Transnational Organized Crime

An Overview from Six Continents

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Transnational Organized Crime in Europe

Klaus von Lampe

TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME IN EUROPE

This chapter examines transnational organized crime in the European context. There are two sides to this issue. First of all, transnational organized crime is an internal problem in the form of cross-border crime connecting countries within Europe. At the same time, it is a facet of the global landscape of cross-border crime. Both aspects are considered here.

However, before delving into a discussion of the underlying phenomena, it is necessary to first establish a conceptual framework that is more meaningful and more concise than the concept of "transnational organized crime," which adds the notion of transnationality to the fuzzy and ambiguous concept of "organized crime" (Van Duyne & Nelemans, 2012; von Lampe, 2011; von Lampe, van Dijck, Hornsby, Markina, & Verpoest, 2006).

The concept of organized crime can be broken down into three basic dimensions: criminal activities, offender structures, and illegal governance. According to one view, organized crime is about crime that is organized in contrast to spontaneous, irrational criminal behavior. According to another view, organized crime is about organizations of criminals labeled, for example, "networks," "cartels," or "mafias." A third view, finally, holds that organized crime is about the exercise of power by

criminals in those areas that the government is unwilling or unable to regulate—for example, illegal markets or remote parts of a country.

Along these lines, *transnational* organized crime can be conceptualized in terms of three main categories: (1) illegal activities that somehow transcend international borders; (2) transnationally mobile criminal organizations—respectively, criminal organizations with a presence in more than one country; and (3) the extension of illegal governance across international borders.

Although empirically these three categories may overlap, in the interest of clarity it appears preferable to examine each category separately with regard to the situation in Europe.

GLOBAL CRIMES

Transnational criminal activities—namely, the smuggling of illegal goods—connect Europe with other parts of the world, and different countries within Europe (Europol, 2011a; U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2010). When one looks at the trafficking routes that span the globe, Europe can be found at either end: It is a destination for as well as a source of contraband that is being moved between continents. Most commonly, however, Europe is seen as a major consumer market.

This applies in particular to illegal drugs—namely, cocaine originating in South America and heroin originating in Central Asia. According to the U.N. World Drug Report, Europe is the world's second largest consumer market for cocaine (UNODC, 2011, p. 111) and the main consumer market for heroin (UNODC, 2011, pp. 71–73).

Both cocaine and heroin arrive in Europe as finished products. From what is known, there are no laboratories within Europe that manufacture heroin and few if any laboratories that manufacture cocaine from raw materials or intermediate products. What have been found in Spain and Greece are installations for repackaging heroin and for the secondary extraction of smuggled cocaine from substances used to prevent detection during overseas transport (UNODC, 2011, pp. 61, 104, 105).

A somewhat different picture presents itself with regard to cannabis. Although Europe is an important market for cannabis from Africa, in particular Morocco, it appears that European consumers are increasingly supplied with cannabis produced in indoor plantations within Europe (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction [EMCDDA], 2011, p. 41; UNODC, 2011, p. 190). Interestingly, indoor

cannabis plantations in a number of European countries—namely, the United Kingdom, have been prominently linked to Vietnamese immigrants (Larsson, 2009; Nozina, 2010; Silverstone & Savage, 2010).

In the case of synthetic drugs, likewise, the European market is primarily supplied by producers within Europe. At the same time, Europe is the world's main producer of amphetamine (EMCDDA & Europol, 2011) and it has in the past also been an important source for ecstasy (MDMA) marketed overseas. However, as a result of successful law enforcement intervention, Europe's role as a supplier of ecstasy has declined sharply in recent years (UNODC, 2011, pp. 38–39; U.S President, 2008, p. 21).

Besides illegal drugs, Europe is an important destination for other illegal goods such as protected cultural artifacts (Lane, Bromley, Hicks, & Mahoney, 2008), protected wildlife (Liddick, 2011), and counterfeit brand products, including medicine (World Health Organization [WHO], 2010), software (Nill & Shultz, 2009) and cigarettes (von Lampe, Kurti, Shen, & Antonopoulos, 2012).

Human trafficking for sexual exploitation and labor exploitation, since the fall of the Iron Curtain, appears to have been primarily a phenomenon within Europe. But there are also trafficking routes into Europe—for example, from China and Nigeria (Dowling, Moreton, & Wright, 2007; Europol, 2011a; Lebov, 2010; Smit, 2011; UNODC, 2009). However, the main illegal movement of people into Europe involves alien smuggling rather than human trafficking. All European countries are believed to be affected to some degree by illegal migration, facilitated in part by commercially operating alien smugglers (Antonopoulos & Winterdyk, 2006; Coluccello & Massey, 2007; Düvell, 2008; Kaizen & Nonneman, 2007; UNODC, 2010, pp. 67–77).

There are also illegal cross-border movements in the opposite direction, out of Europe to other parts of the world. Europe's role as an exporter of ecstasy and amphetamine has already been noted. Two other areas of transnational crime are also noteworthy: the trafficking in stolen motor vehicles and the trafficking in illegal waste. Main trafficking routes for stolen cars extend from Western Europe to Asia and to Africa (Europol, 2004). Likewise, in the case of illegal waste disposal—namely, secondhand electric and electronic equipment—main target countries are located in Asia and Africa (Europol, 2011b; Interpol, 2009).

Europe is an important global center for the theft and sale of credit card data and similarly valuable information over the Internet. This pertains in particular to the Russian-speaking parts of Eastern Europe (Chu, Holt, & Ahn, 2010). At the same time, European Internet users are the target of advance fee fraudsters from Africa (Ampratwum, 2009).

In the case of arms trafficking, smuggling routes lead into and out of Europe, and they also connect countries within Europe (Sagramoso, 2001; Spapens, 2007; UNODC, 2010, pp. 129–146).

The global illegal trade in human organs is a special case. There is a strong European component here as well, both in terms of organ donors from poor countries such as Moldova and in terms of wealthy Europeans receiving trafficked organs, with the transplantations typically, it seems, taking place outside Europe (Lundin, 2012; Scheper-Hughes, 2004).

The common pattern these global crime connections follow for the most part, with the notable exception of synthetic drugs, is the transfer of wealth (e.g., in the case of agricultural drugs from Latin America, Africa, and Asia being sold in Europe) or of costs (e.g., in the case of electronic waste trafficked from Europe to Africa and Asia) from richer to poorer countries. A similar pattern can be observed within Europe.

TRANSNATIONAL CRIMES WITHIN EUROPE

Transnational organized crime within Europe is mostly framed as an expression of the socioeconomic contrast between Western Europe on one hand and the former Soviet Bloc and Balkan countries on the other. There are indeed certain transnational crimes that to some extent are defined by an East-West axis. For example, the trafficking in stolen motor vehicles typically goes from Western Europe to Eastern Europe (Antonopoulos & Papanicolaou, 2009; Gounev & Bezlov, 2008), similar to other forms of predatory crimes such as cross-border serial burglary where Eastern European criminal groups operate in Western Europe (Weenink, Huisman, & van der Laan, 2004). In contrast, the trafficking in women for sexual exploitation (Surtees, 2008; Viuhko & Jokinen, 2009) and the smuggling of cigarettes (Europol, 2011a, pp. 32–33) goes primarily in the opposite direction, from Eastern Europe to Western Europe. There are, however, variations. Human-trafficking routes are in part determined by geographical proximity—for example, between Scandinavia and the Baltic states; in part they appear to reflect consumer demands and to connect source countries in Eastern Europe with Western Europe over greater distances. At the same time, trafficking routes also exist between different countries of transition in Eastern and Southeastern Europe (Englund, 2008; Kelly, 2002; Surtees, 2008; Viuhko & Jokinen, 2009).

In the case of cigarette smuggling, particular European countries have at different times stood out as main source and transshipment countries—such as Belgium, Poland, Lithuania, Montenegro, and Ukraine—and main

destination countries—such as Italy, Spain, Germany, and the United Kingdom (Hornsby & Hobbs, 2007; Hozic, 2004; Joossens & Raw, 2008; Vander Beken, Janssens, Verpoest, Balcaen, & Vander Laenen, 2008; von Lampe, 2006).

Other transnational crimes fit even less readily into a strict East-West schema. In fact, the European crime landscape can perhaps best be described as a patchwork where trafficking routes and regional crime hotspots are unevenly distributed across space and time (von Lampe, 2008). This is best documented in the case of illegal drugs.

The main point of entry for cocaine and cannabis imports into Europe is the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) while heroin enters Europe primarily through the traditional Balkan route involving countries in Southeastern Europe, and the silk route through Russia. The Netherlands and to a limited extent Belgium likewise serve as important points of entry as well as distribution centers within Europe for these agricultural drugs (EMCDDA, 2011; UNODC, 2011).

The Netherlands and Belgium also figure prominently in the production and distribution of synthetic drugs, namely, amphetamine and ecstasy (EMCDDA, 2011). The production of methamphetamine, however, is historically concentrated elsewhere in Europe, namely, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Labs have also been found more recently in Lithuania, Germany, and Poland. At the same time, consumption of methamphetamine is most prevalent in Scandinavia and the Baltic region, underscoring the patchwork character of transnational crime in Europe (EMCDDA, 2011, p. 52; Europol, 2011a, p. 16).

Other examples for the uneven distribution of crime patterns across Europe include the concentration of the production of counterfeit Euros in Bulgaria and Italy (Europol, 2011a, p. 34) and the concentration of certain kinds of cybercrime in the Russian-speaking parts of Eastern Europe (Chu et al., 2010).

THE ORGANIZATION OF TRANSNATIONAL OFFENDERS

When one shifts the focus from patterns of criminal activities to the organizational structures that connect the offenders involved in these criminal activities, an even more complex picture emerges. This is true especially when one departs from superficial accounts fixated on the ethnic background of offenders.

Transnational organized crime is often classified along ethnic lines or by the nationality of offenders. This makes sense to some extent since in particular areas of transnational crime there is a disproportionate involvement of offenders of certain ethnic or national backgrounds (Europol, 2011a). This may reflect the strategic importance of certain countries for specific types of transnational crime or particular trafficking routes, and it may reflect links between former colonial powers and their colonies or links between source and destination countries of migration. For example, offenders with personal links to important production and transshipment centers such as Colombia, Venezuela, the Antilles, or West Africa in the case of cocaine trafficking tend to have a competitive advantage over offenders with no such ties (Zaitch, 2002).

Migrant communities are also often highlighted as an important support infrastructure for transnational offenders. They constitute "niches of familiarity" (von Lampe, 2011, p. 6) and provide some level of protection from law enforcement because of the shielding effects of cultural and language differences (Kleemans & van de Bunt, 2002, p. 25; Paoli & Reuter, 2008, p. 24; Williams & Godson, 2002, pp. 330–331).

At the same time, ethnicity and nationality are too broad and too superficial categories for the conceptualization of transnational criminal structures. And they are misleading in the sense that they fail to capture the ethnic diversity of criminal structures in Europe. A more careful analysis needs to take other dimensions into account—namely, the form and function of criminal structures.

A Conceptual Framework for Analyzing Transnational Criminal Structures

Offender structures, generally speaking, serve one or more of three functions: economic, social, and quasi-governmental. Economic criminal structures aim at material gain. This category comprises entrepreneurial structures in a broad sense, including, for example, drug-smuggling rings and burglary gangs. These entrepreneurial structures have to be distinguished, analytically, from criminal structures that serve social functions. These noneconomic, associational structures support their members' illegal economic activities only indirectly. For example, they facilitate contacts, give status, reinforce deviant values, and provide a forum for the exchange of information. Examples for structures serving these social purposes include criminal fraternities such as the Sicilian Mafia (Paoli, 2003) and outwardly legal associations such as so-called outlaw motorcycle gangs (Barker, 2007).

A third type of criminal structures serves quasi-governmental functions. These illegal governance structures support illegal economic activities in a more abstract way by establishing and enforcing rules of conduct and by settling disputes in a given territory or market. A textbook example for this kind of criminal structure is once again the Sicilian Mafia (Gambetta, 1993). This highlights the fact that the three functions (economic, social, and quasi-governmental) may empirically overlap (von Lampe, 2008).

Entrepreneurial, associational, and quasi-governmental structures are not linked to a particular form of organization. Criminal structures may be formal or informal, and the interactions between offenders may vary with the degree to which they are integrated in long-term relationships. Following a threefold typology of markets, networks, and hierarchies, borrowed from economics (Powell, 1990), three basic forms of cooperation between offenders can be distinguished. Interactions may involve *independent actors* engaged in market-based transactions. In other cases, offenders may be integrated in *networks* that provide some level of commitment beyond a single transaction. Finally, in the case of *criminal organizations* in the narrow sense, coordinated action is the result of authoritatively assigned tasks. What form of organization emerges depends on various factors, including the specifics of the criminal activity offenders are involved in and the social environment they operate in.

Criminal structures, irrespective of their form and function, can be transnational in different ways. They may temporarily cross borders, they may establish a permanent presence in two or more countries, or they may migrate from one country to another.

Illegal Entrepreneurial Structures

Fairly complex criminal organizations have been reported in the area of cross-border predatory crime. These organizations operate from bases in Eastern Europe and engage in crimes such as serial burglary or pickpocketing in Western Europe. They typically consist of a management level and an operative level that may comprise several teams charged with separate tasks, such as casing a target, committing a burglary, and disposing of the loot (see, e.g., Europol, 2007; Weenink et al., 2004, p. 186).

One example is the so-called Koszalin gang (also known as "hammer gang" and "Rolex gang"), named after a town in northwestern Poland. The gang comprised about 200 members and existed over a time span of about 10 years until it was dismantled in 2004. It engaged in robberies of jewelry stores in Western European countries, using either stolen cars to gain entry

into stores by brute force or entering stores during business hours to then, within minutes, smash showcases with sledgehammers and remove high-value merchandise such as luxury watches. Gang members were typically recruited for the execution of these crimes from among unemployed men in their mid-20s to mid-30s. They operated in teams under the direction of "group leaders" who cooperated with "residents" in the target areas and reported to the gang leadership in Poland (Rieger, 2006).

Predatory crime groups tend to retreat from an area of operation after committing a certain number of crimes. They constitute what may be called 'transnationally mobile criminal organizations." In some cases, however, including the Koszalin gang, they rely on individuals who permanently reside in the country of operation and assist in the selection of targets and provide logistical support (Vander Beken & Van Daele, 2009; von Lampe, 2009). Such residents, who may have been sent or recruited by a criminal group or who may operate as independent entrepreneurs, can also be found in other areas of crime—namely, drug trafficking (Soudijn & Huisman, 2011).

In contrast to transnationally mobile criminal organizations with little or no permanent presence abroad, there are also criminal organizations with branches in two or more countries where similar tasks are completed in each country or a division of labor exists between branches in different countries. In these cases, one may speak of "multinational criminal organizations." For example, in the case of trafficking in stolen motor vehicles it appears to be more common for offender structures to extend across international borders on a more permanent basis. This means that tasks such as the stealing of cars and the changing of the identity of the stolen cars is typically done in one country, while the overall management of the operation, including the selling of the stolen cars, is handled in another country (von der Lage, 2003).

However, Gounev and Bezlov (2008) argue with regard to Bulgarian car traffickers that in recent years there has been a tendency away from complex, multinational illegal enterprises. They found that offenders involved in this type of crime—such as car thieves, mechanics, document forgers, courier drivers, and intermediaries—now tend to flexibly cooperate in changing combinations of individuals and small groups within larger transnational networks of criminally exploitable ties (Gounev & Bezlov, 2008, pp. 419–420).

In fact, such fluid structures, rather than vertically and horizontally integrated organizations, appear to be common for many other transnational criminal activities. Drug trafficking, human trafficking, and alien smuggling, it seems, tend to involve chains of individual offenders, partnerships, and small clusters of criminals linked up by more or less temporary cooperative

arrangements (Bruinsma & Bernasco, 2004; Englund, 2008; Kostakos & Antonopoulos, 2010; Leman & Janssens, 2008; Matrix Knowledge Group, 2007; Ruggiero & Khan, 2007; Soudijn & Kleemans, 2009).

Underlying Associational Structures

Illegal entrepreneurial structures are in many cases embedded in underlying social network ties that facilitate both the creation and the maintenance of entrepreneurial structures by providing a basis of trust (von Lampe & Johansen, 2004).

Ethnicity is often mentioned in this respect. In most cases, however, it appears that ethnic homogeneity is a superficial characteristic of criminal networks based on family, friendship, or local community ties (Kleemans & van de Bunt, 2002, p. 23). As a result of migration, these close social ties may span great geographical distances. For example, heroin trafficking from production in Eastern Turkey to sale in Western Europe may be handled by members of the same family (Bruinsma & Bernasco, 2004, p. 87).

Ritual kinship ties can potentially provide a similar support infrastructure for transnational criminal activities. This is true for various criminal fraternities with membership spread across different European countries, such as the Sicilian Mafia (or Cosa Nostra), the Camorra, the Calabrian 'Nrdangheta, the Russian and Georgian Vory v Zakone, and the Chinese triads, as well as outlaw motorcycle gangs such as the Hells Angels and Bandidos (Barker, 2007; Kukhianidze, 2009; Pullat, 2009; Roth, 2009; Schwirtz, 2008; Silverstone, 2011; Soudijn & Kleemans, 2009; Wright, 2006).

How this plays out in practice has been shown by Campana (2011) in his analysis of a Camorra clan that included some members who had relocated to Scotland and the Netherlands. The members residing abroad assisted members in Italy in a number of ways—namely, in the laundering of money, by providing refuge, and by sharing investment opportunities in legal and illegal businesses.

Criminal Networks Not Embedded in Associational Structures

While kinship ties and ritual kinship ties provide a basis for illegal entrepreneurial structures, close bonds of that nature are not necessarily a precondition for the emergence of transnational criminal networks. Relatively weak social ties such as childhood acquaintance or contacts

established in the context of legitimate business relations can be sufficient grounds for criminal cooperation (Antonopoulos, 2008, p. 277; Kleemans & de Poot, 2008, pp. 90–91; von Lampe, 2009, pp. 26–34; von Lampe & Johansen, 2004).

Prisons are an incubator sui generis of transnational criminal networks. An illustrative case is Ronald Miehling who went from pimp and small-time criminal to one of Germany's major drug traffickers as a result of meeting a cocaine dealer from the Dutch Antilles in a German prison. At a Christmas party in Amsterdam, Miehling was subsequently introduced to a drug trafficker from New York City who eventually brought him in direct contact with cocaine suppliers in Colombia (Miehling & Timmerberg, 2004).

The Christmas party Miehling mentions is an example for convergence settings that bring transnational criminals together without preexisting ties. It also underscores the special role that the city of Amsterdam plays for transnational organized crime in Europe and, in particular, the drug trade. Amsterdam has been identified as an important European meeting place for drug traffickers involved in the trade of cannabis, cocaine, and heroin as well as synthetic drugs (Caulkins, Burnett, & Leslie, 2009, p. 68; Huisman, Huikeshoven, & van de Bunt, 2003; Junninen, 2006, p. 157; Ruggiero & Khan, 2006, p. 479, 2007, p. 170; Zaitch, 2002, p. 106).

A different kind of international offender convergence setting has been pointed out by Kleemans and van de Bunt (2008). They describe a case of financial professionals who regularly met at international tax conferences and under the guise of "tax seminars" and conspired in the commission of large-scale tax fraud. This example underscores the importance of legitimate social network ties and of "routine activities of everyday life" (Decker & Chapman, 2008, p. 108) in the creation of transnational criminal structures. While certain patterns in the organization of transnational offenders exist, reflecting, for example, flows of migration and the direction of trafficking routes, the multiplicity of factors that shape criminal structures almost inevitably results in the diffuse patchwork of activities and actors that characterizes transnational organized crime in Europe.

⩸ ILLEGAL GOVERNANCE

The discussion in this chapter so far has focused on the commission of transnational profit-making crimes and on the organization of offenders involved in these crimes. This leaves one issue to be examined that

ranks prominently in the public debate on organized crime in Europe: the transnational expansion of the spheres of influence of "mafia" organizations. In this context, mafias are not addressed as fraternal associations of criminals but as illegal governance structures that exercise some level of control over illegal and possibly also legal activities in a certain territory. The controversial question is to what extent these structures, which historically are local in nature, can replicate their position of power in another country.

Concerns that Italian mafia-type organizations such as the Sicilian Mafia, the Neapolitan Camorra, and the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta or Russian criminal groups such as the Moscow-based Solntsevskaya might colonize Europe have been a recurring theme for decades. These concerns typically surface in the wake of spectacular acts of violence such as the killing of six men outside an Italian restaurant in Duisburg, Germany, in August 2007. However, these events tend to be misleading. The victims in Duisburg, it turned out, were members of a 'Ndrangheta clan; however, they were murdered not in a quest for power in Germany, but in the course of a long-standing blood feud that pitted two families from the Calabrian town of San Luca against each other. The Duisburg murder was reportedly committed in revenge for the killing of a woman in San Luca a few months earlier (Fisher & Kiefer, 2007).

According to one view, mafias are unlikely to expand their territorial control across borders because of the specific sociopolitical context within which they have emerged (Gambetta, 1993, p. 251). According to another view, mafias are able to establish themselves in new territories provided a demand for criminal protection exists that is not met by domestic criminal organizations (Varese, 2011, p. 23).

Research on this issue is scarce and only two studies exist on the question of mafia transplantation within Europe that suggest that mafia organizations indeed tend to be unable to establish territorial control abroad.

The first study is Campana's (2011) previously mentioned investigation of members of a Camorra clan residing in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. He found that while the clan provides illegal protection services at its home base in Italy in the form of, for example, protection against competitors and thieves, dispute settlement and debt collection, no evidence exists of any such activities being carried out abroad (2011, p. 219).

The second study, by Varese (2011), investigates the presence of members and associates of the Moscow-based Solntsevskaya in Italy and Hungary.

In the case of Italy, Varese (2011) found a picture similar to that described by Campana. Russian "mafiosi" residing in Italy aided members

of Solntsevskaya in the laundering of money, but they made no attempt to establish any form of territorial control or to engage in any form of criminal protection in Italy (p. 81). In contrast, Varese argues that a successful "transplantation" of Solntsevskaya has taken place in Hungary in the 1990s citing evidence that a group led by a Ukrainian-born businessman with "solid connections with the Solntsevskaya's leaders" extracted protection payments from criminals and owners of legitimate businesses (2011, p. 92).

From the evidence presented by Varese (2011), however, it is not clear whether this can be attributed to Solntsevskaya as an organizational entity or is better interpreted as the work of individuals and groups operating within the context of Hungary's transition economy.

In the latter case, the example of criminals from the former Soviet Union operating in Hungary would better fit a more general pattern of multiethnic underworlds that appear to be characteristic of most if not all European countries. Criminals of particular ethnic and national backgrounds may achieve prominence in certain localities and certain illegal markets that would be more reflective of general migration patterns than of the migration of criminal organizations.

A separate issue is the expansion of outlaw motorcycle gangs in Europe. Organizations with origins in the United States—namely, the Hells Angels and Bandidos—have established chapters in Northwest Europe since the 1970s and 1980s. More recently, recruitment efforts have extended to Southern and Southeastern Europe, including Turkey and Albania (Ziercke, 2010, p. 701). Outlaw motorcycle gangs are fiercely territorial. However, it seems that territorial control is primarily sought within the context of the biker subculture in terms of the hegemony or exclusivity of one biker club in a given geographical area (Bader, 2011; Barker, 2007). Violent conflicts between outlaw motorcycle gangs have broken out as a result of territorial conflicts, for example, in Scandinavia in the 1990s (the "Nordic Biker War") and in Central Europe in the 2000s (Wright, 2006).

⩸ CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined transnational organized crime in Europe with regard to criminal activities, offender structures, and illegal governance. Transnational crimes connect Europe with other parts of the world and different countries on the European continent. The picture that emerges

is that of a patchwork of trafficking routes and crime hotspots, involving criminals of different ethnic and national backgrounds. Offender structures take on a variety of forms, from purely market-based interaction to networks of criminally exploitable ties and, in some cases, more integrated criminal organizations. Mafia-like organizations such as the notorious Sicilian Mafia have a presence in various European countries as a result of the migration of individual members. However, in their role as illegal governance structures these mafia organizations tend to be confined to their territories of origin.

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