The news of Giovanni Falcone’s murder made headlines across the world. Foreign heads of state and government leaders paid fulsome tribute to his courage and dedication, and sent messages of condolence befitting the death of a statesman. Falcone had travelled widely in the course of his investigations throughout Europe and to North and South America, and had developed many personal contacts with attorneys and police officers. Former US attorneys Louis Freeh, Richard Martin and Rudolph Giuliani, who had worked closely with Falcone since 1984, expressed their grief at the loss of a close friend. The US government made an immediate offer to assist the Italian investigation, and within 48 hours of Falcone’s death at Capaci, forensic scientists and explosives experts from the Federal Bureau of Investigation were on their way to Palermo. British law-enforcement officers were horrified by the ruthlessness and audacity of the attacks, and by the level at which the Mafia was prepared to strike. Their fears were aggravated by the implications for a post-1992, barrier-free Europe of an internationalized Italian Mafia with the capacity to challenge the sovereignty of an EU member state.

By the early 1990s investigations had shown that Italian Mafia groups were operating in every continent, and had begun to exploit the possibilities offered by the Single Market and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. The opening up of the former East bloc and the war in ex-Yugoslavia had created new drugs- and arms-trafficking routes between East and West. In June 1991 the Interior Minister of Czechoslovakia
warned of ‘numerous concrete indicators’ that the Italian Mafia was trying to establish new centres of drug production in the USSR in collaboration with Soviet organized crime and said it was possible that the profits were being laundered in Czechoslovakia, where legislation did not permit the investigation of suspect bank accounts or financial transactions.¹

West European countries had also become more alarmed about recent Mafia expansion. In the summer of 1992 there were around 70 Italian mafiosi in French prisons, most of whom had been arrested on the coast between Marseilles and the Italian border.² François D’Aubert, a deputy of the French centre-right party UDF, was one of several politicians who claimed that gambling, tourism and the construction industry had been heavily infiltrated by Italian criminality, and gave as an example the fact that Italian building firms in Nice were regularly undercutting French builders by as much as 30 per cent.³ Members of the Camorra were reputed to be laundering drug profits on the Côte d’Azur, and in June 1991, had used front companies in Monte Carlo and in the French border town of Menton in an attempt to purchase the Menton casino – a bid thwarted at the last minute by a joint Franco–Italian police operation.

The absence of money laundering- and asset-tracing legislation had encouraged all four Italian crime groups to set up operations in Germany after 1982, when the Rognoni–La Torre law came into effect (see Chapter 2), while the fall of the Berlin Wall had opened up the possibility of new lucrative investments in the former East bloc, with Berlin as a convenient springboard. A senior Italian investigator recalls hearing an order being issued.

When the Berlin Wall fell we were intercepting the telephone line of an important mafioso. This mafioso received a telephone call from another in Germany, and said to him, ‘Have you seen what’s happened? Go off immediately and start buying.’ He replied, ‘But what should I buy?’ ‘Buy everything you can’ was the answer. That’s the Mafia for you, it goes wherever there’s business to be done.⁴

The murder of Sicilian judge Rosario Livatino in September 1990 had been committed by two Sicilians employed in a pizzeria in Leverkusen, near Cologne, where they were arrested a month later. Four Sicilians had been arrested in April 1992 in Mannheim in connection with a series of murders committed in the southern Sicilian town of Palma di Montecchio on New Year’s Eve 1991. Paolo Borsellino had been working closely with the German federal police investigation service, the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) at the time of his murder – some 60 mafiosi had