

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Joint Area Centers Annual Symposium  
Criminal Trafficking and Slavery: the dark side of global and regional migration  
February 23-25, 2006

**Trafficking in Women  
Markets, Networks and Organized Crime**

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**I INTRODUCTION**

**1. Purpose and Scope**

In recent years, the trafficking of women and children for commercial sex has become a major global problem. Yet one of the most striking aspects of this business is the parallels with “the white slave trade” at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.<sup>i</sup> Then, as now, Russia and Ukraine were among the major source countries, while Western Europe, the United States and Turkey were among the major destination countries. Then the trade was facilitated by the expansion of railways, the steamship, and the telegraph; now it is facilitated by airline travel, by the mass mobility of people and by global communications systems such as the telephone and the Internet. The technological advances that have accompanied and contributed to globalization have increased the efficiency of both legal and illegal markets and significantly reduced transition costs. Globalization has also facilitated the transshipment process, making it easier and cheaper to link the supply of women for commercial sex with centers of demand. It has also provided new opportunities for exploitation that make the trafficking process even more lucrative. The development of the Internet, for example, has led to a close connection between trafficking and pornography, with trafficked women sometimes being exploited for internet pornography, either en route or in their destination country.

Against this background, this paper focuses on three dimensions of the problem, each of which has implications for the development and implementation of effective policy responses. It examines the market dynamics; the criminal networks that connect the various parts of the market, and the facilitating and inhibiting factors that underpin market operations. By examining all three facets and considering ways in which the market can be disrupted, the networks can be compromised and degraded, and the balance between facilitators and inhibitors can be tilted in favor of the latter, it is possible to adopt a holistic approach to the development of an effective policy response. The concluding section elucidates – albeit rather briefly - some of the key components of such a response.

One of the most pernicious and demeaning aspects of trafficking in women and children is that it reduces people to the status of commodities. Understanding this, however, is also an important insight since it suggests that what we are seeing is the operation of a commodity market that is subject to the same kinds of laws, impulses, and trends as any other illicit market whether drugs, nuclear materials, illicit arms, fauna and flora, or art and antiquities. This is not intended to be cold or inhumane; it is simply to contend that it

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is necessary to engage in detached analyses of an emotion-driven subject in order to enhance both our understanding of the problem and our capacity to do something about it. The major players in the market do not take an emotional approach: instead, they trade in human misery and treat women and children as simply more commodities that can be trafficked and sold – and resold - for substantial profits. From the point of view of domestic and transnational criminal organizations or shady entrepreneurs, women and children are a product, like any other – except that they are more durable and can be used on a medium or even long term basis to make money. A market approach to understanding, therefore, is an appropriate if distasteful one.

Consequently, it is necessary to understand supply and demand, the dimensions of the market, profitability issues, and even market trends based on opportunities, cost-benefit calculations, and risk considerations. This analysis looks at these issues and seeks to identify the major contours of the market. The analysis also looks briefly at market investments, in effect the costs of entrepreneurship, as well as the profits and what is done with them.

The second part of the analysis focuses on the market participants with particular emphasis on the supply networks that traffic in women and children. The market for commercial sex depends critically on criminal networks that link the supply and demand sides and bring women and children to places where they are sold into and subsequently enslaved in prostitution. While the nature of the criminals who are involved varies, the trend has been towards greater organization and professionalism.

The third part of the paper focuses on the balance between market facilitators and market inhibitors. For criminal markets to function effectively and criminal networks to operate efficiently, the facilitators must outweigh the inhibitors. Consequently, it is necessary to identify both kinds of factors, before considering the ways in which facilitators can be reduced or removed and inhibitors can be expanded. In effect, by identifying and then manipulating facilitators and inhibitors it should be possible to reduce profitability and to increase the costs and risks of trafficking. As noted above, the concluding section of the paper considers briefly some of the ways in which this might be done. Prior to all this, however, it is necessary to identify some of the problems encountered by this kind of analysis.

## **2. Problems and Complexities of Analysis**

Numerous problems are encountered in any effort to discuss and analyze the phenomenon of trafficking in women. First is the problem of distinguishing trafficking from alien smuggling. Indeed, efforts to define the trafficking phenomenon immediately run into the issue of what is voluntary and what is not. Trafficking in women and children overlaps with alien smuggling but also has certain distinct characteristics that set it apart. Although aliens who are smuggled into the United States or Western Europe often endure enormous and unexpected hardships, the decision to migrate is usually a voluntary one.

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In effect, the demand comes from the would-be migrants themselves, and those who arrange the transportation and false documents are simply responding to demand from willing customers. With trafficking in women and children, however, the demand tends to come from the other end of the chain, from “legitimate” entrepreneurs requiring cheap or forced labor and unscrupulous businessmen, semi-legitimate enterprises or criminal entrepreneurs seeking a regular supply of participants for the commercial sex trade. As Finckenauer and Schrock note, human trafficking differs from alien smuggling because of the greater prominence of the elements of coercion and exploitation. “Alien smuggling produces short-term profits. Trafficking, on the other hand, includes long-term exploitation to continue to produce profits. The criminality associated with trafficking usually continues” after the migrants reach their destinations.<sup>ii</sup>

Not all cases of women traveling to another country and then engaging in prostitution can be categorized as trafficking. In Murmansk, for example, “Russian women began taking the bus to a small Norwegian town, where they spent the weekend selling alcohol and souvenirs. Soon they were selling their bodies as well, and bringing home large sums of money. The news of this new enterprise spread among friends and as many as 70 women began boarding the bus each weekend”.<sup>iii</sup> This was voluntary prostitution and the women were able to return home at will. Although it is likely that prostitution in Murmansk subsequently became more organized, more exploitative, and more coercive, this was not the case at the outset and this clearly falls outside the scope of the analysis.

Less clear cut, of course, are situations in which women are trafficked voluntarily and in the full knowledge that they will be engaged in prostitution at their destination. Yet prior knowledge does not necessarily eliminate the element of coercion. On the contrary, women who are trafficked willingly often have the expectation that they will make enough money to live well and send funds back to their families. Instead, they find themselves in a form of indentured labor that all too often is more akin to slavery than to traditional forms of prostitution in which the women themselves at least reap significant financial gains. With women who are trafficked, the rewards typically go to others to such a degree that some observers have claimed that this marks a fundamental shift in the nature of prostitution. French feminist author Elisabeth Badinter, for example, noted that “at the end of 1999, Western Europeans began witnessing a new, very visible form of prostitution”.<sup>iv</sup> She observed that whereas, traditionally, European prostitutes more or less chose their trade, even if for unsavory reasons, prostitution had become vastly more coercive with younger women imported, often against their will from Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa. There are actually two shortcomings in this comment. First, the problem was evident – elsewhere in Western Europe if not in France - well before 1999. Second, and much more significant, the comment does not go nearly far enough: the phenomena of trafficking and exploitation have developed to such an extent that they transcend prostitution. As one international aid worker observed: “It’s not classic prostitution...They are not paid. They are never paid. Of the 50 women we have seen, not one has received a single deutsche mark. And they are often held in horrendous conditions”.<sup>v</sup>

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There is also a problem with the standard definition of trafficking in women – the emphasis on its transnational character as a *sine qua non*. “Trafficking in women occurs when a woman in a country other than her own is exploited by another person against her will and for financial gain. The trafficking element may - cumulatively or separately - consist of: arranging legal or illegal migration from the country of origin to the country of destination; deceiving victims into prostitution once in the country of destination; or enforcing victims' exploitation through violence, threat of violence or other forms of coercion”.<sup>vi</sup> Although this emphasis on the cross-border nature of trafficking is both appropriate and important, there is another dimension to the problem - which occurs at the national level. This does not involve trafficking across national borders, but it involves women being taken from their home environment to another location where they are basically compelled directly (i.e. through intimidation) to become involved in the sex trade. Moreover, in Europe there are cases in which the women continue to be trafficked even after they have arrived in the destination country. Sometime they are sent on to another country; on other occasions they are sold to new owners in the destination country. The same is true in Israel where women are often sold from one brothel to another. Whether the trafficking is within one nation or across borders, however, it is clear that the financial benefits almost invariably accrue to others rather than the women themselves.

Another, and not unrelated difficulty, concerns the problem of categorization. Although it is tempting to categorize countries as either countries of origin or countries of destination, the realities are often more complex than this. The Czech Republic, for example, has been described as being “a point of origin, sale and transit of women”. Forty percent of the female sex trade workers are “foreigners from Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia”, and many of them stay in the country for less than six weeks.<sup>vii</sup> Similarly, Turkey is a recipient of women and girls from Romania, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, while also acting as a transshipment country for women from Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the former Yugoslavia who are destined for other countries in Europe.<sup>viii</sup> For its part, Thailand is a recipient for women and girls from Myanmar and a source country for women who are trafficked to Japan.

In the past there was another difficulty, especially when examining the role of organized crime, and that was limited information. In the last few years, however, as the women trafficking issue has gained greater salience, more details of arrests have emerged, in some cases providing important and occasionally surprising details of the criminal networks involved and the nature of their operations. It has become clear from these reports that organized crime has become very deeply involved in the trafficking business.

The other problem in analyzing trafficking in women, of course, is the sheer complexity of the issue. Trafficking in women for commercial sexual exploitation has many dimensions. It involves fundamental violations of human rights; it is also a gender issue in that it is predominantly – although not exclusively - women and girls who are victims of trafficking. Yet there is a big debate within feminism. On the one side are those who

emphasize a woman's right to choose and distinguish between free prostitution which does not involve trafficking and forced prostitution. Arrayed in the opposite camp are those who oppose all prostitution on the grounds that women would never willingly chose to be involved. In short, some feminists emphasize the right of women to engage voluntary prostitution; other contend that all prostitution is the result of a lack of choice or, at the very least, a lack of alternative options.<sup>ix</sup> Where they tend to agree, however, is that efforts to treat the trafficking issue as predominantly a problem of organized crime ignores the human rights violations – a tendency that is reflected in the desire of law enforcement to treat women who have been trafficked simply as potential witnesses to be used against the criminal rather than as victims to be protected from further harm. There is certainly something to this criticism. There are also other dangers in focusing too narrowly on the role of organized crime – including the natural tendency to focus on large criminal organizations which are among the most obvious perpetrators and to ignore the small operations, the cases in which women are trafficked by friends, boyfriends, fiancés or even family members. A market perspective, at least, suggests that we need to identify the whole range of actors and go beyond the well-known criminal organizations.

## **II The Market**

### **1. Supply and Demand**

Trafficking dynamics are very simple – women are trafficked from states in transition or from developing states to developed countries where the money to be made from prostitution is considerable. This has now been extended into countries and localities in the Balkans where the developed states acting through the aid and donor communities as well as peacekeeping forces have established developed world enclaves, that have also become major destinations for trafficked women. The extension of trafficking in this way is not surprising. As Soren Christensen, secretary-general of the Nordic Council of Ministers, observed: “modern slave traders are businessmen. They are sensitive to market mechanisms of supply and demand”<sup>x</sup>.

The supply side of the market is relatively easily understood. Supply countries are generally states-in-transition with low levels of economic development, high levels of unemployment, limited opportunities, especially for women, in the legal sectors of the economies, and significant crime and corruption problems that spillover into many sectors including trafficking in women. Where organized crime is pervasive, it is hardly surprising that it extends into women trafficking and prostitution. The underlying causes, however, are social and economic. In some countries, family structures have broken down with the result that parents are sometimes willing to sell their children into slavery. Even when this does not occur, dysfunctional economies combine with high levels of unemployment, the growing prevalence of divorce, unemployment and discrimination of women (alternatively reliance on women as the major bread-winners combined with sexual abuse in the workplace) and high levels of physical abuse to make their existing conditions intolerable. At the same time there is often a degree of wishful thinking about

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the possibilities in the West. This was manifest in a 1997 survey of tenth-grade girls in Russia, in which “70 percent responded their career goal was to become ‘foreign currency prostitutes’; just 10 years before, respondents to a similar survey said they wanted to become teachers, doctors, cosmonauts, and actresses”.<sup>xi</sup> For men faced with limited economic opportunities in state in transition, one option has been to become a members of a criminal organization. Women faced with the same limits, do not generally have this option. Nevertheless, some of them migrate from the legal economy to the illegal economy at home, choosing to become domestic prostitutes. Others prefer to migrate geographically rather than functionally in the hope that there are less unpalatable employment opportunities in other countries. Unfortunately for many of them, they end up in the illegal economy outside the country, forced into prostitution and subject to enormous humiliation, degradation and exploitation.

The other characteristic of many states in transition is that they are home states for powerful criminal enterprises that exhibit a high degree of criminal sophistication in identifying and exploiting market opportunities. In the case of trafficking in women, this sophistication translates into provision of the necessary documentation whether real or fraudulent, arrangements for transportation, reception at the destination, the maintenance of a cover story and so on. In other words, criminal enterprises have the resources to exploit the opportunities made available the them by the social and economic problems. Yet this is not simply a passive response. Recruiters use all sorts of deception methods to expand the supply of women, trading on both the existing conditions and the dreams of a better life. For those women who are deceived the mistake is thinking that the traffickers are facilitators when in fact they are only interested in putting the women in a position where they can be coerced and exploited.

Most of the demand countries have advanced industrialized or post-industrial economies, high standards of living and substantial levels of disposable income. They also have significant sex industries in which trafficked women usually end up. These can center around clubs, escort agencies, hotels, bars, and the like. In many major cities in Western Europe well-known red light districts are frequented by men seeking commercial sexual diversions. In thinking about demand, however, there are two distinct levels that have to be separated: demand from those who control the commercial sex trade and provide opportunities for men to buy sex and demand from the men themselves who use prostitutes. These two levels are mutually reinforcing – and both are exploitative. Consequently, both need to be targeted as part of a comprehensive strategy that attempts to alter the market dynamics.

## **2. Scale, Scope and Profitability of the Market**

It is evident from all this that trafficking in women for commercial sex is a highly lucrative business. It is also a business in which the entry costs are very low and the barriers to entry are modest. In some cases, opportunist individuals will exploit friendships or relationships to traffic a few women; in other cases small-time criminals

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will use modest proceeds from other crimes to develop small trafficking operations. In all cases, success tends to breed success and deepening involvement in the market.

The value of the market, of course, is extremely difficult to assess with any degree of confidence or certitude. Methodologies for assessment are lacking and there is no agreement on what is to be counted or how it is to be counted. In spite of this there are frequent suggestions that the market is worth anywhere in the region from 7 to 12 billion dollars a year. While such figures are always tendentious – and are typically presented with no accompanying explanation of the underlying methodology – neither the range of possibilities nor the upper and lower figures is implausible. And what can be said with some certainty is that the commercial sex market is large and has grown enormously in the last decade.

There are several reasons why the market is so profitable – for all concerned except the women themselves. For the traffickers, the transportation overheads are generally low – although corruption payments can be significant. For the criminals who control the women once they are in place, prostitution involves continuing enterprises with enduring if replaceable “commodities” that are consumed repeatedly rather than just once. Buying women who are trafficked is a limited once off investment; the sale of their services continues to generate profits long after the initial outlays have been covered. Moreover, once they are in place, the women are usually paid only a pittance – if at all. Finally, in some cases, the women can be sold to other brothel owners, providing yet another accretion of profit in what can be described as a secondary trafficking market. There are some cases in which girls have been bought and sold as many as seven times. To put it crudely, a trafficked woman involved in commercial sex is a good investment for the person or organization reaping the profits from her activities. It has been estimated, for example, that in Kosovo where international peacekeepers, NATO officers, and development officials add to the demand for commercial sex, a pimp who keeps 15 girls and works them six nights a week can easily bring in more than a quarter million tax-free U.S. dollars a month.<sup>xii</sup> In the final analysis, therefore, there are few other criminal activities in which the profit to cost ratio is so high and in which limited investments can have such large pay-offs.

This, in turn, raises the issue of what is done with the profits. Although there are no good studies of this aspect of the problem, it is likely that the proceeds from trafficking and subsequently the controlled prostitution of women fall into four categories:

- money that is simply spent on the lifestyle that the traffickers and pimps want for themselves. It is a myth to think that criminals always launder their proceeds. In the case of some criminal activities, the penalties are so low and the security that the criminals enjoy is such that there is no need for laundering. Consequently, criminals simply enjoy their ill-gotten wealth, with a far more lavish life-style than would otherwise be available. Simply spending the money is perhaps most likely with the low-level traffickers and the small-time pimps.

- Some of the money is re-invested in the business. It is used for the trafficking of more women, the acquisition of more night-clubs and brothels, and so on, as well as the corruption payments that are a key part of the process.
- Some of the proceeds are likely re-invested in other criminal businesses – the money from trafficking and prostitution can be used to finance other criminal activities including drug trafficking and trafficking in arms.
- Some of the money is laundered so that it is transformed from illegitimate proceeds of crime to legitimate funds that are presented as the profits from legal businesses. The laundering process itself, can take many forms. In the Balkans, for example, where most countries still operate through cash-based economies, cash is often smuggled from one part of the region to another, used for real estate and business purchases, and for construction projects. As government sensitivity to money laundering has grown and more restrictions and safeguards been put in place criminals have responded by using or investing their money incrementally in order to avoid triggering suspicious activity reports. In other places, the money laundering process is more sophisticated. It is easiest of course when the criminal use legitimate companies as fronts for their illegal activities. Indeed, when the money is presented as legitimate profits, the traditional phases of placement, layering, and integration that financial institution and law enforcement look for are short-circuited. Where Asian organized crime is involved, then it is possible that an underground banking system or alternative remittance system known as *fié chien* (flying money) is utilized to move and hide the proceeds without leaving a paper trail. In yet other instances, the criminals will use lawyers and accountants to put the money through multiple jurisdictions and hide it in offshore financial centers or bank secrecy havens where it will be safe from law enforcement.

In sum, the market in women for commercial sex is large and growing. The demand and supply factors create a synergy that has made this a rapidly expanding and highly vibrant criminal market. In any market, of course, a critical role is played by those individuals and organizations that succeed in bringing together the demand and supply sides of the equation. In the case of prostitution it is those who traffic in women, bringing them from the supply countries to the demand countries and thereby making the market function effectively. It is essential therefore, to identify the major types of trafficker.

### **III The Trafficking Organizations**

#### **1. A Typology of Traffickers**

Although it is tempting to see trafficking in women for commercial sex as something that is dominated and controlled by organized crime, the picture is actually rather more complex than this. As Finckenauer and Schrock, in their analysis of trafficking in women in the United States observe, “the actors driving this criminal market vary.... Traffickers

may be individual entrepreneurs, small "mom and pop" operations, or sophisticated, organized rings. There is little consensus among those who have studied the problem as to the proportions of each of those types; nor with respect to their level of organization and sophistication".<sup>xiii</sup> Much the same assessment could be made of the participants in the women and children trafficking business at the global level. Indeed, in thinking about the actors in any criminal market, there are those who are criminal already and simply diversify and there are those who are not necessarily involved in crime already but see opportunities that they seize. What follows, therefore, is an attempt to elucidate the major players in this market, recognizing of course, that the market is highly dynamic with different kinds of entities sometimes working in combination with one another as part of a hybrid trafficking network. Moreover, some actors are so successful that they transform themselves from small groups with limited reach into larger, more powerful, and more extensive trafficking organizations. With this in mind, the following typology identifies the most important actors.

- *opportunistic amateurs*. Perhaps the most pervasive but least important category consists of individuals and small groups of friends. These are generally small-time opportunists and confidence tricksters who, prompted by economic crisis or simple greed and encouraged by friendships with women who can be turned into victims, become traffickers. Instead of describing small criminal groups engaged in the trafficking business as mom and pop operations perhaps it might be better to refer to them as friend and fiancé operations. In many cases of trafficking, individual women are inveigled abroad by a friend or boyfriend who promises marriage but who is simply intent in either selling his girlfriend to a pimp or is intent on exploiting her himself. In either case, the trust that is established is simply an exploitative device to lure the woman into a position where she is powerless and can be exploited for profit. Where this is simply opportunist and a one-off case, it will usually exhibit a low level of sophistication. If the trafficking is successful, however, the procurers will tend to repeat it, becoming more adept at a task that, in effect, is small scale recruiting and trafficking. The result of this is likely to be the emergence of a network of small trafficking groups that resemble some of the patterns identified by the BKA with regard to African drug dealers spreading into Europe and that have "nothing to do with mafia structures. There are neither godfathers nor any hierarchies of note, but instead many small, very flexible groups branching out in all directions, which start and end cooperation as required and set up new groups".<sup>xiv</sup>
- *Transnational criminal organization with broad portfolios of activity*. At the other end of the spectrum are broad-based transnational criminal organizations. While some criminal organizations specialize in a narrow range of products and markets; others focus much more broadly. An example of this latter kind of organization is Solntsevo, based in Moscow but with linkages and activities extending into Central Europe and beyond. Characterized by strong leadership and a high levels of professionalism, Solntsevo acts as an umbrella organization for over 300 individual crime groups. Not surprisingly, it has a wide diversity of

- criminal activities and an extremely entrepreneurial approach to any criminal activity that might result in significant profit. A key figure is Semeon Mogilevich, based in Budapest, who is believed to run criminal networks that operate through legitimate, semi-legitimate and simple front companies. In Russia itself, the Solntsevo organization reportedly controls the University and Cosmos hotels; and several casinos amongst many other things. The group's control over transportation resources, its capacity to corrupt officials, and its transnational links provide three of the requisites for effective participation in trafficking in women. Moreover, Mogilevich operates a major night-club in Hungary. There is also speculation that he was linked to several killings in Berlin's red-light district in the early 1990s that were almost certainly about control over the lucrative business in prostitution. There are also allegations that Mogilevich traffics in arms and drugs, although it must be noted that law enforcement has had no success in proving these allegations in a court of law.
- *Traditional criminal organizations.* Traditional organized crime involvement, especially by Italian Mafia organizations has also been a key factor in the trafficking business and helps in part (although there are other factors too such as proximity to the Balkans and the emergence of Albanian trafficking organizations) to explain why Italy has become such an important destination for trafficked women. In Asia, the Japanese Yakuza has also become deeply involved in the trafficking business.
  - *Ethnically based trafficking organizations.* Albanian and Kosovo Albanian networks fit this category. They have become critical to the trafficking of heroin from Central Asia to Western Europe and along with drugs are also involved in trafficking in arms and women. Once the infrastructure, routes, and methods (including bribery of officials) are in place, the product itself becomes almost irrelevant. Not surprisingly, contraband of all kinds is smuggled across the Adriatic and groups move from one product line to another with ease and speed as opportunities dictate. There were reports some years ago that some of the Albanian organizations were bringing both people and drugs into Italy and that when detected or challenged they would simply throw the people overboard to divert their pursuers.
  - *Criminal-controlled businesses.* Organized crime infiltration of and control over licit business has become the norm rather than the exception in Russia and other states of the FSU. Import-export companies and criminal-controlled travel agents are particularly useful for trafficking in women. Among the advantages of such companies are their well-established trade links, their affiliations, an existing and seemingly legitimate cover for travel, and established financial channels that can be used to move funds and process payments

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The above categorization is neither exhaustive nor rigid. Nor are the categories mutually exclusive. On some occasions various kinds of groups will work together. This is why it is also important to recognize that trafficking networks are dynamic and fluid rather than fixed or static, bringing together different kinds of participants in alliances of convenience. In some cases, where collaboration is harmonious, successful, and profitable, it is likely to be repeated. In other instances, the network will simply dissolve as the participants move on to other criminal endeavors with other partners. This makes the analytic and intelligence tasks more complex and more formidable, but recognizing it is indispensable to understanding the phenomenon of organized crime involvement in trafficking in women. Moreover, the alliances can come at any part of the trafficking process – and in some instances, women will be passed along a chain from group to group. In other cases, transnational organizations will simply deliver the women to domestic criminal groups or to “businessmen” involved in the commercial sex trade and who own clubs and bars that they use for prostitution. Connections can be forged at the transnational level or between transnational organizations and those who act at the local level. There have been specific cases of Italian organized crime groups in New York and New Jersey, for example, being supplied with women for clubs by Russian criminal networks.<sup>xv</sup> None of this should be surprising. As R Thomas Naylor has argued, inside most criminal markets “one finds operational a myriad of individual entrepreneurs along with ‘firms’ large and small, all of whom engage in essentially arms-length commercial relations with one another”.<sup>xvi</sup>

If the market is a mixed one, however, the role of organized crime has become increasingly important. There are several characteristics of trafficking operations that are likely to indicate the involvement of organized crime: the groups or networks involved in trafficking in women make extensive use of bribery and corruption to facilitate transshipment; the groups involved have both the capacity and the propensity to use violence in support of their activities, not simply to keep the women docile and pliant, but to protect their business either from rivals or against law enforcement agents who attempt to interfere with their activities; the trafficking involves considerable sophistication either in methods of concealment or in methods of circumvention through false documentation; and there are multiple shipments of the women, using well-established routes, methods, and facilitators. While some aspects of this, are not unique to organized crime, these indicators provide a useful approach to the issue of organized crime involvement, and certainly go beyond simple assertions that the trade has increasingly become a preserve of organized crime.

Acknowledging that networks can vary in degree of sophistication and organization, geographic scope and reach, and the mix of actors, and that some remain atomized and fluid, it is nevertheless very clear that organized crime is playing an increasingly important role in trafficking in women. Organized crime increasingly dominates the supply chain and fulfills a series of functions from the initial recruitment to the exploitation of the women at the other end – in effect acting as both trafficker and pimp. In the mid 1990s it appeared that organized crime was sometimes involved more tangentially, providing protection and coercive support for those who organize the

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trafficking, rather than playing a more central role in trafficking. This has clearly changed. Organized crime is now much more directly involved. The type of organized crime group that is involved, however, varies. In some cases, the trafficking network will be created and run by criminal organizations that specialize in the trafficking of women and children; in other instances the criminal organization might do many more things, trafficking in multiple commodities including arms, drugs and people. In some instances the networks will be blatantly criminal, relying on strong arms tactics and the ability to outrun or corrupt law enforcement; in others the networks might be more subtle, using as cover ostensibly legitimate businesses such as travel agents which engage in some legal activities; while other networks will exhibit a hybrid kind of structure that mixes the blatant and the subtle. In some cases, the criminal organization will specialize in women trafficking; in others this will simply be one of several activities that might well include drug trafficking or arms trafficking.

### **Relationships with Drug trafficking and Arms Trafficking**

One issue that has been implicit in the discussion of the kinds of actors involved in trafficking in women, concerns the relationship between trafficking in women and trafficking in drugs and guns. Unfortunately, this is not something on which much empirical evidence has been collected – at least in the public domain. It also makes sense to suggest that this will be, in part, a function of the organizations involved. In cases of women trafficking by friends and fiancés, for example, there is less likely to be overlap. In other cases, where a major criminal organization is involved then the overlap will be much greater. With these points in mind, it is possible to identify several different kinds of relationships. These must now be elucidated:

**Parallel Trafficking.** The first kind of relationship is what is sometimes termed parallel trafficking, when different kinds of commodities move along the same routes, using the same mechanisms and modalities and targeting the same corrupt officials. This is a term that has been used in relation to trafficking in drugs from Latin America to the United States and the use of the same routes and methods for trafficking in endangered species of fauna and flora.<sup>xvii</sup> In effect, it recognizes that countries that play a particular role in one kind of commodity trafficking often play a similar role with different commodities. There are certainly examples of parallel trafficking in women and drugs. The Balkans route to Western Europe provides perhaps the best example of this: what used to be a prime route for drugs going from Central Asia to Western Europe has also become a prime route (and in many cases destination) for trafficked women.

**Combined trafficking.** Another possible relationship – and one aspect of the interlocking discussed by Naylor – is the notion of combined trafficking i.e. criminal organizations not only traffic in different products but transport and move them together where this is feasible. Albanian criminal organizations that traffic people and drugs into Italy provide some of the best examples of this. Even if the different commodities are not co-mingled or physically trafficked together, (because of concerns over security or the inconvenience of moving different products) the fact that transnational criminal

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organizations with broad portfolios engage multiple commodity trafficking provides a tacit linkage between the illicit markets in different products. There is also another linkage between drug trafficking and women trafficking: the coexistence of drug and sex outlets in various red-light districts in major cities.

**Reverse trafficking.** This occurs where one commodity is brought in one direction and a different commodity is taken back. Some of the women trafficking from Eastern and Central Europe to Holland and Belgium might well exhibit this quality with women coming the one way and synthetic drugs or stolen cars going back east.

**Displacement trafficking.** Although the kinds of trafficking discussed above are the most obvious relationships, there are others to consider. One possibility, for example, is displacement of a criminal organization from one market to another – because the opportunities and profits are greater, because the risks are less, or because the profit risk ratio is simply more favorable. In the Balkans, for example, some of those who were involved in trafficking in arms during the conflicts of the 1990s now find it more attractive to traffic in women or exploit them for prostitution. In this connection it is worth considering the case of Eduard Dilber who was arrested in December 2002 and placed in custody in Zenica prison. Dilber had become “one of the most prominent persons in the white slave trade and soliciting in Bosnia. Before that he had been linked with arms smuggling”.<sup>xviii</sup> A former commanders in the Bosnian Croat army, he owns the Edo cafe in the suburbs of Brestovsko where girls were held against their will. In this case, he moved into a market in which efforts were being made to crack down on the problem. More generally, however, the risks in the women trafficking market are lower than in other criminal markets.

Another potential linkage involves criminal proceeds: profits from trafficking in women could be used to finance drug trafficking or arms trafficking. The converse is also possible. This financial linkage is another way in which the markets can intersect with one with one another. Whether the activities are specialized or diverse, they still depend critically on networks of trusted relationships and a set of activities carried out by these networks. The next section examines some of these networked organizations.

### **Trafficking Networks in Operation**

Although it used to be fashionable to treat criminal organizations as classic hierarchical structures, in recent years this has changed as many analysts have realized the advantages that accrue to networked organizational structures. Networks are highly flexible and adaptable, they can disperse and reassemble with speed and ease and thereby avoid offering a static and easy target for law enforcement; they can exhibit significant levels of redundancy so that even when they are attacked and degraded they can regenerate themselves. They can also extend and truncate as needed. One aspect of networks is that they tend not to be preoccupied with organizational form and identity. Achieving their objectives with speed and efficiency takes precedence. This kind of approach encourages important synergies in the criminal world, enabling organizations to work together in

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ways that are advantageous to all except their victims and those trying to combat their activities.

In the world of women trafficking in the OSCE region, the most important criminal networks are those from Russia and Ukraine, those from the Balkans, particularly Albanian trafficking organizations, and Italian mafia organizations. As suggested above, they are not the only players in the market; but they are almost certainly the most significant.

The importance of the Russian criminals in transforming the market in commercial sex is hard to exaggerate. In Finland, for example, prostitution was limited and for the most part non-coercive. Then in the early 1990s, Russian criminals moved into Finland and compelled “almost all of the Finnish prostitutes either to give up their customary livelihood or join their ranks. These criminals read the advertisements put by Finnish prostitutes in the local newspapers, made contact with them, and went to meet them. If the threats they would make had no effect, the women were beaten”.<sup>xix</sup> The result was both an expansion and a consolidation of the market in commercial sex in Finland, which is now controlled by ten major gangs. The leaders of these organizations are based in Estonia or Russia and local Finns are employed to deal with logistics such as transportation and accommodation for the prostitutes.<sup>xx</sup> Another way in which Russian criminal organizations display considerable ingenuity is in the recruitment process, using women who have themselves been prostitutes to recruit others. In August 2002, for example, police in Dnipropetrovsk caught a group of people who exported women for prostitution abroad, via Moscow. In this case the recruiter was herself a Ukrainian prostitute, who had gone to Moscow in search of wealthier customers, had met other people in the business, and had been sent back to Ukraine to find girls and women to be recruited for sale “into the brothels of the United Arab Emirates. They made 2,000 dollars on each unfortunate girl who wound up in a brothel. This gang managed to ship to this destination more than 15 Ukrainian young women aged between 16 and 30”.<sup>xxi</sup>

If Russian criminal networks were in this market early, they were soon followed by the Albanian mafia clans. Indeed, according to one assessment, “trafficking in women and forced prostitution seem to have become much more important for Albanian organized crime in 1999, with thousands of women from Kosovo having fled to Albania during the armed conflict in the region. About 300,000 women from Eastern European countries work as prostitutes in Europe. More and more seem to be ‘organized’ in Albanian networks that are not only limited to ethnic Albanian prostitutes, but also comprise women from Romania, Bosnia, Moldova, Russia, etc. The pimps often pretend to be Kosovars in order to have the status of a political refugee, even though many of them come from Albania. Some seem to control the “business” from abroad. Belgium, in particular, seems to be the seat of several leaders of the trafficking networks. In 1999, ten people linked to Albanian crime were shot in Brussels”.<sup>xxii</sup> The other country where Albanian criminal networks are particularly prominent in the women trafficking business is Italy where according to one well-informed assessment, 48% of the prostitutes are from Eastern Europe; 35%-40% are minors (from 12 to 18 years old); and 26% have been

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kidnapped and taken from their countries of origin by force.<sup>xxiii</sup> Moreover, whatever their origins, “all the women currently on the streets (of Italy) are slaves. The proof is that the Nigerians, the Albanians, the Romanians and the women from Eastern European countries all have their passports taken away by their pimps. There is not one meter of street in which prostitution is not controlled by criminals...The Albanians operate in family clans, in ‘joint ventures’ with the Mafia in Eastern Europe and Italy”.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Cooperation among criminal organizations is particularly important. As suggested above, a key factor in making Italy such an important destination for trafficked women has been agreement between Albanian criminal organizations and the Camorra and ‘Ndrangheta. These criminal associations or alliances have been mutually profitable. Indeed, what is surprising is the lack of competition and conflict among criminal organizations over the trafficking business. One reason for this might well be the expansion of the business. In cases where the market is growing there is usually enough for everyone to have a share of the spoils. In the event that government and law enforcement agencies succeed in reducing the demand and contracting the market, some of this cooperation might well degenerate into more competitive and even violent relationships as organizations, faced with declining revenues, become concerned about their share of the market and increasingly intent on maintaining this share.

As well as thinking in terms of formal criminal organizations, however, the trafficking business can also be understood in terms of networks of criminals, with each individual or small group fulfilling certain roles and responsibilities within the network. Moreover, the networks can also include other entities such as legitimate and front companies. As one commentary observed “The trafficking network includes sellers, guards, numerous modeling and travel agencies, brothel owners, corrupt public officials, and smugglers. Individuals who supply false documents, bribed air and auto transport company workers, etc”.<sup>xxv</sup> This list could easily be extended to include the recruiters who initially identify and approach victims, luring them with false promises and subsequently brutalizing or coercing them. In the case of trafficking through the Balkans it also includes villagers in key border hamlets who know local trails that can avoid checks by border guards and police. The other virtue of the network approach is that it is inherently flexible,. In some cases, a criminal organization might set up all the infrastructure and arrangements and exert “total control over the process of transporting the ‘goods’ from the point of departure to the point of delivery”.<sup>xxvi</sup> In other instances, the organization will control part of the trafficking chain but hand off or contract out other parts to individuals or groups able to bring specialized knowledge or skills to where they are needed.

### **A Network Case Study**

In October 2002, Operation Girasole, a major international effort to break up women trafficking operations, culminated in a series of arrests and asset seizures in several countries.<sup>xxvii</sup> Girasole not only disrupted a major trafficking network but also highlighted some of the methods and modalities used by criminals to circumvent laws and migration restrictions. It revealed a very successful and sophisticated association of criminal organizations working together in ways that were mutually profitable – if

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sometimes rather surprising. The network uncovered by Girasole was characterized by a multiplicity of criminal individuals and organizations who engaged in high levels of cooperation. It used front companies and legitimate business for criminal purposes, was truly transnational in scope, and was highly profitable. Three other features of the network are also worth noting. First is the specialized role of the impresarios who initially recruited the women. Second is the continuous and systematic financial exploitation of the women. As one report noted: “the young women were provided with false passports bought by the gang for a few hundred thousand lire, but which they [the women] were forced to pay 8-10 million lire for by means of their ‘job’ in the clubs. Nothing was free for the ‘sex slaves’: they paid out 50,000 lire per night to sleep squashed together in concentration camp-style apartments”.<sup>xxviii</sup> A fee was even charged for the trip from their houses to the night clubs. Third is the way in which the network extended from the underworld to the upperworld in an effort to provide ostensibly legitimate ways of bringing in the women to Italy and other European Union countries.

The Girasole operation was Italian in origin and leadership but involved extensive cooperation with law enforcement agencies in a number of other countries. Europol also played a major role in supporting the investigation, assisting with coordination and providing analytic support that was helpful in identifying the main contours of the network, its operational methods, and its inclusion of people who would not normally be considered criminal but who assisted in the provision of legitimate cover for the women to come to Italy. The operation yielded considerable insight into a large hybrid trafficking network that brought together criminal organizations from different countries, ethnic trafficking networks, and criminal controlled companies in an extensive cooperative venture, was highly sophisticated in its operations. Indeed, the network operations exemplify many of the characteristics of trafficking described elsewhere in this paper.

In 2001, the Carabinieri Special Operational Unit (ROS) began an investigation into a transnational criminal network involved in trafficking women from Eastern Europe for prostitution in Italy. Some reports suggest that the investigation was prompted by the murder of a prostitute. It was subsequently discovered that large numbers of women had been brought from Russia and placed in sexual servitude in a carousel of clubs and brothels. The first phase of the operation resulted in 105 individuals – including a large contingent of Albanians – being detained in Italy. It also revealed that women – from Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Colombia, Somalia, and Tunisia – were being subjected to high levels of violence both en route and when they were in Italy. They were “forced to become prostitutes after being raped by their Albanian ‘protectors’” who were linked to the Camorra in Naples and the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta. Girls who fought the system were viciously killed and at least three murders were believed to have occurred. Ten cases of classic Cosa Nostra murder rituals were also identified.<sup>xxix</sup> Those arrested were charged with “mafia-style criminal association, enslavement, illegal immigration, forging documents, and drugs trafficking. Nine night clubs were seized, along with one hotel and several apartments in which the young women were housed”.<sup>xxx</sup>

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It was also revealed that the operations generated an income of about 1,100,000 Euro a month.

The second phase of the operation was aimed at the disruption of the wider trafficking network including those who facilitated the entry of the women into the European Union. Although the Carabinieri still played the leading role, law enforcement agencies in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Netherlands also became involved. Moreover, the cooperative efforts extended beyond the European Union to Albania, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Switzerland, Russia and Ukraine. Europol's role was to provide an in-depth analysis of the intelligence gathered not only in Italy but in all the relevant countries and to offer a comprehensive assessment of the *modus operandi* and the structure of the criminal network. Europol also helped to identify the major participants and their respective roles and responsibilities in the network. This made it possible to identify the critical nodes and links and to delineate points of vulnerability in the network that could be exploited by targeted disruptive measures. Although it was not portrayed in this way in Europol's announcement and press conference on Girasole, what Europol really did was provide intelligence for transnational law enforcement efforts to engage in "netwar". In effect law enforcement formed its own network to fight the criminal networks and was very successful as a result.

The arrests in October 2002 were concentrated in Italy with 80 arrests made and 32 persons charged. Proceedings were also initiated against one person in Germany, 2 in Austria, 8 in Russia 13 in Ukraine, and 2 in Poland. One of the arrests in Poland was of an Italian, Antonio A, who seems to have been a key figure in the network. Antonio had reportedly been in Poland for three weeks but had been kept under police surveillance and was arrested in Krosno. Ironically, the Italian police arrested a 53-year-old Polish woman, Irena G. who recruited women and trafficked them to Italy, where she also employed them.

One of the leading figures in the networks was Radio Tiberi, who owns a series of clubs in Italy and is suspected of paying local police to allow his operations to continue without interference. Radio is reported to be one of the major organizing figures and described as "ruthless... capable of all sorts of crimes, and ... highly dangerous".<sup>xxxii</sup> He uses front men and women to control the women in his recreational clubs. He also uses the clubs for drug distribution and is a prime example of someone who combines trafficking of women and control of prostitution with involvement in drug retailing. Document forgery is also among his capabilities.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In market terms, it was Radio who provided the demand for the women and the outlets for prostitution.

Other players in the network included the De Franco Brothers, who are rivals of Radio and are linked both to Albanian groups and the 'Ndrangheta. The Albanians include Markeljian Leshaj and Fred Nika who sometimes operate independently and sometimes with the de Franco brothers. Nika's role was frequently to travel to Montenegro to

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purchase women. In some cases he purchased the women from Serb criminals – a relationship that illustrates once again that politics and ethnic animosity are no barrier to criminal cooperation. For their part, the Serbs purchase the women from East European traffickers and then sell them to Albanians to be brought into Italy. The supply chain itself is an intricate network of different groups with differing roles and responsibilities.

In Naples the Caiazzo Brothers, Vincenzo and Luigi, and their organization appear to be involved in the money laundering aspects of the trafficking business. Those arrested also include a number of leading members of the Farao-Marincola clan - which apparently supplied the cocaine that was distributed through the night clubs.

The other key components of the network were Russian and Ukrainian organized crime groups. Indeed, considerable concern was generated by the involvement of Russian organized crime which combined its power of intimidation with considerable sophistication and a capacity to extend its reach into “all phases of this complex mechanism of exploitation”. Russian and Ukrainian criminal organizations were behind a network of criminal controlled companies that played a critical role in the trafficking process. Indeed, one of the most significant aspects of the operation was a “highly-active criminal network composed of a large number of Ukrainian travel companies in co-operation with partner travel agencies and hotels, mainly based in Austria, Italy, Germany, France and Spain” – all of which were involved in trafficking women. The individuals and companies based in Ukraine along with their associates in Western European travel agencies facilitated illegal immigration into the EU by means of Schengen visas that were fraudulently obtained. For their part, “the tourist agencies had the girls arrive by regular bus trips and with tourist visas” while the complicit hoteliers came up with false reservations.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

What was described as a “closely woven collusive network” extended beyond the travel agents and hoteliers to encompass people who facilitated the acquisition of residence visas and permits by providing forged documents for certifying attendance at university courses, arranging marriages of convenience or devising similar schemes. This was reflected in the arrests which included not only the usual suspects such as night-club managers and madams, but also lawyers, complicit hotel-keepers, and a university professor in Rome who provided at least one false university certification for a Russian girl that enabled the criminal organization to obtain a residence permit for her. Marco Presciutti, UBF welterweight boxing world champion, was charged with recruiting several women from outside the European Union and forcing them to become prostitutes

Operation Girasole sought to arrest not only the individuals responsible for the trafficking but also to dismantle the infrastructure that was used for trafficking. Consequently, 3 travel agencies in Ukraine were seized, while elsewhere 4 hotels, 13 apartments and 9 nightclubs were shut down or confiscated. Both the arrests and these seizures were a blow to criminal enterprises that had an inherently expansionist quality about them. As one report noted: “the girls were sent to the West in a continuous cycle; there were terminals in the various countries to welcome them, and by paying handsomely they

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would find the way to obtain pseudo-legal entries; the capital obtained from the prostitution of those girls was immediately reinvested in Russia to feed the circuit and in thousands of other dirty businesses”.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Operation Girasole interrupted the cycle and temporarily at least put a huge dent in a major criminal network. An important characteristic of networks, however, is their capacity to regenerate themselves and re-establish their enterprises with relative speed and ease. It is important, therefore, for law enforcement to keep monitoring the situation either for signs that the network is coming back into business or for indications that other networks are moving in to fill the vacuum.

#### **IV Facilitators and Inhibitors**

In assessing those factors that facilitate and those that inhibit the trafficking of women in the OSCE region for commercial sex, the most striking point is the asymmetry in favor of the former: there are many facilitating factors and very few inhibitors of any significance. .

##### **Facilitators**

###### **1. State Weaknesses in Source Countries**

States in transition generally suffer from capacity gaps and functional holes that can readily be exploited by organized crime. In this respect it can hardly be over-emphasized that many states-in transition lack the framework of laws and regulations to prevent trafficking in women. These states also offer congenial low risk environments that provide attractive home bases or safe havens for transnational criminal organizations. Although some organized crime figures are prosecuted, many leading criminals are able to act with impunity simply because of the limitations of the legal system and the paucity of enforcement mechanisms. Such conditions often exist not only in source countries but also in transshipment countries – which are numerous.

###### **2. Multiple Transshipment Countries**

Another facilitator in the OSCE area is that there are multiple transshipment countries and multiple routes for traffickers and the women they traffic. Richard Friman has argued that most transshipment countries exhibit two major characteristics – ease of transit and access to target.<sup>xxxv</sup> In Central Europe, which is the gateway to the European Union, ease of transit reflects the same kinds of state weakness as evident in the source countries. Indeed, in the Balkans, in particular – which have become both transshipment and destination countries - state structures are, in many cases, less effective than those in the former Soviet Union. Consequently, transshipment is easy. So too is access. Central Europe offers multiple points of access to the European Union – both across land borders and across the Adriatic. Once access to the European Union has been achieved there is considerable mobility and few serious checks. Getting into the United States is more difficult, particularly after September 11 and the efforts to combat terrorism. Yet there are still opportunities to come in directly with good quality counterfeit documents or to come in with the help of alien smuggling groups across the Mexican-US border. Another

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way in is through Canada which itself has had a number of cases of women being trafficked from Asia for work in the commercial sex trade in cities such as Vancouver and Toronto.

### **3. The Political Criminal Nexus**

A major problem in many source and transshipment countries is the existence of what Roy Godson termed the political criminal nexus, a symbiosis of crime and politics that is mutually advantageous.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The political-criminal nexus and the corruption that goes with it represent a triumph of individual interests over collective good, and private profits over public order and well-being. Indeed, the nexus allows the criminals to operate not only with little fear from law enforcement but also with a safe haven in the event that their transnational criminal activities elicit tough reactions from other governments. For politicians it offers a reciprocal relationship that can provide financial political support, personal financial advantage, and sometimes even a willingness to coerce or eliminate political opponents. In such circumstances, the state itself is either unable or unwilling to uphold the security of its citizens, to protect their rights, and to ensure their safety.

At the very least, efforts to stop organized crime in general and women trafficking in particular typically fail to generate much political support. Indeed, it is possible to identify several reactions on the part of the political elite to trafficking in women and children. The first kind of reaction is acquiescence or apathy, where they simply fail to take the problem seriously and take no action that might interfere with it – either because of indifference or because other problems appear more urgent and important. According to Mariana Peterdel, director of the Romanian-based aid organization Salvati Copii, this is the situation in Moldova where “even the highest ranking officials ...condone the trade in women and children because the economic crisis means the state cannot take care of the population”.<sup>xxxvii</sup> A second and even more disturbing possibility is connivance, where the political elites accept bribes whether in the forms of money or sexual favors. Revelations about the deputy state prosecutor in Montenegro suggest an important degree of connivance on the part of the political elite in that country in the trafficking of women. A third possibility is official collusion in the trafficking business. The investigations in Russia undertaken by Global Survival Network, during the 1990s, for example, “revealed serious allegations of government complicity in the business, including allegations that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was falsifying passports to get under-age girls out of the country”.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Indeed, it is highly likely that, in various countries, corrupt officials assist in provision of passports, visas, work permits, and any other documentation that is required. In this area of criminal activity, as with so many other forms of trafficking, corruption is a critical lubricant and allows criminal organizations to operate efficiently and with minimum interference.

### **4. Police Corruption**

The same phenomenon of corruption (albeit at lower level) and the same kinds of attitudes to trafficking are also evident in police forces. Although there are honest policemen who genuinely seek to help women who are trafficked and used for prostitution, all too often the police are facilitators rather than inhibitors. Stories are

legion about women being held in sexual servitude, escaping and going to the police, only to be handed back to the pimps or brothel owners, or other organized criminals who control them. In other cases they are mistreated as badly by those with whom they sought protection as they were by the traffickers. A Moldovan woman, for example, who “tried to flee the clutches of the sex trafficking mafia three times ... had the misfortune to turn for help to policemen who had contacts with her powerful bosses and who immediately handed her back to them”.<sup>xxxix</sup> In some countries, connivance and collusion are all too prevalent. In Bosnia, for example, “trafficked women reported ... that their employers sometimes forced them to provide free sexual services to local police officers. In a handful of cases, Bosnian police actively participated in trafficking, either as part owners or employees of the clubs, or by procuring false documents for traffickers. Trafficking victims, terrified of retaliation by traffickers, feared reporting the abuse to law enforcement authorities. Eager to fan that fear, employers routinely claimed that they counted police officers among their friends”.<sup>xl</sup> Even some members of the International Police Task Force (IPTF) in Bosnia had visited or bought prostitutes. As one report noted, “trafficking of people into Bosnia continued unabated in 2002, as did the corruption that allowed it to flourish”.<sup>xli</sup> In October 11 local police officers were fired either for using sexual services in nightclubs or informing the bar owners of forthcoming raids. A UN spokeswoman commented that the conduct of these policemen revealed “not only their lack of respect for victims of human trafficking but also their total disregard for the role of police in upholding law and order”.<sup>xlii</sup>

### **5. Widespread Connivance.**

Even if the police are vigilant, however, they face an uphill battle. In border villages in the Balkans, for example, the villagers typically help the traffickers avoid the police and military checkpoints and continue their journeys. Yet in many respects even this is merely another example of connivance that in some cases start with families selling their daughters and continues with travel agents and hotels who work closely with traffickers in ensuring that the women arrive at their destination with minimum interference. In this connection, it is worth emphasizing that even in many transitional countries the travel agency sector has expanded enormously. It was reported for example, that in Romania police conducted checks of economic or lawful activity at 906 companies that deal in transportation of persons, 742 tourism companies, 154 companies that act as agents for artists, 118 companies that deal in placing workers abroad, and 6,630 companies that engage in other activities.<sup>xliii</sup> Although they found only 56 economic crimes, the extent of the transportation infrastructure certainly lends itself to exploitation for illegal activities such as trafficking in women.

### **6. The Use of Coercion and Violence**

Another important facilitator of the trafficking process is the use of coercion to ensure that the women are kept under control. In some instances where the women are tricked this is unnecessary until the later stages of the trafficking process when the realities of their situation become evident. In others, the women are physically, sexually, and psychologically abused until they are pliant and unlikely to do anything to interfere with the trafficking process. Nor does coercion end when they are sold or indentured. Their

owners either abuse them directly or employ “guards” to ensure that the women do not try to escape and to inflict punishment in the event they try. These can range from the men who provide muscle for organized crime to Nigerian “mamas” who are often associated with forms of witchcraft and exercise psychological rather than physical control over Nigerian women in particular. Whatever form it takes, violence is one of the most distinctive features of prostitution in the OSCE region and one of the most important facilitators of trafficking in women.

### **7. Diaspora and Migrant Networks**

An important facilitator for many transnational criminal activities are migrant communities in developed countries that provide recruitment, cover and safe haven for criminals. The role of Turkish and Kurdish networks in drug trafficking in Western Europe through the 1990s and to the present is a case in point. The same phenomenon is evident in the women trafficking business. Russian migration to Western Europe, Israel and the United States facilitates the trafficking business. So too does the Albanian diaspora into several countries in Western Europe. Indeed, “the Albanians and the Russians have set up enough networks of contacts across several countries to be able to organize large-scale trafficking. Through these networks, the girls are moved from one town to another and from one country to another”.<sup>xliv</sup> The Nigerian diaspora also facilitates trafficking in drugs and women. Nigerian networks that operate throughout Western Europe are frequently active in drug trafficking; in terms of trafficking in women, as suggested above, they are especially important in Italy.

### **8. The Low Risks of Trafficking**

Another major facilitator of trafficking in women for commercial sex is that it is a very low risk activity. As one commentator noted, “the risk is much smaller than the risk involved in arms and narcotics trafficking. What you lose in this business is merely ‘raw material’ which can be retrieved. But, how many major traffickers around Europe are behind bars for this form of crime? I do not think that you can count them on two hands”.<sup>xlv</sup> The reason for this is twofold. In many countries there are few serious laws against trafficking in women. Moreover, even when a legal framework designed to combat trafficking is in place, a large gap usually exists between the law and its implementation. Enforcement is generally poor. Even when this is not the case, penalties are modest to say the least. Men arrested for trafficking are usually treated as if they committed a misdemeanor; in very few cases do their crimes elicit punishment truly commensurate with the nature of the offences. Part of the reason for this is the traditional tendency to treat prostitutes as criminals not victims, and a concern over illegal immigration that again militates against the women being treated as victims - especially if they have been brought into the country illegally or over-stayed the permitted time for visiting. When women are encouraged to testify against their tormentors this also puts them at risk as few countries have witness protection programs, and even those who do often fail to extend these programs to the victims of trafficking. What makes all this a particular dereliction of duty by law enforcement and criminal justice agencies is the high

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rate of very serious violence inflicted on many trafficking victims. According to some reports, significant numbers of Nigerian and Albanian women and girls have been killed for trying to get off the streets and out of organized prostitution.<sup>xlvi</sup>

### **9. Uncertainty About Ownership of the Problem.**

The problem with many transnational phenomena is that they are so ubiquitous that they tend to be everyone's problem. The corollary of shared ownership is that no one has primary responsibility for combating the problem. Moreover, there is a tendency to "pass the buck" and emphasize that the problem is caused by someone else. In the current debate in Europe on organized crime and corruption in general and trafficking in women in particular, the focus on Russian organized crime and the Balkans obscures the harsh reality that the market for commercial sex is in Western European countries.

### **10. Variability in Combating Trafficking**

Trafficking is not only a low risk activity it is also an activity for which the risks are unevenly distributed. As well as raising risks, therefore, these risks also need to be distributed more evenly.<sup>xlvii</sup> This requires efforts to harmonize legislation in the European Union and to impose similar and much harsher penalties. Until such conditions are established the criminals will continue to operate with little interference. As one observer noted: "they are very experienced in exploiting loopholes in national legislation and national employment practices, for example, and the approach to this should be a transnational one. Crime is becoming much more sophisticated in the way it operates and traditional approaches to law enforcement are not sufficient".<sup>xlviii</sup>

### **Inhibitors**

When looking at the list of inhibitors to trafficking in women what is most obvious is how much shorter it is than the list of facilitators. The market in women for commercial sex has had few serious obstacles: law enforcement has tended to be complacent and to give this a low priority. Legislators have exhibited outrage, but have rarely passed laws imposing penalties commensurate with the kinds of brutal crimes that are typically involved in the trafficking process. Nevertheless, there are some signs, that the market is becoming slightly less risk-free. There are certainly some law enforcement successes that suggest this criminals involved in this activity can no longer count on acting with impunity. Among the successes are the following:

- In January 2003, Lithuanian police cracked a major human trafficking ring that supplied as many as 200 Lithuanian women to Western European brothels over a several year period. Three men and a woman were arrested in the [train] station district in Vilnius along with three women who had been sold and were being prepared for a trip abroad. One of the women was only 16 which reportedly reflects a tendency for traffickers to look for younger girls with valid passports who are easy to take out of Lithuania. Two of those arrested were members of the Panevezys-based [northern Lithuania] Zemaitukai gang, which has a reputation

- for brutality. It is believed that the detained individuals had maintained contacts with Turkish organized criminal gangs and had accomplices still operating in Germany, Italy and other European countries. The Zemaitukai gang bought women from pimps operating in Lithuania made them obedient, then forged the necessary documents and moved the women to Western Europe.<sup>xlix</sup>
- A network trafficking women from Bulgaria to the Czech Republic operated for a year and a half before it was broken in June 2002. Six Bulgarian men and two women, some of them with police records, as well as a Czech man and a Slovenian woman were arrested in the operation. A Bulgarian man in a Czech prison was the major organizer. Tsvetomir Belchev, had been imprisoned in 1997 for an identical crime, but ran the operation through visitors or letter of instruction. The women worked as prostitutes in four night clubs in the northern Czech town of Chomotov. They had come to the Czech Republic with their own IDs in response to promises of well-paid jobs. Some of them left Bulgaria as career prostitutes but others were forced into prostitution after their arrival in the Czech Republic. The joint operation by Bulgarian and Czech law enforcement rescued 18 women, including 6 Bulgarians, 6 Czech and 2 Slovak women, and 4 Ukrainians.<sup>i</sup>
  - In June 2002, Albanian police in Durres and Tirana, as part of an international law enforcement campaign called Operation “Kanun”, arrested four members of a criminal organization which dealt in heroin and cocaine, and trafficked arms and women for prostitution. The arrests were part of a more extensive operation that had already resulted in over 60 previous arrests. The network operated in Genoa and Milan in northern Italy, as well as in Belgium and Switzerland and involved close cooperation between Albanian and Italian criminals. Its profits reportedly ran into the millions of dollars, much of which had been deposited in Albanian banks.<sup>ii</sup>
  - In Athens in December 2002 police broke up a criminal network involved in the trafficking of women and drugs, arresting eight people and confiscating weapons, drugs, cash, a fake passport and stolen car. Those taken into custody were 6 men and two women aged from 24 to 30. They were of varying nationalities with one Ukrainian, an Uzbekistan, 2 Kazaks a Georgian and 3 Bulgarians. Police believe that the group brought 28 women into Greece and rented and sold them for work in the sex trade.<sup>iii</sup>
  - Slovak police succeeded in breaking up a gang of sex traffickers from Nove Zamky, southwestern Slovakia, and arrested seven members of a gang that had been operating for at least three years and controlled at least 60 prostitutes. The police suspect that even a couple of public servants were involved in the trafficking. Both pimps and prostitutes sent money to the gang via banks in Germany, France, Austria and Switzerland. The organization was unusual in that

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it was led by a woman who is a career criminal and had been imprisoned for theft, fraud, and for women trafficking.<sup>liii</sup>

These arrests are notable and reflect the growing attention that governments and law enforcement agencies are given to the trafficking problem. When combined with the success of Operation Girasole they suggest that the environment in which traffickers operate is not quite as congenial as it was a few years ago. The fact that more people are getting arrested for trafficking in women is a positive sign. What remains to be seen, of course, are the kinds of penalties imposed on those who have been arrested, the lengths of prison sentences, and the extent to which imprisonment is accompanied by asset seizure and forfeiture. Indeed, a more punitive approach needs to be developed in an attempt to strengthen the inhibitors in the market. The concluding section develops this theme more fully.

## **V Conclusions**

The preceding analysis has sought to identify the market dynamics that have led to a major upsurge in the trafficking of women, the criminal networks that play a major role in connecting the supply and demand sides of the market, and the facilitators that allow the market and the networks to function effectively. What also emerges from this analysis is the paucity of inhibitors. There is no real deterrent to trafficking, the risks are low and the gains are significant. For criminals – whether individual and simply opportunist, or organized and highly coercive - it is a rational economic decision to enter and stay in this market. The aim, therefore, must be to change this calculation – both to create serious risks and to distribute them in such a way that the safe havens for the traffickers are removed. To the extent feasible, therefore, it is important to engage law enforcement agencies in Russia and the Eastern and Central European countries in joint operations such as Girasole. Yet there also has to be a recognition that sometimes there are risks in such engagement given the pervasiveness of corruption in many of these countries. Acknowledging this, however, there are still things that can be done, especially increasing the penalties for those who are convicted of trafficking; and using asset seizure and asset forfeiture laws to combat trafficking networks. This can start with the night-clubs and other premises used by the criminals for prostitution and extend to all property of convicted traffickers. Taking the profit out of the crime is not a complete answer but is an important component of a more comprehensive approach.

Following on from this and given the major role that is now played by organized crime in trafficking in women and children, the adoption of classic law enforcement weapons to fight organized crime – electronic surveillance, infiltration of the organization, the use of controlled deliveries and other undercover operations - is essential. The adoption and use of RICO type legislation or laws that prohibit criminal association enables law enforcement to attack criminal structures and when combined with asset forfeiture offers law enforcement a much more potent arsenal than has been available. At the same time, it is worth emphasizing that – as Girasole revealed – the networks are often highly

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distributed and, therefore, difficult to attack as there is no obvious center of gravity. At the same time, one clear point of vulnerability is the intersection of the underworld and the upperworld, something that is exemplified in the use of travel agents and hotels and embodied even more in the networks of facilitation created by the political-criminal nexus. Going after the links between criminals and their protectors, whether in government or the police, is critical to combating organized crime in general and, as we have seen, has considerable relevance to attacking women trafficking.

The other aspect of risk creation is that it has to be extended to the customers. The changed nature of prostitution makes those who visit them and use their services wholly complicit in the trafficking and exploitation processes. This is not a victimless crime and the customers need to recognize that they are a large part of the problem.

It is at this point that the law enforcement component intersects and overlaps with other parts of what has to be a holistic strategy. Part of this is education which has to be directed both at the women who are potential victims of trafficking and at the customers who are the ultimate reason for the trafficking. Along with education is empowerment. Repressive and indeed punitive strategies against the traffickers need to be combined with both sensitive and empowering approaches to the victims of trafficking. Witness protection measures and special treatment of victims in terms of immigration are important measures that need to be introduced.

In the final analysis, the trafficking of women and children for commercial sex is a symptom of the growing disorder and the breakdown of governance – globally regionally and nationally – that has characterized many parts of the world since the end of the Cold War. The implication is that it is a problem that is going to get worse before it gets better. The experience of the 1990s reveals very clearly that unless more measures can be taken to reduce the role of organized crime, trafficking in women will continue to expand. So too will the human misery it creates.

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