Global Crime
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fglc20

The KGB campaign against corruption in Moscow, 1982-1987, by Luc Duhamel

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Available online: 14 Jul 2011

To cite this article: Ararat L. Osipian (2011): The KGB campaign against corruption in Moscow, 1982-1987, by Luc Duhamel, Global Crime, 12:3, 236-238
To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2011.589603

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or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit’. ‘Serious crime’ is defined as ‘conduct constituting an offence punishable by a maximum deprivation of liberty of at least four years or a more serious penalty’. However, what qualifies as a criminal offence, and the maximum prison time for an offence, varies among states. These differences may frustrate the convention’s purpose of promoting cooperation between states, because a group may qualify as an ‘organised criminal group’ in one country but not in another country.

Chapter 3 discusses the obligations imposed upon states by transnational criminal law and the challenges that states face in fulfilling those obligations. The Organised Crime Convention requires that four substantive offences be included in the domestic law of signing states: participation in a criminal group (Article 5); money laundering (Article 6); corruption (Article 8); and obstruction of justice (Article 23). Additional obligations include international cooperation, such as extradition and mutual legal assistance in criminal investigations. Chapter 4 examines the involvement of non-state actors in preventing organised crime, such as non-governmental organisations, and concludes that the current state-centric system against organised crime is insufficient and that it would benefit from the involvement of non-state actors.

Having examined the norms and principles regarding transnational organised crime in Chapters 3 and 4, the book then analyses how they are applied in Thailand, Serbia, Kosovo and the United Kingdom (Chapter 5). It finds that, although the four countries have legislation that is roughly in compliance with the Organised Crime Convention, they have not fully met the standards set by the convention, and ‘intelligence-led law enforcement... has much room for improvement’. The book also concludes that the Organised Crime Convention alone is not sufficient to address the problem and that states must cooperate on regional and international levels. In keeping with that, the book examines initiatives and programmes against organised crime by the European Union (Chapter 6) and the United Nations (Chapter 7). It argues that, in both organisations, state sovereignty and political interference limit the effectiveness of regional and international efforts.

*Transnational Organised Crime in International Law* is an important contribution to the field. The book offers well-organised and lucid analysis of concepts and case studies that may interest both academicians and practitioners and is accessible for the casual reader who is interested in an introduction to the subject matter.

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While the book refers in its title to the anti-corruption campaign led by the KGB in Moscow, the author’s main focus is on corruption in Soviet trade. In this sense, the scope of the research is quite limited, because neither corruption in Moscow, nor the KGB struggle against corruption, was limited to trade. At the same time, the author extends its scope far
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beyond Moscow, often referring to cases of corruption in Russia’s regions and other former Soviet republics.

The author emphasises the role of the KGB in Soviet society and economy: ‘While the party fell into deeper stagnation with Brezhnev’s enfeebled ability to rule, the KGB continued to be one of the few organizations on the rise. Brezhnev relied more and more on Andropov to solve thorny problems’ (p. 58). He says that large department stores and grocery stores were under the constant surveillance of KGB officers. Emelyanov, the prosecutor general of Russia, helped the KGB in organising the anti-corruption brigade and prized the firmness and harsh methods of KGB investigators.

The police supervision unit, OBKhSS, was insufficient to control economic crime and corruption. In fact, OBKhSS itself was rotten with corruption. Duhamel brings an example of one of the OBKhSS agents: ‘Kirillova inspired respect and submission from store managers. She was responsible for inspecting a particular group of stores and would receive food from the store managers in return for a lenient inspection. She also extracted substantial sums of money and other material advantages from managers; in turn, she made sure that the managers obtained immunity from prosecution’ (p. 123). In a time when the very officers who were assigned to oversee the conduct of sales managers collected protection, the KGB, as the least corrupt of all state agencies, was the only answer.

Duhamel points out the high level of cooperation by arrested store executives and the reasoning for such cooperation: ‘Hoping that their sentences would be substantially decreased if they collaborated, executives were ready to submit to the KGB’s prosecutors and divulge evidence that compromised their superiors. The executives inclined to cooperate with the KGB were those who knew the most about the wrongdoings of high-ranking executives or officials’ (p. 141). Recognition of their guilt and cooperation with the investigators did not help. The Soviet system of justice was not similar to the US system, where criminals negotiate their deals with prosecutors. Duhamel says that ‘Emelyanov was aware that Sokolov’s trial and his harsh sentence had set a precedent that other judges would follow in subsequent corruption cases’ (p. 184).

Duhamel pays some attention to the corrupt hierarchies forming in Soviet trade: ‘Sokolov, the manager of the Eliseevski store, was another ex-convict . . . . Trade organization leaders appreciated colleagues like Sokolov and Roganov, who both displayed unparalleled generosity; because their pasts made them vulnerable, they needed strong support from higher up and therefore tended to be more generous when bribing’ (p. 128). Nevertheless, more theorising is needed in the book, including on organisational hierarchies and their sustainability and transformations. The author mentions Max Weber, but only briefly. The issue of corrupt organisational hierarchies in the former Soviet Union, including those developed in Soviet trade, healthcare, and education sectors over the decades, should not be underestimated.

Coming back to the Eliseevski store, the largest gastronom in Moscow, and the issue of hierarchies, corrupt organisations, and complicated schemes of illegal supply and re-sale in the Moscow trade sector, the author missed the movie ‘Zmeelov’. ‘Zmeelov’ [Snake Hunter] produced in 1985, before the start of Perestroika, is a result of Andropov’s purges

of the early 1980s, conducted by the KGB. It gives a wealth of knowledge about the underground shady world of the Moscow trade mafia. ‘Zmeelov’ features the ex-manager of the Eliseevski store, after serving a term in prison for illegal manipulations, embezzlement, and fraud, saying ‘Is it at all possible to work honestly in retail trade?... It is possible, but not everyone can.’

There are numerous minor infelicities that can be found throughout the text. For instance, the author confuses Odessa and Rostov, saying that ‘Odessa is the father and Rostov is the mother of criminality’ (p. 72), misspells the name of one of the figures, Oganesov, Bairam (p. 131), and misrepresents the title of the major economic crimes prevention unit in the USSR (p. 166), as OBKhSS, which did not include speculations as he did it; it stands for the Department Against Theft of Socialist Property [Otdel po bor’be s hishcheniyami sotsialisticheskoj sobstvennosti]. Apparently, these and similar infelicities arise from the extensive use of foreign-language documents.

Overall, this book is an excellent account of how corrupt a centralised distributive system can become despite strong controlling organs. There are things to learn from the USSR, including in secondary schooling and healthcare. What not to learn and certainly not to borrow from is Soviet trade. The Soviet system was quite successful in secondary education, and somewhat successful in universal healthcare, but it was largely unsuccessful in trade, including both wholesale and retail trade.

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