

## HUMAN SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING IN TURKEY

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Human smuggling and trafficking, another aspect of organized crime, is strongly connected to the global drugs and illegal arms trade. They know no borders, nationality and continue to generate enormous profits. The profits of the global industry of human trafficking amount up to \$32 billion, including the value of individuals being sold and their services. As far as the profits of sex trafficking is concerned, the data vary from \$7 billion to \$19 billion annually (Interpol) and even up to \$217.8 billion (International Labor Organization 2005 Report) <sup>1</sup>.

Turkey, a country in the crossroad of Africa, Asia and Europe, is used not so much as a transit, but more as a destination one for women and children, victims of sexual exploitation and to a lesser extent for forced labor. Most victims come from Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Romania, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Belarus and Bulgaria. In addition, there is a significant trend of internal displacement of Turks either for purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labour. Despite the existence of autonomous trafficking networks, even more powerful are those extended all over Europe and have the means to facilitate the integration of illegal migrants. Those networks infiltrated the Turkish and Kurdish Diaspora many years ago.<sup>2</sup>

According to a Report of Italian Police, the “heads” of the Turkish mafia that controls the European networks are based in Istanbul, at Aksaray district. People are transported in Italy or in Greece by the Aksaray mafia, and in particular those arriving to Greece, continue their way to Italy or Albania. In 1997, according to Italian experts, the Turkish mafia signed an agreement with the Albanian mafia. As soon as the clandestine migrants are transferred by Turks in Greece, are handed over to Albanians, who, in their turn transfer them to Italy.<sup>3</sup> Air, sea and land routes lead the victims to their destination, or almost to it.

For example, the main four Mediterranean Sea routes are the following:

- From Maghreb to the south east coast of Spain or through Mellila and Ceuta (Morocco) to the Mediterranean coasts.

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<sup>1</sup> Trafficking in Persons Report, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Person/U.S. Department of State, 2008, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Trafficking in Persons Report, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Person/U.S. Department of State, 2005, pp. 28-29, Trafficking in Persons Report, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Person/U.S. Department of State, 2008, pp.248-250.

<sup>3</sup> *Kurdish Observer*, 22.10.2000.

- From Turkey to Greece, Sicily or to the mainland of Italy.
- From the southeast coasts of Adriatic to Italy and mainly to Puglia
- From Egypt to Sicily (or from Maghreb, through Tunisia and sometimes via Malta) to Sicily or Italian mainland.<sup>4</sup>

In general, human trafficking is controlled by organized crime groups that simply expand their scope of activities, pursuing to maximize profits and minimize risks. Nevertheless, according to a research of the Turkish University Bilkent, which was carried out on behalf of the International Organization for Migration, in the February 2003, inside Turkey, there were not found any mafia type organizations but only smaller, flexible ones that tend to exploit the opportunities given, when it is possible. However, it should be stressed out that the possibility of international cooperation or the existence of a central coordination structure is neither excluded, nor confirmed.

Based again on the outcomes of this research, the networks have loose structure, consisting of hundreds of smaller units that cooperate among them. Their viability depends clearly on their flexibility and adaptability. Even when a “link” of the “chain” breaks, it is replaced directly without inflicting any harm.

When the irregular migrant crosses the borders, he is handed over to another smuggler that speaks many languages and has many different passports at his disposal. The smugglers who take part in this procedure do not know each other, so as in case of an arrest, the anonymity of the others can not be threatened. The local networks are specializing in certain fields, such as counterfeiting. In different stages of trafficking, they even cooperate, broadening thus their scope of activity. They manage to coexist, due to the fact they have mutual interests and benefits and above all they should avoid the authorities. A lot of migrants are in their service because they cooperate with persons of the same nationality, building easily trust among them, as they know well how to approach the presumptive victims.

Tourist agencies in Haydarpasa and Dilovas are considered to transfer bulk of irregular migrants into truck containers, directly to Italy. Each container can carry up to 40-50 persons, each of them, paying at least 2.000\$–3.000\$.<sup>5</sup>

According to the police force, a job or even a marriage are often offered to the victims in order to persuade them to abandon their country. The mechanism of a typical trafficking network is the following:

The network consists of a leader, an assistant, a “cashier”, a driver and a “supervisor” that follows the women closely and prevents them from escaping. The person in the top of the scale is of different nationality and usually a woman, often a former prostitute that knows well the Turkish language, brings women from her country or selects them inside the Turkish territory.

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<sup>4</sup> Ahmet İçduygu, “Irregular migration in Turkey”, *International Organization for Migration*, February 2003, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 49-54.

Thus, each network has a “mama”, a woman who is in charge of 10-15 women, and comes from the same country of origin of the victims. The victims, by arriving, begin to work for their “boss” who in turn provides them with food and accommodation. After a certain period they are allowed to keep 40% of their profits, receiving the rest of it. As it is known, it is almost impossible to escape alive...<sup>6</sup>

This type of modern slavery, that constitutes a flagrant breach of human rights, is comprised annually of, at least, 800.000 people trafficked worldwide, while this number does not include those, trafficked inside their national borders.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Irregular Migration and Trafficking in Women: The Case of Turkey”, *IOM/ International Organization on Migration*, 2003, p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Trafficking in Persons Report, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Person/U.S. Department of State, 2008.