

## Transnational Organized Crime in the Former Yugoslav and Post-Soviet Republics: A Desk Review

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### Abstract

By means of discourse-analytical desk review of qualitative sources, this article discusses the factors that have facilitated the prevalence of transnational organised crime in post-Soviet and former Yugoslav states together with the impacts and the factors that are affecting the effective prevention and control of transnational organized crime (TNOC) in post-Soviet and Yugoslav states. It examines the factors affecting the effective prevention and control of transnational organized crime (TNOC) in post-Soviet and Yugoslav states, and impacts, especially those connected to the globalization of the world economy; the increased mobility of people and services across transnational borders leading to the ethnicization of criminal activities and internationalization of organized crimes due to borderless illicit traffic. The paper argues that as a result of the combination of multiple factors, the prevailing rhetoric of TNOC in the former Yugoslav and Post-Soviet States is explained in terms of the profitability of TNOC economy for political elites, border police, smugglers and people living around the borders and the ability of organized criminal groups to supplant state institutions and its replacement it with private interests which has led to the institutionalization of criminality and the privatization of criminalization occasioned by breakdown of law and order and the corruption of the political elites. Finally, the paper concludes by nothing that the current manifestation of transnational organized criminal activities in former Soviet territories is a synthesis of political corruption and criminal syndication.

**Keywords:** Transnational organized crime; Former Soviet territories; Illicit drugs; Conflict and former Yugoslav

### Introduction

The end of the Cold War in post-Soviet states has been identified by prior and existing studies as the precursor for the growth of TNOC in former USSR [1,2]. Contrary studies however, argue that organized crime have been in existence within these states before the eventual demise of defunct Communist economies [3,4].

Institutional reports such as Transparency International [TI] (2007a, 2007b) and Euro barometer (2008), among others, are of the opinion that with the involvement of political and private sector corruption, transnational organized crime (TNOC) had become institutionalized and pervasive in recent years in the former USSR Republics. This is reinforced by studies including [5,6] that the manifestation of organized crime in contemporary SEE is a merger of traditional organized crime and white collar crime morphed by forces of globalization. According to the current Transparency International Index, most South Eastern European countries (SEECs) are corrupt with Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia as the most corrupt (TI, 2017).

The European neighborhood has been a historic and significant hub for the proliferation of organized criminal markets and activities [7]. The United Nations Office for Drug and Crime (UNODC) as referenced by Hamzeh [8] identifies drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, counterfeiting, robbery, kidnapping, extortion, cyber-crime and many other forms of illicit activities as flourishing within these geographical contiguous borders of SEECs. While certain conditions have precipitated its development and spread including wars, illicit economy and corruption, [9] transnational

organized activities still continues to prevail in these emerging democratic states of former USSR several decades after the Cold War.

Studies by Dillinger associate the contemporary prevalence to the merger of criminal enterprise with domestic politics, facilitated through privatization and import and export control of illicit goods. This is supported by Frederick, [10] establishing monopolies, control of black economy for the generation of revenues of petty crime, drug trafficking including prostitution and the distribution system as catalyst for the institutionalization of TNOC in SEE economies. Similarly, emerging new dimensions for the perpetuation of financial crimes including cyber-crime and credit card fraud as Jeffrey, [11] observed has led to the redistribution of dirty money into the lobbies of government structures these present SEE countries leading to a political criminal nexus in what Craig [12] defined as the inevitable synthesis of political power and professional criminal activities.

In addition, new evidences based on studies on organized crime in former USSR states including [13,14] revealed that the growth of TNOC in its present form was facilitated due to the liberality of the economy of crime and corruption by regional governments. This is in agreement with studies by Shelley and Glonti [15,16] that state institutions through strategic collusion with law enforcement agencies have become ardent perpetrators of TNOC by encouraging big players in the criminal enterprise to operate within the shadow of laws. However, while a number of regulations have been made to dismantle the growth of these TNOC activities in the European neighborhood, the effectiveness of these interventions has remained questionable [17,18]. Partly associated with the inefficiency of the judicial system to criminalize and counteract the economy of crime [1], the rhetoric of transnational organized crime is still evident in these countries despite best efforts at preventing and controlling it.

While several emerging and prior studies have identified the conditions that have impacted the rise of these organized criminal syndicates in most of EN including Sheiley, [2] several high profile cases in literature have examined the involvement of organized crime, businesses, law enforcement and political class. However, emerging studies including the UNODC, [19] have focused on the role of the professional services industry, such as law-firms, accounting firms, custom and tax authorities in facilitating crimes and laundering of criminal proceedings and serving further as mechanisms for the institutionalization of organized crimes in the present era.

It is the focus of this paper to identify and appraise the factors engendering the manifestation of TNOc, and assay its attendant impacts for future stability permutations in the SEE region. The essay is organized as follows: Part one presents conceptualizes and contextualizes transnational organized crime. The second part examines the impact of globalization on organized crime in SEE. Part three examines the dynamics of transnational organized crime in former Yugoslavia (SFRY) and in Post-Soviet Republics. Part four discusses conditions that have facilitated Transnational Organized Crime Groups (TNOcs) in former Yugoslav and Post-Soviet States as well as determining the Impacts of Organized crime on SEE. The final part concludes the analysis by providing a synthesis of the discourse.

## **Conceptualizing and Contextualizing Transnational Organized Crime**

The greatest challenge for global security in the 21st century is the management of criminal activities across transnational borders of sovereign states with disparate national criminal laws [9]. With the signing of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in Palermo, Italy, in December 2000, the international community demonstrated the political will to answer a global challenge with a global response to crime crosses borders. The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime provided the institutional basis for criminalization of participation in an organized criminal group and provided a new tool to address the scourge of crime as a global problem, and therefore, a watershed event in the reinforcement of our fight against organized crime.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime constitute an effective tool and the necessary legal framework for international cooperation in combating, inter alia, such criminal activities as money-laundering, corruption, illicit trafficking in endangered species of wild flora and fauna, offences against cultural heritage and the growing links between transnational organized crime and terrorist crimes, Transnational organized crime is a global problem [1] and a big market generating an estimated \$870 billion globally annually from illicit activities [20]. It has been identified as affecting the gross national product (GNP) through the monopolization of economic activities [21] engendered by proliferation of criminal activities due to political instability, economic distress, growth of illicit trade, corruption [22]. It is defined as self-perpetuating associations of individuals operating across national borders for the purpose of obtaining power, influence and or commercial gains through illicit means [23]. According to the United Nations Office for Drug and Crime, [UNODC], [1] TNOc has political, economic implications affecting the rule of law and with implications for security in the New World Order [24].

Organized crime is a loosely defined concept due to different perceptions of its definition and amenability [25]. Schelling argues that

using organized crime in a generic sense to designate organized criminal activities may not apply as not all organized crimes have a defined structure i.e. the Russian Mafia. According to the UNODC Article 2(a) (2012), organized criminal groups are viewed as a structured group of three or more persons existing for a period of time with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or financial or material benefits. Similarly, Michael perceives organized crime as systematic criminal activities, and the National Crime Agency (NCA) views organized crime as a serious crime planned, coordinated and executed by people working together on a continuing basis which in most cases is motivated by financial gains.

Organised crime groups continuously exist over time across various climes using systematic violence and corruption to facilitate their criminal activities with the ability to cause economic, physical, psychological and societal harm [21]. However, whatever form or purpose they exist for, organized criminal groups have been identified in literature to be formed in three ways: through the family patriarch system referred to as the Mafia (i.e. Russian Mafia, Italian Mafia and the Medellin cartels); through business relationship; and lastly through criminal gangs (Mexican Sinaloa cartel) [26]. The Mafia which is common in Europe has a close knit hierarchy (Cosa Nostra) usually within a family; the business cartel usually has complex hierarchy while the latter usually have loose hierarchy. However, these groups are characterized by the operation of illegal business entities in which case members are bound together with the sole desire of making profit.

## **The Impact of Globalization on Organized Crime in SEE**

Emerging and existing studies in literature have associated the proliferation of transnational organized criminal activities in the globalization of the world economy [27,28]. Improved communications, better technologies, and the increased mobility of people and services across transnational borders in the present decade have engendered the rise of organized criminal groups. As Law, puts it the greatest challenge for global security in the 21st century is the management of criminal activities across transnational borders of sovereign states with disparate national criminal laws. As Porter, notes globalization has led to the ethnicization of criminal activities and internationalization of organized crimes due to borderless illicit traffic in drugs, arms and humans.

Organized crime profiting from the demise of the Cold War and the reform freeze that characterized the former Soviet republics and Yugoslav states assumed a transnational dimension leading to international debate by states in the 90s for the development of effective actions for the management of the growth of organized criminal markets [29]. Williams and Sanova, [30] viewed this as a consequence of the desire of organized criminal groups to maximize their expansionist ambitions and minimize national and international control over their activities.

As Galeotti [24] observes, transnational criminal activities in the present decade has assumed a distinctive security threat for the New World Order. These security threats as the United National Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), notes has consequences for global peace and undermining political, economic and socio-cultural structures. Shelley, [15] in corroboration, opines that transnational organized crime in the contemporary world have transcended its local traditional dimension to assume a more regional, global and cross-border form with illegal trafficking in persons, drug and arms as key to its

operational repertoire. The Solntsevskaya Bratva (Russia Mafia cartel) in Russia, Yamaguchi Gumi (Yakuza) cartel in Japan, Sinaloa cartel in Mexico, Camorra and Ndrangeta cartel in Italy, Medellin cartel in Colombia are examples of national cartel groups with strong transnational organized crime network.

Transnational organised criminal groups as part of their operational repertoire engage in many activities including drug trafficking, arms smuggling, money-laundering, firearms trafficking, counterfeiting, cybercrime, sex trafficking, black market trading of human parts and nuclear weapons and all other illegal activities across disparate national borders. Organized crime generates an estimated \$870 billion globally annually from these illicit activities [20]. Of all these activities, drug trafficking is the most common among transnational criminal groups and it is estimated to generate an estimated \$320 billion as total revenue from illegal sales and trade of drugs like cocaine, cannabis, heroine through illicit trade routes across transnational borders. Similarly, human trafficking is also estimated by the UNODC to generate \$32 billion in profit from sexual and labour-based exploitation of women, men and children through the illicit smuggling of migrants. Cyber-crime which includes identity theft, illegal sale and trade of nuclear weapons, fraud and many other illicit activities generates an estimate of \$1million annually and firearms smuggling generates between \$170 million to \$320 million yearly in estimated revenues [20].

### **Transnational Organized Crime in Former YUGOSLAVIA (SFRY)**

Transnational organized crime thrives under certain conditions. Political instability, economic recession, conflicts and wars, geographically contiguous porous borders and breakdown of law and order have been identified in literature to flourish the proliferation of organized crime groups [2]. For example, in the case of former Yugoslavia, several studies have associated increased political tensions within the Yugoslav states [31]; economic distress occasioned by the collapse of the Socialist economy [18]; corruption and weakness of security forces to prosecute criminal activities [26]; as contributory factors to its eventual disintegration.

The former Yugoslav region flourished under the Socialist federal republic economy during the Cold War as a regional power and vibrant economy with a Gross Domestic Product of 6.1 percent and 91 percent literacy levels [32]. The former Yugoslav region consisted of six states including Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Macedonian Republic, Montenegro and Serbia and two provinces in Vojvodina and Kosovo composed of cultural groups of Bosnians, Serbs, Croats and Albanians.

The Balkanization, of these Slavic territories started with struggles for national independence within the region which degenerated to bloody ethnic wars between the Serbs, Croats and Albanians [33]. In the face of a declining socialist economy and intra ethnic wrangling, former Yugoslavia became a hotbed for violent fratricidal and genocidal wars (i.e. ethnic cleansing of Croat-Bosnian Muslims) [34]. A study by UNODC revealed that over 3000 organized crime groups flourished in the former Yugoslav region [1].

The resulting war which led to the imposition of sanctions and embargo on the former Yugoslav territories by the United Nations led to the proliferation of organized criminal groups involved in the illegal smuggling of arms from neighboring Soviet states and trafficking in drugs and persons [35]. Criminal gangs, armed groups, drug lords as

Misha, [36] notes, profited from this anarchy for the merchandise of an illicit economy on drug and arms in southeastern Europe. Similarly, the lifting of state monopoly to the import and export of petrol products in former Soviet economies in 1991/1992 and the UN embargo on the importation of petrol to Serbia and Montenegro in the early 90s consequently increased smuggling activities of organized criminal groups with individuals, economic groups, politicians enmeshed in the petro-smuggling boom. As Carl, [37] notes this embargo coupled with the sanctions on the former Yugoslav regions made organized crime to thrive within a prosperous the unofficial economy.

The proliferation of organized crime in the region as Soina, [28] notes was further exacerbated by the involvement of the political elites in the former Yugoslav region in the aiding and development of smuggling channels by protecting those directly involved and facilitating smuggling collaborations with security forces lobbyists and organized crime syndicates for its illicit profit. More so, as Shelley [2] confirms, the corrupt new party leaders in former Yugoslav worked together with Yugoslav secret service and army in maintaining smuggling routes. Political leaders were either directly or indirectly involved with smugglers by granting passage across the new state borders to the organized criminal groups. The manifestation of organized crime in the former Yugoslav region corroborates the criminal hypothesis of Federico Varese, a Professor of Criminology at University of Oxford that 'the process of creation of new states leads to permanent transformation of state/national interests into private ones and fosters the development of corrupt, non-transparent and crime-permeated societies' as evidenced in South Eastern Europe.

### **Transnational Organized Crime in Post-Soviet Republics**

The end of the communist regime following the end of the Cold War led to the eventual collapse of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The blight of a dwindling economy coupled with the political commotion within its territorial borders, occasioned by separatist demands for greater regional autonomy and democratization, led to the disintegration of the former USSR into Russia, Baltic, Central Asia, East-Central Europe and Southern Caucasus states. The emergent post-Soviet states as Keith [34] observed, grappled for survival and viability under the weight of the new liberal economic and political reforms. This eclipsed the defunct Soviet states in an economic freeze following rapid reforms [26] and blossomed into a situation which engendered criminal legacies characterized by proliferation of criminal groups, breakdown of law and order, corruption of the political elites and law enforcement agencies and a non-functional civil society [2].

The porousness of contiguous borders which facilitated the easy movement of goods fostered the growth of organized criminal groups [38]. Heroin, cocaine and other illicit drugs dominated most trading activities as well as trafficking in arms and persons in the former USSR. The borders as the UNODC, notes, became a transit route for the shipment of illicit goods to other countries especially in Southern Europe. Notably, this illicit trade has produced the largest criminal group in the world today based on revenue- the Solntsevskaya Bratva also known as the Russia Mafia. The group has an estimated membership of 9,000 and deals mainly in drug trade (mainly heroin originating from Afghanistan) and human trafficking. Russia consumes 12% of the total world heroin production.



As Jeremy observes, poverty and unemployment in the former USSR contributed to the metastasized growth of criminal groups and activities. Most of the Baltic and South Eastern Europe states were ebbed in poverty and unemployment as a result of economic distress and internal conflicts. To exacerbate this, the purchase of state assets in the privatization process that followed the economic reform exacted a form of authoritarianism that saw security agencies working with political elites in collaboration with organized criminal groups and smugglers to acquire state assets. A situation which Bradley [22] posits led to the institutionalization of criminality. Shaw [22] aptly described this as a manifestation of the privatization of criminalization occasioned by breakdown of law and order and the corruption of the political elites.

### **Conditions that have facilitated Transnational Organized Crime Groups (TNOCs) in Former Yugoslav and Post-Soviet States**

Several conditions have been identified in literature to facilitate the proliferation of transnational criminal activities in the former Yugoslav and Soviet republics. In the case of former Yugoslav states, international sanctions and embargoes imposed by the United Nations; fratricidal ethnic wars; the growth of the illegal economy of illicit trade in drugs and arms smuggling especially in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania; and the corruption and involvement of the Milosevic regime in organized criminal activities encouraged the spread of TNOCs in the region. As Keith, [34] notes, under Milosevic in Yugoslavia TNOCs and corruption became endemic, institutionalized and commonplace with huge segments of the population involved. The following paragraphs would discuss these conditions in greater details;

#### **Collapse of former Soviet and Yugoslav States (Wars)**

The first condition that has helped transnational organised crime groups thrive is the wars that occurred in both regions. These wars allowed the already existing local criminal groups attain positions of power thereby creating new network of criminals comprising of political elites and states security who made their profit from smuggling and war profiteering. In Croatia for instance, the paramilitary unit and official security forces consisted of various criminals who engaged in ethnic cleansing and continued their criminal activities after the wars [18]. Another contributing factor to rise of organised crime groups was the unemployment spread through the region as a result of the war most especially among the youths. Hence there was an increase in youth involvement in crime.

Similar to former Yugoslav region, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the implementation of the 'Shock Therapy' in 1992 accelerated the growth of organised crime groups from local groups to transnational groups. This aim of this reform was to prevent the breakdown of the Russian economy which was declining as a result of the fall of communism. It entailed political and economic openness of market opportunities which led to an increase in transnational organised crime activities, illegal trade and markets and many other business opportunities for these groups [22]. For instance, transnational organised crime activities increased by 7% every year and by 1991, there had been an intermittent increase in the amount of gangs with over 700 gangs in the Russia alone. With the collapse of the region at large, transnational organised crime groups profited from all forms of illicit activities ranging from drug trafficking to

embezzlement of state funds. States assets were privatized giving room for criminal groups to flourish.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia brought about different failed states the former into twelve and the latter into eight states, a vacuum of power in the states, instability and collapse of government institutions thereby giving room for transnational organised crime groups to flourish. In the absence of state enforcements, both regions were anarchical with the lack of any form of central governments. In addition, there was no established rule of law, very few institutions were functioning and this brought about high level of corruption and organised crime.

Recovering from the collapse of both regions, the weak states found it difficult to adapt to the emergent conditions in the aftermath of the Cold War. For instance, the judicial institutions in Russia were ineffective and very inefficient which made prosecution of transnational organised crime members difficult. In the same light, the weakness of the state security systems caused by the wars in former Yugoslavia made it difficult for law enforcement agencies to put an end to criminal activities [26]. The illegal organisations controlled by transnational organised crime groups contributed to the sorry state of both regions. Such organisations were not obligated to pay taxes because of the government's inability to make effective structural changes in policies of transparency and accountability.

#### **Illicit drug trade**

The dissolution of former Yugoslavia as a result of ethnic wars led to the rise of transnational organised crime activities such as smuggling and illicit sale of small arms and light weapons (SALW), drug trafficking especially heroin and cocaine. By the late 1990s, the region had not only become one of the top networks for smuggling drugs, arms and illegal immigrants into the EU, but it had also become the major pathway for various illegal products into the EU and its neighbourhood. Till date, the EU and its neighbourhood still suffers from the presence of organised crime groups. For instance, about 30% of Afghan heroin gets into Europe through the Balkans [1,17,18,39,40].

Furthermore, while the Dayton Agreement brokered a peace deal in the restoration of normalcy and peace in the warring region of former Soviet republics by dealing with organized crime, corruption and smuggling, it failed to deal with issues of internal displacements, refugee syndrome, post-war reconstruction and sustainability of peace which according to Daugh, [41] portends a tendency for the recrudescence of organized criminal activities.

Prior to the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in 1999, a province in the redundant SRFY, drug dealers and smugglers had a free reign. As Sofia, [38] notes, the goal of the illicit trade was to fund armed insurrection activities of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) against the Yugoslav security forces and to fight for the liberation of Kosovo from Serbian occupation. The KLA used the drug traffic in acquiring arms for their goal leading to the growth of TNOCs. In Albania, the presence of a weak government, corrupt security forces and dwindling economy enabled the growth of organized criminal groups. This was the situation that encouraged the Macedonian, Bulgarian, and Turkish Mafiosi cartel collaboration with indigenous Albania criminal groups in human trafficking, and heroin trade. Organized criminal groups continued to flourish in Albania up until 1997, with the deployment of the European Commission Customs Assistance Mission (ECCAM) in Albania which stymied their activities under a new pro-reform government. Prior to ECCAM intervention,

criminal groups were used by political elites of the governing Democratic Party in Albania for targeted killings of opponents (Edgar, 2003). In Romania, corruption that characterized the privatization of state assets; alliance of government officials of the Party for Social Democracy (RSDR) with organized crime by the provision of unsecured credits for the illicit drug trade as Bart, observed led to the prolificacy of transnational criminal groups in the former USSR.

### **Liberalization of movement**

The introduction of 'glasnost' and "perestroika" which consequently opened the Soviet economies to forces of globalization and allowed for the liberalization of movement of people and goods across borders including the lifting of visas and other restrictions for greater regional economic and political integration greatly increased the proliferation of TNOCGs in the former Soviet regions. Particularly, this withdrawal of state control of territorial movement of people and goods within and outside its borders encouraged the development of smuggling channels which favoured transnational criminal activities [17].

As Morrison, [18] notes, criminal groups in collaboration with former security agents employed in key institutions like border control, police, and customs were used to expand TNOCG networks. Also, most of the borders of these contiguous Soviet states were not properly marked or cartographically recognized in most cases until about the late 1990s, the implication as Brenden, observed was the unlawful acquisition through corrupt practices of border control from the state by illegitimate actors mostly organized criminal groups.

Liberalization of movements also had consequences on migration following the war in former Yugoslavia. As Edgar, [28] notes, the migration pressure as a result of internal wars and conflicts in southeastern Europe increased the demand of human trafficking and the illegal smuggling of migrants into Western countries. As the UNODC, [17] notes, demand for clandestine cross border services, provision of fraudulent travel documents, guided border crossings, accommodation and job seeking created a booming market for trafficking in persons in the region.

### **Impacts of Organized Crime on SEE**

The flourishing of organized criminal groups in the Balkans in the aftermath of the ethnic wars of the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians had impacts that extended to other countries in southern Europe. The imposition of embargoes by the UN on the former Yugoslav states as Sofia, [38] adds, encouraged the development of regional smuggling channels and the proliferation of organized criminal networks in Romania, Bulgaria and Albania. Smuggling of goods into embargoed Yugoslavia impacted not only on the profitability of illicit trade but increased the income of political elites, border police, smugglers and people living around the borders. The impact of organized crime in SEE has been identified in literature by several studies including [2,17,34] to affect politics, security and the economy as well development.

### **Economic impacts**

A survey on private businesses by UNODC, [17] in former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia, reveals that the incidence of corruption and organized crime in the region is still militating private enterprise and foreign direct investment (FDI) as businesses pay bribes to public officials to facilitate business transactions. Accordingly, the porous nature of the Balkan boundaries and the transnational

dimension of illicit trade generates more than two-thirds of the Gross Domestic Product for a single country, however these monies are stashed in private hands without concomitant benefits to the economies of these regions. As Bradley, [22] adds, 'the losses incurred through illegal import and export over the last 13 years exceeds the value of revenues from privatization, including the countries where privatization is almost completed (Bulgaria and Croatia)'. Furthermore, the economic cost of providing security (budget, arms, training, and remuneration) along its borders to checkmate the activities of these criminal groups also impacts negatively on the economies of these countries in SEE.

In most of these countries, organized criminal groups have supplanted state institutions and replaced it with private interests. According to the European Parliament study, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia are the most corrupt countries in the European Union and costs an estimated 800 billion pounds annually. As Sheiley [2] notes the proliferation of organized crime and corruption among the political elites poses the greatest threat to the development of the economies of SEE. Corruption index of most states in the southeastern Europe has not improved since 1999 as a result of profits made from illicit trafficking which has become a major but unlawful distributor of wealth in most of these former Soviet republics [37]. A Macedonian Business Report by the UNODC, [17] in an examination of business operations in the country revealed the prevalence of corruption kickbacks (bribes) in the daily businesses of many companies.

The linkage between organized crime and the state portends high risk for economic growth argues Shredner, as social deprivation, stunted economic growth, undermined free market enterprise and competition are not only implicated by organized crime but extends to considerably engender instability at the regional level. Illegal transactions facilitated through illegal imports and exports has not only warped the national economies of SEE but as the UNODC, notes has led to the loss of enormous revenues to black market operations. It is estimated that illegal transactions performed in these black markets make up for 40% of Balkan national economies creating an unofficial economic model of transnational crime.

### **Border governance and security**

The emergence of weak states following the spate of armed conflicts and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia states has not only flourished organized crime but has consequently engendered the weakening of the governance and security regime of its borders and the balkanization of its territories and facilitating the distribution of illicit wealth across borders [42].

According to Vlad, [43] the proliferation of organized crime impacted significantly on the borders of SEE leading to the carving up of these borders as major trade routes for illicit drugs- the southeast-northwest route for trade of heroin and criminal activities; the European corridor of Greece-Romania through the Bulgarian Black sea coast- Albania- Macedonia for trafficking of illicit drugs, arms and human beings. These former Balkan territories serves as a major entry point of Asian heroin originating mostly from Afghanistan [17].

The borders of SEE are also an important corridor for the trafficking of thousands of illegal immigrants from Asia and Near East, who are fleeing their war-ridden countries with the hopes of reaching other EU states for jobs and asylum. SEE is also known as a major route for the smuggling of European cigarettes and trafficking of girls and women for the services of sex industries in Europe. These activities flourished

in the gamut of political corruption, weak judicial systems and compromised security forces aiding these illegal businesses. Before the Dayton Agreement which ended the Bosnian-Herzegovina war, efforts to dismantle these illegal trade were undermined. As Edgar, [44] notes no legislation, police, customs or clearly defined and properly demarcated recognized borders existed neither were political elites ready to end the profit smuggling and transnational organized crime. Till date based on the UNODC report, these borders still serve as routes for illegal trafficking due to the prevalence of corruption which has affected law enforcement agencies prosecution of criminal activities.

### Political impact

The ascendancy of local groups to positions of power creating a new class of political elites and the rise of paramilitary agencies and private armies to protect these disparate political interests, greatly impacted on the polity of most southeastern European states [45]. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo, organized criminal groups led a long legacy of fratricidal wars. These criminal groups leveraged on the ensuing political condition to support an ideological class of corrupt political elites to gain ascendancy to various power positions [46].

As Sheiley, [2] notes, transnational organized crime and corruption impacted seriously on the functioning of the states in the regions. Most regimes were actively involved and facilitated illicit smuggling and trade and made no significant attempt to end trans-border crime. As cited in Sofia, [38] government in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia paid only lip-service to organized crime while in Romania, Macedonia, Albania and Bulgaria, the measures were generally ineffective owing to large scale institutional corruption.

Furthermore, the impact of illicit drug money in politics as Edgar, [44] observes negatively affected public perception and trust of emerging democratic institutions. Political parties and electoral campaigns were funded by monies made from organized crime hence, subordinating government to corruption as well creating channels for the abuse of public power for clandestine interests of groups. For example, the corruption that flawed the privatization and transition of state owned economy in the former Soviet regions.

### Conclusion

From the foregone analysis, we have examined the factors and conditions that have engendered and continue to promote the growth of transnational criminal activities in the former Yugoslav and Post-Soviet States. We noted that transnational organized crime has become institutionalized in most parts of the European neighborhood. Despite the evidence in some states in the former Yugoslav and Post-Soviet States have of being able to prevent and control TNOG, we observed that transnational organized crime continues to flourish despite interventions and enforcement to dismantle its cross border operations, especially in the European neighbourhood where the effectiveness of these interventions have remained questionable.

In the Post-Soviet Republics, we identified the new liberal economic and political reforms which eclipsed the defunct Soviet states in an economic freeze following rapid reforms as a major factor that engendered the proliferation of criminal groups, breakdown of law and order, corruption of the political elites and law enforcement agencies and a non-functional civil society. Also, the porousness of contiguous borders which facilitated the easy movement of goods; unemployment as a result of economic distress and internal conflicts; the purchase of

state assets in the privatization process that followed the economic reform exacted a form of authoritarianism that saw security agencies working with political elites in collaboration with organized criminal groups and smugglers to acquire state assets, fostered the growth of organized criminal groups in the former USSR, especially, in the Baltic and South Eastern European states.

With the collapse of the Socialist economy, in the former Yugoslavia we observed that crime thrives because of political instability, economic recession, conflicts and wars, geographically contiguous porous borders and breakdown of law and order, and weakness of security forces to prosecute criminal activities which made organized crime groups to proliferate.

Similarly, the balkanization, of the former Yugoslav region and the resultant war struggles for national independence within the region which degenerated to bloody ethnic wars between the Serbs, Croats and Albanians Slavic territories, and the imposition of sanctions and embargo on the former Yugoslav territories by the United Nations were among the factors that led to the proliferation of organized criminal groups, armed groups, drug lords involved in the illegal smuggling of arms from neighbouring Soviet states. Also, the lifting of state monopoly to the import and export of petrol products in former Soviet economies and the UN embargo on the importation of petrol to Serbia and Montenegro consequently increased smuggling activities of organized criminal groups with individuals, economic groups, politicians enmeshed in the petro-smuggling boom made organized crime to thrive within a prosperous the unofficial economy

Finally, as a result of the combination of these factors, the prevailing rhetoric of TNOG in the former Yugoslav and Post-Soviet States is explained in terms of the profitability of TNOG economy for political elites, border police, smugglers and people living around the borders and the ability of organized criminal groups to supplant state institutions and its replacement it with private interests which has led to the institutionalization of criminality and the privatization of criminalization occasioned by the breakdown of law and order and the corruption of the political elites.

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