

MODERN ORGANIZED CRIME IN UKRAINE: STATUS AND TRENDS, CAUSES AND CONDITIONS, MAIN AREAS OF PREVENTION

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Annotation. The present day poses significant challenges to Ukrainian society, as the situation within our society is very complex and alarming, as the fervor and unity that dominated at the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine have been sharply replaced by hatred (intolerance) and fierce internal clashes. Social relations built by Ukrainian society act: first, as a source of causes and conditions for crime, in particular, determining the growth of organized crime; second, they inflame the atmosphere within the country, which makes it impossible for key state institutions to work systematically and productively and to exercise effective control over them, and this makes them vulnerable to organized criminal groups; third, they contribute to destabilization in the country and vulnerability to the enemy, who takes advantage of negative processes in society, using various mechanisms and means, in particular, using connections in the criminal world. With the support of European partners (law enforcement specialists) and using the many years of experience of Ukrainian specialists, a single concept is currently being developed for systematizing indicators, analyzing and forecasting organized crime, as well as collecting and summarizing information and further assessing the threats of committing serious and especially serious crimes by organized groups, criminal organizations, and criminal communities. In view of this, the article reveals individual components of the criminological characteristics of modern organized crime. An analysis of the causes and conditions of organized crime, which are mandatory for study by subjects of crime prevention in the state and require effective influence related to their blocking, neutralization or elimination, is carried out. Taking into account the analysis and short-term forecasting, the main directions of preventing organized crime in the state are proposed, which require the development and implementation of a number of effective measures in this area.

Key words: organized crime, organized group, criminal organization, conditions and causes, dynamics and trends, spheres of criminal influence, directions of crime prevention.

1. Introduction.

The pre-war situation with organized crime in Ukraine was significantly different from the situation before and after the full-scale Russian invasion of our state, since the fusion of organized groups and criminal organizations with transnational Russian-Ukrainian ties was almost leveled. If in the pre-war period (before 2014), and, in some places, even until February 24, 2022, Russian and Ukrainian criminal groups controlled or had criminal influence, and, accordingly, super-profits, from transnational organized crime on the Eurasian continent and beyond, starting with trafficking in people and human organs and ending with drugs and various minerals, today the situation has changed dramatically in terms of the ways of interaction and functioning of organized crime in Ukraine. First of all, organized crime in our country has reoriented its relationships to the countries of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the EU), other countries that have friendly relations with the EU, as well as some Asian countries. Secondly, a significant trend that law enforcement agencies need to take into account in the fight against organized crime in Ukraine is that organized

crime has rethought the criminogenic situation and transformed itself to adapt to new realities in wartime, and has also expanded its spheres of criminal influence in order to control and obtain criminal profits. Thirdly, there has been a reorientation from the fusion of corrupt officials and criminal authorities, and, accordingly, a decrease in the number of crimes in the fuel and energy complex, due to the suspension by our state of the transit of Russian gas (from January 1, 2025), which served as a tool for the criminal activities of Russian and Ukrainian organized groups to siphon off millions of dollars, in the conditions of the unstable weak economic, political and information sphere of the country. Therefore, the rapid change in the spheres of criminal influence of organized crime and the forms of its manifestation, under martial law, requires the development and implementation of an effective system for preventing the threats posed by organized crime, and the development and implementation of productive measures to counter its spread, and, therefore, the need for scientific research in this area is necessary, which explains the relevance of this article.

2. Analysis of scientific publications.

Domestic scientists have studied various problematic issues of organized crime, in particular, those related to criminological characteristics and determination, prevention and counteraction, including O.M. Bandurka, V.S. Batyrgareeva, V.I. Borisov, P.S. Bepriksky, V.V. Golina, B.M. Golovkin, N.O. Gutorova, O.M. Dzhuzha, A.P. Zakaliuk, S.A. Kuzmin, O.G. Kalman, M.V. Kornienko, O.M. Lytvynov, G.V. Novytsky, O.Yu. Shostko and other scientists. However, despite the significant scientific contribution of the above scientists to the development of the specified topic, unfortunately, the present, dictated by the war in the state, requires additional research in the field of combating organized crime.

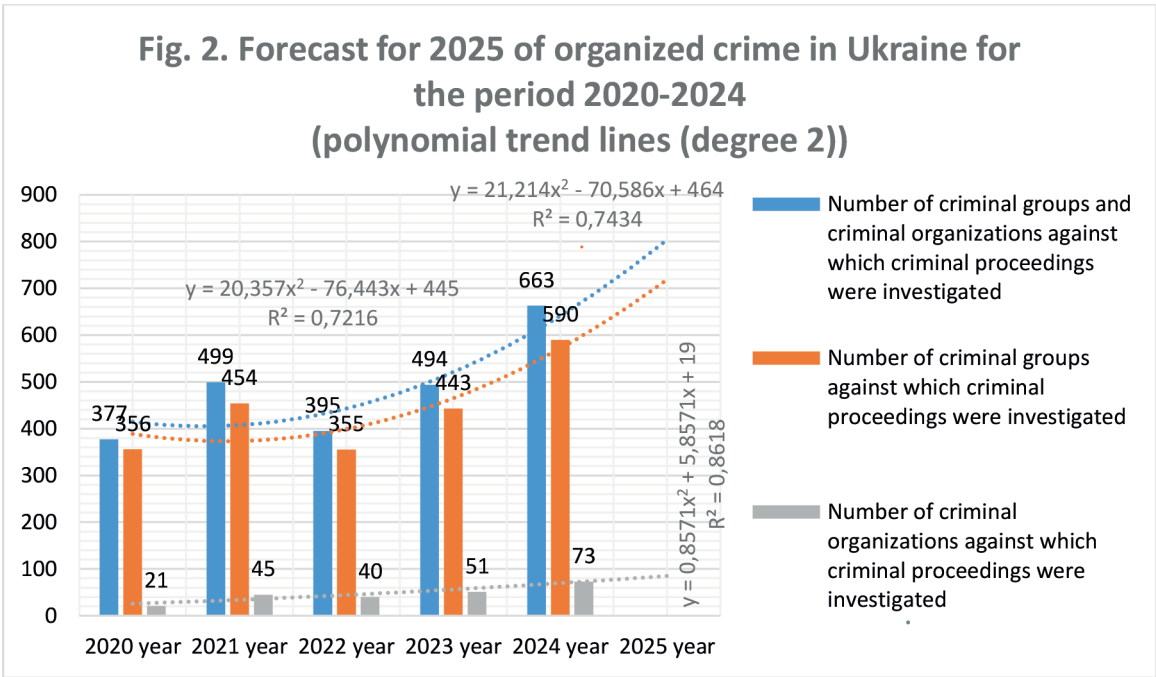
3. The purpose of the article is to study the state and trends of organized crime in Ukraine at the current stage, outline its main causes and conditions, and determine the main areas of prevention.

4. Review and discussion.

Organized crime is a phenomenon inherent in all countries of the world community, but in developing countries its level is much higher than in developed countries. Ukraine has always been at the center of geopolitical events, which made it attractive for transnational organized crime in different historical periods and with different intensities of organized criminal influence. The negative impact of organized crime on various aspects of public life (economy, politics, governance, social and legal spheres, public consciousness, international relations) is difficult to assess, because excess profits resulting from the criminal activities of organized groups and criminal organizations increasingly affect legal and ethical relations between people and are gradually legalized in the real sector of the economy, institutionalized in legislative, organizational, regulatory and administrative form. Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, hostilities, and martial law generated a growth in organized crime in the country and an increase in the number of participants in organized groups or criminal organizations, which in modern conditions has become a factor that threatens national security and the constitutional order of our state. In order to maximally prevent and counteract organized groups and criminal organizations and their criminal activities, it is necessary to analyze the level, structure, dynamics of organized crime in the state and the scope of their activities. Thus, in Ukraine, for the period from 2020 to 2024, the total number of organized groups and criminal organizations against which criminal proceedings were investigated was 2,428, of which organized groups - 2,198, and criminal organizations - 230. [1] (see Fig. 1)

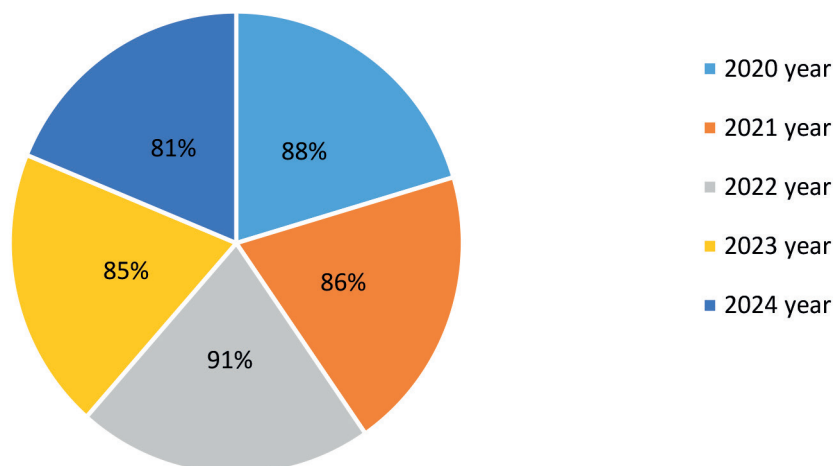


Provided that the factors that caused organized crime in the country continue to operate, the trends in overall organized crime for 2025 indicate its growth by the end of the current year, the same forecast applies to organized groups and criminal organizations. (see Fig. 2) Trends in the ratio of the share of organized groups and criminal organizations will be similar until 2024 with minor fluctuations.



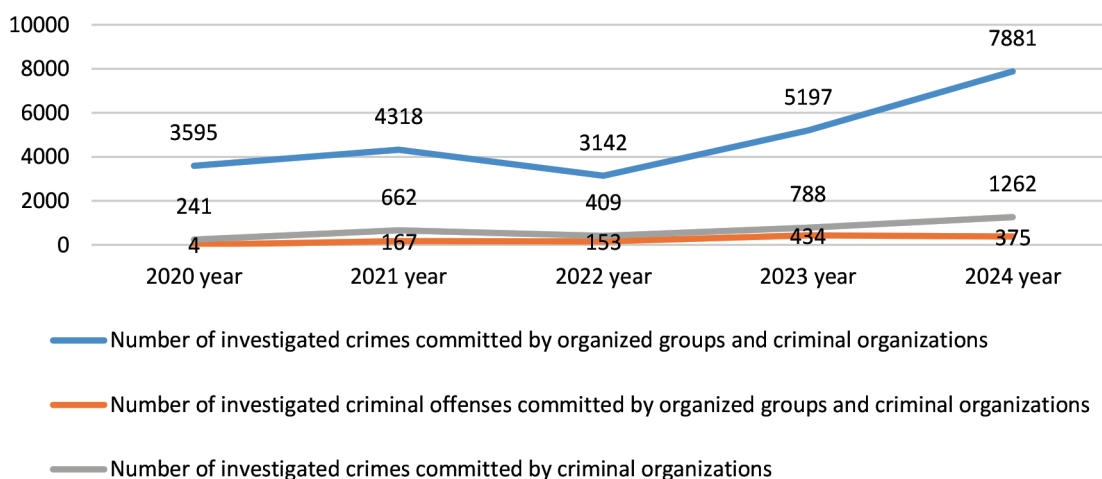
The lion's share of organized groups and criminal organizations was detected by operational units of law enforcement agencies, in particular: 2020 year - 92.6% (of which criminal organizations - 90.5%); 2021 - 91.2% (88.9%); 2022 - 91.1% (92.5%); 2023 - 92.5% (88.2%); 2024 - 92.6% (79.2%). Bodies and units of the National Police of Ukraine show the greatest share in the fight against organized crime, in particular, during the reporting period they detected and documented the most, from 91.2% of organized groups and criminal organizations in 2022 to the least 80.5% in 2024. (see Fig. 3)

Fig. 3. The proportion of organized groups and criminal organizations detected by the bodies and units of the National Police of Ukraine



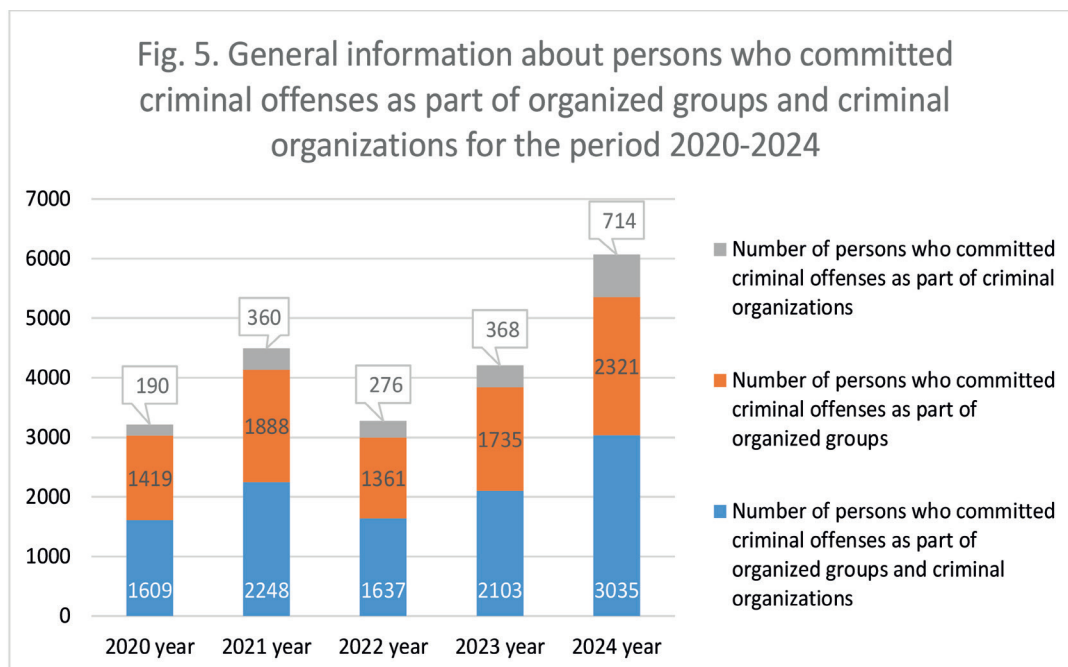
The ratio of criminal offenses committed by organized groups and criminal organizations to crimes and criminal misdemeanors, for example, in 2024 year, there was 1 criminal misdemeanor for every 21 crimes committed; in 2023 and 2022 - 21:1; in 2021 - 26:1; in 2020 - 15:1. [1] (see Fig. 4) This indicates careful preparation, planning, hierarchy, and severity of the criminal activities of organized groups and criminal organizations, as well as the distribution of profits from committed crimes and actions to conceal criminal activities.

Fig. 4. Investigated criminal offenses committed by organized groups and criminal organizations from 2020-2024



It is worth noting that criminal statistics on persons who committed criminal offenses as part of an organized criminal group or criminal organization are imperfect in terms of studying the criminological portrait of the leader and participants, since the official statistical reporting of law enforcement agencies, which is accumulated on the website of the Prosecutor General's Office, does not contain such information. This information can be obtained only by examining each criminal case or documents of operational content, which requires studying a large amount of information and significant time expenditure and

does not allow for prompt adoption of correct management decisions when planning measures to prevent and combat organized crime. General information on the number of persons who committed criminal offenses as part of an organized group and criminal organization, in respect of which the pre-trial investigation has been completed, indicates an increase in their number. [1] (see Fig. 5)



Given the current situation in Ukraine, organized crime is characterized by a number of conditions and reasons that determine it. According to some criminological researchers, the conditions of crime are circumstances that do not directly generate this phenomenon, but accompany its causes, ensuring their certain development, necessary for the emergence of the consequence. [3, c. 57] In this case, it is appropriate to agree with criminological scholars who argue that there is a close relationship between causes and conditions, which is manifested in the fact that conditions by themselves cannot generate crimes and criminality, but without them the cause can neither be formed nor realized. [2] Undoubtedly, the main general condition for the transformation of organized groups and criminal organizations was the conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but there were other conditions that were derived from the general one and, in turn, influenced the formation of the causes of organized crime, accompanied their action and did not prevent the commission of serious and organized crimes, in particular:

- 1) political confrontation of Ukrainian oligarchic clans, whose worldview, beliefs and actions were mainly dictated by the criminal politics of the aggressor country or other countries that had significant influence on them;
- 2) economic security has in some places been actually destroyed, and in some cases is being transformed due to threats and challenges caused by the war due to: damage caused by the war, inability to fully carry out foreign economic activity, reduced investment in expanding the production potential of industry, lack of formation of a military economy and failure to transfer the country to it, time and financial prospects for restoring economic potential in many areas of activity, physical destruction of fixed assets and economic infrastructure, inability to carry out economic activity in conditions of military operations in local areas; missile and drone attacks, lack of qualified labor, etc.; demographic crisis, because, despite the low birth rate in the country in the pre-war period and high natural mortality (Ukrainians are an aging nation), the number of the country's population, both military and civilian, who died during the war due to military operations or from concomitant diseases due to non-provision or poor-quality provision of medical services and the lack of necessary medicines has increased;
- 3) financial security, which is at high risk due to the state of public debt and budget deficit – which are growing, losses from tax and customs revenues, instability of the pension system, underfunding of certain budget expenditure items due to lack of funds, problems in the banking system and non-

functioning lending to the real sector of the economy, demands of US President Donald Trump to repay non-existent and fictitious debt at the expense of Ukrainian mineral deposits, etc;

- 4) the migration crisis, primarily due to the annexation of the peninsula and the occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine, has left a significant number of people in the occupied territories, and given the excessive cruelty (terrorism, murders, kidnappings (of children, adults), rape, abuse, torture, resettlement, etc.) of the Russian army and the hostile policy of the criminal leadership of Russia, their fate is largely unknown. Secondly, according to the Minister of National Unity of Ukraine, as of January 31, 2025, about 25 million people have left Ukraine over the entire period, 7.5 million of them during the full-scale invasion, in particular: 30% of Ukrainians who left for Europe will remain there after the end of the war, 40% may return if the war ends this year and competitive labor markets are created, the economy develops, reforms and moves forward, 30% of those who left after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion will return, but the majority of emigrants will not return.[4] Thirdly, about 3.7 million remain displaced persons in Ukraine itself, and the lion's share of them requires state support, which is sometimes inadequately provided due to economic and financial problems caused by military operations on the territory of the state and beyond;
- 5) social deformation – does not effectively affect the preservation of human capital, because limited opportunities to restore and accumulate social capital have significant immediate and delayed effects that worsen the state of society, the most vulnerable categories of which are supported by the welfare state Ukraine;
- 6) psychological instability – most Ukrainians are in a state of inattention, absent-mindedness, lack of concentration, conflict, frustration, uncertainty about the future, uncertainty about protecting their lives and those of their loved ones, preserving their homes, property, and providing themselves with the necessary basic necessities of life (according to the World Health Organization, about 10 million people are at risk of mental disorders, and with the approach of winter, the situation is worsening, and according to a survey by the research company Gradus Research, the share of Ukrainians experiencing stress and severe nervousness increased to 77% from autumn 2022 to autumn 2024 [7]), and during the war, about 20% of people develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to a traumatic event experienced or when a person witnesses it (according to the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, in the last two years (2023, 2024), the number of patients with PTSD has increased and There are 12,494 patients registered (beginning of March 2023) and already 3,292 patients (beginning of March 2024 [7]);
- 7) food crisis, which consists of: first of all, a reduction in allocations from the state budget for subsidies and attracting investments in the agricultural sector and, as a result, a deterioration in the financing of enterprises and their material and technical base; secondly, due to hostilities, shelling with missiles, artillery shells and aircraft guided bombs, the fall of shaheeds and thermobaric charges, the fertile soil layer is being destroyed on a significant area of farmland, and the consequence of this is the impoverishment of the fertility of Ukrainian lands, a decrease in the volume of agricultural production, a decrease (in some places the impossibility) of processing and storage of agricultural products and food; thirdly, constant shelling complicates logistics, which is an obstacle to foreign economic activity related to trade in agricultural products, reduces the industry's income, and also increases the cost of imported agricultural equipment and food products and increases the cost for the average citizen, who, in war conditions, has lost purchasing power; fourthly, the lack of labor resources in agricultural production due to the ongoing mobilization of people caused by the war.

The conditions listed above generate a whole range of causes that determine organized crime as their consequence, and in some cases the conditions themselves can act as causes and vice versa. In turn, the causes of crime are interpreted as "those factors that generate crime as their consequence".[2] For example: **a) political reasons** that contribute to deeper and more permanent corrupt ties and, in some cases, the growth of organized crime and politics are errors in choosing a political state strategy, where the function of parliament, including the controlling one, is weakened; suspension of elections to government bodies at all levels and a ban on holding referendums, demonstrations, rallies, etc.; formation of military administrations; change in the information space, when one channel has become dominant on television, and instead, activity on the Internet outside the Ukrainian platforms Facebook, YouTube, Telegram, Tiktok is growing; improper, sometimes chaotic, functioning of political institutions in wartime; reduction of party lists and

disappearance of some political parties from the information field; after the rule and control over some institutions of the Ukrainian, and sometimes Russian, oligarchy, new subjects of influence on state policy have appeared; lack of development and timely amendments to the Electoral Code of Ukraine to establish safeguards for participation in the electoral process after the victory of persons who have been recognized by the court as traitors to the state or are collaborators and other persons convicted of crimes against the foundations of national security of the state or have involvement or connections with organized crime; etc.; **b) social causes** that determine organized crime - the radicalization of society, which is caused by post-traumatic syndrome, distorted social ties between all participants (individuals, groups, communities, institutions), and affects the stability of the state, normal political competition, and, in general, threatens democratic freedoms and leads to dictatorship, monopolization of power and the growth of organized crime; the accumulation of a number of destructive processes caused by prolonged ineffective socio-economic and political changes in the state, and then the war, which led to the problem of increasing the intensity of the manifestation of social risks, which are related in terms of national security, public administration, human and social development; qualitative and quantitative losses of the workforce due to a decrease in the level of education due to COVID-2019, migration, urbanization, mobilization, high mortality, and the retention of the able-bodied population in the occupied territories by the enemy are a source of risks in the social and labor sphere, which has caused a shortage of workers in certain industries and imbalances in the market, in particular, excessive burden on workers and weakening their motivation to work; increased unemployment due to the territories occupied by Russia, which worsens the living conditions and well-being of individual families, and, ultimately, of the entire society; weakened communication between society and state authorities and management, in particular, the inability to influence decisions that contradict the Constitution of Ukraine or violate other legislation; systematic violation or restriction of citizens' rights by individual institutions or officials, which leads to public distrust of the electoral process, through which citizens delegate their representatives to state authorities, administration and local self-government, and, ultimately, to the effectiveness of the state's social policy; **c) economic reasons** that cause organized crime: shadowing of the economic sector, simplification or cancellation of tender procedures (Prozorro) for the procurement of goods and provision of services, minimization of verification of the legality of the origin of funds introduced into economic and financial circulation; lack of effective regulatory support and protection of entrepreneurship, insufficient effectiveness of the system of liability for violations of antimonopoly and tax legislation; corruption, adoption of a regulatory act "beyond competence", misuse of budgetary and extra-budgetary funds, untimely adoption of a complex of criminological measures to ensure economic security, unwillingness of relevant financial and regulatory authorities to promptly detect and reliably record illegal actions in the economic sphere, etc.

Thus, the reasons that determine organized crime in Ukraine depend on the war started by Russia, the functioning of state institutions during wartime, the perfection of the political, economic, financial, and social systems, and other conditions.

5. Conclusions.

Therefore, based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative indicators, causes and conditions of organized crime in the state, the creation of an effective system and determination of the main (priority) areas of crime prevention in wartime in Ukraine, and the development and implementation of effective measures to combat it, is one of the most difficult tasks for the state and society. The priority directions of preventing and combating organized crime, in our opinion, are: 1) international cooperation in the context of a thorough reform of the system regarding approaches to combating organized crime and borrowing foreign experience in identifying areas of criminal influence, planning and implementing effective measures to counter organized groups and their criminal activities; 2) development and approval of a new Strategy for Combating Organized Crime for 2025-2029 years, which should clearly outline the model for preventing and countering organized crime, in particular, clearly define the goal, objectives, ways and directions of implementation, international cooperation, expected results, and most importantly, provide a mechanism for monitoring, assessing implementation, and holding entities accountable for failure to fulfill their assigned tasks. This direction should also include a planning process that will take into account the forecast, and the result of which is the development and approval of a plan of measures to prevent and counter organized crime. The Procedure for Interaction of Entities in the Field of Preventing and Counteracting Organized Crime, approved by a resolution of the Cabinet

of Ministers of Ukraine, should be a supplement to the Strategy for Combating Organized Crime for 2025-2029, which will establish leadership, coordination, methods, forms, mechanisms, and responsibility of entities; 3) transformation of existing law enforcement agencies that prevent and combat organized crime, in particular: bringing their structure in line with European standards; changes in the legislative support for their activities by eliminating gaps or conflicts; revision of the outdated system of performance indicators and the formation of a new approach to their collection, through changes in reporting; implementation of an effective international methodology, where through a thorough analysis, taking into account the forecast, it is possible to identify the most criminogenic areas of criminal influence that require urgent attention from law enforcement agencies (SOCTA Ukraine assessment system [6, 5]).

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