1
Networks: Rational and Cultural Components

1. An introduction

This book discusses the trafficking of human beings (THB) and smuggling of migrants (SoM) from and via Southeast Europe and Russia (SEE&R). In terms of arrival or transit countries, we shall limit the cases examined to Belgium. In some cases, however, practices in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Austria, Spain and the UK are discussed if they arise in the Belgian files. When we say ‘from’ Southeast Europe and Russia, we refer to networks from Albania, Romania and/or Bulgaria, but also from Russia. By ‘via’ Southeast Europe we refer to networks originating from Turkey, Iraq, India, Pakistan and China, when they cooperate with one or more SEE&R networks or travel through an Eastern European country.

The authors have focused their attention on international networks in which criminal organizations are involved. Using the criteria of the explicit involvement of criminal organizations and the Eastern Europe-to-Belgium link means that generalizing about THB and SoM either on a small scale or outside Europe is not within our remit. There are in fact many individual or ‘soloist’ traffickers at work, which are not the object of our study. Not all illegal transports of people across a border are, by definition, people smuggling. In order to qualify as people smuggling, there must be real illegal profits accumulated by the trafficker through the transport. Illegal border transports on humane grounds, in which only the operating costs are paid without any acquisition of real profits, do not therefore constitute people smuggling. In addition, a distinction must be made between people smuggling and illegal migration, which is generally not allied to criminality.

It is not the authors’ intention to suggest that all cases of SoM and THB from SEE&R conform to the patterns observed in this study. In
limiting the subject to THB and SoM in SEE&R and further restricting it to only a few countries, even if those are very important in the context of this trade (Carletto et al., 2006; Hajdinjak, 2002; Limanowska, 2002; Monzini, 2001; Wallace et al., 1996; Kara, 2009), the authors acknowledge that their findings for THB and SoM as businesses should not be extrapolated to other continents and countries (McCabe, 2010). Still less is it their intention to claim that this business should be seen as a model for the overall current patterns of irregular migrations from Albania, Bulgaria, Romania or Russia to Western Europe, or for irregular migrations in general (see Gurak & Cases, 1992; Hirschman et al., 1999). Interpersonal factors may play a more significant role than organizations in most of the irregular migrations. Research indicates that when traffickers are recruiting, the social networks of acquaintances, family and person-to-person advertising are considered by the prospective migrants to be the most trusted factors (Boyd, 1989; Köser & Pinkerton, 2002: 22–24). However, from a legal point of view these people cannot be seen as conscious participants in the illegal construction.

Both authors have been involved in the fight against THB and SoM for many years. Johan Leman was involved for ten years in the fight against THB and SoM. He was director from 1993 to 2003 of the former federal Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (CEOOR) that was the de facto national rapporteur for Belgium on THB and SoM. He was also a member of the task force against THB in Belgium (1995–2003). At the end of the 1990s, he had several meetings in Sofia with a former head of Intelligence and with some Bulgarian police officers. He is currently emeritus professor in social and cultural anthropology at KU Leuven University.

Stef Janssens serves as an expert analyst of THB and SoM and participates in the meetings of the national rapporteurs on THB of the European Commission. He cooperated in the preparation of the OSCE report (2010) on THB: ‘Analysing the Business Model of Trafficking in Human Beings – OSCE’. In 2014 he participated as an expert in the SELEX project (Severe Labour Exploitation) of the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Commission. He served as an adviser to several Belgian parliamentary commissions on organized crime and human trafficking between 1996 and 2003. In his capacity as a THB and SoM expert, he also acted as a liaison for Belgium with the US embassy to comment on the TIP report by the US State Department. Both authors are associate members of LINC (Leuven Institute of Criminology) at KU Leuven. The authors both participated in a NATO advanced research workshop on ‘Human Trafficking, Smuggling and Illegal Immigration: International