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ORGANIZED CRIME AS A SECURITY THREAT

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Abstract: *Safety, in a theoretical-practical sense, is understood as a state, organization, function and system. As a state, security is valued in an amplitude of values whose poles are: completely safe and completely unsafe. It is a fact that absolute security does not exist, that is, that every security reference object is threatened to a certain degree. For a long time, the only (key) threat to security was war. However, during the Cold War, the concept of security was expanded from purely military to other sectors, such as political, economic, social and environmental. Thus, the security of the reference object can be threatened by a whole corpus of threats, which are basically divided into military and non-military.*

In the last few decades, among the numerous challenges, risks and security threats, organized crime stands out. Although acts of crime are evident, both nationally and internationally, organized crime remains undefined, which makes it particularly difficult to prove. This is also due to the fact that in the various classifications of acts that constitute organized crime, different activities are implied.

In this paper, the state of organized crime is analyzed through selected criminal acts - threats to security, such as human trafficking - trafficking, narcotics trade and arms trade. The aim of the research is to prove that organized crime in the world has been increasing in the last few years.

The work was created as a result of research for teaching purposes, as well as the preparation of the diploma thesis of the first author of this article, which was defended at the Faculty of Business Studies and Law in Belgrade in early 2024.

Keywords: *Organized crime, Trafficking, Arms trade, Narcotics trade.*

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INTRODUCTION

Man has created many goods to make his life easier and better. However, man has also created many means to destroy another man. Thus, as the only conscious being on planet Earth, man is destroying his own species in a very brutal way. The destruction of man - man is not only immanent to physical force/violence. There are many other means and methods that directly and indirectly contribute to the mass suffering and suffering of the population. One such threat is organized crime.

Organized crime is recognized as a criminal act, but also as a security threat in the strategies of all countries of the world. However, the scope of activities that this criminal offense - a security threat includes, and thus its typology in theory and practice, is different.

THE SUBJECT OF THIS PAPER IS ORGANIZED CRIME, VIEWED FROM THE ASPECT OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING - TRAFFICKING, DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ARMS TRAFFICKING.

Preliminarily, in this paper the basic terms have the following meanings:

- *Organized crime*: “commitment of criminal acts by an organized criminal group, i.e. another organized group or its members, for which a prison sentence of four years or a heavier sentence is provided” (*Zakon o organizaciji i nadležnosti državnih organa u suzbijanju organizovanog kriminala, 2003*).
- *Trafficking in human beings - trafficking*: “trafficking in human beings is recruiting, transporting, transporting, hiding and disguising a person, by the threat of force or the use of the same or coercion of various kinds, by fraud, deception, abuse of authority or a difficult position or by giving or receiving money or benefits in order to the consent of a person who has control over another person was obtained, with the aim of exploitation” (*Protokol za prevenciju, suzbijanje i kažnjavanje trgovine ljudskim bićima, 2000*).
- *Narcotics trade*: in the broadest sense, it includes the entire activity of production and distribution of psychotropic substances (drugs) in a way that is prohibited by laws or international conventions.
- *Illegal arms trade*: in the broadest sense, it includes the entire activity of the production and distribution of arms in a way that is prohibited by law or international conventions.

The subject of research in the spatial sense has a broader and a narrower aspect. In a broader sense, the case covers the entire world, while in a narrower sense, the case refers to the Republic of Serbia.

In terms of time, the subject of the research covers the period of the last five years.

The following scientific methods prevailed in the research: content analysis; case study and statistical method.

Structurally, apart from the introduction and conclusion, the work is operationalized in: 1) Research results and 2) Discussion of research results.

1. RESEARCH RESULTS

As research results, we will present an analysis of the general aspect of organized crime and its individual types.

1.1. General aspect of organized crime

Organized crime is primarily understood as a criminal offense. However, in all the security strategies of the countries of the world, that criminal act is also recognized as a threat to security. In this sense, we state how the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia identified organized crime:

„Organized crime represents one of the most significant threats to the security of the Republic of Serbia, especially when one takes into account the intensity of its manifestation and its transnational character. The following forms of organized criminal activity are most prevalent: production and smuggling of psychoactive controlled substances, smuggling and trade in firearms, people smuggling and illegal migration, economic and financial crime in the form of illegal production and trade in excise goods and money laundering, corruption, as well as other less prevalent forms. In this regard, a special security threat is represented by the activities of criminal groups in the south of the Republic of Serbia, primarily due to their connection with the bearers of terrorist, extremist and separatist activities” (*Strategija nacionalne bezbednosti*, 2019).

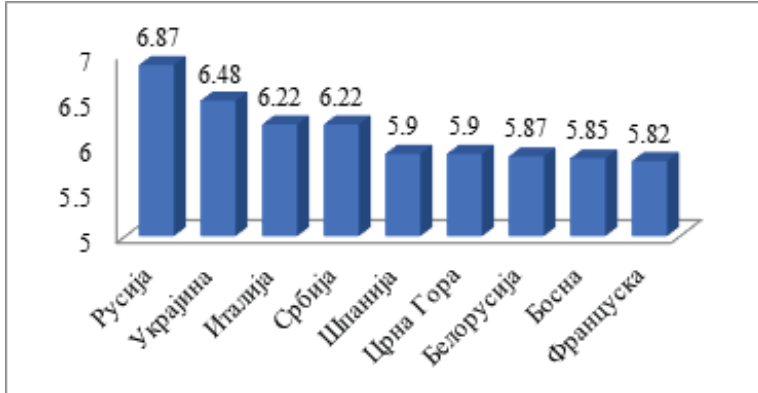
Therefore, the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia recognized organized crime as a transnational threat and determined its forms, which are the most dangerous for the security of our country. And in theoretical sources, when it comes to organized crime, we primarily encounter its transnational dimension. Milo Bošković writes about it:

„Transnational organized crime means international crime, organized criminal activity with foreign elements; more serious forms of delinquency that cross the borders of two or more countries and crimes that the international community is interested in suppressing. Occurrence related to offenses of organized crime, terrorism, forgery, illegal trade and smuggling of weapons and drugs, trade in white slaves, etc. In the sense of criminal law, crimes against international peace and security” (*Bošković, M., 2015:348*).

The Global Initiative to Combat Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), from Geneva, publishes GI-TOC every year for the whole world, and some of its regions. By the way, the Global Initiative consists of over 600 independent experts from the world in the fields of human rights, democracy, criminology and other disciplines. Before directly presenting the ranking of countries by GI-TOC, we note that the Global Initiative Report for 2023 states “that organized crime is constantly increasing and that 83% of the world’s population lives in conditions of high crime” (*GLOBAL INITIATIVE, 2023*).

When it comes to European countries, and according to the GI-TOC for 2023, Russia and Ukraine are in first place in terms of organized crime, and Serbia is also quite high (shares 3rd place with Italy).

Graph 1. Index of organized crime in Europe (Source: Mitrović, A., 2024:17)



The index of organized crime is much higher in countries from other parts of the world, as we can see in Table 1.

Table 1. Index of organized crime for 2023

North and Central America	
Mexico	7.57
USA	5.67
Canada	3.88
Sout America	
Columbia	7.75
Paraguay	7.57
Ecuador	7.07
Brazil	6.77
ASIA	
Myanmar	8.15
Irak	7.13
Avganistan	7.10
Sirija	7.07
Iran	7.03
AFRICA	
DR Congo	7.35
Nigeria	7.28
South African Republic	7.18
Kenya	7.02

(Source: <https://ocindex.net/>, 02.03.2024)

1.2. Human trafficking - trafficking

Human trafficking, as an illegal activity, has been known since ancient times. In contemporary international relations, it manifests itself as a criminal act and a threat to human security, and is especially exposed in the mass migrations of the population in the war-torn areas of the Middle East, Afghanistan, Syria and Africa. According to data from the World Refugee Organization (UNHCR), “in 2022, a record number of people on the run was reached. It is estimated that around 108.4 million people will be forced to migrate in 2022. Of these, about 65% are internally displaced persons, that is, they sought refuge in another part of the country they are from, while about 35% are forced to leave their country. At the same time, the largest number of refugees is from Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine” (UNHCR, 2023). It is precisely among these people that people smugglers find their source of “business”, which often ends tragically for the refugees.

Within the framework of determining the organized crime index, the Trafficking Index is also determined. That index is the highest in countries affected by wars or conflicts, as shown by the data in Table 2.

Table 2. Trafficking index

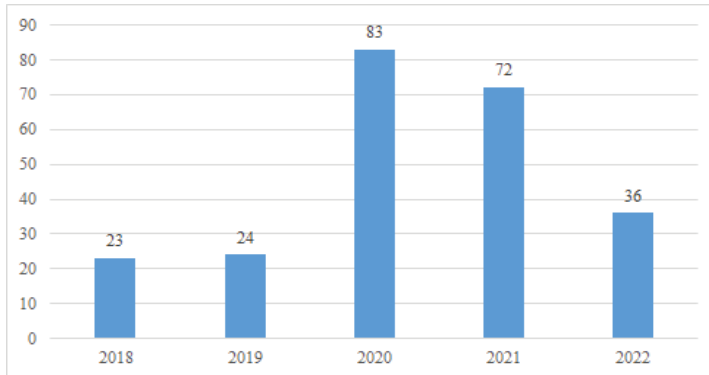
STATE	INDEX
Ukraine, Russia, Moldova	7.50
Belarus, UK, Italy, Spain	7.00
Mexico	8.00
Columbia	8.00
Venezuela, Paraguay	7.50
Afganistan	9.00
Myanmar, Turkmenistan	8.50
Iran, Turkey, India	8.00
Eritrea	9.00
Libya	8.50
Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia	8.00

(Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics>, 02.03.2024)

Since 2015, the Republic of Serbia has been affected by mass migrations from the war-affected areas to the developed countries of the European Union (Balkan route). This was used by people smugglers to illegally acquire financial gains, primarily in the illegal transfer of migrants across the state border.

Graph 2 shows human trafficking in the Republic of Serbia in the period 2018-2022.

Graph 2. Human trafficking in the Republic of Serbia 2018-2022



(Source: Republic Statistical Office, 2022)

1.3. Drug trafficking

Drug addiction is a scourge of the modern world. It is an illegal source for acquiring huge financial resources and enriching a small group of people, while at the same time a threat to human safety and health. As such, drug addiction is recognized as a security threat in all security strategies. In the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, it is written: “Drug addiction, as an increasingly pronounced social problem, also acquires the character of a security problem and affects the increase in the number of serious crimes” (*Strategija nacionalne bezbednosti, 2019*).

Narcotics trade is one of the most widespread forms of transnational organized crime, in which numerous structures are involved, from the state, through criminal groups, to the end users - a wide population of persons, unfortunately including minors.

„United Nations Information Service: The continued record supply of illegal drugs and increasingly active trafficking networks are compounding global crises that are intertwining and challenging health care and law enforcement responses, says the World Drug Report 2023, which is the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). According to the latest data, the global estimate of the number of people who inject drugs in 2021 is 13.2 million - 18 percent more than previously estimated. Globally, more than 296 million people used drugs in 2021, an increase of 23 percent over the previous decade. Meanwhile, the number of people suffering from substance use disorders has jumped to 39.5 million, a 45 percent increase over 10 years.” (*UN Srbija, 26.06.2023*).

When determining the Narcotics Trafficking Index, records are most often given on cocaine, marijuana and cannabis (Table 3).

Table 3. Index of drug trafficking, 2023

STATE	INDEX
Columbia	9.50
Afganistan, Myanmar	9.50
Brazil, Venezuela Peru	9.00
Iran	9.00
Maroco	9.00
Mexico	9.00
Italy, Belgium	8.00

(Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics>, 27.02.2024)

The most common crime in Serbia is aggravated theft, second is drug trafficking, and third is robbery. According to the statistics of the Appellate Court in Belgrade:

„...the largest number of cases that were resolved by appeal during the previous five years - refers to criminal offenses against property. Aggravated theft takes the first place with a total of 1,847 cases in the five-year period, i.e. since the need for criminal records was established - from October 1, 2016, with a cut-off date of December 31. in 2022. In second place in terms of frequency of criminal acts is “unauthorized production and distribution of narcotic drugs”, with a total of 1,650 cases, while “unauthorized possession of narcotic drugs” is in fourth place with 563 cases. Since separate records are kept for each of these two crimes, it can be concluded that the total number of drug-related crimes (2,213) exceeds the number of serious thefts, which are the most numerous individually. (Politika, 21.03.2023).

1.4. Illegal arms trade

Arms trade is a legitimate and legal activity in relations between states, for which very rigorous international regulations are established. However, arms trade also has illegal flows, which are considered one of the biggest threats to global security. As expected, the biggest problem in the illegal arms trade appears in regions fraught with conflicts, especially those where wars are being waged. In this sense, Ukraine, the Middle East, the Balkans, but also Africa, Central America, are the regions with the highest Arms Trade Index (Table 4).

Table 4. Arms trade index

STATE	INDEX
Ukraine	9.00
Iran	9.00
Libya	9.00
Paraguay	9.00
Afganistan	9.00
DR Congo	9.00
Sudan	9.00

(Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics>, 02.03.2024)

According to the special report of the Global Initiative (GI-TOC) for Southeastern Europe, and when it comes to arms trade, it is pointed out that Bosnia and Herzegovina, through which the main route of illegal trade goes, is particularly critical (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Bosnia and Herzegovina main route for arms trade



(Source: Global Initiative, 2023)

2. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

From the end of the Second World War to the last decade of the last century, in the period named as the Cold War, the key threat to global security was the expected armed conflict between the USA and the USSR, that is, NATO and the Soviet Union. However, that conflict did not occur, because the VU was dissolved and the USSR collapsed. After the Cold War, given that the key threat to security had been removed, the creators of the new world order launched a virile corpus of challenges, risks and threats to security, such as: terrorism, collapsed states, organized crime (trafficking in human beings, drug

trafficking, arms trafficking), pandemics and epidemics of infectious diseases, climate disasters and others (*Forca, 2021*).

No matter how illogical it may seem, the appearance of the above-mentioned challenges, risks and threats to security were mostly contributed by the world powers, that is, precisely those who, ostensibly, fought against those threats the most. The greatest influence on the emergence of new challenges, risks and threats was the effort of the USA to establish a unipolar world order in globalized international relations after the Cold War. In this sense, the USA and NATO intervened armed in numerous countries around the world, on the one hand, and strengthened the neoliberal form of capitalism, on the other hand. All this resulted in the strengthening of terrorism, but also of all other challenges, risks and threats, including organized crime. Therefore, the main cause of the strengthening of organized crime as a threat to global security is the creation of a new world order.

There are numerous approaches to the phenomena that make up an organized criminal, both in theory and in the legal regulations and practice of various countries. Therefore, there is no unity regarding the typology of that type of threat. For this claim, we will cite only the sources that happiness in domestic theory and practice (Table 5).

Table 5. Structure of organized crime

SOURCE	STRUCTURE OF ORGANIZED CRIME
<p>Mičo Bošković, 2002</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - terrorism, - illegal transfers of weapons, i.e. dual-purpose technology, - the spread of chemical-biological-radiological nuclear and missile technologies to countries that do not have them (proliferation), - irregular emigration, - illegal drug production and trade, - racketeering and money laundering, - computer crime, - contagious diseases, - endangering the environment, поморско пиратство и пљачке бродова.
<p>Strategija nacionalne bezbednosti, 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - production and smuggling of psychoactive controlled substances, - smuggling and trade in firearms, - human smuggling and illegal migration, - economic and financial crime in the form of illegal production and trade in excise goods and money laundering, - corruption, - other less common forms.

(Source: Editing by the author)

On the other hand, organized crime, by default, is the combination of criminal groups with the authorities, either at the national or international level. In this sense, an organized criminal is very difficult to prove.

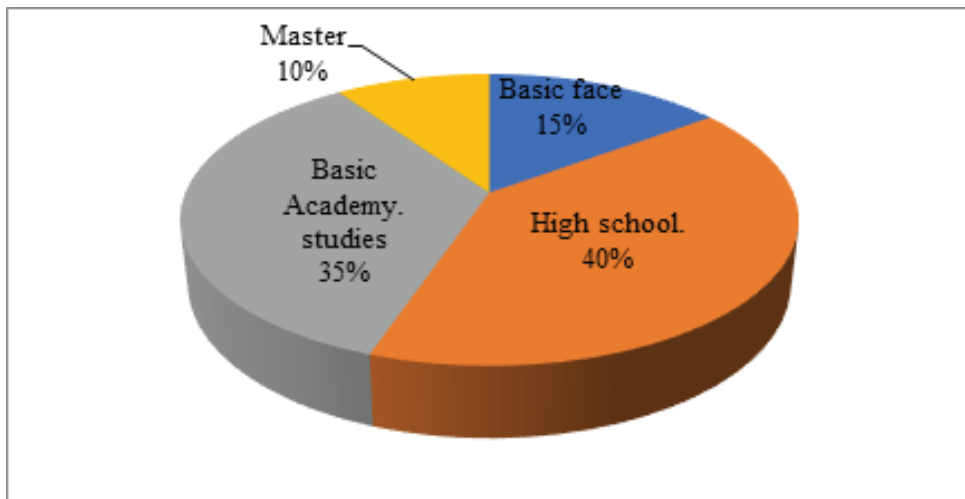
The complexity of the issue of organized crime is also due to the fact that the perpetrators of that illegal act are classified differently. For example, Parezanović scales participants in organized crime into: 1) Organized criminal groups, the lowest aspect; 2)

Criminal associations or organizations, higher aspect and 3) Mafia, as the highest form and level of criminal organization. (Parezanović, M., 2012:21).

Any form (type) of organized crime that we analyze, the primary fact is that it occurs in crisis regions, that is, countries that are burdened with various problems, especially those that are at war or have recently come out of war. Observed in this sense, the characteristic regions for the growth of organized crime are: the Middle East, the Balkans, Africa, West Asia and South America.

The perception of organized crime among the citizens of Serbia is different, as indicated by the research conducted by the first author of the paper in October 2023 on 114 respondents. The educational structure of the respondents is shown in Graph 3.

Graph 3. Educational structure of respondents



(Source: Mitrović, A: 2024:41)

Respondents were offered a set of questions - a statement, with the request to express their opinion on agreement or disagreement (Table 6). At the same time, the Table shows only the final values of statement-agreement: "I completely agree" and "I do not agree at all".

Table 6. Respondents' views on organized crime

FINDING	I completely agree (%)	I do not agree at all (%)
Organized crime is not developed in Serbia	10	43
Organized crime is associated with African countries	40	12
Organized crime targets South American countries	35	8
Human trafficking affects all countries of the world	40	10
Human trafficking affects developed countries	40	12

Criminal groups are more sophisticated than in the past	35	8
Organized crime in Serbia began to develop in the 90s of the last century	32	9
Serbia is successfully fighting organized crime	10	32
The fight against organized crime requires the cooperation of all countries of the world	48	5

(Source: Mitrović., A: 2024:42-47)

CONCLUSION

Security was and remains the basic prerequisite for the survival and development of humanity. The biggest security threat is war, which has been proven countless times in history. However, since wars occur due to conflicts of interest, the root cause of all conflicts in international relations is precisely the conflict of interests of opposing parties.

War and conflicts are fertile ground for the emergence of numerous challenges, risks and threats to security. Organized crime stands out among those threats. No matter what definition and classification of organized crime you take into consideration, the fact is that this threat is strongly developing, globally.

Organized crime primarily develops and strengthens in regions burdened by conflicts and wars. The Balkans, as a region to which Serbia belongs, is a particularly suitable ground for the strengthening of organized crime.

Due to the connection of criminal groups and organizations with authorities, organized criminals are difficult to prove, and therefore even more difficult to prosecute.

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