

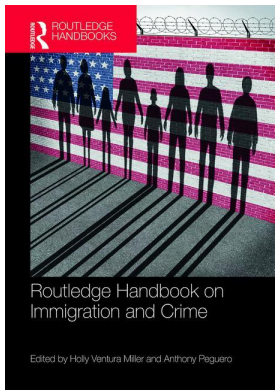
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EASTERN EUROPEAN  
IMMIGRATION AND CRIME*Jana Arsovska***Introduction: Securitization of Migration After the Fall of Communism**

By 1990, free elections overthrew the Communist regimes that had been dominating Eastern European countries for approximately five decades, and borders opened. At the same time, however, violence and ethno-nationalism rose, as exemplified by the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Also, organized crime, terrorism, and immigration associated with Eastern Europe became topics of interest to policy makers (Ibryamova, 2004; World Bank, 2010).

The terror attacks of September 11, 2001 in the US further transformed the global security context, and the fight against international terrorism became the main US policy goal. Around the same time, the EU started its enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean islands of Cyprus and Malta, which caused further worries among some EU policy makers. In 2004, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia became EU member states. Then by 2007, two more South-Eastern European countries, Bulgaria and Romania, joined the EU. By the end of 2013, Croatia, a Western Balkan country, had also joined the EU.

The removal of internal borders within the EU put an emphasis on the policing of its external borders due to fears that terrorism and transnational crime would spread to EU member states. As Ibryamova (2004) argues, “portrayed as a root cause of perceived threats to economic well-being, social and political order, and cultural and religious identities, migration is securitized as an existential threat to society, thereby justifying the need to take extraordinary measures to protect it” (p. 2). Some examples of securitization can be found in the Schengen Agreement.<sup>1</sup>

Politicians in their speeches have also addressed their concerns about a long list of unwanted consequences of immigration and the dangers associated with open borders. They have argued that admitting new members, particularly Eastern European countries whose institutions are unstable and economies weak, could pose a serious danger to the EU states, and the Western world in general. Javier Solana, former High Representative of the EU for CFSP, stated that, “massive flow[s] of drugs and migrants are coming to Europe and [will] affect its security”<sup>2</sup> (Ibryamova, 2004, p. 2). Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, also argued that Britain should be extremely cautious about the wave of immigration from Eastern Europe: “It is important that we recognize that there is a potential risk from these accession countries” (Ibryamova, 2004, p. 6).

A decade later, UKIP Party leader Nigel Farage spoke about the negative impact of Eastern European immigration and claimed there was a “dark side” to immigration (Charlton, 2013).

According to Farage, London was “experiencing a Romanian crime wave,” and Romanians were responsible for more than 90% of all crimes related to ATM machines: “This gets to the heart of the immigration policy that UKIP wants, we should not welcome foreign criminal gangs and we must deport those who have committed offences” (Charlton, 2013). While the accession process helped stabilize the European region overall, the fear that the porous borders may allow for increased drug trafficking, people smuggling, and terrorist activities in the Western world has continued to persist.

Eastern European crime has raised concerns among US law enforcement officials, as well. Grant D. Ashley, former Assistant Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) stated that Balkan organized crime groups, particularly those composed of ethnic Albanians, have expanded rapidly to Western Europe, and are beginning to gain a strong foothold in the US. In his view, after the end of the Cold War, criminal groups from the Balkans, Eastern and Central Europe, and the former Soviet Union, became involved in all types of crimes in the US:

[f]rom drug trafficking and human trafficking to burglary and home invasion robbery rings, from money laundering and securities fraud to traditional organized crime gambling and extortion rackets . . . They have been successful in their criminal endeavors, and their illegal operations have increased at an alarming rate.

(FBI, 2003)

Special Agent Jim Farley, of the FBI office in Newark, New Jersey, who led the bureau’s Operation Black Eagle targeting Albanian drug traffickers in 2009, also noted that in addition to Italian and Russian organized crime gangs, ethnic Albanians had begun moving very expensive heroin into the US (Pavia, 2011).

There have been a number of studies looking at the link between Eastern European immigration and crime in Europe and the US, particularly after the EU enlargements in 2004, 2007, and 2013, as well as during and after the Balkan conflicts in the 1990s. Despite the fact that they could not find evidence that the new waves of immigration are posing a threat to established Western countries, immigration nevertheless remains a contested issue, allowing for the resurgence of right-wing parties. Anti-immigrant groups, using sensationalized media reports as their evidence, lobby for restrictive immigration policies, and are against the free movement of persons from some Central and Eastern European countries, particularly the Balkan region. This chapter will discuss Eastern European migration (more specifically South-Eastern European migration) to Western countries, mainly the EU and the US. It will also examine its real and perceived effects on crime, including organized crime and terrorism, in EU member states and the US.

### **Immigration, Crime, and the EU and NATO Enlargements**

In post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe, mainly as a result of the deteriorating economic situations, corruption, and ineffective judicial and law enforcement institutions, organized crime flourished during the 1990s. Particularly, the South-Eastern European region, also known as the “Balkan region,” experienced a rapid increase in crime rates. In fact, after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the term “Balkan” became a synonym for organized crime and political corruption. Albanian, Serbian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Bulgarian, Romanian, and Bosnian criminal groups all became widely known for their criminal activities (Anastasijevic, 2006; Arsovska, 2015a; Doyle & Wright, 2012; Stojarova, 2006; World Bank, 2010).

The already established EU member states quickly recognized the potential for expansion of organized and conventional crime as well as terrorism into their territories (Jervis, Cooper, & Fields, 2002; *New York Times*, 2002). The fear was that the strive for economic development and the growing ease of cross-border transportation and communication would quickly spur the flow of

illegal goods across borders, and this would threaten the safety and security of people. Consequently, at the beginning of the new millennium, the immigration–crime topic quickly appeared high on the agendas of EU politicians.

Isolated crime incidents committed by illegal immigrants in Italy were common during the late 1990s. This provided some opportunities for right-wing groups to argue for stricter immigration laws (EU Times, 2014; Ibryamova, 2004). Such incidents were often sensationalized and overstated, which led to a general fear of mass immigration. Consequently, since the late 1990s, the International Community on numerous occasions noted that organized crime groups originating from South-Eastern Europe pose one of the main security threats to the EU (UNODC, 2008).

According to the European Commission’s Eurobarometer, European citizens have held positive views about their country’s membership of the EU since its creation. In 1991, after the reunification of Germany, 71% described the membership as a “good thing.” The positive opinion on the EU membership, however, decreased to below 50% around the turn of the century, before the 2004 enlargement, and during the economic crisis in 2010 and 2011 (European Commission, 2014). The 2003 Eurobarometer Survey illustrates that support for enlargement dropped to 46% across the EU in the early 2000s. By the end of 2003, the majority of Europeans (51%) believed that with enlargement and open borders, the fight against crime and drug trafficking would become more difficult (European Commission, 2003).

During the Communist period, immigration from Eastern Europe to the US was very limited. However, after the dissolution of the Iron Curtain, this changed. The number of Eastern European immigrants admitted for legal permanent residence grew from 18,260 in 1987 to 121,083 in 2001 (Robila, 2007). People emigrated mainly due to economic hardship and fear of wars (e.g., Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo) (Okolski, 2004). For example, as a result of the transition to a market economy, a large number of people in Eastern Europe lost their state jobs and secure living arrangements. In the 1990s, unemployment rates reached 30% in Serbia, 19.5% in Poland, and 12.7% in Bulgaria (Robila, 2007). Also, refugees and asylum seekers came to the US due to fear of persecution in their country of origin.

The US military, political, and economic interests and involvement in the Balkan region in general affected the patterns of immigration to the US. For example, after 1990, NATO incorporated several Eastern European countries: ten former Warsaw Pact members and two former Yugoslav republics entered NATO between March, 1999 and April, 2009. Albania and Croatia joined in 2009. This involvement of the US in Eastern Europe suggested that the number of Eastern European immigrants to the US would continue to increase. Yet, after the early 2000s, there was a growing fear that among these new immigrants and asylum seekers, terrorists and criminals would also start establishing themselves on US territories (Rom, 2010). The main argument has been that the chaos created by the bloody wars in the former Yugoslavia brought the rise of more direct terrorist interests in the area and allowed Arab–Afghan fighters refuge in Europe. Many have argued that foreign mujahideen took this opportunity to gather recruits for their cause as well as establish a base of operations in Europe (Mincheva & Gurr, 2010). The US’s main fear has been that the Balkan ties to organized crime and black markets have provided international terrorists with weapons, fake documents, and safe havens in exchange for money. Since the late 2000s, analysts have argued that this development poses a potentially major security threat to the Western world, especially the US (Kohlmann, 2004; Rom, 2010).

However, despite the growing concerns about the effects of mass immigration on crime, was there any solid evidence to support the idea that immigration leads to increases in crime? Were crimes committed by immigrants from Eastern European, including the Balkan region, isolated cases that attracted international attention, or were these immigrants indeed responsible for overall increases in crime rates in affected Western countries? With the opening of borders, were established organized crime groups from Eastern European countries looking forward to transplanting themselves to new Western territories with the aim of expanding their criminal empires?

Below we first review the popular and media view on Eastern European immigration and crime. In this section, we also refer to police and government reports that elaborate on the expansion of Eastern European offenders to Western territories. We then examine scholarly studies and empirical research that discusses the link between EU expansion, immigration, and crime prior to Brexit,<sup>3</sup> in order to gain a more informed view of the issues at stake. We also look at issues of criminal mobility and “Balkan” criminal transplantation to the US.

### Attention! Eastern European Criminals Taking Over

By the turn of the century, concerns about the rise and expansion of Eastern European organized crime were widespread, and this fear continued over the years, partly culminating in Britain’s decision to leave the EU in 2016.<sup>4</sup> French criminologists Raufer and Quéré (2006) argued that powerful organized crime groups comprised of Eastern European criminals, particularly ethnic Albanians, were gaining prominence in the global criminal underworld.

One of Italy’s top prosecutors, Cataldo Motta, argued that Albanian organized crime had become “a point of reference for all criminal activity today” (Barron, 2000). Cilluffo and Salmoiraghi (1999) also argued that Albanian offenders dominate smuggling within Europe, overshadowing the Italian mafia.

Stories of immigrants committing serious offenses started drawing a lot of public attention during the past decade. In 2012, the Metropolitan police in the UK suggested that a new group of Eastern European criminals were “heading” to London and have already been extorting bogus “fines” from tourists. Making references to police reports, the *Daily Mail* blamed a quarter of all crimes in London on Eastern European offenders. Nationals of Poland, Romania, and Lithuania were reported to be the most likely of all foreigners to be prosecuted by the police. According to the report, seven of the top ten offender nationalities in the UK in 2011 were European, and Poland came first with 4,742 alleged offenders (Doyle & Wright, 2012). As the authors argue, the figures “gave force to warnings of a growing immigrant crime wave.”

During the same year, the *Daily Mail* wrote about a young Polish burglar who received 34 years in prison for the murder of an elderly couple in their home. One week after arriving in the UK, Ireneusz Bartnowski stabbed Giuseppe and Caterina Massaro to death. He attacked them with a knife and a hammer, which horrified the local population (Doyle & Wright, 2012).

Then, in another event that attracted enormous media attention, the inside man for one of the world’s largest cash robberies (£53 million [\$69 million] stolen from a Securitas cash depot) was Ermir Hysenaj, an Albanian who entered the UK in 1999, claiming to be a Kosovan refugee. Hysenaj was communicating with a friend from Albania, Jetmir Bucpapa, who had paid money to a smuggler to take him to Western Europe, also posing as a Kosovan refugee (Campbell, 2012).

Bucpapa met some local criminals who introduced him to the man regarded as the mastermind of the robbery, Lee Murray. Hysenaj was hired as cash administrator at Securitas’ depot and passed the security checks with a false name and birthdate. Soon Hysenaj became the inside man and passed on details of the depot’s security weaknesses. In 2008, both Hysenaj and Bucpapa were sentenced along with the other robbers (Campbell, 2012; Sturcke, 2008).

During the same time period, there was a fatal shooting in an Albanian/Kosovan social club in London. A gunman had opened fire, killing one man and wounding two others. The reason for the shooting was control over parking meters. For years, teams of Albanian-speaking Kosovans, Montenegrins, and Albanians had been robbing parking meters. Although the behavior appeared irrational to many, to those involved, the millions made were worth the trouble; no home-grown criminals seemed interested in collecting coins, and coins are also untraceable. Yet, over time, disputes arose over control of the territory, which led to murders. The gunman, Herland Bilali, escaped to Denmark, where he was arrested, and is now serving a life sentence. Another Albanian parking-meter murder from 2008 remains unsolved (Robertson, 2007).

Luan Plakici, who called himself an Albanian “immigration expert,” is another offender that attracted a lot of police and media attention. He had smuggled at least 50 Eastern European women, mainly from Moldova and Romania, into UK for prostitution. He entered the country as an asylum seeker from Kosovo in 1999 and worked for law firms as an interpreter. Plakici made more than £1m [\$1.3m] from bringing poor and young women to the UK. They were forced to entertain up to 20 men a day as payment for the £8,000 [\$10,000] “travel bill” they owed after traveling from Moldova and Romania. One of the women, whom he married, earned him £144,000 [\$190,000] in less than two years, allowing him to build luxury homes for himself. He received a 23-year prison sentence (Muir, 2003).

In fact, by the early 2000s, ethnic Albanian offenders in Europe developed a reputation for being some of the most notorious pimps and traffickers of women and children for sexual exploitation (Arsovska, 2015a). The *Independent* and *The Times* wrote that the emergence of violent Albanian gangs on the vice trade was “changing the landscape” of Britain’s sex industry (Burrell, 2001). Kidnappings have also been closely linked to ethnic Albanian traffickers. The Italian Ministry of Interior reported that 168 foreign prostitutes were killed in 2000, mainly Albanian and Nigerian women murdered by their pimps (Hysi, 2005). In Italy, in the late 1990s, around 20% of imprisoned Albanians were being held for prostitution-related offenses (Jamieson & Sily, 1998). Media sources in the 2000s indicated that ethnic Albanian offenders controlled more than 75% of the prostitution network in London (Bennetto, 2002).

Bulgarian sex traffickers have also gained a reputation, particularly after 2006. With the support of Europol and the Italian Carabinieri, the Bulgarian Police have dismantled an organized criminal group of 12 Bulgarian nationals who were trafficking Bulgarian and Eastern European women for sexual exploitation. The victims were recruited in Bulgaria and then transferred to Italy. The investigation revealed that the members of this criminal network were using violence, intimidation, extortion, and assaults to control their prostitution business. They were also violently fighting other criminal groups over control of territory. One of the group’s leaders was identified as a high-value target criminal, already convicted of murder and actively wanted by a number of police forces in Europe (Europol, 2016a).

Drug trafficking is also one crime closely associated with Eastern European, and specifically “Balkan,” offenders. According to the UNODC (2015) report, South-Eastern Europe (“the Balkans”) has long represented a crucial stage of the “Balkan Route”—a known and widely used heroin supply route that travels by land from Afghanistan to Western and Central Europe.

The importance of the Balkan route is evident. Frequently, large seizures are made at various points at this route. UNODC’s (2015) estimates suggest that 60 to 65 tons of heroin flow into South-Eastern Europe annually. According to an earlier 2010 World Drug Report released by the UNODC, 87% of all heroin entering Europe does so along the Balkan Route. The Balkan Route’s heroin trade is estimated at \$20 billion annual market value (UNODC, 2015).

In 2005, the Italian Ministry of Social Solidarity reported that about 40% of the heroin trade in Europe was controlled by ethnic Albanians, and in 2006, the Italian Central Directorate for Antidrug Services stated that ethnic Albanians controlled 80% of Europe’s heroin trade (Arsovska, 2015a). Interpol notes that the heroin travels through Turkey, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, and into either Italy or Austria. The media has noted that the turmoil in Afghanistan and the instability in Pakistan has led resurgent terrorist networks to converge with Balkan drug traffickers in order to bring Southwest Asian heroin to Europe via the Balkan Route (Srdoc, 2015).

According to the UNODC (2008) Report *Crime and its impact on the Balkans*, 337 kg of cocaine were seized on a boat in Croatia in September 2003—the fact that this seizure comprised 88% of the cocaine seizures for the region that year indicates that Croatia is being used primarily as a transit route for the drug headed to Western Europe. When Croatia entered the EU in 2013, the fear was



that other Balkan offenders would continue to use Croatia as an entry point to the EU, and this fear has remained.

The report *EU Organized Crime Threat Assessment [OCTA]* (Europol, 2011) argues that Albanian criminal organizations also have a significant role in the transport of cannabis in South-Eastern Europe. According to that report, the cannabis is grown in Albania and the Balkan region, and is then sent to Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, and Turkey where it is traded for heroin, which is then distributed in Western Europe.

A UNODC (2008) report on crime in the Western Balkans concludes, “There is round consensus that Balkan organised crime groups, and particularly ethnic Albanian groups, are a hazard in West Europe. Arguably, Albanian heroin dealers are the single most notorious Balkan organised crime phenomenon.” This has further solidified the perception that Balkan offenders are posing a serious threat to the already established EU member states.

Some notorious Balkan groups known for controlling the drug markets from the Balkan region to Western Europe are the ethnic Albanian Kelmendi and Osmani clans, originally from Kosovo. In Germany, and later Croatia, the Osmani brothers for years have been known as the leaders of one of the most powerful Albanian/Balkan drug trafficking group (the so-called kings of the European drug market). They have cooperated with Naser Kelmendi, another ethnic Albanian who attracted enormous attention for his worldwide drug trafficking activities. Kelmendi’s criminal organization operated a drug distribution network that stretches through Afghanistan to Turkey and into Europe—primarily for the sale of heroin, but also for the trafficking of cocaine and ecstasy. The Kelmendi organization has also been involved in cigarette trafficking, money laundering, and loan sharking (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2010).

On June 1, 2012, former US President Barak Obama and the US Department of Treasury named Naser Kelmendi a significant foreign narcotics trafficker pursuant to the Kingpin Act (Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act). Both Kelmendi and Osmani have been on Interpol’s list for more than a decade. In 2000, the Albanian Osmani brothers moved their business to Croatia where they received Croatian passports. Many Balkan drug traffickers have Croatian passports and they use them to travel across the EU. Only in 2012 the authorities seized 53 falsified passports, and believe that at least as many are already in use (Hopkins, 2012; Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2012). In the arrest of several Balkan criminals in Spain in February 2012, all possessed official Croatian passports.

Many other powerful Balkan drug trafficking groups have been operating across Europe since the early 2000s. In 2014, Albanian nationals Eugert Bici and Elis Pisha, and Italian national Simone Canu were arrested. During the arrest, the police sequestered drugs that amounted to €5 million, a Beretta, €28,000, and two cars. Upon the request of the prosecutor Rosana Allieri in Cagliari, 13 other arrests were executed of individuals identified as part of the same organization. Among them was the former Mayor of Buddusò in Italy, Giovanni Satta (La Nuova, 2016). The group involved Italians, Albanians, and Romanians. The organization is known to specialize in drug trafficking between Italy, the Netherlands, and Albania.

The Czech Center for Investigative Reporting also noted that a number of companies in Prague are linked to some of the most powerful Balkan drug trafficking organizations. Some of these companies are engaged in the gambling business and control casinos. Others act as offshore companies without offices. Critics have noted that Czech law allows foreign nationals who own businesses to obtain Czech (and thus EU) residency (Holcova & Dojcinovic, 2015).

Moreover, illegal immigration involving people from the Western Balkans has also attracted media and law enforcement attention. In 2016, Europol supported the Sirocco-2 operation aiming to dismantle migrant smuggling criminal networks operating along the Western Balkan route. Thirty-nine migrant smugglers and 580 smuggled migrants were arrested during this action. Europol noted that border management restrictions in the South-Eastern European region have created a

demand for criminal networks to offer their services to migrants (Europol, 2016b). In 2016 alone, more than 7,000 new suspected migrant smugglers were reported to Europol, many of them of Eastern European origin. Reports indicated that facilitators often appear in refugee camps and offer their services to asylum seekers. The Balkan offenders are connected to smugglers in Western Europe and are able to ensure immigrants arrive in the destination country.

Albanians have been known to regulate the transportation market in Belgium and have been often subcontracted by various criminal groups to help with the smuggling of illegal immigrants from Belgium to the UK or other Western European destinations. Once the immigrants (of different origins) arrive in Belgium, they are brought to safe houses controlled by ethnic Albanian smugglers, and then the smugglers offer them different services depending on the amount of money they can afford to pay. In cases of smuggling “without guarantee,” they are brought to parking lots and placed in various parked trucks that travel to the UK without the knowledge of the truck drivers. Typically, the migrants were hidden in trucks at the Belgian ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge in Belgium, and then ferried to the British ports of Hull and Purfleet, where they applied for political asylum. If the immigrants pay more money, then they are smuggled “with guarantee.” In this case, the driver is part of the criminal organization and the immigrants are placed in specially designed containers located inside the trucks (Arsovska, 2015a).

Critics have been arguing that, for example, Britain’s open borders with other EU members made it impossible to control who enters the country, and that due to EU regulations, it is often impossible to stop offenders from entering, even when they have prior convictions. The UK media wrote about Lithuanian Rimvydas Liorancas who hanged himself in prison in 2012 while awaiting his trial for double murder. After his death, it was reported that Liorancas got into Britain despite a conviction for armed robbery. He arrived in the UK twice illegally, and the second time he had no passport (Fagge, Faulkner, & Dolan, 2012). A Lithuanian child-rapist, Victor Akulic, was also let into Britain, where he went on to beat and rape a woman. He had been jailed for nine years in Lithuania after raping a 7-year-old child. The open border and liberal regime have been blamed in most of these cases and such media reports have caused fear of Eastern European offenders.

The rise of Albanian organized crime was not only of concern for EU member states. The so-called Albanian Bad Boys was a gang that was created by a group of Albanian immigrants who arrived in the Bronx in New York as political refugees in the 1990s. Members of this gang were known for engaging in violent fights with other gangs. Rival gangs quickly acknowledged that the Albanians were fearless and tended to show up in very large groups to help one of their own (Gonzalez, 1992). This attracted a lot of public as well as law enforcement attention. Overall, during the 1990s, some ethnic Albanian organized crime groups in New York City were solidifying relations with the Italian mafia, while others challenged the mafia’s dominance. Smaller criminal groups took advantage of new opportunities, such as the expansion of ATMs and credit card payments. Robbery and theft also became common (Arsovska, 2015a).

Then, by the early 2000s, the criminal organization of Alex Rudaj, or “The Corporation,” led by Albanian immigrants, became known as the “sixth crime family” in New York City, joining the five major Italian American crime families that had traditionally had control over New York’s organized crime scene for decades. These ethnic Albanian immigrants from Montenegro were involved in illegal gambling, loansharking, extortion, and attempted murders, among other things, and they worked closely with Italian organized crime figures.

During the trial of two other ethnic Albanian offenders running a drug trafficking ring in NYC, US Attorney Preet Bharara said:

Bruno and Saimir Krasniqi led one of the most brutal and violent organized crime groups in recent memory. In one six-month period, they committed two murders, two kidnappings, two drug robberies, and an arson. Today, nearly six years after the brutal



murders they orchestrated, the jury's swift verdict has brought the Krasniqis' reign of terror to an end.

(FBI, 2011)

And when 37 members of an Albanian criminal organization, smuggling large quantities of cocaine and pills hidden in secret compartments inside luxury cars, were arrested in New York in 2011, the court documents described the organization as comprised of several interrelated ethnic Albanian immigrant families (led by Gjavit Thaqi aka Doc) with a code of honor, strong ties to the homeland, and a record of ruthless violence (Pavia, 2011).

The list with offenders and offenses that involve Eastern European immigrants is a long one and the media and law enforcement officials have paid close attention to these offenders and their, sometimes violent, ways of conducting "business." However, do those crimes, large-scale robbery, organized sex-trafficking, drug trafficking, gangland murders, and illegal immigration, mean that there is a wave of high-level Eastern European crime in the EU or the US?

## The Research Evidence

### *Immigration and crime in Europe*

Studying the impact of immigration on crime is an extremely important policy question; however, currently there have been only a limited number of robust findings on the crime-immigration link. This is important because many newspapers and public opinion polls postulate that immigration causes crime. Nevertheless, contrary to this populist view, existing research (albeit limited) finds it hard to detect an impact of immigration on crime (Bell, Fasani, & Machin, 2013; Bianchi, Buonanno, & Pinotti, 2012).

After the 2004 EU expansion, the majority of the 15 EU countries imposed immigration restrictions on new member states, which meant that the legislative barriers facing new member nationals wanting to work or live in these countries were little different following the enlargement of the EU in May 2004. Denmark, Ireland, Sweden, and the UK were the only four countries that allowed these new workers to move relatively freely across national borders.

Boeri and Brücker (2005) suggested that the immigration restrictions imposed by the majority of the EU 15 countries resulted in the diversion of migrants from the traditional destination countries that border the new member states, such as Austria, Germany, and Italy, to the EU 15 countries with more liberal immigration policies, such as the UK. Consequently, the composition of migration to the UK changed dramatically with the accession of Eastern European countries in 2004, and this resulted in some studies on immigration and crime. The UK became a setting where more significant migration flows after 2004 offered an opportunity to study whether the populist view that immigration causes crime is supported by evidence.

Jaitman and Machin (2013) studied the link between crime and immigration in England and Wales. In their paper, the authors presented new evidence on the impact of immigration on crime, using a range of data sources. They consider the crime-immigration relationship in the 2000s, a period when the composition of migration changed dramatically with the accession of Eastern European countries (known as A8) to the EU. Their study also presents an analysis of differences in arrest rates of natives and migrants using unique data from the London Metropolitan Police Service.

The authors argued that when implementing a credible research design with statistical power, there was no evidence of an average causal impact of immigration on crime despite the immigration wave. The authors also studied London, the capital, by itself. Again, they found no causal impact of immigration on crime. The data on arrests of natives and immigrants in London also showed no differences in the likelihood of being arrested. Thus, the authors found no positive immigration-crime

linkage in their descriptive analysis, or causal research design. When excluding immigration-related offenses, and when analyzing monthly police data of arrests in 32 boroughs in London between June 2009 and June 2012, the arrest rate for immigrants was higher by 0.7 arrests per 1,000, compared to UK nationals. Both UK nationals and immigrants were arrested for similar crimes. According to the authors, however, age played a role and could explain the differences. The majority of the arrested immigrants in this study were between age 25 and 30, younger than the nationals. When controlling for age, the authors found no immigrant difference in the likelihood of being arrested, compared to UK nationals (Jaitman & Machin, 2013).

In another research study that examines the relationship between immigration and crime in the UK, the authors consider possible crime effects from two large waves of immigration that occurred in the UK. The first one of these was the late 1990s/early 2000s wave of asylum seekers, and the second was the large inflow of workers from 2004 EU accession countries (Bell et al., 2013). The authors show that the first wave led to a small rise in property crime, while the second wave had no such impact. There was no observable effect on violent crime for either wave. The victimization data also suggested that the changes in crime rates during the immigrant waves cannot be ascribed to crimes against immigrants. Overall, the findings suggested that focusing on the limited labor market opportunities of asylum seekers could have beneficial effects on crime rates.

Both waves of immigrants (asylum seekers in 1990/2000s and A8 2004) consisted primarily of young males. The A8 immigrants were more likely to be single and have no children. This may be due to the fact that they have migrated with the goal of seeking employment rather than relocation. The data on which the findings are based consisted of recorded offenses by 43 police agencies across the country. The findings regarding A8 immigrants show “a significant negative relationship between immigrants and total crime, driven by property crime” (Bell et al., 2013, p. 12). When looking at the nationality of prisoners on a national level, the “incarceration rates for the A8 nationals almost exactly mirrored the trend for British citizens from 2004, suggesting no obvious impact of this wave on prison populations” (Bell et al., 2013, p. 19). For both immigration waves, the authors did not find a “significant relationship between immigrants and violent crime” (Bell et al., 2013, p. 24). Franco Fasani, one of the researchers, argued that A8 immigrants are eager to work and had pre-arranged jobs (Endley, 2014).

The second group of asylum seekers who fled in the late 1990s and early 2000s came to the UK under different circumstances. According to the researchers, most were forced to flee their homeland, were housed in deprived high-crime areas, and were prevented from working in the legitimate sector. These immigrants were given little money, which could have led some to turn to crime, including property crimes. According to Brian Bell, “The view that foreigners commit more crime is not true . . . Immigrants are just like natives—if they have a good job and income they don’t commit crime” (cited in Endley, 2014).

Moreover, a survey carried out by the Association of Chief Police Officers in 2008 found no evidence that Eastern Europeans were responsible for any crime wave (Dodd, 2008). The report finds that, despite newspaper headlines linking immigrants to crime, offending rates among Polish, Romanian, and Bulgarian communities are in line with the rate of offending in the general population. As far as crime levels in the UK are concerned, the reports show that in 2013 they were at their lowest for 33 years (Dodd, 2008). Also, rates of murder and violent crime have fallen more rapidly in the UK in the past decade than in many other Western European countries. For example, between 2003 and 2012 (a period known for its mass migration), the UK Peace Index<sup>5</sup> found that UK homicides per 100,000 people had fallen from 1.99 in 2003 to 1.0 in 2012.

The fear that immigration incites racial hatred and increased crime levels has been fueled by right-wing politicians such as UKIP leader Nigel Farage, who warned that Britain was facing a “Romanian crime wave” (Charlton, 2013). However, several months after the borders were opened to Romanians and Bulgarians, nothing major changed: the number of arrests remained more or less

the same, and the number of charges dropped. Research indicates that despite predictions about rise in crime following the arrival of Eastern European immigrants in January 2014, in the first three months of 2014, the number of Romanians convicted of crimes in the UK was 1,522, a 15.3% reduction from the same 2013 period (Elgot, 2014).<sup>6</sup> Also, the number of Romanians charged with an offense in London in January 2014 dropped 3% compared to the same month last year (Elgot, 2014). Finally, according to the 2011 Census, 1.1 million people were born in countries which joined the EU in 2004 or after; however, between 2002 and 2011, the crime rate decreased from 103 to 65, per 1,000 population.

Some research found involvement of Eastern European immigrants in specific types of crime and studied more systematically the role of exclusion and marginalization of communities to understand the involvement of immigrants in a life of crime. For example, Leerkes, Engbersen, and Van der Leun (2012) studied immigration and crime in the Netherlands, and argued that both the number of crime suspects without legal status and the number of irregular or undocumented immigrants held in detention facilities increased substantially in the Netherlands between 1997 and 2003. By April 2004, 49% of all apprehensions by the police involved irregular immigrants related to crime rather than to immigration offenses or misdemeanors, a rise since 1997 when it was 31%. In the early 1990s, 32% of irregular Eastern European immigrants had come into contact with the Rotterdam police because of criminal activity.

The authors argued that external border controls with respect to Eastern European countries were eased considerably after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Visa requirements for short visits were already dropped for a number of countries such as Poland and then Bulgaria and Romania. According to the authors, it appears that the relaxation of external border controls for Eastern Europeans has facilitated an increase in transnational crime as well as involvement of Eastern European criminals, many of whom are irregular immigrants, in house burglary and car theft in Western Europe (Leerkes, Engbersen, & Van der Leun, 2012). The authors argued that, “The share of criminal migration and cross-border crime is also somewhat elevated among property crimes with burglary or violence, particularly among Eastern Europeans (40%)” (p. 29). Almost 70% of arrested people in the Netherlands were males ages 20 to 40 years old, and the largest groups came from Eastern European countries (and Turkey, Morocco, and Surinam).

A combination of factors has resulted in the rise in immigration and crime. According to the study, developments in policing may account for 29% of the increase, criminal migration and cross-border crime account for 22%, demographic growth (15%), and status reclassification (6%). Marginalization effects were responsible for at least 28% of the crimes. The authors explain that in this period, the Dutch state increasingly attempted to exclude irregular immigrants from the formal labor market and public provisions. At the same time, the registered crime among irregular migrants rose. The “marginalization thesis” asserts that a larger number of migrants have become involved in crime in response to a decrease in legitimate opportunities to earn money and conventional life chances. The authors, however, conclude that “although irregular immigrants appear to have become overrepresented in crime statistics in recent years, their [immigrants] criminal activities still account for a very small part of all crimes committed in the Netherlands” (Leerkes et al., 2012, p. 33).

During the 1990s and early 2000s, media outlets in Italy also wrote extensively about the rise of Eastern European criminals on their territory. Similarly to Leerkes et al. (2012), Mastrobuoni and Pinotti (2015) studied the effects of “legal status” on immigrant crime in Italy, following the 2007 EU enlargement. They argued that Central and Eastern Europeans made up half of all immigrants to Italy after 2007. There were visa opportunities such as staying for 90 days prior to the enlargement. In regard to recidivism rates, the authors focus primarily on inmates from Romania and Bulgaria in Italy, and argue that in 2006, 80% of arrested foreigners in Italy were illegal.

In 2006, 22,000 individuals were pardoned from prisons in Italy, of which 9,642 were foreigners. They found that “rate of committing a crime decreases by about 50 percent after obtaining legal

status as a consequence of the EU enlargement” (Mastrobuoni & Pinotti, 2015, p. 26). However, the fact that a lot of foreigners were in Italian prisons does not mean that immigrants from Eastern Europe were committing more crime than the native population overall. For example, Bianchi et al. (2012) study crime and immigration across Italian areas, finding no significant empirical connection.

Paoli and Reuter (2008) studied drug trafficking and ethnic minorities in Western Europe, specifically Germany. They argued that popular media as well as law enforcement agencies in European countries frequently identify ethnic minorities, and recent immigrants in particular, as responsible for trafficking and selling illegal drugs. The authors argue that examination of the existing literature, as well as official police data, indicates that certain sectors of the drug market are indeed dominated by small segments of specific immigrant groups. According to the findings, Turkish and Albanian groups in particular control the importation, high-level trafficking and open-air retailing of heroin, while Colombian groups dominate the importation of cocaine. However, the authors explain that there are other sectors of the drug market, notably those for cannabis and synthetic drugs, in which native populations are more important. The authors explain that the fact that specific immigrant groups have tighter connections to source and transit countries, combined with the decreased ability of police to gain cooperation within immigrants’ communities in consuming countries, could explain the involvement of immigrant groups in specific illegal markets (Paoli & Reuter, 2008).

Another study linked to drug trafficking was conducted by Fabian Zhilla and Besfort Lamallari (2015). It illustrates that Albanians in Europe do hold an important position in the drug trafficking chain, as described by Paoli and Reuters. The study is based on interviews with 44 experts in the field of organized crime in Albania and on analysis of investigatory documents (Zhilla & Lamallari, 2015).

### ***Criminal mobility in the US***

In the US, similar to the situation in Europe, foreigners are often blamed for crimes and other problems. However, studies show that in the US, immigrants are more law-abiding than natives, regardless of race, education, and even class. Walter Ewing, Daniel E. Martínez, and Rubén G. Rumbaut published a study in 2015 that used Census and FBI data, among other statistical data, to refute stereotypes about immigrants. The study illustrated that between 1990 and 2013, the foreign-born population in the US almost doubled and the number of unauthorized immigrants more than tripled. At the same time, the violent crime declined 48% and property crime fell 41%. Also, according to the study, the incarceration rates of native-born Americans were much higher than those of migrants. The findings of the study confirmed once again that, “the overwhelming majority of immigrants are not ‘criminals’ by any commonly accepted definition of the term” (Gladstone, 2016).

In the US, the number of Eastern European immigrants is not as noticeable as in European countries. For example, there were 4.8 million European immigrants in the US in 2014, out of a total immigrant population of 42.4 million (Zong & Batalova, 2015). According to a study by the United Nations Population Division from 2013, out of 55.1 million European immigrants in the world, the majority (63%) reside in other European countries; the rest are mostly located in the US and Canada.

The number of European immigrants in the US decreased rapidly between 1960 and 2014 (from 75% in 1960 to 11% in 2014), as immigration from Latin America and Asia increased. This was partially an outcome of the Immigration Act of 1965 that abolished national-origin quotas that gave preference to European immigrants (Zong & Batalova, 2015). The most recent wave of European immigration followed the fall of the Iron Curtain in the early 1990s when a substantial number of Eastern Europeans moved to the US to reunite with family members; some were also seeking humanitarian protection due to the ongoing wars. The number of European immigrants in the US has remained steady since 2000, at approximately 4.8 million. Most Eastern European immigrants in the US are from Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Zong & Batalova, 2015).

However, despite the less significant numbers, Eastern European crime remains an important topic in the US, and there are some studies that discuss the link between Eastern European immigration and crime, specifically organized crime.

Renowned scholars such as Louise Shelley (1999, 2006), who has studied Russian organized crime, argue that organized crime groups are very similar to corporations. They are strategic, rational, and highly mobile, and take advantage of open borders. According to this view, criminal groups easily move to advanced market economies, where they create long-lasting outposts and form criminal alliances. On the other hand, many other scholars (see Arsovska, 2015a, 2015b; Campana, 2011; Morselli, Turcotte, & Tenti, 2011; Ubah, 2007) argue that mafias, and organized crime groups in general, have great difficulty establishing themselves outside their territory of origin. First, there is the issue of trust. Second, they are not necessarily recognized as “tough” guys by other criminals in the host country, which affects their decision to move abroad. According to Peter Hill, the Japanese Yakuza was traveling to foreign countries mainly for recreational reasons (Hill, 2003), while Gambetta writes that the Sicilian mafia “is heavily dependent on the local environment” (Gambetta, 1993, p. 249). Varese (2011) also shows that criminal clans do not move “on their own volition,” but are forced to migrate abroad (Varese, 2011, p. 8).

Drawing on research based on privileged access to confidential information, James O. Finckenauer and Elin J. Waring (1998) focus specifically on Russian criminal networks in the New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania areas. They examine significant criminal cases, some involving Russian participation with Cosa Nostra families in bootleg gasoline schemes. Their study is one of the first studies about the Russian Mafia in America since the breakup of the Soviet Union and the arrival of large numbers of Russian immigrants to the US. Although the authors discuss the presence of Russian criminals in various criminal markets in the US, the conclusion is that there is no such thing as “Russian Mafia” in the US—mafia that was strategically transplanted after the opening of the borders.

Similarly, Arsovska (2015b) studied the migration of Balkan organized crime groups to the US, particularly focusing on ethnic Albanian offenders. In her sample of 88 ethnic Albanian subjects, 30 respondents (34.1%) had direct contact with, and knowledge of, organized crime. A significant number were interviewed in US Federal prisons. Respondents in this category mentioned that they had worked closely with organized crime groups at different levels. In addition, 25 of the respondents (28.4%) had indirect knowledge of organized crime through observation (e.g., owners of ethnic cafés or relatives/friends of organized crime figures), and 17 respondents (19.3%) reported no contact with organized crime. In 16 cases (18.2%), the respondents’ answers were vague and it could not be determined whether the subjects had contact with organized crime.

Through in-depth interviews, the study examined the subjects’ views on transplantation and migration of organized crime, comparing the comments of those with and without knowledge of organized criminal activity. For example, some of the questions were:

What do you think, do Albanian criminal groups emerge as a response to social exclusion and limited opportunities in their new host country? Or are they sent by criminal groups operating in their country of origin (e.g. Albania or Kosovo) to expand the criminal empires?

The answers were categorized as “transplanted,” “not transplanted,” “both,” or “N/A.”

Assigned to the “transplanted” category were responses suggesting that organized crime is strategically transplanted or imported to the new host country because established groups in the Balkan region are sending their “soldiers” to foreign territories to expand their criminal empires and take advantage of new market opportunities. These responses support the notion that the immigration of Albanian organized crime figures to the US is strategic and well planned, and mainly economic in



nature. The interesting finding is that the more direct knowledge of organized crime respondents had, the less they supported the idea that Albanian organized crime is transplanted strategically. In fact, no respondent who acknowledged direct contact with organized crime groups supported the idea of transplantation/importation, and only 10.5% of respondents who knew about organized crime through observation/indirect contact supported the transplantation model. Moreover, 72.7% of the respondents with direct knowledge of criminal activity argued that Albanian organized crime “is not strategically transplanted/imported to the United States.”

It appears that some ethnic Albanians who became involved in organized crime in the West were forced to leave their Balkan homeland because of retaliation and prosecution. Also, a large number of offenders were raised (and sometimes born) in their host country. The study also found out that although aversive stereotyping, unfair profiling, discrimination, and social exclusion may have contributed to the rise of Albanian organized crime in some European countries, this has not been the case in the US. Albanian offenders and non-offenders alike reported that they don't feel excluded in the US society, and they don't think exclusion and profiling are the reasons for Albanian offenders getting involved in crime in the US.

Overall, it is not to argue that Eastern European immigrants are not involved in crime once they arrive at their host country; they have indeed been involved in various criminal activities from robberies and murders to drug and human trafficking. However, the limited number of studies indicate that it is hard to detect an average impact of Eastern European immigration on crime in Western Europe or the US. Also, there is no solid evidence of strategic criminal transplantation of Eastern European organized crime groups to the EU or US. In general, more attention is placed on immigrants and their actions because they are often depicted as foreign and sinister, which could also partially explain some higher arrest rates in specific EU countries. Some isolated cases where immigrants were involved in crimes attracted a lot of attention because of the unusual methods of operation, which shifted the attention of the police to specific immigrant groups. The native population of many EU countries is equally involved in various types of crimes, although sometimes those crimes are less detected.

## **Conclusions**

The connection between immigration and crime is one of the most contentious topics in contemporary society. The theoretical and policy discussions surrounding the topic are not new, however. From the beginning of the last century, many other ethnic groups have been associated with various crime waves. For example, Russians/Jews/Latvians were often associated with robbery and firearms; Chinese with opium; Italians with protection rackets, robbery, and gaming; Colombians with cocaine; Nigerians with fraud; and so on (Campbell, 2012). But do the crime incidents presented in newspapers and political speeches mean that there is indeed now a new wave of high-level Eastern European criminals in the EU or other Western democracies?

The review of the academic literature on immigration and crime with a focus on Eastern Europe indicates that there is no evidence to support the argument that Eastern Europeans are causing an increase in crime rates in EU countries or the US. Within most waves of immigration there is always a small number of criminals who benefit from the fact that the police in the host country do not speak their language, or have their fingerprints. However, there is no evidence that there is any systematic transplantation of Eastern European offenders, or sophisticated criminal structures, to Western territories.

Interestingly, while most of the discussions on the topic around Eastern European immigration involved the activities of Russian, Albanian, Romanian, Polish, and Bulgarian migrants in Western countries, scholars rarely look at the activities of “Western” offenders in Eastern context after the EU accession. For example, according to Europol, the presence of outlaw motorcycle gangs



(OMCGs) has so far been detected across the entire European continent (except in Cyprus). Hells Angels Motorcycle Club (HAMC) has already expanded significantly into Eastern Europe, including Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Turkey. In the past years, Europol has started initiating a joint investigative approach to this issue in light of OMCGs' general capacity to engage in drug trafficking on the "Balkan Route" and previous involvement in organized crime activities in North-Western Europe. Over 60 local motorcycle clubs, many of which display links to international OMCGs, have been detected across South-East Europe (Europol, 2010). However, more research in this field is required to fill the intelligence gap concerning local OMCGs in South-East Europe. The local authorities in South-East Europe face an unfamiliar threat and HAMC is already using diverse strategies to build a capacity to exert corruptive influence in the region.

### Notes

- 1 The Schengen Agreement is a treaty that led to the creation of Europe's Schengen Area, in which internal border checks have largely been abolished between EU member states. It was signed on June 14, 1985.
- 2 Summary of the Address by Javier Solana, former EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy to the European Parliament. Brussels, June 18, 2003.
- 3 Brexit is a term for the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Following the 2016 referendum vote to leave, the UK government started the withdrawal process on March 29, 2017, putting the UK on course to leave by April 2019.
- 4 A referendum was held on in June 2016, to decide whether the UK should leave or remain in the EU. Leave won by 51.9% to 48.1%. Economic and immigration concerns were a big part of the decision to leave.
- 5 See <http://visionofhumanity.org/#/page/indexes/uk-peace-index>.
- 6 Based on an article by the Romanian Ambassador published in *Huffington Post* (2015, July 14). "Thoughts Before Leaving Britain." See <http://londra.mae.ro/en/node/1276>.

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