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The Bulgarian Government's Efforts to Address The Issue of Transnational Organized Crime: Trafficking in Human Beings and Smuggling Migrants

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Abstract

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are forms of transnational organized crime (TOC) that affect people all over the world, including in Bulgaria. The actions taken by the Bulgarian government to combat these illegal operations are the focus of this study. A more effective evaluation of Bulgaria's involvement within the regional security complex can be achieved by employing qualitative approaches with the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and applying primary and secondary data collection methods. Institutionalization, increased border surveillance, and public education initiatives are among the steps highlighted in the report. Understanding Bulgaria's anti-crime activities has been enhanced by this analysis, which provides valuable information for improving policies against migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

Keywords

Transnational organized crime, regional security complex theory, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, Bulgaria security

Abstrak

Perdagangan manusia dan penyelundupan migran adalah bentuk kejahatan terorganisir transnasional yang mempengaruhi orang-orang di seluruh dunia, termasuk di Bulgaria. Tindakan yang diambil oleh pemerintah Bulgaria untuk memberantas operasi ilegal ini menjadi fokus penelitian ini. Evaluasi yang lebih efektif terhadap keterlibatan Bulgaria dalam kompleks keamanan regional dapat dicapai dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan Teori Kompleks Keamanan Regional (RSCT) dan menerapkan metode pengumpulan data primer dan sekunder. Pelembagaan, peningkatan pengawasan perbatasan, dan inisiatif pendidikan publik merupakan beberapa langkah yang disoroti dalam laporan ini. Pemahaman terhadap aktivitas anti-kejahatan Bulgaria diperkuat dengan analisis ini, yang memberikan informasi berharga untuk meningkatkan kebijakan melawan penyelundupan migran dan perdagangan manusia.

Kata Kunci

Kejahatan terorganisir transnasional, teori kompleks keamanan regional, perdagangan manusia, penyelundupan migran, keamanan Bulgaria

Introduction

According to the (Ministry Of Foreign Affairs Of The Republic Of Indonesia, 2019), UNTOC, also known as the Palermo Convention, was formed in 2000 and covers a wide range of dangerous activities that span across international borders. Because they transcend

state borders, transnational criminal organizations (ICOs) and illicit operations including migrant smuggling, drug and weapon trafficking, and human trafficking pose serious concerns to international security (Bruwer, 2020).

The government and the people of Bulgaria are both affected by the complex problems caused by migrant smuggling syndicates that engage in Trafficking in Human Beings (THB). There are major ramifications on a global scale for Bulgaria's fight against transnational organized crime. Bulgaria is often used as a recruiting ground within its boundaries, and it is also a country where human trafficking victims primarily come from (Jovanoski & Rustemi, 2021). Despite a noticeable increase in cases of forced begging and labor exploitation, sexual exploitation is still the most common type of human trafficking in Bulgaria (Jespersen et al., 2019). There has been a noticeable change in recent years, while Bulgaria still operates as a starting nation for trafficking individuals. In 2015, the GRETA Report on Emerging Trends in Trafficking in Human Beings found that the country was both a starting and ending point for human trafficking.

Due to multiple vulnerabilities, Bulgaria, like many other nations, struggles with organized transnational crime, particularly in the areas of human trafficking (THB) and migrant smuggling. Being bordered by nations like Greece and Turkey in southeastern Europe is a major consideration. Migrants and traffickers using Bulgaria as a transit route to the EU take advantage of its strategic location. Smugglers of migrants find the country attractive due to its closeness to EU members. Inadequate surveillance infrastructure and challenging terrains in certain parts make Bulgaria's lengthy borders an obstacle to security and monitoring, which in turn makes the country more vulnerable to migrant smuggling and transnational criminal organizations (THB). Bulgaria faces varied obstacles in combating transnational organized crime, particularly in relation to human trafficking and migrant smuggling. This complex situation highlights these challenges.

Numerous scholars in the fields of political science, economics, psychology, law, legislation, economic theory, sociology, and transnational organized crime have studied TNCs and their operations in recent years (Golubovskii et al., 2020). Nevertheless, evaluations of regional linkages and relationships have been scarce in prior research, which has had a significant influence on broader security issues. Furthermore, this article is just one of many scientific articles that have recorded studies on the state or government's efforts to combat transnational organized crime (TOC). For example, the efforts of the Turkish government to combat transnational organized crime (TOC), which is fueled by drug trafficking across borders, were examined in the research of (Khausar, et al., 2021b). Additionally, this study looks into what the government is doing to address the TOC issue. The main difference between this journal and Khausar's study is that the countries studied are different; although this publication concentrates on Bulgaria, Khausar's work centers on Turkey. Additionally, there is a difference in the type of TOC. This study investigates migrant smuggling and human trafficking, while Khausar's research focuses on trafficking in illicit drugs.

For that reason, this research employs the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) framework to examine the interplay and regional connections of Bulgarian measures against



Transnational Organized Crime (TOC). Prior research did not specifically address how to apply RSCT to Bulgaria. Alternatively, Bulgaria's security dynamics can be better understood by using the overarching principles of RSCT. The purpose of this research is to shed light on the current state of affairs regarding the Bulgarian government's response to transnational organized crime (TOC) and to suggest ways in which this response could be enhanced.

A multi-faceted and intricate subject is the application of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) to the setting of Bulgaria, especially when it comes to case studies or specific scenarios. The global security dynamics can be better understood by looking at regional elements, according to the RSCT theory of international relations put forward by Ole Waever and Barry Buzan (Farzayee, 2023). The regional security complex influences and contributes to transnational issues such as migration, organized crime, and human trafficking; RSCT can shed light on these relationships. These issues are major concerns for Bulgaria. By situating Bulgaria's security within its regional surroundings and the larger dynamics of international security, the RSCT offers a useful framework for analysis.

An analysis of the Bulgarian government's efforts to tackle transnational organized crime, particularly migrant smuggling and human trafficking, is the scholarly contribution of this paper. This report sheds light on Bulgaria's anti-crime initiatives and helps shape future policies to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research methodology. The predominant research methodology employed by prior studies is qualitative research (Khausar & Sadadi, 2021a), (Šekarić Stojanović & Lazić, 2020). This report undertook a thorough analysis of the Bulgarian government's efforts in addressing transnational organized crime, with a specific emphasis on "Trafficking in Human Beings and Smuggling of Migrants". The research approach incorporates both primary and secondary data collection methods, ensuring a comprehensive investigation of this complex subject. The main aim of this research is to provide a comprehensive answer to the following question: The Bulgarian government's response to transnational organized criminal activities pertaining to human trafficking and migrant smuggling has been robust. Various measures have been developed to effectively combat these challenges.

The study will utilize the Regional Security Complex Theory and the International Security Theory to address this subject. The Regional Security Complex Theory posits that security problems within a particular region are interrelated, with governments exerting influence on each other's security dynamics (Cannon & Donelli, 2020). The project will analyze how Bulgaria's efforts to combat transnational organized crime, including human trafficking and migrant smuggling, are influenced by the regional security complex in Southeastern Europe. The analysis will examine the influence of neighboring nations' security priorities and activities, as well as regional organizations, on Bulgaria's policies and strategies in addressing these crucial concerns. The main objective is to provide a detailed understanding of how Bulgaria's efforts match with regional and global security considerations. The research aims to get insights into the efficacy of its initiatives and identify

potential areas for enhancement.

Result and Discussion

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) suggests that geographical regions can give rise to security complexes, in which the security issues of governments are so intertwined that they cannot be effectively examined or handled in isolation. Furthermore, RSCT's focus on the interaction between regional and global security dynamics is especially pertinent to Bulgaria, since it is impacted by wider European security concerns and worldwide geopolitical patterns. This include Bulgaria's involvement in tackling issues such as the migrant crisis, its engagement in international security endeavors, and the influence of both regional and global influences on its internal security policies. It emphasizes the significance of taking into account regional interdependencies and relationships when comprehending and tackling security concerns in and around Bulgaria.

Result

This study uncovers that the Bulgarian government has enforced a range of actions to address these problems, which encompass.

1. The Bulgarian government has created specialized agencies and units specifically focused on combatting the issues of human trafficking and the illegal transportation of migrants. These agencies have a vital role in coordinating activities, conducting investigations, and implementing measures to combat trafficking.
2. Bulgaria has prioritized improving border surveillance to counter transnational organized crime and prevent illegal entrance and trafficking operations due to the vulnerability of its borders. This encompasses the utilization of advanced technology and law enforcement activities at the border to identify and discourage smuggling endeavors.
3. The government has launched public awareness programs to enlighten the populace about the perils associated with human trafficking and migrant smuggling. These programs have the objective of educating the general public about the indicators of human trafficking and the hazards linked to unauthorized migration.
4. Bulgari has implemented a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to promptly offer support to those who have been trafficked. The NRM assumes a crucial function in orchestrating victim support services and guaranteeing efficient aid for individuals impacted by trafficking.
5. The Bulgarian government has actively participated in international cooperative efforts to combat transnational organized crime. This entails collaborating with foreign nations, global institutions, and law enforcement entities to counteract the illicit activities of trafficking and smuggling that occur beyond national boundaries. In addition to these endeavors, the report also highlights obstacles and opportunities for enhancement, including the necessity for heightened law enforcement, improved inter-agency collaboration, and the resolution of intricate migration-related matters. Enhancing government efforts in these sectors is crucial for effectively combating transnational organized crime in Bulgaria, as indicated by the research.



Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of improving services and support for victims of human trafficking, particularly males, by increasing the capabilities of specialist services and guaranteeing access to essential medical care, counseling, and legal aid. The research underscores the importance of international collaboration in tackling transnational organized crime, emphasizing the necessity of partnering with other nations, international organizations, and law enforcement agencies to effectively counteract trafficking and smuggling activities that occur across borders. Although the Bulgarian government has made endeavors to tackle transnational organized crime, the study indicates that there is still scope for enhancement. It highlights the necessity for improved inter-agency collaboration, tackling the difficulties presented by smuggling networks, and the intricacy of migration-related matters. Enhancing these facets of governmental endeavors is important in order to effectively counteract transnational organized crime in Bulgaria.

Discussion

Comprehensive Understanding of Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) in Bulgaria

Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) continues to be a long-standing issue in Bulgarian society, exhibiting substantial influence on governmental decisions and public aspects (Bankov, 2020). The need for coordinated action is highlighted by collaborative efforts such as the cooperative operations conducted by Europol and Bulgarian authorities to combat migrant smuggling networks along the Balkan route (Europol, 2023). Bulgaria's significant involvement in combating human trafficking, both as a country where victims originate from and as a transit country, underscores the necessity for comprehensive cooperation with neighboring nations such as Turkey and Serbia. Emphasizing collective endeavors against Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) (Official Website of European Commission, 2021).

The extensive network of human trafficking, specifically for sexual exploitation and forced labor, goes beyond the borders of Bulgaria, encompassing many European countries that serve as destinations for this illegal activity. This interconnectedness underscores the urgency for comprehensive regional strategies to effectively address these transnational security concerns (Official Website of European Commission, 2021). Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) and Migrant smuggling persist as two of the most critical criminal challenges confronting the European Union (EU) (Europol, 2022). Bulgaria emerges as one of the nations facing the most significant threats in this regard. Following the lifting of Schengen visas for Bulgarian nationals in 2001, Bulgaria became a major country of origin for the THB exploited in the EU (Antonopoulos et al., 2019). Bulgaria is also a migrant smuggling route as human smuggling networks based in Bulgaria provide in-transit logistics for migrant smuggling (GI-TOC, 2021).

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling have garnered significant attention from anti-trafficking entities at both the European and international levels (Official Website of European Commission, 2021). Esteemed organizations like the Council of Europe and OSCE regularly publish reports highlighting risks associated with exploitation and trafficking, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive, regionally focused strategies.

Applying the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) to Bulgaria's security landscape provides essential insights:

- 1. Regional Security Interdependence:** Bulgaria, as part of the Balkan region, shares close ties with neighboring countries such as Turkey and Serbia. The presence of Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) operations, such as human trafficking and migrant smuggling, in this region establishes a highly interwoven security landscape. The existence of transnational criminal networks demonstrates that Bulgaria's security risks cannot be separated from the wider regional security dynamics.
- 2. Shared Security Issues:** Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) disregards national boundaries, impacting not only Bulgaria but also other states in the region. Utilizing a Regional Security Complex (RSC) perspective helps facilitate the comprehension of how Transnational Crime (TPC) represents a collective security concern that necessitates extensive regional collaboration and tactics.
- 3. Geopolitical Influence:** Bulgaria's geopolitical position, characterized by extensive borders and its location on migration routes, adds to the complexity of security in the region. It is crucial to comprehend geographical characteristics when dealing with TOC.
- 4. Regional Cooperation and Diplomacy:** In order to address the issue of transnational organized crime (TOC), it is crucial to prioritize regional collaboration and diplomacy. Bulgaria should engage in cooperation with neighboring countries and international organizations in order to formulate efficient collective approaches in addressing the transnational organized crime (TOC) challenges. The RSCT technique allows for a more accurate assessment of Bulgaria's involvement in the regional security complex. This assessment helps identify key areas that require combined efforts and strategies to effectively combat transnational organized crime (TOC).

Government Initiatives and Their Impact

The Bulgarian government has implemented proactive steps to combat transnational organized crime (TOC), specifically focusing on human trafficking (THB) and migrant smuggling. This demonstrates a strategic approach to law enforcement and intervention. The organization has created specialized agencies that are solely focused on combating human trafficking and the illegal transportation of migrants, with a strong emphasis on law enforcement. In light of the susceptibility of Bulgaria's borders to transnational organized crime, the government has instituted heightened border surveillance. This involves the utilization of technology improvements and greater police presence to deter criminal operations associated with human trafficking and smuggling.

The government's public awareness efforts are crucial in teaching the public about the risks involved, with the goal of not just fighting crimes but also preventing them by equipping individuals with information. The implementation of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) guarantees the organized provision of aid to victims of trafficking, offering essential support services. However, in spite of these initiatives, there are still issues and areas that need development. Further progress necessitates the implementation of enhanced law enforcement,



improved inter-agency collaboration, and a more nuanced approach to the issues associated with migration.

The addition of Section IX 'Human Trafficking' in the Bulgarian Criminal Code demonstrates the country's dedication to thoroughly criminalize human trafficking. The national definition includes the act of recruiting, transporting, housing, or receiving individuals for various exploitative purposes, regardless of their consent. This demonstrates a broad legal approach (Alemika & Ifeakandu, 2019).

Influenc of External Powers in Bulgari'as Efforts to Combat Transnational Organized Crime

Bulgaria's ability to properly tackle these security concerns is greatly impacted by the participation of external powers, such as neighboring countries and international bodies. Cooperative endeavors with neighboring nations like as Turkey and Serbia are essential for the development of comprehensive policies. Reports and recommendations from international organizations including the European Commission, Council of Europe, and OSCE highlight the importance of regionally targeted strategies. These strategies guide collaborative initiatives and diplomatic interactions. To effectively combat the cross-border activities of organized crime, it is crucial to maintain ongoing collaboration, exchange of information, and coordinated actions. This will help create a safer environment not just for Bulgaria but also for the entire region.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement

Notwithstanding legislative efforts and administrative initiatives, obstacles endure in the rates at which prosecutions occur and the efficiency of enforcement. The efficacy of anti-trafficking laws is impeded by inherent structural deficiencies within law enforcement institutions and apprehensions over corruption. As a result, there has been a decline in the number of prosecutions, even though there has been an increase in the number of victims of trafficking who have been identified. There are significant difficulties in discovering and prosecuting instances of severe labor exploitation, which emphasizes the necessity for stronger enforcement and control measures.

Future Directions

To effectively tackle these difficulties, it is necessary to consistently work on improving legislation, enhancing law enforcement capabilities, raising public knowledge, and developing trust in governance. To strengthen Bulgaria's position against transnational organized crime, it is crucial to focus on specific sectors such as labor exploitation and promote increased international collaboration.

Conclusions

Bulgaria faces significant difficulties in addressing the issue of human trafficking, which encompasses a range of exploitative practices such as the sexual exploitation of women, forced labor of men, trafficking of newborns for begging purposes, and fraudulent marriages. The concerns are influenced by several factors, such as the utilization of technology by traffickers, the presence of vulnerable populations in the sex industry, and the lack of development in certain locations.

Notwithstanding Bulgaria's sincere endeavors, these issues endure. Although the country has officially approved international accords and implemented laws and plans, deficiencies in law enforcement lead to a disparity between recognized wrongdoers and the number of successful prosecutions. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a valuable tool that assists victims, but it has to be improved by offering more comprehensive assistance, especially for male victims, and by raising public awareness. Bulgaria is currently experiencing an increase in attempts to illegally cross its borders, which requires increased focus to address the issue of migrant smuggling. To address this problem, the country utilizes operational strategies, technology innovations, and law enforcement activities at the border. Nevertheless, the emergence of trends such as increased numbers of larger groups seeking to cross borders and a sudden rise in covert entrances using vehicles provide novel obstacles.

Bulgaria has established legal measures to punish anyone who assist in unlawful immigration and residence within its borders. These measures include fines outlined in the Criminal Code, which are enforced by different departments under the Ministry of Interior. However, proposals to revise legislation regarding criminal sanctions for anyone assisting in the housing and transportation of illegal migrants have emerged. Despite Bulgaria's considerable efforts in implementing legal and operational measures to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling, there are still significant obstacles that must be addressed. It is crucial to take necessary measures such as enhancing law enforcement, reinforcing prevention and victim protection, rewriting legal definitions, promoting international collaboration, restoring public trust, conducting continuous reviews, seeking international support, and prioritizing prevention in order to make progress.

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