



Organised Crime Monitor

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Research issues and policy relevance

The purpose of the Organised Crime Monitor is to optimise the use of knowledge gained during large-scale investigations to develop an insight into the nature of organised crime in the Netherlands. By using intrusive investigation methods such as covert policing, wiretapping, bugging and observation, these investigations provide a unique insight into the phenomenon of organised crime. It is vital that these insights are recorded systematically and are fed back to policymakers and practitioners involved in combating organised crime. After all, without a sound insight into the nature of organised crime, it is impossible to fight it.

Research method

The main sources of this ongoing research project are files of closed Dutch police investigations of criminal groups, often spanning a period of several years (for more information, see Kleemans, van den Berg & Van de Bunt 1998; Kleemans, Brienen & Van de Bunt 2002). Since 1996 up to now we have analysed systematically 120 large-scale investigations (40 case studies per sweep). Each case study always starts with structured interviews with police officers and public prosecutors. After these interviews we analyse and summarise the police files. Describing and analysing these files, use is made of an extensive checklist which elaborates upon the following leading questions: What is the composition of the group and how do offenders cooperate? What kinds of illegal activities do they engage in and how do they operate? How do they interact with the opportunities and risks of their environment? What are the proceeds of the criminal activities and how do they spend these proceeds? Transcripts of wiretaps, and data obtained from police observations and interrogations of victims and offenders, often provide us with a detailed and interesting look into the social world of organised crime.

Following three data sweeps we now have collected a wide cross-section of 120 cases, not only about the various forms of organised crime and various forms of cooperation, but also set within a specific timeframe. In addition, use was made of expert interviews, information from other investigations, confidential reports, crime analyses and (scientific) literature.

Key findings

The research project yielded a range of conclusions that touch upon salient policy

assumptions. We refer to a number of conclusions from the first two reports which the Minister of Justice presented to Parliament (Kleemans et al. 1998; 2002). The third report will be published in 2007.

Racketeering versus transit crime

When the issue of organised crime reached the Dutch political agenda in the early 1990s, the threat of organised crime was framed in terms of 'Mafia-type' organizations in Italy or the United States. Organised crime groups were portrayed as bureaucracies with a pyramidal structure – a strict hierarchy, with a clear division of tasks and an internal sanctioning system. Corruption, racketeering and infiltration in economic sectors were viewed as major threats of organised crime. Controlling certain regions or economic sectors, organised crime was believed to make a profit by taking over two traditional state monopolies – the use of violence and taxation. In the international literature this kind of activity of organised crime groups is referred to as racketeering.

Considering the available evidence of two decades of research into organised crime in the Netherlands, one may conclude that this conception contradicted the phenomenon: the major business of organised crime groups in the Netherlands boils down to international smuggling activities – drug trafficking, smuggling illegal immigrants, human trafficking for sexual exploitation, arms trafficking, trafficking in stolen vehicles and other transnational illegal activities, such as money laundering and evasion of taxes (e.g. cigarette smuggling and European Community fraud). The nature of organised crime might be more fittingly described as *transit crime* – criminal groups are primarily involved in international illegal trade, using the same opportunity structure that facilitates legal economic activities. The Netherlands could be

either a destination country, a transit country, or, especially in the case of synthetic drugs, a production country (see for a review of Dutch research: Kleemans 2007).

Criminal networks.

In the Netherlands, pyramidal structures with a strict hierarchy, a clear division of tasks, and an internal sanctioning system, are the exception rather than the rule. In many cases of the Organised Crime Monitor the term 'criminal networks' is far better suited for describing the actual structure of cooperation. Offenders cooperate in certain projects, yet the structure of cooperation is fluid and changes over time. Social relations form the basis for criminal cooperation (Kleemans & Van de Bunt 1999). Family, friends and acquaintances work together and introduce each other to third parties. In this way, offenders do not only find new opportunities, but also solve problems of cooperating in an environment that is dominated by distrust, suspicion and potential deceit. The flexibility of networks is also the foundation for their development.

Changing views on investigation strategies

The changing view on the nature of organised crime in the Netherlands is mirrored by a change in criminal investigation strategies. Flexible 'prompt intervention strategies' are more common, as an alternative to the large-scale and lengthy police investigations of the past. Arrests and seizures in criminal networks are no longer postponed or prevented at any

cost, but are – on the contrary – sometimes used deliberately to gather evidence against the prime suspects. Prompt interventions are now often combined with a more long-term investigation strategy.

Both covert policing/ infiltration and uncontrolled deliveries (e.g. of drugs) are strictly regulated or forbidden. Police investigations increasingly rely on 'unobtrusive' methods of gathering evidence such as the extensive use of wiretapping and bugging. In the main, observing criminal activities has replaced getting heavily involved in the criminal milieu.

Evidence available suggests that quite 'traditional' policing methods may still be effective in cases of organised crime. The main reason wiretapping generates much evidence, particularly in cases of transit crime, is that communication by the main suspects is essential in these cases. Because people live in different countries, they have to communicate by phone, fax or e-mail, and this (traceable) communication can only be partially replaced by meetings in person. Furthermore, communication by business partners and co-offenders may also generate evidence against prime suspects. Finally, seizures and arrests may turn the relatively comfortable and strategic position of a 'broker' sour. When problems arise, he is the one who gets called about what went wrong, who is responsible and who is going to pay the debts. His indispensability forces action and communication – and can be monitored by wiretapping and observation.

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