

Summary

Organized Crime in the Netherlands

Third report of the Organized Crime Monitor

Research issues and policy relevance

This report contains the main findings of the third data sweep of the so-called Organized Crime Monitor. The purpose of the Organized Crime Monitor is to optimize the use of knowledge gained during large-scale investigations to develop an insight into the nature of organized 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 organized crime. It is vital that these insights are recorded systematically and are fed back to policymakers and practitioners involved in combating organized crime. After all, without a sound insight into the nature of organized crime, it is impossible to fight it. The Organized Crime Monitor is a direct result of the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee into Criminal Investigation Methods, which concluded that an accurate description of organized crime in the Netherlands was lacking (PEO, 1996).

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 et al. 1998; 2002). Since 1996 up to now, we have analyzed 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 analyze and summarize the police files. Describing and analyzing 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 organized crime.

Following three data sweeps we now have collected a wide cross-section of 120 cases, not only about the various forms of organized 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

This third report is a continuation of the findings from the previous two monitor reports (Kleemans et al., 1998; 2002). For that reason, the summary below also mentions a few relevant conclusions from the previous two reports.

Racketeering versus transit crime

When the issue of organized crime reached the Dutch political agenda in the early 1990s, the threat of organized crime was framed in terms of 'Mafia-type' organizations in Italy or the United States. Organized 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 organized crime. Controlling certain regions or economic sectors, organized 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 organized crime groups is referred to as racketeering. Considering the available evidence of two decades of research into organized crime in the Netherlands, one may conclude that this conception contradicted the phenomenon: the major business of organized 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 organized 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).

Rather than controlling certain regions or certain sectors of the economy, criminal groups use the legal infrastructure and legal commodity and money flows. As the Netherlands is an important logistical node in Europe (Amsterdam-Schiphol Airport, the port of Rotterdam), this also creates an excellent opportunity structure for organized crime. Economic sectors are

used to commit or to conceal crimes or to spend criminal proceeds. Most of these investments are in sectors familiar to the criminal groups, such as bars, hotels and restaurants, prostitution, cars and transport. Both the nature and location of the investments are largely influenced by the 'cognitive map' of the offenders. Offenders tend to invest in their country of origin – native Dutch offenders in the Netherlands, Turkish offenders in Turkey, and so on. When money was invested in other countries, this often could be explained by close personal contacts or the logistics of criminal activities.

However, the exact scope of investments is still unclear. Furthermore, recent rumors about real estate agents being extorted caused a lot of distress about criminal investments in real estate. Finally, successive contract killings in the 'Amsterdam' underworld raised serious questions about mistrust and conflicts within the realm of organized crime and about the relationships between the underworld and the licit world.

From pyramid-shaped criminal organizations to 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 Organized 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. 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.

However, this does not imply that criminal associations do not have a structure or that the relationships within the organization are interchangeable and horizontal. The previous monitor reports highlighted the wide variety of organizations and the fact that the logistics of the criminal activities (what matters have to be arranged?) have a major impact on the way in which offenders shape their criminal cooperation. The focus was also on the internal dynamics of criminal organizations and criminal networks. By analyzing criminal associations as criminal networks, in which offenders can collaborate with each other in varying combinations, not only is it possible to get a clear view of the stability in certain associations, but also of discontinuity and change. Such insights are vital to police investigations.

Thanks to this wider perspective, we are able to better analyze the positions of offenders within criminal networks and their mutual dependency. In many cases, there are clear key players on whom many other offenders depend because of their financial resources, know-how or contacts. These key players or nodal offenders feature time and

again, in different investigations and in different criminal associations. Little by little, other offenders may become less dependent of these key players, as they gather money, know-how and contacts themselves and subsequently start engaging in their own criminal activities. So, by not presuming a priori a permanent, pyramid-shaped organization, it will become clear how criminal networks grow and develop. It may also become clear that *facilitators*, who usually operate in the periphery of criminal organizations (such as money changers, underground bankers, financial service providers and forgers), render services to several criminal organizations. This way, they occupy a more important position within a criminal network than the consideration of separate 'criminal organizations' would make one think.

Trust, mistrust and criminal cooperation

In transit crime, contact must in general be made between offenders from different countries, different ethnic groups, or between the underworld and the licit world. In some forms of transit crime, such as smuggling heroin from Turkey to Europe, existing social relationships can easily be used. The previous two reports have extensively addressed the importance of existing social relationships in criminal associations. However, existing social relationships do not always offer a solution, particularly in transit crime. The problem with social relationships – most notably family ties and bonds of friendship – is that such 'strong' social relationships are often clustered, geographically, socially, professionally, et cetera. As a result, they offer offenders few extra opportunities. We make the point that 'trust' in criminal cooperation involves more than just reliability or integrity; it also involves a component of capacity. For this reason, some offenders, involved in major and risky criminal operations, throw in their lot with 'outsiders' – i.e. no relatives, friends or standing business associates. New relationships can offer new business opportunities. Moreover, these relationships can work more adequately (and therefore more safely) than trusted partners, thanks to the skills of these new people. This is called the 'strength' of 'weak' ties. But how exactly do you get to trust these new partners? In the first place, there are learning effects: trust is based on one's experience with regard to the partner's performance (present or past). Secondly, trust can be based on other people's experience (which they share). The decisive factor is the reputation of the business associate. Reputations are built within social groups. In meeting places, people show who they are (or want to be), and reputations are built and replicated. Reputations can also be based on generalizations regarding the alleged or true characteristics of certain groups.

The issue of trust in criminal cooperation is even more important, if one partner has more opportunity to ignore the best interests of the other partner. Either party trusts that they will not be harmed by the other one.

However, when there is no basis of trust, more security will have to be provided for transactions. The way in which this is given shape depends in part on the extent to which the relationship is symmetrical. Where there is no trust in an asymmetrical relationship, this will easily result in drastic submission and control. Insofar as any rewards are promised, these rewards reflect the asymmetry of the relationship and the unequal division of proceeds and risks. In more symmetrical relationship, we identified other forms of control: more emphasis on 'equal sharing', voluntarily committing oneself by providing 'hostages', or engaging third parties that take on a role similar to that of the 'notary'.

Last but not least, our conclusion concerning offenders' responses to problems in criminal cooperation is that there are many conflicts and that violence (or the threat of violence) is regularly used to resolve these conflicts. In that sense, these transactions are really quite different to those of legitimate businessmen. However, there are other ways in which conflicts are resolved. The actual use of violence is not the 'standard' and certainly not the only answer to conflicts.

Many conflicts arise from one of the following four problems: no delivery/late delivery; no payment/late payment; associates become competitors (start for themselves); talking to the police. In case of either of the first two problems, there is room for negotiation and assessment (what are the full facts of the case?). In relation to the last two problems, the damage has already been done when the problem is identified. How one responds to a conflict depends, among other things, on what prompted the conflict and the nature of the relationship (whether or not it is based on trust). Where the problems related to payment and delivery, no response at all was given in a number of cases, or violence was used proportionately or instrumentally. Where an associate started their own business or talked to the police, we usually saw more drastic reactions, in which severing the relationship based on trust also plays a role.

The social embeddedness of organized crime

In the previous two reports, we focused on the embeddedness of organized crime in existing social relationships. In this report we pursue two aspects of social embeddedness which have so far been underexposed in the literature: the link between occupations and organized crime and the local embeddedness of transnational organized crime.

There are many different ways in which occupations can provide opportunity for organized crime. First of all, some occupations foster international contacts and traveling, as a result of which offenders can discover opportunities for crime (transit or otherwise) and commit such crimes. Examples are occupations related to mobility, transport and logistics. Secondly, the individual discretion of certain occupations plays a role (autonomy). This explains the non-existence (relatively speaking) of professionals hired by an employer, working for the government or in

major organizations in the cases we studied, and the involvement of the more 'autonomous' occupations: managing directors of (usually) small businesses, independent professionals, and in some cases people that can act autonomously (relatively speaking) in bigger organizations such as businesses or banks. Thirdly, the 'social' nature of the occupations plays a part. Occupations in which people come into contact with other people frequently, offer more opportunities to meet potential co-offenders. Networks of colleagues offer good opportunities to gain trust and exercise control when establishing relationships with one another. Social cohesion is also relevant in that context. In this respect, reference is made to the occupation-related opportunity structures of independent entrepreneurs. Close social relationships can cause a sort of snowball effect, transferring certain methods to commit fraud to others or committing the same criminal activity every time with different new partners. In some 'closed' social worlds, other standards of good and bad may be introduced, and rationalizations and justifications may encourage and maintain illegal conduct.

As for the local embeddedness of organized crime, it is wrong to assume that transnational organized crime has no local dimension. Without local embeddedness, it is really hard to operate successfully. On the other hand, offenders that are locally strongly embedded, have a multitude of existing relationships with both the licit world and potential co-offenders. They are ahead in terms of knowledge on the possibilities the environment offers them to develop criminal activities, which enables them to develop into versatile, local, illegal entrepreneurs. This versatility, however, is often a result of the fact that many offenders have not been able to rise above the level of 'local hero' and therefore have insufficient access to lucrative international criminal activities. What is more, they do not have exclusive skills or a specialization that makes them interesting for criminal associates outside the region or outside the Netherlands. Nevertheless, we can see in several cases that locally operating offenders manage to join in with transnational commercial activities. In that context, meeting places are important, in particular the position of the 'Amsterdam market place' in the international illegal drugs trade. In addition, international 'brokers' enable locally operating groups to join in the international drugs markets, without the need for such groups to cross the Dutch border. This sort of relationship can only grow thanks to the fact that they are aware of each other's reputation, that they can meet each other and can develop steady partnerships.

Criminal careers in organized crime

During and after the Parliamentary Inquiry into Criminal Investigation Methods, rather a lot of attention was paid to the risk of young people becoming involved in organized crime through recruitment. Current findings, however, compel us to have a wider take on criminal careers

in organized crime. The criminal careers of the approximately one thousand offenders that were involved in the first eighty cases of the Organized Crime Monitor, have been studied based upon data from the Judicial Documentation System (JDS) and our own analyses of closed investigations.

In the first place, it turns out that there are no young offenders in the group of suspects studied by us: none of the offenders is under 18 at the time of the index case and only 7% is aged between 18 and 24. Older offenders – compared to the total JDS population – are also overrepresented. In total, about three quarters of the offenders is aged thirty or older.

Secondly, it turns out that the criminal justice authorities have no idea about the antecedents of 28% of the offenders. It is not until the investigation that these offenders come within the scope of the Dutch criminal justice authorities. These ‘unknown offenders’ to a large extent are offenders that were born elsewhere and came to live or reside in the Netherlands at a later date. A substantial proportion of the offenders is unknown to the criminal justice authorities due to the very nature of the criminal activities they are involved in. Many organized crime activities boil down to transnational illegal trade and other transnational illegal activities (transit crime). With transit crime (import, transit, export) it is usually difficult for the authorities to gain a full picture of all the actors active in these activities, either in the Netherlands or abroad.

Thirdly, there is a large number of ‘known offenders’: 72% of the offenders has had a brush with the Dutch judicial system. A striking feature in the judicial record of the offenders is the fact that they had little to fear from the Dutch judicial system until the index case. In total, 31% of all offenders had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment, and 15% had served more than 12 months.

On average, offenders are aged approximately 27 when they come into contact with the Dutch judicial system for the first time. Although an early start is fairly standard, especially for people with a long criminal career, only 25% of all offenders come into contact with the Dutch judicial system before reaching the age of 20. On the other hand, 40% of the offenders is aged between 20 and 30 when they first have trouble with the law, and 34% is even older than 30 at the time of their first contact with the judicial system.

If we want to find out how we could identify in an early stage that someone gets involved in (organized) crime, it is important that we verify the way in which people become involved in organized crime and how people ‘make a career’. An analysis of 92 ‘starters’ shows that people get involved in many different ways in forms of organized crime: existing social relationships, through work and professional relationships, through leisure activities and sidelines, through certain life events and through recruitment. This also explains the phenomenon of the late starters:

some opportunities to carry out profitable criminal activities do not arise until later in someone's life. In addition, some opportunities are grasped only later in life, as a consequence of life events such as bankruptcy and serious debts. In other words, there are several roads that lead to involvement in organized crime. These roads cannot be taken until later in life. In many cases, a striking aspect is that starters play an active rather than a passive role.

An analysis of the careers of 66 'ringleaders' or nodal offenders demonstrates that the standard image of 'a life of crime' only is true to some extent. A significant part of the ringleaders switched at a certain point in time to organized crime from their former occupation. Among these 32 offenders a distinction can be made between a group of 19 offenders with a background in legal trade (including import and export) and a group of 13 offenders with other types of occupation, people from the business sector, the construction industry, assembly, hotels and catering, financial services or government. Some offenders carry out their criminal activities as an extension of their legal activities. Others clearly switched at some point in time from their lawful occupation to the trade in illegal goods. Apart from the opportunity element, this switch also involves an element of choice (agency), as a result of which the lives of these offenders change course and increasingly become dominated by organizing criminal activities and shielding these from the criminal justice authorities. Last but not least, life events – also later in life – may bring certain illegal opportunities within reach of people with a negligible criminal career, or may become more appealing compared to other alternatives. It is true for all these offenders with a professional background, of which the majority did not come into contact with the law until after their twentieth birthday, that it is anything but evident that they were already on the 'police radar'. They are 'newcomers' – usually later in life – that take advantage of the opportunities and contacts their jobs offer them.

In the overall group of ringleaders studied (66), a substantial part of the offenders (30) has already had a brush with the police before they were twenty. Some of them grew, thanks to their local roots, to be versatile 'local heroes'. However, they do not have the necessary contacts to outgrow their region, nor do they have any specific skills that make them interesting for associates from outside their region. Therefore, their own region is their limit, and – thanks to their contacts – they remain focused on the opportunities that present themselves to make a profit, engaging in legal, semi-legal and illegal activities. Their versatility is also a result of the restrictions of the local context. Some of them, for example local XTC manufacturers, manage to gain access to interesting export markets via brokers. As a result, these local heroes can develop into big players, at national or, sometimes, even international level. This is also true for other offenders that know how to optimize economies of

scale. Thanks to scaling, profitable illegal activities can gradually take over from other illegal activities, which in practice usually results in a sort of specialization. In respect of some offenders, we also see that capital acquired by criminal activities, such as burglaries and robberies, is sometimes used to switch to forms of organized crime, in particular the trade in illegal drugs. Capital is an important stepping stone, as it creates opportunities to invest in illegal activities. In addition, it creates opportunities for an increase in scale and limitation of risk. Risks can be limited at a given moment by engaging in less risky, semi-legal or legal activities or by a more 'backstage' involvement in activities. Finally, some criminal careers gain momentum because offenders have or develop specific expertise which many other offenders depend on: transnational contacts, skills regarding transport or money laundering. These are essential bottlenecks for many offenders that are active in transit crime. There are also certain crime-specific bottlenecks, such as in human trafficking (forgery) or in the production of synthetic drugs (precursors, hardware, and – in the past – knowledge of the manufacturing process). For that reason, offenders with this know-how or these contacts have the possibility of moving up the 'ladder' in criminal circles. Not only because of their own actions, but also because of the network that is formed by others around these individuals: offenders tell other offenders about specific expertise of this or that individual, which prompts the other offenders to contact them.

Investigation of organized crime

The changing view on the nature of organized crime in the Netherlands since the early 1990s 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 organized 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.

In this report, we elaborate on these earlier findings. In addition to a study into the 40 criminal investigations analyzed most recently, we also carried out an in-depth analysis of 22 cases (the complete file of these cases was available on CD-ROM).

A large part of the 40 criminal investigations examined was initiated on the basis of know-how readily available at the police: know-how from running criminal investigations or intelligence. In addition, offenders may leave behind clues (or even visible traces), information from citizens/organizations (reports, tips), seizures during (regular) checks or international requests for mutual legal assistance in criminal cases. Although almost all cases examined have some sort of international dimension, the majority of the reasons to start criminal investigations came from within the country.

In a large part of the cases, the police collaborated with one or more foreign police forces in the criminal investigation. The nature and intensity of this collaboration varied. Sometimes, it was brief and consisted of merely requests for information addressed to foreign institutions. In other cases, the collaboration was more intensive, involving the provision of information and the active gathering of information, for example through wiretaps, witness hearings, or observation reports regarding specific situations. In those cases, the international aspects of the criminal cooperation is reflected in the criminal investigation. International collaboration sometimes gives a better view of the international criminal cooperation, for instance of suspects outside the Netherlands, movements of people and financial transactions. The view, however, is far from complete. We have to be realistic; it is probably an illusion to believe that better international collaboration between police forces will give an overall clear picture of goods, money and human trafficking, from source to client or final destination. Another question is whether this is advisable from a cost-benefit point of view. After all, insight is rarely the ultimate goal. The main question is what better insight adds to the objectives of a criminal investigation. Hence, the costs and benefits of international collaboration will vary from case to case.

The debate on the 'prompt intervention' strategy in practice resulted in three different forms of 'prompt intervention' investigations. First, the term 'prompt intervention' is used as the investigation strategy is focusing on a short lead-time, between six weeks and three months. In terms of the sentences imposed, these short criminal investigations have a similar 'yield' as longer investigations. Moreover, these investigations are not so much a success thanks to their short duration but because of the approach taken, avoiding longwinded decision-making procedures and using opportunities that present themselves during the investigation. Those short-term investigations also have their downside, as the background to and causes of the crimes committed often remain unexplained. Nor is the 'prompt intervention' very conducive for collaboration with investigating bodies from abroad and the investigations often have a strong focus on the local dimension of phenomena.

A second variant is prompt interventions within the context of protracted criminal investigations. These may focus on unsettling the various relationships within the organization or brief investigations against specific individuals to gather intelligence on the more important offenders. Whether offenders respond immediately to such interventions and if so, in what way, remains uncertain. The most significant hazard of this 'prompt intervention' variant as a deliberate strategy is in the unpredictability and excessiveness of physical violence. If this strategy is applied, it is extremely important that the situations and reactions of offenders can be monitored at all times.

A third variant focuses on tackling a crucial link (such as a facilitator or a broker) in the criminal network. This concerns a strategic ('smart') intervention that is based on thorough know-how of, for example, logistics or the facilitators of criminal organizations. This 'prompt intervention' does not necessarily have a short lead-time. It may also be part of a long-term investigation.

Finally, we discuss collaboration by offenders and witnesses. Interrogations and witness statements can make a significant contribution towards criminal investigations. Collaboration of offenders and witnesses, however, also causes problems, because there are many indications that violent threats are made and in some cases, violence is really used.

Almost all main suspects in the cases examined by us refused to make a statement, even when confronted with obvious evidence (statements made by others, photographs, wiretaps, etc.). Among the less significant suspects, there are some who are willing to be open about things, to a greater or lesser extent. In about half of the 22 cases, one or more offenders confessed. In many cases, these individuals had 'executive' jobs, such as transporting goods or acting as courier. There are also statements made by suspects who were further removed from the criminal organization, socially or professionally, such as suppliers and brokers.

A striking feature is that the willingness to make a statement varies through time. In some cases, we found a kind of 'tidal waves', in the sense that they went from saying nothing to confessing to going silent again. In almost all 22 cases examined, one or more witnesses were prepared to collaborate, sometimes despite fear of retaliation. The files reveal that witnesses further removed from the offenders were in general prepared to provide the information requested. In some interviews, the respondents indicated the importance of making time for and paying attention to witnesses. Several times, put in different ways, they said that those witnesses' willingness to collaborate was 'flexible'. Where the criminal operations were embedded in legal occupations and organizations, there were, precisely because of this embeddedness, always witnesses that were able to make a statement about the criminal transactions committed in the context of their organization, industry or occupation. In some cases, interviewing such witnesses did not only result in a lot of information, but probably contributed to crime prevention as well.

Implications for policy

Combating organised crime in a rational way?

In the early 1990s, the fight against organised crime took a start in a rather improvised way. These days, policies increasingly rely on information from scientific research and crime analysis. Politicians, policy makers and executive officials have the ambition to act in line with a rational model of policy making, by setting priorities based on threat analysis and by selecting targets for police investigations based on intelligence reports on the full range of potential investigations.

However, a major drawback of such a rational approach is that the 'top-down' decision making processes have become increasingly formalised and protracted, while the intelligence that is required for such an approach flows exactly in the opposite direction. This intelligence is produced 'bottom up', by running police investigations and actual police work. Therefore, an alternative to enhance intelligence is to allow more discretion to start short-term investigations, to react more promptly to signals and clues, and to act swiftly when opportunities arise from running investigations.

International cooperation

The Dutch judicial authorities are primarily oriented towards offenders who are native born or who live in the Netherlands for a long time. However, transit crime involves offenders from several countries. These offenders sometimes visit the Netherlands or reside here for a while. They can be crucial links in the international trading activities of Dutch offenders. Hence, judicial authorities abroad often have more information

about relevant offenders than the Dutch judicial authorities. This calls for further intensifying international police cooperation in order to enhance intelligence, which is vital for successful police investigations, and to build confidence in bilateral relations. Next to strengthening the infrastructure of international police cooperation, sufficient room should be given to bilateral cooperation. After all, much police cooperation, though international, is in fact bilateral.

Situational prevention and the administrative approach towards organised crime

Several illegal activities arise from opportunities and are embedded in the licit society. Offenders come and go, yet these activities continue to exist in certain places, professions or organisations. This embeddedness has two implications for combating organised crime. First, it makes it difficult to find evidence. At first sight, it is not clear whether airport personnel carrying luggage is committing crime or just doing their job. Yet the embeddedness also has an impact on the amount of potential witnesses: (ex)employees, customers, competitors, local people, visitors, et cetera are all potential witnesses. As much police effort is concentrated on actual police investigations, more energy might be devoted to liaising with vulnerable professions, organisations and localities and to stimulating potential witnesses to take the stand and testify about criminal activities in their sector or profession.

A second implication is – next to the judicial aspects of criminal cases – to focus more on the situational circumstances allowing the investigated crimes to happen in the first place. One criminal case, with an adequate follow-up, can have a far wider impact. Hence, more energy should be devoted to analysing the situational circumstances and to making organisations change these circumstances, by screening personnel, monitoring and changing production logistics and procedures, checking customers, et cetera. This calls for a further development and actual implementation of the administrative approach towards organised crime.