Triangle is a narcotics trafficking area in South-east Asia, known for opium poppy cultivation, involving nations such as Myanmar, Laos and Thailand.

The “Golden Triangle“ region of Southeast Asia has become the centre of a thriving opium economy and a crucial source of narcotics for the world. The current oversupply has led to the warehousing of huge quantities of opium, making the heroin problem in the area intractable and leading to the possibility of potential heroin epidemics. The Golden Triangle includes parts of Burma, China, Laos, and Thailand, providing ideal conditions for opium cultivation, which began during the 16th and 17th centuries.

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

Heroin became a major component of the opium trade after World War II, and the demand for heroin by United States troops during the Vietnam War helped transform the opium economy of the Golden Triangle into a large and profitable heroin economy. Drug trafficking influences every aspect of politics in the region. The crop eradication efforts that have been conducted since 1964 have had no significant impact.

Drug traffickers in the Golden Triangle have diversified into other illegal economies, including wildlife trafficking, financial fraud, and illegal resource extraction. Displaced, poor, and migrant communities are suffering the consequences of this instability, sometimes forced to turn to opium farming or illegal resource extraction to survive, falling into debt entrapment with crime groups, or using drugs themselves.

These illicit activities have also contributed to environmental degradation through deforestation, the dumping of toxic waste, and chemical contamination.

The Golden Triangle emerged as the largest producer of opium and drug trafficking after World War II (1939-45) when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) gained power in mainland China.

Prior to the existence of the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent, China accounted for most of the world's opium production and trade. Due to the Treaty of Tientsin 1858, signed between the Qing dynasty of China and the Britishers after the Second Opium War (1856), the opium trade was legalised in China.

After World War II, the Chinese Communist Party severely cracked down heavily on drug traffickers and consumers by putting the consumers forcefully into rehab, having drug traffickers arrested and executed, and opium-producing regions either burnt or planted with new crops.

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

As a result, the remaining opium traffickers were driven by these actions to relocate their businesses south of the Chinese border into the Golden Triangle region. The Kuomintang (KMT), a US-supported anti-communist resistance group, operates in the Golden Triangle. KMT also forced the local villagers of the region to become its recruits in exchange for food and money.

The region's proximity to communist China, Vietnam, and Laos made it a key focus for anti-communist operations by the West, particularly the United States. After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949 and communist forces gained ground in Vietnam and Laos, the United States and its allies feared a "domino effect" in the region.

Thailand became a major strategic ally, hosting U.S. airbases and facilitating covert access to Laos and Myanmar. In Laos, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) launched Operation Momentum, arming and training Hmong hill tribes and other ethnic minorities to resist the communist Pathet Lao forces.

These groups operated primarily in remote, mountainous areas—precisely where opium poppy cultivation thrived. Similarly, in Myanmar, remnants of the Kuomintang (KMT) army—fleeing communist victory in China—settled in the Shan State and engaged in both anti-communist activity and large-scale opium trafficking to finance their continued resistance.

These factors led to the creation of "narco-states" where opium trade was the main economic activity. The Golden Triangle saw an emergence of local warlords and insurgent groups (e.g., Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army) who operated quasi-governments funded largely by heroin exports.

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

Golden Crescent

The Golden Crescent, which includes Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, is one of the most important regions in the world for the global narcotics trade.

Afghanistan's poppy cultivation surged in the 1970s and it became a global supplier of opiates when other countries in the region banned poppies.

Arms smuggling in Pakistan and Afghanistan traces back to resistance against British colonial rule, but the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan catalysed the cross-border movement of weapons and narcotics in the region.

Smugglers took advantage of pre-existing routes and developed new ones during the 1980s to create the routes that are still in use today. Afghanistan's prolific poppy fields now produce a massive outpouring of opiates that smugglers transport to European and other foreign markets. Traffickers use well-developed networks and techniques to convey narcotics from Afghanistan to Pakistan and Iran and precursor chemicals to heroin labs near the border through a combination of force, stealth, and corruption. The Golden Crescent provides an abode to the Taliban and other insurgent groups with firearms and heavier weapons.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have a 2,430-kilometre-long porous common border called the Durand Line. It passes through hilly and mountainous areas. Due to the difficult terrain and tribal belt, there is uncontrolled movement of persons across the border. The situation is further worsened due to the fact that tribal people residing on both sides of the border, have common social bonds and family relationships.

The easement rights conventionally exercised by Afghan peoples for the movement of their goods through the Pakistan border is another aspect of this challenge, as vehicles on their way back from Afghanistan are normally being used to import illicit narcotic substances into Pakistan. Another challenge is that around 3 million Afghan refugees settled in Pakistan.

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

Due to the unbridled movement of these refugees in the country, they can easily roam around the entire country; thus, not only is law and order jeopardized but illegal drug trafficking is also facilitated. The majority of the transactions between the tribal peoples associated with narcotics trafficking and their Afghan counterparts take place through the hawala/hundi system.

This leads to an absence of control over unusual financial transactions that take place in the illegal trade. Under the law, Section 67 of the Control of Narcotics Substances Act, 1997, financial institutions are responsible for reporting any unusual financial transactions when there is no apparent source of income. However, due to the prevalent system of hawala/hundi, this provision is almost impracticable in the area. Due to the war on terror in Pakistan, the security situation across Pakistan is precarious. Most of the areas in the far-flung mountainous regions of the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) are infested with terrorists; hence, ANF cannot operate there against the drug peddlers.

Apart from FATA the situation in Baluchistan is also precarious. Several sub-nationalist Baloch organizations are involved in active terrorism against the state of Pakistan. It is an established fact that some officials in the drug control agencies are involved in corruption. These “black sheep” in collusion with the drug peddlers not only give protection to the drug peddlers, but also help in transportation of narcotics. One of the factors facilitating the thriving narcotics business in Pakistan is the lack of literacy and prevalent poverty among the masses.

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

The poor and illiterate youth become easy victims for transportation of narcotics in return for petty sums of money. According to the UN report on drug addicts, there are 6.7 million people in Pakistan who are drug addicts. This poses a serious challenge to the control of narcotics, and unless a detailed programme is implemented for rehabilitation of these addicts, there will always be demand for drugs. Witness protection is another challenge of the day.

Drug trafficking is a transnational organized crime. People engaged in this crime are members of very powerful groups. Persons who give evidence against these groups are hardly available. Witnesses normally hesitate and even refuse to give testimony before the courts.

The opium harvested in Afghanistan is subsequently processed into heroin within the Golden Crescent region.

Utilising various refining and chemical processing methods, such as extraction and purification, raw opium is transformed into heroin. The drug trade in the Golden Crescent region is predominantly controlled by organised crime syndicates and drug cartels. These powerful criminal groups maintain extensive networks involved in all stages of the drug production and trafficking process.

To protect their interests and evade law enforcement, they often form alliances with local tribes, warlords, and corrupt officials. The drug trade in the Golden Crescent poses several challenges for the APAC region.

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

Latin American Drug Trade

The South American regions have remained a hub for illicit drug trafficking and a vital target for eradicating production of cocaine and marijuana, two of the most widely used illicit drugs in the world. It is believed that this surgery of drug trafficking goes hand in hand with political and social instability in the Latin American region.

There have been several failed attempts to kill this illicit market but it has strengthened and drug production continues to increase.

During the early 19th century European and US pharmacists travelled through the South American forests to look for new medicines, where they found people of the indigenous communities using coca leaves to cure pain and boost energy.

However, crossing borders between Europe and the Americas transformed an almost natural product into one of the most popular drugs in the world.

Initially, European scientists started to extract the cocaine from the leaf for medical purposes. But cocaine stopped being medicine in the 1940s to become a recreational drug like alcohol or tobacco, with much more fatal consequences.

When cocaine was first introduced in the international market, it was received with great praise. It became a widely recognized drug reportedly offering quick energy and improved concentration. It was not until the 1920s that cocaine began to be seen as dangerous and was banned by the US government.

During the 1970s the production peaked and Columbia became the hub for the exportation of cocaine. Initially, the fight to control the US market was especially bloody. It was nicknamed the "Miami drug wars" because 50 per cent of the homicides in the city were drug-related.

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ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

There have been various attempts at freeing Latin America of the nefarious activities of drug trafficking, many of which were funded by the US government. The Plan Colombia is just one of the plans in which the US government has issued its declaration of success multiple times.

With Colombian military assets, the United States utilized US\$10 billion to train, arm, and implement coca eradication strategies to stabilize the country and strip narcotics traffickers of their power. The US government has helped the government of Peru in combating drug trafficking since 1991, based on coca plantations and routes to Colombia for distributing the cocaine.

The U.S. policy in Colombia did produce some measurable results. The infamous Medellin and Cali cartels were toppled, but the victory was short-lived as Colombian drug manufacturers turned to new and safer transit routes through Mexico where enforcement policy was practically non-existent. Thus began the rise of organized and profitable drug trafficking in the region.

Throughout the nineties, three major cartels emerged in Mexico: Gulf, Sinaloa, and Juarez. The rapid increase in the quantity of drugs (mainly marijuana and cocaine) transported through Mexico resulted in huge profits for these cartels. Money transformed the cartels from loosely associated groups of traffickers to fully-fledged criminal organizations with operations beyond narcotics.

Cartels began to hire private armies of enforcers to protect their market shares through any means necessary, becoming increasingly violent as the decade progressed and competition became fiercer. More recently, Mexican cartels have also begun to develop relationships with American street gangs and traffickers to ensure a steady distribution of their product throughout the United States.

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

The dominance of the three big cartels began to be challenged in the 2000s by a powerful emerging group: los Zetas. Having begun as a private army for the Gulf Cartel, the Zetas decided later to enter the drug business for themselves.

The change from enforcement to trafficking did not alter their methods, which continue to be based on the use of extreme violence. Above all, it was the Zetas who transformed the Mexican drug trade from simply buying and selling drugs for a profit to include kidnapping, torture, human trafficking, and gruesome murder.

Brazil has become one of the top suppliers of cocaine to Europe, transforming the country's role in the trans-Atlantic drug trade at a speed that has stunned anti-narcotics authorities.

Long regarded as a cocaine-consuming nation, a market for products manufactured in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, Brazil has turned into a critical launch pad to get it across the ocean. Local syndicates have infiltrated Brazil's ports, authorities said, sending record amounts of coke on container ships bound for Europe, where it fetches premium prices. Cocaine hydrochloride, cocaine base, cocaine essential chemicals, and heroin essential chemicals are either produced in Brazil or transported through the country.

There is also evidence of a serious drug abuse problem in Brazil, as coca derivative products become more readily available. In addition to inhalants and marijuana, crack cocaine and bazuco, a highly impure solid by-product created during the cocaine conversion process, increasingly are being consumed primarily by low-income Brazilians.

ROUTES OF DRUG TRAFFICKING (OTHER THAN THE BALKAN ROUTE)

An equally disturbing drug problem in Brazil is the emergence and use of combination and hybrid drugs like merla, a mixture of cocaine base and marijuana, and skank, a crossbreed of Afghan, Moroccan, and Thai cannabis.

(note that even though these routes are not in Europe, they are relevant as changes in these routes impact Europe)

A NOTE ON THE TERM 'BALKAN'

In the middle between Asia and Europe, inhabited by a largely heterogeneous mixture of people in linguistic, cultural, and religious terms, the Balkans have often been associated with negative connotations, in particular in Western imagery. Initially attributed by geographers to the mountain range, which was wrongly considered to run across the region, the term started, since the very beginning of its usage, to refer to more than a simple geographical space. After the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in the very heart of the peninsula they became even a "toxin threatening the health of Europe" .

With no mountain ranges separating the Balkans from the rest of Europe, undefined geographical borders intersect with mental borders in creating a fragile space. Which country starts 'the Balkans' is a controversial dispute. To some Slovenians, their country represents the official geographical limit between Balkans and Mitteleuropa. For Serbs, it begins with Kosovo or Bosnia, their country being the last shield of Christianity; for Croats, advocates of the Western democratic civilization, it begins with Serbia and its Byzantine tradition. While Greece considers itself as the heart of Western civilization, thus nothing further from "Balkaness," Hungary claims its belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire to declare itself a truly Central European country.

The Balkans are, thus, always "the other," something lying further East or further South, far from civilization and development; this "other" becomes, though, a "nowhere" when the Balkan states themselves do not want to be inscribed in the region.

AN INTRODUCTION TO DRUGS IN EUROPE

The Situation

Drug use appears to be relatively stable in Europe. Prevalence levels overall remain high by historical standards, but they are not rising. And in some important areas, such as cannabis use by young people, there are positive signs. On the other hand, there are worrying indications of developments in the synthetic drugs market and, more generally, in the way drug consumers now use a wider set of substances. Polydrug use, including the combination of illicit drugs with alcohol, and sometimes, medicines and non-controlled substances, has become the dominant pattern of drug use in Europe.

European Drug Policy

A comprehensive policy for addressing psychoactive substance use is still lacking in most Member States, and treatment services are having to adapt their practice to meet the needs of clients whose problems span multiple substances. Similarly, targeting and assessing the impact of measures to reduce drug supply requires consideration to be given to the overall market for psychoactive substances. Without this wider perspective, gains made in relation to one drug may result in a displacement of use to other products.

The European model of drug policy can be characterised as both balancing drug supply reduction and demand reduction objectives, as well as acknowledging the importance of both human rights and community safety.

This approach permits both concerted action and cooperation in law enforcement and border control efforts to limit drug supply, as illustrated by current programmes targeting heroin importation routes from Afghanistan, cocaine trafficking via the Atlantic and West Africa and synthetic drug production.

It also permits innovative developments in the area of treatment and harm reduction, one example of which is heroin-assisted treatment, which is of growing interest to a number of European countries and is the subject of a new EMCDDA review.

AN INTRODUCTION TO DRUGS IN EUROPE

Risks of a HIV Epidemic

Following reductions in the overall spread of HIV in Europe, the focus on HIV prevention as a primary public health objective for drug policy has become less evident. The potential risk for new localised HIV epidemics may be growing due to usage of injected drugs.

The economic downturn affecting many European countries may be increasing the vulnerability of communities while, at the same time, limiting the ability of Member States to provide adequate responses. If the conditions exist, drug-related HIV infections can spread rapidly within vulnerable communities.

Looking within Europe, the situation is dire. Greece, historically a low-prevalence country, reported a local HIV outbreak among injectors in 2011, and there has been rising rates of infection in Bulgaria.

The picture is also looking less positive in some countries that had made progress in addressing drug-related HIV/AIDS epidemics, with gains made in recent years in tackling new infections in Estonia and Lithuania, for example, now looking increasingly fragile, as both these countries report recent increases in infections.

THE OPIOID SITUATION

Internationally, and particularly in North America, there has been increasing concern about the availability and misuse of prescription opioids, mainly painkillers. The extent of this phenomenon in Europe is difficult to access from the data currently available. Moreover, direct comparisons between the European Union and other parts of the world are difficult to make, due to the considerable differences that exist in prescribing patterns and regulations.

Currently, illicit synthetic opioid use in Europe appears mainly to involve the consumption of substitution drugs diverted from drug treatment. In addition, some countries in northern and central Europe are now reporting the use of fentanyl, which is likely manufactured illicitly outside the European Union.

The appearance of this drug is of particular concern and, overall, given the situation elsewhere, a good argument exists for improving our capacity to monitor trends in the misuse of psychoactive products intended to be used only for therapeutic purposes.

As synthetic opioids are used illicitly mainly in place of heroin, information on their use can provide insights into the overall heroin market. Currently, an important question in this area is the extent to which supply reduction measures are now impacting on the availability of heroin on the streets of Europe.

The possibility that supply reduction measures are reducing the heroin availability in Europe is supported by indications that some, but not all, European countries experienced a heroin drought in late 2010.

An alternative explanation put forward to explain this apparent shortage referred to a recent outbreak of poppy blight in some parts of Afghanistan. However, on closer inspection, this association is probably tenuous, although other events in Afghanistan and some significant successes resulting from cooperation between Turkish and Europol may have played a role. Any short-term supply problems, however, have to be viewed in the context of the long-term, relatively stable heroin market in Europe.

THE OPIOID SITUATION

Despite the importance of information on heroin availability to understanding the dynamics of the illicit drug market in Europe, it is worth noting how difficult it is currently to comment on this issue with authority. More sophisticated attempts are now being made to better achieve this based on analysis of both production and use data.

However, for a number of technical reasons, considerable caution is still merited when drawing conclusions on this sensitive topic. Good indicators of market availability in Europe are largely lacking, for example. Estimates of opium production in Afghanistan are frequently taken at face value, despite the fact that such calculations are in many ways methodologically challenging. Also, suggestions of opium production in other countries in Asia are rarely considered.

Moreover, models of heroin flows often include the existence of 'stocks' of stored opium or heroin — although there is limited empirical evidence to support this assumption.

Elucidating the relationship between opium production and heroin availability is further complicated by the existence of different trafficking routes into, and sub-markets within Europe and by the significant time lag that is believed to exist between the harvest of opium in Afghanistan and its appearance as heroin on the streets of Europe.

THE CANNABIS DILEMMA

Cannabis remains Europe's most popular illicit drug, but it is also the one on which public attitudes are most divergent. This is reflected in the recent Eurobarometer study of youth attitudes to drug use, which found that views on cannabis prohibition were more mixed than for other drugs.

In most European countries, cannabis use increased during the 2000s and early 2010s. Europe may now be moving into a new phase, as data from general population and school surveys point to a stabilising or even decreasing trend in cannabis use in many countries.

Levels of use, nevertheless, remain high by historical standards. The last few years have also seen a growing understanding of the public health implications of the long-term and widespread use of this drug, and rising levels of treatment demand for cannabis-related problems. Therefore, what constitutes an effective response to cannabis use remains a key question in the European debate on drugs.

Cannabis can be cultivated in a wide range of environments and grows wild in many parts of the world. It has been estimated that cannabis is cultivated in 172 countries and territories. Herbal cannabis in Europe is also imported, mostly from Africa (e.g. Ghana, South Africa, Egypt), and less often from the Americas (especially the Caribbean islands), the Middle East (Lebanon) and Asia (Thailand).

Information on cannabis potency is mainly based on forensic analysis of selected samples of cannabis seized. The extent to which the samples analysed reflect the overall market is unclear, and for this reason, data on potency should be interpreted with caution.

In 2009, the reported mean THC content of cannabis resin ranged from 3 % to 17 %. The mean potency of herbal cannabis (including sinsemilla — the form of herbal cannabis with the highest potency) ranged from 1 % to 15 %. The mean potency of sinsemilla was reported by only three countries: 2 % in Romania, 11 % in Germany and 15 % in the Netherlands. Over the period 2004–09, the mean potency of cannabis resin has been diverging in the 15 countries reporting sufficient data.

THE CANNABIS DILEMMA

The potency of herbal cannabis remained relatively stable or decreased in 10 reporting countries, and increased in the Czech Republic, Estonia, the Netherlands and Slovakia. It is conservatively estimated that cannabis has been used at least once (lifetime prevalence) by about 78 million Europeans, that is over one in five of all 15- to 64-year-olds.

Considerable differences exist between countries, with national prevalence figures varying from 1.5 % to 32.5 %. For most of the countries, the prevalence estimates are in the range of 10–30 % of all adults.

An estimated 22.5 million Europeans have used cannabis in the last year, or on average 6.7 % of all 15- to 64-year olds. Estimates of last month prevalence will include those using the drug more regularly, though not necessarily in a daily or intensive way. It is estimated that about 12 million Europeans used the drug in the last month, on average about 3.6 % of all 15- to 64-year-olds.

Population survey data suggest that, on average, 32.0 % of young European adults (15–34 years) have ever used cannabis, while 12.1 % have used the drug in the last year and 6.6 % have used it in the last month. Still higher proportions of Europeans in the 15–24 age group are estimated to have used cannabis in the last year (15.2 %) or last month (8.0 %). National prevalence estimates of cannabis use vary widely between countries in all measures of prevalence. For example, estimates of last year prevalence of use among young adults in countries at the upper end of the scale are more than 20 times those of the lowest-prevalence countries.

Cannabis use is generally higher among males, with, for example, the ratio of males to females among young adults reporting use of cannabis in the last year ranging from just over six to one in Portugal to just under ninety to one in Norway.

THE CANNABIS DILEMMA

Available data point to a variety of patterns of cannabis use, ranging from experimental use to dependent use. Many individuals tend to discontinue their cannabis use after one or two experiments; others use it occasionally or during a limited period of time.

Of those aged 15–64 who have ever used cannabis, 70 % have not done so during the last year. Among those who have used the drug in the last year, on average, nearly half have done so in the last month, possibly indicating more regular use. These proportions, however, vary considerably across countries and between genders.

Cannabis use is particularly high among certain groups of young people, for instance, those frequently attending nightclubs, pubs and music events.

Targeted surveys recently conducted in nightlife or dance music settings in Belgium, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Lithuania and the United Kingdom reported prevalence levels that are much higher than the European average among young adults. Cannabis use is also often associated with heavy alcohol use: among young adults (aged 15 to 34), frequent or heavy alcohol users were, in general, between two and six times more likely to report the use of cannabis compared with the general population.

In Europe, cannabis treatment includes a broad range of measures including Internet-based treatment, counselling and structured psychosocial interventions and treatment in residential settings. There is also a frequent overlap between selective and indicated prevention and treatment interventions.

Cannabis treatment is mainly provided in specialist outpatient facilities, and services specifically targeting cannabis-related problems are now available in more than half of the Member States.

THE CANNABIS DILEMMA

Globally, no clear direction in the development of cannabis policies is evident. Seeing the big picture: drug use in Europe today examples of policy development here include the USA and the Netherlands. In the USA, there has been a move towards liberalising the availability of herbal cannabis for medical purposes in some states. In the Netherlands, policymakers now appear to be taking an increasingly robust stance against domestic cannabis production and the operational rules applied to 'coffee shop' sales.

The extent to which policy changes influence cannabis use is a much-debated question. In data presented in this report, no direct association can be seen between measures of the recent use of this drug and changes made to either increase or decrease penalties for use, suggesting that more complex processes are at work.

A general observation may be made that, over the last decade, European cannabis policies have tended to direct law enforcement efforts towards offences connected with trafficking and supply rather than the use of the drug.

One reason for this is to avoid the possible negative consequences of bringing large numbers of young people into contact with the criminal justice system, especially if their cannabis use is experimental.

However, figures show that the number of offences related to cannabis use in Europe continues to rise, against a background of stable or even declining prevalence. This highlights a possible disconnect between policy objectives and practice.

Explaining this observation is difficult, but one possibility is that the data reflect a net-widening effect, in which the adoption of more administrative sanctions for use results in an increased likelihood that they will be applied in practice.

Europe remains the biggest global market for cannabis resin. Historically, Morocco has been the main producer country of resin consumed in Europe. Recent reports, however, suggest that cannabis resin is increasingly imported from other countries, including Afghanistan and Lebanon. This is supported by recent UNODC field surveys, which reported large-scale cannabis resin production in Afghanistan.

THE CANNABIS DILEMMA

Most European Member States now report domestic cultivation of cannabis, a phenomenon that appears to be increasing.

This is particularly of note in the Balkan countries. This is mirrored in the existence of 'grow shops', which specialise in equipment for cannabis cultivation. Domestic cultivation can be small-scale, but it may also consist of major production sites run by organised crime gangs. A knock-on effect of this is that some countries are now reporting increases in violence and other crimes associated with large production sites.

A NOTE ON COCAINE IN EUROPE

Cocaine remains the second most commonly used illicit drug in Europe, although prevalence levels and trends differ considerably between countries. High levels of cocaine use are observed only in a small number of, mostly, western European countries, while elsewhere the use of this drug remains limited.

There is also considerable diversity among cocaine users, including occasional users and more socially integrated regular users, who commonly snort cocaine powder, and more marginalised and often dependent users, who inject cocaine or use crack cocaine.

The conversion of coca leaves into cocaine hydrochloride ($C_{17}H_{22}ClNO_4$) is mainly carried out in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, although it may also occur in other countries. Colombia's importance in the production of cocaine is corroborated by information on laboratories dismantled and seizures of potassium permanganate, a chemical reagent used in the manufacture of cocaine hydrochloride.

Spain, the Netherlands and Portugal, and to some extent Belgium, appear to be the main points of entry to Europe for cocaine. Within Europe, reports frequently mention Germany, France and the United Kingdom as important transit or destination countries. The United Kingdom estimates that 25 to 30 tonnes of cocaine are imported into the country each year. Recent reports also indicate that cocaine trafficking may be expanding eastward. Cocaine is, after cannabis, the second most tried drug in Europe, although its use is concentrated in a small number of high-prevalence countries, some of which have large populations.

It is estimated that about 14.5 million Europeans have used cocaine at least once in their life, on average 4.3 % of adults aged 15–64 years (see Table 9 for a summary of the data). National figures vary from 0.1 % to 10.2 %, with half of the 24 reporting countries, including most central and eastern European countries, reporting low levels of lifetime prevalence (0.5 % to 2.5 %).

About 4 million Europeans are estimated to have used the drug in the last year (1.2 % on average). Recent national surveys report last year prevalence estimates of between zero and 2.7%. The prevalence estimate for last month cocaine use in Europe represents about 0.5 % of the adult population or about 1.5 million individuals.

A NOTE ON COCAINE IN EUROPE

Cocaine is prevalent among school students in the most recent surveys available is 1 % to 2 % in over half of the 29 reporting countries. Most of the remaining countries report prevalence levels of 3 % to 4 %, while France and the United Kingdom report 5 %. Where data are available for older school students (17–18 years old), lifetime prevalence of cocaine use is generally higher, rising to 8 % in Spain.

The health consequences of cocaine use are likely to be underestimated. This may be due to the often unspecific or chronic nature of the pathologies typically arising from long-term use of cocaine.

Regular use, including by snorting, can be associated with cardiovascular, neurological and psychiatric problems, and with the risk of accidents and of transmission of infectious diseases through unprotected sex and possibly through the sharing of straws, for which evidence appears to be growing. Studies in countries with high levels of use indicate that a considerable proportion of cardiac problems in young people could be related to cocaine use.

Cocaine injection and crack use are associated with the highest health risks among cocaine users, including cardiovascular and mental health problems. These are generally aggravated by social marginalisation and the risks associated with injection, including the transmission of infectious diseases and overdoses.

Crack use is unusual among socially integrated cocaine users, occurs mainly among marginalised and disadvantaged groups such as sex workers and problem opioid users and is largely an urban phenomenon. In London, crack use is considered to be a major component of the city's drugs problem.

A NOTE ON COCAINE IN EUROPE

Further insights into problem cocaine use may be gained from data on the number and characteristics of people entering treatment due to cocaine use. Nearly all reported cocaine clients are treated in outpatient centres, although some might be treated in private clinics for which data are not available. Many problem cocaine users, however, do not seek treatment. The primary treatment options for cocaine dependence are psychosocial interventions, including motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioural therapies, behavioural self-control training, relapse prevention interventions and counselling.

Self-help groups such as Cocaine Anonymous can also play a role in the recovery process for individuals with cocaine use problems. The support they provide may be combined with formal treatment.

In contrast to the Balkan route of heroin, South-Eastern Europe provides only a secondary route to the Western European markets for cocaine produced in the Andean countries of South America. Spain, the Netherlands, Portugal and Belgium are the main points of entry for cocaine destined for those markets.

This is illustrated by the fact that Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands seized 20.7, 17.5, and 10 tons of cocaine respectively in 2012,³¹ while South-Eastern Europe seized only 356 kg, equal to just 1 per cent of all the seizures made in Western and Central Europe that year.

Even in 2009, when cocaine seizures peaked in South-Eastern Europe, the amounts seized represented only 4 per cent of the 53 tons seized overall in Western and Central Europe. Since 2009, cocaine seizures within South-Eastern Europe have continued to decline, with

THE HERO(IN) OF THE STORY

Two forms of imported heroin have historically been offered on the illicit drugs market in Europe: the commonly available brown heroin (its chemical base form), which comes mainly from Afghanistan; and white heroin (a salt form), which typically originates from south-east Asia, though this form is considerably less common.

In some northern European countries (e.g. Estonia, Finland, Norway), fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, and its analogues are in use. In addition, some opioid drugs are produced within Europe, principally home-made poppy products (e.g. poppy straw, concentrated from crushed poppy stalks or heads) in some east European countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Poland).

Heroin consumed in Europe originates predominantly in Afghanistan, which accounts for most of the global illicit opium output. The other producing countries are Burma/Myanmar, which mainly supplies markets in east and south-east Asia, Pakistan and Laos, followed by Mexico and Colombia, which are considered the largest suppliers of heroin to the United States.

Heroin arrives in Europe mainly by two trafficking routes. The historically important Balkan route brings heroin produced in Afghanistan through Pakistan, Iran and Turkey, and then towards other transit or destination countries, mainly in western and southern Europe. Heroin is also trafficked via the 'silk route' through central Asia and towards Russia. To a limited extent, this heroin is then smuggled through Belarus, Poland and Ukraine to other destinations such as Scandinavian countries via Lithuania.

Problem drug use is defined by the EMCDDA as injecting drug use or long duration/regular use of opioids, cocaine and/or amphetamine. Injecting drug use and the use of opioids form the greater part of problem drug use in Europe, although in a few countries users of amphetamines or cocaine are important components. It is also worth noting that problem drug users are mostly polydrug users, and that prevalence figures are much higher in urban areas and among socially excluded groups.

THE HERO(IN) OF THE STORY

Both drug-free and substitution treatment for opioid users are available in all EU Member States, Croatia, Turkey and Norway. In most countries, treatment is conducted in outpatient settings, which can include specialised centres, general practitioners' surgeries and low-threshold facilities.

In a few countries, specialist inpatient centres play an important role in the treatment of opioid dependence. A small number of countries offer heroin-assisted treatment for a selected group of chronic heroin users.

For opioid users, drug-free treatment is generally preceded by a detoxification programme, which provides them with pharmaceutical assistance to manage the physical withdrawal symptoms. This therapeutic approach generally requires individuals to abstain from all substances, including substitution medication. Patients participate in daily activities and receive intensive psychological support. While treatment can take place in both outpatient and inpatient settings, the types most commonly reported are residential (or rehabilitation) programmes, many of which apply therapeutic community principles or the Minnesota model.

In Europe, methadone is the most commonly prescribed substitution medication, received by up to three quarters of clients. Buprenorphine is prescribed to up to a quarter of European substitution clients, and is the principal substitution drug in the Czech Republic, France, Cyprus, Finland, Sweden and Croatia.

In addition to the more commonly used substitution medications, slow-release oral morphine, which was originally licensed to treat pain in cancer patients, is currently provided as an alternative drug for substitution treatment for opioid dependence in Bulgaria, Austria, Slovenia and Slovakia.

THE HERO(IN) OF THE STORY

Heroin precursors: The reverse Balkan route

The role of South-Eastern Europe as a transit zone for trafficking is not limited to illicit drugs - it was long the transit region for acetic anhydride (AA), the main precursor chemical used in heroin processing.

The chemical was sourced in Western and Central Europe and shipped along the “reverse” Balkan route to Afghanistan through Turkey.¹¹⁰ Over the last decade, the classic modus operandi for such trafficking has involved diversion from domestic trade channels in Europe followed by transportation by road - mainly along the Romania-Bulgaria-Turkey “northern branch” (although a Serbia-Bulgaria-Turkey trajectory also seems to have been used).

There has been an almost total absence of AA seizures in South-Eastern Europe since 2010, when Bulgaria seized some 21 tons of the substance.¹¹² In 2012, the reverse Balkan route of AA appeared to be relatively dormant. Turkey, which in the past has seized anything from several hundred kilos to multi-ton shipments, saw its lowest seizures in over a decade.

This is likely due to intensive law enforcement activity, including several international operations and the arrest of the main organized criminal group involved in the traffic of AA towards Turkey (the trial of the group leadership is underway). Nevertheless, significant AA seizures in Turkey in 2013 appear to indicate that the route was still active.

A NOTE ON AMPHETAMINES, MDMA, MDA, MDEA, HALLUCINOGENS, GHB AND KETAMINE IN EUROPE

Amphetamines (a generic term that includes both amphetamine and methamphetamine) and ecstasy are among the most commonly used illicit drugs in Europe. In many countries, either ecstasy or amphetamines is the second most commonly used illicit substance after cannabis. In addition, in some countries, use of amphetamines constitutes an important part of the drug problem, accounting for a substantial proportion of those in need of treatment.

Amphetamine and methamphetamine are central nervous system stimulants. Of the two drugs, amphetamine is by far the more commonly available in Europe, whereas significant methamphetamine use has historically been restricted to the Czech Republic and Slovakia. More recently, there have been reports of the increased presence of this drug on the amphetamines market in some countries in the north of Europe.

Ecstasy refers to synthetic substances that are chemically related to amphetamines, but which differ to some extent in their effects. The best-known member of the ecstasy group of drugs is 3,4-methylenedioxy-methamphetamine (MDMA), but other analogues are also sometimes found in ecstasy tablets (MDA, MDEA).

The drug's popularity has historically been linked with the dance music scene. While still popular in these settings, recent years have seen a gradual decline in use and availability of ecstasy in many European countries.

The most widely known synthetic hallucinogenic drug in Europe is lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), consumption of which has been low and somewhat stable for a considerable time. In recent years, there appears to have been a growing interest among young people in naturally occurring hallucinogens such as those found in hallucinogenic mushrooms.

A NOTE ON AMPHETAMINES, MDMA, MDA, MDEA, HALLUCINOGENS, GHB AND KETAMINE IN EUROPE

Since the mid-1990s, recreational use of ketamine and gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB) — both anaesthetics, and widely used in human and veterinary medicine for 30 years — has been reported in certain settings and among sub-groups of drug users in Europe. The illicit use of these substances has become a cause for concern for treatment services in a limited number of European countries.

Amphetamine, methamphetamine and ecstasy are synthetic drugs requiring chemical precursors in the manufacturing process. Insights into the production of these substances can be gleaned from reports of seizures of controlled chemicals — diverted from licit trade — that are necessary for their manufacture.

In recent years, the European ecstasy market went through a period in which the availability of tablets containing MDMA became increasingly rare.

Commonly, 'ecstasy' tablets sold on the illicit market contained other drugs, often a piperazine, with the result that some of those buying what they believed to be an illicit drug were in fact buying a non-controlled substance.

The scarcity of MDMA in ecstasy tablets appears to have been related to a shortage of the main precursor, PMK, possibly reflecting the success of interdiction efforts.

A NOTE ON AMPHETAMINES, MDMA, MDA, MDEA, HALLUCINOGENS, GHB AND KETAMINE IN EUROPE

However, the most recent data point to increasing MDMA availability, with some reports noting the existence of very high dosage tablets and high purity powders. Current MDMA production methods now appear to be based on either safrole or, increasingly, on imported chemicals, such as PMK-glycidate and alpha-phenylacetonitrile, that are structurally similar, though not identical, to the controlled precursors hitherto used.

A parallel exists here with developments in the 'legal highs' area, where non-controlled products replace controlled ones. These chemicals are selected with two aims in mind: the new substance should not be subject to current controls, and it should be easily converted into a precursor necessary for MDMA synthesis. This illustrates again the considerable adaptability shown by synthetic drug producers.

A related phenomenon has been observed in the amphetamine market, where precursors have been chemically 'masked' to avoid existing border and sales control mechanisms. As producers become more technically sophisticated and seek out new ways to circumvent interdiction efforts and regulations, the possibility to modify and reconvert substances represents another challenge to current drug control approaches.

International efforts to prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs are coordinated through 'Project Prism'. The project uses a system of pre-export notifications for licit trade, and the reporting of shipments stopped and seizures made when suspicious transactions occur.

A NOTE ON AMPHETAMINES, MDMA, MDA, MDEA, HALLUCINOGENS, GHB AND KETAMINE IN EUROPE

Information on activities in this area is reported to the International Narcotics Control Board. Another recent initiative by the INCB is the publication of a set of guidelines to assist national governments in establishing voluntary control measures in cooperation with industrial manufacturers of chemicals, with the aim of preventing their diversion for the production of illicit drugs.

In a few countries, the use of amphetamine or methamphetamine, often by injection, accounts for a substantial proportion of the overall number of problem drug users and those seeking help for drug problems.

In contrast to these chronic user populations, a more general association exists between the use of synthetic drugs, often together with alcohol, and attendance at nightclubs and dance events. This results in significantly higher levels of use being reported among young people, and exceedingly high levels of use being found in some settings or specific sub-populations. The overall prevalence levels of hallucinogenic drugs such as lysergic acid diethylamide.

(LSD) and hallucinogenic mushrooms are generally low and have been largely stable in recent years. The treatment options available for amphetamines users in European countries often follow the national history and patterns of problem amphetamines use, which differ considerably between countries.

In western and southern European countries, treatment systems have mainly specialised in responding to the needs of opioid users. Despite the low levels of problem amphetamines use in these countries, the lack of dedicated services may hinder access to treatment for such users, especially for more socially integrated amphetamine users.

A NOTE ON AMPHETAMINES, MDMA, MDA, MDEA, HALLUCINOGENS, GHB AND KETAMINE IN EUROPE

In those northern and central European countries with a long history of treating amphetamines use, some programmes are tailored towards the needs of amphetamines users. In the central and eastern European countries where significant problem amphetamines use is more recent, treatment systems are primarily geared towards problem opioid users and have been slow to address the needs of amphetamines users.

Psychosocial treatment provided in outpatient drug services is the most common form of treatment for amphetamines users. The more problematic users, for example those whose amphetamines dependence is complicated by co-occurring psychiatric disorders, may receive treatment in inpatient drug services, psychiatric clinics or hospitals.

In Europe, pharmaceuticals such as antidepressants, sedatives and antipsychotics are administered for the treatment of abstinence symptoms at the beginning of detoxification, which is usually provided at specialist inpatient psychiatric departments.

Longer-term treatment with antipsychotics is sometimes prescribed in cases of lasting psychopathologies due to chronic use of amphetamines. European professionals report that the psychiatric problems often presented by problem amphetamines users are difficult to handle within the therapeutic context.

Although some limited substitution prescribing is reported in the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom, there is currently no evidence available to support the efficacy of this approach. Clinicians are, however, actively exploring pharmacological therapies that may be helpful in treating amphetamines dependence.

A NOTE ON AMPHETAMINES, MDMA, MDA, MDEA, HALLUCINOGENS, GHB AND KETAMINE IN EUROPE

The central nervous system stimulant dextroamphetamine, when tested among methamphetamine patients, gave positive results for reduction of craving and withdrawal symptoms, and for retaining clients in treatment, but did not reduce use of methamphetamine compared to a placebo.

Bupropion, an antidepressant that has been used to assist smoking cessation, was piloted with a small group of methamphetamine-dependent men who have gay sex; a more powerful study is needed to confirm the positive results found.

Another pilot study, aiming to control the symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in problem amphetamine users, combined sustained release methylphenidate with weekly sessions of skills training, but no difference with the placebo group was found.

A number of ongoing trials have been registered in this area, including studies on extended-release naltrexone for amphetamine dependence, and for methamphetamine dependence, studies on monoamine antagonist, an angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitor, N-acetylcysteine, rivastigmine and varenicline.

Psychological and behavioural interventions for methamphetamine problems are the focus of a small number of studies. An Australian study attempted to compare two psychological approaches for methamphetamine use, but participant dropout was too high to obtain significant results.

A NOTE ON AMPHETAMINES, MDMA, MDA, MDEA, HALLUCINOGENS, GHB AND KETAMINE IN EUROPE

Dependence on gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB) is a recognised clinical condition, with a potentially severe withdrawal syndrome when the drug is abruptly discontinued following regular or chronic use. There is evidence that physical dependence may occur in recreational users, and cases of withdrawal symptoms on cessation of use of GHB and its precursors have been documented. GHB dependence has also been reported among former alcoholics.

Benzodiazepines and barbiturates are the pharmaceuticals most commonly used to treat acute problems related to GHB use.

A FOOTNOTE ON METHAMPHETAMINE MANUFACTURE AND TRAFFICKING

While law enforcement agencies are discovering illicit laboratories dedicated to methamphetamine manufacture in most countries along the Balkan route, four clusters have emerged:

Afghanistan

The manufacture of methamphetamine in Afghanistan has emerged over recent years, with domestic annual seizures rising rapidly from less than 100 kg in 2019 to nearly 2,700 kg in 2021. Unlike other main manufacturing areas of methamphetamine where chemical precursors are used, traffickers in Afghanistan utilize ephedrine extracted from ephedra plants that grow wild in the mountainous regions of the country as the main precursor.

Aside from the documented use of ephedra, precursor chemicals, including cold medications containing ephedrine, may also be used in the manufacture of methamphetamine in Afghanistan.

Indeed, chemical precursors offer more efficient and reliable means for methamphetamine manufacture. Record-breaking amounts of methamphetamine, believed to be of Afghan origin, have been seized along the Balkan route, notably in Iran and Türkiye.

Southeastern Europe (Greece and Bulgaria)

The involvement of illicit actors in the manufacture of methamphetamine in Greece and Bulgaria has seen an uptick in recent years. Traditionally known for other illicit drug activities, criminal actors in these two countries have become increasingly involved in the manufacturing of methamphetamine.

A FOOTNOTE ON METHAMPHETAMINE MANUFACTURE AND TRAFFICKING

While Greece serves primarily as a transit point for methamphetamine destined for Western Europe, domestic manufacture has also emerged. In Bulgaria, rural areas are known to house clandestine laboratories, making it a more prominent manufacturing hub for methamphetamine.

Northern Europe

There is large-scale illicit methamphetamine manufacturing in the Netherlands (and, to a lesser extent, in neighbouring countries). These laboratories manufacture methamphetamine using a precursor known as BMK (benzyl methyl ketone), following the same methods used by Mexican cartels.

Notably, Mexican and Latin American “cooks” have been identified in laboratories dismantled in the Netherlands, suggesting the transfer of knowledge and expertise from Latin America, and possible involvement of Latin American Cartels in the European market.

Central Europe.

There are a myriad of small-scale laboratories in Czechia, Slovakia, and Austria. Operations in this subregion primarily utilize ephedrine and pseudoephedrine as precursors.

The annual value of opiate and methamphetamine trafficking along the Balkan route was between US\$13.9 and US\$21.4 billion in the years 2019 to 2022.

A FOOTNOTE ON SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS IN EUROPE, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON FENTANYL AND NITAZENE

Lab-manufactured and highly dangerous opioids such as nitrazine and fentanyl have, as of late, gained great popularity in the various urban regions of Europe.

Often presented as 'soft' drugs at social gatherings of young adults at colleges and fraternity houses, or sometimes as the drug ecstasy, these dangerous substances are now being produced in secret high-tech laboratories across the Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands

They are sold to unsuspecting teenagers and young adults who are unaware that a single dose of such a substance could cause rapid addiction, severe organ damage, and fatal overdoses that could end their lives.

This new wave of such potent synthetics has quietly surpassed traditional drugs like heroin, causing record overdose deaths, while out-of-date laws and disjointed policies are unable to keep up with the rapidly changing threat. While the antiquated laws and disjointed policies are unable to keep up with the rapidly changing threat, this new generation of powerful synthetics has subtly surpassed classic drugs, especially among the younger demographic.

What makes Europe particularly vulnerable to these new-age drugs is a deadly combination of factors. These factors are:

- Top-of-the line and pharmaceutical facilities that can be easily exploited for secretive drug production
- The Schengen Area's open borders that allow drugs to move freely once they enter the aforementioned Schengen area
- Dark-web marketplaces and cryptocurrency systems that make large-scale anonymous trafficking simpler through enhanced transnational connectivity through unregulated digital platforms

A FOOTNOTE ON SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS IN EUROPE, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON FENTANYL AND NITAZENE

The Council of Europe's emphasis on international cooperation complements the efforts of international bodies such as the EUDA and UNODC. These international bodies collectively assist member states in developing adaptable yet harmonized strategies aiming to prevent Europe from deteriorating under the wrath of ever-more-potent drugs.

The Council of Europe offers an excellent platform for the sharing of drug trafficking and drug control strategies, such as early warning systems, and cross-border investigations. Through its oversight and reports it also ensures that the actions of various States respect the principles of law and human rights.

This modern synthetic drug crisis situation which has gripped Europe directly engages with the core mandates of the CoE which calls for the promotion of public health, security and welfare. The prompt emergence of these highly potent psychoactive substances, particular fentanyl and nitazene, is of grave importance.

According to the European Drug Report 2025, (published by the EUDA) nitazenes were the only new opioids notified to the EU Early Warning System in recent years, with the quantity of nitazene powders detected increasing in fake medicines across at least eight countries.

A FOOTNOTE ON SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS IN EUROPE, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON FENTANYL AND NITAZENE

Researchers say that these synthetic opioids are often more than a hundred times more potent than heroin, heightening risks such as accidental overdose and use of polysubstance. Not only do such drugs create a large crisis in public health by affecting the drug users, but they also strain hospitals and emergency systems, affecting the health of the general populations.

The three-year Work Program organized by the Pompidou group, a subcommittee of the Council of Europe, responds to emerging challenges like synthetic drugs and changes in distribution methods while also supporting inclusion and recognition of human rights in national and international drug policy.

These policies include the protection of teenagers who fall into drug addiction, as well as the protection of children in unstable households with drug addictions.

It also takes preventive measures, attempting to discourage people from trying drugs in the first place.

The EUDA's Early Warning System has already uncovered seven new nitazenes in 2024, the highest number of new synthetic opioids found in a single year, and at least 22 nitazene strains are now under monitoring across Europe. The effect of these highly potent drugs can be felt most severely in the Baltic countries, where these deadly opioids have been linked many times to a large share of drug-related deaths, as they are incredibly easy to overdose on due to their high potency compared to traditional drugs such as heroin or cocaine.

These Nitrazene variants are often found as 'fake medicine' or presented as soft drug alternatives to drugs such as cannabis. This causes a large number of party-going young adults and teenagers to experiment with them, causing addiction and overdoses galore.

A FOOTNOTE ON SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS IN EUROPE, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON FENTANYL AND NITAZENE

In early 2026, Operation Fabryka, a year-long investigation that was coordinated by Europol with the aid of multiple European countries such as Poland, Germany, and Belgium, dismantled more than two dozen laboratories dedicated to the production of nitrazene. Europol arrested a total of 85 people and seized around 1,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals, stopping the creation of hundreds of tonnes of synthetic drugs. However, history teaches us that these drug networks are quick to regroup— and it would not be surprising if this seizure uncovered only the tip of the iceberg.

THE ENTRY OF NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)

The rapid emergence of many new non-controlled psychoactive substances represents a growing challenge for current models of drug control. In 2010, a record 41 new substances were reported to the European early-warning mechanism, and preliminary data for 2011 show no sign of decline. This reflects both the continuing introduction of new substances and products into the marketplace and the increasing use of proactive measures to identify new substances. The Internet is one of the main marketplaces for these substances, especially the dark web.

Sales practices in this area also appear to have become more sophisticated, with more evidence of measures taken to restrict access and protect the identity of buyers and sellers. Moreover, reports have come to light of illicit drug sales being conducted using restricted websites on the Surface Web itself. It is unclear to what extent this kind of development will represent a significant future threat, but given the speed at which changes have occurred in this area, there is a need to remain vigilant.

Most new psychoactive substances reported to the early-warning system have been either stimulants or synthetic cannabinoids, largely reflecting the market for illicit drugs in Europe. It is likely that new substances of these types will continue to enter the market. In addition, producers appear to be exploring other substances with a psychoactive action that may be attractive to consumers.

A large and accessible research literature exists that can be exploited for this purpose, and there is concern that the results of pharmaceutical research may be harnessed to provide more of the new psychoactive substances appearing in the future. Much of the policy focus in this area has been on the legal status of new substances; however, it is also important to see them in the context of the overall drug market.

As an example, users report that as well as Internet sales, mephedrone was also sold through the same illicit supply networks as used for drugs such as ecstasy and cocaine. In addition, and as mentioned earlier, non-controlled psychoactive substances may be tableted as ecstasy and sold on the illicit market.

THE ENTRY OF NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)

Conversely, the controlled drug PMMA has recently been identified in some products advertised as 'legal highs'. Taken as a whole, developments in this area are worrying as they are suggestive of a growing interplay between the 'legal highs' and illicit drug markets.

NATIONAL DRUG STRATEGIES

A central element of Europe's drug policy model is the adoption of national drug strategies and action plans, and these now exist in almost all of the 30 countries monitored by the EMCDDA.

As seen in other areas of social policy, as countries become wealthier, the proportion of GDP spent by the government on activities related to drugs increases. In Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom, it is estimated that at least 0.1 % of GDP was devoted to drug-related problems; in France, Latvia (labelled expenditure only), Hungary and Slovakia, it accounted for between 0.1 % and 0.04 % of GDP. Taking into account that different methods were used and that the degree of completeness varies, these values do not differ greatly from estimations for the USA (0.42 %) and Australia (0.41 % of GDP).

Public expenditure studies also attempt to estimate the allocation of funds for different types of drug related issues. However, caution is required in making comparisons between countries, as they may not apply the same classification of expenditure. Among the 12 countries presenting complete estimations, supply reduction activities — 'law enforcement' or 'public order and safety' — accounted for between 48 % and 92 % of the total. Expenditure for justice, police, customs and prisons were the items most frequently reported.

A number of European countries are already using data on public expenditure as a tool for planning and evaluating the implementation of drug policies, while others, such as Portugal and Slovakia, report plans to do so. Developing a clear and complete picture of national drug-related public expenditure in Europe, however, remains a challenge.

Currently, there is no consensus on how to estimate specific types of drug related expenditures. In order to improve accuracy and comparability across countries, a comprehensive mapping of the public bodies funding drug policy will be necessary, as well as the harmonisation of concepts and definitions

INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT ISSUES

The current drug policy environment in which the Pompidou Group finds itself is defined by a basic change in the nature, volume, and mechanisms of illicit drug markets, resulting in a crisis situation that is multifaceted and extends beyond traditional control dynamics.

This crisis is no longer defined by geospatially predictable routes of drug supply or traditional narcotics but is instead defined by the interrelated elements of synthetic drug proliferation, technological disruption, policy fragmentation, and international criminal integration, which all inform and define each other.

At the core of this dynamic crisis is the proliferation and development of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances (NPS), which have significantly altered the global drug market. Unlike traditional drugs that have been naturally produced, synthetic drugs have been produced in controlled environments with little dependency on natural resources. This has enabled their production to be dynamic and decentralized, making it difficult to control or regulate. This dynamic nature has empowered those in the illicit trade to adjust chemical compositions, effectively circumventing legal classifications and creating a dynamic gap in terms of legal adaptation to new substances.

As such, traditional enforcement mechanisms that were effective in controlling traditional drug types have become less effective in controlling substances that evolve faster than legal processes. This change is further compounded by the digitalization of drug trafficking networks, particularly in relation to the development of encrypted communication systems, dark net marketplaces, and cryptocurrency-based financial systems.

The digitalization of drug trafficking networks has significantly minimized the risks associated with physical drug distribution systems, allowing drug traffickers to operate with increased anonymity and reduced risk across multiple state borders.

As a result, the drug trade has become more decentralized, networked, and resilient in nature, making it increasingly difficult for individual states to monitor, intercept, and prosecute drug trafficking activities.

INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT ISSUES

In relation to our approach to drug trafficking issues on the basis of multilateral cooperation, this issue poses a significant challenge in relation to the ability of drug trafficking networks to outpace existing mechanisms of cross-border cooperation and legal harmonization.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The UNODC is the lead agency for the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its three supplementary protocols. It helps countries create and improve laws to criminalize organized crime (participation, money laundering, obstruction of justice, smuggling), offering model laws and reviews, and convenes regular meetings to oversee implementation. Its technical assistance includes training for police, prosecutors, and judges in aspects like financial investigation, witness protection, and maritime crime.

The UNODC also leads regional programs to strengthen cooperation (e.g., West Africa Coast Initiative), promote intelligence-sharing, joint patrols, and harmonization of law enforcement across borders.

Collaborative efforts between countries in the region and the wider international community are essential to develop sustainable solutions, ranging from law enforcement and border control to alternative development programs and rehabilitation initiatives.

UNODC is mandated to support the Member States in facing threats and impact of drugs and crime. A number of conventions, treaties, and international instruments guide their work, such as:

- The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)
- The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)
- Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)
- Convention against the Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988)
- The Compendium of UN standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice
- General Assembly Resolution on Technical assistance provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime related to counter-terrorism A/RES/74/175

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

INTERPOL

Interpol is the world's largest international police organisation, with 194 member states. Its mission is to promote global police cooperation and assist in the prevention and suppression of international crime. Interpol works by facilitating communication and cooperation among national police forces, and by providing a range of services and resources to support law enforcement efforts. These include the issuance of international arrest warrants, the provision of forensic expertise, and the coordination of multinational investigations. Through its work, Interpol plays a vital role in fighting transnational crime, terrorism, and other global threats to security.

EUROPOL

EUROPOL coordinates EU efforts against serious transnational crimes (organized crime, trafficking, terrorism, cybercrime) via strategic threat analysis, secure intelligence exchange (SIENA platform), and support for joint investigations and operations. It provides specialized services through the European Cybercrime Centre, Counter Terrorism Centre, and asset recovery teams. Europol also facilitates legal and operational frameworks for cooperation between EU countries.

EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL)

The EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) plays an important role in providing police officers with the necessary expertise and skills to face the evolving challenges posed by organised crime. The EPP Group therefore calls on law enforcement authorities across the Union to make use of the training provided by the Agency.

The European Public Prosecutor Office (EPPO) and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) both have crucial roles to investigate and prosecute crimes against the financial interest of the EU, including fraud, corruption and misuse of EU-funds. In this regard, the EPP Group encourages all Member States to participate in the EPPO.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The EPP Group welcomes the intention by the Commission to strengthen the mandate of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) in order to ensure that the agency can play a more important role in identifying and addressing current and future challenges related to illicit drugs in the EU.

International Center for the Prevention of Crime

The International Center for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC) is a non-profit organisation that focuses on crime prevention research, policy development, and program implementation. The ICPC collaborates with local, national, and international partners to promote evidence-based strategies and interventions that address the root causes of crime and violence. Its areas of focus include urban safety, violence against women and children, youth and gang violence, and the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism.

International Narcotics Control Board (INCB):

The International Narcotics Control Board derives its authority primarily from the 1961 Convention and functions as an independent monitoring body within the United Nations system. It is responsible for supervising the implementation of all three major drug control treaties. The INCB reviews national estimates of drug requirements, monitors actual consumption and trade, and identifies discrepancies that may indicate diversion into illicit channels. It also publishes annual and special reports assessing global compliance and highlighting emerging challenges. While it does not possess direct enforcement powers, its quasi-judicial role and ability to issue recommendations exert significant influence on state behaviour and international policy alignment.

The INCB uses the following schedules to classify risks:

The narcotic drugs and their preparations under international control are grouped and listed in four Schedules, defined according to the dependence potential, abuse liability and therapeutic usefulness of the drugs included in them.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Drugs controlled under the 1961 Convention are listed in one of two Schedules (I and II), depending on the relationship between their therapeutic utility and abuse liability. The control provisions applicable to drugs in Schedule I constitute the standard regime under the 1961 Convention; Schedule II consists of drugs which are considered to be less liable to abuse and which are more widely used in medicine.

Two additional Schedules III and IV cover, respectively, preparations of drugs in Schedule I and II intended for legitimate medical use, and selected drugs from Schedule I considered to have particularly dangerous properties and rather limited therapeutic utility.

- ❖ Schedule I (1961/1971): Substances that are highly addictive and liable to abuse, or convertible into drugs that are similarly addictive (e.g., heroin, cannabis) or pose a serious threat to public health with little therapeutic value (e.g., LSD, MDMA).
- ❖ Schedule II: Substances that are less addictive and liable to abuse than those in Schedule I, or posing serious threat but with some therapeutic value (e.g., codeine, amphetamine-type stimulants).
- ❖ Schedule III: Preparations containing narcotic drugs that are intended for medical use and are unlikely to be abused.
- ❖ Schedule IV: Substances presenting a risk of abuse, posing a serious threat to public health, which are of low or moderate therapeutic value.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

In addition to the itemized substances listed in Schedules I, II and IV of the 1961 Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the following extension of the scope of control should be noted, involving:

Schedule I:

- (a) The isomers, unless specifically excepted, of the drugs in this Schedule, whenever the existence of such isomers is possible within the specific chemical designation;
- (b) The esters and ethers, unless appearing in another Schedule, of the drugs in this Schedule, whenever the existence of such esters or ethers is possible;
- (c) The salts of the drugs in this Schedule, including the salts of the esters, ethers and isomers as provided above, whenever the existence of such salts is possible.

Schedule II:

- (a) The isomers, unless specifically excepted, of the drugs in this Schedule, whenever the existence of such isomers is possible within the specific chemical designation;
- (b) The salts of the drugs in this Schedule, including the salts of the isomers as provided above, whenever the existence of such salts is possible.

Schedule IV:

- (a) The salts of the drugs in this Schedule, whenever the formation of such salts is possible. Furthermore, the scope of control also extends to all isotopic forms of controlled narcotic drugs, e.g. deuterated drugs which are typically used as analytical references.

IMPORTANT CONVENTIONS

The Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (CETS 198)

The Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism, or CETS 198, is the primary legislation enacted by the Council of Europe to break up drug trafficking.

This Convention aims to disarm the financial pillar of drug trafficking organizations. Rather than catching drug shipments or low-level drug dealers, CETS 198 focuses on stopping the flow of money that funds these ventures.

Member states are mandated to make laws for tracking, freezing, and taking away assets from serious crimes like drugs, even in the absence of a full conviction. This measure is really useful because traffickers try to stay away from the actual drugs, but their fancy cars or properties are tougher to hide.

The convention also mandates fast-track mutual legal assistance between member states, meaning that a request to freeze assets in another country must be acted upon quickly.

When it comes to real effects on fighting drugs, this Convention revolutionizes European Policy. The contraband-related ventures bring in tons of cash that need to be laundered and moved around international bank accounts.

This treaty allows Europol and other European Law Enforcement agencies to follow that money without proving every single step of the crime in advance. This civil forfeiture mechanism lies at the core of this convention and related policies. It also criminalizes lawyers or accountants who aid such ventures.

As of 2025, CETS 198 has been ratified by 38 states, including most European Union member states as well as non-EU countries such as Switzerland, Norway, and Turkey. However, implementation remains uneven across different legal systems.

IMPORTANT CONVENTIONS

The Council of Europe monitors the implementation of this legislation through its Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures (MONEYVAL), which conducts peer reviews and publishes reports, showing how effective these measures are in the real world.

The Convention severely penalizes State parties involved. This has contributed to a notable shift in how sophisticated trafficking networks operate, forcing them to rely on more complex and expensive laundering methods such as trade-based money laundering, cryptocurrency mixing services, and shell companies in offshore jurisdictions.

CETS 198 continues to shape how countries team up against the money side of trafficking, but some parts still feel uneven in practice.

The Council of Europe Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (CETS 173)

The Council of Europe's Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (CETS 173) is a critical instrument in fighting drug trafficking. Corruption is the secret passcode which allows underground organizations to operate across numerous jurisdictions and national borders.

While moving products, drug traffickers systematically bribe customs officials, police officers, judges, politicians, and border guards to ensure their shipments pass unchecked; investigations against them are stalled, and their assets remain unseized. The Criminal Law Convention on Corruption was opened for signature in 1999 and entered into force in 2002. It continues to be one of the most comprehensive binding treaties ratified by the members of the Council of Europe. It specifically criminalizes both active and passive bribery of public officials, including foreign officials and members of international organizations.

The Convention patches up legal loopholes traditionally used by corrupt drug traffickers. First, it criminalizes bribery not only of domestic public officials but also of foreign officials and members of international parliamentary assemblies, a critical blow to drug trafficking. After all, drug trafficking by its very nature is a transnational enterprise.

IMPORTANT CONVENTIONS

Second, the convention requires states to establish corporate liability for corruption, meaning that companies and legal entities used as fronts for drug trafficking can be held criminally responsible and fined or dissolved, enforcing the legal doctrine of vicarious liability, the absence of which had previously given a fall guy to 'senior' criminals of mafias and such organizations.

Third, it mandates that states enact legislation to protect whistleblowers and witnesses who report corruption linked to organized crime, including drug trafficking. This measure aims to promote the reporting of such crimes, countering the violent threats issued by drug trafficking organizations to witnesses (snitches get stitches?)

Moreover, the convention also includes a protocol which extends criminalization to bribery of arbitrators and jurors, aiming to stop judicial intimidation during court cases and resolutions through Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms (ADRM).

The practical connection between the legislation and drug trafficking enforcement is obvious and has been a key instrument of law enforcement agencies all across Europe.

The “Mafia Capitale” investigation in Italy, which uncovered extensive links between organized crime, drug trafficking, and political corruption, found its legal backing through Italian national law created through the regulations laid down by the “Rognoni-La Torre” Law of 13 September 1982 (Law n. 646/1982), which resulted in not only the prosecution of the drug lords, but also the public officials who took bribes. Similarly, on the Balkan route, the legislation has been used as a benchmark by anti-crime groups to pressure national governments into strengthening anti-corruption laws that directly affect their ability to intercept trafficking networks and dirty officials.

The convention has been ratified by a total of 47 states, including all member states as well as several non-member countries such as Belarus and Kazakhstan.

IMPORTANT CONVENTIONS

However, enforcement gaps persist. The overseeing body for this convention is the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). Its monitoring reports consistently identify weaknesses in several member states regarding the criminalization of bribery of foreign officials, the effectiveness of whistleblower protection laws, and the actual prosecution rates for high-level corruption linked to organized crime. These reports have seen little to no action in plugging vulnerabilities that drug trafficking networks continue to exploit.

Taken together, the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption and its enforcement mechanisms provide European law enforcement with legal mechanisms to attack corruption, and consequently, the drug trade.

The UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its Protocols

The Convention criminalizes participation in an organized criminal group, money laundering, obstruction of justice, extradition, and mutual legal assistance.

It contains the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol on Human Trafficking), the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (Palermo Protocol on Migrant Smuggling), and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol)

IMPORTANT CONVENTIONS

Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (as amended by 1972 Protocol):

Adopted in 1961 under the United Nations, this Convention created a unified global system to control narcotic drugs such as opium, heroin, and cocaine. Its central legal obligation is contained in Article 4, which requires states to strictly limit the production, manufacture, export, import, and use of narcotic drugs exclusively to medical and scientific purposes. This principle forms the backbone of the entire international drug control regime.

Articles 19 and 20 establish a comprehensive estimates and statistical reporting system, under which states must annually declare the quantities of drugs required for legitimate use and provide data on production and consumption. This ensures transparency and prevents diversion into illegal markets.

Article 21 further strengthens this by placing quantitative limits on manufacture and import, ensuring that supply does not exceed legitimate demand. Article 36 mandates that states criminalize serious drug-related offences, thereby introducing a legal enforcement dimension to what is otherwise a regulatory framework.

The Convention also introduces a system of Schedules (I-IV), categorizing substances based on their potential for abuse and therapeutic value, with stricter controls applied to more dangerous drugs. Oversight is carried out by the International Narcotics Control Board, which ensures compliance through monitoring and reporting mechanisms (mentioned in glossary/definitions).

Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)

The 1971 Convention was adopted to address the growing prevalence of synthetic and psychotropic substances such as LSD, amphetamines, and benzodiazepines, which were not adequately covered under the 1961 framework.

IMPORTANT CONVENTIONS

Article 2 defines the scope of control and establishes the scheduling mechanism, under which substances are classified into four categories based on their abuse potential and medical utility, with scientific input from the World Health Organization. Article 5 reinforces the limitation principle by requiring that these substances be used only for medical and scientific purposes.

Article 7 introduces particularly stringent measures for Schedule I substances, imposing near-prohibition except for very limited scientific use. Article 9 requires states to implement a licensing system governing the manufacture, distribution, and trade of psychotropic substances, ensuring that only authorized entities can handle them. Article 16 obligates states to submit detailed reports on production, manufacture, and usage to international monitoring bodies, thereby maintaining transparency and facilitating oversight

IMPORTANT RESOLUTIONS PASSED

UNGASS 2016 Outcome Document (Draft Resolution A/RES/S-30/1)

The outcome document of the UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs 2016, formally adopted as Resolution A/RES/S-30/1, represents one of the most comprehensive modern policy frameworks. It was drafted in response to global dissatisfaction with purely prohibitionist approaches and increasing concerns over human rights and public health.

The document is structured into thematic chapters, including demand reduction, supply reduction, access to controlled medicines, and international cooperation. It explicitly calls for proportionate sentencing policies, alternatives to incarceration, and improved access to treatment and rehabilitation services. While reaffirming the three drug control conventions, it allows interpretative flexibility, enabling states to adopt policies suited to national contexts.

Political Declaration and Plan of Action 2009 (CND Resolution)

Adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in 2009, this document functions as a strategic blueprint rather than a simple declaration. It is divided into two major components: the Political Declaration, which outlines overarching commitments, and the Plan of Action, which provides detailed operational guidance. The Plan includes specific measures on demand reduction, supply reduction, and international judicial cooperation. It also introduces monitoring mechanisms and encourages states to set measurable targets. The drafting context was a recognition that earlier goals, particularly those from 1998, had not been achieved, necessitating a more realistic and structured approach. It remains a key reference for drafting resolutions because of its detailed policy language and actionable clauses.

IMPORTANT RESOLUTIONS PASSED

Ministerial Declaration 2019 (CND High-Level Segment Document)

The 2019 Ministerial Declaration, adopted during the high-level segment of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, serves as a review and reaffirmation document. It evaluates the implementation of the 2009 Plan of Action and identifies gaps in addressing emerging challenges such as synthetic drugs and online trafficking. The document emphasizes strengthening international cooperation, improving data collection, and enhancing institutional capacity. In terms of drafting relevance, it provides updated terminology and reflects the most current consensus language used by states, making it highly useful for framing modern resolutions.

UNGA Resolution 57/176 of 18 December 2002, entitled “Trafficking in women and girls”:

Urges Governments to take appropriate measures to address the root factors, that encourage trafficking in women and girls;

Further urges governments to consider signing and ratifying relevant UN legal instruments; encourages Member States to conclude bilateral, subregional, regional and international agreements;

Calls upon all Governments to criminalize trafficking in women and children; invites the same to consider setting up or strengthening a national coordinating mechanism to encourage the exchange of information and to report on data, root causes, factors and trends in violence against women;

Urges concerned Governments to support and allocate resources for programmes to strengthen preventive action;

IMPORTANT RESOLUTIONS PASSED

Calls upon Governments to take steps to ensure that the treatment of victims of trafficking are applied with full respect for the human rights of those victims;

Invites Governments to take steps to enable women who are victims of trafficking to make complaints to the police or other authorities;

Further invites Governments to encourage Internet service providers to adopt or strengthen self-regulatory measures;

Urges Governments to strengthen national programmes to combat trafficking in women and girls through sustained bilateral, regional and international cooperation;

Invites Governments to formulate training manuals for law enforcement and medical personnel and judicial officers who handle cases of trafficked women and girls;

Urges Governments to provide or strengthen training for law enforcement, immigration and other relevant officials in the prevention of trafficking in persons;

Requests the Secretary-General to include in his report to the General Assembly at its 59th session proposals for a future international/UN year against trafficking in persons.

This resolution operates within the broader legal framework of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

IMPORTANT RESOLUTIONS PASSED

Resolution 58/137 of 22 December 2003, entitled “Strengthening international cooperation in preventing and combating trafficking in persons and protecting victims of such trafficking”:

Urges Member States to employ a comprehensive approach to combating trafficking in persons; calls upon Member States to collaborate with a view to preventing trafficking in persons, especially for the purpose of sexual exploitation, through:

- (a) improved technical cooperation;
- (b) information campaigns on the techniques and methods of traffickers;
- (c) a focus on post-conflict regions;

Urges Member States to take measures to ratify or accede to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and to implement those instruments.

Resolution 59/156 of 20 December 2004, entitled “Preventing, combating and punishing trafficking in human organs”:

Urges Member States, should they ascertain that such a phenomenon exists in their country, to adopt the necessary measures to prevent, combat and punish the illicit removal of and trafficking in human organs;

encourages Member States to exchange experience in and information on preventing, combating and punishing the illicit removal of and trafficking in human organs;

requests the 11th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice to pay attention to the issue of the illicit removal of and trafficking in human organs;

IMPORTANT RESOLUTIONS PASSED

requests the Secretary-General to prepare a study on the extent of the phenomenon of trafficking in human organs for submission to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its 15th session.

Resolution 61/180 of 20 December 2006, entitled “Improving the coordination efforts against trafficking in persons

Underlines the importance of bilateral, subregional and regional partnerships, initiatives and actions, and encourages their development;

urges Member States that have not yet done so to consider taking measures to ratify or accede to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and to implement fully all aspects of these instruments;

Invites Member States to give necessary guidelines and provide training and adequate resources to law enforcement bodies and other relevant authorities to combat trafficking in persons, to care for the rights and needs of the victims and to consider establishing coordination and cooperation mechanisms at the national and international levels on extradition, mutual legal assistance;

requests the Secretary-General to improve upon the fledgling inter-agency coordination group on trafficking in persons in order to enhance cooperation and coordination and facilitate a holistic and comprehensive approach by the international community to the problem of trafficking in persons.

IMPORTANT REGIONAL INITIATIVES

European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust)

The European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, also known as Eurojust, is a judicial cooperation agency of the European Union (EU). Its primary mission is to improve the effectiveness of investigations and prosecutions of serious cross-border crime by fostering cooperation among national judicial authorities.

Eurojust supports the coordination of investigations and prosecutions of organised crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, and other serious crimes that have a cross-border dimension. It also provides support and expertise to national authorities, including assistance with extradition, mutual legal assistance, and the coordination of joint investigation teams.

Directive 2011/36/EU on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

On 14 April 2021, the European Commission adopted a new EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025). This plan is directly related to the EU's 2021–2025 Plan to Combat Organized Crime. offers a thorough response to the crime, including measures to stop it from happening in the first place, protect and empower victims, and apprehend traffickers.

It emphasised a new approach mainly because it aimed to break the traffickers' business model by efficient operating methods that go against the illegal business model, whilst also combating the culture of impunity by enhancing the ability for a strong criminal justice reaction, and taking on the traffickers' digital business models.

Declaration of the Ministerial Conferences concerning Drugs

The Ministerial Conferences concerning Drugs are regular conferences held since 1980 after the Pompidou Group's joining the Council of Europe.

IMPORTANT REGIONAL INITIATIVES

These declarations are important as they allow for a uniform approach to dealing with drugs, considering the different approaches to solving the problem across different countries that created chaos and confusion. The Annual Activity Report on National Developments in the Area of Drugs Annual Activity Reports on National Developments in the Area of Drugs have been developed since the 1980s-1990s because of growing complexity in drug situations in various countries.

In addition, such documents are necessary because governments prefer to base decision-making on factual data rather than assumptions.

With an increasing tendency to smuggle drugs in the late 1970s and early 1980s with the help of aircraft, the Airport Group was formed. These reports provide recommendations on preventing international drug trafficking at the airports and cooperation of respective countries in this area.

Due to a growing number of young drug abusers, the Prevention Platform Guidelines were introduced in the 1990s-2000s. Governments realized that prevention is much cheaper and easier than dealing with consequences and thus, introduced the mentioned guidelines as preventive educational measures.

Governments have realized that drug abuse should also be regarded as a health problem which requires treatment. The documents are dedicated to treating addictions in terms of providing healthcare services to reduce harm done to health and avoid death of patients.

THE BALKAN ROUTE

Introduction

Since the 1990s, the Balkan route has been the most significant trafficking path for supplying illegal opiates, particularly heroin, from Afghanistan to Western and Central Europe. The route begins in Afghanistan and passes through Iran and Türkiye. Here, the Balkan route splits into three main branches.

The Northern Branch

The Northern Branch crosses South-Eastern Europe through Bulgaria and Romania, continuing to Western and Central Europe.

The Western Branch

The Western Branch passes through Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia, eventually reaching Western and Central Europe.

The Southern Branch

The Southern Branch leads into the European Union by moving from Türkiye to Greece and then to Italy.

Another branch of the Balkan route goes through Iran, and possibly Central Asian countries such as Turkmenistan, by land or over the Caspian Sea, to the countries of the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) and then into Turkey by land or through the Black Sea. From Turkey the heroin may be transported west into the EU along one of the traditional branches of the Balkan route, or it may be shipped north on one of the ferries plying the Black Sea between Turkey and Ukraine or Moldova.

The Balkan Route, which passed largely unnoticed in the past, has suddenly garnered public attention as it has become the instrument of the unprecedented flow of refugees and migrants.

THE BALKAN ROUTE

While immigration is becoming a real business, and the smuggling of migrants a highly profitable activity, (which generated a revenue of 5 to 6 billion USD in 2015) and while fences and walls are being erected by an increasing number of countries, and EU members seem far from agreeing on common policies of management of such flows, Balkan criminal groups are, once again, taking advantage from gaps in legislation, from the passiveness of European institutions and from the restrictive immigration policies of local governments.

Since studies reveal that it is very likely that trafficking in persons is managed by criminals already involved in other forms of illicit activities, criminals involved in migrant smuggling networks were typically previously involved in drug trafficking, the engagement of Balkan-based criminal groups in the smuggling of migrants was, at least, foreseeable.

The existence and continued survival of a route for the smuggling of different types of drugs and vulnerable human beings, which involves, to different extents, all the countries of the Balkans, provides, thus, a concrete example of the consequences that smuggling channels which have never been dismantled, unpunished criminals and unstopped criminal activities had on the entire region. Fostered by the wars and the exploitation of unpatrolled borders, used to finance the fighting factions, partly covered by the police or the political elites, illegal smuggling remains a significant problem in the region, still among the main transit zones for heroin and suddenly also an important consumption market.

THE BALKANS AND DRUGS

Since the entry of Bulgaria and Romania into the EU, the northern branch now crosses only one EU border, while the western branch crosses multiple borders, making it a riskier option for traffickers. However, recent border seizures indicate that, for some networks, the strength of local partners on the western branch can compensate for any risk associated with entering the EU more than once.

It remains unclear whether the integration of Bulgaria and Romania into the European Union resulted in any major transformation in the drug routes.

Aside from Iran, where the consumption of both heroin and opium is widespread, Western and Central Europe are the primary destinations for the heroin produced in Afghanistan and trafficked via the Balkan route. While opiates are consumed in every country along the route, the vast bulk of consumption is concentrated in a few large countries, including France, Germany, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The region is no longer just a transit zone, but is now also a huge consumer on its own: while the consumption market reached proportions similar to the four major heroin consumers of Western Europe, the percentage of people aged between 15-64 injecting heroin is 4.6 times higher in the region than the global average as per the UN report of 2014.

In addition to the obvious negative consequences that the smuggling of drugs inflicts on the economic and social development of a region, the health of its citizens and their health care systems are unquestionably negatively affected by such circumstances.

South-Eastern Europe, indeed, has been identified as new entry points for cocaine coming from South America through the ports of the Adriatic and Black Sea. Among others, the Sinaloa cartel, one of the most dangerous Mexican drug cartels, found in the Western Balkans the entry point it was looking for to expand its trade towards Europe, while Colombian and Peruvian criminal groups are also allegedly showing their interests in new business in the region.

THE BALKANS AND DRUGS

The Austrian government also identified a Balkan Route, which in this case does not originate from Afghanistan, but still crosses all the Balkan countries, as one of the ways in which cocaine reached the country. It is, thus, clear how this route started, with the passing of time, to serve a twofold purpose, satisfying the demand of both the opiates and cocaine addicts of Western Europe.

Although the quantity of cocaine smuggled through the Balkans remains minimal (around 1%), this situation shows how broadly Balkan-based groups are expanding, reaching a more and more global extension.

TODAY'S BALKAN ROUTE

The geographic position of the Balkans and a rugged internal environment opposed to an easy external accessibility did not provide many stimuli to their internal economic development, contributing to transforming the area into an ideal transit zone, whose profits have always come more from its borders rather than from its own territory.

In the past dividing the Ottoman from the Habsburg Empire, the NATO members from those of the Warsaw Pact, the Balkans happen to link, today, the world's main supplier of heroin, Afghanistan, with one of its most lucrative markets, Western Europe. Approximately following the historical Silk Road, a long and ramified Balkan Route survived the conflicts, changing laws and governments, serving as a giant illegal bridge between East and West.

The geographical direction and ramification of the route changed following the political and historical events that took place in the region: when the transiting through Croatia and Bosnia had to be suspended because of the wars, new channels linking Macedonia to Albania and Italy were immediately opened. Soon after the end of the wars, however, the pre-war Balkan Route was restored, certainly much before the rule of law. The political stabilization that ensued and the enforcement of the police, more successful in countries such as Croatia and Serbia, resulted in the relocation of the centres of illegal trade in countries where such processes have been rather less successful, like Kosovo and Montenegro.

Today, Kosovo is known as the “new Colombia of Europe“, which supplies heroin not only to the continent but even to the USA. If this situation is preventing the country from obtaining a free visa regime, paradoxically, the entry of Bulgaria and Romania into the EU, resulting in more lenient controls at their borders, was followed by a redirection of the heroin flow destined to Western Europe, to these countries.

Over time, the region became not only a transit zone, but also a huge consumer on its own: while the consumption market reached proportions similar to the four major heroin consumers of Western Europe, the percentage of people aged between 15-64 injecting heroin is 4.6 times higher in the region than the global average.

TODAY'S BALKAN ROUTE

Since studies reveal that it is very likely that trafficking in persons is managed by criminals already involved in other forms of illicit activities (Study prepared by the Secretariat of the Budapest Group, 1999), criminals involved in migrant smuggling networks were typically previously involved in drug trafficking, the engagement of Balkan-based criminal groups in the smuggling of migrants was, at least, foreseeable.

Although it is not easy to gather reliable data on such a contemporary, constantly evolving phenomenon, it is now beyond doubt that some of the region's most unscrupulous and established criminal syndicates have moved into migrant smuggling. While the Macedonian legislation was prohibiting the use of public transportation to illegal migrants, the border with Greece was immediately transformed into an open-air market of bikes, sold at least at three times their market value, and when Orbán, the then-President of Hungary, was announcing the building of a 175km fence along Hungary's border, a Bulgarian-Hungarian mafia gang was deemed responsible for the death of 71 people trying to cross the border in an overcrowded lorry.

While Palic, in the north of Serbia, became a meeting point for traffickers and trafficked Kosovars who paid 200€ for their pursuit of freedom, Lojane, in Macedonia, became a renowned smuggling centre where politicians and top-ranking police officers collaborated with criminals in the smuggling of migrants.

The existence and continued survival of a route for the smuggling of different types of drugs and vulnerable human beings, which involves, to different extents, all the countries of the Balkans, provide, thus, a concrete example of the consequences that smuggling channels which have never been dismantled, unpunished criminals and unstopped criminal activities had on the entire region. Fostered by the wars and the exploitation of unpatrolled borders, used to finance the fighting factions, partly covered by the police or the political elites, illegal smuggling remains a significant problem in the region, still among the main transit zones for heroin and suddenly also an important consumption market.

TODAY'S BALKAN ROUTE

In addition to the obvious negative consequences that the smuggling of drugs inflicts on the economic and social development of a region, the health of its citizens and their health care systems are unquestionably negatively affected by such circumstances.

Following the continuous changes in the market of narcotics, and in particular the decrease in consumption of heroin, paralleled by an increase in the demand for cocaine, UNODC (2007) expressed its concerns about the expansion of the cocaine routes toward Eastern Europe and the formation of alarming inter-oceanic drug alliances. South-Eastern Europe, indeed, has been identified as new entry points for cocaine coming from South America through the ports of the Adriatic and Black Sea (as per a Europol Report from 2011).

Among others, the Sinaloa cartel, one of the most dangerous Mexican drug cartels, found in the Western Balkans the entry point it was looking for to expand its trade towards Europe, while Colombian and Peruvian criminal groups are also allegedly showing their interests in new business in the region. The Austrian government also identified a Balkan Route, which in this case does not originate from Afghanistan, but still crosses all the Balkan countries, as one of the ways in which cocaine reached the country. It is, thus, clear how this route started, with the passing of time, to serve a twofold purpose, satisfying the demand of both the opiates and cocaine addicts of Western Europe.

Although the quantity of cocaine smuggled through the Balkans remains minimal (around 1%), this situation shows how broadly Balkan-based groups are expanding, reaching a more and more global extension (as per a United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime Report from 2007). The same Balkan Route which passed largely unnoticed in the past years, suddenly came into the limelight when it was frequented by an unprecedented flow of refugees and migrants.

While immigration is becoming a real business, worth more than drugs, and the smuggling of migrants a highly profitable activity, which generated a revenue of 5 to 6 billion USD in 2015, while fences and walls are being erected by an increasing number of countries, and EU members seem far from agreeing on common policies of management of such flows, Balkan criminal groups are, once again, taking advantage from gaps in legislation, from the passiveness of European institutions and from the restrictive immigration policies of local governments.

TODAY'S BALKAN ROUTE

Along one branch, there may be a series of sales and re-sales that gradually move the drug towards its point of highest return. Along the way, shipments may be repackaged and cut with adulterants to increase profits. This appears to be a feature of the “southern branch” through Greece towards Italy as well as the “western branch” through the Western Balkans towards Western Europe. Of course, these features are not static in space and all three branches may display any of these characteristics. Large shipments may also be centrally coordinated from origin to user; this appears to be the case for some large-scale trafficking on the “northern branch” (Turkey-Bulgaria-Romania-Western Europe), in particular as it concerns trajectories to Germany and the Netherlands.

The northern branch consists mainly of overland trafficking while the western and, in particular, the southern branch include sea trafficking at key stages. A key difference between the branches is whether or not the areas they straddle are within or outside the EU. With the entry of Bulgaria and Romania into the EU, the northern branch became a single entry point into the EU.

In contrast, the western branch crosses multiple EU borders, making it a riskier option for traffickers. There are, of course, additional factors to consider, and Greece provides an interesting example in that regard - despite having been a member of the EU since the 1980s (and Schengen since 2000), the country has not seen increased flows. It may be that other variables have mitigated the risk of trafficking, such as weaker networks linking Greece with earlier stages of the Balkan route, compared to the established connections linking various areas of South-Eastern Europe. All such factors could help predict the impact of disappearing borders on new EU members, such as Croatia. While most branches of the Balkan route were once under the influence of Turkish/Kurdish criminal groups, a shift occurred in the 1990s leading to Albanian groups from the Western Balkans gaining market shares, in particular in transit or destination countries such as Italy, Greece and Switzerland.

Albanian groups generally purchase from Turkish wholesalers, the latter of whom continue to handle large heroin consignments all the way along the Balkan route to destination markets.¹⁰⁰ Other traffickers indigenous to South-Eastern Europe often appear to be transportation professionals who are contracted to do the job, and are not necessarily members of the group that owns the drugs.

TODAY'S BALKAN ROUTE

The core transportation network in South-Eastern Europe is multimodal and includes road, rail and inland waterway links, along with a number of seaports, river ports and airports. Most trafficking is not multi-modal, however, and road vehicles are the preferred mode of transportation. Rail and air routes do not appear to be widely used to move heroin into or through the region. For example, the total amount of heroin reportedly seized on trains in South-Eastern Europe in 2011 amounted to little more than 4 kg. Trafficking and concealment methods tend to vary.

Cars with EU license plates are thought to be under less scrutiny than those with non-EU license plates and are often used by traffickers.¹⁰⁵ Certain reported methods are able to bypass scanners, sniffer dogs and visual inspection.¹⁰⁶ The Balkan route includes maritime trajectories. The most common involves the transportation of drugs across the Adriatic towards Italy on Greek or Albanian ferries. In 2008-2009, traffickers used the Black Sea ports of Romania and Bulgaria, but this appears to have declined in recent years. Heroin trajectories across the Black Sea remain a possible alternative to the traditional overland trajectory.

For example, Turkey's antismuggling and organized crime department reported heroin seizures linked to the Black Sea coastline totalling 493 kg in 2012.

TODAY'S BALKAN ROUTE

Problems With Data Collection along the Balkan Route

Problems with forensic data relate not only to heroin but also to other drugs. Though progress is being made in that respect, data on drug purity and composition is often unavailable or contradictory. One issue is that some countries do not make a clear distinction between wholesale and retail (street) seizures. The ability to assess drug purity accurately also depends on the capacity of a country's forensic laboratories.

Unfortunately, few countries in the Balkan region have the resources and capacity to regularly and properly collect price and purity data, making this level of assessment challenging. There is also a lack of detailed information about the prevalence of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) in South-Eastern Europe.

While some countries, such as Bulgaria, report some penetration of their markets by NPS, others such as Montenegro and Serbia indicate little to no presence of the drugs. However, the impact of NPS on local markets can be significant.

Romania consistently reported seizures of over 1 kg in 2010, 2011 and 2012. More dramatic still is the change in lifetime prevalence in Romania. While lifetime prevalence for cocaine, heroin and amphetamines stood below 0.7 per cent in 2010, that for NPS was 2 per cent - higher than cannabis. Despite such evidence, a clear regional picture for NPS is not currently available. However, as indicated by the Romanian situation, there is clearly a need to fully assess the threat to local markets in South-Eastern Europe.

TODAY'S BALKAN ROUTE

Firearms smuggling in the Balkan route:

The Western Balkans is a principal departure point for firearms intended for trafficking throughout Europe. This can be attributed to the oversupply of legacy firearms dating from conflicts in the 1990s. In addition, the region remains a thoroughfare for drugs moving between continents, via the 'Balkan route'.

This route acts as a connector for global drug trafficking routes, with heroin from Afghanistan being the most common drug smuggled into the European Union via this route. Also, cocaine, trafficked from Latin American, and cannabis, which is either produced in Albania or passes through the Western Balkans from Afghanistan or Central Asia, converge onto this route.

Concurrently, firearms traffickers use the 'Balkan route' to smuggle their contraband on a regional basis and, often, simultaneously with drugs that have been smuggled from various continents.

A Flemish Peace Institute report commenting on firearms trafficking from the Western Balkans notes: "Most of the time, large shipments of illegal drugs are accompanied by illegal firearms. Firearms seizures are then a by-product of attempts to stem the illegal trade in drugs."

One such instance of trafficking routes facilitating the smuggling of both firearms and drugs was discovered by a joint action coordinated by the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) in 2022.

The operation led to the arrest of 382 criminals who were alleged drug and firearm traffickers using the Balkan route but also allegedly participating in other criminal activities such as the facilitation of illegal immigration and document fraud.

Overall, the action led to the seizure of 106 firearms and 304 kg of heroin, 147 kg of cannabis, 5,402 plants of marijuana and 1.3 kg of cocaine.

THE REVERSE BALKAN ROUTE

The Balkan route begins in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where Afghan networks send heroin over the border into the Islamic Republic of Iran, offloading their shipments to groups that will manage transportation up to the border areas of Turkey.

In recent years, perhaps as a result of the strengthening of border controls between Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran, a sub route through Iraq may have emerged. Large seizures in Georgia and Armenia in 2013-2014 represent examples of the way in which traffickers may opt to travel through the Caucasus to reach Europe.

Nevertheless, most of the flow travelling from the Islamic Republic of Iran continues into Turkey. The main players organizing shipments into and through Turkey appear to be Turkish groups. Afghan groups do not appear to operate beyond their national border when it comes to heroin trafficking on the Balkan route, but Iranian groups and to lesser extent Bulgarian, Albanian and Nigerian groups are active in opiate (heroin and opium) trafficking throughout Turkey as attested by arrest statistics.

*[Bonus: if you need some humor to survive the rest of the study guide-
Why is clapping not allowed in Afghanistan? Because of the Tali-ban.
Yes we found that funny. And so should you.]*

ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

Introduction

The region of South-Eastern Europe, or the Balkans, has been at the centre of various studies, which have looked in turn at the debated origins of the Yugoslav wars, the economic consequences of the transition towards a market economy, the political results of the democratization process, the relations between the different ethnic groups inhabiting it, or whether or not its countries should be eligible for EU membership. Only more recently has the analysis also focused on the powerful influence organized crime has exerted and is exerting on the region. Starting from the assumptions that organized crime is today one of the major problem affecting the Balkans, considered as an organized crime gateway into Europe by certain researchers, and that there has been little examination of the reasons why organized crime found such a fertile ground for its activities exactly in this region, it is necessary to identify the root causes which contributed to its significant expansion during the last decades.

The geographic position of the region, located in the middle between big empires and powers, Asia and Europe, drug producers and drug consumers fostered the creation of illegal channels of smuggling, as per a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report. The socialist period provided other opportunities to organized crime: strong links were established between the security sectors and criminals in all the countries, while the consumers' needs that the official economy could not satisfy started to be met through the flourishing of smuggling channels and black markets, with the tacit or explicit approval of politicians.

Fought by paramilitaries, criminals and released prisoners engaged in looting and smuggling, the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s have been addressed as another major cause of the growth of Balkan-based organized crime.

ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

The shady political and economic process of transition which followed, led to the enrichment and social advancement of criminal segments of the society, while the disappointment of the civilian population who had high hopes in the process, acted as another incentive to criminality (once again, sourced from the 2008 United Nations report).

Past and more recent international actions, from the lifting of sanctions in the 1990s, to the same presence of soldiers in poor, war-torn countries, to military interventions, contributed to the growth of the phenomenon as well.

Out of all these factors, there are two which are the most prominent and the most relevant in relation to the connection between organized crime and drug trafficking. These are—

- The Yugoslav wars
- The post-Yugoslavia economic and political transition into the unipolar liberal democracy model

Researchers have argued that the chaos, economic uncertainty and political vacuum which characterized both these events, provided particularly fertile opportunities to an embryonic form of organized crime which was already affecting the region. Fed by a “culture of impunity”, corruption and economic hardship, organized crime in this region grew almost undisturbed, today reaching a dimension and power impossible to ignore.

As a result, since the early 1990s Cosa Nostra and 'Ndrangheta families have extracted a growing percentage of their income from entrepreneurial activities that depend on the exercise of regional political domination. They practice systematic extortion in their communities and, thanks to intimidation and collusion with corrupt politicians, they have struggled to control the market for public works.

ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

Given the variety of commodities and suppliers involved, it is difficult to estimate the overall revenue of the criminal sector. Though exorbitant estimates can often be read in the press, the revenue from the criminal sector in Italy represents only a small fraction of the total revenue of the underground economy (which additionally includes the much larger informal economy).

Italy's criminal economy is not significantly larger than that of other Western countries. Some criminal activities – such as the smuggling of tobacco and human beings – do seem to be particularly prevalent in Italy, above all due to its extensive coastline and geographical position.

Southern mafia associations and other organised crime groups also engage in illegal transfers of money – through extortion, embezzlement, fraud, or robbery, for example – that are not usually included in the definition of the underground and criminal economies, because they do not create value but merely transfer it from one person to another.

According to estimates made by the Direzione Centrale della Polizia Criminale (DCPC), extortion produces an annual revenue of at least ITL 1,400 billion (€ 700 million) (Rey, 1992). On the whole, however, crime in Italy does not pay much, according to the most comprehensive and reliable estimates of the criminal economy. Working in cooperation with police forces and several other state agencies, in 1992 Guido Rey (1992; see also Becchi and Rey, 1994: 25), then president of the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), concluded that the total revenue from criminal enterprises was about ITL 30,000 billion (€ 15 billion) in 1990, with roughly 150,000 persons variously involved in these activities.

ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

Within the relevant literature, two main models explaining the structure of criminal organizations emerged. These are:

- The Corporate Model
- The Network Model

The corporate model considers them as highly centralized and hierarchical corporate structures, while according to the network model, criminal organizations are composed of isolated networks of individuals or small groups collaborating with each other. The latter has recently gained ground both within the literature and among police forces, to the point that the term “serious crime“ is often preferred to the sometimes ambiguous “organized crime.“ Modern and dynamic networks acting in a globalized world are, indeed, replacing the old image of hierarchical, rigidly structured organized groups.

A Reuters report from 1985 questioned the very essence of organized crime to the extent of introducing the notion of a “disorganized crime“ made of a huge number of extremely small criminal enterprises, marginal and ephemeral. Organized criminal networks today operate through “fluid network structures”, which do not follow rigid and permanent patterns, but rather adapt themselves to the ever-changing political and economic environment. Acting in more and more interconnected societies, the nature of modern organized crime networks profoundly changed as well, becoming more complex and flexible.

Given their high capacity to adapt to changing external situations and activities and the large scale of their criminal links, Balkan-based organized criminal groups will be considered here as perfectly fitting the network model. The organized side of crime, therefore, no longer describes the reality of the phenomenon. Yet, it continues to be extensively used in policy, among the police and by the media.

ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

If past theories considered criminal organizations as enterprises, ready to use violence to reach their ultimate scope of creating monopolies, today, the view according to which criminal organizations are no longer fighting each other for power, but are, instead, increasingly cooperating to reach a common objective, is gaining more ground.

Whereas the new Italian and foreign entrepreneurs are likely to expand their activities on Italy's illegal markets, the future of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra and the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta is more uncertain. Far from expanding toward the outside, Cosa Nostra groups and, to a lesser extent, even those of the 'Ndrangheta have since the early 1990s receded into their territories, avoiding international competition. Today they obtain a growing and preponderant quota of their revenues by manipulating the tendering process of public works and imposing generalised extortive regimes on all the economic enterprises of their areas. Instead of creating stable 'enterprise syndicates'

Given the multidimensionality of organized crime as well as the variety of disciplines dealing with the phenomenon from different points of view, most of the literature acknowledges the difficulty of giving a clear and unique definition. A certain consensus seems to have arisen around the broad definition given by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime: "Organized criminal group" shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit".

The Working Group entitled to provide such a definition focused on the broadly accepted elements of the phenomenon, namely a certain organization, characterized by continuity, using intimidation or violence, pursuing profits and exercising influence on the public, on the media and on the political structure. Some defining common characteristics can, in fact, easily be highlighted, leading to two main ways of understanding it: as a set of actors or as a set of activities.

ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

The general public more often understands it as a set of actors, referring to the most famous criminal organizations such as the Italian or Russian mafia.

Such cooperation shapes international connections which will create in the future a new “pax mafiosa“, in which scattered units of criminals work together to peacefully build a global criminal market. Globalization has, without any doubt, modified the ways in which organized criminal groups flourish and work together, involuntarily facilitating their cooperation.

Criminal organizations that often gather to deal with local realities, satisfying specific needs, were suddenly enabled, thanks to globalization processes, to operate beyond national borders, taking advantage of improved transport capabilities and enjoying higher profits. Thanks to increased economic interconnectedness, easy and rapid communications and the development of new technologies, smuggling definitely encounters fewer obstacles and, thanks to growing economic inequalities and to different systems of taxation, its profitability grew as well.

The reduced capacity of states to properly regulate transnational activities and control their borders, led to an augmented, unchecked flow of smuggled goods, but also of human beings. Such increased possibilities for transnational crime thus represent the dark side of globalization. The difficulty in giving an exhaustive definition of organized crime, the continuously changing nature of its patterns and of the smuggling routes it runs, and the impossibility of collecting enough objective data, make this activity extremely hard to be firmly grasped and contained.

It is important to consider Balkan-based organized crime as fluid networks of people, existing for a period of time, with the aim of committing crimes of a nature which changes following exogenous opportunities, or responding to concrete necessities, in order to obtain a financial or other material benefit.

ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

The Balkan Criminal Axis

Despite the well-known violent and bloody past of the region, and a bad reputation that is hard to change, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) surprisingly defined the Balkan region as “one of the safest in Europe,” which reports relatively low rates of “conventional crime,” such as murder, rape, assault or robbery.

Although average income in the Balkans are lower than in Western Europe, and a certain income inequality persists, alongside high rates of unemployment, the Balkans are today relatively well-developed, their populations do not face grinding poverty and education levels are high.

The region is, thus, not affected by many of the factors traditionally associated with rising crime. Its demographic situation, characterized by a relatively old population, and by low fertility rates in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, reduces the risk of street crimes and violence, ordinarily committed by young people.

As urban areas host by nature higher crime rates than rural areas, the lesser level of urbanization in the region, compared to Western Europe, is an advantage in terms of criminality rates.

Moreover, the criminal justice system appears to be well equipped, to a certain extent thanks to the communist heritage which left behind a considerable security coverage, and a relatively efficient police system. Yet, Europol identified the “South East hub” as the European area in which organized crime activities have most remarkably increased in recent years.

ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

Whilst not famous worldwide in comparison to the Russian or Italian Mafia, this “Balkan axis”, as it is termed by the Europol in a report dating to 2011, silently became one of the most important epicentres of organized crime and one of the main trafficking routes into the European Union (EU), to the point that it is simply impossible for one interested in ‘organised crime’ and illegal markets to ignore the area of the Balkans, according to many reputed researchers in international relations and criminology.

Due to increased trafficking through the Black Sea, a never-ending demand for illegal commodities in the EU and the increase in the number of illegal migrants coming from Greece, the region has recently seen a significant expansion in several criminal activities. To the old and never outdated trafficking in weapons, women, and heroin, for which the region holds a sad record, trafficking in cocaine and migrants have been added more recently. As the Balkans are the main geo-economic hub linking the EU, the Middle East, Turkey and Russia, the expansion of organized criminal activities should pose a serious concern to the whole of Europe.

The discrepancy between a seemingly well-developed and safe region, the Western image of turbulent Balkans and the growth of the Balkan criminal axis appears substantial, allowing the assumption that “organized crime in South East Europe must be 'organised crime of a very special type'” (quoted from a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Report from 2008).

THE ROOT CAUSES OF ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

Introduction

Invasions, centuries of foreign rule, the demise of empires, conflicts, migrations, the birth and breakup of Yugoslavia, surrounded by communist dictatorships, contributed to the creation of a complex ethnographic mosaic in the region, which offered a fertile ground to the explosion of violence and to transnational organized crime. To some authors, the root causes of organized crime in the Balkans go back to the remote past of the region: to the famous researcher Hozic, “since the days of the Ottoman rulers, informal and illicit trade networks have paralleled legitimate commerce while Hupchick (another researcher, this time with a very strange surname) considers banditry as endemic in the region, already undermining the stability of the Ottoman Empire.

Other authors identify the socialist period as the era during which regional organized crime emerged. To Brady (finally a normal name), the links established between security sectors and criminal groups at the times of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1992) mark the beginning of the unstoppable growth of organized crime.

The geostrategic position of the non-aligned Yugoslavia, in the middle between NATO and Warsaw Pact countries, acted as an incentive to smuggling activities and to the creation of black markets. Black markets started to flourish throughout the entire region, often with the tacit approval, if not the direct involvement, of party officials, while smuggling became the only way to meet the needs of consumers which the official economy could not satisfy. If foreign dominations, years of communist rule, dictatorships, economic backwardness and even a favourable geographic position created good conditions for organized crime to flourish, two major historical events have been crucial for its growth and expansion throughout the entire region: the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and the shady political and economic transition which followed.

THE ROOT CAUSES OF ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

Focusing on these two events, the next sections show how they gave the fundamental boost to the contemporary expansion of organized crime in the Balkans.

The Yugoslav Wars

The Yugoslav wars have, only recently, started to be looked at in relation to organized crime. The wars which opposed Slovenes, Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks during the 1990s, the same ethnic groups who had been peacefully living together for more than fifty years, marked the very same origin of Balkan organized crime. The breakup of Yugoslavia, the economic blockades, the legal vacuum and the difficult post war reconstruction, indeed, created favourable conditions for organized crime to bloom throughout the Balkans. The simple fact that these wars were intrastate wars, as most contemporary conflicts, entailed a criminalized component: without the possibility of counting on trained armies, and with limited financial resources, intrastate fighters rely on looting, smuggling or on making profits on humanitarian aid.

The Post-Yugoslavia Transition

The fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Yugoslav wars, marked the failure of the economic and political system of Eastern Europe, and the triumph of the Western liberal values and capitalist system. The Balkans, as the other former socialist countries, embarked, then, on a complex economic and political transition toward liberalization and democracy.

THE ROOT CAUSES OF ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

If the threat posed by criminal organizations to a state is directly proportional to its vulnerability, states in transition are weak and easily permeable by definition. While experiencing high inflation, a significant fall in GDP, financial uncertainty and massive unemployment, common to all the countries in transition, the Balkans had also to recover from years of conflicts and to deal with the expansion of an already strong parallel criminal system.

In conclusion, the main beneficiaries of the economic and social transformations following the collapse of communism have been precisely the criminal groups, to the point that instead of a functioning democracy, the authoritarianism of the communist rule was replaced by the authoritarianism of organized crime.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

Introduction

Once the Yugoslav wars had come to an end, new borders had been drawn, and a democratic political system and a liberal economy had been established, at least on paper, governments had to face the increased power and influence of criminal groups all over the region. By the end of the 2000s, when governments had changed at least once all over the region (with the exception of Montenegro), all the countries had engaged in the fight against organized crime and corruption.

To various extents and more or less successfully, most of them have recently also made improvements in the field of security, in their legislative frameworks and law enforcement. More importantly, they have also acknowledged that national responses are far from sufficient to combat the type of organized crime well-rooted in the region.

Therefore, at the threshold of the 2000s, regional and international initiatives started to flourish, while cooperation among the Balkan countries considerably increased. The next sections present and briefly analyze, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, the most important regional and international initiatives implemented in recent years with the aim of fighting organized crime in the Balkan region.

Given the transnational nature of organized crime in this region, regional initiatives to fight organized crime assume critical importance. As previously stated, in the last decades several initiatives of regional cooperation, often initiated and supported by external actors, have been implemented.

If, on the one hand, regional cooperation led to improvements in economic and social development, infrastructure and energy, justice and home affairs, security cooperation and building human capital, considerable efforts have still to be made to properly implement effective regional strategies.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

The Southeast European Co-operation Initiative (SECI)

Among regional cooperation initiatives, the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) has been one of the most active in the field. Initiated in 1996 by the USA as a support to the implementation of the Dayton Accords, its main objective was the development of a sustainable economic strategy in the region.

Cooperation in the field of combating trans-border crime was an essential part of its activities aiming at regulating the normal functioning of cross-border cooperation and in 2000, a Regional Center for Combating Trans-Border Criminality was established in Bucharest. Recognized as the main actor in the region in the fight of trans-border crime, the center closely collaborated with the most important international organizations devoted to the same cause (INTERPOL, EUROPOL, OSCE, etc.).

After ten years of activity, the SECI had substantially contributed to increase the awareness of practitioners and policy-makers on the challenges to face in trans-border investigations and to strengthen the regional identity of South-Eastern Europe through the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative of 2008.

After having provided the region with a certain stabilization and having obtained the support of international organizations and actors, in 2011, the SECI transformed into the Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre (SELEC), whose primary objective is exactly to support the coordination among South-Eastern European countries in preventing and combating all forms of crime, including transnational, serious and organized crime.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

The Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre

After ten years of activity, the SECI had substantially contributed to increase the awareness of practitioners and policy-makers on the challenges to face in trans-border investigations and to strengthen the regional identity of South-Eastern Europe through the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative of 2008.

To facilitate and better organize the investigations, exchange of information and research activities, till date, eight task forces have been created by the SELEC.

The eight taskforces of the Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre are–

- Task Force Mirage on Countering Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration
- Anti-Drug Trafficking Task Force
- Financial and Computer Crime Task Force
- Anti-Fraud and Anti-Smuggling Task Force
- Anti-Terrorism Task Force
- Container Security Task Force
- Stolen Vehicles Task Force
- Environment and Nature Related Crimes Task Force

The SELEC is one of the most cost-effective investments and the best governmental response in exchanging criminal intelligence, which has been successful in speeding up investigation processes and the exchange of information among participant countries.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

South East European Co-operation Process

Launched on Bulgaria's initiatives, and not on the initiative of international organizations or non-Balkan countries, as the SECI and as it is often the case in the region, the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) is, according to its founder, the most successful initiative in the region. With the aim of bringing a lasting stability in the region, while improving regional cooperation, this initiative, which brings the Balkan countries together with Moldova, Greece and Turkey, has been engaged in the battle against illegal activities since 1996.

While not having achieved considerable progress in major bilateral political issues in the region, the regular meetings involving heads of state and government and foreign ministers from all the participant countries are substantially contributing to improve the political atmosphere and to ease persisting tensions among countries; an outcome which, given the troubled historical past of the region and its heterogeneity, has not to be underestimated.

Observations on Regional Co-operation

Regional cooperation has, in any case, reached important results, illustrated, for instance, by the latest seizing of 62kg of heroin thanks to the cooperation between SELEC, Bulgarian and Turkish police, but several problems, exacerbated by the historical developments of the region, persist.

Efforts of a coordinated regional action, indeed, fail when reaching Kosovo (excluded, for instance, from the SELEC, and which joined the SEECP only in 2014) or Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the two entities, Republika Srpska and the Muslim-Croat Federation, maintain their own police forces 15 operating under different laws.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

Despite increased commitments, substantial gaps in regional cooperation persist, concerning in particular limited capacities of law enforcement agencies, lack of cooperation between agencies and prosecutors, and lack of information exchange without prior request. Shortages of human resources, infrastructure, technical advice, equipment and training are addressed as major, long-standing problems, together with a lack of a comprehensive, long term strategy.

Since organized crime and corruption are listed among the non-military threats with the highest potential of threatening regional security, the Balkan states should cooperate much more closely at a regional level to successfully eradicate the problem. Given the past turbulent history, including continuing changes in borders, significant external influences and different (more or less oppressing) political regimes, the creation of a united, peaceful society, willing to cooperate with each other becomes, without any doubt, much harder.

The European Union

Despite numerous difficulties, the European Union has always actively fostered regional cooperation.

The EU Stabilization and Association Agreement, which has been extended since 2008 to cover the entire region (with the notable exception of Kosovo), served as a fundamental step in bringing closer, and in few cases, admitting the Balkan states to the EU. The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, aiming at strengthening peace, democracy, human rights and economy in the wake of the Yugoslav wars, was replaced by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in 2008.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

According to the RCC, this initiative established itself as “the central cooperation framework in SEE“, and strongly contributed to improving regional cooperation also in the fields of justice and home affairs (including fighting serious and organized crime, activities in the area of migration, asylum and refugees), security cooperation and inclusive growth (including anti-corruption strategies). However, in many cases, agreements on regional cooperation remain purely declaratory, and they are very rarely followed by an exhaustive follow-up.

Recent annual reports of the RCC show that while regional initiatives proliferate, together with the documents and websites listing their importance and specialties, an exhaustive overview of their concrete impacts is still missing.

This situation, together with the fact that much research is now outdated, leads to a major difficulty in understanding and assessing progress made through regional cooperation. However, the willingness of joining the European Union acts as one of the strongest incentives for the countries of South-Eastern Europe to engage in more serious programs and reforms in the field: its “magnet effect” is still widely regarded as having the capacity to change wayward nations into states that follow liberal European norms.

To join the EU, indeed, candidate countries must have a functioning market economy and stable institutions able to guarantee democracy. In the Pre-Accession Pact these countries commit themselves also to instituting central judicial and police bodies which have the task of elaborating the national policy against organized crime, to creating national contact points dedicated to information exchange on organized crime issues, and to structuring a network of the magistrates entrusted with the fight against organized crime.

Despite more or less satisfactory performances, the fact that Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia are today part of the Union, and that Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia are candidate countries, shows that, since the end of the 1990s, undeniable progress has been made all over the region in these areas.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

The Western Balkans, however, and in particular Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, proved to be the slowest countries in their recovering, remaining stuck in a limbo in which they are neither truly in, nor truly outside of Europe

The stabilization of these countries, which after the enlargement became even closer neighbours, remains, thus, a priority for the EU, which can be achieved only if these countries and the EU itself work closely together to “address the criminal threats to the stabilization and development of the region, as to the very security of the EU”.

If the willingness of joining the European Union, thus, unquestionably pushes the countries of the region toward stabilization and a more effective fight against organized crime and corruption, it can, at the same time, open new opportunities for a further expansion of organized crime.

If widened markets and lessened controls on the movements of goods and people bring benefits to national economies, indeed, they similarly benefit both transnational and local organized crime. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, for instance, was supposed to be followed by remarkable improvements in the tackling of organized crime and corruption.

The reality was that, while the governments were raising excise duties to the EU level, as requisite for the accession to the single common market, and alcohol, tobacco and petrol were becoming incredibly expensive, organized crime groups had already turned to the smuggling of these goods. Seven years after their accession, still “few tiny steps forward [and] some big steps back have been made, while systemic corruption, government instability, and mass protests are the defining features of politics in both countries and have been for years.

Although Romania proved to be more effective than Bulgaria in tackling organized crime and corruption, this situation has been delaying the entry of both countries into the Schengen area since 2010.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

Even though the situation of organized crime has always been less severe in Croatia than in other countries of the region, it was only with the death of President Tudjman, who led the country between 1990 and 1999, that more effective reforms started to be adopted.

Despite the disappointing experience of Romania and Bulgaria, and despite the conviction of the former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader for taking multi-million dollars' bribes from foreign companies, Croatia succeeded in joining the EU in 2013.

Not much seemed to have changed right after the accession, since EU-initiated reforms to the rule of law, judiciary, and prosecution of political corruption remained below expectation, and the "three branches of government are held by the same types of crooks". Between 2001 and 2012, illicit financial flows cost Croatia over \$17.5 billion, which led some to argue that the large funds the country was receiving by the EU during the same period should have been suspended until it would engage in a real fight against illicit activities, or that, if this considerable amount could be recovered, today Croatia would not need a foreign loan.

Moreover, according to the latest study commissioned by the European Parliament, corruption throughout Europe is costing €990 billion in GDP terms a year, and, not surprisingly, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania have been elected as the most corrupt countries in the European Union (RAND Europe, 2016).

Like EU accession, the Schengen membership can be a double-edged sword: if, on the one hand, it can increase the national capabilities of the countries in terms of law enforcement and intelligence, on the other hand, it raises again new possibilities for 17 smugglers. The accession of the countries to the free-passport zone of the EU as well as the EU visa exemptions for the Western Balkan states could be, for instance, exploited by Albanian, Turkish and Russian criminals who are looking for more direct access to the European illicit markets.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

Moreover, since the flow of refugees and migrants coming from the Middle East and North Africa via Turkey into Europe does not seem to have significantly decreased, the abolition of custom controls at maritime borders could transform the Black Sea into a new entry channel, and, as a consequence, become a new opportunity for human smugglers. In any case, apart from increased opportunities for criminal gangs, and the doubtful success of the fight against organized crime and corruption of some of the countries of the region, the willingness of becoming an EU member remains one of the biggest catalysts for change.

The EU remains one of the most active external actors in South-Eastern Europe, which today seems to be fully aware of the importance of cooperation in the region, and of the risks organized crime can pose to socio-economic development and stability in its neighbourhood countries. Its increased engagement, together with the fact that the domain of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) has experienced one of the fastest growth in recent years, while traditionally domestic policy ambits such as organized crime, terrorism and immigration are progressively acquiring an external dimension, demonstrate such an awareness.

Nevertheless, the same complexity and fragmentation of the European institutional framework obstructs the creation of a coherent, long-term EU strategy in the field. Fighting a multi-dimensional phenomenon such as organized crime should involve a long term political commitment, resources to be employed and multi-dimensional strategies.

International Initiatives

International initiatives, efforts and actors played and are still playing an equally important role in fighting organized crime in the region. These efforts, which resulted in a series of initiatives, mostly of Western origin, such as the Paris Pact Initiative or UNODC's Regional Programme for South Eastern Europe, seem to have been more promising than the regional and national ones. The huge number of initiatives and programmes dealing with the fighting against organized crime and corruption in this region shows, once again, the complexity of the problem, the links between the security of this region and the rest of Europe, underestimated in the past, and the impossibility of solving it with unilateral solutions.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

The main international instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime is the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime adopted in 2000. When ratifying this convention, States commit themselves to adopting a series of measures against transnational organized crime.

The fact that all the countries of the region (with the exception, once again, of Kosovo) have ratified this instrument between 2001 and 2005, demonstrates their recognition of the seriousness of the problem and of the necessity to deal with it on an international and cooperative level.

Nevertheless, the absence of Kosovo's signature of the Convention, and its exclusion from international police organizations related to security issues such as INTERPOL, EUROPOL, SECI, and FRONTEX remain major obstacles in the tackling of the problem at both regional and international levels. In 2009, UNODC established a Regional Programme for South Eastern Europe.

Closely aligned with the EU, this programme aims at providing the countries of the region with expertise, technical tools and services to counter organized crime, drugs and terrorism, while contributing to the implementation of the EU acquis. Positive results have been achieved, going from improved skills and infrastructures for border police, which resulted in an increased quantity of drug seized in the region, to an augmented cooperation between judicial authorities, or to some of the countries joining the European Union. Nevertheless, changes in the region, inadequate funding from donors and limited resources from UNODC, made the actions too fragmented, and the results remained below target.

A special focus on fighting organized crime along the Balkan Route was then included in the Paris Pact Initiative (PPI), officially launched in 2003. With the ambitious aim of countering the trafficking in opiates originating from Afghanistan, this initiative involves today more than 70 countries and international organizations. Bringing together partners who would not engage with each other elsewhere, the PPI is one of the most important partnerships in the fight against illicit trafficking in opiates.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

By creating tools which facilitate the exchange of information among partner countries and by establishing platforms for cooperation and intelligence sharing, and an international forum for discussion, this initiative has already reached important objectives, also illustrated by the fact that the total area under poppy cultivation in Afghanistan decreased by 19% in 2015, and that opium cultivation decreased in most Afghan provinces, according to both the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime as well as the Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics.

Despite the increased commitment and awareness of the partner countries, and despite the decrease in cultivation reached last year, the problem of trafficking in opiates from Afghanistan has however been worsening since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, showing that military initiatives do not always lead to the expected results. As opium was one of the biggest sources of income for warlords and insurgent groups, eradicating its production was a key aspect of NATO's plan for defeating the Taliban regime, and a key argument in the decision of joining the invasion of the country taken by the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, determined to destroy the production of the same heroin which was killing so many young British people. Yet, opium cultivation kept increasing, reaching the highest levels in 2007, 2013 and hitting a new record in 2014 (*oops*).

The fact that the opium cultivation was all but eradicated, that terrorist groups are still earning huge profits through it, while young Europeans are still dying from heroin, reveals that the destruction brought by military interventions can foster rather than stop organized crime, leading exactly to the opposite of the desired effect. A similar situation was experienced by Kosovo, which is therefore called "the black hole of Europe" as well as "the new Colombia of Europe".

In 1999, while organizing the air campaign which would later be conducted against Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo, NATO trained the KLA gangs of Kosovo (listed as a terrorist organization by the US) to manage the bombing from the ground. This action hugely increased their military and financial power, transforming the KLA into the "absolute master of Kosovo" and the Kosovo mafia into one of the leading criminal organizations in the world.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

An analysis of the situation of the country one year after the NATO bombing and the deployment of the NATO mission KFOR in Kosovo highlights how the objective of restoring peace was far from achieved¹⁹. On the contrary, the alliance seemed to have further lost control of the power the KLA was seizing: supposed to be disarmed and disbanded after the cease fire, it became, instead, better organized and certainly better armed than ever before.

Not only military interventions, but the mere presence of international actors can lead to, often unintended, side effects which can foster organized crime activities rather than contribute to the stabilization of the countries.

After the end of the war, the flocking of rich international actors into Bosnia and Herzegovina, from trainers, to legal advisers and private contractors, and of soldiers from the NATO Stabilization Force (SFOR), was accompanied by a considerable increase of women trafficked into the country, while brothels started to flourish. The situation started to seriously affect the reconstruction of the war-torn country to the point that a United Nations Report from 2004 noted that “peacekeepers have come to be seen as part of the problem in trafficking, rather than part of the solution“.

Despite concerns and international embarrassment, the same situation repeated itself in Iraq and Afghanistan in the following decades, when the increase in the presence of international soldiers was followed by a sharp increase in the demand for prostitution.

Altogether, the analysis shows that although interventions and aid coming from international organizations are often considered as the best way to help countries in need, and have indeed often succeeded in doing so, they can also lead to unwanted and unexpected side-effects.

On the one hand, actions of external, neutral, actors can help in creating forums for mediation, help opposite factions to reach solutions, foster stabilization and democracy; on the other hand, the presence of rich, international actors, or their military actions, can, and in most of the cases did, provide new opportunities for organized crime, an outcome which should not be underestimated.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

When intervening in a complex context, with a turbulent history, with high rates of corruption, international actors are well-advised to better analyse the local history and possible implications, especially of a military intervention, while regularly monitoring the effects of their actions.

Future Prospects

In the last decades, the simultaneous, active involvement of the European Commission, of regional actors and international organizations, together with the increased commitment of the countries of the region, has been successful in helping the South Eastern European countries (to various extents) to reach the demanded standards in terms of fighting organized crime and to establish (more or less) functioning and stable institutions.

Nevertheless, organized criminal groups still cooperate at regional and international levels much more efficiently than the governments and international organizations which are trying to suppress them. Despite reports, concerns of governments and international organizations, an increased awareness and a more recently gained global attention the Balkan Route remains a fundamental channel in the global system of supply and demand of illegal goods, while the Balkan criminal organizations are expanding their activities.

Organized crime being a long-standing problem, the inability of national governments and international bodies to find an effective solution appears even more striking.

Having acknowledged the complexity of the causes and the depth of the roots which led to the current expansion of organized crime in the region, it seems clear that the responses to confront the problem have to be multiple, strong, and to involve different actors.

Given the increased interconnection among organized crime groups, which now reach global levels, the response of law enforcement officials and policy-makers should become more and more globalized as well. If local and regional efforts are fundamental, indeed, the need for a coordinated approach at European level and even internationally is indispensable.

FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

Since organized crime thrives on corruption which is still endemic in the region, the European Union should start to rely not only on the political elites of the region, but also on a Balkan civil society which seems to have awakened in recent years.

In conclusion, to effectively tackle the threat of organized crime, a combined national, regional, and international strategy involving policy-makers, international organizations and civil society should be adopted. As suggested by one of the organizers of a workshop of Western-European and Balkan activists aiming at coordinating their anti-trafficking efforts, then, “we must become as coordinated, flexible, and effective as the traffickers“

FOOTNOTE ON OBSERVATIONS ON ORGANIZED CRIME

Having survived the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, communist dictators, the changing of political and economic systems and the global economic crisis, organized crime seems to be the most enduring “institution“ in the Balkans. The Balkan Route and the criminal groups operating throughout it proved to be highly flexible and promptly adaptable to changing conditions, to the point that today organized criminals are able to exploit not only the roads crossing the region in all directions, but they are also increasingly controlling ports and sea routes, performing a proper global role.

Due to the liberalization of the 1990s, but also to the increased economic interconnectedness, and improvements in communications, transport and technologies brought about by globalization, criminal organizations created to satisfy local demands were suddenly transformed into transnational criminal corporations.

If, to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the last decade has been a lost one for the entire region, which has not been able to implement structural reforms and not even to return to the GDP level it had attained prior to the fall of socialism, the same cannot be said of its criminalized side, which, during the same period, has assumed a central role for organized criminal activities in the rest of Europe.

While theories of a crime-terror continuum are gaining ground, a future hypothetical convergence between transnational organized crime, corruption and terrorism appears as a possible, frightening scenario in the Balkans, where at least two of the phenomena are already deeply-rooted.

Since alleged contacts between AQ (Al-Qaeda) members, Bosnian criminals and KLA members in the smuggling of heroin seem to have already been established, the risk that the same Balkan Route crossed by drugs and people could become a corridor for the access of terrorists to the heart of Europe becomes a realistic possibility.

FOOTNOTE ON OBSERVATIONS ON ORGANIZED CRIME

Given the current strength of organized crime in this region, and the possible negative prospects for the future, the necessity of finding effective solutions appears not only fundamental but also urgent. In light of this analysis, the envisaged strategies should cautiously take into consideration the different, interlinked, factors laying behind the growth of organized crime.

Due to its geographic position, the region found itself in the middle of huge powers and markets, which, combined with an internal geographic environment which did not provide many stimuli to economic development, contributed to the creation of smuggling channels and black markets generating much higher profits than legal exchanges.

Historical developments offered, then, ideal conditions for organized crime to bloom, to the point that the existence of organised crime in the Balkans is generally understood as a rational response to a very specific set of challenging historic circumstances.

Corruption and harsh economic conditions inherited by the socialist period fostered the creation of trans-national smuggling channels, in many cases necessary to the survival of the population, in which political leaders and security sectors were, often, directly involved. While intrastate armed conflicts are often intertwined with criminality, the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s were completely intertwined with crime. Released prisoners, criminals and paramilitaries enormously enriched themselves through smuggling and looting, while fighting a war which was losing its ideological foundations.

International interventions also played a part in the growth of Balkan-based organized crime: the sanctions and arms embargo lifted during the conflicts were immediately and easily violated by a proliferation of smuggling channels; the reassuring presence of soldiers in post-conflict countries was paralleled by a worrying increase in the number of women trafficked into the same countries and military interventions ended up increasing the power of local mafia gangs.

FOOTNOTE ON OBSERVATIONS ON ORGANIZED CRIME

After the Balkan wars, the politicians who kept governing the countries at the end of the 1990s had strong links with criminals, who often gained prominent positions. Having fought national wars, unpunished criminals became national heroes, which would have dangerous effects on the rule of law and democratic governance of states in the years to come.

A poorly regulated economic transition left room for illegal transactions, black markets and illicit profits. While the current, massive improvements in technology, communications, and transport facilitated the expansion of the activities and connections of local criminal groups, the global economic crisis and the turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa provided new opportunities.

Facing the arrivals of huge migration flows to the Balkan states, and a parallel implementation of increasingly restrictive migration policies by both Balkan and European States, organized criminal groups found, again, ways of escaping the laws, while providing migrants and refugees with goods and services they were desperately looking for. Only by taking into consideration all these factors simultaneously, the embeddedness, depth and multi-dimensional origins of organized crime in the region will be understood, together with the difficulty of eradicating such a phenomenon today.

Although national, regional, European and international initiatives are multiplying, and progress has been made in all the Balkan countries, organized criminal groups still appear more flexible, adaptable and organized than efforts to counteract them. This implies that the Balkans remain today, to different degrees, still of immense insecurity and instability.

The crises posed by organized crime in Europe, in particular, that of drug trafficking, human trafficking, undermining of the rule of law, violence, and the proliferation of illegal arms trade must be addressed by the Council of Europe to ensure a stable and more peaceful Europe.

THE BALKAN CARTEL

Introduction

The Balkan Drug Cartel is an international drug trafficking syndicate run by a core group of notorious gangsters who once controlled Kings Cross' Golden Mile but have now formed offshore bases in Montenegro, Spain and Holland to move the drugs, guns and cash in hand. Identified as the "Kingpin" (head) of the Balkan drug cartel is Vaso Ulic, 55-year-old ethnic Albanian who migrated to Australia in 1979. Within a few years of arriving in Australia, Ulic was working as a small-time foot soldier running drugs and cash along the infamous Golden Mile of Kings Cross. His rapid rise to power, now places him as a kingpin of an organization so big, very few drug consignments enter Australia without his knowledge or permission. Ulic personally has been connected to an estimated six tonnes of MDMA and hundreds of kilos of heroin of Balkan-sponsored drugs entering Australia each year.

Background

The history of the Balkan Drug Cartel ties back to the upheaval during the Yugoslav break-up (1991-2001) because of the sanctions that led to hyperinflation - which, in turn, turned the "gangs" or criminal groups into professional OCGs. It started out as an anticipated response against economic hardships but has since flourished in its trades and sustained itself into the post-economic failure world.

It began with the smuggling of cigarettes, then various fuels; before Serbian-Montenegrin OCGs moved onto bigger and better things - heroin from Afghanistan to Turkey (See: Reverse Balkan Route). Then, Miloš "Tula" Maksimović constructed trucking empires in the late 1990s.

Case Study

In the biggest firearms operation ever coordinated by INTERPOL, authorities in Central and South America have made 14,260 arrests and seized some 8,263 illicit firearms, as well as 305,000 rounds of ammunition. With illicit firearms used by criminals to commit armed robberies and murder, they are also closely associated with the proliferation of a wide range of other crimes using the same trafficking routes.

THE MOCRO MAFIA

The Mocro Maffia (an extremely unstable alliance between various Dutch-Moroccan OCGs, OMGs and other such related crime groups) operates mainly out of the Netherlands and Belgium. It conducts various violent activities akin to terrorism in the outskirts of Amsterdam and Rotterdam; especially the Antwerp and Rotterdam ports. In fact, “pink cocaine” (*tusi/tusibi* - a pink-dyed powder containing an unpredictable mix of ketamine, MDMA, and other substances like meth or caffeine. Despite its name, it rarely contains cocaine and often functions as a hallucinogenic stimulant or depressant) was first marketed for parties and OCGs by the Mocro-Maffia.

While the network has historically operated in the Netherlands and Belgium, recent incidents in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) raised discussion about a possible expansion into Germany. This phenomenon raises important questions about the spread of transnational organised crime (TOC), the increasing scale of drug trafficking across Europe, and the effectiveness of law enforcement in addressing these issues.

Encrypted messaging plays a fundamental role in the operations of the ‘Mocro-Mafia’:

It is a highly violent gang, (having executed more than 200 fellow members of OCGs since 2015) has following key arrests but reformed using digital anonymity, symbolizing the digitization and criminal enterprise of the problem.

A major breakthrough for law enforcement came with the dismantling of the encrypted communication platform EncroChat. This operation enabled authorities to access over 20 million messages, providing crucial evidence in investigations related to drug trafficking, money laundering, and customs corruption (Andringa, 2020).

The operation began in 2020 with a joint investigation team formed by French and Dutch authorities, supported by Eurojust and Europol. Investigators intercepted over 115 million messages exchanged by approximately 60,000 users, leading to the arrest of 6,558 individuals globally, including 197 high-value targets (Europol, 2023). In addition, nearly 900 million Euro in criminal assets were seized or frozen. The gathered intelligence played a critical role in disrupting planned violent attacks, murder attempts, corruption, and major drug trafficking activities (Europol, 2023).

THE MOCRO MAFIA

After secretly monitoring communications for more than two months, the police conducted large-scale raids involving approximately 1,000 officers across multiple European countries. These raids resulted in the seizure of drugs, firearms, vehicles, and illicit funds. The information retrieved from EncroChat was vital for uncovering a wide range of criminal activities, including the identification of a corrupt police officer, cocaine laundering operations, and the planning of a torture chamber.

This unprecedented access significantly disrupted several criminal operations across Europe, since the platform was widely used by various criminal networks operating across borders.

AN EXTREMELY DIMUNITIVELY BRIEF OVERVIEW ON ITALIAN MAFIAS

In Italy, 'mafia' is the term used since the 1860s to describe the widespread manifestations of organised crime in the southern regions of the country. With different forms and intensity, Italy's three main criminal associations – the Sicilian mafia, the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta and the Campanian camorra – have intertwined their criminal history with the wider one of Italian social, political and economic development.

Since 1982, a specific legal category exists in Italian law ('the offence of mafia-type criminal association'), which is frequently applied in the investigations against the Sicilian mafia, the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta and the Campanian camorra. In the 1980s, even the Italian Parliamentary Investigative Committee on the Mafia (operating in the Italian Parliament since 1962) changed its name to Parliamentary Investigative Committee into the Phenomenon of the Mafia in Sicily and Other Similar Criminal Associations. And, again, the Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, the anti-mafia central investigating office created in 1991 to coordinate anti-mafia investigations, presents bi-annual reports to the Parliament in which the Sicilian mafia, the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta and the Campanian camorra are all included in the category 'Organised Crime of Mafia Type'.

The term 'Mafia' in the context of Italy, can be defined as:

“a criminal and delinquent structure, or better, an aggregate of criminal organisations having a particular ‘political skill’ i.e. the ability to take root in a territory, control vast economic resources, exercise forms of control over increasing parts of local society by imposing itself with the use of a strong military apparatus”

In other words, the mafia is a type of organised crime with 'something extra', which resides in its organisational dimension – formal and secret, independent and pre-dating the management of the single activities and illicit enterprises, and which operates as a primary element of internal identification and of defence against the outside world.

AN EXTREMELY DIMUNITIVELY BRIEF OVERVIEW ON ITALIAN MAFIAS

The organisation-extortion-violence triad really describes the structure, methods and activities of the mafia since its origins. And this triad is not exclusively typical of the Sicilian mafia, but also characterises the Calabrian and Campanian mafia phenomena. In Naples, for example, extortion is the camorristi's main activity, and is imposed on all, licit and illicit, economic businesses. Similarly, the first criminal cases against members of the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta at the end of the nineteenth century confirm the extraordinary relevance of extortion, the illicit crime that symbolises mafia control over local communities.

Another common element is the presence of initiation rituals and of a peculiar inner reality. Mafiosi are made, not born, (they should hire me as a thriller scriptwriter) and the presence of this symbolic and value-linked dimension is not an invention of those who are collaborating with judicial authorities (the so-called pentiti, literally 'repentants'), nor is it an element of folklore, but a very strong source of identification within the organisation itself. In this case as well, the historical continuity is very strong.

The initiation ritual (the presentation of the 'candidate' in front of the assembly of mafiosi; the swearing of an oath while holding a holy image; the explanation of the rules) was for the first time described to contemporary law enforcement officers by Tommaso Buscetta (rhymes with tomato bruschetta), member of a Palermitan family of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra who was the main witness during the maxi-processo (maxi-trial) held in Palermo against the Sicilian Cosa Nostra in 1986 and 1987.

AN EXTREMELY DIMUNITIVELY BRIEF OVERVIEW ON ITALIAN MAFIAS

However, a similar description may be found in the 1876 confession of Salvatore D'Amico, a mafioso of the Stoppagliari group in Monreale and in several other instances of mafia history. This ritual is present also in the history of the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta, or Onorata Società (Honoured Society), where it assumes the form of a schematic series of questions and answers at first learned by heart and then orally transmitted.

Through their convicted members, nineteenth-century mafia associations took these initiation rites over from the sects of the Carbonari and Freemasons that were widespread in southern Italy regions in the first half of the nineteenth century. Before Italy's unification in 1861, in fact, both political opponents and the first mafiosi long prison terms were handed down in Palermo and particularly in Naples.

The initiation rite strengthens the organisation cohesion, being a rite of passage through which the new mafioso undergoes a process of 're-socialisation' within the organisation and underwrites a 'status contract', subordinating to the mafia group all his previous allegiances.

Thanks to this 'ritualised personal relationship', the bond between the mafioso and the mafia group assumes the outlines of a 'not entirely institutionalised political community', which is nevertheless capable of providing itself with norms, such as the obligation to tell the truth, the duty of mutual assistance and the respect of secrecy. The importance of the ritual is confirmed by its persistence through the decades and by its transposition into social contexts different from the original ones.

In Sicily, several conditions favoured the development of the mafia phenomenon in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1812, the Sicilian Parliament abolished the feudal system, a decision confirmed by the Bourbon rulers during the Restoration, and a model of census monarchy (i.e. a system in which political rights were based on the income taxes paid) was established in Sicily for the first time.

AN EXTREMELY DIMUNITIVELY BRIEF OVERVIEW ON ITALIAN MAFIAS

As a result of these changes, identities and social and juridical hierarchies were redefined and conflicts split local communities. Clashes did not merely set aristocrats against bourgeoisie, but involved different patron-client groups, the so-called 'clientele' or partiti. The political struggle and social tensions resulting from this embryonic process of modernisation were not resolved by the political dialectic or market forces but rather outside the framework of legality.

In Sicily, in other words, there were no hegemonic social classes able to guide social processes and interact with political institutions. In the course of what has been called a 'violent modernisation', 'violent entrepreneurs' (imprenditori della violenza) came to play an important and often decisive role, usually composing networks that impinged upon a wide range of social groups.

Illegal violence was resorted to by a plurality of social players: the so-called 'parties' (partiti), namely factions struggling for the control of local administrations; social climbers and nouveaux riches, who were usually of peasant extraction and controlled the break-up of large agricultural estates; as well as bandits or people of very humble origins, who used violence as an alternative means of climbing the social ladder.

These violent groups and individuals organised themselves on the basis of familiar and personal solidarities, often tracing back to the feudal period. Many of these 'violent entrepreneurs', in fact, came from the old feudal landowners' armed groups. Although formally disbanded after 1812, these groups kept on roaming the Sicilian countryside committing crimes such as cattle rustling, theft, and kidnapping. At the same time, they displayed a very marked interest in politics, creating alliances for control of local administrations. Furthermore, they established protective agreements with representatives of higher social strata, both with landowners (who often resold stolen goods) and public authorities (mayors and judges). The latter often occupied the highest positions in the violent entrepreneurs' networks of support and protection, which enabled their gangs to operate freely and guaranteed them impunity.

AN EXTREMELY DIMUNITIVELY BRIEF OVERVIEW ON ITALIAN MAFIAS

This socially widespread violence – the real defining characteristic of nineteenth century Sicilian society – had an organisational framework since its beginning. At least some of the criminal networks developed a hierarchical internal structure. As the official Puoti from Carleone put it in 1846, there are the ‘organisers’ who ‘work together, prepare the plans, supervise the operations, establish the objectives and choose the operatives, hide the booty, keep the animals on their own land’; the ‘mediators’ who transmit the orders to the lower ranks and ‘negotiate and deal with the courts, the island judges, the public officials and the prisons in order to keep intact all the strands of the black web of destruction’; and finally, the ‘operatives’, the criminal ‘labourers’.

This is, thus, a violence systematically enforced to accumulate resources. For example, in the centre of Sicily an organisation, the Sacra Unione (Holy Union), operated since the 1820s in the villages of Mazzarino, Aidone, Barrafranca, Mussomeli, Delia and Butera, comprising 38 people, mainly campieri (herdsmen) and gabelotti (lease-holders), but also including two priests. The network of collusive relationships was very wide, including even the judge of Mazzarino and several local politicians.

Possibly having similar cases in mind, in 1838 the Bourbon official, Pietro Calà Ulloa, wrote a report to the Minister of Justice of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. This report is considered the first precise description of a mafia cosca (group, i.e. mafia family):

“There are in a lot of villages unions or brotherhoods, kinds of sects that are called parties, without colour or political aim, without meeting-places, without any other link than the dependence on a leader, who may be a landowner here, or an archpriest there. A common fund serves various needs: to get an official dismissed, to defend him, to protect a witness, to accuse an innocent. There are so many kinds of little governments in the government. The lack of police has multiplied the number of crimes! People have come to a tacit agreement with the criminals. As soon as a theft occurs, intermediaries come out to offer transactions to recover the stolen goods. The number of such agreements is never-ending. So a lot of landowners thought it would be better to become oppressors rather than the oppressed, and they joined the parties. Many important officials covered them with an impenetrable aegis [...] Sometimes the funds are held in common with other provinces in order to commit thefts and to deal in stolen animals between one province and another.”

AN EXTREMELY DIMUNITIVELY BRIEF OVERVIEW ON ITALIAN MAFIAS

These 'Violent entrepreneurs' also played a significant political role during the revolutionary crises which affected Sicily in the first half of the nineteenth century up to Italy's unification in 1860. In particular, during the 1848 revolution, violent gangs and their leaders (Giuseppe Scordato and Salvatore 'Turi' Miceli), officially under the authority of the Provisional Committee, played an autonomous role in the political vacuum resulting from the fall of the Bourbon government that revolutionary authorities could not completely fill.

Scordato and Miceli's gangs, in particular, enjoyed ample freedom to resolve conflicts, to take revenge against the Bourbon police, to free their comrades from jail and to carry out illegal actions for gain. There was, in effect, a sort of osmotic process between the path of political mobilisation and growth of Sicilian society and the experiences of organised violence: an osmosis which was centred upon the development of initiation rites.

After the 1848 revolution, in concomitance with the harshest period of Bourbon repression, the early violent networks became quiescent. They often operated at the service of the landowners and the rich bourgeoisie, keeping an eye on their lands. However, they did not give up their illicit activities although they did forget their modernity and desire for autonomy, which would re-emerge during Giuseppe Garibaldi's expedition for the unification of Italy in 1860.

The spread of the new unitary political and administrative system was fraught with problems and difficulties in Sicily right from the beginning. The new political system (a parliamentary monarchy) allowed greater political freedom, the power of local administrations increased (as they became responsible for tax collection, public works tenders and the control of electoral lists), but the new state's social legitimacy remained very low and its relationship with the Sicilian ruling class was difficult. The peculiarities of the Sicilian society were a real puzzle for most public officials of the Kingdom ruled by the House of Savoy.

AN EXTREMELY DIMUNITIVELY BRIEF OVERVIEW ON ITALIAN MAFIAS

The problem of public order remained insoluble (in 1861 alone there were 200 murders in Palermo, most of which went unpunished), and the local ruling class had no qualms about continuing to cultivate relationships and links with 'violent entrepreneurs', with the aim of gaining power and wealth.

In other words, the Italian state, especially in Sicily, was unable to establish a monopoly of force, to guarantee the security of its citizens, to have the rules of free trade respected – and all these functions were instead carried out by violent networks.

In 'unified' Sicily these networks consolidated their position by taking advantage of precisely the tensions between central institutions and local society, between national and local interests. It was as if the process leading to unification had given a further impetus to the 'violent modernisation' begun in preceding decades, thus paving the way for the process of 'democratisation of violence'.

Proof of collusive agreements between state authorities and mafiosi emerge clearly from documents dating to the mid-nineteenth century. As early as 1861, Diomede Pantaleoni, a physician from Macerata sent to inspect Sicily by the then Prime Minister, Bettino Ricasoli, criticised the frequent habit of state officials of turning to members of violent associations for help:

“As happens in every sectarian association, those who establish ties with this party include people of ill-repute, the violent, the cut-throats, who, causing great scandal and harming the government's reputation, often come to be appointed to government posts on account of the protection, which a sect always gives its followers”

AN EXTREMELY DIMUNITIVELY BRIEF OVERVIEW ON ITALIAN MAFIAS

By the early 1870s, mafia associations succeeded in consolidating their own structure and activities, particularly in western Sicily. This process of consolidation was noted by Giovanni Maurigi, advocate general at the Court of Cassation of Palermo, in the course of a hearing in May 1867:

“Every village near Palermo has two or three bosses with their following [...] They are involved in thefts and componende [illegal mediations]. The authorities have often reached a compromise with the mafia [...] and its members have grown proud and become emboldened by this”

The area with the greatest mafia concentration was the so-called Giardini (‘Gardens’), namely a district of the Palermo province that had the most intense cultivation of citrus fruits. Historical research shows that since the late nineteenth century, mafia groups developed and concentrated in the richest areas with the most lucrative economic activities, controlling the circulation and exchange of goods and products between the city and the countryside.

In the Sicilian hinterland, mafia groups usually drew most of their revenues from large agricultural estates, which were the main economic and productive units of that part of the island. The mafiosi were heavily involved in the struggle for controlling the local land rent, and were campieri (herdsmen) and gabellotti (lease-holders), playing a mediating role between the landowners and the farm labourers

. They were also involved in activities, such as kidnapping and stealing livestock that they often carried out with bandits. In this way, mafiosi established relationships of complicity and protection, guaranteeing bandits’ impunity in exchange for receiving stolen goods and a share of their illicit gains.

AN EXTREMELY DIMUNITIVELY BRIEF OVERVIEW ON ITALIAN MAFIAS

“Despite their frequent partnerships, however, the mafia and banditry remained distinct phenomena: the mafiosi were often, at one and the same time, protectors of the bandits and defenders of property against them. Nonetheless, certain features of banditry (the gang structure, the control of a given territory, contacts with the legitimate authorities) also provide a marked analogy with the mafia.

During the second half of the 1870s the failure of the first phase of the state’s anti-mafia policy also became evident. While the Historical Right was still in power, evidence was collected against members of many criminal associations, above all in the cities. However, most of the mafiosi brought to trial were subsequently acquitted (and so only retained a ‘presumption’ of guilt).

This was also the case for the above-mentioned cosca of Uditore, so much so that its leader, Giammona was able to continue his violent rise in subsequent decades.

Likewise, soon after the ‘Parliamentary Revolution’ of 1876, General Antonio Malusardi conducted a campaign to suppress banditry and, between 15 and 23 August 1877, succeeded in capturing the leaders of the main bandit gangs operating in Sicily.

Malusardi, however, could not dismantle the relationships of collusion and protection that the bandits and mafiosi had with their accomplices in the upper classes of society. In their testimonies, bandits often mentioned members of rich, upwardly mobile families who had maintained constant and profitable relations with them, but were never charged of any crime.

AN EXTREMELY DIMUNITIVELY BRIEF OVERVIEW ON ITALIAN MAFIAS

Since the late nineteenth century the association of the mafia with a criminal organisation has been challenged by the 'Sicilianist' movement with a fair degree of success. This was a cultural and political movement that was promoted by Sicily's ruling strata and developed in order to oppose what was perceived as an indiscriminate criminalisation of all Sicilians by the Italian law enforcement apparatus and Italian public opinion as a whole.

In the eyes of the Sicilianisti, the mafia was merely an attitude, the product of a particularly fierce Sicilian reaction to the foreign powers, which had dominated the island for centuries. An analysis of mafia activities in the years preceding and following the First World War unequivocally disproves the frequent thesis that describes the mafia as a persistent feudal or semi-feudal entity.

By the First World War the 'facinorosi of the middle classes' had become a class that retained very few traditional characteristics, but, on the contrary, was doubly tied to the sites of wealth production and was able to monopolise the channels of communication of the political and social system between the periphery and the centre.

Both before and after the First World War the mafia relationship with the nascent peasant movement was by no means always congruous or peaceful: in this period the socialist propaganda in the countryside became a problem for landowners and gabellotti, many of whom were themselves members of mafia groups.

Nonetheless, the mafia's social role cannot be reduced to that of the strong arm of the dominant classes. The mafiosi pursued their own economic interests in complete autonomy: their social action vis-à-vis the peasant movement (and later on, the fascist movement as well) was inspired by a 'pattern of alternatively resisting change and then moving to exploit change'.

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When the mafiosi were unable to 'manipulate' the ongoing social processes or infiltrate local institutions (cooperatives, movements, political groupings) participating in these processes, they strove to obtain a position of hegemony through the use of violence. When it was not possible, for example, to control the actions of peasant or land-leasing cooperatives, the mafia obstructed them by threatening or murdering peasant leaders.

Given the entrenchment of mafia groups in Sicily's politics and society up to the end of the First World War, the consolidation of the fascist regime represented a real watershed and break with the past.

The evaluation of anti-mafia repression operated by the fascist regime in the 1920s is today still an object of discussion among scholars, but undoubtedly the totalitarian nature of the regime eased the state monopolisation of violence. From 1926 onwards, there was an evident decrease in the number of crimes, and, for the first time, between 1929 and 1939 there was a series of successful prosecutions against members of mafia groups in the district of Palermo, Madonie, Mazzarino, Bagheria and Monreale. Furthermore, the complete suspension of parliamentary democracy deprived mafia networks of that web of protection that had safeguarded them for so long.

In short, one could say that the modernisation without modernity realised (or hoped for) by the fascist regime replaced the 'violent modernisation' typical of the mafia. Despite the severity of fascist repression, mafiosi demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for resistance.

The thesis describing the mafia as dead proved in the 1930s to be a mere propagandistic statement of the regime. In fact, in the second half of that decade police reports presented at the yearly ceremony for the opening of judicial activities provided more than one hint about the persistence of mafia activities: even if the regime forbade the use of the term 'mafia', the phenomenon was still alive.

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Let us now look at the mafia movement after WW2.

In its first decades, republican Italy witnessed a clear strengthening of mafia associations. The post-war growth of Italian organised crime was, however, not a novelty, but an extension of what had happened before the fascist regime and the Second World War. The mafia did not spring up again at the end of the Second World War thanks to Allied support, as has long been thought, but more simply it was soon able to consolidate its own internal structure (membership recruitment was already operational in 1946) and re-establish its relationships with the legitimate authorities.

As much as the year following Italy's unification in 1861, the immediate post-World War II period was characterised by the weakness of the state and the political system: in such an emergency situation the violent know-how of the mafia and its 'social capital' found fertile soil in which to quickly recover the ground lost in the preceding 20 years.

Electoral support and violence (primarily against the leaders of the peasant movement, who in the 1940s and early 1950s were the embodiment of political opposition) became the basis of a veritable fusion between the mafia and the christian democrats.

Even several Catholic researchers have recently recognised the 'transplanting' of Sicilian mafia associations from the old liberal groupings to the new Christian Democratic Party structures, which emerged in Sicily in the second half of the 1940s. Catholic hierarchies also played an important role in this 'transplantation' process: cardinals, bishops and priests openly encouraged believers to support christian democrat politicians and their mafia clients instead of the socialist and communist parties. And, once again, we are faced with the intermingling of the three levels within which the 'mafia problem' developed.

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The establishment of stable and long-lasting ties with political institutions guaranteed mafiosi judicial impunity until the beginning of the 1960s. In their turn, these ties had a clear representation at the cultural level. For over 15 years after the Second World War, public discourse was dominated by views and a language that tended to deny the presence of mafia associations and minimised the criminal (and social) danger of the mafia phenomenon.

Control of territory allowed mafia associations to get engaged in a multiplicity of economic enterprises in which they kept on shifting between resistance and openness to change. Between the 1940s and the 1950s mafiosi helped landowners to successfully sabotage the agrarian reform. Later on, however, mafia modernity expressed itself in the exploitation of the rapid building expansion of many Sicilian towns and in the involvement in tobacco and drug trafficking.

During the 1950s and 1960s there was an expansion of illicit markets in Sicily, and, as a result of this expansion, the 'industry of violence' found new sources of economic gain. The desire to control the drugs market also fostered violent competition between various mafia groups, giving rise to a 'mafia war' between 1961 and 1963.

The real indication of the resurgence of a new form of mafia can be seen by observing their newfound interactions with the Italian democratic offices. This makes the last 30 years of the twentieth century a very important period for the history of the mafia, one worthy of particular and close attention.

As we know, the mafia has always maintained, as a basic approach, its own autonomy vis-à-vis the political system. Precisely due to its secrecy and its capacity to take root in a territory, and thus control a certain number of votes, mafia power has succeeded in offering politicians support in exchange for judicial impunity and economic favours. As a result, since Italy's unification there has been a two-fold mediation between politicians and local communities (a mediation conducted by mafiosi) and between mafiosi and the state (a mediation conducted by politicians).

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Up to the 1960s, politicians and mafiosi largely remained two distinct entities. Very rarely in fact, before that time, we come across politicians who are strictly speaking mafiosi, namely members of criminal associations – Raffaele Palizzolo is, in this case, the exception. In the 1960s, for the first time this distinction became blurred and the relationships between mafiosi and politicians became closer and more intense. As the former Palermitan prosecutor Giuseppe Ayala puts it:

“Nowadays there is the politician who yields to the mafioso, because he obtains electoral support by promising favors. Then there is the politician who is a typical example of a business-like management of politics, who not only gets the mafioso’s votes, but also deals and intrigues with the mafioso, in particular in the assignment of public works contracts; finally, there is the politician who is an organic expression of mafia himself”

et, the influence of the mafia waned quite quickly in the 1970s and 1980s, and its actual militant impact was minimal. The Sicilianist view of the mafia deeply influenced the social scientists carrying out their first field studies in Sicily between the 1960s and the early 1980s for this very reason.

For them the mafia was simply a sub-cultural attitude as well as a form of behaviour and power. That is, they asserted, there were mafiosi, single individuals, who embodied determined sub-cultural values and exercised specific functions within their communities, but no mafia organisation existed as such. (The organizations had gone underground due to low membership, or had ceased to exist as a practical entity).

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This belief was prevalent to such an extent that Famous Researcher (check the references) Pino Arlacchi's successful book, *La mafia imprenditrice* (Mafia Business), opened with the following statement: 'Social research into the question of the mafia has probably now reached the point where we can say that the mafia, as the term is commonly understood, does not exist'.

All three primary Italian mafias feature some form of origination myth, a kind of historical narrative that describes the unique exploits of a group and its leader, usually in epic terms. The 'Ndrangheta has the legend of Osso (bone), Mastrosso (masterbone), and Carcagnosso (heelbone), three legendary Spanish knights who created the three Italian mafias. The legend of the Beati Paoli sect relates to the Cosa Nostra and involves only Palermo. First described in 1909, the story relates the adventures of an order of knights that fought to help the commoners and the poor. When the feudal system was introduced in Sicily, nobles began to exploit their advantages and, according to legend, in 1071 the Beati Paoli were founded to oppose the powers of the nobility and the church.

It is not important whether these stories are true. What is important is that the Italian mafia, like other similar organizations (e.g., the Yakuza, Triads), feel the need for a mythological origin, an aura of justice that surrounds their work—a false one, of course. In addition to their origin myths, the mafias are characterized by complex rituals that accompany the various events that make up organizational life, including initiation, integration, and promotion.

The three mafias have different organizational models. While the Cosa Nostra and the 'Ndrangheta are characterized by a unitary structure and higher-level coordination bodies, the Camorra clans are diverse, with the majority maintaining a fluid, polycentric, and conflictual structure.

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The Cosa Nostra and the Camorra have particularly strong roots in their places of origin, mostly carrying out trading activities when they move into new areas, while the 'Ndrangheta, in addition to its territorial roots, coordinates a multitude of organizational units in Italy, Europe, and elsewhere.

Over time, relationships have existed among the three mafias, who have cooperated in some forms of trafficking, and there have been a limited number of cases of shared membership. No violent conflict has ever broken out among them.

The Italian mafia are long-lived and resilient, evolving organizations that can adapt to environmental changes. Changes may derive from internal dynamics, such as the organizational characteristics of each individual mafia, and from external factors related to changes in legal and illegal economic environments. These factors include opposition from or connivance with the political system, the role of law enforcement agencies (LEAs), and changing social contexts.

Two organizational levels can be distinguished in the mafias. The first is the basic organizational unit, which has different names in Italian mafias, such as the family, the clan, and the 'drina, and is hierarchically based with a boss in command and up to three or four subordinate levels.

The second is the higher-level coordination bodies (HLCBs), organizational units above the families with functions of strategy, coordination, and conflict resolution. HLCBs are not hierarchically controlled, even though the Corleonesi clan dominated the HLCBs of the Cosa Nostra for about 20 years. The presence or absence of HLCBs makes it possible to distinguish two organizational schemas: "clan-based federations" (with HLCBs) and "clan-based" (without HLCBs).

The former have HLCBs, centralized coordination, and more systemic decision-making. The latter lacks HLCBs, favoring distributed power and clan-based decision-making. HLCBs coordinate but do not rule the families.

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Whereas Italy's criminal economy is not significantly larger than that of other western countries, Italian organised crime's infiltration of the legitimate and informal economy certainly is. This has to do with the very nature of Italian mafia groups and their claim to exercise a political dominion within their communities, which is mainly expressed today in the extraction of a 'protection tax' – the so-called pizzo.

All the families associated with Cosa Nostra and the 'Ndrangheta and many camorra groups as well force – by fair means or foul – many (if not most) of both the licit and illicit enterprises that are active in their area of competence to pay this on a regular basis. There are many different ways of paying the pizzo, though this usually takes the form of a (forced) transfer of money (known as a tangente, i.e. kickback).

This can also be a payment in kind, for example, by forcing a company to take on a guardiania (i.e. protection services) that is then paid for by putting a 'man of honour', or a client of his, on the company's payroll, or the acquisition of supplies from firms controlled by the mafiosi.

Sometimes the company subjected to extortion is also forced to accept the participation of mafia members or their associates in jobs for which it has a contract.

Mafia companies have also been active in the illegal construction business, building thousands of square metres without the necessary authorisations, in protected areas, or without respecting security standards. Unauthorised house building (abusivismo edilizio) is a common activity, especially in southern Italy. Between 1994 and 1998 alone, for example, 232,000 unauthorised houses were built, with a surface area of over 32.5 million square meters and a real estate value of approximately € 15 billion.

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However, Mafia companies are far from being the only or even the major actors of the abusivismo edilizio. Much of the unauthorised house-building is due to 'ordinary' Italians with no direct ties to organised crime. There is no doubt, however, that mafia building companies have profited considerably from the rooted disrespect of the law that characterises the whole building sector in large parts of southern Italy. Moreover, members of mafia and other criminal groups frequently earn money even if their companies are not directly involved in the construction of unauthorised buildings. Especially in Campania, but to a lower extent in the three other southern Italian regions most affected by organised crime, camorra and mafia groups control the sand extraction and the production of concrete and sell this material at an increased price to all building companies in their areas of settlement.

Undoubtedly however, the building companies owned by mafiosi draw much of their profits not from the petty unauthorised house-building but from the manipulation of large-scale public tenders.

The novelty of the 1980s and 1990s was, indeed, represented by the involvement of mafia representatives in the comitati d'affari, originally formed of politicians and entrepreneurs, which had controlled the bidding processes of large-scale public works all over the country for many years.

As the judges of the southern Calabrian city of Palmi noted with reference to the construction of a power plant by ENEL (Italy's Electric Public Company) in the Gioia Tauro Plain 'the mafia has not only infiltrated into subcontracting, but into the direct management of the works [...] through liaison elements linking the private [building] firms, the state company afflicted by party kickback policies, politicians and the representatives of imprese a partecipazione mafiosa [companies in which mafiosi had a share]'.

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In Campania, there is often a clear superimposition between the 'cement cycle' and the 'waste cycle': i.e. camorra members and their front-men are involved in both the illegal construction and waste disposal businesses. In fact, the sand that is necessary to produce concrete is often extracted by camorra companies from illegal quarries, which are then filled with waste of different type, to try to hide the soil subsidence.

Since the early 1990s other state bodies have joined the Commission parlamentare antimafia in regularly publishing information on organised crime in Italy. The Italian Ministry of the Interior began to produce *Rapporti annuali sul fenomeno della criminalità organizzata* in 1993, though since then the reports have occasionally been published with considerable delay.

The most recent report currently available for example concerns the year 2002. The reports provide qualitative analyses of the organised crime situation in the different Italian regions and, particularly, in southern Italy.

More general information on crime and its control can also be drawn from the *Rapporti sullo stato della sicurezza in Italia*, which are published by the Ministry of the Interior more regularly. Since 1992 bi-annual reports on organised crime are also published by the *Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (DIA)*, a police force specialised in fighting organised crime, established as part of the Italian Ministry of the Interior in December 1991. Though these reports primarily concern the DIA's activities and operative results, their first part usually illustrates the national organised crime situation on the basis of the investigations recently concluded by the DIA. Due to the poor cooperation among Italian police forces, however, the DIA reports do not take the investigations of the other Italian police agencies into account.

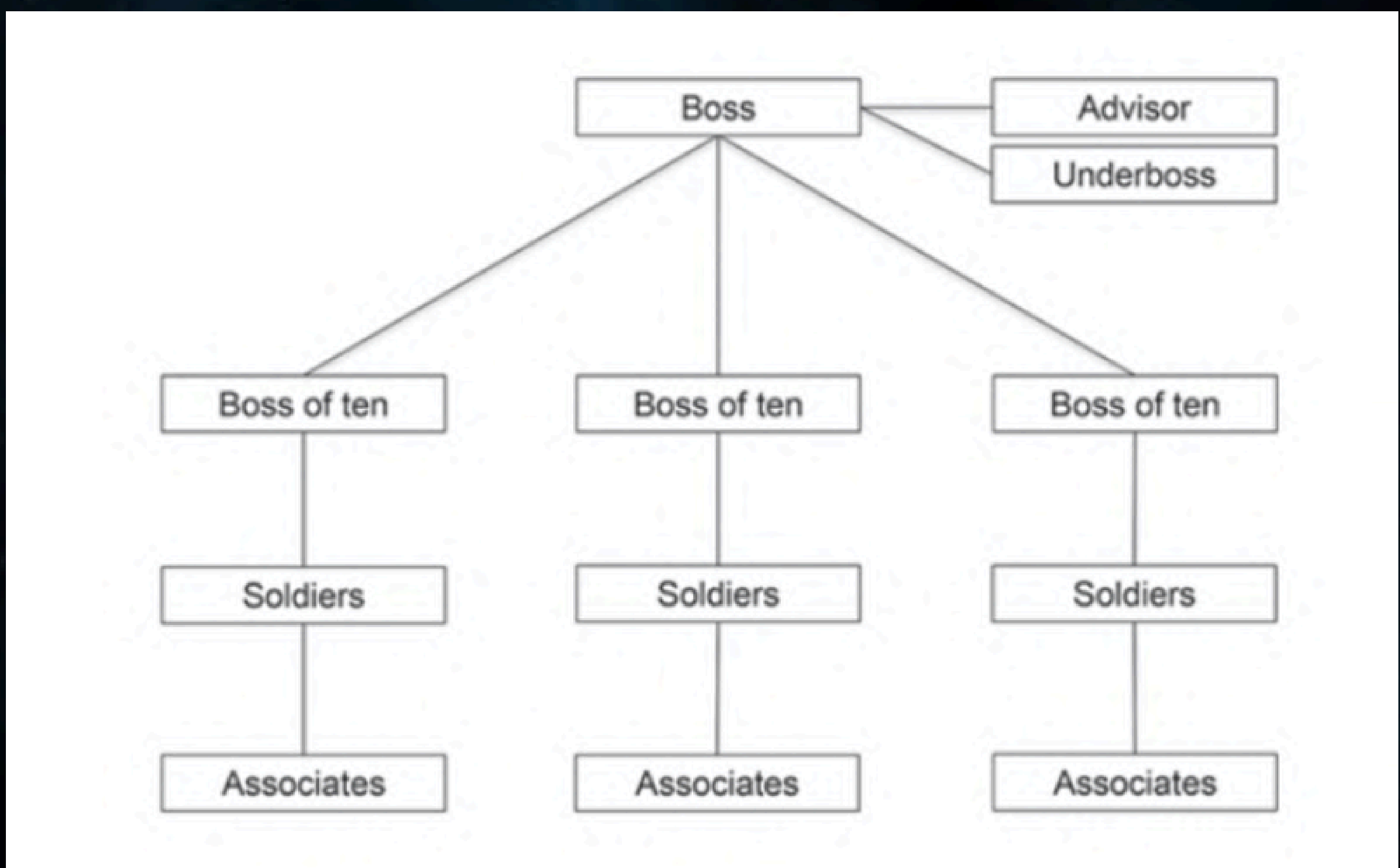
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The Cosa Nostra Family (SCN)

The term “family” denotes the fundamental importance of concepts of loyalty and honor. Recruitment is extremely limited and is not based on blood ties, although being the relative of a mafioso can be a positive element in terms of recruitment. Membership is not restricted to blood ties, but selection is very strict.

The families are characterized by a hierarchy in which subdivision of power is well defined: from the picciotto (soldier) at the bottom to the family heads. The soldiers, also known as “men of honor,” carry out operational orders.

The capodecina (“head of ten”) manages and oversees a crew of soldiers, ranging from 5 to 30 depending on the size of the family. The boss is elected by the soldiers and makes the decisions.



SIMPLIFIED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE COSA NOSTRA

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The boss nominates an underboss who makes decisions in his absence. Advisors or counselors provide advice to the boss and serve as liaison with the soldiers. In the current period of the Cosa Nostra crisis, the families have a simpler structure and fewer members.

The Sicilian mafia probably began to refer to itself as Cosa Nostra after the Second World War; the term was used in the United States to indicate that the organization was not open to membership from other ethnic groups. Under the influence of the American Cosa Nostra (ACN), after a meeting held in Palermo in 1957 with Joe Bonanno, head of one of the five New York families, the Sicilian Cosa Nostra entered an agreement to become involved in heroin traffic. The Sicilians would supply the American distributors.

At the same time, the Sicilian Cosa Nostra began to develop the structure of the organization, deploying HLCBs. It is likely that the opportunities provided by international drug trafficking favored the creation of HLCBs, in order to coordinate complex activities on an international scale and contain and regulate conflicts resulting from these new business opportunities.

After the 1992 maxi-trial that led to the final conviction of hundreds of mobsters and their bosses, the Cosa Nostra leader, Totò Riina, adopted a strategy of frontal confrontation with the state that involved the killing of numerous high-profile figures. The new strategy was intended to pursue various aims: revenge against the decisions of the courts, destabilization of institutions, establishment of new political contacts given that previous ones had not prevented the convictions, and an easing of law enforcement pressures. The strategy led nowhere.

In the end, law enforcement measures broke up the Cosa Nostra organization at the regional level and, in part, the provincial level. With the arrest of Totò Riina and other bosses in January 1993, Riina's successor Bernardo Provenzano promoted a "submersion" strategy. Until his arrest in 2006, Provenzano preferred to do business quietly, minimizing homicides, in order to lessen attention from newspapers, the general public, the government, and the LEAs. Recent law enforcement efforts have undermined Cosa Nostra's efforts to reestablish itself at the provincial level, particularly in Palermo.

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The 'Ndrangheta

The Calabrian mafia, the 'Ndrangheta or “Honored Society,” has become the most powerful mafia in Italy. It has around 6,000 members, grouped into 150–70 gangs called 'ndrine; they also operate outside Calabria in many Italian regions, in Europe, and in other countries. The 'Ndrangheta is the only mafia whose membership relies on blood ties and strategic marriages between families.

Within each family there is a strong hierarchy based on doti (ranks) and cariche (offices), which are awarded with specific ceremonies. The ranks represent the merit accumulated by members during their careers, which increases with crimes committed and can be awarded only with the approval of the Calabrian headquarters.

The nominal rank of giovane d'onore (young man of honor) is assigned by “blood right” at the birth of the sons of the 'Ndranghetisti. The first true rank is the picciotto d'onore (man of honor), who is designated merely to carry out orders.

The most important universally recognized rank is padrino, “godfather,” although recent surveys have reported new ranks at higher levels. The offices relating to the roles within the structural organization are temporary.

The basic organizational level is the 'Ndrina, which gathers together members connected by blood ties (up to a few dozen) and has its own boss, the capondrina or capobastone (zone boss). Several 'Ndrine operating in the same territorial district form a locale or Società, the boss of which, called the capo locale (local boss), manages both the criminal activities of that territory and all issues related to the locale's internal structure and functioning.

The boss is assisted by the contabile (bookkeeper) and the crimine (crime), who deals with violent activities. These three roles form the copiata. In addition, the mastro di giornata (day master) circulates information and orders throughout the organization, connecting the two organizational groups within each locale, known as “the major society” and “the minor society”

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The Camorra

The Camorra originated in the first half of the nineteenth century among people from lower social classes, particularly within prisons, in Naples, Caserta, and other areas in Campania. It developed a written statute, called *Frieno* in 1842, and called itself the *Bella Società Riformata*—the “Excellent Reformed Society.”

The Camorra was initially organized into small, independent groups called *paranze*. These showed a high level of organized hierarchy, being subdivided into the minor society and the major society, with a fairly slow career path. In Naples, there were 12 *paranze*, one for every district in the city, whose heads, the *caposocietà*, gathered together to form the “great council.” This was directed by a *capintesta*, the boss of bosses, who had absolute authority over the organization. These HLCBs provided quick responses to any emerging conflicts between groups.

This organizational model disappeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, following intense police and judicial attention after the *Cuocolo* trial (1911–12).¹⁶ The contemporary Camorra is thus more a product of recent history than of the past. The contemporary Camorra is fluid and polycentric, with a clan-based organizational configuration.

The clans, for the most part, operate independently. However, there may exist strong ties, giving rise to alliances, or weak ties, such as pacts of nonbelligerence or sporadic activities and relationships. Unlike the other Italian mafias, the Camorra lacks HLCBs that can potentially coordinate the entire system. Power is distributed among competing clans that can independently undertake strategies and criminal actions.

Clan sizes range from 30 to 300 members and, depending on the activities to be implemented, possess organizational structures with different degrees of formalized roles and hierarchies. It is therefore more appropriate to refer to *Camorre*—the plural form of Camorra, rather than to a single mafia organization.

What distinguishes mafia organizations from other types of criminal organizations is that they supply private protection. While an organized crime group attempts to regulate and control the production and distribution of a given commodity or service unlawfully, a mafia group attempts to control the supply of protection.

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A criminal organization can operate in illegal markets by producing illegal goods (e.g., drugs) or by trading such goods (e.g., human beings, information), or by providing an illegal service (e.g., gay sex) but only mafias are able to provide governance and protection by eliminating competition; provide protection from thieves; intimidate customers, workers, and unions for the benefit of entrepreneurs; quell disputes; and obtain credit.

The economic activity of Italian mafia groups occurs in both illegal markets and legal markets, where they often operate illegally. In both legal and illegal markets, mafia groups can provide market protection and governance and become market players. This is referred to as mafia trading. Mafias in their territories of origin provide protection and governance of markets and territories, but in areas of more recent penetration they tend to limit themselves mainly to trading.

Illegal markets in the European Union produce about \$127 billion a year, equal to 1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) of the entire area. Numerous estimates of mafia revenues have been made. They vary widely. Large differences result from lack of reliable data and use of methodologies that often are not adequately specified. Many are “mythological numbers,” meant to draw public attention to the subject. They gain prominence because they are repeated by the media, the general public, policy makers, and some scholars.

Illicit annual mafia revenues in Italy are approximately €3.3 billion for the Camorra, nearly €3 billion for the ‘Ndrangheta, and €1.87 billion for Cosa Nostra. The total represents 0.7 percent of national GDP. Approximately 75 percent of revenues are received by the Camorra and ‘Ndrangheta.

The Camorra plays an important role in international drug trafficking, often in collaboration with Spanish and Dutch criminal groups. The ‘Ndrangheta seems to dominate in the Italian market.. The huge quantity of cargo traffic at the port of Gioia Tauro (Reggio Calabria) has made Italy into a strategic center for cocaine trafficking in Europe.

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The US government has since 2008 included the 'Ndrangheta on the "blacklist" of foreign criminal organizations to be fought in the struggle against drug trafficking under the provisions of the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designa-

tion Act. The 'Ndrangheta has focused on cocaine trafficking. It deals directly with South American producers, thus reducing intermediation and transport costs. It also plays a significant role in the control of other ports such as Rotterdam in the Netherlands. The 'Ndrangheta has proved to be more reliable than the Cosa Nostra in management of the process from producer to consumer, of economic aspects and payments to suppliers, and, because there have been few significant cooperating witnesses, of security.

However, although the 'Ndrangheta plays an important role in drug trafficking, there is no empirical evidence that it has a monopoly in Italy on cocaine trafficking from Colombia as is frequently stated. The 'Ndrangheta faces competition from Italian and foreign traffickers who have direct connections with drug-producing and transit countries.

Despite this, the 'Ndrangheta is the Italian mafia organization most involved in drug trafficking.

Extortion is the second most important source of revenue. Particularly in their home territories, the mafias organize structured and complex extortion systems that generate an estimated income of about \$5.4 billion.

Extortion constitutes the most reliable way to meet the organization's economic needs, and functions as an instrument for achieving territorial control and asserting the organization's criminal authority. Intimidation and damage from fires affecting properties of merchants and entrepreneurs, mainly in the mafias' home territories, express their extortive pressures.

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Sexual exploitation and counterfeiting also generate high illicit revenues.

The Camorra stands out for its know-how in creating fake products (from clothing to work tools such as drills, etc.), and in marketing. Large quantities of goods arrive in Naples from Asia through dense networks of contacts. The Camorra also specializes in counterfeiting banknotes and documents. A cooperating witness recently declared that his clan provided fraudulent disability pensions and mobility allowances to individuals connected to the criminal group for about a decade. This was done by counterfeiting administrative rules and provisions and eliciting cooperation from corrupt public employees.

The Camorra also manages numerous fuel distribution outlets. Its intimidating power in its home territory allows it to dominate the supply of fuel. This leads to market distortions and prices significantly higher than market rates in other territories.

Other illegal activities typical of mafia organizations include usury, arms trafficking, and cigarette smuggling, and low-profile crimes such as theft and robbery of credit institutions, post offices, jewelers, tobacconists, and tobacco carriers that provide quick sources of funds. The illicit proceeds can then be invested in legal markets.

Other criminal organizations of Italian and foreign origin exist in Italy. Of these, only the Stidda, a spinoff of Cosa Nostra in Sicily, and the Sacra Corona Unita (Sacred United Crown [SCU]) in Apulia can be linked to other mafia organizations.

The Apulian mafia was founded between 1981 and 1983 in local prisons to regulate issues arising between prisoners and to counteract the power of other mafias (Massari 2014). Currently, the SCU is confined to certain territories in the southern part of Apulia, in the Salento peninsula. Originally dedicated to tobacco trafficking, it has begun trafficking drugs from nearby Albania and protecting businesses from extortion, online gaming, public tenders, and recently, the tourism industry. The SCU experienced its maximum growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with a series of highs and lows that led to the birth of the Nuova Sacra Corona Unita, the “New Sacred United Crown.”

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The SCU is facing current difficulties, due to pressure from LEAs and violent competition from other criminal organizations. This has led to a narrowing of its territory of reference and a change in behavior; it has become less violent and shows greater interest in the business world. Other criminal organizations exist in Apulia, often extremely violent ones.

They include the Società Foggiana, which has about 200 members; the Mafia dei Montanari in the Gargano area; and the Mafia della Pianura in the Capitana area. Fragmentation and the absence of a top management level and HLCBs prevent these organizations from containing internal conflict and developing medium- and long-term strategies.

As already mentioned, southern mafia associations are far from being the only actors in the criminal sector of Italy's underground economy. Even though they control many (but not all) activities in the areas they dominate, they do not have monopolistic control over the national illegal markets. Apart from Cosa Nostra and 'Ndrangheta members, a variety of different groups, gangs and individuals participate in Italy's illegal economy.

As in most other European states, this is open and competitive, as shown by the fact that most of its enterprises are price-takers rather than price-givers. That is, none of them are able to influence the commodity's price appreciably by varying the quantity of the output sold. The 'disorganised' nature of Italy's illegal markets is due to the fact that their enterprises are subject to the 'constraints of illegality' and thus tend to adopt a small and flexible organisation and to be ephemeral.

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Albanian groups have a strong presence in Italy. They collaborate with Italian criminal organizations in drug trafficking, exploitation of prostitution, and crimes against property. Romanian criminals commit the same kinds of crime, competing with both Italian and Albanian organized crime, and, especially in northern Italy, have acquired expertise in credit card cloning and tampering with ATMs.

Criminal groups from the former Soviet Union are also active. They are active in the legal economy, through sophisticated financial operations, and in drug and weapons trafficking, smuggling of tobacco manufactured abroad, and predatory crimes. Ukrainian organizations are active in facilitation of illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings, especially for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Georgian groups, characterized by high internal cohesion and well-defined organizational structure, specialize in apartment and villa robberies, often employing exceedingly violent and brutal methods.

Other foreign organizations, mainly from South America, North Africa, and Nigeria, collaborate with indigenous mafias in trafficking in drugs and in human beings for purposes of sexual and labor exploitation.

Despite their power, mafia fraternities have not been able to guarantee themselves a monopoly in any sector of the illegal economy outside of southern Italy. In the early 1980s, Cosa Nostra families played a pivotal role in the transcontinental heroin trade from Asia to the United States via Sicily. But in the second half of that decade, the Cosa Nostra lost this position after being targeted by law-enforcement investigations and replaced in the United States market by a plethora of Mexican, Chinese, and, more recently, Colombian heroin suppliers

Despite the growing relevance of economic activities, 'the mafia has not become a set of criminal enterprises'.

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Its history as well as its cultural and normative apparatus prevent this transformation and today constitute a constraint as much as a resource. By building a strong collective identity, shared cultural codes and norms enhance group cohesion and create trustful relationships among mafia members.

The reliance on status and fraternisation contracts, which are non-specific and long-term, produces a high degree of flexibility and makes the multi-functionality of mafia groups possible.

The same shared cultural codes and norms also represent, however, a powerful brake on entrepreneurial initiative. The prohibition on exploiting prostitution, for example, which exists in both confederations, has blocked the entrance of the Sicilian and Calabrian mafia groups into what has become one of the most profitable illicit trades: the smuggling of humans and the exploitation of migrants in the sex industry.

Since the 1980s the families and members of both Cosa Nostra and the 'Ndrangheta as well as the most successful camorra clans have employed a significant portion of the money accumulated with illegal activities to buy – either directly or through fronts – a large number of small and medium-sized companies in their area of dominion. According to data collected by the Confcommercio in 1992, about 4,000 Sicilian retail shops – about 10 per cent of all those active on the island – are either run or directly controlled by members of crime groups.

It is an estimate that is hard to verify. What did emerge very clearly in a survey commissioned by the association of the Youth Branch of the Confindustria (Italian Industrialists' Association) in 1993 was that 55 per cent of the owners of Calabrian, Sicilian and Campanian firms claimed that in their particular sphere of activity it is current practice for businesses to yield a quota of their ownership to a variety of people who are tied to illegal or suspect businesses.

AN EXTREMELY DIMUNITIVELY BRIEF OVERVIEW ON ITALIAN MAFIAS

In some contexts, Cosa Nostra and the 'Ndrangheta families have even succeeded in establishing monopolies, which are not imposed through violence, but are built on the effective ownership of all the local firms in a certain area.

For more than a decade, for example, the market for new and old vehicles in Reggio Calabria was controlled by front-men of a 'Ndrangheta family. Having no need to make any immediate profits and being able to rely on cash from illegal sources, the mafia-controlled firms managed to put other agencies out of business in a very short amount of time since they could not afford to give the discounts that the former offered.

If mafia groups do not receive the political support they desperately need, in the long-term Italy might end up having the same type of organised crime that is widespread in the rest of western Europe: namely, a myriad of criminal enterprises selling prohibited commodities with no ambitions to exercise a political power of any sort.

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The key stages in the formation and development of criminal organisations and organised crime in Russia are:

- The roots of contemporary organised crime lie in the tradition of the thieves' law and thieves' slang (*blatnaya fenya*), which goes back to the fifteenth century. Criminal gangs were first reported to be active in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, most of them relying on the traditional social institution of the *artel* (cooperative). Such gangs flourished in most Russian cities during the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.
- The Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War, which marked the first years of Soviet authority, favoured the development of a multiplicity of criminal organisations and gangs. Some of these briefly enjoyed much power and high-level connections, to such an extent that they can be seen as a first manifestation of organised crime. The first decade of Soviet authority is usually known in Russian literature as the 'gangster period'.

In the 1930s the first national form of organised crime was developed, namely the unique Russian community of the 'thieves-in-law', which is still active throughout Russia.

From the late 1950s to the end of 1970s, the social base of organised crime in Russia widened considerably. This was due to the appearance of a plurality of shadow economy entrepreneurs (the so-called *tsekhoviks*), some of whom accumulated great wealth and cooperated with high-level party and government officials. As most of their activities were considered illegal by the Soviet state, *tsekhoviks* were usually obliged to accept the protection of the thieves-in-law. This created the roof – the close intermingling of shadow entrepreneurs, traditional criminals, government and party representatives and officials.

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From the end of the 1970s onwards, we observe the rise of a new generation of criminals (the so-called 'sportsmen' or 'bandits') and, more generally, the consolidation of contemporary organised crime. Its activities were initially related to traditional black-market racketeering – drugs, arms and weapons dealing, and control over the gambling and sex businesses.

Thanks to the immense opportunities created by the implosion of the Soviet Union and the liberalisation and democratisation processes, by the end of the 1990s, there was a merging of organised crime with legal business and political structures.

Criminal organisations (as opposed to 'organised crime', yes, they are different) were born in Russia some time during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Thieves' traditions – thieves' law and thieves' slang (so-called *fenya*) – appeared in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. Rules pertaining to the collection of money for the thieves 'brotherhood' also originated in this epoch.

Peasants who ran away from their land-owning masters were the initial social basis for early criminal gangs. It is possible that in the sixteenth century about 200,000 peasants ran away every year, many of them joining gangs of robbers. Most often they made their way to the southern regions of the country, making forays into the central regions from there. Serfdom (the full physical and economic dependency of peasants on landowners) lasted in Russia up to the 1860s and was the mainstay of the social base for the runaway peasants – robbers, who became members of criminal gangs.

In the seventeenth century, Moscow became the centre of Russia's criminal society. According to several researchers, the consolidation of professional criminality and its traditions took place during this period. In the 1740s, Moscow's underworld was led by Vanka Cain (Ivan Osipov). Vanka Cain began his criminal career in 1731 with thefts from his master and general pickpocketing. His success in these crimes opened the doors of the Moscow's criminal community to him. He was accepted in the thieves' world, having paid a donation and sworn the thieves' oath (*blatnaya fenya*).

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However, in 1741, Vanka Cain betrayed his colleagues and joined the police. The betrayal did not, however, mean the end of his criminal activity.

This now concentrated on the extortion of former comrades by larceny, and of merchants by arson. For a time Vanka Cain controlled the whole criminal world of Moscow and used his relationships with both the underworld and the police for his own gain. This predecessor of modern 'tough guy' bandits left an autobiography entitled *Life of Vanka Cain, Told by Himself*.

Russian researchers of organised crime hypothesise that the 'first' Russian criminal organisations were set up as an artel. This is an old Russian social institution, a cooperative set up to organise joint labour activity (in the agriculture, trade, construction, and craft industries).

Quite often artels were recognised officially (for instance, during the reign of Emperor Peter I). In the opinion of some authors, it is impossible to imagine Russia without artels; these were such an established form of organisation of joint labour that even the Soviet state officially defined kolkhoz (collective farm), the newly enforced form of agricultural association, as an agricultural artel.

The spread of artels was favoured by the traditional communal Russian lifestyle, which possibly also helped establish the communist ideology in Soviet Russia. This communal lifestyle not only promoted the ability to survive the awful conditions of 'communal' flats (in which several families, sometimes dozens of families, lived in a single apartment), but also group criminality (the criminal artel, gangs, the community of 'thieves-in-law', and modern criminal communities and organisations).

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The main principles of organisation in a Russian artel are:

- a voluntary agreement (most often verbal) on the activities to be carried out together; – the equality of all members of the artel;
- the principle of circular guarantee or sole liability (meaning that the artel is responsible for its own members, and each member is responsible vis-à-vis the artel);
- the election of the artel leader or chairman (variously called the head, senior, or ataman).

Members of artels often helped each other in private life (such as in the event of illness). A punishment system existed in artels for different misdemeanours and derelictions of duty.

From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards we start to see references in the literature to artels of thieves, and specifically horse-thieves. Unlike legal artels, any relationship with thieves' artels was forbidden – and this prevented thieves' secrets being divulged.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, several types of criminal artel existed, which can be differentiated by the basis of the specialisation of their members:

- robbers: the most dangerous groups, who carried out robberies and murders, usually by means of the Finnish knife (a knife with a special groove for draining blood);
- professional thieves: the most widespread groups with multiple specialisation – including medvejatnik (safe crackers), railway thieves, shoplifters, burglars, pickpockets and horse-thieves;
- Ivans without kin ('Ivan, rodstva ne pomnyaschy'): professional beggars and vagrants, who collected alms and were involved in theft. The name derives from the fact that representatives of this type of artel usually had no identity papers and during detention by the police were named 'Ivan [one of the most common Russian names] could not remember his next of kin';

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- swindlers: the criminal elite – among them there were farmazonschik (specialists in precious stones), card-sharps, fraudulent money-changers (in modern Russian lomschik means fraudulent currency exchange) and marriage brokers;
- forgers: members of these groups often had international relationships

The emancipation of the serfs in 1861 had a profound effect on the history of organised criminality in Tsarist Russia. Peasants now began to run away not from slavery, but for economic reasons. Though it abolished serfdom and the physical dependency of peasants on their masters, the emancipation did, in fact, ensure peasants' economic independence. Many peasants thus ran to cities to work in factories, and many replenished the numbers of the criminal world.

The professionalisation and scale of criminality in the nineteenth century were already so high that, according to an early twentieth-century scholar, there was not 'an aspect of public life to which the criminal world is not adapted for its profit'

The beginning of the twentieth century was a crisis period in Russian history: the unsuccessful war with Japan, the failed revolution of 1905 and Russia's poor performance in its entry in the First World War fuelled the already serious crisis of the monarchy and the widespread discontent with the regime from all sectors of the population. The bourgeois Revolution of February 1917 could not solve all the accumulated social and economic problems. It is therefore little wonder that the bourgeois Revolution was followed by the 'proletarian' October Revolution of 1917.

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Against the backdrop of general crisis and discontent, the weakening of state authority, and the Civil War that began in 1918, the activities of criminal organisations intensified. In addition to the current members, these organisations recruited new followers among the peasants ruined by the war, deserters and criminals amnestied by the bourgeois Revolution of February 1917.

The work of detective police of the Russian Empire was highly professional – at the International Criminological Congress in Switzerland in 1913, the Moscow detective police was recognised as the best in the world.

In response to the formation of the Department for the Management of Criminal Investigations a so-called *skhodka* (meeting) of criminal world authorities (thieves, robbers, counterfeiters, and so on) was allegedly called, in which an urgent decision was taken to destroy the archive of the imperial criminal police, in which fingerprints, items of information on previous convictions and other sources of information about recidivists were kept. To carry out this decision seemed impossible, but then, in October 1917, there was a fire in the department, destroying most of the archive.

Organised crime in Russia at this time existed primarily in the form of gangsterism. The numerous gangs operated throughout extensive territory of Russia, chiefly in the central and southern regions. Gangs also terrorised the population of Russia's two largest cities, Petrograd and Moscow. Some gangs had an ideological or political character, acting on behalf of the 'white' (counter-revolutionary army), the 'red' (revolutionary armies) or the 'green' (independent, mostly peasant). Organisers and chiefs of the gangs would quite often change colour – the famous gang of Batka 'Father' Makhno was at war sometimes on the side of the red army, at other times on the side of the white army, or else acted as a 'third force'. Other gangs were purely criminal.

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In Petrograd, for example, the gang of Lyonka Panteleyev (Leonid Pantyolkin), a very courageous, dexterous professional robber, operated. His gang primarily plundered the rich, and was known to the lower classes of Petrograd, with a mixture of fear and admiration, as the 'cleaner of rich men'. From November 1922 to February 1923 Panteleyev killed 10 men, and his gang committed at least 20 street robberies and 15 armed robberies.

In his long criminal career, Panteleyev served in the All-Russian Emergency Commission (usually known as VChK – Vserossiyskaya Chrezvychainaya Komissiya), the first Soviet security agency, which was founded on 7 December 1917 to combat 'counter-revolution, speculation and malfeasance in office' and was active until February 1922.

Panteleyev was accepted into this new retaliatory service of the Soviet state, the forerunner of the KGB, by the founder and chief of the VChK, Felix Dzerzhinskiy. Thanks to his connections, Panteleyev even managed to escape from prison after having been arrested by the militia (Russian police). When he was again caught in a militia ambush in February 1923, he was executed by shooting, the danger of taking him into captivity now being clear.

In the years immediately following the Revolution, criminal gangs were active in all of Russia. The Vorobey gang operated in the Pskov area, close to Latvia, and numbered about 170 criminals. The gang of Sedlitsky operated in Khabarovsk Krai, the area around the border with China and Japan, and the gang of Abramchik Lekherea worked in Kherson, in south-western Russia. This wave of criminality forced the new authorities to apply extreme measures in its struggle with gangsterism, sometimes with the participation of military divisions. Rather than go through any judicial process, the gangs were often wiped out at the scene of the crime or at their own headquarters. As a result, political criminal gangsterism was almost eradicated by 1927, and the criminal world underwent a great transformation.

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After the end of the Civil War in 1920, the country gradually returned to a peaceful life, but new criminal groups rose in prisons and labour camps. Besides an increased quota of political prisoners ('enemies of the people' and their family members), there were plenty of 'old' and 'new' criminals in prisons and camps. In the late 1920s, a quarter of the prison population were professional thieves, many of whom had begun their career in pre-revolutionary times. Among their number, authority figures emerged who came to be known as urka or urkagan (a title given to professional thieves in the traditional underworld).

In addition to 'traditional' thieves, there were also 'new' criminals, who were more ideological and justified their criminal behaviour as a disagreement with Soviet authority. They received a common nickname – jigan (before the October Revolution, this was the name given to poor convicts, and to losers at cards). Former officers of the imperial army also belonged to this second set, some of them having become gang leaders during the Civil War. For instance, a former staff captain, Aniskevitch, had headed a gang of horse thieves in the Petrograd province, and former ensign Dudnitsky had supervised a gang of 35 members in the same province.

By the late 1920s, a war for the leadership had flared up between jigans and urkas. Jigans had more means and connections outside the penitentiary system, but urkas were stronger in prisons and labour camps. As of January 1929, there were about 37,000 professional thieves – or so-called 'authorities' – in penitentiary institutions. They headed the war against jigans and won. This marked the beginning of the development of a form of organised crime that is closest to contemporary forms of organised crime in Russia – the thieves-in-law.

The well-organised association of thieves-in-law came into being in the early 1930s and was composed of several local thieves' communities. A thief-in-law was a professional thief or swindler who chose crime as a permanent way of earning his living, was well-known in the criminal world, and obeyed the law of the thieves, a special code for criminals, which was primarily developed and observed in prisons.

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The community of the thieves-in-law is a unique form of criminal organisation and we shall discuss it in more detail. We start our discussion by defining some key terms.

A thief is literally one who steals (very groundbreaking information, we know); from ancient times, however, this word in Russia has signified more – criminals, on the fringes of the rules of law, irrespective of the kind of crime they are involved in. So, for example, even the leaders of the peasant revolts, Emelian Pugachyov and Stepan Razin, were labelled as thieves by law enforcement authorities. As much as a ‘normal’ thief, a thief-in-law could be not only a thief, but also a robber or a swindler.

Law is a normative act accepted by the supreme body of legislative authority. In a wider, household sense, it means any normative act or code of rules. But the word ‘law’ has a wider sense, and includes general rules of behaviour, as in ‘the laws of friendship’, ‘the laws of family life’, and so on.

Thieves’ law is a code of unwritten rules of behaviour, to which professional criminals and members of the criminal community of thieves-in-law submit. Thieves’ law was not generated entirely anew in the 1930s. The ‘rules’ and ‘concepts’ formalised by the association of thieves-in-law in the 1930s had their roots in the ‘varnak’s rules’, which were followed by criminal world members even before the Revolution (varnak means dangerous criminal or convict; in private life even today people still occasionally use the expression ‘Oh, varnak!’).

Interestingly, some members of the contemporary galaxy of Russian organised crime (above all the so-called ‘bandits’ and ‘sportsmen’) follow new rules of behaviour called ‘concepts’.

To live on concepts means to obey the rules of behaviour, which have been – or were – in force in the Russian underworld since the 1930s.

Infringement of the thieves’ law was traditionally punished by various sanctions from the requirement to apologise to the victim, a ritual slap in the face right up to the death penalty, which was often carried out during the skhodka.

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Skhod or skhodka (a meeting) is a general assembly of all the thieves-in-law, at which issues concerning the whole thieves community were addressed – thieves' safety as affected by government crime policies, definition of the thieves' income share to be deposited in the obschak, initiation of new members (a 'coronation'), punishment of the guilty ones, management of international communications, and so on.

Obschak is the general thieves' cash department made up of the contributions of each member of the criminal community, by means of a share of the stolen property. The size of a share varies from community to community – 10 per cent was accepted at one skhodka in the 1980s. Obschak exists to help arrested criminals and convicts who obey the thieves' law. Money from obschak also goes to families and kinsmen of convicted or dead criminals. Money to help the people in the zone (a penitential institution) is called grev (warm). There is a Russia-wide obschak, and an obschak in every zone. The keeper of obschak is a respected professional criminal appointed by the skhodka.

A coronation (or christening) is the final stage of procedure whereby a new member is accepted into the community of the thieves-in-law. Originally a person wishing to be accepted in the community undergoes a period of candidacy. For this time he is kept under observation to ensure he obeys the thieves' law. Then a special letter (malyava) is sent to each zone announcing the forthcoming coronation and inviting any possible objections to the candidate. If there are no objections at the next skhodka, the coronation takes place – a solemn reception into the community of the thieves-in-law.

From their very first days of existence, the thieves-in-law insisted they were apolitical, that they were 'thieves with honour'. One of their basic tenets was to deny any merit to political criminals.

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They did not struggle with the Soviet authority, but only targeted frayers (an honest frayer is a lawful citizen), in other words, private persons not linked to criminal circles. They avoided murders or violent crimes, describing their operations as 'work'.

This had a practical side: the sentence for theft (secret plunder – Art. 162 of Penal Code of Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) of 1926) was between three months and two years of deprivation of freedom (to a maximum of five years with aggravation).

However, for gangsterism, murder or robbery the penalty was between ten years and the death penalty. Furthermore, the Soviet repressive bodies – the Main Political Directorate (Glavnoje Politicheskoe Upravlenije, usually shortened to GPU) and People's Commissariat for Interior Affairs (Narodnij Kommisariat Vnutrennih Del or NKVD) – indulged urkas and thieves, while directing all their efforts to the struggle with political criminals (the jigans, i.e. the 'enemies of the people' and dissidents).

The basic rules of the thieves' law were developed in the 1930s. The basic requirements of the thieves' law of the 1930s-1940s were:– Authority in the criminal world was to be granted only to the thieves-in-law, the blatniye, and, among them, to their elected chiefs.

The criminal world was constructed on principles of rigid hierarchy: there were 'castes' (or mast, as they are called in the thieves' slang, i.e. 'suit').

- The thieves-in-law were the highest caste,
- subordinated castes were moujik (i.e. unrelated citizens, the so-called frayer),
- ignominious castes were composed of pidor (passive homosexuals),
- krisa (meaning 'rat' – a person stealing from members of the community),
- chushok (slovenly thieves, who committed mistakes endangering the group), s
- tukach ('informers'), and others;

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The rules to be followed were

- Thieves' were not under the jurisdiction of other criminals and convicts;
- All other criminals were to punish anyone who broke the traditions of the criminal world (stukach, krisa) and did not respect the thieves' laws;
- All the blatnoi (urka, thief) should pay duties;
- A thief-in-law could not cooperate with the state;— It was forbidden to participate in the work of state and public organizations;
- A thief could not work either in freedom, or in zone (i.e. prison or labour camp);
- A thief could live only from the revenue of criminal activities;
- A thief was not allowed to officially marry (there were two main reasons for this rule: first, the marriage would distract the thief from his 'job' and, secondly, to enter a marriage was to 'cooperate' with the state);
- It was forbidden to engage in politics or serve in the army;
- It was forbidden to have property or a permanent residence;
- It was forbidden to contact government officials or representatives, especially members of law enforcement bodies (militia or prison administration) or courts (except when compelled to appear in court as the accused)

In addition to these behavioural rules, other rules determined the election of the thieves' leaders, the way in which they were supposed to exercise their authority and how they should prosecute and punish guilty thieves. Rules of recognition were also foreseen by the thieves' law: to be accepted as a full member, a thief should have previous convictions, have a special tattoo and use blatnoi language (botat po fene – to speak fenyá). Tattoos had a special meaning. For example, a heart pierced by an arrow or an ace in a cross signified a criminal with a high level of authority. There were special places on the body where the tattoo could mean a high level of authority and respect. Thighs and elbows are for respected criminals. Any tattoo on the face or buttocks characterised a person as not worthy of respect. The making of the wrong tattoo could have far-reaching consequences, such as amputation and sometimes death.

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In the 1930s a new wave of gangsterism was fostered by the generalised confiscation of property, the imprisonment and execution of thousands of rich peasants (kulaks) and the resulting famine of 1931-1933. Increased activity of the gangs was recorded in Moscow, Rostov and other cities at this time. In Leningrad, the gangs plundered bakeries and shops. Huge numbers of homeless teenagers swelled the ranks of criminal organisations. The epoch of mass reprisals and Stalin's Gulag began in 1934. In comparison with political convicts, who were deemed enemies of the people, blatniye became a convenient way to guarantee order in penitentiary establishments.

Thieves began to dominate the zone. The officially recognised authority of thieves, however, did not last for long. The terrible reprisals of 1937-1938 and the mass execution of convicts (which were decided by administrative, not judicial bodies, with no legal justification) were meted out, not only to political prisoners and enemies of the people, but also to criminal authorities and thieves-in-law.

The Gulag's 'daily' routines were interrupted by the Great Patriotic War against Hitler's Germany – the Second World War. In 1941-1942 the Soviet army suffered defeat after defeat and the situation at the front caused the Soviet government to implement a series of extraordinary measures. They decided to offer convicts the chance to go to the front, and 'expiate their faults' with their own blood.

With the ending of the criminal wars, the criminal community of thieves did not disappear. The thieves' language (fenya) continued to be updated, the meaning of certain tattoos changed, and the attitude of thieves to moujiks (who also suffered during the wars) improved. It became much more difficult to be accepted into the ranks of the thieves-in-law. Their number was reduced to increase quality at the expense of quantity by virtue of strict selection mechanisms, stringent checks, high requirements of intelligence and organising abilities.

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In the 1970s and 1980s a new generation of criminals grew up alongside the thieves-in-law – the ‘bandits’, or ‘sportsmen’ (many new bandits were in fact sportsmen).

These criminals were young, energetic, physically gifted and well-trained. They sought a better lifestyle without the limitations of the thieves’ law, aggressively tried to impose their power and eagerly resorted to open violence, a behaviour that was condemned by most thieves.

Though these new criminals would fully show their power later, at the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s, their activity began in the pre-perestroika period of Mikhail Gorbachev. It was clear that sooner or later the conflict between thieves-in-law and ‘bandits’ was inevitable. It happened in open form after an abortive attempt to agree upon the peaceful division of Moscow in a meeting which took place in Dagomys (a Black Sea resort) on an unknown date.

The war flared up in the early 1990s. The trigger for the beginning of the war was the murder of Kalina (Victor Nikiforov, foster-son of Yaponchik) in February 1992.

It is easy to assume that organized crime based in Russia is also ethnically Russian, but that is a mistake. Many criminal groups hail from the Caucasus, for example. The most useful definition in this context is thus Russian based organized crime for those groups, which, even while operating abroad, retain a strong stake in Russia. This applies whether their operations depend on access there or they simply have sufficiently valuable assets or family still left behind. This gives the state leverage.

These groups are often not predominantly ethnically Russian. The 2005 anti-mafia campaign in Georgia, for example, saw traditional underworld authority figures driven to Russia because, as ‘thieves within the law’ (kanonieri qurdebi), they faced prison time.

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Likewise, there are some Russian criminals who ought no longer to be considered part of Russian-based organized crime. Since 2022, for example, many of the Russian gangster-expats in Spain have essentially cut politically dangerous ties with networks back home.

Likewise, a sizable Georgian and Armenian organized burglary ring active across France and Belgium, which was broken up in 2012, was initially described as 'Russian organized crime' but its members and leaders had no real connection with Russia.

A hallmark of recent developments is the pervasive influence of covert law enforcement techniques and the blurring of boundaries between police and security functions. The final chapter brings some observations on international police and judicial cooperation in combating organised crime.

ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE NETHERLANDS: THE WESTERN GATEWAY TO EUROPE

In the Netherlands the problem of organised crime was largely ignored until the early 1990s, despite the fact that in the previous two decades the nature of serious crime had substantially changed due to the emergence of the drug trade. It took quite a long time, however, before practitioners and policy makers became fully aware of this gradual transformation of the problem of serious crime caused by the huge quantities of drugs being bought and sold through the Netherlands.

A turning point for policy and research was the Dutch-American Conference on Organised Crime in 1990, a meeting of members of the New York State Organised Crime Task Force and Dutch police officials, public prosecutors, and researchers (Fijnaut and Jacobs, 1991). During this conference, several differences between the problem of organised crime in the United States and the situation in the Netherlands were noted and alternative ways of combating organised crime were discussed. Partly as a result of this conference, the police chiefs of Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam and the director of the Central Criminal Intelligence Service decided to devote further attention to the problem of organised crime.

In 1992 the problem of organised crime reached the national political agenda, in the form of an ambitious memorandum presented to the Dutch Parliament: *Organised Crime in the Netherlands: An Impression of its Threat and a Plan of Action*. With the benefit of hindsight, one may conclude that the problem of organised crime was somewhat overstated – organised crime was on the verge of infiltrating economic sectors and political institutions and was considered to be a major threat to the integrity of Dutch society.

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Consequently, a firm preventive and repressive approach was promulgated, laying the foundation for a number of changes in legislation in later years, e.g. regarding the confiscation of criminal assets and the reporting of unusual transactions by financial institutions.

Furthermore, special (inter-regional) investigation squads were established and new investigation methods were introduced to combat organised crime.

In December 1993, however, the so-called 'IRT affair' emerged with the sudden dismantling of the Amsterdam-Utrecht Inter-regional Investigation Squad (IRT). According to the authorities in Amsterdam the IRT had been dismantled because of the use of unacceptable investigation methods. In the media, however, suggestions were made of a dispute regarding the jurisdiction over the team and even accusations of corruption in Amsterdam.

The dispute between Amsterdam and Utrecht about the 'real' reasons for the dismantling of the IRT escalated further and resulted in a fact-finding committee of independent experts (March 1994), a fact-finding committee of the Dutch Parliament (October 1994), and eventually a full-fledged Parliamentary Inquiry Committee into Criminal Investigation Methods.

Organised crime in the Netherlands is a serious problem, but the nature of the problem is fundamentally different from 'mafia-type' organisations in Italy or the United States, which have gained control of certain economic sectors or regions, acting as 'alternative governments. According to the traditional view, organised crime is portrayed as a bureaucracy with a pyramidal structure – a strict hierarchy, with a clear division of tasks and an internal sanctioning system.

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Controlling certain regions or economic sectors, criminal organisations are assumed to make a profit by using corruption, violence and intimidation. As a result, organised crime is supposed to reap the fruits of taking over two traditional state monopolies – taxation and controlling violence. This traditional view of organised crime was also common in the Netherlands until 1996.

An important conclusion of the Fijnaut research group, however, was that no criminal groups at either a national or local level had gained control of legitimate sectors of the economy by taking over crucial businesses or trade unions (labour racketeering). Also the follow-up studies of the ‘organised crime monitor’ provided no indication that criminal groups had taken over certain economic sectors or political institutions and acted like ‘alternative governments’. In the case studies, there was hardly any evidence of protection, political corruption, illegal manipulation of political decisions, or infiltration in trade unions.

Rather than controlling certain regions or certain sectors of the economy, criminal groups seem to join in with the legal infrastructure as well as with the legal commodity and money flows. As the Netherlands is an important logistical node in Europe (with for example the port of Rotterdam and Amsterdam Schiphol airport), this also creates an excellent opportunity structure for organised crime.

Many forms of organised crime in the Netherlands boil down to international smuggling activities – drug trafficking, smuggling illegal immigrants, trafficking women for sexual exploitation, arms trafficking, trafficking stolen vehicles, and other transnational illegal activities, such as money laundering and evading taxes (cigarette smuggling, European Community fraud, and so on

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). The nature of organised crime in the Netherlands might be described as ‘transit crime’ – criminal groups in the Netherlands are primarily involved in international illegal trade, using the same opportunity structure which also facilitates legal economic activities. Furthermore, the Netherlands can be either a country of destination, a transit country, or, in particular for synthetic drugs, a production country.

Next to the excellent opportunity structure for illegal activities, the Netherlands also provides a good social opportunity structure, in particular for the international drug trade. A clear example is the involvement in international drug trafficking of immigrant groups in the Netherlands.

It is an historical coincidence that the very countries from which so many people emigrated to the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s (Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, Aruba, Morocco and Turkey), turned into the leading producers or transit dealers of the major drugs for the European market in the 1980s and 1990s. The bulk of the heroin now comes from Turkey.

Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba link Colombia and its cocaine to Europe; and Morocco has developed into the leading hashish producer. The social ties between the Netherlands and the old countries, which have been created by migration, constitute a fertile breeding ground for international drug trafficking.

The social logic of international drug trafficking is clearly demonstrated by the analysed cases of the ‘organised crime monitor’ – over and over again family ties as well as bonds of friendship turn out to be the foundation for international criminal associations. In the analysed cases criminal cooperation is not built so much on ethnicity as it is on social relationships between several individuals.

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Thus, the overall picture is that the Netherlands plays a major role in the transnational drug trade. All this started with the contact between Dutch seamen and Pakistani hashish dealers off the coast of Dubai in the early 1970s. The Dutch ships were stationed there for hydraulic engineering projects, and the Pakistanis, with their trade in heroin as well as cannabis, were apparently being left alone by the Americans because revenues from their trade were going towards the battle against communism in Afghanistan.

The result of these contacts was that several Dutch trailer camp residents funded large shipments of hashish to Europe and northern America. Later on, native Dutch offenders also became heavily involved in the production and export of synthetic drugs. Combined with the excellent infrastructure as well as the social links with Colombian cocaine, Turkish heroin, and Moroccan hashish, this might explain why the Netherlands might be viewed as an important transit country for drugs in Europe.

Smuggling rings provide a most wanted connection between poor and/or dangerous countries (such as Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, India, China and several African countries) and rich, democratic countries such as the Member States of the Council of Europe, Canada, the United States and Japan. The main suspects in the analysed cases very often had social ties with both the countries of origin and the countries of destination. Traffickers and clients often share the same ethnic background and, before they started smuggling, many traffickers had been smuggled to the Netherlands themselves.

The Netherlands functions primarily as a transit country for the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, Canada and the United States. Reasons for the attractiveness of the Netherlands as a transit country are for example Amsterdam Schiphol airport, the multi-ethnic character of the Netherlands, and the Dutch asylum policy (making – until recently – a temporary stay in asylum facilities very easy).

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However, starting a new life and making a living without being noticed by the authorities is quite difficult in a small and densely populated country with extensive registration for such things as housing, work and taxes, which have recently become increasingly interconnected. Therefore, the Netherlands is more important as a transit country than as a country of destination. People often enter the Netherlands by air (via Amsterdam Schiphol airport, but also via nearby Belgian or German airports) or by land, taking a mainly 'eastern' route (from eastern Europe, Austria and/or Germany) or 'southern' route (from Italy and/or France, and Belgium). The analysed cases show the importance of the so-called 'blue borders' (the Mediterranean, the Channel, and the Atlantic), and the borders between European Union and non-European Union Member States.

In regard to smuggling illegal immigrants, the European Union is virtually 'borderless', apart from some 'physically isolated' countries such as Greece, the United Kingdom, and Ireland.

In the Netherlands a lot of research has been done on the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation or – in short – 'forced prostitution'. A Researcher recently estimated that in the year 2000 there were about 3500 victims of 'forced prostitution', approximately 20 per cent of the total estimated number of prostitutes working in the Netherlands.

With the benefit of hindsight, one may conclude that, when the problem of organised crime reached the national political agenda in the early 1990s, the problem was somewhat overstated – organised crime was on the verge of infiltrating economic sectors and political institutions and was considered to be a major threat to the integrity of Dutch society.

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One of the major goals for the Fijnaut research group of 1996 was to assess the ‘intertwining’ between organised crime and the legal economy.

The main conclusion reached by the Fijnaut research group was that no criminal groups at either a national or local level had gained control of legitimate sectors of the economy by taking over crucial businesses or trade unions (labour racketeering). The authors, however, noted that this does not mean that economic sectors are not subject to all kinds of fraud, causing a great deal of damage to governments and businesses. In the preceding decade, a lot of research has been done into value added tax fraud, evading taxes on highly taxed goods (such as oil, tobacco and alcohol), counterfeiting (e.g. textiles, CDs and CD-ROMs), European Community fraud (e.g. meat and dairy products), financial fraud, and so on.

According to the Fijnaut research group, there were some indications of criminal infiltration in the transport sector. The transport sector plays a crucial role in the transportation of drugs by sea, air and road. Criminal groups hire, buy or set up their own haulage companies to import and export drugs, and use Amsterdam Schiphol airport and the port of Rotterdam for the same purpose. In particular at Amsterdam Schiphol airport, criminal groups get ample help from insiders. There was, however, no evidence that criminal groups play a permanent role of any significance in the transport sector, let alone that they have it under their control.

Furthermore, the hotel, restaurant, night club and pub sector was one of the few fields in which an organised crime pattern was observed that went beyond facilitating illegal activities. In some cities, in particular Amsterdam, criminal groups control or own many of the hotels, restaurants, night clubs and pubs in a way that can be termed racketeering.e.

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By investing in these establishments, criminal groups not only create a certain kind of private territory, but also an infrastructure for other illegal activities, such as selling drugs, laundering money, and installing illegal slot machines.

The Fijnaut research group also devoted attention to the roles of specific professions (lawyers, notaries public and accountants). Professionals and persons providing consumer related services, such as lawyers, public notaries, accountants, real estate agents and banking institutions, may all come into contact with organised crime. Many of these contacts are inevitable. Providers of such services are not necessarily aware of the purpose of any contacts. A financial institution, for instance, does not always know if money is being deposited in a foreign account in an effort to relocate proceeds of crime. Increasingly, however, service providers are being expected to be wary of possible misuse of their services.

Certain professional groups have drawn up guidelines specifying when to question the validity of the request or the credentials of a consumer, and when to deny access to their services. Also, laws have been promulgated, such as the Unusual Transactions Act, which require financial service providers to report unusual transactions to a central office

Certain professional groups, for instance lawyers and notaries public, have appointed consultation officers to whom one can turn if faced with doubts about the legitimacy of a client's request.

In the early 1990s there were several confrontations between criminal groups and the public authorities. After years of leniency, special police teams started investigations into the dealings of some major Dutch drug dealers, in particular in the vicinity of Amsterdam. The Fijnaut research group highlighted several 'counter-strategies' of these organised crime groups – counter-surveillance, intimidation, corruption, and, to a lesser extent, media manipulation and the use of influential people to counterbalance potential official intervention.

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It was concluded that, in particular in Amsterdam, criminal groups had exerted various kinds of pressure on the criminal justice system. The counter-strategies, however, were apparently confined to executive employees in official agencies most directly involved in combating organised crime, particularly the police and customs. There was no evidence that groups had used either corruption or intimidation to gain control over any of the important government services, let alone the major official bodies or authorities.

To a large extent, organised crime in the Netherlands boils down to crossing borders. Organised crime takes advantage of global differences in price, in prosperity, in opportunities, and in laws and regulations. It caters to societal needs that legitimate companies cannot satisfy. Many forms of organised crime in the Netherlands concern international smuggling activities – drug trafficking, smuggling illegal immigrants, trafficking women for sexual exploitation, arms trafficking, trafficking stolen vehicles, and other transnational illegal activities, such as money laundering and evading taxes (cigarette smuggling, European Community fraud, and so on). Hence, the nature of organised crime in the Netherlands might be described as ‘transit crime’ – criminal groups in the Netherlands are primarily involved in international illegal trade, using the same opportunity structure that also facilitates legal economic activities.

‘Transit crime’ focuses on trade, on crossing borders. To be profitable and successful, it does not need to dominate certain regions or economic branches. Therefore, this kind of crime is fundamentally different from the kind of organised crime that can be found in the Balkans, Italy or Russia. However, these foreign stereotypes still inspire much of the present containment policies in the Netherlands.

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To make further predictions about the development of organised crime in the Netherlands, one should be aware of developments in both opportunity structures and the social fabric. In fact, many opportunities can only be grasped if the social fabric is present to take advantage of these opportunities. This might explain why a country like the Netherlands with large immigrant populations originating from drug producing countries, plays such a prominent role in the international drugs trade. It might also explain why many awesome predictions about the influx of organised crime activities from eastern Europe and Russia, did not come true, as the Iron Curtain had also frustrated the creation of social links with these countries. It may take some time before these borders can be crossed effectively.

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“Gauner (crooks) are people who make a trade of robbery and theft and, by using this trade to their advantage, develop their own rituals and language. All those who adopt the same philosophy of life and rituals are their allies and the cant is the tool that helps them to recognise each other.”

With these words, the chief criminal judge of the province Upper Hesse (Ober-hessen), Friedrich Adolf Von Grolmann, tried to define the type of organised crime he and many of his colleagues were confronted with in the early nineteenth century Germany: organised gangs (Bande) of robbers. Von Grolmann’s definitional efforts were, however, hampered by the blurred classifications that the public authorities of his time used for identifying the offenders they targeted.

These were, in fact, alternatively and arbitrarily labelled as beggars, tramps, Gypsies, cheats and, even more often, as Gauner (or Jauner, i.e. crooks),¹ in some cases bandits and robbers. The equal treatment of these heterogeneous groups of individuals shows how undifferentiated the debate was back then. Occasionally, the poor did not even need to commit a specific offence to find their names on a ‘black list’ of sought crooks.

Von Grolmann’s definition is nonetheless important because of its reference to the crooks’ organisational structure, common rituals and slang. Other of his contemporaries referred to the ranks of the Ständegesellschaft (estate society) to describe the internal organisation of the world of crooks.

Due to insufficient source material, the reasons for collective crime during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century cannot be precisely determined. Current knowledge on this matter primarily relies on the statements of the defendants during investigations and trials. These statements were, however, made under a lot of psychological and physical pressure and were often distorted and false. For prisoners under interrogation it was a common practice to reinvent – or at least reshape entirely – their biographies

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. Only the reports of their fellow detainees made them ultimately tell the truth . Even the descriptions of the fugitives' on the 'wanted lists' were usually based on the statements given by arrested crooks.

These sources are nonetheless not useless: during police interrogations and court testimonies, crooks must have made much use of 'authentic details from their criminal environment' if they wanted to seem credible.

Despite the weaknesses of our sources, the following is what we know about the social background of this early form of organised crime in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Gangs of robbers were largely a phenomenon of the lower classes. Underprivileged or badly integrated people, such as vagrants, constituted the majority of gang members. In one of the gangs analysed by Danker, whose members were tried in Coburg in 1736, 65 per cent of the members were Jewish vagrants.

However, it is not true – as long believed – that vagrants almost exclusively represented the source of gang members' recruitment. For example, two other gangs studied by Danker – the gang of Nickel List, whose members were arrested in Celle (in contemporary Lower Saxony) in 1699, and the Saxon bandits headed by Lips Tullian, who was executed in Dresden in 1715 – had a mixed social background. Many of their members, in fact, were farmers, hosts and artisans with a fixed residence.

Germany was characterised by a distinct inequality in its membership, strict and rigid hierarchies, and the strenuous effort of the upper classes to maintain the social status quo. As descent and ancestry determined individual destinies, the lower classes were de facto excluded from effective membership of society.

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Most of them merely lived at its margins, without fully participating in social life. The most important preliminary condition for being recognised as a member of society was having a permanent residence: itinerants were a priori excluded from participation.

Since the late Middle Ages, and increasingly during the seventeenth and, above all, the eighteenth century, public authorities morally condemned and prosecuted beggars and tramps. This attitude fostered a suspicious attitude vis-à-vis all non-local poor people in the general population. Whereas the local poor were exempt from discrimination, non-local vagrants were avoided and marginalised without knowledge of their economic and social background.

The lifestyle of itinerant people helped justify their marginalisation: itinerants, in fact, hardly respected many of the conventional behavioural norms that had to be inspired by virtue, discipline, diligence and the so-called 'usefulness' (Nützlichkeit).

The very existence of large numbers of people without permanent residence was additionally inconsistent with the sovereignty claim made by the local government authorities. Formally, itinerant professions were tolerated only for a short period of time, after having been approved by local authorities. Those moving around from one place to another without carrying a written allowance were regarded as criminals and had to face legal prosecution. Vagrants who were arrested for the first time were forced to leave the territory and go back to their home towns, as far as these were known. If they were caught for a second time, they were supposed to be branded and expelled from the 'state' borders. The mark they were branded with determined their fate if they were caught a third time: they were, in fact, bound to be punished with death, even if there was no clear proof of their guilt.

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As shown by trial papers, the very fact of vagrancy was then considered an 'offence against property'. Given these draconian prescriptions and prohibitions, one may wonder how vagrants could at all survive in the eighteenth century. Vagrants' survival was made possible by the discrepancy between the written norms and their actual enforcement in the early modern period: In hardly any of early modern Germany's 800 states and mini-states were regulations and sanctions consistently applied. To avoid inflicting the death penalty, for example, many law enforcement officers did not brand vagrants when they arrested them for a second time. For the same reasons, public officers occasionally desisted from initiating a full criminal trial, merely imposing a sentence on the delinquents themselves.

Once caught by government authorities, however, vagrants could anticipate serious punishment: the authorities executed or neglected the law arbitrarily. Every arrested vagrant could receive the maximum sentence provided for by the law if the officer decided that the vagrant's punishment had to serve as an example for other offenders.

Even if they were occasionally treated mildly, vagrants and other members of fringe groups could in principle and a priori all be subject to severe punishment: this very fact contributed to their stigmatisation, which often became a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' and pushed many vagrants into real criminality. Once caught into the law enforcement net, vagrants accepted the role that public authorities gave to them.

Criminal careers were also promoted by the public prosecution and criminalisation of individuals – usually for petty crimes, such as theft – early in their lives. A veritable 'vicious circle' was, thus, inadvertently set in motion.

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The prospect or certainty of draconian punishment (until the eighteenth century even the death penalty was provided for an offence against property) prompted offenders to become fugitives and thus lose their social roots. The physical punishments and subsequent expulsion from the country that the authorities often imposed on criminals also frequently marked the debut of a criminal career. As a result of their sentences, offenders often lost their social contacts and economic support. The famous bandit Schinderhannes, for example, declared that public thrashing, following the theft of some pieces of fur in the house of his landlord, prompted him to become a criminal.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (as much as today) many people assumed that robber gangs constituted conspiratorial communities with strong and recognised leaders. However, only one gang seemed to come close to this widespread myth – Krummfingers Balthasar's gang, that was active in the first half of the eighteenth century. This gang had a strict hierarchy, the leader was called 'king' and was supported by lower 'noblemen', there were symbols to manifest the king's power and the gang membership as well as a written codex of norms and sanctions.

Despite loose membership criteria and occasional conflicts, most gangs developed communitarian feelings and a clear collective identity. As a result, they often tried to avoid the penetration of another gang into their territory, even though they allowed, and occasionally even invited, skilled bandits belonging to other gangs to participate in their actions. Gangs usually felt bound to a specific territory and its inhabitants.

As already mentioned, the small operational units that were set up for the purpose of a criminal action needed supporters and potential participants, most of the time settled people who did not actively participate but who tolerated them by not betraying them, for example

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. These people made up a 'criminal infrastructure' (räuberische Infrastruktur), which can be best described with the cant term 'trusted people' (Kochemer, the vagrants and gang members living at the margins of society).

Without these contacts, the mere existence of collective criminality, and the survival of marginalised bandits, would not have been possible.

]The scarce presence of law enforcement forces in rural areas also strengthened the links between local inhabitants and gangs. Until the eighteenth century, only a single layman deputy watched over a rural area. Due to the low police presence, bandits could easily find suitable hiding places in rural areas, which were consequently much preferred to urban locations. Bandits particularly favoured remote places close to 'state' borders. Thus, if necessary, bandits could quickly flee the pursuing deputy who would first have to get in contact with other authorities in order to catch them. As inter-state cooperation was not highly developed, the cumbersome actions of the authorities gave a temporal advantage to the bandits.

Bandits usually had a lifestyle, a Kochemer subculture, appropriate to the conditions of illegality in which they lived. A key element of this subculture was the secret communication codes, which allowed safe communication among the Kochemer and strengthened their togetherness. Secret communication codes also sharply distinguished and separated bandits and their accomplices from the so-called Wittischen, who lived in accordance with the law and were regarded as ignorants.

The most important of all means of communication was the cant (Rotwelsch).

The Kochemer used it most often when they were in prison in order to agree upon a collective statement in a trial or to deceive their victims. The Rotwelsch grammar and syntax had a clear German origin; however, the words were drawn from several dialects, foreign languages and, above all, Hebrew.

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Differing slightly from one region to the other, the cant was composed of 150 to 350 secret terms, which were enough to indicate the main objects and activities of bandits' everyday life.

The gangs operating in the late eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century differentiate themselves from the bloodthirsty gangs of the early eighteenth century by the predominance of non-violent and secret crimes they usually carried out, as opposed to the offensive robbery crime and the almost expedient use of violence of their predecessors. From the middle of the eighteenth century there was, indeed, a certain humanisation in the gangs' modus operandi. Apparently, the change in the commission of criminal activities reflected a general change in the evaluation of violence.

Until the late seventeenth century, offences against property were considered much more serious than bodily harm. As a consequence, the punishment of property was much more severe than the penalties for violent offences, such as manslaughter. These could usually be settled with a penitent or expiatory sacrifice in agreement with the victim's family, without the necessity of a trial.

During the eighteenth century, however, attitudes toward crime changed with the beginning of the Enlightenment and the formation of civil society. Expressions of violence as irrational brute force receded in different parts of society and state. A consequence of this process was the cessation of physical violence on delinquents in the penal system. Physical punishment was increasingly replaced with imprisonment, and the principles of education and re-socialisation substituted deterrence and retaliation as the main aims of punishment. This change often produced a mere displacement of violence – although the application of torture in interrogation was reduced, psychological methods of questioning brought about another kind of violence.

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Organised crime did not become a topic of great interest in Modern Germany until the 1980s. First arising in police discussions, the threat posed by organised crime rapidly became an increasingly important issue in the political and public debate during the following decade. At the same time, significant changes were made to the criminal justice system, which have affected both the legislative framework and the praxis of criminal prosecution. Due to the broad official definition of organised crime and the fact that empirical research on the topic has been either conducted by the police or relies heavily on police data, the actual impact of organised crime in Germany cannot be established with certainty.

In particular, the data presented by the Federal Office of Criminal Investigation (Bundeskriminalamt, hereinafter referred to by its acronym – BKA) in its annual Organised Crime Situation Report (Lagebild Organisierte Kriminalität) strongly influence the understanding of organised crime in Germany.

Traditionally, drug trafficking and smuggling represent the most frequent organised crime activity in Germany, followed by economic and nightlife crime, property crime, the facilitation of illegal immigration, violent crime, forgery, arms trafficking and smuggling and, finally, environmental crime. The recorded cases do not reveal the existence of special strategies by organised crime members to infiltrate or unduly influence police and political authorities in Germany.

As the police themselves have started to admit, organised crime repression has until now largely focused on the most visible and less controversial illegal activities (such as drug-related crime) and offenders. From the available data, it is indeed hard to avoid the impression that much of what is termed organised crime in Germany can be more properly referred to as Bandenkriminalität, i.e. gang crime.

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Whether this form of crime justifies the numerous measures that have radically changed the criminal justice and the police system in Germany is an open question that should be answered by a serious evaluation programme.

After a failed attempt by the state and federal police agencies to define organised crime in the early 1970s, in 1986 the Ministers of Home Affairs and Justice of the German federal states agreed on a common definition of organised crime as follows:

“Organised crime constitutes the planned commission of criminal offences driven by the quest for acquiring profits or powers. Such criminal offences have to be, individually or in their entirety, of major significance and involve the cooperation of more than two participants acting with a common intent”

Since the early 1990s, both criminal law and criminal procedural law have been substantially modified in Germany, allegedly to improve the fight against organised crime.

Initially, some special acts were introduced or amended: the Act to Fight Drug Trafficking and Other Forms of Organised Crime (usually termed as Organised Crime Control Act, in German known under the acronym of OrgKG), for example, was introduced in 1992. Two years later, a new bill to fight crime was passed by the Bundestag (German Parliament). In 1998, the Act to Improve the Fight against Organised Crime was added. Through these acts, several parts of the Penal Code (Strafgesetzbuch) were also amended.

In addition to these changes, the offence of money laundering was inserted into the Penal Code and other technical measures were introduced to hinder criminals from making a profit from crime.

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The comparison of the traditional and the new policing methods recalls the earlier differences between policing methods and those of the secret services. In organised crime cases, the traditional 'open' methods – like witness questioning, collection of evidence and forensic examination – are increasingly supplemented by covert methods shedding light on a whole milieu rather than simply supporting the investigation of a particular crime. The general changes in the penal system can be described as being of great significance. In particular, as a result of the organised crime debate, the system of crime prosecution has been entirely reorganised and police methods of investigation have become more covert and pro-active.

The connection to organised crime is twofold. On the one hand, organised crime cases are hard to solve because, in contrast to traditional forms of crime, there are almost no victims with an interest in reporting offences. A consumer of drugs does not want to see his drug distributor in jail, whereas a person who has been robbed, will certainly want the robber to be arrested.

On the other hand, the term 'organised crime' refers to a broad range of different phenomena which all share the fact that they are seen by the public as a great threat to society. On the basis of this angst, the 'fight against organised crime' is a very useful justification to introduce and adopt new policing methods and furthermore serves as a reliable footing for the presentation of political decisions as well as police effectiveness. Starting from the late 1980s, organised crime has often been used as a passe-partout to justify substantial changes to penal law, criminal procedure and the police system. Nowadays, the given impression is that of an organised crime threat decreasing in importance as an instrument to introduce and justify legal and institutional reforms

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Even the police agencies have begun presenting a more realistic assessment of organised crime in Germany and have started to concede that there was some overestimation of its threat in the past. A study of the State Office of Criminal Investigation (Landeskriminalamt) of Baden-Württemberg, conducted in cooperation with Kinzig, states that the police 'fight against organised crime' has until now been limited to the prosecution of offenders and crimes that are relatively easy to detect and apprehend (e.g. drug-related crime). Illegal practices in the domestic and international business sector and especially in the bidding of public contracts, which would most probably meet all the criteria of the official organised crime definition, have so far not been regarded as such and thus have yet to be duly investigated.

TRACING CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS IN FRANCE

In France, as in other European countries, organised crime is a relatively recent concept, though it is now referred to with increasing regularity. The expression 'organised crime' made its appearance in the French public debate in the early 1990s, in parallel with the end of the Cold War and the bipolar world view that this had engendered. Two assessments are implicitly associated with the concept of organised crime: that the existing law enforcement arrangements are inadequate to deal with this new form of criminality and that the process of globalisation created opportunities for the growth of organised crime. In other words, it is assumed that the upheavals in the various economies all around the world allowed criminal organisations to emerge or transform themselves.

Milieu (underworld) and beaux voyous (goodfellas) are two essential concepts in the French collective imagination. These two terms are often linked with the name of a variety of French cities. Milieu and beaux voyous are also frequently used to describe men known to the public for their illegal activities, both proven and suspected, their unshakeable respect for the gangsters' 'code of honour' and their various escapades (novel hold ups, connection with the nightlife or socialising with famous personalities from the world of sport, politics or cinema).

Even in the perception of law enforcement officers, in fact, the word 'underworld' often invokes the image of a 'godfather', 'boss' or 'consigliere' (caïd, parrain, juge de paix), as represented by journalists and film directors since the early twentieth century. This perception, moreover, reflects an idea originating from the public domain: that the underworld is a set of individuals, often based in Marseilles, Corsica or Paris, who have opted for a career in crime.

Thus, the first characteristic of the French criminal world, as described by law enforcement officers, appears to be a duality between underworld and criminal career. Within this duality, the underworld is associated with a specific territory, while the career extends over an undefined territory or even the whole world.

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According to law enforcement officers, criminal entrepreneurs are supported by people 'in the same business' (who have proved their specific skills in the criminal and/or legitimate economy) and head up international businesses based on the capitalist model. They directly control groups of individuals from a military-style command post. These groups are involved in many different illegal activities and work in specific areas in France (south-eastern region, Paris and the French Caribbean islands) and abroad. They also indirectly manage many legitimate companies under figure-head directors or using various money laundering techniques.

They are also in contact with a selected variety of other entrepreneurs of the criminal economy, at both national and international levels, particularly with Italian-American organisations. They appear to make use of confidential information relating to the security of their 'business', and enjoy the protection of individuals in (highly) responsible positions in the legitimate fields of law, economics, politics, finance and secret services.

By piecing together and cross-checking information from criminal investigations and the informal admissions of the accused (which are never formalised because their authors would not sign them due to fear of reprisals on their families or on themselves) some examining magistrates even mention the existence of a 'superstructure'. This superstructure allegedly culminates in a central person whose authority within the various French underworlds appears to be undisputed. Other interviewees assume that in addition to his protean activities, a goodfella is also in charge of solving 'public order problems', which presupposes a direct link between this criminal and third parties from legitimate public and private sectors.

Despite the partial dismantling of the tangled web of networks of French drug traffickers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is surprising to find some of the same operators, 15 to 20 years later, in control of the entire production and distribution chain of synthetic drugs, above all ecstasy or amphetamines.

TRACING CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS IN FRANCE

The path followed by some operators, who are still active despite having played a part in the development of the French criminal economy since the Second World War, reveals several dominant areas of activity in addition to drug trafficking: (which is the main action).

These are–

- Prostitution and the associated trafficking (exploitation of cheap and illegal labour);
- Hold-ups
- Kidnapping for Ransom;
- Forgery
- Racketeering
- Smuggling.

However, there are still many questions to be asked about the formation of a national market that is increasingly inclined towards product diversity and the development of a specific economy, broadly dominated in its large-scale distribution by the same criminal organisations that have occupied dominant positions since the 1960s. Whether the market is a monopoly, an oligopoly, or one based on plain old competition is still in doubt.

Before we consider some of the characteristics that will help us better understand the drugs market in France, it is interesting to note that the starting point for the industrialisation of this market was identified with the international heroin trade.

In the 1980s, a French ‘godfather’ revealed during one of his rare spells in police custody that the dismantling of the ‘French Connection’ was the starting point for the rapid rise of heroin consumption in France – some commentators even use the word ‘epidemic’ along the lines of the situation in the United States. Given the problems involved with exporting the product to the American continent, the French operators (those who had escaped North American, Swiss or French justice) turned their attention toward the national demand.

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They no longer sold their products to a narrow and well-informed segment of the population whose usage was socially 'controlled' (professionals and artists), but exploited the growing demand of groups of individuals living on the margins of a society in the middle of a socio-cultural identity crisis (e.g. connected with the events of May 1968).

Following the heroin model, use of cannabis derivatives (and, later on, cocaine) also moved out of the normal circles of habitual users and expanded into larger social strata, with increasingly eclectic consumption patterns and growing problems in financially supporting the various forms of use, particularly for heroin addiction.

It is thanks to the multi-skilled nature of French organised crime that its members have been able to acquire and maintain a leading position in the drugs market without neglecting their previous specialisation and activities, such as armed robberies, procurement, illegal gaming and forgery.

Since the 1960s and 1970s the multi-skilled group has been a key characteristic of French organised crime. Of course, this does not exclude the possibility of temporary specialisation. An individual who specialises in forging may find himself involved in procuring or drug trafficking. Over the following decades, the dividing lines between criminal activities became even more blurred, and we can now see that multiple skills are essential.

Today, three activities are emerging, two of which appear particularly profitable. These are—

- Armed robbery
- Drug trafficking
- Drug Procuring
-

It is still difficult to carry out a strong analysis of the involvement of organised crime in the legal economy. Without any doubt, the fact that organised crime actors and bandits are anchored in society means to a certain extent their participation in the formal economy.

TRACING CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS IN FRANCE

The first step of the infiltration in the economy involves the acquisition of legitimate commodities, such as land holdings, buildings and movable properties, with dirty capital. Most criminal entrepreneurs seek to be directly or indirectly owners of their housing. A small percentage of them still pursue a typical underground lifestyle that manifests itself in extravagant expenses, particularly in the leisure industry. Those underworld members thus enjoy the nightlife in the French big cities and spend time abroad.

Satisfying the basic needs of their close family is an important objective for the majority of the goodfellas – this usually means that they buy flats, cafés or shops for their close relatives and ensure high-school training to their children. It is not unusual to see the descendants of French criminals in legal sectors such as law, medicine, engineering or politics.

The participants of the milieu define themselves as businessmen and not as criminals. The preliminary fields of investment remain the cafés, bars, restaurants and discothèques because these are high-liquidity businesses and provide goodfellas with a territorial anchorage. The cafés are also a central place of socialisation for the underground. They enable informal transactions and facilitate the construction of networks. In these cases, participating in ‘realty trusts’ (société civile immobilière) to buy bars and restaurants is an optimal way to hide the illegal origin of money.

In a much more limited number of cases, a consolidation may take place, involving more capital and more labour. For instance, organised crime members may decide to acquire a participation in commercial companies to launder huge amounts of money and sometimes also hire specialists (such as lawyers, legal counsellors, notaries, insurance agents, stockbrokers, and so on) to plan their investments. Furthermore, it is judicially proved that milieu members have invested money in some French casinos (such as those Nice and Menton). Indisputably, the casinos provide considerable advantages to justify a legitimate activity.

TRACING CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS IN FRANCE

It is clear that there are connections and multiple forms of cooperation among criminal organisations. French organisations are in business with Italian mafias, Chinese triads, Russian criminal nebula and Colombian cartels. These relationships do not follow a hierarchical regulation but are based on the actual interests of each organisation. The evolution of these networks tends to soften the (artificial) boundaries between white collar crime and the traditional criminal activities.

SPAIN-THE SOUTHERN GATEWAY

Today, one of the major challenges for Spain is to distinguish between terrorism and serious and organised crime for profit.⁸ In Spain, the debate on organised crime has been entirely dominated by the debate on ETA and the Basque Separatist Party, BATASUNA, which has been recently banned from public participation on charges of granting political protection to ETA.⁹ In this realm, the Nathanson Centre¹⁰ has raised some concerns about the association that is usually made between transnational organised crime and terrorism.

While it is true that the links between terrorist organisations and serious and organised criminal groups have always existed, the nature of those links contributes to the drawing up of policies and to the policing of such activities. For example, the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) Transnational Organised Crime Working Group identified what some policy makers observe as 'dangers' if governments make the links too definitive. One of the main concerns was that if the links were considered to be ingrained into one absolute goal the 'war on terrorism' could turn into a 'war on crime' and anti-terrorism powers could normalise exceptional policies and procedures, which in turn could impose a threat to the principles of citizens' rights and privacy. Another concern was that if the nature of the links was not thoroughly understood, law enforcement efforts could be wasted before really recognising who the target actually was. Or, as in the case of Spain, efforts against organised crime or against terrorism in general could be overshadowed by the fight against ETA.

This was confirmed by the terrorist attack against a major railway station in Madrid on 11 March 2004. It killed 192 people and injured 1500 train commuters on their way to work in the early morning. The attack was carried out by a locally based group of radical Islamists inspired by Al Qaida. While public intelligence and senior police officers focused their attention on ETA, this loosely organised group acquired explosives through contacts with local criminals. They financed their activities through the sale of Moroccan hashish and probably through forged pre-paid telephone cards.

The truth is that while money is the goal of organised crime, money is the tool for terrorist organisations. Although there is some overlap in time and space between terrorism and the criminal markets this is more the result of the former's need for temporal joint ventures for funding rather than long-term strategic alliances.

SPAIN-THE SOUTHERN GATEWAY

To date, there has been no proof confirming the liaisons between ETA and serious crime for profit. However, some claim there is enough circumstantial evidence to support such an accusation. For example, the last report from the Observatoire Géopolitique des Drogues (2000) underlined repeatedly that ETA is involved in drug trafficking. In addition to that, a pentito, a collaborating witness, attached to the camorra clan of the Genovese from Avellino declared recently before the anti-mafia prosecutor of Naples that ETA exchanged drugs (cocaine and hashish) with them for weapons and explosives.

Criminal groups with international connections began operating in Spain in the early 1980s. On one side, foreign criminals attached to the Italian Mafia and to the international arms-dealing market found refuge in a newly born democracy and operated from here. Genaro Mazzuarella, one of the heads of the Neapolitan camorra was arrested in Puerto Banus (Marbella, South of Spain) in 1998, after many years of residence there. More recently, some of the main figures of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra (e.g. Nitto Santapaola) were linked to the former mayor of Marbella, Jesus Gil y Gil, through various obscure businesses and the funding of the mayor's campaign. Other 'celebrities' living in the south of Spain (Marbella) include Monzer al Kassar who, although indicted on numerous occasions and constantly under surveillance by international law enforcement agencies, nothing has hampered his Mediterranean joie de vivre. On the other side, Galician smugglers (engaged basically in the smuggling of American tobacco) expanded their business when they reached agreement with Colombian drug traffickers that were trying to expand into the European market.

Today, the general picture of organised crime in Spain suggests a mixture (although not necessarily cooperative) of national and international criminal groups and networks engaged in different activities whose ultimate goal is profit.

Since the early 1980s Spain has been exposed as the main entrance point to Europe for cocaine smuggled from South America and for hashish from Morocco. In 1999, Spain broke records for drug seizures in continental Europe: one ton of heroin, 18 tons of cocaine and 431 tons of hashish. Although figures for heroin have dropped, seizures for hashish show a rising trend and, as far as cocaine seizures are concerned, 2001 broke records: 33.6 tons was seized. And these trends have more or less continued.

SPAIN-THE SOUTHERN GATEWAY

As mentioned earlier, various international criminal networks are conducting businesses in Spain. However, one must not ignore the local context that has facilitated their penetration into the country. Issues like cooperation with local criminal networks, police and political protection or the investment of illicit funds into the legitimate economy are difficult to measure accurately. Nevertheless, drawing statistics from the National Plan on Drugs (Plan Nacional sobre Drogas) the leading role that Spanish nationals play in drug trafficking in Spain turns out to be quite evident.

KEY ISSUES TO DEBATE

Hello delegate, unfortunately, this is not Key Issues to Debate. Fortunately, you have stumbled upon the pre-committee update for the Council of Europe. For beginners who are confused, or for further clarifications please *text the Chairperson (+91 9432326953)*.

Across the past 4 days, 3 different massive drug operations were unveiled, each at 3 different branches of the Balkan Route, and this is the information we have as of the morning of 11th June, 2026:

1. A seizure of 1,067 kg of high-grade Heroin in the early hours of 7th June 2026 through a raid conducted by Interpol at 'Bohem Hotel Riva' led to the arrest of 10 individuals. This marked the first of three high-profile drug seizures along the Balkan route. The Interpol, through intense interrogation, came to the knowledge that the drug trafficking was conducted by 'Rosa e grigio,' a recently founded sub-clan of the Camorra. The clan, which is thought to be based nearby, reportedly collaborates with local organized crime groups in Bulgaria and Romania in cahoots with local law enforcement agencies to smuggle various drugs such as heroin and methamphetamine to Central Europe. However, as the confiscated heroin was being loaded onto Bulgaria's Air Force plane, a loud explosion was witnessed, killing the detained traffickers as well as several Interpol officers.
1. A major seizure of over 100,000 nitazene-laced pills worth \$2.5 to \$5 million has been made on a highway off the city of Novi Sad, Serbia, during the preparations for the biggest music festival in Europe, the EXIT festival, on 10th June, 2026. The vehicle was supposedly heading towards the Petrovaradin Fortress, where the festival is held annually. The investigation has revealed that the individuals involved in the operation belong to the infamous Italian organized crime group, 'Ndrangheta. It seems that the group has expanded from trafficking traditional drugs to NPS (new psychotropic substances) as well. So far, the matter has been investigated by the Serbian government but will soon be handed over to I-CAN (the branch of INTERPOL dedicated solely to investigating the 'Ndrangheta group) due to the transnational nature of the drug supply, supposedly starting its journey from Turkey.

KEY ISSUES TO DEBATE

- On 11th June, 2026, a few minutes after midnight, 653 kilograms of cocaine was seized at the Port of Thessaloniki in Greece by the port authorities, who reported suspicious activities at the docking station at 11:06 p.m. before finding and subsequently seizing the illicit material. Around 3 hours after this matter, 108 kgs of heroin were seized at the Port of Piraeus. Greek authorities addressing this matter have raised major concerns regarding the sheer size of the drugs and suggests that transnational organised criminal groups have expanded exponentially and the drug capacity has grown at unprecedented levels in a short span of time. This awaits referral to the Europol and concerned regional authorities by the host government while experts attribute it to a lesser-active, older mafia body within Europe itself.

All 3 groups are now said to be operating mainly in Turkey as well as the above-mentioned countries, but with minimal interference or competition with each other's activities.

INTERPOL has allocated additional resources to the Balkan Route task force. It is upto the Council of Europe to deliberate on this matter and draw any conclusions deemed necessary.

PAPERWORK

Committee Email Address: councilofeurope.thsmun@gmail.com

Please note that in this committee, the Position Paper is due on 13th June, 2026, 11:59 pm. Submission of the Position Paper is compulsory. The format of the position paper is given in the [sample paperwork drive link](#).

Along with this, delegates are allowed 2 pre-committee communiques, to be sent by 15th June, 2026, 11:59 pm.

This committee will be accepting the following forms of paperwork:

- Position Paper (Compulsory)
- Public Communique
- Private Communique
- Presidential Statement

Position Paper Writing

Your position paper must have 3 sections-

- Statement of the Problem
- Country Policy
- Solutions

Statement of the problem

In your allotment's opinion, what are the main elements of the problem?

What are the roots of those elements?

Policy

What are your allotment's interests/stakes in the situation?

What has your allotment done to address this/what policies are in place?

Solutions

How does your allotment plan to solve the issues that you've mentioned in the first part of your position paper?

What future steps will you like to see taken to deal with the problem?

How can you improve already existing solutions to address the issue further?

While these pointers are not mandatory it is advisable delegates follow this format to give the Executive Board an idea of the delegate's stance and their understanding of the agenda at hand.

PAPERWORK

Communiqués

A communiqué is an official document that is used to send a message or plan of action. Communiqués can be used to do virtually anything, from proposing plans of actions to carrying out operations to communicate with other portfolios or delegates. However, all communiqués must be logical and physically possible. They are subject to ratification by the Executive Board.

Public Communiqués

Public Communiqués can be used by a delegation to declare a significant step, policy or action that has been taken by their country, pertaining to the crisis in committee, which changes the dynamics of the crisis. Public Communiqués are usually read out by the Executive Board to the committee if they are ratified. They can be submitted by a single country or multiple countries through **Joint Public Communiqués**.

Private Communiqués

Private Communiqués are used by a country to take covert or secret actions through their country's agencies. These communiqués need to be realistic and outline the idea behind the action so that the Executive Board can understand the intentions of the delegation. Private Communiqués are introduced by the Executive Board to the committee in the form of updates, if they are ratified by the Executive Board. Countries usually act individually through Private Communiqués, but multiple countries can take covert actions together through **Joint Private Communiqués**.

The more detailed you go and the more layered you make your communiqués, the more likely they are to be ratified. Always remember, quality over quantity. Get as creative as you can. Surprise us.

Presidential Statements

These are statements made by the Head of a State of a particular country to declare a major decision or action which signifies a shift in policy of the country concerned. It can either be written by the Head of State of one country or can be jointly written by the Heads of State of several countries together in the form of Joint Presidential Statements. Note that presidential statements are always circulated to the entire committee (so if you screw up, you screw up badly).

PAPERWORK

Resolution Writing

When writing resolutions/final paperwork, remember QARMA (Questions A Resolution Must Address):

The acronym breaks down into six essential questions that a resolution should answer:

- **Q – Question:** What is the specific problem or question the resolution is trying to solve?
- **A – Action:** What actions or measures does the resolution propose?
- **R – Responsibility:** Who is responsible for implementing these actions?
- **M – Mechanism:** How will the actions be carried out?
- **A – Administration:** Who will oversee and coordinate the implementation?
- **A – Assessment:** How will progress or success be measured?

FINAL PAPERWORK

Article 19 of the Statute of the COE-

At each session of the Consultative Assembly the Committee of Ministers shall furnish the Assembly with statements of its activities, accompanied by appropriate documentation.

The final paperwork for this committee will be an internal report of the COE titled “Statement of Activities” (this is a provisional paperwork, no document as such has been released by the COE to the public in the past). This document is of flexible nature, mostly formatted like a Working Paper, and its contents/voting procedure will be clarified to you later.

While technically this document should have no format, as ministers of the COE, we expect you to keep these basic guidelines in mind:

- Clauses are numbered sequentially with Arabic numerals, no bullets or letters, with subclauses given in lowercase roman numerals.
- All clauses end with a semicolon, written in plain text
- References to previous resolutions and recommendations follow the format: “Resolution Number\ (Year)” and “Recommendation \ Number\ ([Year)“.
- Quotations from legal texts (like the European Convention on Human Rights) are italicised or placed in quotation marks.
- The title is short and factual
- Each subclause ends with a full stop (.)

PAPERWORK

Policy for Paperwork

As diplomats of the COE, we expect all of you to maintain a certain professional work ethic in this committee. You will be highly penalized for violating these ethical codes.

PLAGIARISM POLICY: All submissions are expected to be the delegate's original work, and sources are to be cited properly in Position Papers/Communiques. Violations of such policy will result in heavy penalization.

AI POLICY: Any document flagged with over 10% AI will NOT be marked.

SUBMISSION FORMAT:

All submissions must be in Times New Roman, size 12 for body and size 14 for headings. All submissions should be named as follows: AllotmentName_TypeOfPaperwork

(Eg: Monaco_PositionPaper)

MLA or Harvard formatting is always preferred (don't trust citation generators, they're as reliable as a mafia group's right-hand man).

Delegates must submit all paperwork in accordance with the deadlines provided by the Executive Board. Late submissions will NOT be marked.

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THE END

(PLEASE DON'T HATE US. WE HAD TO GO THROUGH ALL OF THIS, TOO <3.)