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BOOK REVIEWS

Allum F. and Gilmour S. (eds., 2019), *Elgar Handbook of Organised Crime and Politics*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, ISBN: 9781786434562.

The nature of the relationship between organised crime and politics

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Despite its obvious relevance, it is surprising how little the social sciences have studied the link between organised crime and politics. Although the phenomenon is universal, as it may occur in different forms and dimensions in both democratic and non-democratic countries, the connection has long been relegated to the interstices of research. There are several reasons for this limited scientific production, being a relationship, which by its very nature tends to be hidden or denied. Moreover, reliable data sources are often scarce and, those accessible to researchers are seldom adequate to describe these connections. Because this relationship can take on many forms based on geographical contexts, the historical origins of the criminal organisation, the political institutions and the structure of the government it is difficult to arrive at a definition upon which there can be wide agreement.

As the attention of researchers is frequently diluted by other more dominating interests, the complexities that surround any link between organised crime and politics have often discouraged multidisciplinary research on this topic as a specific field of in-

vestigation. Only recently has the interest of social scientists grown, especially following the development of several contemporary research tools. The recently published work, *Handbook of Organised Crime and Politics*, edited by Felia Allum and Stan Gilmour is a notable attempt to fill this knowledge gap by offering readers a comprehensive and detailed handbook on the subject. The two principle stated purposes of this handbook are first, to shed light on a little-studied research question while providing a coherent and multidisciplinary overview “of the relationships between criminal organisations and politics in countries and organisations where research is possible and is being undertaken” (p. 4) and second, to raise questions and stimulate reflections on the nature of these issues.

The handbook offers readers two different proposals. On the one hand, it can be considered a useful guide for those interested in exploring the subject, especially social science researchers and students. On the other hand, it constitutes a sort of “manifesto” for scholars who are interested in acknowledging the relevance of this topic as an autonomous research domain and wish to analyse this phenomenon from the standpoint of different disciplines.

A few numbers are sufficient to give an idea of the size and scope of this impressive collection. In it are gathered the contributions of 46 authors set out in well over 500 pages. The preface, by the Italian magistrate Giuseppe Borrelli, is followed by an extended introduction, which provides hermeneutic coordinates that guide the reading of the texts, authored by the two editors of the volume, Allum and Gilmour together with Catherine Hemmings. The remaining 30 chapters, written by different contributors, are grouped into five sections. The first four are divided into global geographic areas with nine chapters discussing this issue in Europe, seven in the Americas, five in Africa and six for Eurasia. The final three chapters of the last section are dedicated to how international organisations are dealing with this issue.

The vastness and richness of the contents of this handbook are extraordinary. Nevertheless, this variety also raises some problematic issues. Though, on the one hand, the text offers the reader a broad overview of the link between criminal organisations and politics in different scenarios on the world stage, on the other, the heterogeneity of each of the chapters makes the work less uniform as a whole. Frankly, the editors are aware of this potential weakness since the aims of the book and its discussions can only be placed within a multidisciplinary setting. Moreover, the authors of the case studies were given the greatest degree of freedom possible in their choices of perspectives and methods when writing their contributions to this research-oriented handbook.

Part I focuses on Europe, discussing the variegated picture of the connections between organised crime and politics as it has been affected by the recent history of each country. The nine chapters in this section describe the situations in France (Jean-Louis Briquet and Gilles Favarel-Garrigues), Sweden (Carina Gunnarson and Amir Rostami), Germany (Martina Bedetti and Nicolò Dalponte), Italy (Vittorio Mete), the Western Balkans (Jana Arsovska), Ukraine (Yuliya Zabyelina and Anna Markovska), Bulgaria (Marina Tzvetkova), post-Soviet Eurasia (Alexander Kapatadze) and Russia (Alexandra V. Orlova).

In France, for example, unlike in many other countries, the political dimension of criminal groups has long been ignored by the institutions as well as by public opinion. Hence, little or no interest in this topic has been explored by academic research. This is one of the reasons that there is scarce or limited official data on the question. Any debate on the phenomenon within the country has long been focused almost exclusively on the situation in Corsica and the city of Marseille. Therefore, the notion that emerges is that despite the fact that organised crime is not particularly well rooted and has only rarely tried to exercise any form of control over French politics, the hypothesis that France is not at all protected from criminal infiltration of its political system is reinforced. Those few reported cases of agreements involving politicians appeared to be fragile, temporary and fragmented compared to those established in other contexts of the society.

The presence of connections between organised crime and politics has also emerged in Sweden. The Scandinavian country has prominently been characterized by low levels of corruption, stable governments, high levels of trust in its institutions and a strong civil society. Yet, in 2010, a major police operation revealed the existence of a Syrian criminal organisation similar to the mafia type model in the country. The investigation dismantled a vast structure of criminal power, composed of over 120 subjects, with ramifications that reached into politics. The resulting trial ended with convictions that brought sentences exceeding 160 years of imprisonment.

Germany has proved particularly attractive for several foreign criminal groups, especially for the Turkish, Polish and Italian criminal organisations as globalization and the creation of a single European market have increased the mobility of these groups. In particular, the southern Italian Mafia-type organised crime group based in Calabria called the *'Ndrangheta* has shown the marked ability to collude with elements of the upper classes. Moreover, the presence of many foreign criminal organisations in the country is now being recognised by the German political institutions and by public opinion. In recent years, a heated debate has emerged about the impact of organised crime in the country, which has led to the creation of some anti-Mafia associations, ac-

tive in the defence of legality in Germany, such as *Mafia? Nein, danke!* [Mafia? No Thanks!].

In Italy, Mafia-type organisations have long been able to establish exchange relationships with politicians and representatives of the institutions. In addition to these figures, Mafia associates owe their power and strength to the weaker ties they establish within loose-knit networks of business executives, professionals, bank managers, etc., which together constitute what has been called the “grey area”. Organised crime in Italy participates in political activities in three principal ways: a) the political use of violence, b) the inclusion of representatives in the institutions and c) the management and control of political and administrative institutions. According to Mete, the author of the chapter on Italy, although it may apparently seem less important than the infiltration established at the level of national politics, it is, above all, at the local level that the Mafia organisations are able to develop and grow their economic and political power. The study focuses on the measures that the Italian state has introduced to counter the complicity between the Mafias and politicians. In particular, the author analyses the law on the dissolution of local councils suspected of being infiltrated or influenced by Mafias. Ultimately, in Italy there is a lack of a unified approach capable of tackling the problem of the Mafia infiltration of local administrative bodies. Furthermore, citizens do not seem able to perceive the extent of the real threat that the Mafia represents, especially in non-traditional areas.

The chapter on Ukraine provides a detailed analysis of the illicit economies that have arisen in the two de facto republics of Eastern Ukraine, which are not controlled by the official Ukrainian government. The case study analyses the criminalization of the Donbas region during the privatization era in the 1990s, with attention given to the illicit seizure of coal mining companies and the survival strategies developed by the miners. According to the authors of this chapter, during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich (2010-2014), the process of the convergence among the criminal organisations, the large companies and political elites reached its highest level. The large national protest movement that followed, in addition to overthrowing President Viktor Yanukovich, sparked the Donbas conflict in April 2014. The chapter focuses on the discussion and analysis of the illicit coal trade during the ongoing conflict, shedding light on important aspects of the political economy of “frozen conflicts”. The work contributes to deepening the understanding of the dynamics surrounding the emergence and survival of “de facto states” in the post-Soviet space.

The chapter on Bulgaria considers the widespread emergence of organised crime due to the worsening of social and economic conditions after the fall of communism in 1989. In this context, as had also been observed in other countries, the transition to

democracy and the market economy lead to an increase in the demand for interpersonal trust and state protection. This demand was met by experienced, violent people who, after the collapse of the Soviet system used their power to limit job opportunities. These were often former state law enforcement officers, members of the political and business elite and elite athletes (especially experts of sporting combat disciplines such as wrestling, boxing and mixed martial arts). During the 1990s, these groups became widely recognised as legitimate organisations that specialized in providing protection and private security services.

Russia could be considered one of the most infamous cases of the interconnection - perhaps 'overlap' would be a better term - of organised crime and political power. During the post-Soviet phase (1991-2000), organised criminal entities began to function as quasi-governmental agencies, while at the same time the state began to lose its monopoly on violence. Some scholars have used the label "Mafia State" To describe this relationship. Yet, currently, this expression is no longer able to describe the true nature of this link. Indeed, the most recent period (2000-today) has seen a strong reaffirmation of state power wherein, today, Russian criminal organisations coexist and interact with the legitimate economy and with state structures. Thus, organised crime in Putin's Russia closely resembles, at least outwardly, the situation found in Europe and North America.

Part II of the volume offers a diversified overview of the Americas. The first three chapters are dedicated to the developed democracies in North America, namely the United States of America (USA I by Joseph Wheatley and USA II by Dwight C Smith Jr) and Canada (Margaret Beare). The remaining four chapters discuss the situation found in some of the countries of Central and Latin America. These are the chapters on Mexico (Romain Le Cour Grandmaison), Brazil (Sérgio Adorno and Camila Nunes Dias), Guatemala (Diorella Islas Limiflana) and Colombia (Annette Idler).

The first chapter on the United States examines how public corruption has aided in the development of organised criminal groups in the United States in two ways: (1) neutralizing law enforcement authorities by investigating them and (2) involving public officials and law enforcement authorities in criminal conspiracies. The study comments on the reasons behind a general lack of public corruption undertaken by organised criminal groups as compared to other types of crimes that these groups perpetrate. Without excluding the possibility that the episodes of public corruption have remained obscure, according to the author, there is another factor to consider. Organised criminal groups in the United States may no longer need to resort to public corruption as they have in the past. This is attributed to the rise of cybercrime groups, which cheat individuals and businesses for billions of dollars every year. These groups do not neces-

sarily need to engage in corruption to achieve their goals, as they operate in anonymity and do not require large physical infrastructure requiring protection.

Most research-based literature on organised crime in Mexico tends to highlight how drug cartels have led to the current situation of chaos and violence. Beyond this narrative, as the author notes, criminal organisations have a strong social, economic and political impact on the country. For example, in the State of Michoacán, in west-central Mexico, the most organised cartels do not limit themselves to just producing and exporting drugs. The Familia Michoacana (the Michoacán family) first, and then the Caballeros Templarios (the Knights Templar), have also acquired strong social and political influence, which provides them with recognition by the local population as an alternative to the official state apparatus.

The strength of organised crime in Brazil, especially those activities related to the illicit drug trade, has been shown to be the result of increased involvement of political actors and state bureaucracies. These networks and relationships produce significant and perverse effects, including the corruption of public and political officials. Nevertheless, there is evidence that this malfeasance is manifested differently than in other countries. According to the authors of the chapter, there is no solid evidence that these networks are realizing a real “capture of the state” or its reconfiguration, as has occurred in other Latin American nation states.

In Colombia, the link between politics and organised crime is long-standing. The most famous case involved the infamous drug trafficker Pablo Escobar who, between the end of the nineteen eighties and the early nineties, exercised an almost total control over Colombian politics. Organised crime has penetrated all sectors and levels of government. The problem related to drugs and organised crime in Colombia has also been associated with a long-lived internal armed conflict. Historically, organised criminal groups have been used as a means to finance military forces and to achieve political goals. In particular, four different types of relationships are identified through which organised crime is intertwined with politics in Colombia: (1) collusion, (2) peaceful co-existence, (3) alliances (strategies), and (4) preponderance relationships.

Part III of the volume discusses how parts of Africa have been affected by this phenomenon. Specifically, the cases of Kenya (Stephen Musau), North Africa (Francesco Strazzari and Giovanni Zanoletti), Sierra Leone (Sasha Jespersen), South Africa (Mark Shaw) and Nigeria (Sheelagh Brady) are delineated.

In the chapter on South Africa, Shaw discusses the gradual metamorphosis of the national liberation movement into a political party, and some of the consequences that this transformation has produced. He then describes how elements of the political elite have manipulated the institutions into pursuing their own private interests through

agreements with criminal organisations. However, the presence of some solid bulwarks that protect the nation's democratic institutions, making the outcome of a capture of the state unlikely, is clearly highlighted in the discussion. On the other hand, a completely different scenario can be found in Nigeria, where a symbiotic relationship between organised crime and politics has been consolidated over time. This situation appears to be worsening in a destructive spiral. While Nigeria's fragile and corrupt government institutions have historically allowed organised crime to flourish, the infiltration of criminal actors into political institutions continues to weaken the government while impoverishing the population.

Part IV, entitled Eurasia, contains six case histories taken from very different countries and regions, namely Australia (David A. Bright and Carolien van Ham), New Zealand (Jarrod Gilbert), India (Andrew Sanchez), China (Daniel Silverstone, Alex Chung and Joe Whittle), Malaysia (Sophie Lemiere) and the Pacific Islands (Grant W. Walton and Sinclair Dinnen).

The presence of mature democratic institutions in Australia has not prevented organised crime from acquiring considerable influence in that country over time. This chapter examines the degree of "state capture" in seven case studies, showing the negative impact of the presence of organised crime on citizens' attitudes towards the institutions: tax evasion, white-collar crime and the spread of drugs and weapons. According to the authors, the penetration of criminal organisations in democratic institutions undermines accountability and responsiveness of governments to citizens' interests and can lead to a significant lowering of the people's trust in their national institutions.

Surprisingly, even in China, alongside the remarkable economic growth, there has been an astounding increase in organised criminal phenomena. The chapter on this country outlines the changing nature of Chinese organised crime and explores its relationship with the state. The text argues that in this vast Asian country the term "organised crime" is not recognised by the state in the same way as it is acknowledged in the West. In China, there are culturally specific practices such as *guanxi*, which intertwine and blur the relationship between criminal activities (black) and official state action (red). This interaction between criminal actors and representatives of the institutions is what the authors describe as the "red-black Nexus". According to the authors there has been a movement away from a form of organised crime that exists "despite the state" in China, towards a form of organised crime that exists "in conjunction with the state."

The fifth and final part of the handbook examines the roles played by the EU (Jelle Janssens and Anke De Vos), the Task Force for financial action (Ellen Gutterman and fan Roberge) and the United Nations in the fight against organised crime and politics

(Matti Joutsen). Many of the previous chapters contain numerous references to these institutions, and this part explores the role of monitoring and the problematic interactions that arise in the exercise of their specific functions. The chapter on the European Union traces, in particular, the historical roots of the concept of organised crime that has established itself in the European context. The authors point out that organised crime as it is defined is not a neutral issue, as the production of many EU policies combatting this phenomenon stems from it. Although the definitions of organised crime have been broadly formulated, the EU's attention has been focused particularly on certain groups or activities. Moreover, in general, the authors observe how political initiatives are implemented more quickly in victimization cases than in cases of collusion with criminal groups.

In conclusion, this book indicates that when organised crime is led toward seeking a link with politics it is a natural occurrence and not an anti-state action that is opposed to the nation's institutions. Criminal organisations appear to be inclined to penetrate the centres of power by entering into close relationships with political exponents so they are able to exercise power in parallel to that of the state. In other words, organised crime itself tends to be characterized by a strong political orientation. It is distinguished from other forms of crime by its purposeful attempt to directly or indirectly exercise sovereign functions within the territories it controls.

Besides revealing different degrees of interpenetration between criminal organisations and politics, the 30 chapters of this handbook also show how no form of state can be considered immune from this danger. In recent decades, there has been a growing capacity for organised crime to corrupt political systems, through electoral campaign financing or direct participation in political institutions. While it appears to be true that especially in states where the process of democratisation has not yet been fully developed, there is a very real risk of "state capture", the handbook clearly points out how even in the most developed democracies the penetration of organised crime can reach alarming levels. If not properly addressed, this phenomenon is likely to degenerate considerably, leading to possible regressions of democratic institutions that cannot in any manner be predicted. No democracy is perfect. Even the most advanced democratic institutions often depend on socio-economic conditions, conflict dynamics and historical experience for their very survival. A weak state will allow organised crime to infiltrate its institutions so that it can finance its organisation and develop its illegal activities.

Clearly, the handbook's many chapters show that there can be no single solution to combatting organised criminal groups. Overall, what they do show is that the answer should first of all be sought from a global perspective. Not surprisingly, the final section

of the book deals with the roles of international organisations, focusing its reflections on the international response to the threats that organised crime poses. There is little doubt that to guarantee the safety of the world's citizens and restore the supremacy of nation states' sovereignty, the fight against organised crime and political corruption should be given priority in the agendas of all international institutions.

Ultimately, as has already been said, this handbook deals with a theme that has long been treated at best marginally from the standpoint of scientific research. To fill this gap, these many dedicated authors have provided readers with a rich and variegated picture created from painstakingly collected data and reasoned reflections on how the link between organised crime and politics can be manifested in its many forms. Rather than proposing any single method of investigation, the many different chapters and sections suggest the potential of a multidisciplinary approach to this research. Above all, this handbook underlines how relevant and urgent a task it is to finance and implement new research programs capable of advancing and developing this theme as a specifically qualified area of study.