

Bosses, Soldiers and Rice Grains.

Vietnamese Criminal Networks and Criminal Activities in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

Since 1975, the numbers of Vietnamese in the European countries have steadily increased. As new emigrants appeared in those countries, new types of crime came with them. From communist times, a strong Vietnamese diaspora exists in the Czech Republic as well, and the Vietnamese criminal underground lives in a specific predatory symbiosis with it. To control the community, the Vietnamese “respectable men” create parallel power structures in the diaspora and frequently merge legal and illegal activities together. The Vietnamese criminal networks are engaged in a broad spectrum of criminal activities connected with each other regardless of state borders.

Introduction

Approximately three million Vietnamese people are living outside of Vietnam in the more than 100 countries of the world (Mazyrin 2004, p. 159).¹ The majority of the Vietnamese emigrants are looking for an opportunity to improve their lives and ensure better future lives for their children in the “new homeland,” or back at home in Vietnam. However, criminal activities connected to the local Vietnamese diasporas have been registered in many countries as well.

Vietnamese criminals have been easily crossing state borders and introducing new cultures of crime and new *modi operandi* of criminal activities to the host countries. As a result, Vietnamese crime became a serious

¹ Strong Vietnamese communities exist in the United States (more than 1.6 million Vietnamese people), Cambodia (600,000), France (250,000), Australia (157,000), the Russian Federation (150,000), Laos (150 000), South Korea (85 000), Taiwan (80 000), Japan (40 000), the United Kingdom (35,000), Norway (18,000), Germany (125 000), the Czech Republic (58,000), Poland (between 35,000 and 50,000 people), Hungary (7000), and Slovakia (3000) (Nožina & Kraus 2012, p. 18).

problem in South East Asia, Australia, the United States, Canada, and the Russian Federation (Adamoli et al. 1998, pp. 26, 88–90; Emmers 2002, p. 6; Mazyrin 2004, pp. 172–173).²

In the European Union, the Vietnamese and the Chinese criminal groups are the most active Asian criminal organisations (Siegel-Rozenblit 2011, p. 7).³ During the 1990s, the presence of Vietnamese organised crime groups was mainly recorded in the United Kingdom and France (Nozina & Kraus 2012, pp. 42–51)⁴, but since 2008, their growing activities have also been noted in Belgium and the Netherlands (Siegel-Rozenblit 2011, p. 9). As for the European Union countries, Vietnamese criminal activities have been frequently detected in Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and Hungary (Nozina & Kraus 2012, pp. 56–75). Especially the Vietnamese organisations' activities in the areas of managing the trade in illicit commodities, smuggling of people, large-scale cultivation of cannabis, and money laundering have been attracting the attention of the EU security forces in recent years (Siegel-Rozenblit 2011, pp. 7, 9–10). In November 2013, Europol issued a special warning about the then recently increased activities of the Vietnamese organised crime groups in Europe.⁵

In the following text, the Vietnamese crime in the Czech Republic will be discussed. The Vietnamese criminality in the Czech Republic has a “tradition” reaching back to the times of communism in that country, and the democratic changes at the end of the 1980s further supported its expansion. The Vietnamese delinquents in the Czech Republic have been engaged in a broad spectrum of criminal activities: smuggling of people, economic crime, violent crime, usury, stealing of goods, trade in people, prostitution, counterfeiting activities, trafficking in weapons, trafficking in drugs, etc. The Vietnamese criminal networks frequently function as

² *Asian Organised Crime in Australia. A Discussion Paper by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the National Crime Authority.* Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, February 1995, available at: <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/australia/docs/ncaoc1.html>, accessed 13 March 2013; *Asian Organized Crime and Terrorist Activity in Canada, 1999-2002*, A Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress under an Interagency Agreement with the United States Government, July 2003, available at: http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/AsianOrgCrime_Canada.pdf, accessed 14 March 2014; *Asian Criminal Enterprises. Organized Crime.* FBI, Federal Bureau of Investigation, available at: <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/organizedcrime/asian>, accessed 8 March 2014.

³ *OCTA 2011. EU Organized Crime Threat Assessment.* The Hague, Europol 2011, pp. 10, 16, 17, 21, 22, available at: https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/octa_2011_1.pdf, accessed 14 March 2014; *Organised Crime in the European Union. Library Briefing.* Library of the European Parliament, 6 September 2013, 130566REV 2 (pp. 1 – 5), p. 3, available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201309/20130912ATT71178/20130912ATT71178EN.pdf>, accessed 11 February 2014.

⁴ A. G., Strategic Risk Management and Specialist Crime Prevention Command, Metropolitan Police Service, United Kingdom, interview in London, November 2008; Alain Labrousse, director of the Observatoire géopolitique des drogues (OGD), interview in Paris, June 1998; internal information collected through the study visit of members of the Organised Crime Detection Unit of the Police of the Czech Republic to the French Police Units specialised in Asian organised crime, Paris, October 2008.

⁵ *Re-Emergence of Vietnamese Organised Crime Groups (OCGs), Early Warning Notification 2013/1, Europol Public Information,* The Hague, November 2013, available at: http://mobile.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/ewn_2013_1_0.pdf, accessed 5 February 2014.

parallel power structures substituting for state authority in the closed worlds of the Vietnamese emigrants in the Czech Republic. Some of their representatives were able to establish, corrupt ties to the Czech public administration as well (Nozina 2010a, p. 230).⁶

In the Czech Republic, the structure of the Vietnamese criminal networks, the spectrum of their criminal activities and their *modi operandi* are similar to those we know from other countries of the European Union. However, due to the specific historical, economic and social conditions in the EU, we can also identify some specific features of the Vietnamese criminal networks there. In this region, Vietnamese criminal networks are connected regardless of state borders, and their activities have an international dimension.

The concept of criminal networks

Especially in the last two decades, Vietnamese organised crime highly developed its structures and *modi operandi* and deeply penetrated the societies of Asian diasporas. It became obvious that the “traditional” research concepts of organised crime are not sufficient to describe and analyse this phenomenon. Because of this, the concept of criminal networks was accepted for the purpose of this study.

The research of organised crime in recent years has shown that the traditional image of organised crime as an activity that is dominated by centrally controlled organisations with a clear hierarchy and a strict division of tasks is apparently outdated. It appears, that a better portrayal of organised crime is one in which it is depicted as a collection of offenders and criminal groups that collaborate with each other in varying combinations (Bruinsma & Bernasco 2004: p. 79). Due to this, the concept of “criminal network” has become popular among criminologists as a designation for the structures of the groups of people who are involved in organised crime. According to the concept, criminal organisations have characteristics that are common to other social networks, but they are also different from other social networks in many ways due to the fact that they are criminal businesses (Lemieux 2003: p. 3). They should thus be studied as special kinds of social networks. To support this idea, a growing number of studies emerged that provide empirical evidence that social network analyses could be used to get a better understanding of organised crime (Lupsha 1983; Reuter 1986, Sparrow 1991; Canter & Alison 2000; Coles 2001; Klerks 2001; Raab & Millward 2003; Lemieux 2003; Williams 2001, Chatterjee 2006;

⁶ *Zpráva o činnosti ÚOOZ za rok 2010 [Organised Crime Detection Unit. Annual Report for 2010]*, available at: <http://www.policie.cz/clanek/zprava-o-cinnosti-uooz-za-rok-2011.aspx?q=Y2hudW09NA%3D%3D>, accessed 8 February 2014; *Zpráva o činnosti ÚOOZ za rok 2011 [Organised Crime Detection Unit. Annual Report for 2011]*, available at: <http://www.policie.cz/clanek/zprava-o-cinnosti-uooz-za-rok-2011.aspx?q=Y2hudW09NA%3D%3D>, accessed 8 February 2014.

Morselli et al. 2006; Morselli 2009; Schwartz & Rouselle 2009; Hulst 2009; Spapens 2010; Hobbs 2013; Duijn et al. 2014)⁷.

Finckenauer and Chin applied the criminal networks concept on Asian organised crime. According to them, it is important to differentiate genuine “traditional” Asian organised crime from criminal networks. The “traditional” crime groups (such as the Yakuza, the Triads, the Jaotou, the Jao Phro, the Tongs, and other organised gangs that indeed have a name) are pre-existing – they have their own name, a turf, a certain continuity, a relatively stable hierarchical structure and a restricted membership. Those groups often use violence to monopolise their illegal markets. Some of them have been in existence for centuries, and they are most likely to continue to exist in the future.

In contrast, contemporary Asian crime networks are developed in and shaped by the social environment in the Asian emigrants’ host countries. They develop in response to specific criminal opportunities, and their members (participants) are involved in organised criminal activities on an *ad hoc* basis. They do not have a group name, a territory, or a rigid structure. They are highly flexible and act like, and view themselves as, opportunistic businesspeople rather than violent gangsters. Very often, a nuclear or an extended family initiates an operation in response to a new opportunity. Moreover, it is often the case that people from the same village or region or at least from the same ethnic group are recruited to participate as members of a network that may dissolve after the criminal operation it was created for is successfully carried out. (Finckenauer & Chin 2007: 13–14, 19). The criminal networks have dominated Asian crime operations in recent years (Zhang & Chin 2003; Finckenauer & Chin 2007: 14).

The conditions in the Vietnamese diasporas are favorable for the development of criminal networks and their activities. We can identify various crime risk factors there: language and culture barriers; the emigrants’ troubled relations with the mainstream societies in the host countries, which cause the isolation of the emigrants and the creation of parallel power structures inside the emigrants’ communities; unsatisfied expectations of a distinctive enriching life; the emigrants’ feeling that the stage of the living abroad is only “temporary”, which leads to their exploitation of the resources in the host countries regardless of the limits of the law; surviving family members; regional and ethnic bonds between the citizens of the home country and the diasporas in various other countries, which support the international expansion of the Vietnamese criminal activities, etc. (Nožina 2010a, pp. 231–232).

⁷ ‘Advances in Research on Illicit Networks’, *Global Crime*, Special Issue, 14, 2013, 2–3.

In this environment, organised crime lives in a specific symbiosis with the local Vietnamese communities, where one can identify both “classical” organised crime structures, represented by professional criminal delinquents and gangs, and broader criminal surroundings composed of occasional delinquents. These two components are connected and create criminal networks in response to criminal business opportunities.

The key actors in the bridging of the legal and illegal elements in the Vietnamese diasporas’ societies are “respectable men” – strong personalities acting as both legal businessmen and criminal bosses. These people are exploiting considerable economic power, corruption networks, patron-client ties, and the services of criminal delinquents. Also the *modi operandi* of concrete criminal business activities frequently reflect the duality of “legal/illegal” and give specific features to the Vietnamese criminal businesses.

This interpenetration makes the situation more complicated and allows for further intrusion of criminal networks into Vietnamese communities. Many criminal activities are just cubes in a complicated mosaic of the Vietnamese diasporas’ life. One of the main problems in combating this type of crime is the inability of state authorities to separate the “legal” and the “criminal” components in the Asian diasporas. The “stage of ambiguity” frequently leads to the criminal stigmatisation of whole ethnic communities, and also to an inability to trace Asian criminal activities in their transnational dimension.

Information sources and research methods

There exist numerous high quality studies on the problem of Vietnamese diasporas in the world (Viviani 1984; Coughlan 1998; Dorais 2000; Gilles 2004; Kibria 1993; Rutledge 2000; Thomas 2005; Blanc 2005; Dorais 2005; Sims 2007). In the EU countries, the problem has been studied especially in Germany (Fritsche 1991; Bui 2003; Wolf 2007), Poland (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2002; Halik & Nowicka 2002; Inglicka 2005a, 2005b; Halik 2006), and the Czech Republic (Vasilijev 1989; Tung 2001; Brouček 2003a, 2003b; Martínková 2010; Martínková & Pechová 2010; Martínková et al. 2012; Kušniráková et al. 2013). The majority of the studies discuss the economic, social and cultural aspects of Vietnamese migration and the diasporas’ life in general.

The problem of Vietnamese criminality has been less covered, however. In the majority of the criminological studies on this topic, the focus is on specific criminal activities such as illegal migration (Okólski

1999), the trade in drugs (Silverstone & Savage 2010; Schoenmakers et al. 2013),⁸ the trade in other illegal commodities (Lampe 1999), delinquency as a general phenomenon (Zhou & Bankston III 2006), and Vietnamese gangs (Kleinknecht 1996; English 1995; Du Phuoc Long & Richard 1997).⁹ Vietnamese criminal networks are discussed more or less marginally in this context (Cross 1989).

In the Czech Republic, the problem of Vietnamese criminality was formerly studied in the broader context of the topic of international organised crime penetrating the Czech Republic's territory after the democratic changes at the end of the 1980s (Macháček & Ruml 1997; Nožina 2000a, 2000b, 2003a, 2003b, 2004). Two topics that were especially analysed were the trade in people (Pechová 2007) and the drug trade (Nožina 2010b). Also a few university theses prepared by policemen and customs officers with personal experience in investigations of Vietnamese criminality represented a valuable contribution to the study of the problem.¹⁰ However, in general, the problem of Vietnamese crime has remained only weakly researched.

In response to the existing situation, a special research was carried out by the authors of this article at the Institute of International Relations Prague in the period of time that lasted from 2007 to 2013. Within the research, the authors analysed the main criminal structures in the Czech Republic's Vietnamese diaspora and their criminal activities. In the course of the research, several related studies were published (Nožina & Kraus 2009; Nožina 2010a, 2010c, 2012, 2013; Nožina & Kraus 2013).

The 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. As a part of the research, a "snowball" method based on the observation of communities through communication with selected members of those communities, who act as middlemen between the researchers and the given community, has been applied. For this purpose, 6 field project assistants were engaged in various

⁸ Dung Vo Trung (1998) 'Enquête de terrain sur les trafics de stupéfiants (et autres délits) au sein des communautés vietnamiennes d'Allemagne', Rapport d'enquête pour le projet Diaspora et réseaux vietnamiennes de trafic de drogues en Europe, Paris, Observatoire géopolitique des drogues 1998 (unpublished report).

⁹ Nye, M. D. (2006) 'The Evolution of Vietnamese Gangs in America: An Examination of Violence and Sophistication', A Project Report Presented to the Department of Criminal Justice, California State University Long Beach, December 2006 (unpublished report).

¹⁰ Vlček, Tomáš (2008) 'Vietnamský organizovaný zločin v ČR' [Vietnamese Organised Crime in the CR], Brno, Masaryk University (unpublished thesis); Sed'a, R. (2013) 'Kriminalita vietnamské komunity' [The Criminality of the Vietnamese Community], Zlín, University of Tomáš Baťa (unpublished thesis); Hammer, M. (2007) 'Problematika drogové kriminality páchané menšinovými etniky na území ČR' [Problems of Drug-Related Criminal Acts Committed by Minority Ethnic Groups on the CR's Territory], Brno, Masaryk University (unpublished thesis).

stages of the project. All of them were of Vietnamese origin and fluent in both the Czech and the Vietnamese language. They helped to collect relevant information on the Vietnamese communities and carried out a series of structured interviews with other members of the diaspora. Due to the research objects, all the interviews were strictly confidential.¹¹ The information obtained through the native assistants contributed mainly to gaining a general understanding of the structures and functions of Vietnamese communities in the Czech Republic and the role of crime networks in the communities.

More concrete information related to the structures of Vietnamese criminal networks and the *modi operandi* of their criminal offences and other data were collected through security reports of various police units and carrying out interviews with members of the Czech security forces - mainly the Organised Crime Detection Unit of the Police of the Czech Republic (*Útvar pro odhalování organizovaného zločinu Policie České republiky*), the National Anti-Drug Headquarters of the Police of the Czech Republic (*Národní protidrogová centrála Policie České republiky*), the Ministry of Interior (*Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky*); the Czech foreign services - mainly the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Hanoi, and the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (*Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky*); and the General Directorate of Customs of the Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic (*Generální ředitelství cel Ministerstva financí České republiky*).

The main limitation of these kinds of resources lay in the fact that much of the information was considered as confidential, and its publication could negatively affect the further investigation of concrete criminal cases. Because of this, the information from police sources frequently described commonly known facts, already solved criminal cases (which ended with one or more individuals being convicted of a crime), or outdated or fragmented data. Another problem was that virtually every interview had to be permitted and authorised by the responsible leadership of the security agencies. This made the research process extremely inflexible, and in many cases, the censorship led to a certain devaluation of the information source.

The problem was partly overcome by the personal experience and contacts of one of the article's authors, who has served as a police expert on Vietnamese organised crime in various police units in the Czech Republic over the course of sixteen years. Also the data and information that came from his previous work became an important resource for further analysis. But in some cases, the use of the data and information was limited by the fact that some of the data and pieces of information were obtained in the course of operative investigations and classified as secret.

¹¹ For security reasons, the co-workers and respondents from the Vietnamese community are quoted as "Vietnamese community sources", or VCS, in the text.

Another valuable sources of information for the project were the Vietnamese informers cooperating with the Czech Police. These individuals provide the Czech Police with information from the Vietnamese criminal underworld, and some of them were also willing to cooperate with the authors. The main problem with the use of these resources in the research, however, is their motivation for cooperating. Their motivations range from a certain kind of patriotism and beliefs about the need to fight crime to personal desires for revenge and attempts to abuse the Czech security forces for personal purposes or in order to obtain some benefits from them. The information was frequently tendentious because of these motivations. These people also often reported only vague hearsay information or rumours that were commonly shared in the Vietnamese community. This kind of information has only limited value for an analysis.

Because of the different levels of quality of its sources, the collected field information was further compared to and verified through information from other sources. The research in the Czech Republic was completed by a heuristics of materials from and interviews with experts in Poland, Germany, Slovakia, France, and Great Britain.

The establishment of the Vietnamese diaspora in the Czech Republic

The Vietnamese diaspora represents the third most numerous immigrant community in the Czech Republic. According to the official statistics, approximately 58 000 Vietnamese citizens and Czech citizens of Vietnamese origin were legally living in the country in 2012.¹² The number of illegal immigrants from Vietnam is hard to estimate, but the estimates range from 5,000 to 15,000 illegal residents.¹³ Only the Ukrainian (113 000) and Slovak (86 000) emigrant communities are more numerous.¹⁴

¹² *Cizinci v ČR [Foreigners in the Czech Republic]*, Český statistický úřad [Czech Statistical Office], 2014, available at:

http://vdb.czso.cz/vdbvo/tabparam.jsp?voa=tabulka&cislatab=OBY5092PU_OK&&kapitola_id=743, accessed 24 March 2014; *Zpráva o situaci národnostních menšin v České republice za rok 2012 [Report on the Situation of National Minorities in the Czech Republic]*, Prague, Úřad vlády ČR [the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic], 2013, p. 4, available at:

http://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rnm/dokumenty/dokumenty-rady/zprava_2012_tiskarna.pdf, accessed 9 February 2014.

¹³ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, unpublished confidential analysis, Prague, 2010.

¹⁴ *Cizinci v ČR [Foreigners in the Czech Republic]*, Český statistický úřad [Czech Statistical Office], 2014, available at:

http://vdb.czso.cz/vdbvo/tabparam.jsp?voa=tabulka&cislatab=OBY5092PU_OK&&kapitola_id=743, accessed 24 March 2014; *Zpráva o situaci národnostních menšin v České republice za rok 2012 [Report on the Situation of National Minorities in the Czech Republic]*, Prague, Úřad vlády ČR [Prague, the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic], 2013, p. 4, available at:

http://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rnm/dokumenty/dokumenty-rady/zprava_2012_tiskarna.pdf, accessed 9 February 2014.

These numbers are the result of the close mutual relations between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR) from the communist era and the relative openness of the Czech Republic to foreign immigration after the democratic changes at the end of the 1980s.

The first larger groups of Vietnamese immigrants arrived in the CSSR in 1956. The majority of them were war orphans and students. By 1967, there were 2100 Vietnamese workers and apprentices in the CSSR. During the 1970s and 1980s, approximately 500 new Vietnamese secondary school and university students began their studies in Czechoslovakia annually. Those students were provided with scholarships from the Czechoslovak government, the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and the Central Trade Union Council (Nožina 2003, p. 189).

At the beginnings of the 1980s, the Vietnamese government, in an effort to pay its war debts (the CSSR was an important supplier of arms to the North Vietnamese army in the course of the Indochina War) and fill in the gap in the export-import relations between Vietnam and the CSSR, started to export Vietnamese workers to the CSSR in the framework of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) agreements. It is estimated that between 70,000 and 120,000 young Vietnamese workers were sent to Czechoslovakia during the 1980s with around 30,000 Vietnamese living in Czechoslovakia at any moment within the period 1980 – 1989.¹⁵ The program was strongly supervised and controlled by the Czechoslovak and Vietnamese governments. But despite this close supervision, the first Vietnamese crime networks were established during this period of time.

The living standards of the Vietnamese workers in Czechoslovakia were by no means high. They received only 40 – 50 % of their real salaries directly. Another portion of their wages was converted to the Vietnamese currency (dongs) and sent to their families in Vietnam in the form of small monthly contributions. The third part of the salary was given as a special final bonus to the worker after he or she came back home. Apart from these payments, there was still a considerable remainder of the workers' salaries that was taken by the Vietnamese government to “cover workers' travel expenses”.¹⁶ Because of their low salaries, many Vietnamese workers looked for additional incomes. Uncontrolled business activities were officially interdicted and thus a lot of Vietnamese workers consequently turned to semi-legal and illegal activities on the Czech black market.

¹⁵ Brouček, S. (2002) ‘Vietnamské etnikum v lokálním prostředí české majority. Text vědeckého projektu RB1/1/01 zadaného Ministerstvem zahraničních věcí České republiky’ [Vietnamese in the local environment of the Czech ethnic majority. Report of the research project RB 1/1/01 ordered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic], Praha, Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky [Prague, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic], pp. 11–13 (unpublished report).

¹⁶ VCS, several interviews with former Vietnamese workers in Czechoslovakia, mainly 3 interviews in Louny and Prague, March - April 1999.

Within the CMEA, the Czechoslovak socialist economy was oriented mainly toward the development of heavy industries such as electrical technology, mechanical engineering, metalworking, and the chemical industry, but it failed in the development of the light industry and the production of consumer goods, especially luxury goods such as clothes, digital watches and electronics. Because the imports and distribution of Western consumer goods were limited and strongly supervised by government, a vast black market developed.

The Vietnamese quickly identified the strong interest of Czech people in “Western” commodities and responded to the demand by selling cheaper counterfeit versions of these goods. For this purpose, they started to manufacture jeans and other clothes with fake trademarks of western companies – mainly from stolen textile materials that were originally produced in the CSSR factories for export. The second main source of their additional income was sales of imported goods, especially watches and cheap electronics with fake brand names smuggled from Asia. These originally small-scale entrepreneurial activities became accelerated when the workers’ group supervisors and employees of the Vietnamese embassy in Prague entered the business (Nožina 2010a, p. 236).¹⁷

Meanwhile, in the opposite direction, various products - mainly bicycles, small motorcycles and sewing machines - were transported to Vietnam in planes officially chartered for the transportation of workers coming back to Vietnam. It is not clear how the commodities with fake Western trademarks produced in Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, etc. were smuggled to Vietnam, but the black market trade networks between the Asian countries and Czechoslovakia via Hanoi have lasted for years (Nožina 2010a, p. 236–237).¹⁸

The 1989 democratic revolution in Czechoslovakia dramatically changed the situation, though. With the opening of the state borders and the relaxation of import restrictions, strong international commercial networks attacked the Czech market. Local factories with their outdated equipment and technologies and obsolete products were no competition for them, and a lot of them went bankrupt. Many Czech professionals thus lost their jobs literally overnight, and the unemployment in the country rose quickly. In the new situation, experts on new high-tech technologies with good skills in Western languages (especially English) were demanded.

In this environment, a Vietnamese specialist, albeit one who was educated in Czechoslovakia or the Czech Republic and fluent in the Czech language, had little to offer to his or her potential employers. For most of the Czech companies, the Vietnamese specialists were only relicts from the Socialist era. Another obstacle to a higher participation of Vietnamese specialists in Czech companies was the Czech society's long lasting

¹⁷ VCS, common information shared in the Vietnamese community, based mainly on interviews in Prague in May 2007 and in Louny in July 2007.

¹⁸ M. K., officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interview in Prague, May 1999.

irrational prejudices towards educated Vietnamese professionals. These prejudices survived until the present. Furthermore, because the blue-collar jobs in the Czech industry were being occupied by workers from Ukraine and Slovakia at that point, the interest in the Vietnamese labour force sharply declined there as well.

In 1990, there were still 20,000 Vietnamese residents in the country even though the relations between the Czech Republic and Vietnam had been severed.¹⁹ Despite the existing situation, many Vietnamese workers and students opted to stay in the Czech Republic instead of returning home and, as O’Kane puts it when describing the situation of many immigrants to the USA, they, because of their small chances “of achieving their upward mobility exclusively through the conventionally accepted routes”, utilized alternative means (legal as well as illegal) as “additional vehicles in the climb from the bottom” (2003: 23).

The main domain of Vietnamese immigrants turned out to be small business enterprises. As a result, 95 % of all economically active Vietnamese in the Czech Republic had Czech trade licences during the 1990s. Out of all the foreign resident groups in the country, the Vietnamese had the biggest amount of trade licences. In contrast, only 1 % of all economically active Vietnamese worked in professions such as those of physicians, technicians, teachers, scientists, etc.²⁰ This pattern predominated with only some minor changes until 2006, when considerable amounts of Vietnamese workers started to be imported to the country as a labour force for some Czech factories. Currently, many Vietnamese still prefer to work in the field of business even if they have a university education in the humanities or a technical field. Like before, for the Vietnamese, the easiest way to quickly earn money is through trade activities on the Czech market, especially the selling of cheap Asian commodities (clothing, electronics, CDs), and the organising of networks of grocery stores or restaurants. It is a pattern that is common in all the EU countries (Hüwelmeier 2013; Dang 2011; Hlinčíková 2010).

The old residents started to serve as a base for new Vietnamese immigrants to Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic from both Vietnam and other European countries, and the strong Vietnamese diaspora in the country was established in the course of the 1990’s and 2000’s.

¹⁹ Brouček, S. (2002): ‘Vietnamské etnikum v lokálním prostředí české majority’ op. cit., pp. 12–13.

²⁰ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, unpublished confidential report. Based on the expertise of the Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí České republiky [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic], Prague, November 2006.

The structure of Vietnamese crime networks

Occasional criminals

The Vietnamese immigrants to the Czech Republic come mainly from bigger cities and the countryside of Northern Vietnam – from the poor provinces Nghe An and Ha Tinh, and also from Hung Yen and Hai Duong on the Red River Delta (Brouček 2003c, p. 20). An overwhelming majority of them are coming with strong economic expectations. According to Brouček (2003c, p. 20), the Vietnamese living in the Czech Republic have three goals for their economic activities: to improve their lives and sustain their families, to financially secure their children and to take care of parents who are living in Vietnam. Because of this, their basic strategy is aimed towards gaining a maximal profit as soon as possible.

Among the representatives of the first generations of Vietnamese residents in the Czech Republic, we encounter a strong feeling of “temporariness” in regard to the stage of their life that they are to spend in the Czech Republic. These people usually expect to stay for only a limited period of time in the country and then return home to Vietnam after they gain enough wherewithal for a dignified life in their homeland. This “temporariness” leads to specific behaviour, such as engaging in professions that enable the immigrants to obtain higher earnings (irrespective of the potential risk). It also causes a state in which many Vietnamese immigrants are focused “inward” - i.e. toward the Vietnamese community. This, together with language and culture barriers and the immigrants’ frequently troubled relations with the society and administration in the Czech Republic, causes the relatively high amount of “closeness” among the people in the Vietnamese community. The consequences are rampant.

This approach is usually altered in the second generation of Vietnamese residents, among whom the feeling of “temporariness” is substantially weakened, as the young Vietnamese are well adapted to the culture and society in the Czech Republic and do not feel too closely connected to the country of their parents’ origin (Nožina 2010a: pp. 230, 256).

The strong economic expectations and the feeling of “temporariness” support the exploitation strategies in the Vietnamese community, often carried out regardless of the limits of Czech law. A lot of Vietnamese

residents become occasional delinquents in connection with the exploitation strategies. The quality of this occasional criminality varies in the different social strata of the Vietnamese emigrants' society.

At first glance, the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic looks homogenous. But this is far from the truth. From the beginnings of the Vietnamese migration, some of the Vietnamese residents in the Czech Republic were more successful than others in their business activities. As a result, the Vietnamese diaspora became socially differentiated into three main social groups. According to the Vietnamese residents themselves, the three groups are the *thóc* (poorly established residents), the *xù mộc* (the older settlers from the communist times), and the *doanh nghiệp mới* (new businessmen) (Pechová 2007, pp. 17–18; Nožina 2010a, p. 245).²¹

The *thóc* (a word which literally means “grain of rice”, but is used to refer to poor farmers) represent the lowest level of the Vietnamese community's hierarchy. The majority of them are weakly established newcomers who arrived in the Czech Republic through legal and illegal channels mainly after 2000. They often work as street sellers of goods or employees of restaurants, and many of them are workers imported by labour agencies from Vietnam. The living conditions of these people are often poor. The new emigrant has to pay not only the cost of his or her transfers (from 7000 to 15 000 euros in recent years) (Nožina & Kraus 2009, p. 37),²² but he or she also has to pay for accommodation, food, commodities to sell, the selling place, etc. These expenses are high. For example, the price of a selling place in a market hall ranges from 200,000 to 300,000 Czech crowns (CZK; 7000 – 11,000 euros), and the monthly lease of the market place costs around 25,000 CZK (900 euros).²³

Basically, the emigrant has several possibilities of covering his or her expenses related to the transfer and living costs. The emigrants can collect money independently with the help of their relatives, who might live in Vietnam, the Czech Republic or another foreign country. They can also collect a sufficient sum as illegal workers and / or start doing business “with a debt”, with money and goods borrowed from Vietnamese businessmen.²⁴ The conditions of these loans and labour contracts are usually tough. The contracts last several years. If the sellers are not able to make their payments regularly, the bosses seize their goods. If this is not enough to get the payments from the sellers, other types of pressure follow – beatings, extortions and, finally, assassinations. Under such pressure, often in an effort to cover their debts, a lot of Vietnamese emigrants are turning to more lucrative activities beyond the limits of legality – trafficking in drugs, weapons, or cigarettes, or performing other services for criminal groups. It is quite easy to distinguish between sellers “with a debt” and

²¹ VCS, first enregistered in the course of the interviews in 2007. *Xù mộc* and *thóc* are frequently used terms; *doanh nghiệp mới* is a more formal and less frequently used term.

²² VCS, series of interviews in 2009 – 2012.

²³ K. F., officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interview in Prague, October 2007, November 2011.

²⁴ VCS, series of interviews, the main information is based on interviews from January and February 2007.

independent sellers in the markets. The sellers “with a debt” work longer, occupy not so lucrative (and therefore expensive) places, and so on. It is also typical that the majority of the new illegal immigrants begin their stay in the country as poorly paid illegal workers in Vietnamese or Chinese manufacturing workshops, cooks or waiters in Asian restaurants, street dealers selling various kinds of goods, etc.²⁵

The situation is not too much better in the case of Vietnamese contract workers who were imported to the Czech Republic in 2006 or later. The research proved that the majority of them were highly in debt to Vietnamese agencies that mediated their transfers and labour contracts in the Czech Republic. The economic crisis of 2008 – 2012 further exacerbated the situation, and the majority of the approximately 20 000 Vietnamese workers lost their jobs (Horáková 2010: pp. 47, 91–94). According to information from the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí České republiky*) - only 3670 Vietnamese workers were legally employed in the Czech Republic by the end of 2010.²⁶ Although the Czech government offered to pay Vietnamese workers a certain indemnity and also cover the cost of their return tickets home, just a small part of their total number took advantage of the opportunity because many of them were still highly in debt (Malíková 2009).²⁷ When this policy fell short of the mark, the Ministry of Interior came up with a set of restrictive measures against Vietnamese immigration.²⁸ When their visas expired, the Vietnamese immigrants had to stay in the country as illegal residents or migrate further west. Under these conditions, a relatively high number of immigrants were also forced to engage in activities beyond the limits of legality such as trafficking in drugs or cigarettes or performing other services for criminal groups.

According to the Czech Police, the engagement of this social group in criminal activities became frequent.²⁹ In November 2008, the Czech Minister of Interior Affairs informed the media that Vietnamese criminality is on the rise in the Czech Republic.³⁰ This rise was, according to some experts on migration, related

²⁵ VCS, series of interviews in 2007 – 2012.

²⁶ *Kolik cizinců pracuje legálně v ČR? [How Many Foreigners are Working in the Czech Republic Legally?]* Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs], 22 March 2010, available at: <http://www.mpsv.cz/cs/8487>, accessed 12 February 2013.

²⁷ *Novinky.cz*, 5 May 2009, available at:

<http://www.novinky.cz/kariera/168027-temer-280-cizincu-ze-zapadu-cech-pozadalo-o-navrat-do-vlasti.html>, accessed 12 February 2013; *Lidovky.cz*, 9 July 2009, available at: http://byznys.lidovky.cz/cizich-delniku-zvolna-ubyva-dobrovolne-navraty-ale-moc-nelakaji-p8n-/statni-pokladna.aspx?c=A090609_133836_statni-pokladna_nev, accessed 30 March 2014.

²⁸ Součková, Z. (2010): *Mezinárodní pracovní migrace v ČR po vstupu do EU [International Labour Migration in the Czech Republic After EU Accession]*, Masaryk University, Brno, p. 48 (unpublished thesis).

²⁹ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, analysis for the Institute of International Relations' research project, Prague, September 2010.

³⁰ *Ihned.cz.*, 18 November 2008, available at: <http://zpravy.ihned.cz/c1-30444050-langer-zavazna-zlocinnost-vietnamcu-je-v-cr-na-vzestupu>, accessed 12 February 2013.

to the bad economic situation that occurred after the start of the economic crisis (Kušniráková & Jirková 2011; Jelínková 2013).

The *xù môt* and the *doanh nghiệp mới* represent the higher strata of the Vietnamese community's hierarchy. The *xù môt* are the older settlers from the communist times before the 1989 revolution (*xù* is a local name for Czech Vietnamese, and *môt* means "mouldy"). They are the most successful group in the Czech Vietnamese community. They know the Czech language well, they are economically well established as traders and businessmen, and some of them already gained Czech citizenship. They frequently hire Czech citizens as sellers, guardians and nurses (Nožina 2010a, p. 245). Especially in the last decade, they were joined at the top of the Vietnamese diaspora's society by the *doanh nghiệp mới*, the "new businessmen" of the second economic immigration wave of the 1990's and 2000's, who were successful in their business in the Czech Republic.

Members of both groups occasionally engage in criminal activities or use the services of criminal groups for importing illegal goods, money transfers, tax evasion, resolutions of disputes, etc. A lot of these businessmen easily cross the line of legality in cases where various obstacles reduce their business activities and maximum profits (the obstacles can include laws, administrative restrictions, competition from other companies, fiscal burdens, etc.). It is frequently the case that one Vietnamese business company is engaged in both certain types of legal activities and certain types of illegal activities (organisation of migration, imports of goods, financial transactions, etc.). Also the distribution of illegally produced or imported goods through legal trade networks has been a common practice among Vietnamese businesses.

The professional criminal underground

The Vietnamese professional criminal underground has been quickly developing in the Czech Republic in the last two decades.

The ordinary members of the Vietnamese criminal underground are recruited from the ranks of unsuccessful emigrants, juvenile gang members in the Czech Republic, and criminal delinquents that came to the Czech Republic from Vietnam and other European countries – especially Poland, Germany, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Russia. They know the worlds of the Vietnamese communities in Europe very well, and members of those communities are often the targets of their criminal interests.

Vietnamese criminals operate either independently or with the assistance of several “colleagues”. The structures and activities of their groups vary. They range from groups exclusively created for single acts of violence to stable groups that are permanently engaged in criminal business activities. Vietnamese gangs in the Czech Republic are generally less organised but highly violent and they are usually involved in a wide range of criminal activities – e.g. extortion, theft, contract killings, smuggling of people, and drugs. (Nožina 2010a, p. 249).

Some of the gangs were created by Vietnamese who had been living in the Czech Republic for a long time. In the 1990s, Black Son’s gang was a gang of this sort that became well known among the Czech public. The gang was created and led by a former Vietnamese worker who came to the Czech Republic in the second half of the 1980s and used the nickname “Black Son”. His group (of not more than 10 persons) was active in a large spectrum of violent criminal activities. At the beginning of the 1990s, the gang emigrated to Germany, and since then, they have “worked” in France, probably on contract for Asian bosses. When the police pressure on them became too high in 1995, the gang immigrated back to the Czech Republic. In 1997, Black Son was arrested by the Czech Police and sentenced to a prison term for creating and using forged documents. Some of the members of his gang then created a new group, and the rest of them dispersed (Nožina 2003: pp. 201–203).³¹

Especially in recent years, it was mainly newcomers from Vietnam (sometimes individuals who had already started their criminal careers in their home country) and members of groups of juvenile delinquents who had been born in the Czech Republic who have been recruited to gangs.

The gangs coming from Eastern Europe, who are representatives of this type, are commonly engaged in smuggling goods and people to Western Europe. The gangs of this type are not dominantly violent, although they do not hesitate to use force. Engaging in some special types of activities and frequently working on a temporary contract for bigger Asian groups or criminal bosses are two activities that are typical for them. For example, Vuong Van Vu’s group immigrated to the Czech Republic by travelling across Slovakia in the 90s. Along with smuggling people across the Czech Republic’s territory for a chain of international smugglers specialised in transfers of people from Asia to Western Europe, it was engaged in organised prostitution and other activities of that sort. It was based in the western Czech town Karlovy Vary (Macháček & Ruml 1997, p. 71; Nožina 2000a, p. 27).

³¹ K. F., officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interview Prague, October 2007, November 2011.

Especially in the second half of the 1990's, the activity of criminal delinquents coming from the West European countries grew in importance. A lot of them came to the Czech Republic from Germany.³² In the mid-nineties, the situation in Germany, particularly with regard to the escalating violence between Vietnamese gangs, became unbearable. Because of it, the German security forces began extensive operations against Vietnamese crime (Lampe 1999). This led to a significant outflow of criminally active persons from Germany to neighboring countries, especially to the Czech Republic and Poland, but also to Slovakia and Hungary. A significant increase in Vietnamese violent crime was consequently registered in these countries (Nožina & Kraus 2009, pp. 57–58).³³ For example, the Vietnamese gangs Nghi Xuan and Vinh entered the Czech Republic from Germany and then became active on the Czech local criminal scene.³⁴

The arrivals of gangs from Germany also led to a wave of violent clashes for spheres of influence between the old Vietnamese criminal underground members and the newcomers.³⁵ Currently, their mutual relations are more or less settled and the situation is stabilised.

In general, the Vietnamese criminal groups in the Czech Republic frequently fight with each other, but they only exceptionally wage criminal wars against other ethnic groups, as was typical for example for Vietnamese criminal groups in the U.S.A. (O'Kane 2003, p. 107).

“Respectable men”

The key persons in the life of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic are “respectable men”. These persons are known in the community as successful businessmen – traders, owners of big market halls, export-import companies, and/or restaurants, etc. However, they frequently act as criminal bosses interested in maximal profits regardless of the limits of the law.

These men enjoy great respect among other members of the Vietnamese community because of their “business” skills and their ability to enforce their authority. They have very good knowledge of the Czech environment (many of them are former students of Czech colleges or universities and/or long-time residents in the Czech Republic) and, through personal contacts and corruption networks, they possess the ability to

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, analysis prepared for the IIR's research project “International Organised Crime in the Czech Republic” (1999 – 2002), May 2001, Prague.

³⁵ L. B., officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interview in Prague, September 2007.

influence the Czech government bureaus' decisions regarding the Vietnamese community. These people also have a real "executive power" within the community that is based on contacts with members of the criminal underground. By building up these relationships, the "respectable men" create parallel power structures in the closed world of Vietnamese immigrants.

Circles of assistants surround the "respectable men". A "respectable man" usually has a few close confidantes (usually family members or long-term collaborators), but they usually push their interests through a wider circle of contacts that includes administrators of market halls, restaurants, companies, etc.; people with connections to the state administration (i.e. to its corrupt employees); guards and bodyguards; lawyers; business partners; and members of the criminal underground.

The "respectable men" are able to enforce their authority by violent means in cases of quarrels, small violent struggles, arbitrations, etc. This is why they maintain their contacts with criminal delinquents and Vietnamese gang members and hire them for concrete special assignments as enforcers, guards of market places, and even contract killers. These people are called *bộ đội* – "soldiers" in Vietnamese.

"Respectable men" usually do not communicate with the underground directly but through their adjutants - in some cases, these are former criminal delinquents. This is an important reason why any police investigation of Vietnamese crime is difficult - the relations between the *bộ đội* in the field, i.e. the men directly connected with a concrete crime, and the interests and bosses behind the crime are usually unclear. The indirect connection is the reason why a "respectable man" can have characteristics of a man honoured in the Vietnamese community and characteristics of a criminal boss at the same time.

The "respectable man" also does not necessarily employ *bộ đội* 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 concrete special assignments. Instead of having a regular job and salary from the "respectable man", they are repaid with favours and / or single payments for specific acts. For example, some *bộ đội* are repaid for their services with a profitable place on the market plus the rewards for their concrete actions (Nožina 2010a, pp. 248–249).

There exist three important Vietnamese centres controlled by competing groups headed by "respectable men" in the Czech Republic: they control areas of the cities Prague, Brno and Cheb, and also several other parts of the country. Some of them were also able to extend their "business activities" abroad to Poland, Germany, and

Slovakia.³⁶ Together with them, a range of smaller and less organised independent Vietnamese criminal-business companies operate in the country. Their chiefs are successful businessmen who have sufficient financial sources and contacts with government offices. In some cases, they are former *bộ đội*. They usually have only a few adjutants and contacts with only 2 or 3 *bộ đội*. Similarly to big bosses, the adjutants are involved in both legal and illegal activities.³⁷

Because of the “respectable men’s” ability to find solutions to problems, many Vietnamese residents in trouble turn to them with requests for help. The mechanism they use for solving a problem is usually the following series of steps: The “respectable man” authorises one of his adjutants to handle the problem. The adjutant contacts some members of the corruption network that work in a state office to arrange the necessary documents and licences or hires *bộ đội* for “contract work”, which can include extortion, beating up, lambasting, kidnapping, and other enforcement activities. He also announces the price for the service to the emigrant and collects the sum. In less important cases, the emigrant can turn directly to the adjutant or *bộ đội* and they can operate independently of the boss.³⁸

Frequently, the “respectable man” does not directly accept money for the “service”. The money is paid to the adjutant, who then passes the required sum of money to the “respectable man”. The “respectable man” directly accepts only thanks and expressions of gratitude from the emigrant, which are sometimes accompanied by more or less symbolic presents. In exchange, it is expected that the Vietnamese emigrant will do a favour for the “respectable man” if asked. To reject such a request for a favour is not common, even in cases of criminal offences.³⁹

It gives a great power to the “respectable men” in the closed world of Vietnamese residents in the Czech Republic, and it pushes many of the emigrants into further criminal activities. Not only economic pressure and expected profits but also solidarity born from the complicated network of mutual “gratitudes” is the motor of the engagement of many Vietnamese emigrants in criminal activities (Nožina 2010a, p. 233). Many Vietnamese residents, who are basically without criminal backgrounds, then serve as drivers, receivers of illicit goods and smuggled peoples, sellers of smuggled illicit goods and goods with fake trademarks coming from illegal channels, etc. Also the “tolerance” of the Vietnamese community towards the criminal underground and its low

³⁶ VCS, interviews in Prague in September 2007 and in Brno in October 2011; K. F., officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interview in Prague, October 2007, November 2011.

³⁷ J. B., officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interview in Prague, September 2007.

³⁸ K. F., officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interview in Prague, October 2007; J. S. officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interview in Prague, January 2010.

³⁹ VCS, series of interviews in Prague, Cheb, and Brno in 2010 – 2011.

willingness to cooperate with the security forces of the host country is more understandable in the light of these facts.

Vietnamese criminal networks' activities

Semi-legal and illegal transfers of people

In the last two decades, the dominant patterns of Vietnamese immigration to the Czech Republic have been based on transfers organised by licensed and unlicensed agencies that frequently merge legal and illegal activities.

Licensed labour agencies import Vietnamese workers to the Czech Republic legally, although the conditions of their labour contracts are tough. The domain of unlicensed agencies consists of services in the form of arranging visas and transfers, ensuring residence permits and business licenses in the Czech Republic, etc. These agencies are broadly exploiting gaps in the Czech legal system that abruptly changed several times from the beginning of the 1990s – mainly because of the introduction of new immigration laws, changes in the Czech asylum politics and police restrictions. The agencies are able to flexibly adapt to these changes. Therefore their activities are "legal" in principle and "semi-legal" in practice.

The agencies are organised by Vietnamese emigrants who already stayed in the Czech Republic for a long period of time. They are well established in the Czech space and know the local culture, society and laws. They also solidified their contacts with Czech authorities. These agencies do not work independently. They frequently use the services of mediators and utilise corruption networks established around embassies and government offices. In the last few years, especially the Czech Embassy in Hanoi has been under constant pressure from the agencies. The pressure peaked in 2007, before the Czech Republic joined the Schengen system.⁴⁰ While the Czech Embassy in Hanoi issued 2167 visas to Vietnamese citizens in 2000, 15 000 applications for visas were enregistered in 2007 and 12 000 in 2008. The situation was so critical that the Czech

⁴⁰ K. T., employee of the Czech Embassy in Hanoi (Vietnam), interview in Prague, February 2008.

Republic temporarily halted the issuing of visas to Vietnamese citizens at the end of 2009. The number of issued visas declined to 1200 at this point (Rychetský 2007).⁴¹

One feature that was typical for Vietnamese agencies has been their ability to move smoothly between legal and illegal spheres, and occasionally co-operate with the criminal underground. The agencies serve as shields for criminal organisations connected to smuggling of people as well. The interest of the Vietnamese people in transfers to the Czech Republic is high. The rumours from the Vietnamese community speak about tens of thousands of people who are interested in travelling to the Czech Republic for a job.⁴² Because the cost of a legal transfer mediated by the agency is between 7 and 15 000 euro, depending on the services provided, while the price of an illegal transfer through a smuggling organisation is "only" between 4000 and 6000 euro, many migrants resort to the cheaper, albeit riskier, variant.⁴³

In these operations, the use of counterfeit documents is frequent. It includes the use of counterfeit visas and of stolen and illegally sold passports with alterations from EU countries (e.g. Germany, Poland, Slovakia, and/or Hungary).⁴⁴

Smuggling people across the "green line" (illegal crossing of borders) was frequent in the 1990s and still continues today, but with a lower intensity. One of the most frequent patterns of illegal transfers of Vietnamese emigrants is that in which the emigrants travel by airplane or train to Russia, and then they travel hidden in trucks across Ukraine to Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The trip takes two or more months (Nožina 2010a, p. 241).⁴⁵ The living conditions of the transferred emigrants are hard. Violence and even raping of women are not uncommon during the journeys.⁴⁶

In the years 1990 – 2007, if the organisation was able to ensure the legal transfer of an emigrant to the Czech Republic, his or her way to Western Europe was illegal only in its second part - mainly during the emigrant's crossing of the Czech-German border. The common practise was that a Czech guide working for the Vietnamese smuggling gang or a Vietnamese guide led a group of immigrants to the vicinity of the border and showed them where to go. In the case of a bigger group, the guide led them across the line personally.

⁴¹ Embassy of the Czech Republic in Hanoi, personal communication, Hanoi, November 2009.

⁴² VCS, series of interviews in Prague, Brno, and Cheb in 2006 – 2011. This information was applicable mainly in 2008, when the Czech Embassy in Hanoi temporarily suspended the issuing of labour visas to Vietnamese citizens.

⁴³ B. S., Ministerstvo vnitra ČR, odbor azylové a migrační politiky [Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, the Czech Asylum and Migration Policy Department], interview in Prague, March 2007; VCS, September 2010.

⁴⁴ K. F., officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interview in Prague, 11 October 2007, November 2011.

⁴⁵ H. T., Ministerstvo vnitra ČR, Odbor azylové a migrační politiky [Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, the Czech Asylum and Migration Politics Department], interview in Prague, March 2007.

⁴⁶ VCS, several interviews, mainly registered in Prague and Brno in May 1997 and in Cheb and Prague in June and July 2008.

Cooperating partners were waiting on the other side. The price for a transfer from the Czech Republic to Germany was in the range between 300 and 800 euro.⁴⁷

In January 2008, when the Czech Republic joined the Schengen security system, its border was opened in all directions. The main activities connected to the smuggling of people across the “green” line moved from the Czech-German border to the external borders of the EU in Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary. Thus, the Czech Republic has been facing only secondary transits since that date.⁴⁸ Today, many of the migrants are legally transported by airplanes to Budapest (Hungary) or Bratislava (Slovakia) and then they are transferred (for example, by trucks, in which they remain hidden) to the Czech Republic or further to the West European countries.⁴⁹

Transits from Asia through Eastern Europe and France have been directed mainly to Great Britain in the last three years. According to police estimates, the number of Vietnamese immigrants that were smuggled to the UK over the coastal and northern department of Pas-de-Calais in France increased by 200 % between 2008 and 2009.⁵⁰ The leaders of the smugglers’ organisations are Chinese and Vietnamese individuals, and local people – Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs, Germans, etc, assist them. The local assistants are frequently connected to criminal undergrounds. Furthermore, the current trend is toward enlarging the numbers of “clients” – i.e. refugees are now being smuggled from Central Asia, Southern Asia and the Balkans (Nožina 2010a, p. 243).⁵¹

Economic crime

Economic crime is a major problem in relation to the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic and also in the EU in general. It is usually associated with violations of intellectual property laws (trade in goods with fake trademarks and illegal copies), illegal production of and trade in commodities (alcohol, cigarettes), violations of customs and tax laws, money laundering, illegal financial transactions and transfers of money (including smuggling of cash and the *hawalla* system), etc.

⁴⁷ T. S., officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interview in Prague, September 2002.

⁴⁸ M. D., Generální ředitelství cel, Oddělení dohledu a vyšetřování, Ministerstvo financí České republiky [General Directorate of Customs, Department of Supervision and Investigation, Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic], interview in Prague, February 2008.

⁴⁹ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, unpublished confidential analysis, Prague, 2010.

⁵⁰ *Dismantling of an important network of illegal immigration to the United Kingdom. Communiqué issued by the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Mutually-Supportive Development, Embassy of France in the United Kingdom, Paris, June 22, 2010, available at: <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/Illegal-immigration-ring-broken.html>, accessed 20 January 2011.*

⁵¹ M. D., Generální ředitelství cel, Oddělení dohledu a vyšetřování, Ministerstvo financí České republiky [General Directorate of Customs, Department of Supervision and Investigation, Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic], interview in Prague, February 2008; The Organised Crime Detection Unit, unpublished confidential analyses, 2010, 2013.

The economic crime is tolerated and in many cases welcomed by the members of the Vietnamese diaspora. It helps them in their businesses. For example, the smugglers' groups import containers with undeclared goods for small retailers, and the groups specialised in export of money and money laundering provide undeclared financial operations for the vendors or send financial support to their families in Vietnam. Economic crime does not affect the concept of the "respectable man" in Vietnamese communities.

Vietnamese economic crime has a high degree of international cooperation, which has been increasing after the Czech Republic's accession to Schengen. It is not exceptional when an organised group established in the Czech Republic smuggles goods across large ports like those in Hamburg, Genoa or Split to the Czech Republic, and then further to outlets in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Germany, France, and Italy.

Violation of customs regulations and taxes is frequent in the sphere of imports of Asian goods. The scams are organised by specialised companies called *dịch vụ hải quan* ("services for customs") in Vietnamese. Only in Prague, there are seven companies of this kind, and other such companies are operating in many other locations with a significant concentration of Vietnamese residents in the Czech Republic.⁵²

The popularity of Asian commodities is gradually declining in the Czech Republic, and the market is largely saturated. However, the prices of alcoholic beverages and tobacco products are growing, and the demand for these products is high. Vietnamese traffickers are reacting flexibly to the situation. Czech security forces are registering more and more cases of illegal production and distribution of cigarettes and alcohol products with fake brand names. Raw materials for alcohol production are obtained in the Czech Republic or the Balkan countries, while tobacco and components for producing cigarettes are smuggled from Vietnam or China. The manufacturers are set up in rented premises in the Czech Republic. The products are then distributed in the country or in other EU countries, especially Poland, Slovakia and Germany.⁵³

The damage caused by criminal organisations engaged in illegal imports of goods into the Czech Republic and the related customs and tax evasion reaches the figures of hundreds of millions if not billions of CZK per annum.⁵⁴ A part of these profits is exported from the Czech Republic and other EU countries to Vietnam and China. The Vietnamese economic criminals from the Czech Republic cooperate with their counterparts in Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and other EU countries. Their *modi operandi* differ, but basically there are several major ways in which they export funds - the use of the banking sector, misuse of personal money transfers (e.g. via Western Union), sending money by post and exports of money in the baggage of couriers

⁵² General Directorate of Customs, Department of Supervision and Investigation, Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic, unpublished internal analysis, 2010.

⁵³ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, unpublished confidential analysis, 2010.

⁵⁴ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, unpublished confidential analysis, 2009.

(these are usually transported by air on the Prague-Frankfurt-Hanoi route).⁵⁵ Organisations engaged in exporting funds often combine these methods in a variety of ways. It is quite common that the funds derived from criminal activity or the grey economy in Hungary, Slovakia and Germany are first transferred to the Czech Republic and then sent to various destinations abroad, especially destinations in China and Vietnam. The specialised groups engaged in transfers have “offices” organising transfers of money for clients in many markets and shopping places in the Czech Republic and abroad.

The system of *chuyển tiền* (transfer of money), also known as *hawala* (from the Arab word for “trust”), is widely used in Vietnamese communities abroad as well as in those in Vietnam. *Hawala* is a traditional financial service for Asian emigrants. This system provides a service similar to that of a normal bank. Transactions in the *hawala* system are based on the principle of trust, though. For example, money given as a deposit to a *hawala* banker in Prague will be paid to a client by a partner *hawala* banker in Hanoi without a transmission of money through a bank account or a cash transport. The *hawala* banker in Prague just makes a phone call or sends an email to his partner in Hanoi. The customer must then be able to provide an identification sign - a code number, a password, etc – in order to collect his or her money from *hawalla* banker in Hanoi. *Hawala* is also used in other parts of Central Europe - for example, in the direction of Czech Republic - Poland. Vietnamese businessmen from the Czech Republic often smuggle goods from Asia to Poland via the Czech Republic, since Polish laws are much stricter in this respect. In Poland, the goods are sold and the funds are subsequently sent from Poland directly to Vietnam or China. They are used to purchase Asian goods there, and these are then transferred across the Czech Republic back to Poland. Between the Czech Republic and Poland payments in money do not exist and the business transactions between Vietnamese businessmen are financially secured through the *hawala* system.⁵⁶

The plight in the sphere of Vietnamese economic criminality in recent years has led to a series of police raids on the Vietnamese markets. In the course of the raids, illegal goods worth hundreds of millions of CZK were seized. The raids raised conflicting reactions in the Czech society. President Vaclav Klaus labelled these interventions as “megalomaniacal” and stated that they had “no effect” in his letters to the Ministers of Interior and Foreign Affairs.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ General Directorate of Customs, Department of Supervision and Investigation, Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic, unpublished internal analysis, 2010.

⁵⁶ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, unpublished confidential analyses, 2010, 2013.

⁵⁷ *iHned.cz*, 1 December 2008, available at: domaci.ihned.cz/c131027220klausovisenelibizasahvevietnamske-trznicianiblokovanivietnamskychviz, accessed December 2008.

Violent crime

Violent crimes committed by members of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic include a wide range of offences: extortion, kidnapping, enforcement activities including contract killings, etc. Physical attacks and killings motivated by a desire for revenge are also frequent. Because the economic crisis deeply affected the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic, the cases of home robberies and murders for money increased there as well.

Probably the most common violent crimes are the various forms of violence used in competitions among Vietnamese businessmen and debt recoveries.⁵⁸ A special analysis on Vietnamese violent crime completed in November 2006 states that in the critical period of 1997 – 2006 696 violent crimes committed by Vietnamese citizens were registered by the Czech Police; however, the real number criminal offences committed by Vietnamese in the Czech Republic was probably much higher.⁵⁹

To handle various problems by violent means, the Vietnamese businessmen hire *bộ đội*. It is typical that *bộ đội* behave violently not only towards their victims but also towards each other. Disputes between *bộ đội* are always characterised by high levels of violence - possibly because of the Vietnamese traditional concept of “loss of face” (i.e. a person loses his or her honor and authority after doing something shameful). Only one inappropriate remark directed toward them can lead to an attack by them that can end with the person who made the remark getting killed. This uncontrollable behaviour is typical for criminal delinquents from Southeast Asia.

A concomitant feature of Vietnamese violent crimes is that frequently the victim will not cooperate with the police. Often this is due to the common pattern in which some financial or other compensation between the offender and the victim is agreed upon (it is often arranged by a “respectable man” in the background) before the police can apprehend the offender, or the victim wanting to take justice into his own hands. Plus, another reason for this is the fact that cooperation with the police causes the victim to be seen as an “informer”.⁶⁰

Usury

The Vietnamese understand usurious loans differently than Europeans. The common interest of Vietnamese banks starts at the level of 25%, which is due to the high inflation in the country (and the lack of funds in the market). In recent years, however, the trend has been changing rapidly and some banks are

⁵⁸ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, unpublished confidential analysis, November 2011.

⁵⁹ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, unpublished analysis based on a report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, November 2006.

⁶⁰ An analysis on the basis of several criminal cases and also on the basis of interviews with Vietnamese community members in 2009 – 2011.

providing loans under much better conditions. But still, mainly because of the inflation, even loans among family members have relatively high interest rates. In the Czech Republic, loans for acquisition of goods for resale and loans for starting businesses are frequent among Vietnamese residents. The interest rate in these cases ranges from 5–15 % per week, and it yields a 280–560 % annual interest on debt.

Vietnamese usury is the domain of groups that are also involved in illegal transfers of money and goods, and senior business owners or marketplaces. Another group of lenders in the Vietnamese community are the criminal bosses and businessmen who use loans to subordinate their collaborators and victims – assistants, *bộ đội*, workers in illegal factories or persons forced into prostitution.

This usury is dangerous especially for newcomers, as they must frequently pay the debts they incurred in Vietnam after coming to the Czech Republic. Furthermore, upon arrival, the newcomers often learn that their debt has staggeringly increased - for example, because of some “operational costs” and “complications” that require additional payments. The newcomers then frequently find themselves in networks of debts and, as a result, they are often forced to work under inhuman conditions for Vietnamese bosses.⁶¹

To address the situation, the Vietnamese government adopted special measures to support contract workers who work or plan to work abroad. Within the program, some Vietnamese banks (such as the Vietnamese Bank for Social Policies or the Vietnam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) started to provide specific loans to workers to cover their expenses related to their transfers from Vietnam to the host countries. However, the problem is that many of the loans are mediated by labour agencies that are administering the transfers and collecting money from them. Also the interests on the loans are relatively high – they range from 0,2 to 0,65 % per month, according to the social status of the applicant.⁶²

Stealing of goods

Among certain groups of the Vietnamese underground, stealing of goods has been quite prevalent in recent years, and this type of crime has an increasing tendency. The reason is clear - the poor economic situation of many Vietnamese in the host country.

The perpetrators of theft of goods have different origins. They include members of the Vietnamese

⁶¹ This is a common situation in the Vietnamese community. VCS, information based mainly on the interviews carried out in Prague, Plzeň and Cheb in February – November 2010.

⁶² *Ngân hàng Chính sách xã hội có chức năng [Functions of the Vietnamese Bank for Social Policies]*. The Vietnamese Bank for Social Policies website, 2010, available at: <http://nganhangonline.com/ngan-hang-chinh-sach-xa-hoi-viet-nam-vbsp.html>, accessed 14 September 2012.

community whose earnings are not enough for them to buy the luxury products that are seen as an expression of social status in the community. Therefore, these people often perform petty theft in luxury stores. Vietnamese juvenile gangs also steal goods. These consist mainly of members of the second generation of Vietnamese living in the Czech Republic, and they present a more serious problem. They organise thefts to gain funds for their entertainment as well as funds with which to purchase weapons or drugs. Vietnamese drug addicts also steal to procure funds for their daily doses of drugs. The stealing of goods by drug addicts is sometimes even encouraged by drug dealers. Furthermore, currently, there is also some organised theft in large retail chains that is being carried out by groups of unemployed Vietnamese.

The individual thieves and groups of thieves have developed a number of methods to bring goods out of stores without being detected by electronic sensors. For example, they use plastic bags whose insides are covered with aluminium foil. In one case, a group of thieves was able to steal goods worth 500 000 CZK (ca. 20 000 euro) each day. The goods were then sold to market sellers for half or even one third of their real price. The activities of the group were so lucrative for sellers that the group began to steal goods on request. If a seller was interested in some luxury goods, he contacted the group, and the stolen goods were supplied to him the next day.⁶³

Thefts are also organised by *bộ đội* who want to improve their financial budget and eliminate the business rivals of their bosses. *Bộ đội* are frequently recruited as guards of marketplaces. Therefore, they know the situation of sellers. Due to the lifestyles of most *bộ đội*, the funds they receive for the protection of marketplaces are not enough to cover their living expenses. Therefore *bộ đội* blackmail some vendors at the markets, commit petty thefts such as burglaries in the warehouses that produce illegal cigarettes, attack illegal grow houses that grow marijuana right before the harvest, etc.

The raids of Vietnamese thieves are not restricted to the Czech Republic's territory, as they organise raids abroad as well, mainly in Germany and Poland. For example, the German city Dresden is a popular destination for them.⁶⁴

Trade in people, prostitution

Since the 1990s, the trade in people has been a serious problem in the Vietnamese community. The criminal groups engaged in the trade are highly professionalized.

⁶³ B. J., former officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit - an analysis for an IIR project, 2010; VCS, June 2010.

⁶⁴ B. J., former officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit - an analysis for an IIR project, 2010; K. H. B., an officer of the Landeskriminalamt Sachsen, interview in Dresden, November 2010.

There are some differences between people who were originally trafficked from Vietnam and the people who are trafficked by Vietnamese criminals only in the Czech Republic. In recent years, it was particularly women who were supposed to work as prostitutes that were traded directly from Vietnam. The women were often lured to the Czech Republic by promises of profitable employment or some similar means. Another *modus operandi* was that the women paid for a transfer but the fees were significantly increased after their arrival in the Czech Republic, and the women were forced into prostitution to “cover their new debts”.

Human trafficking for the purpose of prostitution was frequent between 2005 and 2007. But then the Vietnamese sex industry began to attract the attention of the Czech security forces. An extensive network of nightclubs and brothels was destroyed because of the crackdowns of the Czech police. As a consequence, the activity became highly risky. However, it still persists but with some changes. Besides the conventionally trafficked girls, girls who work by day as sellers in shops or in some other menial job are also hired as prostitutes in nightclubs to increase their incomes. This caused a decline of “traditional” human trafficking for the purpose of prostitution to some extent. Also, in the past 10 years or so, the Vietnamese bosses used Czech and Ukrainian girls as prostitutes as well and even offered them outside the Asian community.

Also many new migrants were recruited in Vietnam for work in the Czech Republic under the promise of a transfer “on the basis of a debt” in recent years. Upon arrival, they found that they had to work in Asian restaurants, cultivate marijuana as menial workers, help in the illegal manufacturing of cigarettes and alcohol, etc. These people’s personal documents were taken from them to prevent them from escaping, and they were held in degrading conditions. Their work was also poorly rewarded (which meant that these people had to remain in their dependent positions for a long time). The recruitment of workers in Vietnam lost its purpose after the opening of the Czech labour market to the Vietnamese workers in 2006, though. However, many of the Vietnamese who worked for Czech employers were subsequently released from their jobs due to the economic crisis, their insufficient qualifications, or the machinations of people who work for the agencies. Because of their high indebtedness, these people are often reluctant to go back home to Vietnam and they are willing to perform virtually any job regardless of its legality (Nožina & Kraus 2011, pp. 185–188).⁶⁵

Counterfeiting activities (credit cards, passports and documents)

The Vietnamese counterfeiting activities are frequently connected with the illegal transfers of people and economic crime. While in the 1990s the most prevalent Vietnamese counterfeiting activity was the falsification

⁶⁵ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, unpublished confidential analysis, 2009.

of passports and driver's licenses, probably the most frequently forged documents today are flawless criminal records from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which are needed for applying for a visa or extending one's stay in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, various vocational certificates and documents that serve as evidence of formal qualifications, birth certificates, proofs of marriage and proofs of cash deposits at European banks (which are required for residence permits in the Czech Republic) are also often counterfeited. Especially in the last decade, the practice of "selling an identity" has been common. A Vietnamese who decides to return home can sell his complete identity, i.e. his passport, visa, business licence, etc., to a newcomer. The newcomer can then start his own business very quickly.⁶⁶

The forging of documents for imported trade goods, particularly the invoices of the goods, which are decisive for the assessment of duties and value added taxes (VAT), is a separate chapter in itself.⁶⁷

The price of counterfeit identity documents varies from 700 to 1500 euros. The forgery of birth certificates, criminal records or documents related to goods is frequently part of the broader "services", and it is difficult to estimate its prices. For example, when a client pays a specialised firm for an extension of his residence permit, the firm frequently prefers to produce its own fake documents to save on the costs of legal documents. The price of the forgery is then calculated into all the expenses connected to the operation and many of the Vietnamese clients are unaware that these specialised firms present counterfeit documents on their behalf.⁶⁸

Trafficking in weapons

Trafficking in weapons is not widespread in the Vietnamese community. Usually, Vietnamese criminal delinquents buy only individual weapons „for personal use“. Also, many weapons that are illegally held by Vietnamese individuals only serve the purpose of personal self-defence, since many traders, often carrying substantial amounts of money in cash, have no chance of getting a gun license. Weapons are also a sign of prestige among the juvenile gang members and are used to intimidate rival gangs.

In previous years, some illegal transfers of Czech weapons for Asian organised crime groups in Germany were registered (Nožina 2003, p. 212).

⁶⁶ K. F., an officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interviews in Prague, October 2007, November 2011; J. S., an officer of the Organised Crime Detection Unit, interview in Prague, January 2010; VCS, interview in Cheb, August 2010.

⁶⁷ General Directorate of Customs, Department of Supervision and Investigation, Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic, unpublished internal analysis, 2010.

⁶⁸ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, an analysis of criminal cases (2002 – 2009).

The presence of weapons of Balkan origin among the members of the Vietnamese underground is remarkable. This is probably due to the recent war in the Balkans and the fact that international drug smugglers carry guns during their smuggling activities in order to protect themselves. Vietnamese perpetrators of violent crime also tend to have experiences with guns of Eastern provenience that were used in the Balkan conflict as well as in the Vietnamese Army. For example, the submachine gun AGRAM 2000 is popular among them.⁶⁹

Trafficking in drugs

Until 2000, the illegal production of and trafficking in drugs performed by the Vietnamese did not attract the interest of the Czech security forces. This was tied to the fact that drug abuse and drug dealing are universally rejected and condemned in the Vietnamese community. However, in the first decade of the 21st century, Vietnamese drug-related crime grew tremendously. Because of this growth, the Czech police launched a series of operations against Vietnamese traffickers in 2001. The operations had the code name Mau (Nožina 2003, p. 213). The situation on the Vietnamese drug scene improved in the period of 2003 – 2005, but only temporarily. The Vietnamese drug dealers then adapted to the new situation, refined their security measures, expanded their activities and established new networks. The frequent use of occasional criminals or unemployed Vietnamese workers as menial workers in illegal cannabis ‘farms’, drug and precursor⁷⁰ couriers, or distributors of drugs is characteristic of these networks.

The assortment of drugs currently offered by Vietnamese dealers is broad. It includes heroin, pervitin (methamphetamine, “speed”), marijuana, ecstasy, LSD, and small amounts of cocaine. Kosovo Albanian criminal networks are the main source of heroin for Vietnamese drug dealers (only 10 % of their supplies of the drug are illegally imported from Southeast Asia); meanwhile, the local stimulant pervitin often comes from Czech sources, but it is produced by the Vietnamese themselves as well. The production of pervitin organised by the Vietnamese has grown especially in the years 2010 – 2011. Unlike their Czech “colleagues”, the Vietnamese “cookers” started to build large pieces of equipment that were able to produce substantially bigger amounts of methamphetamine.⁷¹

Methamphetamine is produced from ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, and these substances are obtained mainly from various different pharmacies. Because of this, some Vietnamese traders in drugs are engaged in

⁶⁹ The Organised Crime Detection Unit, unpublished confidential analysis, 2009.

⁷⁰ Precursors are the substances necessary for the production of illegal drugs.

⁷¹ B. B., an officer of the National Anti-Drug Headquarters of the Police of the Czech Republic, interview in Prague, February 2012.

imports of drug precursors mainly from Poland, Germany and Hungary, where even pharmaceuticals with a higher content of ephedrine in one tablet than their counterparts in the Czech Republic are sold over the counter. It is common that the buying of precursors abroad is carried out by specialised buyers for several Vietnamese manufacturers of methamphetamine in the CR at the same time.

In 2010, the first case of importation of precursors (pharmaceuticals) from Vietnam to the Czech Republic was detected. In 2012, the Czech Police also enregistered imports of ephedrine from Asia that had been organised by Vietnamese criminal structures. In one case the perpetrators tried to manufacture ephedrine using technology imported from South-East Asia.⁷²

Since mid-2007, the Czech security forces have been registering a growing engagement of the Vietnamese in the illegal production of cannabis. The rise in their engagement can be largely attributed to hydrophone techniques imported from the Netherlands. While the police discovered only one Vietnamese hydrophone farm in 2005, they came across eight Vietnamese cannabis farms in 2007, 55 Vietnamese grow houses in 2008,⁷³ 84 Vietnamese grow houses in 2009, and 145 Vietnamese grow houses in 2010.⁷⁴ In 2012, 195 grow houses were detected in the Czech Republic but the number of Vietnamese organisers behind such operations was not publicly specified by the Police.⁷⁵

Drugs of Vietnamese provenience are popular among the Czech drug users because of their good quality and low price. Vietnamese traders in drugs are also engaged in exports of cannabis and pervitin to other European countries. A substantial part of the pervitin manufactured by Vietnamese in the Czech Republic and exported abroad is bound for users in Germany, where the demand has been rising in recent years. The border trade in pervitin is highly developed on Vietnamese market places located in the close vicinity of the state border, and it is controlled by Vietnamese and West Balkan organised crime groupings. In 2012, the situation was serious especially at market places situated at the former Czech – German crossings in Rozvadov and Svatý Kříž. Also,

⁷² Národní protidrogová centrála Policie ČR [National Anti-Drug Headquarters of the Police of the Czech Republic], unpublished confidential analyses, 2010, 2011; *Výroční zpráva 2010. Národní protidrogová centrála SKPV PČR [Annual Report 2010. National Anti-Drug Headquarters of the Police of the Czech Republic]*, Prague, 2011, pp. 6, 28, available at: <http://www.policie.cz/clanek/vyrocní-zpravy-annual-reports-jahresbericht.aspx>, accessed March 2011; *National Anti-Drug Headquarters. Annual Report 2012*, pp. 5 – 6 available at: [file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/nozina/Dokumenty/Downloads/VZ_2012_AN_web%20\(6\).pdf](file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/nozina/Dokumenty/Downloads/VZ_2012_AN_web%20(6).pdf), accessed 9 March 2014.

⁷³ National Anti-Drug Headquarters of the Police of the Czech Republic, unpublished confidential analysis, 2008.

⁷⁴ *České noviny*, 10 March 2011, available at: <http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/protidrogova-centrala-zverejni-vyrocní-zpravu-za-lonsky-rok/607424>, accessed 4 March 2011.

⁷⁵ *National Drug Headquarters. Annual report 2012*, p. 15, available at: [file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/nozina/Dokumenty/Downloads/VZ_2012_AN_web%20\(6\).pdf](file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/nozina/Dokumenty/Downloads/VZ_2012_AN_web%20(6).pdf), accessed 9 March 2014.

another important destination of Vietnamese drugs is Italy.⁷⁶

Vietnamese criminal networks use a kind of “division of labour” among particular groups. There are groups which do not run their own large capacity grow houses and pervitin labs but only trade in cannabis and pervitin. They have contacts with other Vietnamese criminal groups operating abroad (in Slovakia, Hungary, Germany, and Poland) and use well-worked out drug courier networks.⁷⁷

In the years 2008 – 2012, 929 criminal delinquents of Vietnamese origin were arrested for the illegal production of and trade in drugs.⁷⁸ Also, a special joint team of the Czech Police and the Czech customs was established in 2009 to fight the international trafficking of cannabis and pervitin organised by the Vietnamese.

Conclusions

One of the main factors behind the penetration of international Asian crime into the Czech Republic was the establishment of a strong Vietnamese diaspora there before the fall of the Iron Curtain. Since then, in the course of the 1990s and 2000s, the Vietnamese criminal networks in the Czech Republic have fully developed their organisational structure and *modi operandi*. The networks are deeply integrated into the life of the Vietnamese diaspora in the country and create strong and efficient parallel power structures there. Some indications that were revealed during the research suggest that the Vietnamese criminal networks were, to some extent, able to penetrate the Czech state administration as well.

The dialectical unity of the legal and illegal spheres of life in the Vietnamese communities is one of the main factors that restrict efficient measures against Vietnamese criminality. Because of it, the Vietnamese criminal underground is closely connected with the broader society of the Vietnamese diaspora.

The main actors in these processes are “respectable men” with features of both successful businessmen and criminal bosses. The “respectable men” create around themselves strong economic and social networks based on their economic power, their ability to enforce their authority through both peaceful and violent means, and their complicated client system of familial, regional, and ethnic bonds. In this system, many Vietnamese emigrants

⁷⁶ *České noviny*, “Protidrogová centrála zveřejní výroční zprávu za loňský rok”, 10 March 2011, available at: <http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/protidrogova-centrala-zverejni-vyrocní-zpravu-za-lonsky-rok/607424>, accessed 4 March 2011; *National Drug Headquarters. Annual Report 2012*, p. 5, available at: [file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/nozina/Dokumenty/Downloads/VZ_2012_AN_web%20\(6\).pdf](file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/nozina/Dokumenty/Downloads/VZ_2012_AN_web%20(6).pdf), accessed 9 March 2014.

⁷⁷ *National Drug Headquarters. Annual Report 2012*, op. cit., p. 15.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

who are basically without criminal backgrounds occasionally participate in criminal activities. On the other hand, criminal delinquents are also involved in the networks, but they are tolerated by the broader diaspora's society because of the criminal activities of those Vietnamese who are not exactly viewed as criminals.

The rise of criminal offences in the Vietnamese community indicates that the problem will grow in importance. In the future, Vietnamese crime networks will probably focus mainly on the organisation of migration and the economic and financial operations that will merge together legal and illegal activities. Together with this, "classic" criminal activities such as trade in drugs, trade in people, prostitution, violent crime, etc. will also be performed.

The Vietnamese crime networks are not restricted to one country but operate internationally. The opening up of the borders of the Czech Republic to the EU states in 2008 further facilitated the operations of trans-border criminal networks and the expansion of their activities abroad. Because of this, the threat that the Czech Republic could become a bridge for the penetration of Asian crime into the whole of Europe still exists. On the other hand, the movement of Vietnamese crime not only from Asia but also from other European countries to the Czech Republic represents an important security threat for the country. Thus, a closer international security co-operation among the involved countries is needed in this situation.

The investigation of the offences is still ineffective because of the difficulty of penetrating the Vietnamese diaspora's community. It is evident that the national strategy of combating Vietnamese crime should include not only efficient legal, administrative and security measures but also strategies for a deeper social integration of the Vietnamese diaspora into the broader Czech society and more communication between the two societies. The Vietnamese residents still have a questionable position in the Czech Republic, where the main society still maintains many prejudices towards Asian communities living in the country. These prejudices are nourished by, among other things, the existing communication and culture barriers, a large number of semi-legal and illegal residence statuses on the part of the Vietnamese, and the marginal and frequently illegal position of the Vietnamese migrants on the labor market and in the national economy. The social exclusion of the Vietnamese residents pushes the community under the influence of the parallel power structures inside the Asian community and into crime networks.

The frequently quoted "isolation" of the Vietnamese diaspora is fictive in many aspects. The current situation in the Vietnamese community is different to the situation two decades ago. What one can consider as a positive feature in its development is the tendency of a growing number of Vietnamese immigrants to adapt themselves to the Czech Republic and isolate themselves from the crime networks. It is mainly the second generation of

Vietnamese residents that is interested in integration into the Czech society. This gives them a chance to eliminate the role of parallel power structures and crime networks in the Vietnamese diaspora.

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