



RUSSIAN ORGANIZED CRIME IN SWEDEN

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Russian organized crime and Russian-speaking criminals have established themselves in Sweden. Authorities are well aware of their existence but not much is known about their extent or what can be done to tackle the problem that they constitute. These criminals are abusing the Swedish welfare system to enrich themselves.

The face of Russian organized crime has been different at various stages of its development. In the early 1980s they mainly smuggled goods and narcotics, but with a growing exchange between Sweden and Russia, Russian criminals began to pose as businessmen. These “businessmen” were, and still are, strongly linked to extensive criminal organizations in Russia. Recently, their involvement in Swedish businesses came to the fore. The most common activity of these “businessmen” is economic crime, such as money laundering and forgery. They also engage in the trafficking of drugs, alcohol, tobacco and humans, as well as arson, racketeering, tax evasion, murder, extortion and theft.

Thieves-in-Law

In contrast to the classic Italian mafia, no Godfather is at the top of the ladder of the Russian organized crime groups. They are networks led by so called “thieves-in-law” (*vory v zakone*). Thief-in-law is a title created by Joseph Stalin, who needed a better control system in prisons. The thief-in-law worked as a guard in the camp and in exchange was promised protection by the authorities and could freely perform illegal activities with impunity. This gave the thieves-in-law a special position during the Soviet era.

Swedish law enforcement authorities know that two thieves-in-law have lived and operated in Sweden since 2009. One of them was recently caught by the police. Despite that he is well known for his criminal activities, there was not enough evidence to charge him for any of the crimes linked to his organization. He has been deported due to false identification papers. The other thief-in-law is still expanding his criminal network in Sweden and does not show signs of wanting to leave.

In the 1980s it was fairly common for Russian citizens seeking asylum to present false reasons or arrange false marriages in order to obtain Swedish citizenship. Nowadays, there are also other methods to enter Sweden. A common way for Russian criminals groups to enter to Sweden, and the EU, and receive all the rights this entails, is to buy passports, most often from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Lithuania. In 2010 all Bulgarian passports were controlled in Sweden and it turned out that 30 percent of them were forgeries.

Using false identities criminals are able to start and run businesses, take bank loans and apply for national registration through the Swedish tax authorities.

Bezpredel - the Period of Disorder

According to Russian speaking criminals, Sweden has gone through a time period called the *bezpredel*, the Russian word for disorder. This period is said to have taken place between 2006 and 2008, when several cases of murder, assault, kidnapping and extortion committed by Russian or Russian-speaking criminals, were reported in the press. The period was called “disorder” because it was seen as the period before order was established. This occurred when a thief-in-law was called to Sweden to create stability in the criminal market, where people know their positions and duties.

Although the *bezpredel* was characterized by disorder, it is not the only period with murders, assaults and kidnappings. Such crimes occur far too frequently. Roughly a year ago a Russian man was shot in the head in central Stockholm but survived. The perpetrator was later caught, and it was found that both he and the victim were from Russian-speaking countries and well integrated into the world of organized crime, which had given approval for the assassination attempt.



Sources of Revenue

The main source of revenue for organized crime groups in Sweden is illegal economic activities, such as money laundering, vehicle theft and illegal employment in, for instance, construction, laundries or restaurants.

Sweden is not among the EU countries most lucrative for organized crime groups. It has nevertheless become an interesting country for them as the open structure of Swedish society makes it fairly easy to start a business. The social security system provides generous benefits, which can be exploited by criminals. The government wage guarantee system and the ROT reduction system are often tapped by these criminals. There are also signs that the Russian organized crime constellations are increasingly using Swedish banks for money laundering, a problem that Sweden is still quite unprepared to tackle.

Impact on Society

Russian crime groups have started to be more and more involved globally in politics, private industries and in different public institutions, banks and government authorities. It gives these groups a new kind of influence at the core of power. It is a trend that can be noticed on a smaller scale in Sweden – several restaurants, construction companies and laundries, as well as some government authorities, have been affected. In the case of the latter, it is known that criminal groups sometimes train members so that they can take up employment in well-known staffing agencies, which serve as gateways for their future operations in the country.

The Swedish Migration Board has been accused several times by law enforcement authorities as well as in the media of having staff involved in corruption. In 2003 two officials were accused of handing out 27 illegal citizenships. Many of those who became Swedish citizens were deeply involved in, and high in the hierarchy of, Russian organized crime groups.

Prevention

To efficiently combat organized crime in Sweden, the groups involved must be properly surveyed. A survey in itself makes it more difficult for these criminals. All public institutions need to be on the alert for this new kind of criminal activities, as it otherwise might become a threat to society. These groups are known for their methods of corruption and skills in constructing networks. In order to better tackle the Russian organized crime groups active in Sweden a new model has been developed. This so-called Arborist Model boils down to removing key intermediate individuals surrounding the core of the group.

A Future Threat

Russian organized crime is a new type of criminal activity in Sweden. Much has been done to combat it and prevent it from growing. New strategies and new thinking are needed in order to prevent it from further spreading.

Today, Russian organized crime does not pose a direct danger to society, but there are signs that it has started to make inroads into public institutions as well as private companies. Groups are now able to influence and exploit the welfare system and conduct illegal activities. It has to be taken seriously. This is also one of the reasons why the new Arborist prevention model has been developed. By removing the intermediate individuals, the boss is left more vulnerable. It is a model that weakens the core of the organization.

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