

Preface

Legal corporations are not the only ones that have adapted their structures and procedures to the modern globalised world. Organised crime has also oriented itself toward the world's new competitive conditions and is proceeding according to the principle of 'think global, act local, go international'. Similar to corporations in the law-abiding economy, international crime is modernising its structures and procedures and is effortlessly adapting itself to modern conditions with the help of global networks. Organised crime has various, often interconnected faces: drug and weapons trafficking, white-collar crime, racketeering, and human trafficking, to name only a few.

The economic repercussions are fatal: organised crime causes financial damage that amounts to billions every year. Equally alarming are the consequences on the socio-political level, especially the insidious threat to democracy that accompanies the expansion of organised crime. This threat is insidious in that the legal and illegal business worlds are often inseparably bound together through money laundering and the reinvestment of illegal money into legal domains. Investments and a focus on profits are not negative qualities or actions in and of themselves. However, when they are coupled with the willingness to act unscrupulously in the face of social norms, attitudes, and behaviours against all legal principles and all moral and ethical values, they become a driving force for organised crime.

The individual citizen plays a decisive role here. A public that is not constantly on its guard allows opportunities for the gradual establishment of criminal developments and negative cultural standards to arise. In light of this, it is alarming that the topic of organised crime is somewhat underestimated in the public's perception. The German public tends to believe that organised criminal developments occur in distant countries, or that they do not concern us. Yet there are countless points of contact with our daily lives, even if 'only' in form of rotten meat scandals, i.e., the targeted Europe-wide dissemination of goods unfit for sale through the systematic cover-up of their origins. The focus on the mafia may also be a result of the belief that we are dealing with an exclusively Italian phenomenon that does not affect the rest of the global community.

However, the reality is quite different. Germany has proven to be a popular place for money-laundering activities, and the Duisburg murders in 2007 have shown that the mafia – in this case the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta – established themselves in Germany a long time ago. Within the global network of organised crime, which exhibits different geopolitical concentrations and specialisations in different 'divisions', Germany also plays a significant role in the spread of human trafficking, in particular with regard to forced prostitution, for which it provides near-ideal conditions.

The financial crisis has also created new and favourable conditions for organised crime to thrive. Times of high unemployment provide the mafia and similar organisations with opportunities to come onto the scene as employers and benefactors – a dangerous development, not only in Italy.

In light of these problems and their international relevance, the criticism is often made that not enough is being done to fight organised crime, or rather that inadequate legal principles do not allow for more effective measures. The creation of such principles, however, is complicated by the fact that organised crime is difficult to grasp, and that there are sometimes vastly diverging opinions on what phenomena should be subsumed under the category of organised crime. The strategies with which nation-states counter organised crime vary accordingly. In Germany, surreptitious electronic surveillance or the legal situation in Italy that regulates the possibilities of encroachment on suspected members of organised crime are strongly contested. Finding a common transnational path forward represents a constant challenge.

The struggle against organised crime always entails finding a balance between freedom, individual rights, and security. The nation-state must guarantee security by ensuring that no possibilities that threaten our basic legal principles arise. At the same time, rights such as the constitutionally protected statute that a person is innocent until proven guilty should be preserved. The weighing of both these points requires a certain knowledge of risk potential, the readiness to draw conclusions from this, and the courage to publicly advocate unpopular and suppressed topics. For this reason, the analysis and description of the existing situation represents the first challenge on the way to finding suitable strategies to combat organised crime.

This was the starting point for the 14th Karlsruhe Dialogues organised by the ZAK | Centre for Cultural and General Studies at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) on the topic of ‘Organised Crime. Dark Sides of Globalisation’. The goal of the event, held in February 2010, was to create an interdisciplinary forum of experts to discuss questions such as: Where and how does organised crime begin? How has the potential for the systematic expansion of what we have come to think of as ‘organised crime’ developed, and indeed been made more dynamic, in recent years? Are certain forms of government – stable democracies, in particular – less prone to the spread of organised crime than others? Is this the reason why we in Germany often believe that organised crime does not affect us? How can the current situation be described and what are the conceivable strategies to combat international crime? Should international cooperation among police and judicial authorities be welcomed as an effective response to transnational crime, or are we dealing with local problems that must be countered locally?

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This collection of essays is based on the discussion of these questions and their outcomes at the 14th Karlsruhe Dialogues. Since the topic of ‘organised crime’ is closely linked to the question of what modern civil society means to us – human dignity, democratic values, civil rights, and security – we would like to offer the public an interdisciplinary overview of current developments in the domain of organised crime. It must therefore be made clear that this phenomenon does not exclusively occur outside of our own living space. Toward this end, we would like to encourage people to think of organised crime as a challenge that encompasses all of society. We would, furthermore, like to foster a wide-ranging discussion of this phenomenon and give new impetus to the search for possible solutions.

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