THREAT AND RISK

Why prevention is important and why perception may be misleading

Some years ago, I was debating with a Dutch University student on whether the Country should or should not endow itself with a decent Anti-Mafia legislation. In the European Union, in fact, Italy is (unfortunately) the only Country that possesses such a legislation. This came following a series of incidents, which highlighted the presence of a specific typology of organised crime in the country, that however seemed to maintain a low profile, attempting to "*fly below the radars*" so to speak. His theory was something along the lines of "*why should my country implement such a legislation if Mafia doesn't exist here?*".

The question is extremely complicated to answer, because if it is a fact that in Italy the Mafia has had an unprecedented impact over the years that has led the country to take countermeasures for other countries this is not apparent. An Italian citizen with no experience in law enforcement-related matters would never dream of asking why the country needs an anti-mafia legislation, but the Mafia is something invisible and intangible, and therefore to provide the answer I had to breakdown the problem in two parts.

Part 1... threat, risk and vulnerability

At the time, the first thing that came to my mind was the exceptional measures put in place by the country to protect the port of Rotterdam, a critical infrastructure, in case of a possible flood/tsunami. It came to mind not because I have a particular taste for engineering, but simply because a couple of days before

I watched a program on television about the topic. I thought of how clever this country was at keeping the sea out, and how forward thinking the government must be to invest in such an endeavour. In a nutshell, I replied to my visiting student, asking him why they had such a system in place if a major tsunami never struck Rotterdam. He did not know how to answer. In reality the threat is probably not that high, however the risk (loss of a critical infrastructure) is such that vulnerabilities have to be reduced as much as possible. Searching the internet for terminology (or "googling", like my children like to say) I found numerous definitions which help even the less skilled reader to understand the concepts of threat, risk and vulnerability.

Threat – Anything that can exploit a vulnerability, intentionally or accidentally, and obtain, damage, or destroy an asset.

Vulnerability – Weaknesses or gaps in a security program that can be exploited by threats to gain unauthorized access to an asset.

Risk – The potential for loss, damage or destruction of an asset as a result of a threat exploiting a vulnerability.

So, in Italy, over the course of history, organised crime exploited vulnerabilities and caused losses and damage in terms of human lives, but also strangling the economy in many regions. High risk, high threat.

This led the country to reduce the vulnerabilities of the legal system, creating an efficient legislation that although not perfect, moved the fight against organised crime to the next level.

Part 2... why do you need this in other countries

I then moved on to draw a parallel between this situation and another thing that was happening at the time: the migrant flow was crossing the Mediterranean Sea as a result of the so called "*Arab spring*". Why did I draw such parallel? To highlight how, in the absence of borders, what happens in two different parts of the EU (especially in the Schengen area) has to be tackled exactly in the same way as if it happened in two regions of the same country or, even better, as two neighbourhoods of the same city. If you take a big city such as Rome, in fact, it is probably easier to reach a different country by plane than driving in the same city from north to south. So what has this parallel got to do with organised crime? Simple. For the same reason one single EU country cannot just open its borders to unidentified migrants just because it's a transit country and "*it's not our problem, because they don't want to stay here*" (obviously millions would reach other countries that have no means to block them at the external EU borders), every single EU country has the obligation to fight against terrorism and organised crime, because "*Al Qaeda never killed anyone in my country*" is not an excuse. Just imagine if three neighbouring countries, let's call them A, B and C to avoid people getting offended, were facing the following situation: A hosts a terrorist cell, B is where the terrorist cell causes losses in terms of human lives, C is where

the financial assets lay. It is a no-brainer that in this hypothetic scenario country A is in the "*what are they doing in my country, because we don't know*" phase, B is in the "*do something please*" phase, and C is in an even milder situation than A. Implementing "*draconian*" measures in country B would be useless, as useless as having the best goalkeeper in the world and no decent players in the rest of the football team.

So what are you saying, Dave?

I decided to write this piece in the middle of the so-called "coronavirus" crisis, because I see several similarities between the latter, organised crime and many other phenomena that this day and age brought about in our day-to-day life. Globalized world requires globalized solutions. Perception may be misleading. "*we have only three cases and it's just a flu*" sounds a lot like "why should my country implement such a legislation if Mafia doesn't exist here?". Maybe 100 years ago this answer could have been satisfying, but today it's just not good enough.

Several institutions are stepping up to this challenge, in my field of work EU agencies such as Europol, Eurojust, Frontex are attempting to tackle crime as if there were no national borders, but the struggle to make policy makers aware of threats, risks and vulnerabilities remain. Similarly, other international efforts on different fields are ongoing. Only time will tell whether these efforts will bring some positive results or if we will revert to borders and smaller scaled economies, so far we are walking on unchartered territory.

The only thing that is clear, now, is that either globalised challenges are met by globalised actions, or we will assist, impotently, at the current situation where my country is counting approximately 100 casualties a day because of the virus, whilst a few kilometres from the border people are still asking themselves whether the threat is real.