
ADAPTABILITY OF ORGANIZED CRIMINAL GROUPS TO THE SITUATION CAUSED BY THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

Ilija Zivotic

International Police Organizatiot Belgrade, Republic of Serbia, iljazivotic@gmail.com

Daniela Trajkovski

Faculty od Security, Skopje, University St.Kliment Ohridski, Bitola, Republic of N. Macedonia,
trajkovski_daniela@hotmail.com

Abstract: The pandemic caused by the COVID 19 virus, which has been inflicting huge human casualties and material damage to economies around the planet for months, has not escaped organized criminal groups (OCGs). Many activities affected by the OK have also been affected by the situation caused by the Corona virus. Tourism, catering, international transport are just some of the economic activities that were previously the target of OCGs. However, the security forces did not have a long break. Organized crime quickly adapted to the new situation and attacked some new economic and social activities that were not its primary targets before. After the easing of measures and the opening of economies and markets in some countries, many business owners have become easy targets. The OCGs, which had large piles of money from previous years, were just waiting for the right moment to return to the game using proven methods such as blackmail, threats, and greening.

Keywords: organized crime, security, economy, covid 19

1. INTRODUCTION

Organized crime since its inception in southern Italy⁵⁷ when the cooperation of government officials and organized criminal groups was first recorded, which is the first school example of the formation of this negative phenomenon in a narrower sense according to the division of many scientists⁵⁸ to this day it has survived thousands of police actions, changes of hundreds of governments and dozens of wars around the world.

In Italy alone, real estate, companies, cash and other valuables worth tens of billions of euros have been seized in the last three decades. In the period from August 2019 to July 2020, in Italy, legally acquired property and goods worth 1.447 billion euros were seized and hundreds of people were arrested on suspicion of belonging to organized criminal groups.

The general health burden of people as a result of the innate instinct for self-preservation activated by the constant general media content related to the pandemic has led to information and news about organized crime becoming secondary, which at one point, organized crime came under the radar. This was certainly contributed by a number of other factors that we will address in the paper, but also increased involvement of law enforcement officers in monitoring the implementation of anti-pandemic measures prescribed by the authorities such as quarantine, wearing masks, maintaining physical distance, banning gatherings but also protests and riots. as a form of resistance and political violence of certain groups.

All of the above, along with countless human casualties caused by organized crime and immeasurable economic damage to individuals, states and society in general, is a reason to assess its impact on the entire human community during the pandemic caused by the COVID 19 virus as a unique event in human history. to study the ability of organized criminal groups to adapt to the new situation.

2. INFLUENCE OF COVID19 VIRUS PANDEMIC ON ORGANIZED CRIME

As organized crime is closely connected with all social movements, it was of course influenced by the situation caused by the pandemic. Namely, in this as well as in previous crises, organized crime behaves like a living organism. He avoids disappearance and fights for survival trying to adapt to the new situation.

Accordingly, we can identify:

Vulnerability of organized crime to the new situation

Adaptability and chances of organized crime in the new situation

Vulnerability of organized criminal groups in a situation caused by a pandemic.

57 Životić I, Trajkovski D, Pekić I; „The Benefits of EU Membership in the Fight Against Organized Crime“, Faculty of Law, Kicevo, N.Macedonia,2020, str.

58 Mijalkovski M.;Terorizam I organizovani kriminal, Fakultet Bezbednosti, Beograd,2010,str.117-120

58<https://www.statista.com/statistics/743673/value-of-assets-seized-and-confiscated-from-mafia-in-italy/>

Organized crime has long been no longer a problem of just one state. Criminal groups have long known no borders or acted locally. Their international character has been the reason for the formation of a large number of international police agencies such as Interpol, Europol and the like. It follows from the above that the unhindered crossing of the borders of members of criminal groups as well as the transport of goods that are the subject of their activities are one of the preconditions for their functioning. The implementation of measures banning the crossing of state borders as one of the measures on a large number of victims that forced countries to react drastically, which is in line with the logical opinions of some authors that large losses, unlike small ones, always force states to act⁵⁹ drugs, primarily cocaine, heroin but also synthetic drugs. It is generally known that some of the main substances are procured by synthetic drug manufacturers on the Chinese black market. As China was the first to introduce total quarantine in certain areas and maximum border control, all types of shipments were delayed and thus the almost impossible procurement of this type of raw materials. This led the criminal groups to look for other sources and instead of raw materials to even try to procure some other products that could not be found to such an extent in certain markets before.⁶⁰

Traffickers were also affected by these measures, mostly those engaged in forced prostitution as one of the most common forms of international character. Unfortunately, this did not lead to a significant reduction in these crimes at home. On the contrary, there are serious indications that the crisis caused by the pandemic has left many shelters or safe houses for victims of trafficking without funds, that many have been closed and that the vulnerability of these people to become victims again has increased.⁶¹ In addition, the police force has become overburdened with new tasks, weakened due to a significant number of infected in their ranks, which further complicates the situation when talking about this topic.⁶²

Adaptability and chances of organized crime in the new situation

In order to properly assess the adaptability of organized crime to this truly unique situation, it is necessary to use a multidisciplinary approach to calling for security as a science or scientific discipline to use the knowledge of other sciences and disciplines, but in its own way. In doing so, special attention must be paid to predicting future phenomena in this case of the development of organized crime in specific conditions dictated by the pandemic. The prediction phase can provide an answer to possible consequences, damages and losses in a specific situation when preventive measures have not led to the desired results.⁶³

1. Investing in legal cash flows and the economy. Even before the pandemic, many companies were burdened with mortgages, loans and other forms of borrowing. Many of them have faced difficult business from various factors. Due to quarantine, border closures, limited working hours and other measures, we can assume that a large number of them faced serious financial difficulties, although some countries responded by providing assistance.⁶⁴ Even before the crisis, such companies were easy prey for criminal organizations. Acquisition of property, recapitalization, drowning in larger companies, use of resources to commit crimes, especially money laundering, are just some of the ways in which organized crime can benefit companies that are on the verge of collapse due to the consequences caused by the crisis. Special attention should be paid to the tourism, catering and international transport sectors.
2. On the other hand, certain branches of the economy have experienced a real boom in this situation. The bright spots of economic activities are in online trade, production and distribution of medical equipment, delivery of products and the like. For example, the criminal organization from Naples, Camorra, has been investing money in the pharmaceutical industry for many years, but also in funeral companies.⁶⁵
3. Counterfeiting of requested products. Numerous cases of seizure of counterfeit drugs, ⁶⁶PCR tests, etc. have been reported. In Serbia, both the production and sale of falsified negative test results for COVID19 were recorded.⁶⁷

59 Slovic P, Fischhoff B, Lichtenstein S. Facts vs. Fears: Understanding Perceived Risk. 1980;

60 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53254879>

61 UNODC; „ Impact of the COVID19 Pandemic on the Trafficking in Persons”, Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section, Vienna, 2020, str.1-4

62 Jennings W.G,Perez N.M; „The Immediate Impact of COVID19 on Law Enforcement in the USA”, Nature Public HealthEmergency Collection, USA,2020

63 63 B. Todorović, D. Trifunović; „ Security Science as a Scientific Discipline-Technological Aspects”, Security Science Journal,Institute for national and international security, Belgrade, 2020, str15

64 <https://novaekonomija.rs/arhiva-izdanja/broj-73-septembar-2020/sti%C5%BEe-te%C5%A1ka-godina>

65 <https://www.fanpage.it/attualita/lallarme-di-roberto-saviano-pandemia-occasione-per-la-criminalita-organizzata/>

66 United Nations Office Drugs and Crime „ REPORT ON COVID-19-RELATED TRAFFICKING OF MEDICAL PRODUCTS

AS A THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH", Vienna, 2020, Str 16

4. Internet scams. Quarantine has led to an increased number of hours spent with the computer and the purchase of various products. Many fake websites have been reported. Even websites have been created that collect voluntary contributions for allegedly vulnerable citizens, which are in fact phantom.
5. The most general prediction is the possibility that organized crime will try to seize the opportunity and get into public funds that finance the expansion of hospital capacities and the purchase of respirators and other things. Similar things happened in the past, in Italy after the earthquake or in Japan after the 2011 tsunami.⁶⁸
6. . Corruption of officials in order to obtain better conditions during direct negotiations when tenders are avoided due to the urgency of procurement of medical equipment.⁶⁹

3. CONCLUSION

Measures taken by states to curb the effects of the COVID19 pandemic were aimed at reducing casualties and reducing economic damage. These measures were shown to us by two persons of organized crime. On the one hand, we saw his vulnerability to some of these measures, and on the other, we learned that organized crime is extremely adaptable to unforeseen situations. Both groups of these measures were not taken to influence organized crime, but to overcome the epidemiological situation as the primary goal, but they extremely influenced the development and transformation of organized crime and are therefore very important for studying from a causal basis. Of course, all with the goal of the society being ready to adequately deal with organized crime in the future in the case of similar situations.

Certainly, real and complete research on this topic will be conducted only after the end of the pandemic, when complete statistical data of security services, ministries of finance, justice and international organizations will be available to researchers and scientists. Then, after a certain time distance, we will be able to conduct realistic surveys among citizens, but also potential victims of organized crime during a pandemic. Special emphasis on future research related to this topic should be placed on the relationship between organized crime and the holders of power during a pandemic, especially criminal groups operating in the territory of higher states. This is important in order to come to the conclusion where the state system has shown signs of vulnerability which are reflected in the intentional or unintentional omission of the influence of criminal structures. All this with the aim of eliminating the weak points of the system and preparing for some future crises and emergencies with the aim of reducing the impact of gangsters on society by using unforeseen and socially dangerous situations.

Also, in the case of groups operating on the territory of several states, we must identify the states in which the bases of these criminal structures are located. So, we have to establish which countries are their safe and firm stronghold and, of course, draw conclusions about why those countries were chosen. Recording which countries are most vulnerable to the influence of organized crime in the legal course of business and the misuse of public funds intended to overcome the consequences of a pandemic is crucial. In such states, work must be done to strengthen the fight against corruption, using the tools and mechanisms recommended in the UN Convention against Corruption. By reducing safe zones, we will also get a reduced impact of organized crime in general.

In the near future, extensive research and intelligence work will be needed to obtain data on the change in ownership structures of companies during the crisis as well as immediately after it in order to mark the possible entry of dirty capital into legal flows. It will also be necessary to analyze the business and the origin of the companies that have been awarded jobs related to the expansion of hospital capacities and the procurement of medical equipment by urgent procedure outside the tenders provided for that.

In all of the above, the basis must be cooperation at the local level between various ministries and other national bodies dealing with issues of importance in this paper, but also comprehensive international cooperation because, as we have repeatedly stated in this paper, organized crime really knows no borders.

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⁶⁷ <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/lazni-pcr-testovi-od-30-do-100-evra-grupa-falsifikatora-izradivala-dokumenta-za/m05ezsw>
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⁶⁹ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/afera-respiratori-premijer-novalic-solak-i-hodzic-sipa-tuzilastvo/30641481.html>

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