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# **HOW CAN CIVIL SOCIETY COUNTER ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE WESTERN BALKANS?**

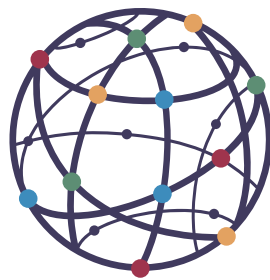
INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ROUNDTABLE ENGAGEMENTS  
WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS ACROSS THE REGION

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October 2019





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October 2019

Cover photo: An anti-government protest outside the prime minister's office, Tirana, Albania, 21 June 2019.  
REUTERS/Florion Goga

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# Contents

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Introduction .....	1
Organized-crime hotspots in the Western Balkans.....	1
Engaging with civil society in a regional context .....	3
Identifying organized crime in the Western Balkans .....	3
A necessary but inconvenient relationship .....	4
Identifying critical voices .....	6
The role of the economy .....	7
Freedom of information – but only for some .....	8
The culture of corruption .....	9
A way forward for civil society in the Western Balkans .....	11
Acknowledgements .....	12
Notes .....	13



# Introduction

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In July 2018, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) launched the Civil Society Observatory to Counter Organized Crime in South Eastern Europe. The observatory focuses on the so-called 'Western Balkan Six', namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo,\* Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Since the establishment of the observatory, a regional network has been created to support civil society through information exchanges and knowledge-building activities. The network mobilizes individuals and groups (from non-governmental organizations, academia and the media) to work together on tackling organized crime and corruption, and building strong institutions.

On 21 May 2019, the GI-TOC released a regional vulnerability report titled 'Hotspots of organized crime in the Western Balkans'.<sup>1</sup> The report identifies places of interest and patterns of organized crime across the region. Investigating the Western Balkan Six, the report uncovers the interconnectedness of illicit activities and organized-criminal groups in the region. It also shows how political elites often provide an umbrella of protection for criminal groups and their activities, while criminal groups, in turn, help the political elites to enrich themselves.<sup>2</sup> In this geopolitical context, space for civil society is shrinking.

One of aims of the observatory is to engage civil-society actors in the Western Balkans. This is why the report was presented at the local level during a regional tour in June 2019.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of the tour was to provide a platform for stakeholders to convene and debate organized crime and corruption. The report was a departure point for discussing the role of civil society in countering organized crime and evaluating possibilities for future engagement.

Roundtable discussions were held in the capital cities of the six countries (Belgrade, Sarajevo, Podgorica, Skopje, Pristina and Tirana), and were co-organized with a local partner. Representatives of local NGOs, members of the media, officials from national prosecutors' offices and members of the international community attended the events. The discussions brought to the fore the concerns that civil society faces in countering organized crime in the region.<sup>4</sup>

The discussion points and findings of these roundtables are summarized in this document, including key themes that emerged, such as how to define organized-crime in the region, the symbiotic relationship between the state and criminal groups, how the political economy influences the emergence of regional criminal hotspots, and challenges faced by the media.

## Organized-crime hotspots in the Western Balkans

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Organized crime is by no means a new phenomenon in the Western Balkans. Yet, despite its pervasiveness in the six countries, regional analyses remain scarce.<sup>5</sup> Information is often anecdotal in character, and data limited and unreliable. Standards and definitions vary across the six countries, which makes data difficult to compare.

To understand how organized crime developed in the region, it is imperative to look at the political-historical context of the Balkans. The break-up of Yugoslavia and the end of communism brought about dramatic changes in the political and economic architecture of the region. The creation of new states led to inter- and intra-state

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\* References to Kosovo throughout this report are made without prejudice to positions on status, and are in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.







### The Western Balkans 'Six'

tensions, administrative structures capable of being exploited and, of course, numerous new national borders. To this day, smuggling operations in the region often take place at regular border crossings, facilitated by low levels of border control.<sup>6</sup>

Looking at the political economy of the region, it becomes clear which structures and factors enable the spread of organized crime: so-called 'hotspots' have emerged in places where economic vulnerability is high and governance is weak.<sup>7</sup>

Because the Balkans form a transit region for illicit activity, most hotspots are places where commodities can enter and leave – seaports, airports and border crossings – and they are usually situated along major transit routes. Therefore, it is possible to map the regional geography of organized crime, as well as the places where it thrives, for example where it is closely linked to the state.<sup>8</sup>

The countries that make up the Western Balkans are closely connected on a national and transnational level. This interconnectedness is key to economic development, but it also facilitates the spread of organized crime. Criminal groups from different countries smuggle illicit products across the region, and are themselves widely connected. For example, groups in Kosovo are closely connected to those in Albania, Montenegro and Serbia, but also to criminal networks originating outside the region, for instance in Turkey. Although the impact of organized crime is usually measured on a national level and is felt locally, organized-criminal groups often work in regional networks and reap their profits transnationally.<sup>9</sup>

Organized crime in the Western Balkans is constantly changing. While the production of cannabis in Albania has been declining since 2017, it is believed that cocaine is increasingly entering the region through the ports of Bar, Durrës and Vlora.<sup>10</sup> Organized crime in the Western Balkans is also increasingly taking on an international character. Groups are becoming more sophisticated and are taking over new markets within the EU, they are increasingly controlling the supply of cocaine from Latin America to Western Europe and have been linked to



shootings in South Africa.<sup>11</sup> The major cities in the region are used to launder money from illicit activities, such as through construction projects.<sup>12</sup> Current trends also point to a surge in human-smuggling activities and increased cybercrime in the region.

## Engaging with civil society in a regional context

Actors involved in fighting organized crime in the Western Balkans face similar challenges, and organized crime in the region is transnational in nature. Yet every country also has its own particular set of characteristics.

Civil-society organizations actively participated in the various regional roundtables. They represent an important voice in the region, with a long history and a wide portfolio. According to Dr Eldan Mujanović, professor of criminology at Sarajevo University, there are more than 25 000 registered NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina alone. Yet, few of them have a particular focus on organized crime and corruption, and those who do work in this area tend not to focus on organized crime itself, but rather on its impact and the victims.

State funding is available to regional civil-society organizations, but is very limited and often comes with a bias. Many local civil-society actors rely on international donors, which helps ensure the independence of their work. International funding also provides them with an additional layer of security when confronting national governments. According to a think tank representative from Montenegro, security is a form of support that can turn out to be even more valuable than the initial financial contribution.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of organized crime and corruption, the role of civil society in the Western Balkans – and globally, for that matter – is to investigate the topic, raise awareness, monitor government responses and maintain pressure on state institutions. This way, civil society can influence the public and the authorities, by promoting initiatives to combat organized crime. Yet, this is almost impossible without sufficient resources. An NGO representative from Albania noted that ‘there are so few people working for NGOs that all of us need to perform two to three jobs at once’.<sup>14</sup> Hence, to maintain pressure on the authorities and have a meaningful impact, it is fundamental to strengthen the capacity of civil society in the region.

The governments in the Western Balkans have been described as ‘stabilocracies’ – in other words, countries that claim to provide stability, but whose institutions are subject to state capture.<sup>15</sup> Montenegro, for example, has been controlled by the same party since its independence in 2006. And in Kosovo, a system characterized by patronage has recently emerged with a handful of people not only controlling the economy, but also the distribution of political power. In this context, the space for civil society is shrinking as media freedom becomes more restricted and a toxic political discourse is fuelled.

It is critical that the space is created for civil society to engage in the fight against transnational crime and corruption, and that civil-society representatives are motivated and supported to push for change. Many young people are very critical of the political situation in their countries. They are open and frank about identifying the root causes of corruption and organized crime. This is a positive sign for the region.

The following sections provide examples of the kinds of challenges that civil society faces in the Western Balkans, generally, and specific issues that were raised during the regional roundtables in June 2019.

## Identifying organized crime in the Western Balkans

It is vital to have in place a clear definition of organized crime. Yet, when engaging with civil society across the region, it soon becomes apparent that different actors conceive of the underlying problem in different ways. Some interpret organized crime as illicit drug consumption or distribution, others believe it refers to serious crime, while others believe organized crime implies state or government involvement.





### A state of flux in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Migrants on their way to Western Europe remain a major security concern in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially now that foreign criminal groups are becoming more active in the country. The GI-TOC's 'Hotspots of organized crime' report did not highlight migrant smuggling in this country, but it will be important to monitor the situation in the future.



The challenge of arriving at a coherent definition is not limited to the region. The UN on Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) does not provide a precise definition, nor does it list the kinds of crimes it might constitute to allow broader applicability. Agreeing on a clear definition that is acceptable to all governments in the UN context may not be realistic. Even during the roundtables, participants could not agree on a common denominator. Nevertheless, they all voiced the clear need to at least achieve regional consensus on what organized crime is.

The abovementioned hotspots report, following the UNTOC definition,<sup>16</sup> defines organized crime as an illicit activity performed over a period of time, by a group of three or more people in order to obtain a financial or other material benefit. Focusing on certain illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, the smuggling of weapons and counterfeit goods, and human trafficking and human smuggling, the report identifies close connections between the state and organized-criminal groups in the Western Balkans. While it argues that close cooperation between criminal networks and government officials cannot be regarded as a precondition for organized crime in the region, it is regarded nevertheless as a closely enmeshed relationship that facilitates its spread.<sup>17</sup>

While the list of crimes mentioned in the report is not exhaustive, especially as new types of crime emerge, such as cybercrime, it serves as a useful starting point for discussion among civil-society actors and the state. It may also serve as a basis for further investigations, and facilitate the standardization of the gathering of statistical data.

### A necessary but inconvenient relationship

In Kosovo, a chief prosecutor who leads the national agencies tasked with fighting organized crime is himself accused of being complicit in corruption.<sup>18</sup> Similar cases abound across the region, which points to states' protection of organized crime.

The relationship between the state and organized-criminal groups in the region has been widely analyzed,<sup>19</sup> providing numerous examples of the symbiotic relationship between political elites and criminal groups. Power is based on political clientelism. An example can be seen in how criminal groups finance party funding and provide other support (such as buying votes) during election campaigns. In return, individual politicians or the party provides political protection for criminal activities.<sup>20</sup>



“Drug smuggling is not the biggest problem in Kosovo, as consumption in the country is generally low. It is the nepotism in tenders and failed state projects that have an even larger effect.”

NGO REPRESENTATIVE, KOSOVO

State capture needs to be addressed both by civil society and governmental institutions. Describing the extent of nepotism in Kosovo, one NGO representative said: ‘Drug smuggling is not the biggest problem in Kosovo, as consumption in the country is generally low. It is the nepotism in tenders and failed state projects that have an even larger effect on society and state institutions.’<sup>21</sup> Unless there is political will to fight organized crime, and corrupt officials are investigated and removed from key positions in office, there will be little incentive for civil society to cooperate. Crimes often go unreported, as the officials involved are seen to serve their own agenda.

The state’s official strategies to counter organized crime in the region are often perceived as mere lip service used to increase political ratings. For example, in Belgrade journalists described the state as selective and favouring one organized criminal group over another.<sup>22</sup>

To restore civil society’s relationship with the government, it needs to challenge it and keep it in check – while also acknowledging and supporting sincere efforts and creating space for cooperation. In Albania, for example, NGOs, the media and prosecutors successfully worked together to stop the construction of hydropower plants and dams in the Osum and Vjosa rivers over environmental concerns.<sup>23</sup> Such collaborations show what can be achieved through well-coordinated collective efforts. Developing this kind of positive relationship will require civil-society actors to establish good points of contact within each relevant governmental agency.

### Uniting against organized crime in Albania

There is a general need for greater collaboration between state authorities, civil-society organizations and the media in Albania, just as in all Western Balkan countries. All parties rely on one another and need to share information to fight organized crime. It is not only important to bring criminals to justice, but also to change the culture of corruption and criminality, and provide young people with viable alternatives to organized crime.



## Strengthening civil society in Serbia

Civil society in Serbia often lacks both the capacity and the resources to face organized crime and corruption challenges, particularly at the local level. Actors are often intimidated by the local political establishment. Civil society in Serbia needs support to grow and enhance its anti-crime portfolio. During organized-crime-oriented discussions and seminars, experiences can be exchanged and capacities expanded. Closer cooperation among NGOs in the region will provide them with a stronger network of expertise.



## Identifying critical voices

The further one moves away from the region's capital cities, the more the voice of civil society fades. For example, in Nis – a crime hotspot of around 260 000 inhabitants in south-east Serbia – there is only one NGO and one media outlet. This is partly due to a lack of funding, as 80 per cent of international funding goes to NGOs in Belgrade.<sup>24</sup> But even if local activities were to be funded, such financial backing is often short-lived and unpredictable.

There is also a lack of capacity and training to deal with organized crime outside of the capital cities. People are reluctant to get involved, as governments in the region tend to take a ruthless approach to those who oppose them. 'Wives lose their jobs, just because their husbands speak freely,' said a local activist in Serbia.<sup>25</sup> Without protection, many simply decide that it is not worth the risk.

“Wives lose their jobs, just because their husbands speak freely.”

ACTIVIST, SERBIA

It is clear that raising awareness of organized crime and corruption will require amplifying the capacity of local NGOs and media outlets. Corruption and nepotism are not only concentrated at the national level. In fact, grey zones can be identified all around the region. This is particularly true for border crossings, where states exert little control and even the rule of law is not clearly defined – for instance in northern Kosovo.<sup>26</sup> In these areas, where it is easy



for organized-criminal groups to take hold, it is especially important to strengthen the capacity of the civil-society sector. It is also important to support the critical voices that already exist across the region and work hard to identify the root causes of organized crime and corruption.

## The role of the economy

“Economic vulnerability is a key factor in the emergence of regional organized-crime hotspots.”

The economic and political context greatly influences the development of organized crime in the Western Balkans. Economic vulnerability is a key factor in the emergence of regional organized-crime hotspots.

Although unemployment is falling in the region, it is three times higher than the EU average, at 19.7%, and many people are trapped in long-term unemployment.<sup>27</sup> In addition, citizens in hotspots typically have incomes that are far below the national average. This leads to a significant brain drain and limits prospects for economic recovery.<sup>28</sup>

Organized crime has captured many economies in the Western Balkans. Albania is probably the most prominent example, where large-scale cultivation of cannabis in 2016 had a serious impact on the country's economic performance. Though the situation has changed, organized-criminal groups continue to have widespread economic power, which they can use to exert influence. Journalists in Albania said that in the last four to five years, they have observed an increase in loan sharking, which constitutes a significant risk for businesses across the region.<sup>29</sup> In societies where the political elite and criminal groups are so closely related, and the public sector is one of the biggest employers, holding the public purse enables considerable influence.

### Anti-corruption as a condition for economic growth in North Macedonia



In North Macedonia, institutions lack accountability. Even when journalists discover activities related to organized crime, they are often unable to report them to the relevant agencies, who



appear 'not to serve the people, but only their own agenda'. Systemic corruption is widespread. Anti-corruption measures constitute the base for economic growth, and if corruption is to be prevented, it must first be detected and sanctioned.

The current economic situation in the Western Balkans means that the youth in particular have lost confidence in the region's development. In 2014, the president of the European Commission announced a five-year halt to enlargement of its membership.<sup>30</sup> Today, with organized crime having gained a strong foothold in the region and continued widespread scepticism among the EU 28, accession to the EU appears to have become more elusive. At the same time, other geopolitical powers, most notably China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, have an increasing





presence in the region. Montenegro, for example, is currently constructing a highway financed by Chinese loans. While this has allowed them to invest in long-needed infrastructure, many countries have also seen their debt rising and are becoming overly dependent on Beijing.<sup>31</sup>

With a lack of prospects and sluggish economic development, organized crime appears to have become more embedded. Guaranteed economic security will remain a priority if the link between the authorities and organized-criminal groups is to be disrupted.

## Freedom of information – but only for some

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“In a country where journalists are killed, it is difficult to talk about media freedoms”

JOURNALIST, MONTENEGRO

Investigative journalists are an essential part of civil society and play a key role in bringing organized crime to light and raising awareness among the public. Yet the capacity of investigative journalists is limited. In Kosovo, for example, journalists note that the systematic coverage of organized crime remains restricted, while the media mostly report on topics related to politics, economic transition and corruption.<sup>32</sup>

Members of the media in the Western Balkans face huge challenges. ‘In a country where journalists are killed,<sup>33</sup> it is difficult to talk about media freedoms,’ said a journalist from Montenegro.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, attacks on journalists are not uncommon.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to an insecure working environment, journalists are hampered by lack of access to information. Few government agencies are willing to cooperate with the media and a great deal of information is declared confidential.<sup>36</sup> Even when information is shared, fact-checking is an arduous but necessary step, as there is a high risk that information might have been manipulated.

Journalists lamented how ‘there are real efforts by the government to cover up the important stories’.<sup>37</sup> Corrupt officials hold office in government agencies, while criminals feel they are untouchable and increasingly challenge the media. Yet, whereas the supply of data from government agencies to civil society is unforthcoming or scarce, government officials reportedly provide information to criminal networks.

Criminal groups are also assumed to influence the media, some of whom report selectively on their opponents’ illicit activities. In Montenegro, especially, tabloid campaigns have been developed against investigative media outfits in an attempt to discredit them and their employees.<sup>38</sup>

The media in the Western Balkans is also challenged by the fact that few whistle-blowers step forward from within the government to share information with civil society. It appears as if government interests and those of civil society are in conflict – energy that ought to be channelled towards cooperation.

“The heroes of our story are the police officers who do their work properly and all those citizens who report on crime.”

JUDGE, NORTH MACEDONIA



### Limited access to information and fake news in Montenegro

There is no access to reliable information on organized crime in Montenegro. Civil-society actors struggle to obtain information from the authorities, which tend not to cooperate. In the few cases where information is shared, it is unclear whether it is correct and remains difficult to fact-check. In Montenegro, very few NGOs and investigative journalists deal with organized crime.



Many recognize the need for rapid change in the state's relationship with the media, and government agencies are frequently called upon to share information on court cases and hearings with the media in an attempt to provide transparency. A judge from Gevgelija, North Macedonia said: 'The heroes of our story are the police officers who do their work properly and all those citizens who report on crime.'<sup>39</sup> This should be acknowledged as a positive first step, while the media should also be encouraged to share information and data on organized crime with prosecutors to support investigations.

Being in control of the news means power – and civil society needs to use this power to combat transnational organized crime. Said one journalist: 'Society in Kosovo forgets quickly, so it is up to us journalists to introduce new topics to the news cycle in order to push back.'<sup>40</sup>

## The culture of corruption

Tackling organized crime and corruption were identified as preconditions for EU accession.<sup>41</sup> As mentioned, the process of EU integration has seemingly come to a halt for countries in the region. Frustrated civil-society organizations in all six Western Balkan countries reasoned that, without the promise of EU membership, there will be no appetite among the NGO and media to stand up and fight against organized crime. There is a deep-seated fear that the status quo will not change without external pressure. However, tackling organized crime needs to go further than merely reaping the potential reward of joining the EU: what is needed in the region is to end society's tolerance of crime.

Nor is tackling organized crime and corruption in the Western Balkans solely a question of introducing a new set of laws or putting people in jail. As an NGO representative from Kosovo said: 'We have filled up the prisons of the Balkans with drug dealers and addicts. But it is easy to present evidence in such cases, as there is no danger to corrupt state officials. Going forward, it will be fundamental to provide less space to corrupt behaviour in the first place.'<sup>42</sup>





### Investigative journalism in Kosovo

There are many excellent journalists in Kosovo, yet few are trained to investigate organized crime. Since the country's independence, Kosovo's media have become preoccupied with so many issues that the topic of organized crime has been neglected. Civil society and the general media need to start raising awareness about organized crime and its links to corruption.



“We have filled up the prisons of the Balkans with drug dealers and addicts. But it is easy to present evidence in such cases, as there is no danger to corrupt state officials.”

NGO REPRESENTATIVE, KOSOVO

This requires raising awareness of the impact of organized crime on people's daily lives and providing alternative solutions. The activities of criminal organizations have become so commonplace in Balkan society that the public seems to have lost their moral compass. For example, it was said that, in Sarajevo, citizens prefer not to report corruption because doing so puts police officers in an 'uncomfortable situation'.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, civil servants need to be sufficiently remunerated, so that they can resist the temptation of bribery.<sup>44</sup>

The rule of law is not just a duty that resides in state institutions: it also has a cultural dimension. In addition to police officers and the judiciary, citizens also need to stop pursuing their own self-interests outside the parameters of the law. Changes will only occur once it is clear that corrupt behaviour can and will be detected by the state, and that there are sanctions to such behaviour.

Civil-society representatives noted that in many hotspots across the Balkans, criminal groups have become role models to young people in areas prone to organized crime.<sup>45</sup> For example, northern Albania has been identified as a ready recruiting ground for gangs operating in Western Europe, especially in the UK.<sup>46</sup>

Public office-holders and civil-society actors need to provide alternatives to young people and inform the public about the consequences of corrupt behaviour. This will only be possible if all actors involved are transparent and report illicit activities, whether it is petty crime or collusion at the highest levels.



# A way forward for civil society in the Western Balkans

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The findings outlined in ‘Hotspots of organized crime in the Western Balkans’ were reiterated during the regional tour roundtable discussions. Chief among these is that organized crime and corruption are closely interlinked in the region, and organized crime cannot be tackled without uprooting corruption. The ecosystem of crime is characterized by a form of systemic corruption – a type of joint-venture relationship between state structures and criminal groups.<sup>47</sup>

In this context, the space for civil society is shrinking. In the Western Balkans, lack of information and financial incentives to investigate and monitor organized crime pose an ongoing obstacle. This means the extent and seriousness of the situation often go underreported.

Civil-society organizations and the media are central to a comprehensive response to organized crime. Their capacities need to be expanded, and especially to more remote parts of the region, by supporting local initiatives. NGOs also need to cooperate with one another and they need a reliable media sector to report their activities to.

Because organized crime is not just a national but a regional issue, civil society also needs to foster greater regional cooperation. Systematic exchange of information could be a significant first step in this direction. For example, a meeting could be organized to exchange information and ideas in the regional reports published by the UNODC, Siracusa International Institute and the GI-TOC. Just as crime is organized by and through networks, civil society must also act as a counter-network.

Yet it is also important to underline that it is not civil society’s sole responsibility to combat organized crime and corruption. As has been outlined above, it is fundamental to create room for civil society to maintain a monitoring role over state institutions.

In July 2018, five of the Western Balkan Six pledged their continuing commitment to the fight against corruption in preparation for the London Summit of the Berlin Process (an initiative to boost regional cooperation among Western Balkan states and guide their regional integration).<sup>48</sup> While these anti-corruption pledges were ambitious and far-reaching, they did not include a specific monitoring process.<sup>49</sup> In response, six regional civil society anti-corruption experts were appointed by the GI-TOC to develop a monitoring initiative in dialogue with the governments, and where possible facilitated by the Berlin Process.

Investing in the capacity of civil-society organizations, academia and investigative reporting should be prioritized. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there is a general sense of ‘training fatigue’ in the Western Balkans. During the roundtables, representatives emphasized that they do not want more reports or working groups, but the space to gather and discuss what can be achieved with the tools they already have at their disposal. Participants – both from the government as well as civil society – welcomed the initiative and the opportunity to discuss the situation frankly at the roundtables of the regional tour. This can be interpreted as a positive sign for the future.

Organized crime in the Western Balkans remains a considerable concern. Tackling corruption in government is a priority for each state, but it should also be kept in mind that organized crime does not recognize nation states or borders – and the region is encircled by EU member states, which are the main demand markets for illicit goods transiting the region.

Organized-criminal groups in the Western Balkans are a step ahead of those who work to combat them. They have graduated to new markets, explored new continents and use advanced technologies, while regional states continue to regard them as a national problem and lack access to technology.<sup>50</sup> While governments and civil society have mainly addressed the problem on paper, the effects of organized-criminal groups are very real and detrimental to every aspect of society.



Researchers in the region warn that organized-criminal groups in the Western Balkans have not yet reached the height of their influence or extent. While combating the evolution of these groups will necessitate developing and accessing more sophisticated technology, tackling organized crime and corruption also depends on human factors and interventions, some of which were highlighted by participants in the roundtable events.

Nevertheless, there is some hope for the region. There is currently a window of opportunity in the Western Balkans for civil society, as government institutions in many countries are still new. This means that civil society can work with these agencies from an early phase, contribute to the development of these institutions and intercept linkages between them and criminal networks before they become too closely entangled. In this way, a significant first step can be taken to shape transparent, effective and crime-proof institutions.

## Acknowledgements

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This report is an output of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime's (GI-TOC) Civil Society Observatory to Counter Organized Crime in South Eastern Europe.

The observatory is a platform that connects and empowers civil-society actors in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. It aims to enable civil society to identify, analyze and map criminal trends, and their impact on illicit flows, governance, development, inter-ethnic relations, security and the rule of law, and supports them in their monitoring of national dynamics and wider regional and international organized-crime trends. The observatory was launched as an outcome of the 2018 Western Balkans Summit in London, a part of the Berlin Process.

This report is based on contributions by civil-society actors across the Western Balkans. We thank them for their valuable contributions, and frank and constructive engagement.

The findings and conclusions draw upon the inputs of Fatjona Mejdini, Ugljesa Zvekic, Johanna Borstner, Fabian Zhilla, Odd Malme and Mark Shaw.

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## Notes

- 1 The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Hotspots of organized crime in the Western Balkans: Local vulnerabilities in a regional context, May 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/oc-western-balkans/>.
- 2 Ibid., 7–34.
- 3 The roundtables organized during the regional tour included Belgrade, Serbia (14 June 2019); Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (17 June 2019); Podgorica, Montenegro (20 June 2019); Skopje, North Macedonia (21 June 2019); Pristina, Kosovo (21 June 2019); and Tirana, Albania (24 June 2019). Discussions were conducted in local languages.
- 4 The textboxes throughout this document highlight central concerns that the participants described in each country.
- 5 This is now changing, however, with two additional studies being published by the UNODC (Measuring and assessing organized crime in the Western Balkans: Supporting evidence-based policy – to be published later in 2019), and the Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights (Strengthening the fight against illicit trade in South Eastern Europe).
- 6 Remarks made by Ugjesa Zvekic, Ambassador, Permanent Observer of the European Public Law to the United Nations, during his presentation at the roundtables in Sarajevo, 17 June 2019, and Podgorica, 20 June 2019.
- 7 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Hotspots of organized crime in the Western Balkans: Local vulnerabilities in a regional context, 7 May 2019, p 7, <https://globalinitiative.net/oc-western-balkans/>.
- 8 Ibid., 30–35.
- 9 Ibid., 35.
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