

Human Trafficking in South Eastern Europe

Lucia Ovidia Vreja *

Trafficking in persons is a crucially important issue in today's world, as it represents both a serious transnational threat to security and a critical challenge in the areas of human rights and law enforcement. Although the definition of trafficking in persons continues to be a subject of debate, this essay applies the definition of trafficking in human beings as stated in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which is a supplement to the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.¹ The Protocol defines trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by the threat or use of force, by abduction, fraud, deception, coercion or the abuse of power or by the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation.”

Equally open to debate—in part due to the complexity of the phenomenon of human trafficking, in part due to disputes over the differences between trafficking and smuggling—are the estimations of the scope of this phenomenon at the national, regional, and global level. For example, the estimates released annually by the U.S. State Department regarding the scope of the traffic in persons worldwide every year vary anywhere from 700,000 to 4 million in 2002, to 800,000–900,000 in 2003, to 600,000–800,000 in 2004 and 2005.² Besides the variation in the methods used for gathering data on human trafficking, the complexity of the phenomenon is also responsible for these fluctuations, as it is very hard (if not impossible) to detect and uncover every act of trafficking and every victim.

Statistics issued by the International Organization for Migration in 2001 indicate that an estimated 700,000 to 2 million women and children are trafficked globally each year, generating total worldwide revenue amounting to about USD 9.5–10 billion a year.³ Whatever numbers one chooses to use, then, it is evident that the real dimensions of the phenomenon of human trafficking are worrisome. When we take into considera-

* Lucia Ovidia Vreja is a Research Fellow at the Institute for the Political Study of Defense and Military History, Ministry of Defense, Romania.

¹ Liz Kelly, “‘You Can Find Anything you Want’: A Critical Reflection on Research on Trafficking in Persons within and into Europe,” in *Data and Research on Human Trafficking: A Global Survey* (Vienna: International Organization for Migration, 2005), 237–38; available at www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/Data_and_Research_on_Human_Trafficking.pdf.

² Ibid, 239. See also *Trafficking in Persons Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. State Department, June 2002; June 2003; June 2004; and June 2005), available at: www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

³ International Organization for Migration, “2001 Trafficking in Migrants,” *Quarterly Bulletin* 23 (April 2001). See also Irena Omelaniuk, “Trafficking in Human Beings,” United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development, UN/POP/MIG/2005/15, 8 July 2005, 3; available at www.un.org/esa/population/publications/ittmigdev2005/P15_IOMelaniuk.pdf.

tion the fact that, of the total number of people trafficked across international borders every year, 70 to 80 percent are female, 50 percent are children, and the majority of these women and girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation, the scale of the crime of human trafficking becomes difficult to comprehend.⁴

At the regional level in South Eastern Europe, the traffic in human beings—as is true of most other forms of organized crime—“represents a very serious and growing threat, not only for the countries in the region, but also for the rest of Europe,”⁵ since “the Balkans have become the gateway to Europe for organized criminals.”⁶ Human trafficking is an issue of critical importance in South Eastern Europe not only because it infringes upon and challenges the protection of human rights, but also because it has the potential to undermine the process of democratization, discredit the rule of law, weaken efforts to reform and build institutions, promote corruption, and even to threaten the stabilization process in the region.

With respect to the scope of human trafficking in South Eastern Europe, it is worth mentioning that the five most common countries of origin in the database of the International Organization for Migration are in this region: Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, Belarus, and Bulgaria. Likewise, the four most important destination countries or regions where IOM has offered assistance to victims are the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania – all also in South Eastern Europe.⁷ This traffic in persons has become one of the main lines of business of organized criminals in the region. It is estimated that, till 2003, Balkan criminal networks have been responsible for the trafficking of 200,000 to 700,000 persons worldwide, mainly for forced prostitution.⁸

Root Causes of Trafficking in Persons in South Eastern Europe

Without being exhaustive, and in no order of importance, the following factors have been identified as the most common roots of human trafficking in Southeastern Europe.

1. The Transition to a Free-Market Economy

The process of economic transition in the countries of South Eastern Europe has led to a decrease in the quality of life and the accelerated spread of poverty to a large portion of the population. For example, in Romania, the poverty rate reached 44 percent in

⁴ *Trafficking in Persons Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. State Department, June 2005); available at www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005, 6.

⁵ *The London Statement*, delivered at “Defeating Organized Crime in South Eastern Europe,” Lancaster House Ministerial Conference, London, 25 November 2002.

⁶ David Blunkett, Home Secretary, Speech at “Defeating Organized Crime in South Eastern Europe,” Lancaster House Ministerial Conference, London, 25 November 2002.

⁷ IOM, *World Migration 2005*, Section 3, International Migration Data and Statistics, 418; available at www.iom.int/documents/publication/wmr_sec03.pdf.

⁸ EU, “A Secure Europe in a Better World – European Security Strategy,” Brussels, 12 December 2003; available at <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

2000, compared to 7 percent in 1989.⁹ Women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have been particularly vulnerable to trafficking networks because the post-socialist transition has displaced many women, and because the “feminization of poverty” has been particularly acute in these former socialist countries.¹⁰ At the same time, the transition process in the countries of South Eastern Europe has led—as a secondary effect—to the weakening of state institutions. At the same time, these institutions also became even more vulnerable in the face of widespread corruption; it is estimated that the degree of the increase in criminal activity in most countries in the region is inversely proportional to the successes that the respective states have achieved in implementing democratic and market economy reforms.¹¹ Therefore, the difficult economic conditions in the countries of the region have made both the victims and the traffickers highly susceptible: the victims to the promise of a better life, and the traffickers to the possibility of gaining huge sums of money with minimal or no investment.

2. The Opening of the Borders

It is known that much of the “new” trade in human beings has emerged from the former socialist bloc since the opening of the borders at the beginning of the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War.¹² Trafficking in persons is not a new phenomenon.¹³ Yet, starting in the 1990s, it dramatically increased in scope. For example, in the case of Romania, the number of persons and vehicles crossing the state’s borders increased by a factor of three, while the number of illegal crossings of the border increased by a factor of sixty. Since then, clandestine migration has continued to grow and become more diversified, both in terms of the practices used and the people trafficked.¹⁴

⁹ *White Book of Government* (Bucharest: Government of Romania, 1999). See also *Trafficking in Children Report – Romania* (in Romanian) (Bucharest: Save the Children-Romania, March 2004), 3; available at www.salvaticopiii.ro/romania/resurse/rap_trafic_Romania.pdf.

¹⁰ Valentine M. Moghadam, “The Feminization of Poverty and Women’s Human Rights,” available at http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/file_download.php/1ec293d182a88561926ecaac403c5642Feminization+of+poverty.pdf.

¹¹ “Transnational organized crime – a threat to the global market” (in Romanian), Romanian Intelligence Service, 2003; available at <http://www.sri.ro/pdfuri/1-12-2002-crima%20organizata.pdf>.

¹² Louise Shelley, “Human Trafficking: Transnational Crime and Links with Terrorism,” Statement to the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Human Rights, 25 June 2003; available at http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/Archive_Index/Human_Trafficking_Transnational_Crime_and_Links_with_Terrorism.html.

¹³ “Human Beings Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation” (in Romanian), Recommendation No. R (2000) 11, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 19 May 2000; The Explicative Report, available at: [www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_Rec\(2000\)11_Romanian.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_Rec(2000)11_Romanian.pdf).

¹⁴ *Some Aspects on the Evolution of Criminality in Romania in 1990–2003* (in Romanian) (Bucharest: Institute for the Study and Prevention of Criminality, Romanian Police, 2003); available at www.politiaromana.ro/Prevenire/studii.htm.

Migration to the countries of Western Europe, be it legal or illegal, represents for most migrants mainly a solution to poverty, and offers a chance of living a better life. Against this background, it is obvious that many persons could very easily fall victim to traffickers when searching for assistance in migrating, or in finding a job abroad. Moreover, the opening of the borders has led not only to the increase of cooperation at all levels between countries in countering illegal immigration, but also to the rise of organized criminal activity, including human trafficking.

3. *The Existence of a Developed “Black Market”*

As is the case of all forms of organized crime, the existence of a developed “black market”—even since the communist period—has played a major role in the establishment and development of illegal networks and routes of traffic. All the centralized economies of Eastern Europe harbored developed black markets, due to the incapacity of the official economies to meet consumers’ basic needs.¹⁵ Against this backdrop, after 1990 different criminal groupings began to appear, taking advantage mainly of the weakness of the state and the corruption of state structures.

It is clear that traditional patterns of trade and investment also shape the trade in human beings, much as they do with the trade in other “commodities.”¹⁶ Usually, the traffickers that transport people across state borders are involved in several other forms of trafficking.¹⁷ Moreover, people involved in the traffic of other commodities can easily become traffickers in persons as well, due, on the one hand, to their familiarity with existing networks and known routes, and, on the other hand, to the high revenues generated by human trafficking, at a relatively low risk.

4. *The Wars in the Former Yugoslavia*

The collapse of Yugoslavia and the wars that emerged led to the increase of organized criminal activities in South Eastern Europe. The need to finance the many war efforts of the various groups involved in the conflict in the region led to the appearance of a so-called “war economy,” which generated its funds from illegal activities.¹⁸ The networks and markets established during the war were maintained even after the war ended, as they had proved themselves to be very efficient. Sometimes even the peacekeeping forces were involved in such activities (mainly human trafficking and prostitution).¹⁹ Moreover, in addition to their occasional active involvement, the peacekeeping forces formed an important consumers’ market for the products of these criminal groups.²⁰ The

¹⁵ “Transnational organized crime – a threat to the global market.”

¹⁶ Shelley, “Human Trafficking: Transnational Crime and Links with Terrorism.”

¹⁷ W. Bruggeman, “Security and Combating International Organized Crime and Terrorism,” paper presented at the European Community Studies Association, December 2002, available at www.ecsanet.org/ecsaworld6/contributions/session1/Bruggeman.doc.

¹⁸ Mary Calder, “Razboaie noi si vechi (New and Old Wars),” *Antet* (1999): 117–27.

¹⁹ “Trade with Poverty, Human Beings Trafficking” (in Romanian), Report on the Human Beings Trafficking in the Balkans, Romanian Center for Journalism of Investigation, September 2003, available at www.proiect.ns/archives/000032.html.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

ethnic, religious, social, and national differences that are supposedly so deeply rooted in the Balkans disappear when it comes to the money generated by these illegal activities. For example, evidence suggests a strong link between Albanian and Serbian gangs, who saw the stabilization of the region as being against their interests.²¹

Factors Favoring the Rise of Human Trafficking

There is a long list of different factors that have contributed to the increase of human trafficking since 1990 in South Eastern Europe. The most relevant will be discussed in this section.

Social Factors

Family Situations. Many researchers have written that most of the victims of human trafficking usually come from families with low levels of education that take little or no care to promote their children's educational advancement.²² In particular, the most vulnerable females come from families with histories of abuse and domestic violence, or from homes with alcoholic parents.²³ The familial environment of the victims is also characterized by a lack of communication between parents and children, and by a general lack of care on the part of the parents for their children's future.²⁴ Many of the victims are also formerly institutionalized or "street" children, with little or no experience of domestic harmony or parental care.²⁵

Zone of Provenance. A very large portion of the victims come from poor regions of the source countries, characterized by an acute lack of employment opportunities (either big cities or poor rural areas) and by heightened levels of migration to seek work abroad.²⁶ Both the social conditions at home and the "success stories" of people who have managed to make a living abroad, or the "mirage" of a better life outside the country, are very important factors in determining a person's decision to trust a recruiter and leave home.

Lack of a Culture of Migration. The environment where the most victims come from is very often characterized by a lack of public information on institutions involved in

²¹ Glenn E. Curtis (Project Manager), *Nations Hospitable to Organized Crime and Terrorism*, Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, under an Interagency Agreement with the United States Government, October 2003, 32; available at: <http://loc.gov/rr/frd>. See also the keynote address delivered by Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime at the ISPAC Annual Conference (3-5 December 2004); available at http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/speech_2004-12-03_1.html.

²² International Organization for Migration Mission in Romania, "Who is the Next Victim? Vulnerability of Young Romanian Women to Trafficking in Human Beings," August 2003, 5-6; available at: www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/Romania_ct.pdf.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Trafficking in Children Report – Romania*, 21.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

the process of migration and on the legal possibilities of getting a job abroad.²⁷ Moreover, the potential victims have little or no information on employees' rights, or about the country to which they want to emigrate for work. In general, victims of human trafficking have an unreal image of life in Western countries, an image that recruiters do little or nothing to dispel.²⁸

Economic Factors

The high level of poverty affecting an increasingly large part of the population in South Eastern Europe, including low standards of living and low wages, make both the victims and the traffickers—including government officials—very vulnerable in the face of the temptations offered by criminals and criminal activities. The high unemployment rate in most countries in the region, coupled with very low wages for unskilled labor (many of the victims having no special training) and the insecurity of most jobs, render a substantial portion of the population of those countries—particularly women—vulnerable to becoming victims of human trafficking. For example, of the total number of 2,791 victims identified in the IOM's database in July 2004, representing thirty-five nationalities, 30 percent had had no work experience at all before they emigrated, while 57 percent had had some work experience. Half of all victims of human trafficking in this sample were employed at the time of recruitment.²⁹ Yet, for those who had work, the wages were extremely low: less than USD 50 per month for 45 percent of all victims, between USD 50–100 for 12 percent, and between USD 101–500 for only 5.25 percent of the victims.³⁰

Social Policy Factors

Most countries in the region are faced with a lack of efficient strategies and social policies to combat unemployment and poverty, as well as with a deficient educational system in relation to the requirements of the job market.³¹ The countries in the region are also characterized by a relatively new institutional framework combating human trafficking and the crimes associated with it, as well as by insufficient budgetary allotments for the implementation of national plans of combating both poverty and human trafficking.³²

Legislative Factors

An ambiguous and very often inadequate legislative framework for combating all forms of organized crime, including human trafficking, can be observed in most of the countries in the region. For example, Romania adopted a law on preventing and combating human trafficking (Law 678/2001) only in December 2001. Also the main law directed

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ IOM, *World Migration 2005*, Section 3, International Migration Data and Statistics, 418.

³⁰ Ibid, 419.

³¹ *Trafficking in Children Report—Romania*, 21–22.

³² Ibid.

at preventing and combating organized crime (Law 39/2003) defines, among other very serious felonies, pandering, human trafficking, and slavery. However, despite the measures taken in recent years by the countries of the region in the field of combating trafficking in persons, the weak performances of the official institutions of the state are still evident, both because of corruption and because of the lack of specialized personnel and equipment.³³

Corruption

South Eastern Europe is faced with a high level of corruption at all levels of society, and institutional corruption is a catalyst for producing an environment where transnational criminality can flourish.³⁴ Without the help provided by corrupt law enforcement, consular officials, diplomats, and lawyers the traffic in human beings in the region would virtually cease to exist.³⁵ Also central to the success of traffickers is the corruption of border guards, police, and personnel in the security and transport sectors. Without employees in the airports and railroad industry turning a blind eye, often after the payment of a significant sum, this form of organized crime could not proceed.³⁶

Moreover, it is not only the case that the official police in the countries of South Eastern Europe are in many cases incapable of stopping the phenomenon of human trafficking, but in certain cases police officers or other high officials are managing their own trafficking networks.³⁷ For example, in the summer of 2003, high-ranking government officials in Montenegro, including the Deputy General Prosecutor, Zoran Piperovici, were accused of direct involvement in a trafficking network; due to pressure from the international community, the case was taken over in July 2003 by an OSCE investigative commission.³⁸ And this is not a singular case.

Dimensions of Human Trafficking: The Romanian Case

Although it is hard to estimate the real scope of human trafficking in the region, some figures compiled by the Romanian police could be significant for assessing the trend of the phenomenon in recent years. For example, the findings of the Romanian police regarding illegal migration and trafficking in human beings and organs for the period 2001–2003 are as follows: the police recorded 423 offenses and 524 persons involved in 2001; 665 offences and 581 persons involved in 2002; and 1,829 offences and 1,396

³³ *Trafficking in Persons Report*, U.S. State Department, June 2005; available at: www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005.

³⁴ Transparency International, "The 2004 Corruption Perception Index," Internet Center for Corruption Research; available at: www.icgg.org/corruption.cpi_2004_data.html.

³⁵ Louise Shelley, Hearing on "Combating Transnational Crime and Corruption in Europe," Statement to the Subcommittee on European Affairs, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 30 October 2003; available at <http://www.american.edu/traccc/resources/publications/shelle03.pdf>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ "Trade with Poverty, Human Beings Trafficking."

³⁸ *Ibid.*

persons involved in 2003.³⁹ Regarding only the felony crime of trafficking in human beings, in 2003 the Romanian police arrested 187 persons under the law on preventing and combating human trafficking and dismantled 283 criminal trafficking networks.⁴⁰

Although Romanian judges sentenced forty-nine individuals in 2003 as compared to zero in 2002, the penalties in twenty-seven cases ranged from one to ten years in prison, and in the remaining twenty-two cases were a year or less.⁴¹ Based on these data, it is not hard to assume that a one-year or less prison sentence is an easy punishment for a trafficker, who could easily resume his activity after serving his time.

With respect to the involvement of government officials in human trafficking, in 2003 the Romanian authorities sent two trafficking-related corruption cases for prosecution, and investigated fifteen police officials for trafficking-related corruption crimes. These investigations resulted in two dismissals; the other thirteen investigations were still ongoing at the time of the report.⁴²

In 2004, the Romanian police arrested 107 persons for trafficking in persons, of which 100 were Romanians and 7 foreigners. They also dismantled thirty criminal trafficking networks, which were responsible for having trafficked 210 women for purposes of prostitution, and 1,676 persons for the purpose of begging.⁴³ Romanian judges convicted 109 traffickers. In addition, 81 police officials were investigated for trafficking-related corruption cases, resulting in administrative sanctions for thirty-one officials, ten dismissals, and forty cases sent forward for prosecution.⁴⁴ One's attention is drawn to the relatively high number of officials involved in human trafficking cases in 2004, which is clear evidence of the importance of corruption in perpetuating this crime and of the huge attraction this criminal activity can exert upon people—including those paid for combating it—due to the large sums of money that can be gained with relatively little or no investment.

Recent Trends in Human Trafficking in South Eastern Europe

The numbers in the IOM database on the victims of trafficking assisted in the countries of South Eastern Europe, although far from revealing the real number of victims, are conclusive in showing the recent trends in trafficking in persons in recent years. The following table shows some broad estimates of the number of identified and assisted victims of trafficking in South Eastern Europe based on the data gathered by the IOM

³⁹ *Some Aspects of the Evolution of Criminality in Romania in 1990–2003*.

⁴⁰ *Trafficking in Persons Report*, U.S. State Department, June 2004, 166; available at www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *The activity of the Romanian police in the operational field – 2004* (Bucharest: Ministry of Administration and Interior, 2005); available at <http://www.mai.gov.ro/Documente/Bilant%20MAI/Plan%20Operational.pdf>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

and the Counter-Trafficking Regional Clearing Point working within the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings.⁴⁵

Although these numbers do not come close to representing the actual magnitude of the phenomenon—including victims who are not able to return to their home country either because of the lack of opportunity or because of fear, or who do not want to talk about what happened to them—at first glance the table could be read as indicating that the phenomenon of trafficking in persons has decreased in the region. This downward trend was also noticed by the non-governmental and international organizations carrying on activity in this field. In the second half of 2003, IOM and other agencies were confronted with a noticeable decline in the number of victims referred for protection and assistance in the Balkan countries.⁴⁶

Table 1: International Victims Assisted

<i>Country</i>	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	March 2004
Bosnia-Herzegovina	14	200	214	283	53	-
Albania	7	137	64	29	15	-
Kosovo	-	13	135	86	45	-
FYROM (victims repatriated)	-	106	262	214	141	-
Moldova	-	308	364	292	235	31
Romania	-	163	261	243	111	-
Bulgaria	-	46	96	164	46	-
TOTAL	21	973	1396	1311	646	31

⁴⁵ “First Annual Report on Victims of Trafficking in South Eastern Europe,” Counter-Trafficking Regional Clearing Point, Vienna, September 2003, 10; available at: www.icmc.net/files/rcp2003full.en.pdf. See also “Changing Patterns and Trends of Trafficking in Persons in the Balkans Region,” International Organization for Migration, July 2004; available at www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/balkans_trafficking.pdf. In spite of the large differences of the data of the two entities, they are sufficiently conclusive in showing the downward trend of the number of assisted victims in the region. The numbers for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, FYRO Macedonia, and Moldova are based on the figures delivered by the IOM missions in these countries, while the numbers for Bulgaria and Moldova are based on the figures delivered by the Counter-Trafficking Regional Clearing Point, whose methods of gathering data include statements provided by victims, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations.

⁴⁶ “Changing Patterns and Trends of Trafficking in Persons in the Balkans Region,” 5.

The effective measures taken by governments in the region, including proper legislation and efficient implementation of laws by national police and border guards, combined with proficient regional cooperation in anti-trafficking activities, could constitute a legitimate and expected explanation of this decrease in the number of trafficked victims. However encouraging these figures may seem related to the effort to combat this phenomenon, and however effective and efficient the regional governments' measures might have been in the last several years, the traffic in human beings is still robust and, unfortunately, on the increase.⁴⁷ Yet in the early years of this century it became less visible, as the criminal networks have adapted themselves more quickly to the new realities than the authorities, and have diversified their methods and changed their routes.

In terms of new trafficking methods, they are more subtle, and thus harder to detect.⁴⁸ For example, traffickers increasingly now use legal or quasi-legal modes of transportation, with real visas on either fake or real documents. Although transporting the victims legally could imply higher costs for traffickers, this sum of money is low compared with the gains a trafficker can obtain from a victim that can be forced into prostitution. The "legal" transport of the victims could also be facilitated by officials, either by diplomatic or consular personnel in getting visas, by border guard personnel in "omitting" a stringent search at the border, or by police officials in getting passports and other travel documents.

Contributing to the ease of these legal methods of trafficking is also the fact that, since 2002, citizens from Romania and Bulgaria do not need visas to enter the Schengen area, which means that victims from these countries can very easily cross the border legally. Even more important, to further ease the transportation of victims across the border, the traffickers financially sponsor the girls to get the travel documents (passports, medical insurance, the sums of money necessary to demonstrate when entering the European Union states), ensure the travel arrangements, and to get them a "proper" wardrobe, aimed at raising their morale and making them more attractive.⁴⁹

The exploitation of modern infrastructure is also increasingly used by traffickers, as "trafficking has moved into private apartments" instead of bars or brothels, where both victims and traffickers were most vulnerable to police raids in the past. Moreover, the connection between traffickers and "customers" is often made via the Internet or mobile telephones, since it is very hard to detect the users of these means of communication.⁵⁰ Another important methodological change has also been to improve the victims' living conditions, by offering them small payments thus avoiding the victims to bear evidence for the state, or by ensuring them modest housing facilities, under conditions that could be even better than those the victims were used to in their home countries.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "The Evolution of Criminal Trans-Frontier Phenomena," report presented by the Romanian Minister of Administration and Interior to the Romanian Parliament's House of Deputies, December 2003; available at: <http://www.cdep.ro/interpel/2003/r1671A.pdf>.

⁵⁰ For a detailed picture of the changes in methods used by traffickers in countries of the region see "Changing Patterns and Trends of Trafficking in Persons in the Balkans Region."

The above-mentioned new practices of traffickers, while by no means a comprehensive list, offer clear evidence of the fact that transnational criminal organizations have modified their strategies and actions in order to adapt their methods to new counter-trafficking measures taken by governments and regional institutions.

With respect to new routes of human trafficking, several alternative trafficking routes have emerged in South Eastern Europe—alongside the traditional ones—which generates difficulties for security forces and police in detecting the new transit points.⁵¹ Nevertheless, Romania remains at the center of the transit process for victims of trafficking, with two main routes starting from or passing through Romania: one that goes north to Hungary and from there to Serbia and Montenegro and Albania, then on to Western Europe; and another one goes south through Bulgaria and FYRO Macedonia towards Greece.⁵²

Romania is first of all a country of origin for the victims of trafficking, due to the existence of a large number of poor people. But it is also a transit country, due to its geographic position, for victims trafficked from Moldova and Ukraine (and even from Asian countries) to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, FYRO Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, or Western Europe for sexual exploitation.⁵³

Until 2002, the Balkans represented the main destination region to which women and girls from Romania and Moldova were trafficked, especially to Serbia, Montenegro and Albania; from here the women were sent to other Balkan countries, or to Western Europe (most often Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, and France). Since 2003, the main destination countries for Romanian, Moldovan, and even Ukrainian victims are Spain, Italy, France, Netherlands, Austria, Greece, or Cyprus.⁵⁴ This change of destination is linked primarily with patterns of migration for jobs, but also with the cancellation of visa requirements and other barriers to migration in these countries.

Nevertheless, intentional changes in routes of trafficking and points of destination seem to be part of the traffickers' response to actions taken by governments and non-governmental or international organizations to combat this phenomenon. Criminal organizations adjust their methods of operation in response to changes in their operating environment in order to avoid being detected and increase their profit. Therefore, in spite of the evident decline in the number of IOM referrals in the region, new findings show that the main reason for this decline is more the ability of traffickers and trafficking routes to adapt rapidly and effectively to changing conditions in the various countries, than it is a real decrease of the magnitude of this phenomenon in the region.

⁵¹ Ladan Rahmani, "Invisible Routes. Changing Patterns and Trends in Trafficking Routes in the Balkans," *Migration* (June 2005): 22–24; available at http://www.iom.int/documents/publication/2005%20Migration_Jun_en.pdf.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵³ *Trafficking in Persons Report*, U.S. State Department, June 2002; available at www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2002.

⁵⁴ *Trafficking in Persons Report*, U.S. State Department, June 2003, June 2004 & June 2005; available at <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/>.

Links with Other Forms of Organized Crime and Terrorism

Besides the human, social, economic, and political pressures that the practice of human trafficking exerts on any society, a crucially important issue related to this phenomenon is its possible link to other forms of organized crime, and even international terrorism. According to experts in the field, illegal trafficking in virtually any commodity and terrorism are linked in some parts of the world, as trafficking is a large and significant component of the illicit economy where these links with terrorism exist. These regions might include the Balkans, as well as parts of the former Soviet Union.⁵⁵ According to institutions that deal with this issue, it is certain that organized crime, and especially drug trafficking, represents the most important source of financing for terrorist groups, providing up to 30–40 percent of their funds.⁵⁶ In the Balkans, trafficking is a major source of profits for organized crime groups.

Although the lack of data on the link between trafficking in persons and other forms of organized crime and terrorism make any accurate assessment impossible, according to the analysis of organized crime, criminal activities linked to trafficking in persons are continuously expanding, evolving, and specializing.⁵⁷ According to UN estimates, human trafficking is the “third largest criminal enterprise worldwide,” generating a profit of about USD 9.5 billion in annual revenues. The practice is also closely connected with money laundering, drug trafficking, document forgery, and human smuggling.⁵⁸

Aside from these crimes that often take place during the human trafficking process, criminal groups do not usually limit themselves to a single criminal activity, as the routes that they rely on could be used for any kind of trade.⁵⁹ Moreover, trafficking in persons, drugs, arms, or stolen cars is becoming “less open to ordinary crime” due to the rigorous and sometimes very costly efforts taken by the traffickers to elude the laws and penetrate national borders. Therefore, the barriers to entry in this field of crime are higher, so the potential profit to organized criminal networks must be maximized, which often involves conducting other forms of illegal trafficking along the same routes and using the same methods.⁶⁰

Although certain sources suggest that human trafficking in some regions of the world “links with the funding of terrorism in the intermingled world of the illicit economy,” there is no clear evidence of such connections in any of the countries in South Eastern Europe.⁶¹ Yet, for terrorists, trafficking of any kind could be quite an easy way to earn substantial sums of money, as well as to gather or distribute large sums of cash

⁵⁵ Louise Shelley, hearing on “Combating Transnational Crime and Corruption in Europe.”

⁵⁶ “Combating the Financing of Terrorist Organizations,” Romanian Intelligence Service; available at <http://www.sri.ro/pdfuri/1-6-2003-combaterea%20finantarii%20organizatiilor%20terroriste.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Louise Shelley, hearing on “Combating Transnational Crime and Corruption in Europe.”

⁵⁸ *Trafficking in Persons Report*, U.S. State Department, June 2005; available at www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005.

⁵⁹ W. Bruggeman, “Security and Combating International Organized Crime and Terrorism.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Louise Shelley, hearing on “Combating Transnational Crime and Corruption in Europe.”

without being detected by authorities, given the well-organized and hard-to-detect financial networks of the illicit trade.

The magnitude of the phenomenon of organized crime in South Eastern Europe, the existence of well-established networks, and the huge profits obtained through organized criminal activities could constitute significant incentives for terrorists and terrorist groups. A very important dimension of combating terrorism is the targeting of its financial resources; trafficking in any commodity, but especially drugs, constitutes a very important source of financing for terrorist groups.⁶² Equally important for terrorist groups' involvement in organized crime is the existence of well-organized networks that are already in use by criminal groups, which could be exploited by terrorist individuals or organizations for extending their infrastructure; recruiting new members; moving people, equipment, and funds without being detected; and establishing new training bases.

All these are important arguments on the possible links between trafficking in persons and terrorism. Even without any clear and incontrovertible evidence of such links, the issue should not be neglected.

An Efficient Strategy for Combating Organized Crime?

Trafficking in human beings, along with all other organized criminal activities, has reached a high level in South Eastern Europe, with major implications for all levels of society, in every state in the region. In this context, any successful strategy for combating this phenomenon depends on a determined and joint effort of the national governments in the region and the international community. The national governments have the crucial role in the process of drawing up a proper and solid strategy to combat human trafficking through passing proper criminal legislation and implementing the laws. At the same time, regional and international cooperation plays a very important role in coordinating the efforts and resources that will give substance to the national measures.

Yet, to be effective, any successful anti-trafficking strategy must be a three-pronged one, developed to include measures regarding all the sides of this equation: the victims, the supply/supplier side (the traffickers), and the demand side (the "sex buyers" side).⁶³ Nowadays, most of the funds allotted by different governments (especially United

⁶² In 2001, it was estimated that the traffic in illegal drugs in the Balkans was part of the Taliban's estimated USD 8 billion annual income from global drug trafficking, predominantly in heroin, of which Osama Bin Laden is alleged to have administered a substantial portion through Russian Mafia groups for a commission of 10–15 percent, or around \$1 billion annually. Moreover, it is estimated that Al Qaeda's "Balkan-directed funds" from "humanitarian" agencies and local banks, without "explicitly counting the significant drug profits," reached anywhere from USD 500 million to 700 million between 1992 and 1998. Yossef Bodansky, the former director of the U.S. House of Representatives' Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, quoted in Marcia Christoff Kurop, "Al Qaeda's Balkan Links," *Wall Street Journal Europe*, 1 November 2001.

⁶³ *Trafficking in Persons Report*, U.S. State Department, June 2005; available at www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005.

States and Western European countries) and international security organizations (mainly the UN, EU, or OSCE) for anti-trafficking assistance that are provided either to certain countries in need or to non-governmental organizations acting in those countries are directed towards victims' assistance, thus dealing with the results of this phenomenon rather than with its root causes and enabling factors. The same is true of the funds earmarked by national governments for combating trafficking.

On the victims' side, prior to being trapped in the snares of the traffickers, national governments could play a very important role by promoting general information campaigns on the risks potential victims are exposed to if they accept offers of working abroad from unofficial sources. The governments should also conduct targeted campaigns, focused on both the vulnerable categories of citizens (unemployed females with low education level) and the zones of origin (the poorest parts of the source countries). Crucially important in the long run are efficient national strategies for combating poverty, increasing living standards and employment opportunities, and improving and expanding the educational and economic opportunities that are available to vulnerable groups.

On the supply/supplier side, both the activity of national institutions and international cooperation could lead to the decrease of this phenomenon, including the adoption of strict and effective legislation against human trafficking and harmonization of the different laws of the countries in the region as well as the effective enforcement of the existing laws. Fighting institutionalized corruption, which both facilitates and profits from the traffic in persons and is one of the major problems facing the entire region of South Eastern Europe, represents a "duty" of the national governments, towards which all available efforts should be directed.

Regional and international cooperation should also be aimed at identifying and dismantling trafficking networks and routes through better methods of gathering and sharing intelligence, through common training and operation for security and police personnel, and through the coordination of broad-based enforcement efforts.

On the demand side, the efforts of the countries in the region are modest, since very often customers for commercial sex are difficult to identify. It is even harder to prove that they knowingly took advantage of a very vulnerable and weak person who is a victim of human trafficking. The demand side plays an important part in the perpetuation and development of this phenomenon, as there would be no trafficking activity—and, by implication, no victims—without the existence of a market for "exploitable" human beings (be the exploitation sexual or of some other nature). Therefore, stringent legislation incriminating and punishing people who exploit victims of trafficking must be adopted, combined with efforts to raise awareness among people in the destination countries, so that the phenomenon can no longer be overlooked or covered up.

South Eastern Europe, with the help of the international community, should do more in the field of combating this modern form of slavery, as this phenomenon represents a real threat not only to the security of the countries in the region, but also to the security of all of Europe. All the citizens of this region, including the poor ones, have the right to be in control of their own lives, and the right to economic and social development.