CIVIL SOCIETY AGAINST ORGANISED CRIME
ROLES, METHODS AND PRACTICES

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BCSP Belgrade Centre for Security Policy

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SUMMARY

Civil society takes in diverse actors, groups, non-governmental and community organisations, investigative journalists and members of think-tanks. Its aim is to hold governments accountable through research, advocacy, protection, support, or mobilisation of citizens. As governments and criminal justice systems rely mostly on crime control practices, civil society happens to be an important and relevant actor in fighting organised crime. A better fight against organised crime requires a re-focus on victims and offenders, as well as an institutional response assessment (where civil society can help). Re-focus is especially significant for the Western Balkans Six, a transit region for illicit activities whose components are currently facing democratic backsliding.

International legislative framework does not properly recognise the relevance of civil society in the fight against organised crime and does not provide for full civil society participation. As a consequence, the effort of civil society to achieve progress in fighting organised crime and build a strong and stable communication channels for key stakeholders in the public and private sector remains questionable. This is why civil society advocates the revision of the existing international legislative framework.

Civil society plays two main roles in tackling the issue of organised crime. It is very useful in exposing illicit organised crime activities, and it can serve as support to criminal justice efforts and reforms in the fight against organised crime. However, the challenge lies in the fact that most civil society organisations are specialised or focused on one specific area of organised crime. They also depend on national situations and donors' funding availability. On the other hand, civil society can link relevant institutions and the private sector in the fight against organised crime.

There are five methods that are available to the civil society: 1) independent monitoring, reviewing or investigating concrete cases of organised crime, its forms and institutional response thereto, 2) raising public awareness and educating citizens about problems concerning organised crime, 3) helping or providing services to vulnerable individuals and groups at risk, 4) networking relevant stakeholders, and 5) advocating solutions or maintaining constant pressure on institutions.

Research and activities involving the investigation of institutional responses or specific cases of organised crime have been marked as some of the best examples of civil society involvement. As a result of civil society activism, organised criminal groups are sometimes tried in national courts. Service-based activities, like victim support, are particularly important and successful. Establishing a network that involves civil society activists, academic criminologists and local communities is another important mechanism for tackling organised crime.

Cohesive activities of the civil society at the local, national, and international level are elements that are required to bring together authorities, practitioners and activists for the cultural wealth of the society. Civil society organisations can contribute to the reform of the current institutional mechanisms of response to OC activities worldwide and act as cultural, economic and social game-changers in fighting organised crime.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALAS	America Latina Alternativa Social
CHANCE	Civil Hub against Organised Crime in Europe
CSOs	Civil society organisations
EU	European Union
GI-TOC	Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime
OC	Organised crime
OCGs	Organised criminal groups
SELEC	Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre
SOCTA	EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment
UN	United Nations
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNTOC	United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WB6	Western Balkans Six

1. INTRODUCTION

The Western Balkans Six (WB6) is a political neologism used to describe Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia in the context of European Union (EU) enlargement to include Eastern Europe, which is where the WB6 are geographically located. The majority of the WB6 have a common history, which has resulted in common issues. Organised crime (OC) is one of the biggest challenges, as illustrated by the fact that the region is geographically placed between Afghanistan, the world's largest producer of opium, and Central Europe as the biggest heroin market (UNODC, 2015).

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, many internal issues that existed among the six former republics remained unresolved (Glenny, 2012, pp. 634-706), only to be followed by "years of under-investment, weak institutions, and a difficult business environment" (Sanfey and Milatović, 2018). As a result of inadequately protected property rights, local employment opportunities and the fragility of states, in the first two decades of the 21st century the WB6 became a fertile ground for organised crime (Dobovšek, 2006).

The region itself is primarily viewed as a transit zone for OC activities or the "OC gateway to Europe" (Andreas, 2004, p. 48). Connecting the illicit trafficking corridors of Afghanistan with the large markets of Russia and Central Europe (UNODC, 2014, p. 35), the "Balkan Route" is an important trajectory, perfect for the activities of criminal groups in the region. Organised criminal groups (OCGs) operate along the "Balkan Route" (UNODC, 2015, pp. 17-21), while capital cities, ports and border crossings constitute the main "hotspots" of their activity (GI-TOC, 2019, pp. 8-27). The Southeast Law Enforcement Centre (SELEC) has assessed that OCGs possess the capacities to network, deploy members, establish contacts with providers and producers in source countries and develop sophisticated tools for conducting illicit OC activities (SELEC, 2018).

Lack of oversight and control mechanisms of the state and civil society in the WB6 is one of the main causes of such robust OC activity (Buscaglia and Van Dijk, 2003). Systemic corruption – sort of a joint-venture relationship between state structures and criminal groups – additionally complicates the fight against OC in the region. UNODC (2013, p. 7) points out that corruption has a great impact on OC activities in the WB6. Even though the fight against OC is one of the WB6 national governments' top priorities, civil society organisations (CSOs)[1] have been well underused as partners in the fight.

The aim of this study is to identify, explain and elaborate CSOs' roles, functions and practices in fighting OC at the global, regional and local level. The study also aims to inform interested national and regional stakeholders on how and why CSO involvement in the anti-OC area can make a difference, presenting the benefits of such an approach to all the relevant actors. The main purpose of the study is to present the modalities of civil society anti-OC engagement and inspire complementary efforts in the WB6.

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1 Civil society organisations are often called "the third sector", "the social sector" or "volunteer land". They include an array of different actors, causes, groups, media and non-governmental organisations that aim to hold governments accountable through research and advocacy, promote transparency, protect human rights or mobilise citizen engagement.

It is conceived as the initial step in researching existing anti-OC efforts and the work of CSOs in the WB6, to be conducted in 2020 by the Balkan Security Platform.[2]

The methodology involved desk research and five interviews with CSO representatives and experts who monitor OC activities. Desk research included highly relevant academic articles published in most cited international journals, while secondary sources included United Nations (UN) documents, reports of other international organisations, studies, policy papers, and official websites of CSOs dealing with various forms of OC.

Desk research was supplemented with five interviews conducted online (three by Skype and two by e-mail). Interviews were based on a semi-structured questionnaire which covered three main sections: 1) profile of the CSO in question, 2) cooperation between CSOs and official authorities at the national and international level, and 3) challenges faced by CSOs when tackling OC issues. Some of the questions had one or more subsections, which were used only if the interviewer failed to fully respond to the main question.

Skype interviews were conducted with Uglješa Zvekić (Senior Advisor at the GI-TOC),[3] Fabian Zhilla (OC expert from the GI-TOC)[4] and Giulia Baruzzo (Senior Official of the International Department of LIBERA)[5]. E-mail interviews were conducted with Tejal Jesrani (Research Officer in UNODC, whose views presented in this study do not reflect those of the United Nations or UNODC)[6] and Lucas Manjon (representative of ALAS)[7].

The study consists of five sections. The first section, which follows the introduction, is focused on key roles of CSOs in tackling the issue of OC. The following section describes the five main methods CSOs use to fight crime, including best practices and conclusions. Recommendations are presented at the end of the study.

2 The Balkan Security Platform (BSP) is a civil society network from the WB6 specialised in security issues. Current partners of the BSP have been working together for almost a decade now. They are: 1) Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) – Albania, 2) Centre for Security Studies (CSS) – Bosnia and Herzegovina, 3) Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) – Kosovo, 4) Institute Alternative (IA) – Montenegro, 5) Eurothink – Centre for European Strategies – North Macedonia, and 6) Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) – Serbia.
3 Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC) provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organised crime. Official webpage: https://globalinitiative.net/
4 Ibid.
5 LIBERA is an Italian association which promotes outreach activities and various types of protest action against the Mafia phenomenon, Italian organised crime, and organised crime in general. Official webpage: https://www.libera.it/
6 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a United Nations agency committed to achieving health, security and justice for all by tackling these threats and promoting peace and sustainable well-being as deterrents to them. Official webpage: www.unodc.org
7 América Latina Alternativa Social (ALAS) is a civil society network committed to promoting social justice, peace, fight human rights abuses, impunity and organised crime in Latin America. Official webpage: www.red-alas.net

2. ROLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CRIME-FIGHTING

Legal Limitations

International legislative framework does not properly recognise the relevance of CSOs in the fight against OC. The most important anti-OC and anti-corruption international legal documents – the 2003 UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) and the 2005 UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) – do not stipulate detailed instruments for CSOs' anti-OC actions; they do, however, recognise CSOs as anti-OC actors.[8] In addition to this, the 2008 European Council Framework Decision on the Fight against Organised Crime does not include a single provision related to the anti-OC role of the civil society. This leaves room for governments to be flexible and able to quickly respond to the shifting markets in the context of illicit OC activities.[9]

> Zvekić (GI-TOC, 2018) explained that both conventions, UNTOC and UNCAC, create an expectation for the civil society to be engaged in preventing organised crime and corruption, but they do not envisage full-fledged civil-society participation in the review process. The contradiction is obvious.

The absence of proper international legal framework for CSOs' anti-OC engagement is not a problem in and of itself; however, without a standard definition of CSO's anti-OC roles and functions and a common understanding of what OC represents at the global level (Finckenauer, 2005), the efforts to make progress in fighting OC and building stable coordination and communication channels between and among different anti-OC actors at the regional and national level have a tendency of becoming questionable.

The above described situation has forced the civil society to advocate for a revision of the existing international legislative framework concerning the definition of OC and the role of CSOs. Some critics are even calling these conventions "ideological statements", because they do not provide legislative provisions or mechanisms that would allow civil society to work against OC, and are therefore just a "dead letter on paper" in terms of the role of CSOs in fighting OC (GI-TOC, 2018).

> "One of our [LIBERA] proposals is to have a new platform, created by the European Commission and CSOs connected to the topic, as they have already designed one specifically for drug trafficking".[10]

For example, the political agenda of the Civil Hub against Organised Crime in Europe (CHANCE) has just requested (2019, p. 4) that the 2008 European Council Framework Decision be replaced with a new one, which would "take into account the new 'social' and case law developments, in line with a new shared definition of the phenomenon".

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8 More specifically, there are just a few articles in the UN conventions and protocols that mention civil society in the context of its relevant role in fighting OC: Art. 6 (p. 44), Art. 9 (p. 46), Art. 10 (p. 47), Art. 14 (p. 61) (UNODC 2004a).

9 Tejal Jesrani (Research Officer in UNODC), interview conducted on 28 April 2020. The interviewee's views do not reflect the views of the United Nations or UNODC.

10 Giulia Baruzzo (Senior Official of the International Department of LIBERA, Rome), interview conducted on 16 April 2020.

In addition to the need to define OC, the CHANCE initiative underlines also the need to strengthen cooperation between the Member States, European institutions and agencies, and to involve the private sector and civil society in fighting OC. The second recommendation from the political agenda is none other than direct collaboration between the civil society and EU institutions in fighting OC:

- Set up a permanent civil society forum on organised crime, between the European Commission and the European civil society, such as the one that already exists concerning anti-drug policies;

- Strengthen the European Parliament's CRIM committee as a supervisory body for the application of the relevant legislation and a promoter of an integrated and global strategy against criminal systems and related activities such as corruption and money laundering;

- Set up national observatories of organized crime, promoted by the civil society in cooperation with academic institutions and public authorities, and encourage training of specialised operators in the fight against crime, corruption and money laundering (CHANCE, 2019, p. 4).

The need for a revision of the legislative framework and the context of OC was caused by the changing nature of OC over time and prompted by the vast experience of CSOs that monitor illicit OC activities.[11]

Exposing Damage

Civil society (investigative journalists in particular) is very useful in exposing illicit OC activities and can serve as support for criminal justice anti-OC efforts and reforms. However, in the domain of fighting OC, most CSOs are specialised in only one specific area of organised crime. They also depend on national situations and donor funding availability. This leads to a sort of partial approach to OC by the civil society, where very few groups are able to communicate messages about organised crime *as a whole*.[12]

"CSO members are people that can bring about change, expose bad behaviour and enforce that which is good."[13] Many organised crime experts agree that the absence of a civil society component has been a very important factor in the creation and operation of the Mafia organisation in Italy. The occurrence of violence and assassination of Italian judges and prosecutors by the Mafia in the 1980s and 1990s was marked as the moment of the beginning of its gradual withdrawal (Picarelli, 2008, p. 491), which left more room for CSOs to manoeuvre and strengthen their relations with other control mechanisms used to prevent illicit OC activities".

A comprehensive approach to OC is necessary if CSOs wish to gain greater influence on all the relevant issues that are linked with OC. At the national level, they should keep in mind that fight against OC is not a priority at the time when countries are tackling their own security issues. Namely, in the past several years, the fight against OC – corruption

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11 Giulia Baruzzo (Senior Official of the International Department of LIBERA, Rome), interview conducted on 16 April 2020.

12 Tejal Jesrani (Research Officer in UNODC), interview conducted on 28 April 2020. The interviewee's views do not reflect the views of the United Nations or UNODC.

13 Fabian Zhilla (Expert on organised crime in GI-TOC), interview conducted on 10 April 2020.

and money laundering in particular – was not the first priority of either national or European institutions because both individual countries and the EU viewed issues such as terrorism, illegal migration, radicalisation and human trafficking as more important. Within this context, CSOs have an opportunity to set a national security agenda beyond these global security issues, and spotlight topics of real domestic interest such as corruption and money laundering.[14] One of the reasons for this state-of-play is the changing nature of OC, where certain less visible and more subtle forms have replaced previous violent types of OC that used to draw the attention of national authorities. This process of changing the nature of OC has been termed the OC's "identity crisis".[15] Hence, understanding the context in which subtle forms of OC take place is also highly important.

Building Bridges

Civil society can connect relevant institutions and the private sector in the fight against OC. The interest of enterprises is focused on minimising the consequences of OC and eliminating them from the free market, where they take up space needed for their own (legal) activities.[16] Profit can thus be viewed as the key motive for the private sector's inclusion in the fight against OC. In this context, cooperation between CSOs, national authorities and the private sector could be achieved using relevant CSOs' methods such as advocating the necessity to include the private sector, networking the main stakeholders, and raising public awareness of the overall harmful nature of OC activities. Of course, the success of this cooperation will highly depend on the profiles of concrete researchers and CSOs, their reputation and level of professionalism, the methodology used and the phenomena studied,[17] as well as on the level of democratisation of the state in question,[18] which would make this sort of cooperation specific from one case to the next.

> "CSOs should build bridges with policymaking institutions."[19]

Besides being viewed as an instrument for building bridges between the national authorities and private enterprises, CSOs are also perceived as an important and supportive factor when it comes to preventing and suppressing illicit OC activities in cooperation with the state. Namely, CSOs do not have only a mediating role in connecting different stakeholders, but also an active one in terms of cooperation with state institutions. The most common form of CSOs' active involvement is the provision of support to victims of crime in various spheres - from offering legal advice and social support, to providing shelter and security for victims of trafficking. Thus, "building bridges" requires not only CSOs' will to combat OC activities, but also readiness of state institutions to recognise this important role of CSOs.

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14 Giulia Baruzzo (Senior Official of the International Department of LIBERA, Rome), interview conducted on 16 April 2020.
15 Tejal Jesrani (Research Officer in UNODC), interview conducted on 28 April 2020. The interviewee's views do not reflect the views of the United Nations or UNODC.
16 Fabian Zhilla (Expert on organised crime in GI-TOC), interview conducted on 10 April 2020.
17 Tejal Jesrani (Research Officer in UNODC), interview conducted on 28 April 2020. The interviewee's views do not reflect the views of the United Nations or UNODC.
18 Uglješa Zvekić (Senior Advisor in GI-TOC, Rome), interview conducted on 6 April 2020.
19 Fabian Zhilla (Expert on organised crime in GI-TOC), interview conducted on 10 April 2020.

Dominant Challenges

Civil society organisations encounter challenges in fighting OC because they are not all the same in terms of development, reputation and the quality of work. Thus, they have different impacts on governments and authorities. This problem is not unique just to the WB6. A respondent from GI-TOC stated that at the international, UN level, there is a visible division between (a few) states that are interested in fighting OC and have a positive attitude towards CSOs engaged in this area, and the rest that do not include CSOs in such activities.[20]

Security issues pose a challenge to many activists and civil organisations that deal with OC. The above state-of-play becomes even more obvious in the context of attacks on CSOs, especially when it comes to the OC which is *per se* quite a sensitive topic. CSOs have a specific position in WB6. Negative attitude of the authorities towards these organisations, frequently coupled with mistrust of both the government and the citizens (BCSDN, 2019) has resulted in the CSOs' insufficient anti-OC involvement. Their more-than-critical attitude towards the government and national authorities could also be one of the significant factors that have led to their less than favourable position. The division of media into those that favour and those that oppose the work of some of the CSOs, as well as the deep polarisation of the society in this context, have also contributed to the complex position of certain CSOs in the society.

These factors, combined with lack of transparency, a sense of fear and risks,[21] have caused the aggravated position of CSOs in fighting OC, which, in most cases, results in their sidelined role. The problem is therefore more systematic in nature. Namely, without state support in the development of civil society and its organisations, it is not possible to include CSOs in many aspects of social life. One of them happens to be the fight against OC.

20 Ibid.
21 Fabian Zhilla (Expert on organised crime in GI-TOC), interview conducted on 10 April 2020.

3. CIVIL SOCIETY CRIME-FIGHTING METHODS AND PRACTICES

Civil society methods of addressing OC issues are: 1) independent monitoring, reviewing or investigating concrete cases of OC, forms of OC and the institutional response to it, 2) raising public awareness and educating citizens about the problems caused by OC, 3) helping or providing services to individuals and groups that are vulnerable or under risk, 4) networking relevant anti-OC stakeholders, and 5) advocating anti-OC solutions or maintaining constant pressure on institutions.

Investigation

Investigative and research activities concerning institutional responses or specific cases and forms of OC – trafficking in narcotics or human beings, illicit trade in arms, or violence caused by OCGs – have been marked as good examples of active and visible civil society methods in tackling the issue of organised crime.[22] Explicitly, strong activism of CSOs and investigative journalists in exposing the nexus between OC and high-profile politics and the presence of their representatives in the media are considered some the most visible and most vocal anti-OC practices.

Unlike investigative journalism, which relies on facts and evidence when revealing the truth, research of specific forms of OC is built on deeper insight and based mainly on literature, databases and interviews with relevant experts. The use of incredible amounts of publicly available data and information contributes to the CSOs' capacities to discover forms of OC in cases that are undergoing investigation and thus pressure governments to act.[23]

> "It is impossible to fight something that you cannot see, and the current collection of data and analysis of organised crime hides its prevalence behind other forms of crime."[24]

However, research and investigative methods are difficult to implement in the WB6 because of governmental lack of transparency. Some positive steps have been made towards achieving open access, but the process is at an unenviable level and still very slow (UNODC, 2017). Another problem lies in the statistical handling of OC cases in criminal justice systems and their impact on the understanding of the phenomenon itself.[25] For instance, in Serbia, it is difficult to track trials through police-prosecution-court system due to different databases used. This problem also exists at the regional level where consolidated methodology of collecting data, data storage and reporting is lacking. There are also security risks for researchers and journalists, especially in countries with backsliding democracy and societies that have a negative attitude towards certain CSOs - usually those that are more vocal when it comes to criticism. In this context, threats to OC researchers and journalists are not rare.[26]

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22 Uglješa Zvekić (Senior Advisor in GI-TOC, Rome), interview conducted on 6 April 2020.
23 Tejal Jesrani (Research Officer in UNODC), interview conducted on 28 April 2020. The interviewee's views do not reflect the views of the United Nations or UNODC.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Fabian Zhilla (Expert on organised crime in GI-TOC), interview conducted on 10 April 2020; Lucas Manjon (Representative of ALAS, City of Buenos Aires), interview conducted on 29 April 2020.

Organised crime trials are another consequence of CSOs' activities in the fight against OC. For instance, CSOs such as LIBERA or ALAS can boast about an enviable number of OC cases they have brought to the court. While LIBERA has had more than 25 such cases, ALAS has conducted nearly 400 judicial investigations.[27] Although these trials can last several years, they are good examples of CSO's activism which has materialised into anti-OC practice.

Another good example of civil society's impact is related to the path one person took from being a researcher to becoming a decision maker. Namely, two Albanian researchers published a study about OC (Zhilla, Lamallari, 2017). According to the interviewee, once the study was finished, one of the authors – Besfort Lamallari – was asked to become the Albanian Deputy Minister of Interior. To him, this represented a chance to enforce and advocate for some of the recommendations, and to foster relations between the authorities and the civil society, and he took it.[28]

Raising Awareness

The investigative method is more efficient if it is linked to exposing the negative effects of illicit OC activities and harm they inflict on any society. Perceiving 'raising awareness' as process that seeks to inform and educate people about the OC, raising awareness actors should be ubiquitous and continually committed to exposing OC illicit activities. One of the current examples of raising awareness was developed in Serbia by the investigative organization Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK). By being present in conventional and social media, their research activities undoubtedly raise public awareness on omnipresence of OC in the WB6 beside exposing criminal activities and their linkages with state authorities. In their last several investigative stories, KRIK's journalists showed how OC activities in the WB6 produce negative effects such as corruption, feelings of insecurity, lack of democracy, social disorder and distrust in state authorities.[29]

Another good example of public raising awareness is so-called anti-mafia initiatives influencing every-day life of European citizens. For instance, Italian CSO adding no-mafia label on products (Burkett, 2009) and 'Mafia? Nein, danke!' Initiative in Germany (Scarabelli, 2013) encourage small entrepreneurs to reject any mafia intimidations and to raise their voice that they are free from any OC connections. However, while these short-term project activities are good examples of raising awareness campaign among the public, it should be understood that only continuous raising awareness activities could produce long-term effects on fighting against OC.

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27 Giulia Baruzzo (Senior Official of the International Department of LIBERA, Rome), interview conducted on 16 April 2020; Lucas Manjon (Representative of ALAS, City of Buenos Aires), interview conducted on 29 April 2020.
28 Fabian Zhilla (Expert on organised crime in GI-TOC), interview conducted on 10 April 2020.
29 Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK) is a non-profit organisation established to improve investigative journalism in Serbia. The organisation was founded by a team of journalists who, for years, have been engaged in exposing crime and corruption, and who have received many awards for their work. Official webpage: https://www.krik.rs/en/

Support

Service-based activities have proven to be particularly important and successful in the alleviating the damage of OC illicit activities. Service providers that work with the local communities on trying to rehabilitate and integrate youth exposed to OC (such as CSOs that work with human trafficking victims and migrants, or those that provide assistance in the area of drug prevention, to prisoners, etc.) play a very important and visible role.[30] Our interlocutor underlined that CSOs which provide different types of services are usually more neutral. They do not have an 'ideological uniform' and are thus more receptive to donors.[31]

> "I believe that the best way is to have a fair combination of social activism, research, creation of new and specific laws to confront the OC, and solid state institutions with people who are suited for the functions they perform."[32]

The RISE-ALB project, financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is one of the powerful examples of how CSOs can be cultural, economic and social game-changers in fighting organised crime in Europe. With the support of the Albanian National Agency of Confiscated Assets, the project utilises assets confiscated in Albania to transform criminally acquired property and use it for public and social purposes. The project's focus is on the possibility of social and public repurposing of assets acquired through criminal activity. Its partner, LIBERA, has shared the Italian experience at trainings and workshops that have been organised for various stakeholders in Albania: representatives of national institutions, members of CSOs and judges.

Networking

Establishing a network that includes CSOs, academic criminologists and local communities with a shared focus on OC research is yet another important mechanism used to combat OC, where networking within the civil society – between expert think-tanks and community-based organisations – is especially significant. What comes to the fore in this context is the exchange of information, experience and know-how. The 'networking' method of gathering different disciplinary views and experiences also serves to achieve the previously mentioned comprehensive approach to the OC phenomenon.

In July 2018, the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC) launched the Civil Society Observatory to Counter Organised Crime in Southeast Europe (SEE-Obs).[33] After the establishment of the Observatory, a regional network has been created to support civil society through information exchange and knowledge-building activities. The network mobilises individuals and groups (from the non-governmental organisations, academia, and the media) to work together on tackling organised crime and corruption and building strong institutions (Amerhauser, 2019).

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30 Fabian Zhilla (Expert on organised crime in GI-TOC), interview conducted on 10 April 2020.
31 Uglješa Zvekić (Senior Advisor in GI-TOC, Rome), interview conducted on 6 April 2020
32 Lucas Manjon (Representative of ALAS, City of Buenos Aires), interview conducted on 29 April 2020.
33   SEE-Obs aims to identify, analyse and map criminal trends and their impact on illicit flows, governance, development, interethnic relations, security and the rule of law, and supports them in their monitoring of national dynamics and wider regional and international organized-crime trends. SEE-Obs is based in Vienna and is supported by the governments of the United Kingdom, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Poland. Official webpage: https://globalinitiative.net/the-civil-society-observatory-to-counter-organized-crime-in-south-eastern-europe/#:~:text=-SEE%2DObs%20aims%20at%20identifying,and%20international%20organized%2Dcrime%20trends

The Alliance on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice brings together a broad network of civil society organisations that contribute to the achievement of security and justice for all.[34] It ensures that civil society is recognised and heard in advancing the crime prevention and criminal justice agenda and in designing, implementing, and measuring results of relevant policies everywhere. Under the umbrella of the Alliance, cooperation will be strengthened, reinforcing the expertise and vision of each of the members to add value and support the work of relevant international organisations, especially UNODC. The Alliance encourages its members to play a key role in achieving the SDGs, particularly Goal 16: "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."

Fostering relationships between the components of the civil society and, especially, policymakers and national authorities, strengthens the bond between society and state and results in mutual efforts to prevent and suppress the OC phenomenon.

> "For example, in the last few years we [LIBERA] have created projects for young people who are tried as minors. The project made it possible for these young people to be prosecuted in a different way, by creating an opportunity for them to have an alternative to going to jail. We did not do this alone, however; we created the project together with the Ministry of Justice."[35]

Good practice refers to the international forum and the organisation of side events where CSOs could be included in OC topics that are discussed at meetings between state representatives. The main anti-OC efforts at this level are focused on the revision of international legislation or achieving a mandatory status of CSOs in combating the OC phenomenon.

> "Libera has a UNODC consultative status. We can participate at most UN meetings at the international level in Vienna".[36]

Advocacy

Advocating legislative updates proved to be fruitful in combating OC, especially in the environments with "long tradition" o illicit OC activities. One of the best examples is that which involves LIBERA, whose activities and mobilisation of public opinion and academia led to the adoption of the 1996 Law on the Social Utilisation of Confiscated Assets. This move had a spill-over effect and has resulted in the adoption of similar laws or projects in other countries.

Law on the Social Utilisation of Confiscated Assets was approved after years of intense debates both within and without the Parliament, thanks to the direct involvement of hundreds or thousands of citizens – promoted by the LIBERA, headed by Father Luigi Ciotti – who collected one million signatures. After the approval, LIBERA demonstrated that this complex Law, which allows for re-use of criminal assets for the benefit of

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34 The Alliance brings together a broad network of civil society organisations contributing to the achievement of security and justice for all. Official webpage: https://crimealliance.org/
35 Giulia Baruzzo (Senior Official of the International Department of LIBERA, Rome), interview conducted on 16 April 2020.
36 Ibid.

society, could be a great opportunity for everyone. This was one of LIBERA's most important contributions. The adoption of the Law was indeed a major success, because it meant that the long-standing problem of how to use the confiscated assets was solved by way of innovative means such as enhancing the social responsibility of communities by creating jobs for young people or making agricultural centres. In 2006, LIBERA started the Terra project, which works with students on confiscated land to produce organic food.

An important step in strengthening the civil society's impact is maintaining pressure on the national authorities. Developing legitimacy on the ground by researching, exposing and fighting OC, CSOs strengthen their ability to put pressure on institutions. That is the most common method, applied through various channels (media, internet, public conferences, street actions, etc.) to express the community's concern about the negative effects of OC activities.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the study, we can conclude that the changing nature of OC, where violent activities have been replaced with those of a more subtle form, requires greater involvement of the civil society, especially in the WB6 as a transit region for illicit activities which also happens to be experiencing a backsliding of democracy. A diverse range of CSOs can fill the gap in institutional crime control through preventive civil society activities focusing on research, advocacy, protection, support and mobilisation of citizens. Activities of CSOs are necessary "as long as quality, a quest for truth above sensationalism, a commitment to the most vulnerable among us, and aspiration for sustainable change are priorities".[37]

The legislative framework at the UN and EU level does not fully recognise the relevance of civil society in the fight against OC. The consequence of this are disputed civil society efforts in building bridges between public and private stakeholders and exposing damage made by OC. However, there are also internal challenges for CSOs. Most of them are specialised or focused on one specific area of organised crime, such as e.g. human trafficking, and depend on national situations, context, and donor funding availability.

The study has identified five methods to tackle the OC issue from the perspective of civil society. CSOs can examine, review or investigate concrete cases, as well as the forms of OC and institutional responses to them. Furthermore, they can raise public awareness and educate citizens about the problems caused by organised crime, or help/support individuals and groups that are vulnerable or at risk. By networking relevant stakeholders, advocating solutions or maintaining constant pressure on institutions, CSOs can be cultural, economic and social game-changers in fighting organised crime.

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37 Ibid.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Civil Society

A holistic approach to OC. It is important that citizens understand the impact of organised crime on their societies – both conceptually and holistically – and how these crimes are interconnected. They all contribute to insecurity and the breakdown of the rule of law. CSOs' focusing on organised crime could fill this role.

Understand the context within which OC takes place. It is crucial to re-define the concept of OC and the context in which it evolved. Different political, economic, legal and social circumstances can produce different forms of OC. Given that WB6 is mainly a transit region when it comes to OC, and considering the level of corruption, CSOs' anti-OC activities must be aligned with these issues.

More active and pressing role of CSOs. Civil society should be more active and put more pressure on governments. Especially interesting are governments that are in favour of CSOs, as they can use diplomatic channels to advocate and foster the role of CSOs in combating the OC phenomenon among governments that do not share their view.

Local community-based orientation. On a community scale, CSOs should make use of their local connections to create messages that resonate with discrete populations (like border communities) that have experienced an increased impact of organised crime. In this context, **targeting youth and other vulnerable groups** exposed to illicit OC activities is one of the most important prevention measures.

Cooperation with religious communities. Depending on the level of citizens' commitment to different religious communities, they can act as a very meaningful medium for achieving some sort of impact on the society. Therefore, potential cooperation between CSOs and religious communities should not be neglected.

Cooperation for a sustainable future. CSOs should build networks with all stakeholders (including politicians) who can help build a consensus and momentum regarding a path towards sustainable change to be taken at the local and national level.

National Authorities

Formalising the role of CSO role in combating OC. CSOs should play a central role in monitoring and evaluating WB6 efforts in fighting OC. As the first step, this mechanism requires a change in regulation and state's willingness to recognise the potential of CSOs and foster their capacities in fighting the OC phenomenon.

Regional cooperation in harmonising the collection, analysis and sharing of OC data. Good practices can serve as models for advocating in other jurisdictions. The result of this activity could be a mutual and better understanding of OC, which would help law enforcement agencies and policymakers to create better policies and strategies to counter organised crime.

Networking. Bringing together all stakeholders in the fight against OC – such as CSOs, academics, journalists, policy-makers and decision-makers – seems to be one of the most important tools. Fostering relationships between the civil society components and, especially, policy-makers and law enforcement and prosecution officials, strengthens the bond between society and state, making it possible for them to join efforts in preventing and suppressing the OC phenomenon. Besides, when CSOs are linked with the existing national agendas and initiatives that address advocacy for a more **enabling environment for civil society development in general,** their role is formalised and they are capable of influencing all relevant politics.

International Community

Legislative inclusion of the role of CSOs. CSOs should be formally recognised as necessary actors in combating OC activities, by being granted a mandatory status in UN conventions and other legislation.

Capacity building. Strengthening the capacities of the civil society in the WB6 is the fundamental step to maintain pressure on the authorities and have a meaningful impact in the WB6 region.

Bring academia closer. In the WB6, the criminological research capacity and the interest of academic researchers in the field of organised crime are generally weak. Several leading research institutions are conducting projects in the region, but trained criminological researchers tend to be mostly external. Greater involvement of academia and universities (particularly because of their autonomy and impact)[38] is thus of utmost importance. Fostering this relationship brings the **exchange of information, experience and know-how practices** to the fore.

Private Sector

Involvement of public and private enterprises. A partnership of public and private sectors and encouraging enterprises to cooperate with CSOs through various advocacy initiatives could be a very fruitful example of fighting illicit OC activities. Namely, this form of cooperation recognises that states cannot combat different forms of OC on their own, while the interest of enterprises is to minimise the consequences of OC and eliminate them from the free market, leaving room for their own legal activities. Hence, mutual engagement would bring mutual benefits for all the parties involved.

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38 Uglješa Zvekić (Senior Advisor in GI-TOC, Rome), interview conducted on 6 April 2020.

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