



**GLOBAL
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AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME



Wilton Park

TACKLING SERIOUS AND ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Wilton Park Regional
Conference Report

FEBRUARY 2020



HM Government




UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



THE
SIRACUSA
INTERNATIONAL
INSTITUTE
for criminal justice
and human rights



Wilton Park reports are intended to be brief summaries of the main points and conclusions of an event. Reports reflect rapporteurs' accounts of the proceedings and do not necessarily reflect the views of the rapporteur. Wilton Park reports and any recommendations contained therein are for participants and are not a statement of policy for Wilton Park, the FCO or the UK government.

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A regional platform is needed to mobilize, engage, facilitate and promote critical and results-oriented research to better understand organized crime and corruption in the Western Balkans.

INTRODUCTION

Organized crime is not a new phenomenon in the Western Balkans. Yet, despite its pervasiveness, research on the topic is scarce. Information is often anecdotal, and data is limited and frequently unreliable. Better quality of information would enable a more accurate picture and allow for more effective responses to fighting organized crime and corruption in the region.

How to gather and analyse such information, and how to design more effective policy responses was the topic of a two-day conference on the Western Balkans region at Wilton Park, an executive agency of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office providing a global forum for strategic discussion. The conference, 'Tackling serious and organized crime in the Western Balkans', was held on 24–26 February 2020, with the support of the UK Home Office and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.¹

New studies from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights (the Siracusa Institute) and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) were presented to stimulate discussion on the nature, extent and impact of organized crime and corruption in the Western Balkans as well as suggestions for how to tackle it more effectively.²

Participants included representatives of civil society from the Western Balkans (including from the media, NGOs and academia), a small number of government

Research is needed to better understand why some investigations into organized crime in the region succeed and why others fail.

1 The conference programme can be found in Annex 1.

2 The following reports were presented: Hotspots of organized crime in the Western Balkans, GI-TOC, May 2019; Measuring and assessing organized crime in the Western Balkans, UNODC, forthcoming; Strengthening the fight against illicit trade in South Eastern Europe, the Siracusa Institute, forthcoming; Review of the anti-corruption pledges and efforts to tackle organized corruption in the Western Balkans, GI-TOC, forthcoming. For short summaries of the reports, please consult Annex 2.

representatives, members of the donor community, as well as partnering organizations. The biggest challenges in terms of tackling organized crime and corruption in the Balkans, as well as how governments and criminal-justice systems are responding to the threat, were presented through a series of interactive discussions.

Through these discussions, as well as in break-out groups, ideas were generated for:

- enhancing collaborative approaches to sharing information and data for policy use;
- supporting criminal-justice strategies for tackling organized crime and corruption;
- strengthening civil-society organizations; and
- enhancing the coordination of international donor activities.

Suggestions were also made on how to enhance cooperation among civil-society actors dealing with this topic in the region; how to improve dialogue between state and civil-society actors on this sensitive issue; and how to improve coordination between donors and recipients of projects related to addressing organized crime and corruption in the Western Balkans. These recommendations are important in their own right, and can potentially contribute to the Berlin Process, an initiative designed to boost regional cooperation among the Western Balkan Six countries (WB6) and their European integration.

Recommendations and strategies on the way forward

Enhance collaborative approaches to sharing information and data for policy use

- WB6 need to work towards establishing national statistical systems which record and analyse organized crime, including the composition of organized criminal groups.
- WB6, international partners and civil society should use qualitative sources and data on organized crime in the Western Balkans more effectively and in a coordinated manner to analyse patterns and trends, as well as emerging themes and the impact of the phenomena.
- Although statistical data on crime is largely available, linkages with organized crime are not widely made. WB6 should remedy this by implementing the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) without delay and use the event disaggregation tags to indicate organized crime involvement in crime events.
- WB6, international partners and civil society should work together towards establishing a physical or virtual platform to collect, support and share analytical products on organized crime

and corruption in the Western Balkans with all stakeholders.

- All stakeholders should prioritize synergies resulting from research to develop new analytical products across disciplines and institutions.
- All actors are strongly encouraged to use the data and the analytical products to generate or support evidence-based policy, encourage the political will of relevant actors, increase the visibility and resilience of actors from different backgrounds who are working towards similar goals, and thereby increase understanding of the characteristics and impact of organized crime and corruption in the Western Balkans, as well as steps taken to tackle it.

Enhance support for criminal-justice systems

- WB6 need to assess more objectively and impartially the shortcomings of their criminal-justice systems in order to enhance their effectiveness. Particular attention should be paid to adopting an enhanced strategic approach and addressing emerging challenges posed by organized crime and corruption (e.g. cybercrime).

- WB6 are encouraged to foster closer cooperation among law-enforcement agencies in the region.
- WB6 shall organize bilateral and regional training courses between law-enforcement managers and operatives and highlight the already existing offers.
- WB6 and international partners should provide further guidelines for law-enforcement agencies and sentencing guidelines for the judiciary to enhance a culture of criminal justice professionalism and performance. Together they should monitor the implementation of these guidelines and provide assistance to enhance implementation.
- WB6 are encouraged to develop a network of regional experts to provide advice, guidance and support to law-enforcement agencies and the judiciary. Best practices can also be shared by international partners.
- WB6 and civil society organizations should increase efforts to enhance dialogue and build trust among each other in order to shape new laws and policies and strengthen cooperation to prevent and combat organized crime and corruption.
- Law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations need to increase efforts to build trust and share best practices to protect the most vulnerable in society.
- WB6, international donors and civil society should encourage and design new research to better understand why some investigations into high-level corruption and organized crime the region succeed, why others fail and lessons learned. This should include research on the penitentiary system and the sentencing policies.
- All actors must promote a culture of integrity, lawfulness and accountability to counter a culture of crime.
- WB6 and international partners should support local NGOs by promoting regional networks. More efforts need to focus on the promotion of an anti-crime civil-society community in the region.
- WB6 and international donors should support efforts to increase resilience in local communities, in particular in hotspots of organized crime and other vulnerable locations. They should aim to fund local NGOs and protect them from threats from organized criminal organizations and political pressure.
- WB6 should seek to promote research in the region and facilitate the development of adequate methodologies for targeted organized crime and corruption research.
- WB6 need to create a regional platform that mobilizes, engages, facilitates and promotes critical and results-oriented research to better understand organized crime and corruption. This should be used to formulate and evaluate evidence-based policy.
- WB6, civil society and international partners should train young professionals (e.g. young journalists, members of NGOs and academia) on organized crime and anti-corruption issues.
- Civil society and WB6 should raise the awareness of and resilience to fake news, disinformation and propaganda across the region.

Strengthen civil society and media freedoms

- WB6 need to promote freedom of the media, and ensure free and lawful access to public information and transparency in data accessibility. They need to provide adequate conditions for journalism and protection of the media.
- International partners, as well as international organizations, such as the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe and the European Union (EU) should be frank about the situation of the media in the Western Balkans and keep up pressure to defend media freedom.

Increase donor coordination and assess donor activity in the Western Balkans

- International donors should promote operational cooperation and work more closely in countering organized crime and corruption in the Western Balkans (e.g. through police cooperation, joint investigations and information sharing). It is especially important that they coordinate better their funding programmes, projects and related activities to avoid duplication.
- International donors should increase the focus of their activities on prevention activities and education.
- International donors need to work to reduce the demand for illicit goods and services provided by

Western Balkans criminal groups, especially in the EU and the UK.

- Enhance sustainability of projects: this needs to be a joint result of the international donor community, national/regional donor community, WB6 and civil society. Such sustainability is not only a matter of funding, but also of setting priorities, needs assessments, monitoring and evaluation.
- International donors need to enhance the credibility of their engagement through more transparency and accountability.
- International donors need to assess and evaluate the impact of their projects systematically in order to better understand what works and what does not.
- International donors need to pay greater attention to the socio-economic conditions outside the region's capitals, e.g. in smaller cities and rural communities, including providing support for local initiatives to reduce vulnerability to crime and corruption.
- International partners and civil society need to provide for a continuous, systematic and targeted monitoring of organized crime and corruption in the Western Balkans, evaluation and policy-oriented feedback.

In the Western Balkans, organized crime and corruption are not limited to the 'underworld', but also have a significant impact on politics and business.

THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

Collaborative approaches to sharing information and data

Organized-crime structures in the Western Balkans are dynamic, ranging from hierarchical mafia-style groups to flexible network-based organizations. These groups do not limit their activities to the Western Balkans but operate on a trans-regional and global level. Groups in the region are often described as modern and opportunistic, with the capacity to easily adjust to new circumstances. Opportunities are often created through the strategic use of corruption.

In the Western Balkans, organized crime and corruption are not limited to the 'underworld', but also have a significant impact on the spheres of politics and business. This results in a culture or ecosystem of organized crime.

To help dismantle this interconnected criminal, political and economic configuration, more accurate data is needed. On a national level, statistical systems are usually not in place and where data is available, linkages to organized crime are not made. It is difficult for researchers and journalists to follow cases through the criminal justice system.

At the conference, two working groups focused on knowledge as a tool for evidence-based policy. Discussions focused on what types of data and information (and from which sources) could be used to better analyse and understand regional organized-crime trends. References were made to economic data (e.g. discrepancies in trade statistics, data on taxes), criminal justice data (e.g. police records, court documents, custom seizures), survey data (e.g. expert surveys or prison surveys), health data, investigative stories published in the media, human intelligence, reports by international organizations and many more.

Many agencies remain ill-equipped to tackle the threats of organized crime and corruption in the region.

Such information and data available at different levels of government should contribute to evidence-based policy. Yet, this data is often scattered with no platforms for synergistic interaction. Goal-oriented research by institutions using sound scientific methodologies that result in clear findings and recommendations were identified as a crucial component of evidence-based policy. There is also a need for an effective communications strategy to spread the message and to disseminate the information provided.

A robust evaluation process, the results of which could be fed back into the project cycle, was also seen as critical. This feedback loop would allow for adjustments in political priorities and responses to the evolving nature of organized crime and corruption, and for an assessment of the impact of policy interventions. It could also strengthen links between those providing this

information and those using it, thereby building constructive and collaborative partnerships.

The challenge of how to generate political will was raised, especially in situations of state capture, or so-called organized corruption. Among the suggestions made was how civil society could play a 'good cop/bad cop' role, using both friendly and forceful messages in order to get their points across. It was also stressed that instead of focusing only on malign actors, it is important to highlight and support (while considering the safety of) champions – and to show the merits and importance of fighting crime and corruption rather than profiting from it. The role of external actors was also discussed. Overall, it was concluded that generating and mobilizing political should take into account the specific situation and be part of a comprehensive plan to tackle organized crime.

Improving criminal-justice strategies

Criminal-justice systems in the Western Balkans Six have been subject to numerous changes over the past 25 years. Although capacity has significantly improved, many agencies remain ill-equipped to tackle the threats of organized crime and corruption across the region. Two break-out groups at the conference looked at obstacles faced by the criminal-justice sector when combating organized crime, and made suggestions on the way forward.

Although some countries in the Western Balkans have established a special prosecutor office or organized crime prosecutor units (including dedicated police investigators), many prosecutors do not benefit from such arrangements and still depend on the police. This is also necessary because of the low capacity of judicial police officers. Furthermore, specialist investigators in complex fields, such as financial crime and money-laundering, are in short supply, not least because of low salaries. It is not uncommon for law-enforcement officials, having been trained to specialist or expert level, to move to the private sector because of higher wages.

Furthermore, although a number of countries in the region have authorized and empowered customs officers to undertake criminal investigations, few conduct their work in collaboration with prosecutors. Indeed, some participants noted that it is more common for customs officers to be *investigated* than to be *investigators*. Regional customs authorities tend to use administrative processes, including penalties, to sanction offenders, which leaves them open to bribery and corruption, as there is insufficient scrutiny from prosecutors' offices.

The break-out groups observed that there have been a plethora of training programmes delivered by external agencies over the past 20 years. But concerns were expressed that such capacity building has not always been sufficiently relevant to, or has taken account of, the needs of criminal-justice systems in the region.

Prosecutors sometimes struggle to understand the content of such training because it often reflects legal systems and criminal-justice approaches of the donor states rather than the needs, circumstances or legal framework of the recipient country. It was

therefore suggested that foreign trainers should conduct more research on national criminal-justice systems or design training in conjunction with local trainers, thereby incorporating a local perspective and expertise in the training. It was also noted that interpreters assisting at training events could benefit from training around legal and technical terminology.

Positive training experiences were also shared. One example given concerned the training of prosecutors in presenting cases in court, and how to sum up cases to judges and explain the seriousness of crimes, the significance of particular items of evidence and the use of forensics. It was suggested that prosecutors might well benefit from courses that external police agencies have designed for senior investigating officers, as the roles of such personnel more accurately reflect what prosecutors do, namely directing investigations rather than undertaking them personally. It was emphasized that training should be subject to evaluation, not just in relation to the instructor or course, but also in terms of its ultimate impact or benefit.

More should be done to assess and determine why some investigations and prosecutions of organized crime or corruption have been successful and others have not. For example, in unsuccessful cases it was questioned why reports from the police have not resulted in prosecutions. Is this because of insufficient evidence, interference or corruption? It was observed that 'big cases' often sit on a prosecutor's desk for years and do not move through the system. The inference is that it is less risky for some prosecutors to never reach a decision or claim that a case is still under investigation. As

a result, major actors are allowed to operate with impunity. Debate revolved around how this could be changed.

It was suggested that assessors or evaluators should not only be drawn from the police, prosecuting authorities and the judiciary, but that there should also be 'external' assessors, to help ensure objectivity and independent oversight. They could also share good practices on how to design methodologies. This would help build public trust in the criminal-justice system.

It was suggested that methods to measure the effectiveness of criminal-justice systems should be reviewed. The traditional approach of counting the number of arrests, reports, seizures, prosecutions and convictions may not accurately indicate whether the criminal-justice system, and its various arms, is genuinely having an impact on crime, especially serious and organized crime. This would not require introducing new laws but rather establishing different methodologies on how laws are being enforced. One recommendation was to establish a cross-sector, cross-border network of investigators and prosecutors, civil-society representatives, academia and the media to advise on criminal-justice strategies. This would create a greater sense of ownership, common purpose and accountability.

Finally, the point was made that criminal-justice approaches alone are insufficient. Preventing and countering organized crime and corruption must also address socio-economic factors, governance, effective institutions, human rights and fundamental freedoms. And civil society has a crucial role to play.

Strengthening civil-society organizations

Most studies on organized crime and corruption in the Western Balkans, including the ones presented at Wilton Park, are internationally funded and implemented. The regional anti-crime research community is small and disconnected. Analytical work is carried out more often by think-tanks and NGOs than by academia and research institutions. Other than examples of some good local

investigative reporting, critical and change-inducing research is largely absent. As a result, current anti-crime and corruption policies are seldom assessed or challenged. Cooperative efforts between NGOs and academia are limited, and usually only prompted by their common engagement in donor-funded projects.

The media in the Western Balkans are under constant pressure. Journalists who speak out are

NGOs and the media were identified as being of crucial importance in promoting community resilience.

frequently criticized, even labelled as enemies of the people. Some are threatened, slandered, sued or imprisoned. Politicians are reported to interfere with independent reporting; media owners sometimes tone down or withhold stories; and journalists too often engage in self-censorship to limit their risks. Some business people fear to be associated with independent media and prefer not support them through advertising. Meanwhile, fake news, disinformation and propaganda are becoming all too common.

Few journalists have the experience, skills or freedom to investigate the topics of organized crime and corruption. Even when a story is published, there is little public support. A domestic civil society reaction could help attract greater international attention, potentially triggering a reinforcing cycle of publicity regarding the exposed wrongdoing. Ordinary people in the region have become almost immune or resigned to the constant drumbeat of stories on political corruption, since there are seldom serious consequences emerging from them for those in high office.

There are few NGOs working on the issues of organized crime and corruption in the Western Balkans. Most of those that do are think-tanks based in the region's capitals, which receive funding from foreign donors and international organizations. Very few are active in smaller towns, rural communities or the hotspots of organized crime.

At the meeting, participants used break-out groups to discuss how to build civil culture against criminal culture. In particular, good practices were exchanged on how to reduce vulnerability and build resilience from the bottom up, through grassroots, local initiatives. It was suggested that a good entry point is to focus on non-political issues and concerns that affect people's daily lives (like health or education) in order to explain the social impact of organized crime and corruption, and what can be done about it. It was observed that civil-society actors could lead by example. Demonstrating integrity and highlighting its benefits are good ways of practising and promoting civil culture, and they help to build donor trust and support.

Local NGOs and the media were identified as being of crucial importance in promoting community resilience against organized crime and corruption, particularly in hotspots in the region. It was also suggested that focusing on local projects could be attractive for donors, as it is easier to measure their impact. At the same time, it was pointed out that local projects and, more broadly speaking civil society, cannot work in isolation. Relationships need to be built between civil society and public officials. It was noted that there is little trust between civil society and law-enforcement agencies in most of the WB6. Journalists, for example, feel that the police and prosecuting authorities will not protect them. NGOs are often consulted only in a formal way when drafting new initiatives, and their proposals are usually not taken into consideration. Meanwhile, government officials often regard civil-society actors as being too critical of the state.

However, governments should not be considered merely as the problem and, at the same time, civil society cannot provide all the solutions alone. The two need to work together against 'uncivil society', even if they do not always agree. A lack of cooperation between the government and civil society will be met with disapproval by all actors, both regionally and internationally.

It was suggested that one way of reframing the issue is to focus on positive values that society stands for (e.g. integrity, justice, fairness, good governance), as opposed to what it is against (crime and corruption). It was also suggested that since crime and corruption have an impact on society as a whole, it is important to engage a wider set of actors than those currently involved in addressing the issue. Engaging youth – especially those in vulnerable situations – was emphasized as being key.

One way of strengthening civil-society organizations is to enhance ties between them. It was observed at the Wilton Park conference that many of the participants knew of one another (or of their work), but had never met before. Others suggested initiatives for the way forward that their colleagues were already implementing. It was recommended to improve networks among people from across the

region who are doing similar work, and to strengthen the triangular relationship between NGOs, academia and the media working on issues related to organized crime and corruption. Such cooperation could enhance the capacity, effectiveness and impact of civil society in responding to organized crime, corruption and criminal culture. Sharing of information, key concerns, developments, findings and strategies would help achieve targeted and coherent civil-society approaches, messaging and responses in the region. This is especially important because of the regional nature of crime markets, networks and trafficking routes in the Western Balkans. Furthermore, working together in a transparent and professional manner would increase the resilience of civil society and help establish a credible partner to local governments and donors. There is safety in numbers.

Enhancing the coordination of international donor activities

The international donor community is of the utmost importance to the region. Many anti-crime and corruption initiatives, as well as law-enforcement and judiciary reforms have been initiated, supported and carried out by international donors. Major donors can also lend their political weight to emphasize that institutional accountability is a *sine qua non* and to underline the importance of civil society (many civil-society organizations are supported by the international donor community). The studies presented at the conference (mentioned above), for example, were produced thanks to the financial support of international donors.

Coordination of international donor activities is also vital. Among some of the good examples cited at the conference are the EU Western Balkans Counter Serious Crime Integrative Plan of Action (WBSCI IPA); FRONTEX (liaison police officers and prosecutors); the UNODC Regional Programme; the German/French roadmap of small arms and light weapons; the UK's projects against illicit financial flows and anti-corruption pledges; the GI-TOC's Civil Society Observatory to Counter Organized Crime in South East Europe; Norway

government-supported projects on combating corruption in law enforcement; as well as various USAID and OSCE projects.

Although an impressive list of donor-funded success stories was cited, the point was also made that lessons should be learned from initiatives that were less successful or had unintended consequences – for example, projects in which efforts to address inequality and vulnerability had backfired, exposing vulnerable groups to organized crime. It is important to understand the 'benefits' and not only the harms of organized crime in order to address the drivers and circumstances that create incentives for illicit activity and a degree of legitimacy for non-state actors who provide protection as well as basic services.

While the Western Balkans region already enjoys considerable donor support, it was noted that there is still room for more targeted assistance in certain areas. For example, it was suggested that more attention needs to be given to the curricula of police academies (and centres of higher education in general). There was also a call for more support for education on topics related to corruption and

organized crime. It was suggested that more mapping of markets, actors, hotspots and trends would be helpful. And an appeal was made to provide more training and support for investigative journalism.

The importance of sustainability was highlighted. This could be enhanced by ensuring that assistance is needs-driven and based on a national strategy, rather than just donor-driven. Where possible, donor assistance should also help to implement priorities identified in multilateral processes (the Berlin Process being a case in point) that have the buy-in of the states where the projects are based. A proper needs assessment beforehand as well as effective monitoring and evaluation of project implementation are also crucial. It was also suggested that more efforts are needed to bring different stakeholders together to work on joint projects.

Donors were encouraged to support initiatives in rural communities and smaller towns, and not only those run by well-established NGOs in major cities. It was suggested that more attention and resources should be focused on supporting community-based organizations and youth.

One of the main conclusions of the Wilton Park conference was that more needs to be done to strengthen networks and synergies between actors who work on issues related to organized crime and corruption in the Western Balkans. Furthermore, donors need a platform that brings the different partners in the Western Balkans together. And there is a clear need for greater and more constructive interaction between civil society and public officials – supported by interested third parties. Such steps could facilitate coordination among donors (as the international community would be able to share what they are working on) and provide the opportunity for partners in the Western Balkans to let the donor community know where the local priorities are and what is needed.

It was concluded that the Wilton Park conference on tackling serious and organized crime in the Western Balkans was a unique opportunity to bring together civil-society representatives and donors, and that it set a precedent that should be replicated in the future, perhaps involving more government officials from the Western Balkans and donor countries.



HM Government



Wilton Park

Tackling serious and organised crime in the Western Balkans

Monday 24 – Wednesday 26 February 2020 | WP1765

Serious and organised crime is by no means a new phenomenon in the Western Balkans. Yet despite its pervasiveness analyses on serious and organised crime in the region are scarce. Information pertaining to regional organised crime is often anecdotal in character, and data limited and unreliable. A more systematic exchange of information and greater regional and transnational cooperation are central to fighting serious and organised crime.

And, just as crime is organised by and through networks, civil society can also mobilise as a counter-network in response to the threat in the Western Balkans. Although conditions across the region differ, civil society organisations (CSOs) broadly face considerable obstacles in attempting to fulfil this role and to generate and lead 'robust public debates' to help expose and penalise serious and organised crime and corruption.

New emerging information and research, as well as debates on the prevalence and impact of serious and organised crime in the Western Balkans, have been a feature of the past year. To promote greater impetus in the engagement around the topic and to discuss effective policy responses, this regional conference is organised with the aim to exchange information and ideas emerging from recently published regional reports and to work on strategic recommendations for the way forward.

This regional conference will seek to:

- Use new studies from GI-TOC, UNODC and the Siracusa Institute as a basis to explore information exchange between participating organisations on serious and organised crime and corruption in the Western Balkans, identifying opportunities and communication streams for long-term research and monitoring of the issue;
- Identify new collaborative initiatives to build bridges between governments and CSOs aimed at reducing the influence of serious and organised crime and corruption on politics and enhancing the ability of state criminal justice systems to tackle organised crime; and
- Generate strategies for increasing the capacity of CSOs and national criminal justice officials to expose serious and organised crime and corruption.

In association with Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Home Office, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights

Monday 24 February

1300 Participants arrive and buffet lunch available

1445-1505 **Welcome and introduction**

Robert Grant

Programme Director, Wilton Park

Mark Shaw

Director, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Vienna

Jean-Luc Lemahieu

Director of the Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Vienna

Filippo Musca

Acting Director General, Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights, Siracusa

1505-1530 **Opening remarks**

John Penrose

MP, Prime Minister's Anti-Corruption Champion, London

1530-1700 **1. What are the challenges?**

What are the most significant and difficult challenges in tackling serious and organised crime and corruption? This session will use two reports as a foundation to discuss in plenary the obstacles faced in the fight against serious and organised crime and corruption in the Western Balkans.

Ugljesa Ugi Zvekic

Senior Advisor, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Vienna

Mark Shaw

Director, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Vienna

"Hotspots of organized crime in the Western Balkans"

This report highlights areas of vulnerability where organised crime groups in the region operate or are located, analysing economic, political social and geographic characteristics of hotspots of organised crime across the region.

Tejal Jesrani

Research Officer, Crime Research Section, UNODC, Vienna

"Measuring and assessing organised crime in the Western Balkans"

A project to address the challenges with respect to enhancing the understanding of the nature and evolution of organised crime and develop a statistical framework for quantifying and analysing organised crime.

1700-1745 Photograph followed by tea/coffee

1745-1900

2. How are governments and criminal justice systems responding?

How can responses to illicit trade and corruption be strengthened and improved? This session will use the presentations of two research reports to discuss in plenary the current responses of governments and criminal justice systems.

Tobias Freeman

Senior Legal Officer, Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights, Siracusa

“Strengthening the fight against illicit trade in South Eastern Europe”

This research, capacity-building and policy development project aims to strengthen the criminal justice response to illicit trade in South Eastern Europe, including through building the capacity of criminal justice officials to investigate, prosecute and cooperate with one another at the national and regional levels.

Ugljesa Ugi Zvekic

Senior Advisor, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Vienna

“Review of the anti-corruption pledges and efforts to tackle organized corruption in the Western Balkans”

A report investigating each country’s current situation, providing insights into a regional corruption assessment and using the 2018/2019 pledges as examples to measure their commitments.

1900

Reception followed by dinner

Tuesday 25 February

0800-0900

Breakfast

0900-1030

3. The current civil society, media and research landscape

What is the current environment for civil society, the media and research organisation? What is their role in combatting corruption and organised crime? What impact have they had? What are the obstacles they are facing?

Slagjana Taseva

Chair, Transparency International Macedonia, Skopje

Fatjona Mejdini

Field Coordinator for the Western Balkans, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Vienna

Anna-Maria Getos Kalac

Associate Professor, University of Zagreb’s Faculty of Law, Head of Balkan Criminology, Zagreb

1030-1100

Tea/coffee

1100-1300

4. Innovative approaches to tackling corruption and organised crime

What are key lessons from success stories in tackling corruption and organised crime? Why were they success stories?

Chair: Mia Marzouk

Regional Conflict Advisor, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London

Andi Hoxhaj

Teaching Fellow in Law, University of Warwick, Coventry

Mentor Vrajolli

Executive Director, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, Pristina

	Stevan Dojčinović Journalist, KRIK
1300-1400	Lunch
1400-1500	Free time
1500-1700	<p>5. Breakout groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing collaborative approaches to sharing information and data for policy use • Criminal justice strategies for tackling corruption and organised crime • The media and strengthening investigative journalism • Building civil culture against criminal culture • The role of international donors
1700-1730	Tea/coffee
1730-1830	6. Feedback from breakout groups
1900	Reception followed by after dinner
	Majlinda Bregu Secretary General, Regional Cooperation Council, Sarajevo

Wednesday 26 February

0800-0900	Breakfast and checkout
0900-1100	<p>7. Taking policy forward: breakout groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilising criminal justice approaches • Civil society and media contributions to counter organised crime and corruption • Enhancing coordination of international donor activities • Knowledge as a tool for evidence-based policy
1100-1130	Tea/coffee
1130-1145	<p>8. Evaluation survey</p> <p>Completion of online survey</p>
1145-1300	<p>9. Feedback from breakout groups and concluding remarks</p> <p>Ugljesa Ugi Zvekic Senior Advisor, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Vienna</p>
1300	Lunch
1400	Participants depart

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT FOR THE CONFERENCE: TACKLING ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Organized crime is by no means a new phenomenon in the Western Balkans. Yet, despite its pervasiveness, analyses on organized crime in the region are scarce. Information pertaining to regional organized crime is often anecdotal in character, and data limited and unreliable. Both a more systematic exchange of information and greater regional and transnational cooperation are essential for fighting organized crime.

Crime is organized by and through networks and so civil society must also mobilize as a counter-network in response to the threat in the Western Balkans.

A number of new studies on organized crime in the Western Balkans – by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights have recently been published or will soon be released. Each report looks at organized crime in the region from a different perspective, reaching mutually reinforcing conclusions on how it can be more effectively addressed.

This document provides a short overview of the main findings on the four reports to be presented at the conference in Wilton Park.

HOTSPOTS OF ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE WESTERN BALKANS. LOCAL VULNERABILITIES IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT. By GI-TOC, May 2019.

This report is a product of GI-TOC's Civil Society Observatory to Counter Organized Crime in South Eastern Europe. It is a report by civil society that focuses on the impact of uncivil society, and the factors that enable it. The report is based on information gathered by a network of 20 experts with local knowledge of the places described who conducted around 350 interviews with police, prosecutors, judges, local politicians, public officials in different levels of administration, journalists, locals living in the hotspots as well as representatives of civil society.

To understand how organized crime developed in the Western Balkans, it is imperative to look at the regional and historical context. The break-up of Yugoslavia and the end of communism brought about dramatic changes in the political and economic conditions of the region. The creation of seven new states led to an excess of new borders and boundaries, inter- and intra-state tensions, and administrative structures capable of being exploited. To

this day, smuggling operations often take place at regular border crossings since control by officials remains low.

Rather than focusing on illicit markets or countries, the report identifies places of interest in the region to discern patterns of organized crime, raise awareness and reduce vulnerability. It looks at the political economy of the region and at the structures and factors that enable the spread of organized crime. It then provides a granular analysis of particular border crossings, intersections and regions of vulnerability. What makes these places particularly vulnerable? Why are they attractive to organized criminal groups? After discussing these questions, the report connects the dots between these locations to identify possible links and patterns that tell us more about the geography of crime in the region.

One key observation of the report is that illicit flows through ports, cities and border crossings in the Western Balkans are enabled by a political economy of crime that is deeply entrenched in most countries of the region. The report therefore takes a look at the ecosystem of crime that creates an environment in which illicit activity can flourish. The report also shows how political elites often provide an umbrella of protection for criminal groups and their activities, while criminal groups, in turn, help the political elites to enrich themselves.

Hotspots emerge in places where economic vulnerability is high and governance is weak. Because the Western Balkans form a transit region for illicit activity, most hotspots are places where things can go in and out – ports, airports, border crossings. These are usually situated along major transit routes.

The countries that make up the Western Balkans region are closely connected on a local, national and transnational level. This interconnectedness is key to economic development, but it also facilitates the spread of organized crime. Criminal groups smuggle illicit products north and south as well as east and west across the region, and are themselves widely connected.

Current trends also point to a surge in human smuggling activities and increased cyber-crime in the region. This fluid situation highlights the need for continuous monitoring. The list of hotspots mentioned is by no means exhaustive, but it is illustrative of trends and activities in the region. In this sense, *Hotspots of organized crime in the Western Balkans* can be described as a ‘weather report’ that presents the current situation, provides a forecast into possible changes and will be updated regularly.

MEASURING AND ASSESSING ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE WESTERN BALKANS. By UNODC, forthcoming.

The Measuring and Assessing Organized Crime in the Western Balkans (MACRO) project was designed to enhance the evidence base used for policy making on organized crime in the Western Balkans. Inspired by the adage “if you can’t measure it, you can’t improve it,” MACRO aimed to develop and implement a conceptual framework for quantifying and analyzing organized crime based on five dimensions: organized criminal activities, organized crime groups, state response, enablers and economic value. These dimensions were then split into crime types, such as drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, and others. A comprehensive assessment was done in order to evaluate which dimensions could be populated by quantitative data, qualitative data, or a mix of the two.

Within different sub-dimensions of the framework, particularly among the different crime types, availability of statistical data on organized crime varied greatly. In general, data regarding instances of crime was largely available. However, data on cases linked to organized crime was not readily available. Regarding the dimensions of the framework related to organized crime groups and economic value, with one exception, there were no existing data systems or databases to be able to record, report and analyze this information in the assessed institutions. These dimensions were then populated using qualitative data sources.

Data collection consisted of a direct web-based, password protected data portal – UNODC’s first - which collected both nationally available and regionally comparable statistical data from criminal justice institutions, such as the police, prosecutors, courts, prisons, customs and national statistical offices. Importantly, MACRO required data on crimes disaggregated by involvement of organized criminal group. In this way, it was possible for the first time to really measure how much of one crime type was associated with organized criminal groups. This is particularly instructive in assessing how much crime is actually organized and presenting the most prevalent forms of organized crime in the region.

Qualitative information gathering included an analysis of 127 court verdicts on organized criminal groups and over 250 interviews with victims, experts and prisoners convicted of organized crimes. What resulted was one of the most, if not the most, comprehensive collection of data on organized crime in the Western Balkans.

Analysis of the data is still ongoing, but initial findings of the data collection showed that 12 per cent of convictions for all crimes included in the MACRO framework showed links with organized crime. The crimes included in the framework are those that have traditionally been thought to have strong links to organized crime, such as drug trafficking and trafficking in persons. Therefore, this is a smaller share than might be expected. Data collected from administrative sources indicate that the most commonly convicted organized crime in the Western Balkans during the period 2012-2018 was participation in an organized criminal group, with 66 per cent of the total. Aside from participation in an organized criminal group, the form of organized crime with the most convictions in the Western Balkans from 2012-2018 was migrant smuggling with around 16 per cent of convictions. Drug trafficking followed with 10 per cent of the total. These initial findings will be expanded and presented in a regional report to be published shortly.

It is hard to fight something that you cannot see. For years, the fight against organized crime has been hampered by the lack of a standardized and replicable set of indicators to measure this phenomenon based on internationally agreed upon legal instruments and definitions. Such a framework has now provided much needed baseline data to assess technical assistance needs, plan operational activities and measure the success of policy interventions in the Western Balkans. It is hoped that this will lead to increased understanding of organized crime in this region as well as provide a model to other countries and regions around the world that wish to more effectively respond to organized crime.

STRENGTHENING THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLICIT TRADE IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE. By the Siracusa Institute, forthcoming.

Strengthening the Fight Against Illicit Trade in South Eastern Europe (SEE-IMPACT) is a three-year research, capacity-building and policy development project of the Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights, Italy. SEE-IMPACT aims to strengthen the criminal justice response to illicit trade in South Eastern Europe through:

- in-depth and cross-sectoral research and interviews with criminal justice officials in order to build a more comprehensive understanding of the practical challenges and obstacles to combating illicit trade at the national and regional level;
- development of tailored capacity-building programs that have now been implemented in seven priority countries; and
- development of cross-sectoral policy recommendations to address national vulnerabilities in their regional context.

The project has a geographical scope that is broader than the Western Balkans, also including Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Romania, Slovenia and Turkey among its partner countries.

National, regional and international experts were engaged to assist the Institute in conducting an assessment of criminal justice responses to illicit trade in the region, leading to further consultations with national partners and development of an innovative capacity-building framework. SEE-IMPACT's research, involving desk research and interviews with national practitioners, looked into national strategies, legislation and institutional frameworks, challenges relating to investigations, prosecutions and adjudication of illicit trade cases, inter-agency cooperation, the role of the private sector in supporting investigations, and regional and international cooperation, among other topics.

On the basis of the project's preliminary research findings, an innovative capacity-building framework, comprising regional and national events (or 'strategic dialogues'), was developed. This framework was launched at the first Regional Strategic Dialogue in December 2018, which brought together more than 100 national ministers, policy-makers and senior criminal justice officials from across the region, as well as directors of INTERPOL, Europol, the Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC), and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime among other international bodies.

The project's capacity-building activities at the national level were implemented in seven countries, namely Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia, and in collaboration with Europol, SELEC and relevant missions of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Each of these events involved a broad spectrum of national actors engaged in the fight against illicit trade and were designed to foster inter-agency cooperation.

In the final months of the project, SEE-IMPACT will develop an overall assessment of criminal justice approaches to illicit trade in South Eastern Europe, and innovative cross-sectoral recommendations addressed to national and regional leaders and policy-makers.

Building on the Institute's preliminary research and capacity-building events, an overall regional assessment will be published and launched at the second Regional Strategic Dialogue to be held from 26-27 May 2020.

REVIEW OF THE ANTI-CORRUPTION PLEDGES AND EFFORTS TO TACKLE ORGANIZED CORRUPTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS. By GI-TOC, forthcoming.

Tackling organized crime and corruption were identified as being important preconditions for EU integration. In this context, in 2014, the Berlin Process was introduced with the aim of facilitating regional cooperation among the countries of the Western Balkans and boosting European integration and security. Since then, political leaders from the Western Balkans region and the EU, policymakers and civil-society representatives have gathered at an annual summit with the objective of working together to achieve greater security, stability and prosperity in the region.

In 2018, in the run-up to the London summit, five of the six Western Balkan countries introduced anti-corruption pledges. Serbia joined these in spring 2019. These pledges represented an important step by the Western Balkan countries in taking action against corruption. Yet, they alone cannot end corruption.

At the Poznan Summit (2019), the topic of anti-corruption was once again back on the agenda. Although no independent civil society-led review mechanism was formally established by the participating governments at the Poznan summit, an understanding was reached that it was paramount that the governments of the Western Balkans must be truly dedicated and held accountable for their commitments.

Therefore, as a follow-up of the 2018 London summit and the 2019 Poznan summit, and with the support of the UK Government, an independent regional assessment on corruption in the Western Balkans was undertaken. The anti-corruption assessment is part of GI-TOC's wider engagement in the Western Balkans and part of the Civil Society Observatory to counter organized crime in South Eastern Europe.

Led by GI-TOC, a team of local experts (including NGO representatives, journalists, and academics) analysed each country's political economy of organized corruption and the government's response to it from September 2019 until February 2020. In the preliminary findings the local experts argue that corruption goes hand in hand with money-laundering activities, tax evasion, clientelism and/or patronage and impunity. Blurred division of powers and little civil oversight contribute to a selective implementation of laws and sometimes even pro-corruption facilitating provisions.

The report puts a special focus on the regional criminal economy and its influence on governance. The outcome is an analytical assessment of corruption in the Western Balkans with a particular emphasis on the most important manifestations of links between organized crime and corruption, particularly political corruption – and so-called 'organized corruption'. Recent case studies from each country illustrate that organized crime is closely linked to the political and economic power establishments in the region.

In the assessment, also the 2018/2019 anti-corruption pledges (and their current status) were used to measure implementation of the Western Balkan Six's commitments. A particular focus was placed on public procurement, beneficial ownership, financing of political parties and campaigns, whistle-blower protection, and access to exchange information.

The review of the anti-corruption pledges was not a box ticking exercise on the pledges alone but aimed at analysing their impact in the context of corruption in each country and the region as a whole. The anti-corruption assessment argues that corruption is one of the main challenges to the rule of law, life chances and livelihoods in the Western Balkans. On the way forward, rule of law, fundamental rights and governance must be strengthened. Judicial and public administration reforms not only need to specifically address the fight against organized crime and corruption but also need to deliver real results, should the functioning of democratic institutions be seriously enhanced.

The report is now in its stage of finalization and is to be combined into a regional anti-corruption assessment. The report will be presented at the forthcoming Sofia/Skopje Summit in October 2020.



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The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with over 500 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

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