VIETNAMESE CRIME STRUCTURES AND CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract
In 2007–2012, a special research realised at the Institute of International Relations (IIR) Prague sought to analyse the structure and activities of Vietnamese crime networks in the Czech Republic. The Vietnamese criminality has been representing dynamically developing phenomena in the country, penetrating not only the local Vietnamese emigrant community but the state apparatus as well. Actually, the Vietnamese criminal underground lives in a specific symbiosis with the local Asian emigrant community, where legal and illegal activities are frequently merged together.

Keywords: Vietnamese, crime networks, Czech Republic

INTRODUCTION
In the last few decades, the numbers of Vietnamese in the European countries have steadily increased. The Czech Republic, with approximately 65 000 Vietnamese residents, is not an exception. Most of the Vietnamese emigrants have been looking for an opportunity to improve their lives and to ensure a better future for their children. However, waves of Vietnamese emigration brought a new type of crime to the host countries as well. The Vietnamese criminal activities include mainly economic crime, smuggling of people, trade in people, counterfeiting activities, violent crime, and drug trafficking. Because many Vietnamese communities abroad have tendency to keep aloof from the social and administrative systems in their new countries of residence, it is very difficult to investigate criminal offences and introduce efficient legislative and preventive measures against their criminal activities.

In the Vietnamese communities, the “legal” and “illegal” spheres live in a dialectical unity and it is often difficult to find the line between them. To identify the both spheres was the main goal of the IIR research.

RESEARCH METHODS AND INFORMATION SOURCES
The IIR research was based mainly on primary sources: unpublished reports and documents, interviews with members of security forces and foreign services, and interviews with members of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic and Vietnamese citizens living in Vietnam.

To penetrate more deeply into the Vietnamese community, the ethnographic methods of structured interviews and participant observation were employed. For this purpose, six field project...
assistants were engaged in various stages of the project. All of them were of Vietnamese origin and fluent in both the Czech and the Vietnamese language. They collected information on the Vietnamese communities and realised a series of interviews with its members. The interviews were strictly confidential. They contributed mainly to forming a general understanding of the structures and functions of Vietnamese communities and the role of crime networks in them.

More concrete pieces of information about the Vietnamese crime were collected with the help of the members of the Czech security forces (mainly the Organised Crime Unit of the Police of the Czech Republic, the Anti-Drug Headquarters of the Police of the Czech Republic, and the Ministry of Interior), foreign service (mainly the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Hanoi, and the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic) and customs (the General Directorate of Customs of the Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic).

RESULTS

The functions and co-existence of the civilian and criminal branches are the result of the transfer of the Vietnamese traditional mentality to the Western cultural space. On the base of the research, the following social model was identified:

THE CIVILIAN BRANCH

Although the Vietnamese emigrant communities abroad appear to be homogenous at first sight, it is far from the truth. As a result of historical and social developments, different social groups of Vietnamese residents were established in the Czech Republic:

A street dealer of goods, a cook or waiter in a Vietnamese or Chinese restaurant, or a worker in a legal/illegal manufacturing workshop is a man on the bottom of the Vietnamese immigrant hierarchy.

A new emigrant needs a substantial amount of money for the transfer to the Czech Republic, whether through legal or illegal channels, and to establish himself in the country. The prices range between 6–15 000 USD for the whole process of immigration.

Basically, a new emigrant has three possibilities to cover the expenses: to collect money independently with the help of his family members, to collect the sufficient sum as an illegal worker, and/or to start doing business “on debt” with money and goods borrowed from Vietnamese businessmen. The conditions of these loans and contracts are usually tough, as they often involve working in slave-like conditions. The contracts last several years. If the sellers are not able to provide their payments regularly, the bosses seize their goods. If this is not enough, other types of pressure follow – beating, rapes of women, kidnap of children. Under such pressures, often in an effort to merely cover their debts, a lot of Vietnamese emigrants turn to more lucrative activities beyond the limits of legality – trafficking in drugs, weapons, or cigarettes or performing other services for criminal groups.

The independent sellers and businessmen – independent emigrants and emigrants with covered debts – form the middle class of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic. They achieve an average level of comfort and a more or less independent status. They have tendency to move from streets and market halls to permanent shops and companies. Sometimes, they are becoming wealthy men – owners of markets, export-import companies, and restaurants, and, in several cases, “respectable men”.

THE VIETNAMESE BOSS

The Indochinese village mentality pattern is based on the superstitious belief that the community’s internal mechanisms are able to bring solutions of problems more quickly and efficiently than communication with state security forces. This superstition was exported abroad.

The mechanism of finding a solution to a problem is usually as following: a man whose interests were damaged turns to a “respectable man” with a request for help. The “respectable man” can be an influential businessman to whom the man requesting help has economic or social bonds or some other important person. He would help him in exchange for “gratitude” which would be expressed financially, in services or, in many cases, morally, with the expectation of a possible favor done in return.
Becoming a “respectable man” in the Vietnamese community is not just a question of wealth. It is a question of real power as well. The power is ensured through a network of assistants. The network includes a circle of close confidantes (usually long-term collaborators and family members), administrators of market halls and companies, guardians, people with connections to the state administration (i.e. its corrupt employees), lawyers, and business partners. As a “respectable man”, the boss must have sufficient power to enforce his authority in cases of quarrels, arbitrages, and small violent struggles – or in any problems connected to the life of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic. This is why he is in a frequent contact with the criminal underground. He has characteristics of a man honored in the Vietnamese community and characteristics of a criminal boss at the same time.

**BO DOI AND CRIMINAL GANGS**

The criminal delinquents stand at the bottom of the Vietnamese criminal hierarchy. They are usually involved in such independent criminal activities as robberies, extortion, burglaries, etc. together with special work as bo doi “soldiers”, respectively enforcers for Vietnamese criminal bosses.

A respectable man does not necessarily employ bo doi on long-lasting contracts. In most cases, his only regular employees of this sort are his personal bodyguards but thanks to his contacts, he is usually able to hire them for specific special assignments as guardians of market places, enforcers, and even contract killers. Instead of a regular job and salary, they are repaid with favors and / or single payments for specific acts. For example, a bo doi could be rewarded for his services with a profitable place on the market in combination with monetary payments for only his specific actions.

Bo doi operate independently or with the assistance of several “colleagues”. The structures and activities of these groups vary. They range from temporary groups created only for single acts of violence to stable groups permanently engaged in criminal business activities. Vietnamese gangs in the Czech Republic are generally less organized but highly violent and involved in a wide range of criminal activities – extortion, theft, contract killing, smuggling of people, drugs. They are often identified as responsible for the whole of Vietnamese organized crime, which is not really the case. They are merely a part of it.

**CONCLUSION**

The Vietnamese crime networks are not restricted to one country, but operate internationally. A closer international security co-operation among the involved countries is needed in this situation.

The rise of criminal offences in the Vietnamese community indicates that the problem will grow in importance. Vietnamese crime networks will focus mainly on economic and financial operations that will merge legal and illegal activities together in the future.

The investigation of these offences is still ineffective because of the difficulty involved in trying to penetrate the Vietnamese diaspora’s community. It is evident that the national strategies of fighting the Vietnamese crime should include not only efficient legal, administrative and security measures, but also strategies for “opening” the Vietnamese diasporas to communication with broader societies of the host countries.

**REFERENCES**

