

PRESS RELEASE

NEW REPORT REVEALS LINKS BETWEEN FOOTBALL HOOLIGANISM, POLITICS AND CRIME IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The report found that 78 out of 122 fan groups in the Western Balkans are 'ultras' – passionate and well-organized associations of football fans. However, 21 of these 78 groups can be considered hooligans, posing a security risk.

The report '*Dangerous games: Football hooliganism, politics and organized crime in the Western Balkans*' offers an overview of organized football fan associations in the region, identifies differences between ultras and hooligans, and describes the nexus between these groups and violence, politics and crime.

Football is a beloved sport in the Western Balkans. However, hooliganism has become a problem because of its links to politics, nationalism, violence and organized crime in the region, although these connections are not uniform across the Western Balkans.

According to Sasa Djordjevic, co-author of the report and field coordinator for Serbia and Montenegro at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), '*hooligans in the Western Balkans are renowned for using violence, especially in derbies and against the police. What is less known is that local politicians sometimes use hooligans to advance their interests and in some cases there are links between hooligans and criminal groups*'.

'Ultras groups are usually well-organized. This gives youngsters something they may lack elsewhere – structure, rules for promotion, a sense of community, identity and belonging. Control of the stands can lead to control of the streets. Loyalty to the group is vital to be assigned by leaders to engage in illicit activities, such as selling drugs; providing security at sports events, political rallies and nightclubs; and extortion,' said Ruggero Scaturro, analyst at the GI-TOC and co-author of the report.

Although the degree of the use of violence and involvement in crime and politics varies from country to country, the phenomenon deserves more attention and an integrated regional approach that includes state representatives, the judiciary, sports associations, political party representatives, the media, academia and civil society. The report includes recommendations for stakeholders to better respond to football hooliganism in the region.

The report is based on data and analysis collected by the GI-TOC's Observatory of Illicit Economies in South-Eastern Europe through interviews with football fans, journalists and experts, and secondary sources such as media and academic articles.

About the Global Initiative

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a network of professionals working on the front lines of the fight against the illicit economy and criminal actors. Through a network of global civil society observatories on the illicit economy, we monitor evolving trends and work to build the evidence basis for policy action, disseminate the expertise of our Network, and catalyze multisectoral and holistic responses across a range of crime types. With the Global Initiative's Resilience Fund, we support community activists and local non-governmental organizations working in areas where crime governance critically undermines people's safety, security and life chances.

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