

English summary

Organised crime—loose connections or stable networks

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The very nature of the term ‘organised crime’ indicates that this is a type of offending conducted in more organised forms than crime in general. It involves groups of people, large or small, collaborating in order to participate in criminal activities. Their professionalism presupposes planning, a division of labour, leadership, communication and financing.

The concept of organised crime leads one to think of criminal organisations such as the Mafia in Italy, the Cosa Nostra in the United States, South American cartels, Chinese triads and the Mafia in Russia and other countries from the former eastern block. And these organisations do indeed constitute examples of organised crime in its most powerful forms. But what is the nature of organised crime in Sweden? Is it a question of hierarchical organisations with Godfather figures at their head, or is it rather a case of more or less tightly-knit networks of association?

Background

Organised crime established itself in Sweden during the 1920s, when restrictions were introduced in relation to alcohol consumption. Merchant mariners from Germany and Estonia landed their cargoes, shielded by the expanse of the Swedish archipelago, which made effective control more or

less impossible. Established merchants functioned as financiers with people from the lower classes brought in to do the heavy work. By contrast with the corresponding situation in America at this time, the amount of violence involved was extremely limited, but there are indications that corruption was not completely unheard of.

During the 1970s, measures against both organised and economic crime came under serious discussion for the first time in Sweden, leading to a large number of commissions of inquiry and legislative reforms. During the 1980s, however, the issue of organised crime ‘disappeared’ from the field of Swedish crime policy. Instead, the focus was directed at economic offending. At the same time, drugs policy underwent a major shift of focus, with the drug users rather than the large scale drug dealers now finding themselves at the centre of attention.

During the 1990s, however, the fight against organised crime once again found itself in favour when it came to the distribution of crime policy resources. The intelligence service within the police was expanded, special prosecutors’ offices were established and the legislation was reformed. Among the factors responsible for these efforts was the high position accorded to organised crime on the agendas of both the UN and the EU.

The Swedish model—more organised crimes than organised crime

Very little knowledge has been accumulated on organised crime in Sweden. Several studies have therefore been undertaken in connection with the production of this report. In-depth interviews have been conducted with police, prosecutors and other persons within the justice system. A questionnaire survey has also focused on these same groups. In addition, the results include the findings from earlier in-depth interviews conducted with persons working in the bar and restaurant trade.

International collaborations, not least in the context of the EU, are based among other things on definitions of the concept of organised crime. These definitions relate to organisations of a relatively hierarchical and influential nature. The findings of the studies conducted in association with this report indicate however that definitions of this kind do not cover many of the instances of organised crime to be found in Sweden. The nature of organised crime in Sweden appears rather to consist in serious offences that are perpetrated systematically and in network form. Quite simply, it is more a case of organised offences, than it is of ‘organised crime’.

Organised crime of the kind referred to in the more widely used definitions is nonetheless to be found in Sweden. This involves amongst other things criminal organisations from other countries using Sweden as a market or transit station in relation to the smuggling of drugs and tobacco.

The organised crime that occurs in Sweden, whether it is conducted within the framework of organisations or in networks, is focused on the following areas:

- Drugs
- The smuggling of alcohol, tobacco and performance enhancers
- Theft (*inter alia* trading in stolen cars)
- Economic crimes (tax crimes, international VAT frauds, trading in the form of shell companies, the employment of black market labour, and fraud) and to some extent also environmental crimes
- Money laundering
- Trade in women—trafficking—and prostitution (involving women from Central and Eastern Europe and Asia)
- Illegal immigration
- Illegal gambling operations
- The arms trade
- Extortion, serious robbery and murder.

Factors such as culture, nationality and language have become less important to the cohesion of the criminal networks involved. Instead the picture that emerges is one of actors from quite different backgrounds who share in common the goal of achieving the maximum possible profit. Contacts within the networks take place via the internet and using mobile phones (using telephone charge cards).

The most telling characteristic of organised crime is its focus on the exploitation of markets. Those involved are often people in poorer countries who are looking for a future with more opportunities, but who cannot emigrate to Sweden legally. Such are the women who are duped or persuaded to leave their countries of origin and who end up working as prostitutes, sometimes under conditions approaching those more often associated with slavery. Such are also those who pay to have their needs for sex, gambling, alcohol, tobacco and performance enhancing or other drugs satisfied.

Motorcycle gangs have also been a target for the attention that the media has directed at the issue of organised crime. There is some doubt however as to whether motorcycle gangs are actually involved in what might be described as organised crime. It is rather a case of individual members being involved in crimes such as extortion, threatening behaviour, illegal immigration, smuggling, drug offences and economic crime.

In-depth interviews with bar owners and restaurateurs provide only weak support for the notion that organised crime occurs in the bar and restaurant trade.

THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY—A NEW AREA OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Public and private insurance policies are currently being exploited for the purpose of systematic fraud. Such frauds are primarily being conducted in the areas of sickness and accident insurance. The staging of road accidents can lead to large sums of money being directed into the pockets of criminals. One case in Skåne related to 33 such staged accidents, involving a total of 70 people. Insurance related crimes also include car insurance frauds and other offences financed by these insurance pay-outs, such as smuggling for example.

One means of conducting money laundering operations is by paying insurance premiums with 'dirty' money. An insurance case is then arranged and 'clean' money is paid out.

Relatively small amounts of traditional organised crime, but it may pose a threat in the future

In summary, the findings indicate that Sweden has to a large extent managed to avoid exposure to organised crime of a more traditional nature, such as involves the use of threats, violence and corruption. The trend however appears to be in the direction of an increase in the use of violence. In the future, there is a risk that both the use of threats and violence, and also corruption may increase, not least in relation to persons working for the authorities. Witnesses and plaintiffs are threatened as a means of sabotaging the efforts of the justice system. Criminal organisations from Poland, the Baltic states and the Balkans are increasingly establishing operations in Sweden.

The interview study shows that certain actors within the justice system feel there is a need for an extension of the powers available to them, to include such things as entrapment, controlled deliveries, under-cover infiltration and bugging, in order to combat organised crime. Others are of the opinion that an extension in the use of such powers constitutes an infringement of civil liberties and would further constitute a drain on resources. Almost everyone agrees, however, that improvements are needed to levels of co-operation, both between the various domestic agencies involved, and across international borders.

The authors feel that there is good reason to be attentive to the perceived threats that are presented in this area. It is questionable however whether such perceptions always have a basis in fact. What is needed now is more research to provide the grounds for a better estimation of future trends and the countermeasures required to deal with them.