

How Criminals Infiltrate Public Procurement

Organised Crime and Corruption in Legal Markets and Public Sectors

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Criminal infiltration in the legal economy – particularly public procurement and corruption – are among the most pronounced challenges facing European States. This work analyses the strategies and methods used by organised criminal groups to tamper with the procedures for the execution of public contracts – with special attention to corruption forms – covering an issue that never been systematically examined. Before presenting the results of this study, the borders of the analysed issue and the general phenomenon of criminal infiltration in the legal market will be considered.

Keywords: Organised Crime, Corruption, Public Works, Public Contracts Criminal Infiltration in the Legal Economy

Introduction

Some academics and EU institutions highlight the important link between corruption and organised crime, which often coexist and interact when advantageous.¹ Although they are two individual phenomena, they are characterised by actual interrelations, especially in reference to the public procurement sector.² This connection is little-explored by scholars and political advisers, although it is important to understand the reality of the facts and to identify an effective counter-strat-



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egy. In fact, it can be considered a bridge that produces opportunities for various actors. For example, organised crime groups can utilise corrupt methods in order to expand their relational networks, even outside their own criminal group, increasing human resources in various economic sectors, both legal and illegal. At the same time, corruption can be used to maintain a system of power or relations. Hence, the connection between corruption and organised crime is functional in creating a grey zone which constitutes an illegal-legal continuum.

How Criminals Infiltrate Public Procurement

Organised crime and corruption – as highlighted by several reports and analyses – are among the most acute challenges facing Europe which affect all EU Member States (EUMS).³ Despite a lack of statistics and data on corruption and organised crime-related offences in relation to public procurements, the importance of these phenomena can be understood using estimations and various indicators.⁴ Consider, for instance, people’s perceptions, as shown by a 2014 Eurobarometer survey: 76% of European citizens surveyed believed corruption to be widespread in their country, while 26% said they were personally affected by corruption in their daily life. 73% of European respondents believed that bribery and the use of connections is often the easiest way to obtain certain public services. Mistrust in public institutions appears to be widespread. According to the same survey, the public offices and sectors most distrusted are: political parties; politicians at national, regional and local levels; and officials who award public tenders or issue building permits.⁵

One of the legal sectors mainly engaged is the execution of public contracts, public works of construction in particular. As a result, criminal infiltration in public procurements merits attention. In particular, it is worth analysing the strategies and methods used by organised criminal groups for influencing the allocation of public funds and for infiltrating public works. In fact, systematic studies on this phenomenon don’t exist. Nevertheless, it is possible to gain an overview of the topic by exploring the literature and reports of national and international institutions. Such documents contain interesting – albeit scattered – information on the matter.

Before presenting the main results of the present study, it is important to identify the characteristics and the borders of the phenomenon, and to have a general overview on the topic of criminal infiltration in the legal economy.

The Borders of the Issue

It is important to clarify the meaning of organised crime as referred to in this work. In fact, among scholars, a standardised definition of organised crime is elusive. This is due to various reasons: (a) several disciplines (such as law and criminal justice, criminology, international relations, sociology, etc.) deal with organised crime and discuss its definition according to their own specific interests and focus; (b) organised crime is conceptualised around the world in different ways, using various cultural points of reference; (c) organised crime is a label that identifies and includes a whole range of different crimes and groups; and (d) the legal-illegal nexus as a characterising element of organised crime has been under-studied. Although many scholars have studied illegal activities carried out by organised criminal groups, the issue of criminal infiltration of legal markets has been little-explored.⁶

Nevertheless, it is worth identifying the borders of the concept of organised crime, in order to gain a common theoretical point of reference and understanding. In this research, organised crime is defined ‘as a structured and permanent group of individuals who use violence [typically, but not exclusively] to gain profit through criminal activities.’⁷ Criminal organisations usually achieve their proper aims using various strategies: for instance, controlling or conquering portions of political power; managing illegal markets or exploiting sections of the legal economy; and/or calling off the civil relationships of solidarity. Although general, this conceptual definition allows us to distinguish organised crime from other groups that use violence, in and of itself, as a source of revenue (such as military companies) or as a means to gain power (such as terrorist groups).

Then, too, it is important to specify the substantial differences existing among various type of criminal organisations (such as street gangs, mafia and so on), each one characterised by a specific level of criminal specialisation. In this perspective, organised crime can be thought of as a broader category (*genus*) consisting of various types of groups (*species*) which peculiarity depend on historical and socio-political context. This conceptual representation includes several kinds of criminal groups which can be laid out on a *continuum*, starting from “organised crime” thought of as a combination of individuals who commit a series of felonies; then proceeding on to “crime syndicates” as well-structured groups which aim to profit economically; and at the end of this

climax, mafia groups that are the most specialised criminal organisations which seek also political control of the territory.⁸

Although so different, mafias and criminal groups often closely cooperate or even work in partnership which weakens the distinction among them.⁹

All such criminal groups are engaged, to some degree, in various types of illegal activities, among which include the exploitation of legal economy especially in the public works sector. With particular reference to criminal infiltration in public works, various criminal groups also cooperate with different actors part of the legal world. The creation of alliances and/or collusive relations or connivances with entrepreneurs, politicians, public administrators, makes criminals increasingly able to infiltrate public sector. Moreover, the involvement of professionals, specialised in economic and financial sectors who provide consulting services to criminals, play a key role for favouring criminal exploitation of legal business. As a result, the relational networks among members of both legal and illegal world are fundamental to endorse the phenomenon. It is not a chance that several scholars underline that various types of criminal groups can be thought of as systems based on relational networks.¹⁰

The strength of various criminal and mafia groups are mainly derived from their capacity for creating complex relational networks which involve figures both in the criminal world and in the legal sphere (such as politicians, entrepreneurs and so on). These networks, created for gaining advantages, increase chances to illicit profits because they guarantee political protection, economic resources, opportunities for infiltrating in new market sectors and a wide range for illegal activities.

The network structure of the various criminal groups allows them to always create new alliances and to increase the complexity of partnerships. The complexity of the criminal systems that are based on relational networks has increased over time with changes in the 1990s, especially with the process of globalisation and the rise and spread of businesses across borders. Adapting to the global dimension of the economic environment, organised crime has become more flexible and less hierarchical. The individual mafias and criminals are thus adapted to operate in vast and articulated agreements and criminal networks that link their interests to the economic activities of the diverse powerful elite. In this situation, the criminal groups tend to operate as a

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business operating within a cluster. In this perspective, the criminal clusters develop systematic relationships with other actors in the same field of activities and agreements. In this sense, criminal groups are linked both to other criminal clusters that have representatives from legal and legitimate institutions.¹¹ The more frequent interaction between criminals and politicians and public institutions, creates a “gray zone” in which legal and illegal are increasingly intertwined and difficult to distinguish. We are witnessing a merging of networks, relationships and diverse areas.¹² This, in addition to being the strength of the criminal groups, leads to the spread of the so-called “Mafia methods” as a type of behaviour based on occult links and the pursuit of individual interests. Such misconduct can be taken even by those who do not belong directly to the criminal groups as a daily mode of action.¹³ The elements just highlighted allow to identify the borders of the issue and to better understand the phenomenon analysed.

An Overview of Criminal Infiltration in Legal Business

To introduce the phenomenon of criminal infiltration in public procurement it is important to give an overview of the economic and financial investments of organised crime groups in legal business. The proceeds of illegal activities (including sexual exploitation, trafficking of weapons or drugs, forgery, trafficking of garbage, extortion, usury and so on) are usually reinvested in various sectors of the legal economy. To understand the size of this phenomenon, Italy is a paradigmatic example: illegal proceeds amount around to €25.7 billion (equivalent to 1.7% Italy’s GDP).¹⁴ However only between 32% and 51% of this amount of money (i.e. from a minimum of 8.3 to a maximum of €13 billion) comes from organised crime and mafia groups activities.¹⁵

As a matter of fact, organised crime infiltration in legal economy is only one aspect of the economic criminality. Various modalities and reasons why several criminal groups infiltrate into legal economy are intertwined with other organisational prerogatives of the modern economic crimes: 1. the so-called white collars criminals who take advantages of business opportunities for money or power. They associate with each other for committing economic crimes or for providing illegal services to organised crime; 2. legal companies that illegally operate for achieving legal objectives.

1. Often businessmen join with other professionals for establishing criminal organisations which, unlike traditional criminal groups, rarely use violence and intimidation. Such new organisations usually tend to utilise corrupt methods, abuse of power and clientelism. Moreover, such organisations considerably and strategically use new technologies for carrying out illegal activities. Frequently, white-collar criminals delegate their illegal activities to traditional organised crime and mafia associations. In this way, they intertwine different interests and skills.¹⁶
2. Several national and international legal cases have highlighted that often legal companies utilise illicit tools and illegal associative forms in order to increase business competition and profits. False invoicing, trust companies, or even false accounting, are used to accumulate capital out of the institutional control useful, for example, to corrupt and gain economic benefits.

The mix among criminal infiltration in legal economy and other actualisations of economical criminality is present in all European countries.¹⁷ The mingling of different worlds (entrepreneurial, business, political and institutional, criminal, etc.) and various interests raise an important question: what are the favouring factors for economic crimes, in general and especially for implementing criminal infiltration into legal business?

A key role is played by professionals specialised in economic and financial sectors who provide consulting services to organised crime. As well as technical skills, these experts provide criminals their experience in cross-border money transactions and in diversifying investments.¹⁸ The skills required of various types of professionals differ depending on the illegal activities to be pursued. Sometimes, skills in the use of computer technology are needed. In other situations, the knowledge of legislations (administrative, European, of taxation, of banking, etc.) and to tamper with the rules, is a must. With others, a depth of knowledge in financial sectors is crucial.

The relational nexus among various professions and different types of organisations (including traditional criminal groups, white collars, and other legitimate economical actors) can be implemented in the form of complicity, cooperation or real conspiracy. These links, usually based on short, medium and long term agreements, can result in complex and composed scenarios. The intensification of relational

networks between several economic subjects and criminals lead to the establishment of a context favourable for committing economic crimes.¹⁹

It is worthwhile introducing the meaning of criminal enterprise and identifying the aspects which distinguish and favour such enterprises in respect of legal companies. Criminal organisations use often techniques in company management and operate establishing entrepreneurial activities. Since the 1970s and 1980s, organisational criminals have increasingly become businessmen establishing relationships of collusion and connivance with legal companies.²⁰

Three specific profitable elements distinguish criminal enterprises from the legal ones: the discouragement of competition using intimidation (which sometimes leads to criminal monopoly of particular economical sectors); the wage compression usually implemented by way of the tax evasion for social security and the no payment of overtime; the sizable financial liquidity originating from illegal activities.²¹ However, it is important to underline that illegal activities are only one of many funding sources for criminal groups. In fact, they can have special access to the legal banking system (constituted by local and national lending institutions) compared to those of legal entrepreneurs.²²

Such advantages are useful indicators to identify the essential aspects of criminal enterprises. Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to characterise a typology of illegal companies. Each illicit enterprise works and operates in an particular way for facing the specific market conditions created by illegality. As a result, illegal businesses differ from each other.²³ They have variable structures and establish unstable relations with each other based on short term objectives.

The development of criminal business has not followed the licit economic growth. But, it has taken place when illegal enterprises have begun to substitute legal companies in some economic sectors.²⁴ This process of growth is accompanied by another important aspect: the *de facto* acquisition of legal companies (or parts of them) by criminal enterprises. Some studies have shown that criminal groups can gradually become the owners of legal companies or control their activities, forcing them to accept their protection in exchange of money. The methods used to get control of legal companies are various (including extortion, usury, recapitalisation of firms, liquidation of business, etc.). The main forms of control are mainly two: participation (when criminal groups controls, for short time, the legal company operations in

reference to an unique and specific economical sector); sharing (when criminals directly acquire the ownership of legal firm and manage its corporation stocks). This form of control is a long-lasting relation and concerns all business activities of the licit company. In the first case, the legal business remains relatively autonomous while committing illegal activities. On the contrary in the second case, the company changes its nature and becomes property of the organised crime.²⁵

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Investment Sectors of Criminal Organisations

The investment sector, ranging from the real estate business to various types of goods and services, is chosen according to the objectives and cultural motivations of each criminal group, as well as to the opportunities offered by the market and by the circumstantial context.

According to several authors, criminal infiltration into legal economy is such a widespread phenomenon what is very difficult to identify where criminal investments occur.²⁶ Nevertheless, some scholars have highlighted that criminals' investments in companies may be explained by five aims:

1. concealment of criminal activities (mainly money laundering);
2. control of the territory;
3. social consensus;
4. profit (and/or income) maximisation;
5. cultural/personal reasons (i.e. criminals invest in certain business because it is close to their culture, education background, family tradition, *status* and prestige).²⁷

Criminal groups focus their activities in business which let them issuing false invoices and/or falsify accounting, hiding their proceeds and concealing incoming and outgoing illicit flows. Concealment of criminal activities can also take different forms. As well as money laundering, it can include the transport and trade of illegal goods hidden among legal products. Such illicit operations need cooperation and involvement of legal enterprises. Another channel in concealing illegal profits is cross-border money transactions which requires a high level of competencies.²⁸

Control of territory and social consensus are very close aims pursued by organised criminal groups. They endorse organised criminals to be socially accepted in a specific territory. Criminal groups are thus able to control particular sectors of the local economy and/or man-

age the subcontracts of local public works, maintaining relations with suppliers, contractors, public administrators and/or politicians. The criminal infiltration into the legal economy also allows criminals to be accepted by the lower citizenship groups. In fact, operating as economic actors, mafia and criminal associations create jobs and new opportunities of life. In this way, criminals may recruit partners from among various groups of society that are not fully integrated, such as ethnic minorities.²⁹

Furthermore, scholars have different theories with regards to the economical objectives pursued by organised crime which are mainly profit (and/or income) maximisation. On one hand, some authors affirm that, although important, profit does not play a key role for decisions making in criminal and mafia groups. It is simply one aspect of the criminal groups interests, but not the most essential. They argue that criminal groups are aimed more at a long term revenue and not to a mere short term profit.³⁰

On the other hand, other thinkers assert that organised criminals focus their attention primarily on sectors with a high and immediate return on investments and with a risk minimisation.³¹ As such, the economic field where organised crime operates is not so important in respect to the opportunities for money laundering and profits that a certain business is allowed to realise. It is not by chance that criminal and mafia groups have increasingly diversified areas of investments and overtaken the entrepreneurial monoculture typical of criminal organisations. The latter, until the 1960s and 1970s, was almost exclusively concentrated in real estate and public works. These areas, although still preferred by criminal groups, were gradually joined with other economic fields, especially in public services (mainly healthcare, private clinics, the treatment of urban and toxic waste). As such, various criminal groups gradually inserted themselves in each field of economic and financial activity.³² Organised criminals select economic sectors for their activities on the basis of both their specific aims and the attractive opportunities offered.

Independently of the investment sector, criminal infiltration into the legal economy produces significant economic and social costs due to the alteration of the competitive rules of the market and placing illegal proceeds into legal business.³³

Criminal Infiltration in Public Procurement: Methods and Strategies

Criminal groups are engaged, to some degree, in different types of illegal activities, among which the exploitation of the legal economy opportunities is growing in importance. In particular, the opportunities given by in the public works sector represent a new area of investment for criminal groups. Although systematic analyses on this specific area do not exist, the reasons for choosing this sector, the main strategies and methods used by criminal groups can be figure out by the analysis of the literature and the reports of national and international institutions.

How Criminals Infiltrate Public Procurement

Reasons of public procurements choice—Various reasons exist why criminal groups and the mafia choose the public works sector in particular the public procurements. The first reason is economic: the expense for public contracts is a great part of the territorial economy especially where the private sector is under developed. The second is linked to the investigative judicial penal sector: the investigations of criminal activity within public contracts are difficult to carry out and very costly in term of procedure and personnel. Crimes committed in the public sector are harder to detect and to prove compared to other ones like, for example, drug trafficking, etc. The third reason is linked to the weaknesses and inefficiencies of the public administration. Especially in certain Countries, like Italy, the public contract sector during the years has revealed its vulnerability to corruption and collusion episodes.³⁴ And finally, criminal infiltration has strategic importance as a means of territorial control in the penetration of social, economic and institutional structures of the territory. In fact, certain businesses and sectors (such as restaurants, supplies, construction) can be used both for maximising physical control on the territory and for strengthening the relationships with politicians and public administrators.³⁵

Channels for exercising influence and for infiltrating public contracts—Analysing the literature and various institutional reports, it is possible to hypothesise that organised criminal groups mainly use two channels for infiltrating public works and public contracts: (a) *direct infiltration* in the public process of bidding through the direct control of private companies i.e. through the use of name and/or members of criminal family; (b) *indirect actions* where the organised crime acts

as mediator among companies, politicians and public administration using relational networking, persuasion, or even intimidation. This is the case of agreements between the criminal exponents and the entrepreneurs, political, institutional and public representatives in order to assure their desired motive.

These channels are context specific. Organised criminal groups behaviour changes according to the characteristics of their own structure and abilities, the features of the market and the opportunity of the moment. The choice of such channels depend, not only on the objectives of criminal groups, and on the context, but also on the phase of the public procurement process in which criminals want to infiltrate.

In fact, the public procurement process can be divided into three main phases summarised in the following table.³⁶

<i>Phases of public procurement and work execution</i>	<i>Steps of the public procurement process</i>	<i>Activities of the companies</i>
1. Pre- tender stage	Allocation of public funds	lobbying
	Choice of the tender procedure	-
	Writing of public bidding and tender specifications	-
	Publication of the tender documents	-
2. Tender stage	Designation of the evaluation board	-
	Selection procedure	Submission of application
	Provisional award	-
	Final award	-
	Signature of the contract	-
3. Post-award stage	Start of the work	Employment of manpower; acquisition of everything is needed to realise the work (materials, services, etc.) awarding subcontracts
	Control and work in progress inspection; audit	
	Public work conclusion	-
	Testing	-
	End of the administrative procedure	-

The first two stages are part of the procedures aimed at the definition of public funds available and the selection of firms. These phases give opportunities to criminals for influencing the allocation of public money process.

The third stage is linked to the post bidding moment when the public work has already been awarded. This phase is particularly attractive for criminal groups in so far allows to control the building site for gaining several advantages. The post bidding protection on site can be agreed upon by both sides or forcefully reckoned where payment is based on a percentage of the total public work fee.³⁷

South Italy is a good example where infiltration frequently occurs in the post bidding phase. The mafia clans/families oblige through intimidation and/or agreement entrepreneurs to pay bribes in exchange for protection of building site, force sub-contract and/or control material acquisition and human resources. The major sectors in the post bidding phase infiltration are linked to infrastructures (Viability, Transport, Waste, Environmental Defence).³⁸

Methods used by organised criminal groups—The practices utilised to tamper with the procedures for the execution of public contracts are various.

First are Collusion/Partnership relations. These practices move from relatively simple agreement between two or more participants in the public bidding to more complex methods (e.g. the creation of networks to control the allocation of public funds, which involve politicians and high-level public officers who return favours to the organised crime in exchanges for votes, protection, etc.). One of the most sophisticated methods is the partnership between criminals and legal market entrepreneurs. It is called “metodo del tavolino” where companies linked to criminal and mafia groups participate in the bidding process for allocating public procurements using falsifications. This method is most frequently used when the public procurement procedure considers the lowest bid auction system as a selection criterion. In this case the contracting authority is usually accomplice.

Another kind of scheme to infiltrate bidding procedures is the “Cartel agreement.” It consists in the networking of companies which take part together in the same bidding process, harmonising illegally their bids, in order to allocate the public contract to one of them.

These more complex agreements can be made with the mediation and coordination of organised crime groups. These pacts work where

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mafia and criminal groups are more entrenched and infiltrated in various sectors of society. They are typical of south Italy during the nineties, and during the following years, with particular reference to infrastructure biddings.³⁹

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The mentioned cases are based on collusive relations which can take place among bidders (as in the case of Cartel agreement), not necessarily linked to criminal groups, or among bidders and politicians and/or public officials (that can include criminals), or among all subjects involved in a public procurement (including the contracting authority).

Second is Corruption. Corruption is used in public procurement in order to obtain the award of a contract in each kind of bidding procedure (from the close procedure to the competitive dialogue) and in each of its phase (starting from the allocation of funds and the preparation of the tender to the final award). Bribes are mainly used to influence the discretionary decisions, to obtain classified information and acquire political and institutional protection.⁴⁰

Influencing the allocation of funds or the posting of a public work, increase the chance of a specific company to obtain the work, because the corrupt public official will use his/her power to help the bidder in exchange for a bribe. Then, too, private corrupt entrepreneurs can increase their own chances of success simply through the fore-knowledge of administrative practices and timing or institutional decisions or the bids of other competitors. The trading of technical or commercial information on bids can take place directly between a private entrepreneur and a public official or with the mediation of intermediaries.⁴¹

The third means or resource (i.e. political and institutional protection) is a complex kind of corruption. The uncertainty of the outcome of biddings or of the corruptive relationships with public administrators, can be diminished by the protection of politicians or public administrators or powerful persons. These power figures can have long-term control on the decisional centres or can have long-lasting influence on individual administrative agents.⁴²

Between the third type of corrupt methods and the collusive practices there is a thin difference. The two are very similar, but the corruption aimed at political and institutional protection takes place in a discontinuing way and only when advantageous. In this case the exchange of bribes and favours is simultaneous. So, all subjects part of this relation are satisfied in the same moment. Instead, the collusion

among criminals and public servants is usually part of long-term and continuative relations. The advantages are differently received by each actor during the time.

Along with corruption are fraudulent practices, such as misrepresentation or omission of facts or documents for influencing a selection process or the execution of a contract. It is important to say that corrupt forms are not used exclusively by criminal groups, but they can be utilised by entrepreneurs without links with organised crime.

Third is Coercion. It includes practices as extortions, intimidations, threats, blackmails. Organised crime uses such methods when it is necessary in order to force entrepreneurs, businessmen, public administrators to be compliant or collaborative in achieving the goals of the criminal group within itself influencing their participation in the procurement process or affecting the execution of a contract.⁴³

The various methods just pointed out are usually utilised together in a combined and/or simultaneous way. Often the crimes are melded and used one to affect on another (e.g. public bidding infiltration is used, not only for getting power or money, but also for money laundering). The operational methods, as the channels for infiltrating public procurement, are chosen considering two important elements:

1. the reasons why a criminal group determines to illegally compete in a public bidding (e.g. if an organised criminal group aims for territorial control and/or to infiltrate the socio-political context, the methods more often used are collusive practices and/or the creation - or exploitation - of relational networks among politicians, entrepreneurs, public officials and so on. In such cases, the infiltration channel is on the level of indirect actions of mediation);
2. the context where organised crime acts. Criminal groups always interact with their environment and use local opportunities. Where a criminal organisation is well-entrenched, the methods frequently used are collusive practices. On the contrary, where an organised crime organisation is less entrenched, coercive methods, such as extortion and intimidation, are more frequent.⁴⁴

The mixture of various elements brings different levels of criminal infiltration into the public sector. According to Buscaglia e van Dijk, five infiltrating levels can be identified: corruption and abuse of authority; gradual control of the public contracting agencies management; affecting State's policies.⁴⁵

Finally, it is worth questioning difference between national and transnational public procurements exists. As evidence has shown, the domestic and cross-border public procurement are basically different only for the jurisdictional conflicts which characterise the second ones and which give numerous opportunities to organised criminals. The dissimilarities among national legislations, as well as the problematic investigative and judicial cooperation among States, give considerable advantages to criminals for minimising risks of their identification, arrest and conviction. The elements potentially increasing risks of criminal infiltration into transnational public works are various: problems of international collaboration among polices and judiciary authorities; lack of information exchanges; incrimination procedures too long and slow; training courses for police agents too expensive.⁴⁶ In this perspective, several criminal and mafia organisations have a transnational nature. They operate in various countries acquiring the ability to adapt in new contexts and to tamper with laws.

Conclusion

Examining the phenomenon of criminal infiltration in legal economy and specifically in public procurement, two essential aspects came to light. The former is that these crimes cause seriously damages. In fact, such crimes threaten the fair competition among companies, increase the costs of public works, affects national GDP and compromise economic investments in the country. The latter is linked to the favouring factors of economic crimes. Among them, the involvement of professionals in economic and financial sectors who provide consulting services to criminals, plays a key role. Moreover, alliances and/or collusive relations or connivances with entrepreneurs, politicians, public administrators, make criminals more and more able to infiltrate public sector. As a result, the relational networks among different actors part of both legal and illegal world are fundamental basis of the phenomenon.

The two aspects just mentioned are recurring elements which characterise the criminal infiltration in public procurement issue everywhere it takes place. Then, too, the analysis of secondary sources considered allowed us to identify other important aspects of the issue, including the reasons why the organised crime to choose the area of public contracts, the main channels of influence into public

procurement and the methods used. The reasons are mainly linked to economic interests, to penal sectors of judicial investigation, to the weaknesses and inefficiencies of the public administration and to the strategic importance of the public procurement in themselves. As well as the specific reasons that make public procurement a profitable sector for illegal activities, the channels (direct and/or indirect) and the methods (collusive practices/partnership relations, corruption and fraudulent practices, coercive practices) for allocating public funds are chosen by various organised crime groups in relations to their specific aims and abilities, and the opportunities of the moment and of the context.

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