PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH ORGANIZED CRIME IN GEORGIA

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The causes of organized crime in the (former Soviet) Republic of Georgia, the different crime groups and types of crime associated with these groups, the connections to the bureaucratic structure, and the specific organized criminal activities in select areas of Georgia are the topics addressed in this paper.

A. Organized crime in Georgia is one of the most prevalent problems today. Factors causing this problem are as follows:

- The difficult political and economic situation in present day Georgia caused by the fall of the USSR and the problems of transition to independence;
- Inter-nationality and inter-ethnic conflict, as well as civil war leading to loss of central government control of over 30% of its territory;
- Poorly formed and financed law enforcement agencies;
- Lack of a modern legislative base;
- High level of government corruption;
- Low level of lawfulness on the part of the general population.

B. Organized crime group formation can be divided into some groups that act only on Georgian territory, and others that act beyond its borders:

1. Criminal Gangs — They target State and commercial enterprises, as well as individual citizens. They specialize in banditry, robbery, racketeering, kidnapping and other crimes. They differ by their method of organization and use a two-three tier hierarchy with distinct leaders. The leaders usually have criminal background histories. Gangs are rarely involved in corruption. In some cases gang leaders have paid off law enforcement agents and court workers either to drop charges against them or to reduce their sentences. Typically, criminal gangs operate in one specific area and do not strive to expand their territory. Group size ranges from five to ten people. Criminal gangs are located all over Georgia, especially in areas of ethnic conflict, such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as in the mountainous regions of Svanetia and Pankiiskoye Ravine.
2. Organized Crime Societies:

a. Crime "syndicates" — activities include theft of government property, tax crimes, contraband and fraud. They are also involved in the drug business, gambling and control of prostitution. Crime syndicates are united, centralized criminal organizations which usually absorb weaker groups into their structure. They form as a result of competition, which is often accompanied by force and violence. These unions have a high level of organization and the leaders are very strong and influential. They usually possess legal structures through which they have connections to State, administrative and financial structures and ties to corruption. The presence of "vory v zakone" (thieves in law) can be observed in these groups. Their objectives are mercenary, and are usually made up of 20–100 people. These societies specialize in different economic areas and usually control the black market on designated territories.

b. Crime "cartels" — operate in the sphere of economic crimes, specializing in large-scale theft, money laundering, bank fraud, and plundering credit and humanitarian aid. Cartels are secret unions among State and criminal structures, usually through voluntary agreements with the aim of starting a criminal business. They have a high level of organization and conspiracy, with many leaders and a very structured hierarchy. The leaders are constantly coordinating their areas of influence and planning joint operations. They possess corrupt ties and usually have partners abroad. The aim of cartels is to influence the government and monopolize their economic spheres. Cartels lobby their interests through parliament and the people in government positions with whom they have ties. Cartels are usually made up of more than 50 people.

c. Crime "unions" — work in the spheres of production, bank fraud, money laundering and use violence as a means of intimidating and racketeering. Unions are parasite operations on legal firms and government enterprises. They have a high level of organization and ties to corruption. The leaders usually do not possess a criminal past, but were former government workers. They are usually made up of about 20 individuals.

Separate organized crime groups possess traits from each of the above mentioned groups and can quickly adapt to political and economic changes. In the past years a general tendency has been observed of government and law enforcement agents working with organized crime groups.

1. Political Crime Societies — direct crime activities towards the government with the aim of taking over or weakening political power and obtaining control over the more profitable economic areas. These organizations take part in terrorist acts, contract killings, intimidation, blackmail, organize mass disorder, contraband, and trade weapons and drugs. Political crime societies are organized as political parties, they have legal status and ways to cover their criminal activities. They have structured hierarchies which model that of a political party and have legitimate leaders with good backgrounds. Usually these groups are ideological and aim to widen their influence. However, their goal is more economic than it is political, a distinguishing factor from terrorist groups.

2. Ethnic-Crime Societies — commit crimes directed towards the government with the goal of taking over and exerting its own ethnic control over a specific