

**Visit of the OSCE PA Special Representative on Combating
Organized Crime to the OSCE Secretariat and United Nations
Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Vienna**

29-30 January 2024

NOTE-TO-THE-FILE

Executive Summary

On 29-30 January 2024, the OSCE PA Special Representative (SR) on Combating Organized Crime, Hon. Eugenio Zoffili, conducted an official visit to the OSCE Secretariat and the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Joined by the Secretary of the Italian delegation and staff from the OSCE PA Vienna Office, SR Zoffili exchanged views with over 20 experts from both organizations. Ultimately, **the visit proved instrumental in (1) introducing the new mandate of the SR, (2) learning more about the latest organized crime trends and, (3) fostering collaborative efforts among key international actors in the fight against all forms of mafias across the OSCE region.**

At the **OSCE Secretariat**, discussions with key departments delved into the comprehensive policy frameworks and coordination mechanisms required to address the complex challenges posed by organized crime. Meetings with the Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and counterparts from the Transnational Threats Department and Office of the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities allowed for in-depth exchanges on a wide range of organized crime-related challenges and projects.

Meetings in **UNODC** with the Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch, Research and Trend Analysis Branch, and Terrorism Prevention Branch provided a comprehensive overview of the evolving landscape



of organized crime. The dialogue encompassed discussions on emerging trends, persisting threats and innovative strategies for prevention and repression.

Throughout these interactions, SR Zoffili explored avenues for enhanced co-operation with the aim to **foster effective responses to organized crime** through coherent policies and operational efforts. Emphasis was placed on boosting **policy alignment and information sharing** at international level, as well as promoting targeted **joint initiatives** addressing human and drugs trafficking, money laundering and migrant smuggling at regional level. The multifaceted interplay between transnational criminal and terrorist networks was also in focus.



Finally, SR Zoffili actively sought ways to **integrate parliamentary perspectives into the broader strategy**, stressing the pivotal role of legislative bodies in addressing complex challenges associated with organized crime. Deliberations centered around **legislative frameworks, parliamentary engagement, and the role of lawmakers** in reinforcing the international response against organized crime.

The visit concluded with a **debriefing at the OSCE PA Vienna Office**, where the SR had also the opportunity to briefly meet local staff.

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Major Organized Crime Trends

Organized crime trends continue to evolve in response to societal changes, technological advancements, and shifts in global dynamics. The **illicit drug trade** remains a significant driver of organized crime, contributing to the financial strength and operational resilience of criminal organizations worldwide. According to the UNODC 2023 World Drug Report, recent trends indicate a growing concern, particularly in the realms of cocaine and synthetic drugs¹. Particularly alarming is the fact that the production of synthetic drugs is



¹ World Drug Report 2023. UNODC. https://www.unodc.org/res/WDR-2023/WDR23_Exsum_fin_SP.pdf

relatively inexpensive, facilitating their widespread availability in illicit markets and subsequently contributing to a surge in demand across the globe.

Money laundering remains a major concern worldwide, with criminal groups always seizing new opportunities to legitimize their unlawful gains. As financial systems become increasingly globalized, the fight against money laundering becomes crucial in disrupting the financial backbone of organized criminal enterprises, emphasizing the need for law enforcement and international organizations to adopt comprehensive and coordinated strategies. **Trafficking in cultural property** is also becoming an important source for the laundering of the proceeds of crime and has been identified as a possible source of financing for terrorist groups.

One significant global trend is the increasing sophistication of organized crime groups, **utilizing advanced technology and global networks** to facilitate their illicit activities. The **convergence of various criminal activities**, illustrating a trend where organized crime groups engage in a wide array of illicit enterprises simultaneously, is another prominent trend.



Hotspots such as the **Balkan and the Mediterranean regions** are of particular concern, with organized crime exploiting these areas for the trafficking of migrants, drugs, and other illicit goods. In the Mediterranean region, the convergence of different routes raises significant challenges. Notably, migrant smuggling routes often overlap with drug trafficking routes. Major drug trafficking routes such as those originating from **South America** and flowing through West Africa into Europe also play a significant role in facilitating the global movement of illicit

substances, contributing to the pervasive influence of organized crime. Similarly, the opium production in **Afghanistan** fuels another major drug route, with heroin and other opiates trafficked through various channels, including Central Asia and the Middle East, before reaching global markets. These regions, especially the Middle East and certain parts of Asia, are not only central hubs for drug trafficking but also exhibit known links between organized crime and terrorism financing.

It was highlighted that the **nexus between conflict and organized crime** represents a complex and dynamic relationship that demands closer examination. In many instances, conflict zones provide fertile ground for organized crime to flourish, taking advantage of the chaotic environments, weakened governance structures, and the breakdown of social order. The intricate interplay between these two phenomena requires further research to comprehensively understand the mechanisms, dynamics, and impacts on both conflict and crime.

Finally, the **growing significance of cybercrime** is a major component of organized criminal activities. The digital realm provides criminals with new opportunities to exploit vulnerabilities, conduct financial fraud, and engage in cyber-enabled crimes. This shift towards digital platforms poses unique challenges for traditional law enforcement methods, necessitating the development of advanced technological solutions and international collaboration.

Intersection with Terrorism

The complex nexus between organized crime and terrorist networks was also duly explored during the two-day visit. The discussions delved into the nuanced intersections of this connection that incorporates elements such as financing, operational methodologies and interlinked routes.

Terrorist organizations often engage in organized crime to finance their activities. Both OSCE and UNODC recognized the importance of disrupting the financial networks supporting terrorism. Collaborative efforts focus on tracking and preventing money laundering, enhancing financial intelligence, and strengthening legal frameworks to counter the convergence of organized crime and terrorism.

The link between terrorism and organized crime is very prominent in Africa, as well as in Afghanistan. UNODC's engagement in the Sahel region extends to comprehensive threat assessments, emphasizing the need for multi-dimensional strategies to prevent violent extremism and enhance the capacities of criminal justice sectors. A critical challenge highlighted was the collection of



battlefield evidence, an impediment to prosecuting Foreign Terrorist Fighters. While these individuals can be arrested, the lack of sufficient evidence hampers successful prosecutions. Efforts are underway to strengthen the work of different agencies, addressing this challenge and enhancing collaboration between investigators and prosecutors on terrorism and organized crime.

Another notable concern is the **exploitation of trafficking routes by**

Foreign Terrorist Fighters, mirroring the patterns observed in the illicit trade of firearms. The interplay between **far-right extremists** and individuals involved in criminal organized groups was also underlined. Additionally, links between **organized crime groups and active sports groups** were discussed, underscoring the need for comprehensive strategies to disrupt these connections.

Through workshops, training programs, and technical assistance, both organizations work to enhance the skills of security personnel and strengthen legal frameworks to counter these converging threats. Raising awareness among youth and engaging with civil society are also crucial components of an effective strategy to prevent serious crime.

Key International Efforts

Recent trends and developments in the organized crime landscape have prompted the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to intensify its efforts in understanding and combating various facets of criminal activities.

The Research and Trend Analysis Branch of UNODC conducts research work related to the trends and developments in the organized crime and illicit markets field. In order to monitor global drug cultivation, the UNODC utilizes satellite imagery for data collection. The collation of data on drug use and trafficking enables the construction of a global picture, which results in the annual [World Drug Report](#), providing in-depth analysis of key developments and emerging trends in selected drug markets, including in countries currently experiencing conflict.



UNODC Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section reviews the impact of organized crime on vulnerable populations, with a particular focus on human trafficking and migrant smuggling. The exploitation of individuals for forced labor, sexual exploitation, and other criminal purposes remains a grave concern, necessitating concerted efforts to strengthen legal frameworks and enhance international collaboration to combat these crimes. The Branch produces a **Global Report on Trafficking in Persons** every two years since 2009, utilizing the largest existing database². Interviews with migrants in countries of origin and transit, amounting to 10,000 interviews, offer insights into motivations and roots for migration, contributing valuable information for policy responses.

In order to enhance the effective implementation of the [United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime \(UNTOC\) and its Protocols](#), the State Parties have recently adopted a new **Review Mechanism**³ which is a comprehensive and collaborative peer review process, emphasizing transparency, efficiency, inclusivity, and impartiality. Over the course of ten-year timeframe, the process aims to thoroughly assess all articles of the Organized Crime

² More information on the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons:

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/global-report-on-trafficking-in-persons.html>

³ More information on the UNTOC Review Mechanism:

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/review-mechanism-untoc/overview.html>

Convention and its Protocols, which have been divided into four thematic clusters: Criminalization and Jurisdiction; International Cooperation, Mutual Legal Assistance and Confiscation; Law Enforcement and Judicial System; Prevention, Technical Assistance, Protection Measures and Other Measures. Each state is reviewed for each instrument to which it is party by two other States. Reviewing states provide written feedback, engage in a dialogue with the reviewed state, and collaboratively prepare a list of observations, including gaps, challenges, best practices, suggestions, and technical assistance needs in the organized crime field.

In close co-operation with UNODC, the OSCE is also actively engaged in strengthening the fight against transnational organized crime. The main focus is on enhancing the capabilities of its participating States in combating transnational criminal activities and promoting regional co-operation. These efforts encompass various areas, including law enforcement, judiciary, and border management.



For instance, the OSCE-led extra-budgetary project on **“Innovative policy solutions to mitigate money-laundering risks of virtual assets”** is designed to support the governments of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in building the capacity of national authorities to mitigate criminal risks related to virtual assets and cryptocurrencies with the help of analytical tracing software. Furthermore, the extra-budgetary project on **“Strengthening the fight against transnational organized crime in South-Eastern Europe”** aimed at improving regional co-operation in the context of the seizure, confiscation, management and social re-use of assets of criminal organizations.

The organization also supports **police forces** across its region. It maintains a network of police advisers in its field operations and provides assessments, expert advice, and assistance to participating States to help them develop accountable policing services that protect their citizens.

List of Participants

OSCE PA:

Hon. Eugenio Zoffili, OSCE PA Special Representative on Combating Organized Crime
Ms. Valeria Galardini, Secretary of Italian Delegation
Ms. Manuela Molinari, Interpreter
Mr. Marco Bonabello, OSCE PA Senior Advisor
Ms. Pauline Hennings, OSCE PA Research Assistant
Ms. Marita Lagidze, OSCE PA Research Assistant

List of Interlocutors

OSCE Secretariat:

Mr. Andrea Salvoni - Senior Adviser, Office of the Secretary General
Ms. Anastasia Fusco - Adviser, Office of the Secretary General
Dr. Kari Johnstone - Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
Mr. Pascal Bradaia - Senior Police Affairs Adviser, Combating Trafficking of Illicit Drugs and Small Arms and Light Weapons
Mr. Sami Ryhaenen - Head of the Strategic Police Matters Unit, Transnational Threats Department
Mr. Noah Lilienfein - Adviser on Fight Against Organized Crime, Transnational Threats Department
Mr. Ivan Calabuig-Williams - Programme Officer, Office of the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities
Mr. Maksym Mishalov Dragunov - Assistant Project Officer, Office of the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities

UNODC:

Ms. Angela Me - Chief, Research and Trend Analysis Branch at UNODC
Sonya Yee - Senior Coordinator Officer, Research and Trend Analysis Branch
Fabrizio Sarrica - Research Officer, Research and Trend Analysis Branch
Constanze von Soehnen - Programme Management Officer, Office of the Chief, the Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch
Dimosthenis Chrysikos - Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer, Conference Support Section (CSS)
Silke Albert - Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer, Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section
Leonardo Lara Villarroel - Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer, Firearms Trafficking Section (FTS)
Ms. Elena Rigacci Hay - Officer in Charge, Terrorism Prevention Branch
Ms. Kate Fitzpatrick - Chief of Section, Eastern Europe and Asia
Mr. Jeremy Douglas - Chef de Cabinet and Strategy Advisor to UNODC Executive Director