

2. DRUG SMUGGLING

2.1. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Like with other criminal forms of "business," a special problem connected with drug smuggling is the lack of not only accurate, but even of approximate statistical data. When analyzing the volume of smuggling of consumer goods, part of which is conducted semi-legally (through various forms of document frauds), some approximate estimates can nevertheless be made. This cannot be done with drug smuggling.

Consequently, the only available method to assess the volume, roots, prices and trends in the development of drug smuggling through Bulgaria are some indirect methods:

- Comparative analysis of the annual quantities of drugs, confiscated by competent authorities
- Sociological research and expert estimates of drug consumption in the country (which gives an idea about the extent of drug distribution in the country)
- Expert estimates about the market values of drugs in the country, as well as in separate regions (which estimates the demand/supply relation)

An additional problem is created by the lack of sufficiently reliable data about the drug consumption, which could offer a picture of the current and future situation in regard to the spread of drugs in society. This was also noted in the report of the British experts, entitled *Bulgarian Twinning Operation: Review of Demand Reduction Strategy* from May 2000.³⁶ The report also claims that the information systems in this field are not well coordinated and subordinated to a strategic goal, that there is no coordination between the information on demand and on supply, that a good analysis of available data is missing, etc.³⁷

Smuggling through Bulgaria is part of a transnational channel for illegal transfer of narcotic substances. In the past years, this transfer was stimulated by a number of circumstances, favorable to smugglers. The systematic and virtually ceaseless traffic of narcotics from Afghanistan through Iran, Turkey and Bulgaria to Western Europe was facilitated by the crisis in the former Yugoslavia, the lifting of visa restrictions within the EU and by the increase in the drug production under the Taliban regime.

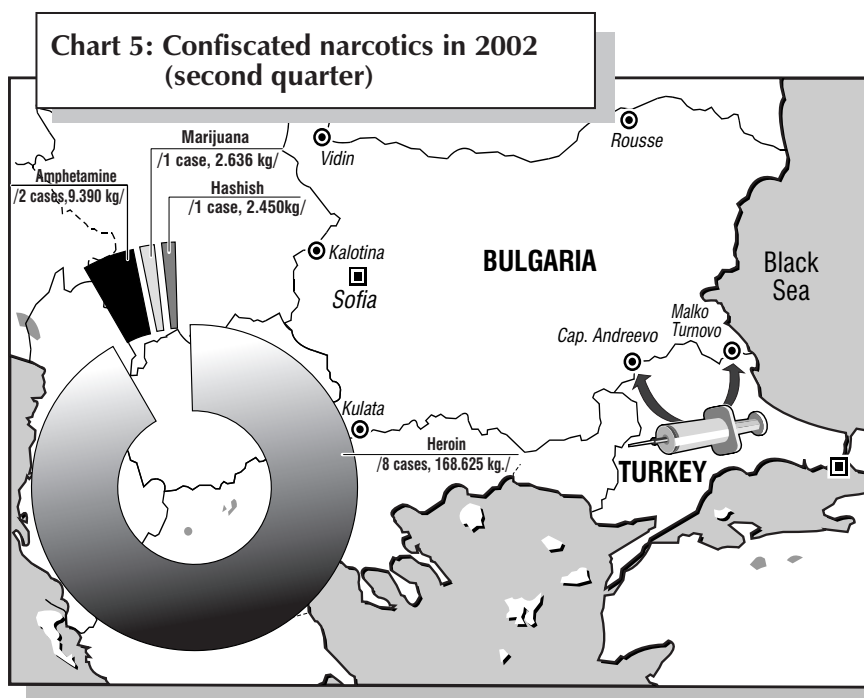
³⁶ The report states that "it is not possible to give accurate or complete assessment of the present situation and of the future prospects regarding drug abuse based on the available information." *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

At the same time, apart from the Balkan route, importance of several new routes for the transfer of heroin from Southwest Asia to Europe has increased – through Central Asia and Russia, with Central Asian countries Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan and Uzbekistan beginning to play a significant role in drug trafficking. Experts believe that increasing quantities of heroin travel along this "Silk Road." The Black Sea is also used more and more often for transferring heroin to Romania and Bulgaria both from Turkey and Georgia. Recently it was discovered that the ferry line between Istanbul and Trieste is also used for direct transfer of heroin to the EU. As a

consequence, the importance of the traditional Balkan Route from Turkey through Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria to Central Europe has diminished, as has been noted also in the Annual Report of the Balkan Information System for 2001. This route was used in only 13 percent of all registered cases of heroin smuggling (in 2000, it was used in 19 percent of the cases.)

An indication of the level of intensity of drug smuggling through Bulgaria are the statistical indexes for discovered and confiscated quantities of heroin on border crossings and in the interior of the country. Unlike the first quarter of 2002, when no cases of traffic of drugs and precursors through Bulgaria were registered, in the second quarter the following quantities were discovered:

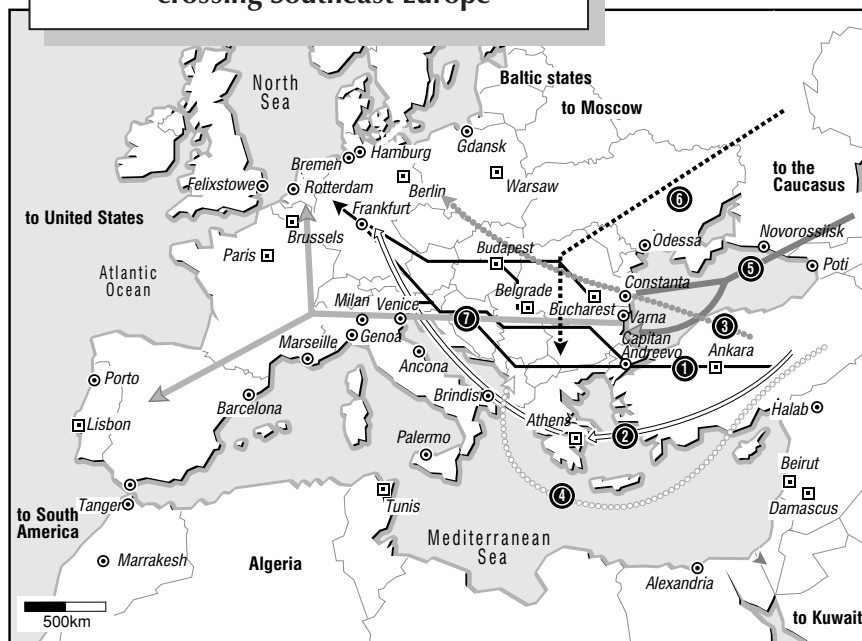


- 168.625 kilograms of heroin (8 cases)
- 9.390 kilograms of amphetamines (2 cases)
- 2.450 kilograms of hashish (1 case)
- 2.636 kilograms of marijuana (1 case)

Five Bulgarian, five Yugoslav, three Romanian, three Macedonian and one Turkish citizen were arrested for drug smuggling. It is interesting to note that the smuggling through the border crossing at Malko Turnovo has increased (in two cases, 114 kilograms of heroin were discovered, and in one case 6.6 kilograms of amphetamines). The Kapitan Andreevo checkpoint, where control has been improved, seems to be used less frequently now (only one case with 20 kilograms of heroin). More often, drugs are shipped in small quantities (from 5 to 10 kilograms) with railway transport.

As far as smuggling of drugs and precursors is concerned, Bulgaria is a typical transit country, although few temporary bases for short-term storage and re-packing of drugs on our territory have appeared. The same route used for traffic of heroin from Turkey through Bulgaria to Western Europe is used in the opposite direction for traffic of synthetic narcotics, cocaine, marijuana, hashish and precursors. The intensive

Chart 6: Drug smuggling channels crossing Southeast Europe



- ← 1. From Turkey, through Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, Yugoslavia and Albania;
- ← 2. From Turkey, through Greece, to Yugoslavia and Albania;
- ← 3. From Turkey, by sea to Romania and then to Central and Eastern Europe;
- ← 4. From Turkey and Pakistan by sea to Albania;
- ← 5. From the Former Soviet Countries in middle Asia, through Black sea and then to Bulgaria and Romania;
- ← 6. Through Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria to West Europe;
- ← 7. From Latin America, through the harbours of Bulgaria to Spain and Netherlands

Distribution of heroin in Sofia

According to the department Narcotics of the Sofia Directorate for Internal Affairs, heroin worth more than 150,000 leva (75,000 Euro) is sold in Sofia every day, of which pure profit amounts to 80,000 leva (40,000 Euro). Profits are divided among dealers and their bosses in the capital (around 300 persons). According to the official data, around 57,000 people use heroin in the country.

Heroin entering Bulgaria is very pure – usually between 50 and 60 percent, and costs nearly 20,000 leva per kilogram. The street value is around 150,000 leva per kilogram. One half-gram dose costs around 20 leva.

The profits of those who smuggle the narcotic into the country are 100 percent, since they get two kilos of heroin from one by reducing its purity. Before reaching the street, heroin passes through several intermediaries, with more additives added each time. In the end, the purity of the heroin is reduced to the point which enables dealers to make between 300 and 400 leva of pure profit per day.

According to the Ministry of Interior, there are 10 large bosses in Sofia. Each dealer covers the territory, usually including ten parallel streets. The most profitable areas are the center and one of the most densely populated neighborhoods (Lyulin).

trans-border traffic of narcotics has lead also to the increase in the local drug abuse and to the growth of distribution networks.

2.2. HEROIN SMUGGLING

The geographic position made Bulgaria one of the principal routes for heroin traffic. After Turkey, Bulgaria is the second barrier for heroin, on its way from Asia to Europe. Large-scale heroin traffic is conducted by foreign drug smuggling organizations, among which Turkish and Albanian are the most important ones. They have long lasting experience, well-organized networks and enormous financial resources. Turkish drug syndicates and their distributors in European cities control the largest part of Balkan routes. Statistics show that they are involved in 59 percent of the cases of drug trafficking in the Balkans. The foreign drug-smuggling networks show a permanent aspiration for mutual criminal cooperation with similar Bulgarian organizations with the goal of facilitating easier and faster transfer of narcotics through the country.

Apart from being an important transit country for heroin, in recent years Bulgaria turned into an important "warehouse" for redistribution of this narcotic substance. Heroin consumption in the country has also increased, owing to the fact that Bulgarian criminal organizations receive part of the smuggled heroin as a payment for their participation in the traffic. As a result, more heroin now remains in the country to be sold on the Bulgarian drug market. The number of drug dealers has similarly increased. Large cities like Sofia, Varna, Burgas and Plovdiv have the highest number of drug abusers, including those addicted to heroin.

During 2002, the traffic and distribution of heroin and precursors for its production continued to be concentrated in large cities and along the E-80 highway. Relatively well-developed transport and

The main channels for heroin follow these routes:

- Turkey – Bulgaria – Romania – Hungary – Austria – Germany – France, Belgium, Holland, Great Britain;
- Turkey through Bulgaria in the direction of Romania – Hungary – Slovakia – the Czech Republic and Poland. The non-traditional route from Macedonia through Bulgaria and Romania to Hungary is also used;
- Turkey through Bulgaria in the direction of Romania, Moldova and Ukraine. Heroin is transported by buses and trucks with Moldovan, Turkish and Ukrainian registrations;
- Turkey directly to Bulgaria;
- From Bulgaria to USA;
- In direction of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Austria;
- From Turkey through Bulgaria to Greece;
- From Turkey through Bulgaria to the Czech Republic;
- From Turkey through Bulgaria to Western Europe with international trains – channel for traffic of heroin with the help of train conductors and stewards, and under patronage of the "power groups;"
- From Turkey to Bulgaria with boats across the Black Sea in the Ahtopol region;
- Heroin is imported also through Varna and Burgas ports, with Bulgarian, Turkish, Russian-speaking and Arab citizens involved. There are no publicly available data for heroin discovered in these two ports in the last three years.

telecommunication infrastructure creates conditions for fast transfer of shipments through the country. According to observers, Turkish citizens, smuggling narcotic substances (mostly heroin) from Turkey to Western Europe, meet with Bulgarian smugglers on Shell petrol stations, located along the Trakia highway, and sell them packages of at least 500 grams of very pure heroin. The drug is paid for on the spot. Most of it is distributed in Plovdiv and some in the Pazardzhik region. In Varna, one of the main organized criminal groups, involved in heroin distribution in the region, also deals with car thefts and racketeering of the owners of stolen cars.

The tendency of individual local criminal groups to organize independent drug smuggling channels has been also noted. This created preconditions for brutal clashes, leading to escalation of tension, connected with division of territories.

It can be expected that intensified efforts to curb heroin smuggling will lead to the establishment of alternative channels. The shipments will most likely travel in a direction which does not lead directly to their final destination.

2.3. COCAINE SMUGGLING

The trans-continental traffic of cocaine through Brazil and Venezuela to Europe in which Bulgaria is a transit country is continuously on the rise. Air transport is used most often. Transport is usually divided into several legs, with different couriers involved in each part of the journey to avoid unnecessary suspicion, which a person traveling from one "risk" country to another might arouse. Smaller quantities, trafficked to neighboring Balkan countries, are transported by cars. There are indications that a channel for cocaine smuggling from Bulgaria to Ukraine (run by Ukrainian citizens) is being activated. It seems that in the near future this channel might be used also for smuggling ecstasy and acetic anhydride to Turkey. The Plovdiv region is becoming a center for traffic of cocaine to and from Bulgaria.

South American cocaine is arriving to Bulgaria from various directions:

- From Uruguay through Cyprus to Varna and Burgas ports;
- From Paraguay through Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria to Western Europe;
- From Columbia through Turkey and Bulgaria to Western Europe;

- From Brazil and Venezuela through German and French airports to Bulgaria;
- With accelerated post deliveries from Columbia and Brazil through Germany and France to Bulgaria;
- From Brazil through France to Bulgaria;
- A channel for transport of cocaine involving bus passengers from Bulgaria through Yugoslavia, Hungary, Slovakia to the Czech Republic;
- With airplanes from Brazil through Amsterdam and Vienna to Bulgaria;
- From island Aruba through Frankfurt to Bulgaria.

The number of cocaine dealers in Bulgaria has increased, as the results of police investigations demonstrate. The cocaine consumption is also on the rise, but at a slow pace due to the small purchasing capacity of the population. Only 2-3 percent of drug abusers can afford to use cocaine. This narcotic is popular among the organized criminal groups, engaged in the smuggling of cocaine and other narcotics.

2.4. SMUGGLING OF CANNABIS, MARIJUANA AND HASHISH

The main channels for smuggling of cannabis, marijuana and hashish are the following:

- Smuggling of marijuana from Albania through Macedonia and Bulgaria for Turkey. Albanian, Macedonian and Yugoslav citizens – ethnic Albanians – are involved. The narcotic is transported with cars and minibuses with Albanian and Macedonian registrations;
- From Pakistan through Egypt with ships to Greece and from there to Bulgaria with trucks;
- From Albania through Macedonia and Bulgaria to Turkey with trucks and vans with Albanian registrations. Traffickers are Albanian citizens;
- The marijuana and hashish market in Bulgaria is supplied also by local production. Numerous cannabis fields have been discovered in the country, and large quantities of dry cannabis leaves confiscated from Bulgarian citizens. According to police data, cannabis is grown by predominantly elderly people, who are paid by people, linked to organized crime. In large cities, cases of some Roma families or of individual consumers growing cannabis in plant pots in their homes were registered;
- It can be claimed that local distribution and consumption of cannabis, marijuana and hashish has significantly increased. According to some research, most hashish is sold in Sofia, Veliko Turnovo and Pleven, and most marijuana in Varna.

The number of cannabis fields, grown on communal land or land without official owners is increasing. Such fields are deliberately located further away from populated areas. Cannabis cultivation and production is often under the control of Bulgarian criminal groups. The largest cannabis cultivation areas are the regions of Blagoevgrad,

Sandanski and Petrich. Cannabis fields have been registered also in some areas of northern Bulgaria.

2.5. SYNTHETIC DRUGS

The problems related to smuggling and consumption of synthetic drugs are also very serious, as both are on the rise in Bulgaria and in other Balkan countries. Conducted investigations have confirmed the information that illegal establishments producing synthetic drugs continue to operate. Six illegal laboratories, equipped for the production of synthetic drugs were discovered in 2001 in the city of Sofia, and in the Sofia and Ruse regions. Distribution of metamphetamine increased in Sliven, Yambol, Stara Zagora and Burgas regions. Law-enforcing agencies are warning that international drug syndicates are shifting the production of synthetic drugs from Scandinavia to the Balkans.

The interest of the local criminal groups in synthetic drugs has also increased. Some of the unemployed Bulgarian chemists, technologists and pharmacists participate in the production. Some of them are involved in the criminal cooperation with citizens of neighboring countries. Synthetic drugs produced in Bulgaria are smuggled to Macedonia, Albania, Turkey, Romania, Poland, Ukraine, Middle East and Africa (Nigeria). The channels for smuggling of synthetic drugs from Serbia, involving Serbian and Bulgarian citizens, and the channels for smuggling of metamphetamine to Arab countries, involving Bulgarian and Turkish citizens, were discovered in 2002.

Consumption of synthetic drugs in Bulgaria has sharply increased. Few networks for distribution were discovered in Sofia in the last three years. Ecstasy (although usually amphetamines are sold under this name) is used mainly by young people – pupils and students. It is distributed mainly in discotheques and other places, where fans of techno music gather.

The profits from the production, distribution and international smuggling of synthetic drugs are enormous. According to the expectations, the production and consumption of synthetic drugs in the country will continue to rise in the following years.

2.6. MARKET VALUE OF NARCOTICS

Assessments of the price at which various narcotics are sold are not uniform. Approximate prices, given by informers, who are close to drug users, are in some cases few times higher than the prices given by the National Service for Combating Organized Crime.

Turkish drug traffickers are selling heroin for 10,000 – 12,000 leva per kilogram. According to informers from drug-using circles, one gram of 40-50 percent pure heroin is sufficient for 15 doses sold for 5 leva, or even for 20 doses containing between 5 and 10 milligrams of heroin and sold for 10 leva. It is believed that the price of heroin is much cheaper in the Roma neighborhoods, but the quality there is also much lower.

Two different and mutually hostile markets for cannabis exist in Bulgaria. One is controlled by organized crime. Cannabis is sold in the form of ready-made cigarettes

to minors and occasional adult consumers. But the larger part of cannabis is distributed by small dealers, who have direct contact with producers and who are selling the narcotic to their friends with little or no profit involved. This so-called "friendly trade" is typical for a larger part of the cannabis market in developed countries.

The criminal groups are continuing their efforts to increase their market share. The process started in the period April – June 2001, when they undertook a series of activities against petty dealers, who were forced to subdue to the mafia control. The actions were organized and coordinated. Members of mafia gangs had the addresses of the petty dealers and were informed about their movement. Dealers claim that active policemen participated in the beatings. As a consequence, the marijuana market (at least in Sofia) underwent significant changes. The quality of available marijuana begun to drop, and numerous dealers who in the past categorically refused to sell hard drugs were forced to start selling heroin. This development is extremely alarming. The lower quality of marijuana and the increased availability of heroin, coupled by very low awareness level among the minors (a result of non-competent or virtually non-existent prevention programs in schools) are blurring the lines between marijuana and heroin and are making heroin more attractive. Since the profits in this sector of the marijuana market are relatively low, it can be presumed that the main goal of criminal groups was namely to merge the teenage marijuana market with the heroin market.

Larger part of cannabis users continue to buy marijuana by weight, which is of a relatively good quality (without additives) and costs between 0.30 and 1.00 leva per gram. Probably over 80 percent of consumers are supplied in such a way because adult consumers, who buy most of the marijuana, intentionally avoid buying ready-made cigarettes from criminals, due to their high price, questionable quality and likely presence of additives (including heroin). The value of dried, non-refined leaf mass is from 80 to 100 leva per kilogram. Between 1,200 and 1,600 cigarettes can be made from such a quantity.

The value of hashish varies widely, depending on its quality. Informers believe that first-class hashish can be bought for less than 1,000 leva per kilogram. The hashish sold in Bulgaria is of loose texture, so it is impossible to form it into a thin stick, which could be inserted into a cigarette. This narcotic is not yet widely available.

The most popular amphetamine is "Dupnica amphetamine" (amphetamine combined with aspirin; the information on the bottle is in French; there is no data about producer), sold in Sofia for one lev per pill. In some cases, this price can be a bit higher, but if the whole bottle (20 pills) is bought, the price can drop to 0.50 leva for a pill. Minors are often ready to pay a higher price, even for amphetamines of extremely suspicious look and quality, but even in such case prices rarely exceed 3 leva.

Amphetamines are often sold instead of ecstasy, which uninformed buyers believe to be purchasing. The real ecstasy (MDMA) is very hard to obtain, and its price is very high (15 to 25 leva per pill). Often, there is even very little amphetamine in such "ecstasy," which is compensated by addition of caffeine.

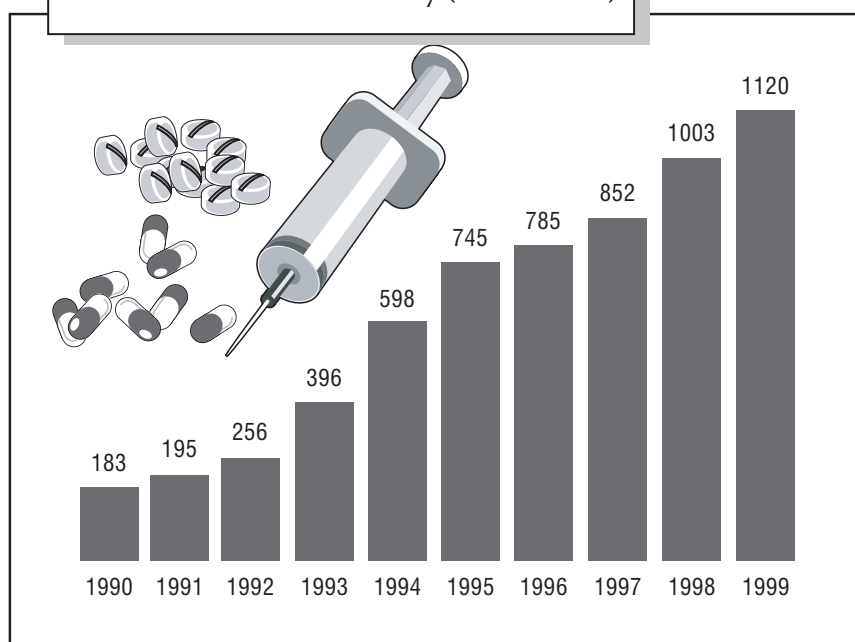
LSD is a semi-synthetic hallucinogen, which appeared on the Bulgarian market in the early 1990s. Its price is around 30 leva for a blotter and it is sold in various shapes (five-point star, Che Guevara, cyclist, pussycat). It appears that LSD comes exclusively from abroad.

2.7. DISTRIBUTION AND CONSUMPTION

The amount of drugs, confiscated in Bulgaria can give an indication of the extent of drug distribution in the country. In the first six months of 2000, the National Service for Combating Organized Crime confiscated on its own or in cooperation with other services the following quantities of narcotics and precursors: 20.792 kg of heroin, 0.447 kg of cocaine, 30.393 kg of hashish, 1.44 kg of opium, 24.3 kg of amphetamine substance, 400,007 kaptagon pills, 120,216 amphetamine pills, 3,031 ecstasy pills, 1,200 ephedrine pills and 20 liters of formamide. Sixteen people were arrested for smuggling and 77 for distribution of narcotics. One illegal laboratory for production of narcotics was discovered and four traffic channels broken.

Official data for drug consumption in the country is alarming. The National Strategy for Combating Narcotics (2002-2007) indicates heroin as the most serious threat to the public health. In the last 5-6 years, heroin was responsible for over 90 percent of cases in which medical treatment was sought in specialized departments in Sofia. Two thirds of heroin users are injecting the drug, which carries additional risk of infection with hepatitis C and HIV. The average age of those seeking medical treatment because of heroin abuse fell in the period 1995-2001 from 24.7 to 22.5 years. This drop seems to be stabilizing now.

Chart 7: Number of drug-addicted patients, treated in psychiatric establishments in the country (1990 - 1999)



Another objective criterion is the number of drug-addicted patients, treated in psychiatric establishments in the country between 1990 and 1999. The data was published in the National Strategy and follows below.

The distribution networks on the territory of the country are constantly expanding. Activities of organized criminal groups involved in the narcotics business are concentrated on large cities in the country (Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas, Blagoevgrad, Haskovo), in border areas (Blagoevgrad, Haskovo, Vidin, Ruse) and in the cities, located along the international highways (Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Veliko Turnovo, Ruse, Blagoevgrad).

The distribution of narcotics is increasingly under the control of organized groups, which emerged from the former "power groups." One consequence of the

increased activity of criminal groups operating in various regions is their desire to permanently divide and occupy particular regional drug markets. Violence is usually used as a means for taking over certain territory. In an attempt to eliminate the competition and obtain full control both in particular areas and in the entire country, numerous major criminal offences were conducted. The conflicts linked to the build-up of permanent networks for the distribution of heroin and cocaine escalated in 2001-2002. A series of explosions, armed skirmishes, assassinations and arsons

occurred as a result of the fight for territories in Varna and Burgas regions. The escalation of tensions has grown into a violent confrontation between the higher levels of criminal hierarchy.

All of the people, participating in groups, which distribute narcotics on the Bulgarian drug market, are Bulgarian citizens, working under the control of bosses of various "power groups." Each group operates almost exclusively on the territory under its control. All groups are hierarchically arranged. Leaders of organized criminal groups periodically change dealers to prevent leaking of information or infiltration of undercover police agents. In some groups, dealers of Roma origin are active – for example in the new "center" for heroin distribution, the Plovdiv neighborhood Stolipinovo, populated predominantly by Roma. Active drug dealers are found also among the residents of Roma neighborhoods in Kyustendil and other cities. The main centers for drug distribution along the Black Sea coast, and in north-west and south-west Bulgaria are Varna and Burgas. Drug markets and distribution networks in both these regions are well structured, monopolized by the organized criminal groups and controlled by a leader of a former "power group."

Narcotics are distributed also by individuals with criminal record, who are not connected to organized groups and who act independently. Many of them are dealing with drugs both for their own consumption as well as to make profit.

Along with their main activity – the drug business – organized criminal groups conduct numerous other criminal acts: arms trade, prostitution, gambling, car theft and smuggling of stolen cars, distribution of counterfeit money and forged documents, etc. They cooperate with similar criminal formations from Turkey, Germany, Holland, Macedonia, Romania and Italy. Thus common interest brings together Bulgarian, Turkish, Kurdish, African, Italian and other criminals.

Some regions have very specific features. For example, in the Blagoevgrad region drug trafficking in the direction of Macedonia takes place through Petrich, with local criminal groups cooperating with Macedonians and with Albanians from Macedonia and Kosovo, or through Sandanski region, where Pontus Greeks are involved. An average package contains 1-2 kg of heroin and 0.5 kg of cocaine. In the Vidin region, narcotic substances and precursors (acetic anhydrite) are smuggled mostly across the "green border."

2.8. TRENDS OF DEVELOPMENT

The international character of drug smuggling requires that the exchange of general and concrete information with similar services abroad takes place. Conduct of international operations for countering and neutralizing local and transnational drug syndicates is also needed.

The following short-term and medium-term predictions can be made, based on the analyzed situation on national and regional level:

- The territory of Bulgaria will continue to be used for smuggling of narcotic substances and precursors

-
- The process of cooperation between transnational drug-smuggling organizations with local structures of organized crime will most likely intensify in 2002 – 2003
 - The convergence of drug business with other types of criminal deeds and its intrusion into legal economy through money laundering will increase
 - Bulgarian criminal groups will continue to cultivate, process and smuggle cannabis to neighboring countries and Western Europe
 - The illegal production and trafficking of synthetic drugs will continue
 - The appearance of new channels is likely, with new methods and transportation means used; it is also likely that new materials will be used for the production of narcotic substances
 - The relative share of criminal acts related to drugs in the overall structure of crime will increase
 - The levels of supply and demand for narcotic substances will continue to rise, as can be seen from increased quantities of confiscated drugs