

ORGANISED CRIME IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AND IN THE BALKANS: CONTEMPORARY TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AT THE DAWN OF THE 21st CENTURY

Why did trafficking in women boom at the turn of the 21st century in the Balkans/Southeastern Europe? Why here and why now?

Introduction

“Trafficking in women has been practiced for thousands of years, argues Sietske Alting, in her book entitled *Stolen Lives. Trading Women Into Sex and Slavery*”(Alting, 1995: 8).

Nevertheless, the 20th century witnessed an *unprecedented* explosion in women trafficking worldwide. Trafficking may be a global issue, but it has certain *local/regional* havens throughout the world. The present article focuses on one of these regional revolving plates of women trafficking: the Balkans and Southeastern Europe. The central question is why did trafficking explode *in the eve of the 20th century in the Balkans and Southeastern Europe*? What happened in this span of time (the post World War Two period) that has turned *this* part of our continent into such a fertile terrain for the flourishing of trafficking in women? *Why here and why now?*

Considering the causes closer

The first cause that has led to the thriving of trafficking in South-Eastern Europe in the 20th century is the **unprecedented boom in technological inventions**. Most probably, the invention of the Internet, of the electronic mail and of different high-tech communication channels (classified mobile phones and text messaging, unlimited email access via sophisticated cell phones, secret blogs, classified websites, virtual forums and communication, which *still* escape the possibility of full surveillance by international counter services) constitute the most profitable 20th century technological inventions for the traffickers operating in South-Eastern

Europe. It is paramount to underline that, there is a specificity of these technological inventions in South-Eastern Europe in the way they are used: without *considerable* risk of being intercepted by any of the counter-trafficking services

(http://anitp.mira.gov.ro/en/docs/raport_semestrial_2007_en.pdf).

That is why, the Internet and the different above-mentioned high-tech electronic communication channels have become the most *secure* means of communication in the present geographical area, a means of risk-free communication. It is a fact that, in each of these countries, all trafficking combating agencies (national police, border police, NGO-s) spend enormous energy on hacking the traffickers' passwords, in order to detect them. Still, intercepting their networking is rarely successful. Why?

In July 2004, The International Organization for Migration issued an extensive official report on Southeastern European trafficking, focusing on the causes of the inefficiency of the counter combating agencies

(http://www.iom.int/DOCUMENTS/PUBLICATIONS/EN/Balkans_web.pdf). The *lack of police experts* and *the lack of adequate technological equipment* make the counter combating agencies unable to hack the dealers' passwords and thus localize and annihilate them.

(http://www.iom.int/DOCUMENTS/PUBLICATIONS/EN/Balkans_web.pdf).

Secondly, the Internet is (ab)used by the traffickers as a huge, risk-free billboard for advertising (seemingly legal) job openings and for recruiting their new victims, due to the above-mentioned *technical insufficiency* signalled by the I.O.M. report

(http://www.iom.int/DOCUMENTS/PUBLICATIONS/EN/Balkans_web.pdf,<http://www.erotic.y.com/defaulthome.asp?AFL=9SEO4>).

Thirdly, many of the Balkans local authorities, still do not find this form of crime *paramount enough as to invest the necessary sum of money* in improving their counter crime intelligence and equipment. What is more, it also happens that the local leaders of these crime networks are *too powerful or too closely connected to the common interests* and businesses of local and/or state officials of these Southeastern and Balkans countries.

From the point of view of international politics, considerable hope comes from the fact that certain South-East European and Balkans counties have joined or are joining the E.U. and the N.A.T.O.. Thus international crime combating and human rights regulations will be imposed on

these countries in case they wish to adhere to the Membership Action Plan of these international bodies.¹

Lastly, the mainstream political discourse and platform of the politicians from these above-mentioned countries quite often proves *their back-of-the-mind conviction*, that this particular form of organised crime (trafficking) would be less important than for example trafficking in arms and drugs. It is a highly controversial standpoint, as human trafficking indeed takes its primary toll on human beings, but ultimately, so do the other two forms of organised crime. A personal explanation to this is the larger transparency and media coverage of the last two and a much lesser concern (at least on the open/public political and media agendas) about women trafficking.

Improvements and changes: the case of Romania.

Since joining the N.A.T.O. in 2004 and the E.U. in 2007, Romania has been coerced by all international bodies, to adopt a top-down policy of combating trafficking in women². Most importantly, the Romanian government was immediately forced to take concrete step and to found a *National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons*, within the Ministry of Administration and Interior (<http://anitp.mira.gov.ro/en/>), with a clear-cut National Action Plan for each year, starting 2006-2007. The *Romanian National Agency Against Trafficking* operates in a well-articulated collaboration with the Romanian Police, the Secret Services, and with different Romanian private and public organisations (<http://anitp.mira.gov.ro/en/?zone=nationala>). It also works in a tight cooperation with all eligible institutional partners of the neighbouring countries³, (http://anitp.mira.gov.ro/en/docs/raport_semestrial_2007_en.pdf). Furthermore, both the Ministry's and the Agency's effectiveness is closely monitored by international bodies and NGOs, as well as by the Romanian government. Their semestrial *Reports on Trafficking in*

¹ In a desperate effort to diminish trafficking in women in the newly accepted countries, the E.U. has designated 18 October as the Anti-Trafficking Day. This is an important step that the European Commission takes in the fight to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and aims to raise awareness of the general public on this phenomenon. The suggestive title of the event has been chosen in 2007: "Trafficking in Human Beings: Time for Action!".

² Romanian Government Decision no. 1584 of December 8, 2005, after pressure from the international bodies.

³ Special attention is devoted to the Czech Republic which, according to the Report, in addition to the so called traditional countries of destination, becomes visible with a large number of victims trafficked in a relatively short period of time

*Persons in Romania*⁴ (http://anitp.mira.gov.ro/en/docs/raport_semestrial_2007_en.pdf) have become not only a reliable database on international trafficking in South-Eastern Europe and in the Balkans, but they also mirror the positive facts regarding this type of organised crime. Most importantly, the Report clearly states, that for the very first time, the Romanian State takes over the “protection, assistance and social reintegration of victims of trafficking”, which in itself represents a huge development, as until now, the victim alone was expected to notify all the competent authorities about his/her situation—a quite impossible mission.

Returning to the overall causes of the explosion of women trafficking in the Balkan region, a second cause is **the war in the former Yugoslavia, in the 1990s**. According to the I.O.M., certain regions of Yugoslavia (especially Serbia) are still quite fertile fields for trafficking in the Balkans, due to the post-war social and political instability (http://www.iom.int/DOCUMENTS/PUBLICATIONS/EN/Balkans_web.pdf). Is the fact that the reminiscences of the former Yugoslav regime’s local mafia, still often prove they have the power to act hand-in-hand with the border police or with customs officials. The reasons for this are: in the Balkans the local state police forces and the militaries are *outdone logistically* by the transnational network of organized crime. Moreover, all these interregional, ex-Yugoslav trafficking networks also *outnumber* the rather few top-trained specialists in the field of women trafficking.

On the one hand, in this part of the Old Continent the national intelligence forces were delayed until recent political changes, in receiving updated training in combating organised crime, due to local soft-core neo-communism (Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine) or due to war. On the other hand, in the same region, organised crime *thrived*, within this framework of war, post-war chaos or soft-core communist leaderships, whose very last and least concern was combating organised crime. Thus the criminal organisations had a double jump-start in their race against the counter criminal forces. I must emphasise repeatedly, that joining the E.U. and N.A.T.O., definitely represents a turn of the situation in favour of combating organised crime. Any international body, whether E.U. or N.A.T.O. desires peace and stability on the territories of

⁴ For the downloadable pdf. Version of the Semestrial Reprt, see: http://anitp.mira.gov.ro/en/docs/raport_semestrial_2007_en.pdf

their (newly welcomed) members. Thus it is also *their* interest as international bodies, to *pressure* and to *aid* the newest countries in their fight against all forms of organised crime. Since USA's 'war on terror' rhetoric, the political agenda of N.A.T.O. has included an unprecedented expansion into the East European countries, in order to keep an accurate surveillance over the Muslim networks of organised crime. That is why, N.A.T.O. bases represent one more factor of guarantee that the uprooting of local organised crime cells will be completed from top-down (international bodies), as well as from bottom-up (local states coerced by the international umbrella organisations).

It is a fact to remember that, Romania functions *as the end of a huge trafficking colander stretching all over Asia and East Europe. Romania is the last country before entering the former Yugoslavia, a space ripe for trafficking* (Serbia; Bosnia). After the East-European and Balkans networks have collected their victims from all over Europe and from Asia (since the fall of the U.S.S.R. block), they flock their victims into the western cities of Romania (<http://revistapresei.rol.ro/2004/08/03/12573.htm>), where foreign tourists pay for the women's sex services considerably more, as in other cities of Romania, except for Bucharest, the capital. According to one of the most prestigious Romanian daily papers, *Jurnalul National*, (*The Daily Dairy*), after the traffickers produce the new, forged ID documents for their victims, they filter them through the Romanian-Serbian border (<http://www.jurnalul.ro/print.php?sid=366>, also http://anitp.mira.gov.ro/en/docs/raport_semestrial_2007_en.pdf). Here the victims are handed over to the Serbian underworld leaders (reminiscences of the paramilitary groups and organizations, which shortly after and during the Yugoslav War took the law into their hands). A second option is that the victims are sold further on, in any direction worldwide, depending on the 'demand' on the sex-market.

The last reason for the contemporary explosion of women trafficking in South-Eastern Europe/the Balkans are the **political changes** that took place in the above-mentioned part of our continent, within the last two decades: the fall of the Iron Curtain, as well as the birth of the E.U. and the expansion of N.A.T.O..

Both the fall of the Curtain and the implosion of the U.S.S.R. gave birth to freedom of traveling/migration from one country to another, after half a century of harsh communism. Consequently, this immediately triggered a large migration/exodus from South-East Europe/Balkans to West Europe. More and more semi-legal or illegal networks mushroomed,

offering their 'legal' services in aiding people to travel to Western Europe. Many of these agencies and companies have proved to be trafficking networks driving women directly into sex slavery, lacking the necessary competence and logistical equipment of the trafficking combating services (<http://www.jurnalul.ro/print.php?sid=366>).

Finally, I will discuss the **expansion of N.A.T.O.** to Eastern Europe. In this case I will devote special attention to Romania, because she has an almost five-hundred-kilometers long coastline on the Black Sea. Geo-politically speaking, the Romanian Black Sea coast is a strategic point for the N.A.T.O. and the USA to surveil the Islamic world. Due to this reason, a number of U.S. army bases are mushrooming on the Romanian Black Sea coast, after she joined N.A.T.O. in 2004. It only took a short period of time for the Romanian hotel owners to realize that this influx of foreign soldiers may become an input of foreign hard currency: it is a fact that since the U.S. army bases were set up on the Romanian sea coast, the Romanian Black Sea coast has developed an 'industry' for prostitution and for women trafficking.

Finally, some striking but irrefutable evidence from Donna M. Hughes: "The U.S. military has a shameful history in Southeast Asia of fuelling the growth of sex industries around military bases"(<http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2003/HughesTestimony030409.pdf>).

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