

Concept Note

Addressing Organized Crime through Strategic Partnerships

Organized crime continues to represent one of the most serious global transnational threats to security and stability across the OSCE and the Mediterranean regions. The OSCE, as the largest regional security organization seeks to provide capacity-building initiatives to strengthen the capacities to address this transnational threat, build resilience and facilitate international co-operation.

Background

Ever since the 1990-s, the OSCE participating States (pS) have recognized the threat that organized crime poses to states' security and stability.¹ In 2005, considering the phenomenon of organized crime as an area of ever-increasing concern, the OSCE adopted its first Ministerial Council Decision. MC.DEC/3/05 on "Combating Transnational Organized Crime". The decision contains a list of typologies of organized crime and tasks the OSCE Secretary General with providing the requesting pS with support for the mobilization of technical assistance, expertise and resources to address this transnational threat.

At the 14th Ministerial Council in Brussels, in December 2006, pS reiterated their strong commitment to tackle organized crime. MC.DEC/5/06 emphasizes the crucial role of efficient and effective criminal justice institutions in fighting organized crime and upholding public safety and security. It also tasks the Secretary General to further support and promote international legal co-operation in criminal matters between participating States under the framework of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The year 2020 marks twenty years from the adoption of the above convention: the role of the OSCE, as regional organization under chapter VIII of the UN Charter, remains significant to support the implementation of its provisions.

Over the years, criminal networks have become increasingly structured, and are not only drivers of illicit activities endangering state security and stability, but also significant economic players, successfully countered only through a comprehensive approach by criminal justice institutions. Different Permanent Council Decisions (e.g. PC.DEC/1049; PC.DEC1063) have repeatedly underlined the importance of addressing the financial side of all forms of organized crime, preventing transfers of the proceeds of crime and pursuing recovery of criminal and stolen assets in order to disrupt or dissolve organized crime.

¹ As e.g. noted in the CSCE Helsinki Summit Declaration in 1992, the Lisbon Summit Declaration of 1996, the Istanbul Summit Declaration of 1999

Stemming from the PC.DEC/1049 (2012), the OSCE can also facilitate capacity building and provide a platform for the exchange of information and best practices related to cyber-enabled crime. This is done in close cooperation with other international organizations such as the UNODC and the Council of Europe which are the most relevant players in this area. OSCE pS and Partners for Co-operation alike have emphasized in multiple fora that security in the OSCE region is closely interlinked with security in the Mediterranean region as a whole, and that political and economic governance issues are increasingly important factors of the Mediterranean security equation.

During the 2017 OSCE Mediterranean Conference in Palermo, different pS and OSCE Partners for Co-operation recognized with concern the increased diversification in organized crime networks engaged in illegal trade of commodities and products. They highlighted how non-state actors are taking advantage of instability in parts of the Mediterranean and negatively affecting the collective security of the region, mainly of fragile States. pS and Partners for Co-operation underlined the urgent need for a holistic view and the development of enhanced capabilities to fight organized crime.

The Transnational Threats Department (TNTD), the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA), OSCE Field Operations, as well as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) have actively been assisting participating States in enhancing their capacities to fight organized crime, while upholding human rights. They also promoted and supported the implementation of the United Nations Conventions against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols, applying a comprehensive and multidimensional approach, including:

1. Policy level support in drafting national strategy to address and fight organized crime.
2. Capacity building initiatives to strengthen investigative capacity along the entire criminal justice chain.
3. Fostering co-operation with international organizations through joint action plan and memoranda of understanding with UNODC, Council of Europe, INTERPOL and FATF.

Purpose

Demanding and complex types of organized crime such as drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings, smuggling of migrants, trafficking of small arms and light weapons, money laundering and cyber-enabled crime continue to pose serious global threats to security, stability and economic growth. Considering the magnitude and impact of such destabilizing phenomena, even further enhanced by the coronavirus pandemic, the OSCE is committed to foster transnational co-operation and capacity building initiatives within its region, jointly with Partners and other states.

The conference will provide an opportunity to illustrate past and ongoing activities as well as outcomes and best practices across the OSCE region, with focus also on the Mediterranean region. It will also offer an overview of current initiatives and different approaches undertaken by other international organizations, think tanks and the private sector.

Content

The conference will include four panels. The first will include a comprehensive assessment of the threat organized crime poses within the OSCE and its responses. Under the second panel, experts and Heads of Delegation will discuss what more OSCE pS and Mediterranean Partners can do to counter organized crime and illicit finance. The discussion will focus on tools and measures that can effectively tackle organized crime such as tracing illicit financial flows and assets seizure and confiscation. The third panel will illustrate the importance of establishing and promoting partnerships among different stakeholders: national institutions, civil society organizations and private sector.

The fourth panel will explore how much organized crime groups are engaging in cyber-enabled crime and in which types of cyber-enabled crime. It will also assess the impacts of COVID-19 on this area. Furthermore, it will examine the criminal misuse of dark web and cryptocurrencies, as well as national and transnational approaches to counter the illicit use.

The heterogeneous panels will allow a comprehensive discussion on how to tackle organized crime both from a politico-military, economic and civil society / grass-root perspective, highlighting possible measures and solutions. The speakers will also touch upon national experiences and partnerships that proved to facilitate regional and international co-operation. The outcomes of the discussions will help identifying main and common challenges and outlining possible joint initiatives with pS and Partners for co-operation.