

2. 3. SMUGGLING OF ILLICIT DRUGS

Southeast Europe is a bridge between Middle Eastern and Central Asian drug producers and West European drug consumers. The heroin produced in Afghanistan travels through Iran to Turkey, where it is refined, and then to Bulgaria (see chart 4).



Bulgaria is the crossroad where three main drug smuggling routes through the Balkans branch out:

- The bulk of the Asian heroin traveled from Bulgaria through former Yugoslavia prior to 1991. During the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, this route was temporarily cut off and two alternative routes took over. After 1995, this "classical" route was again revived.

- The northern route leads through Romania and from there either through Hungary to the Czech Republic and Slovakia (and from there to the EU countries) or through Ukraine to Poland (and from there to the EU).

- The southern route leads from Bulgaria through Macedonia and Kosovo to Albania

One of the consequences of the war in former Yugoslavia was that now the illegal drug trade encompasses all the countries in the region. Political instability,

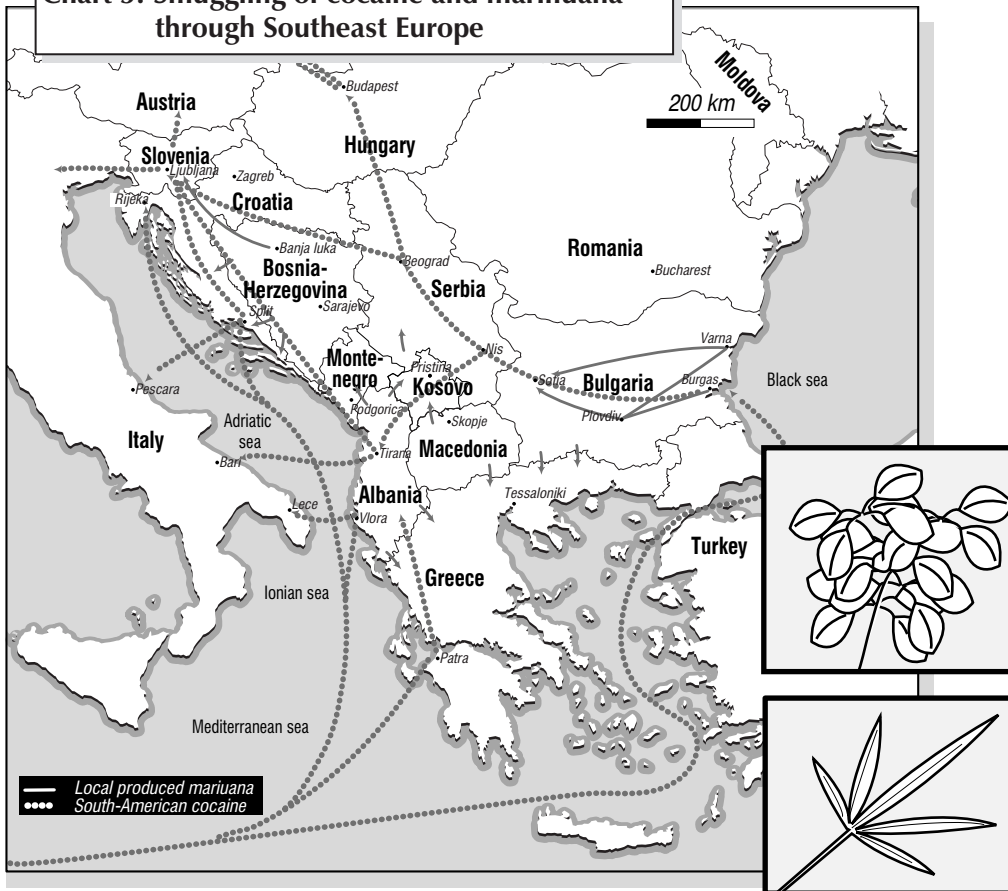
poverty, corruption, weak democratic institutions, insufficient and poorly equipped security forces and ill-guarded, porous borders made the region ideal for drug smuggling.

Cocaine Seizures in Croatia

In May 1997, Croatian police seized 375 kilograms of cocaine, which was then considered the largest cocaine seizure in Croatian history. Yet, it cannot be compared to the seizure of 665 kilograms of cocaine, sent from Ecuador, which the Croatian police confiscated in the port of Rijeka in December 1999, following the information from the Vienna office of the Drug Enforcement Agency. One of the highest ranking Croatian army officers, Ivan Andabak, was arrested for being involved in its smuggling.⁹¹

⁹¹ U. S. Department of State. "1997 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report." Babic. "Details Behind the Andabak Arrest and the Leutar Murder." International Narcotics Control Board. "Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2000," *International Narcotics Control Board Annual Reports*. 2000. < http://www.incb.org/e/ind_ar.htm > .

Chart 5: Smuggling of cocaine and marihuana through Southeast Europe



The drug trade enabled the international organized crime (especially the Italian mafia, and Turkish and Middle Eastern drug smuggling networks) to establish its presence in the region, adding further incentive to the vicious circle in which corruption and organized crime feed one another. According to Interpol estimates, over 80 percent of the heroin, sold in the EU, has traveled through the Balkans. This means that the traffic of heroin through the region represents the biggest problem. Yet, it is far from being the only one:

- Some of the regional countries, most notably Croatia and Albania, also became the most important European points of entry for the South American cocaine.

- Southeast Europe itself has also turned into an important drug producing region, especially of cannabis and opium poppies.
- Laboratories for production of synthetic drugs have also appeared.
- The increased trafficking of drugs has led to increased local drug consumption, and the pace at which heroin abuse is spreading is alarming.

The "Convict's Brigade" and Mostar

The drug trade in Herzegovina and Dalmatia is allegedly controlled by the former members of the infamous "Convict's Brigade," one of the most brutal paramilitary formations of Bosnian Croats. Herzegovina's unofficial capital Mostar is widely recognized as the centre of regional drug distribution. According to one of the diplomats stationed in Mostar, there is a clear connection between organized crime, police in Mostar and the leadership of the Bosnian HDZ.⁹²

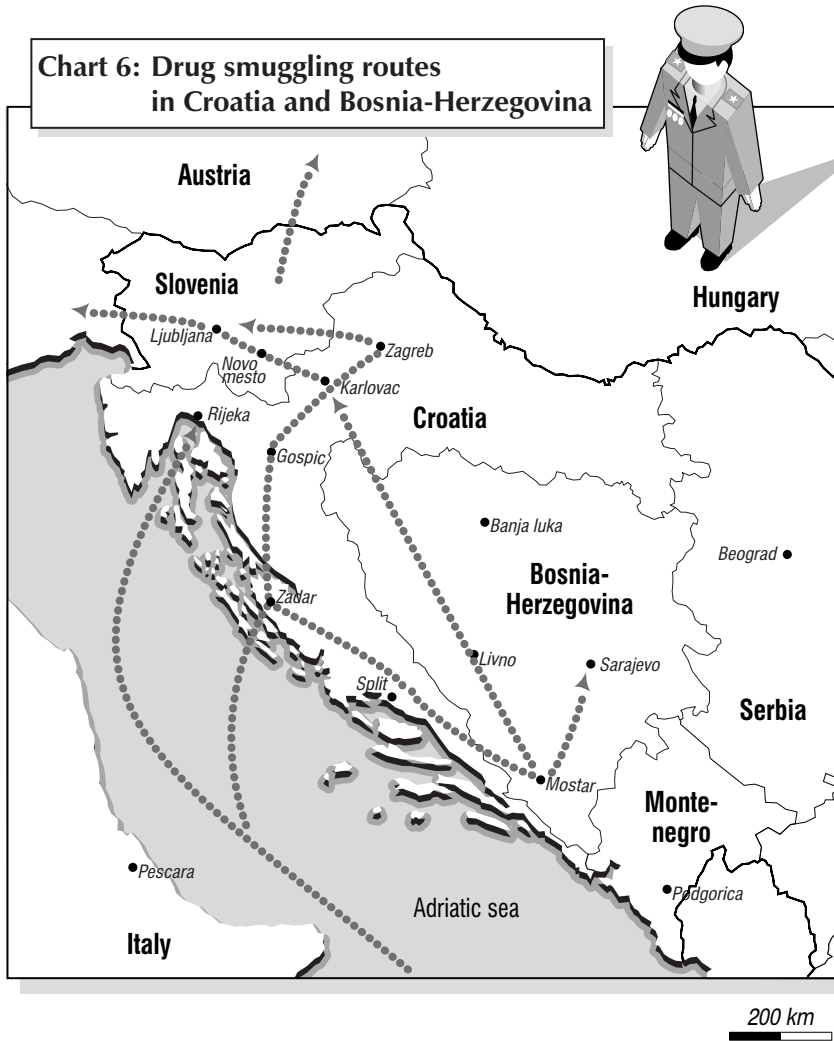
As already mentioned, the end of fighting in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina led to the revival of the heroin smuggling route through former Yugoslavia. In addition, the extensive coastline made Croatia an ideal point of entry for South American cocaine shipments to Europe (see chart 6). By 1997, a sharp increase in drug trafficking through Croatia was noticed, as well as a dramatic

increase in drug consumption in the major urban areas (like Zagreb, Osijek, Rijeka and especially Split, which became notorious for its heroin scene).

The drug trade in Bosnia-Herzegovina has also reached alarming proportions after the end of the war. The war and its consequences have dramatically increased the drug consumption within the country itself. Drug smuggling was taken over by the same people who used to smuggle weapons and oil during the war. Bosnia-Herzegovina also became an important cannabis producer. Most of the Bosnian marijuana is smuggled to Croatia and Slovenia because the prices are higher there. The

⁹² Babic. "Details Behind the Andabak Arrest and the Leutar Murder."

Chart 6: Drug smuggling routes in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina



drug-smuggling gangs usually include former members of paramilitary groups and have connections in the highest levels of the republic's political establishment (see chart 6).⁹³

Drug smuggling through Serbia, which has similarly restarted in 1995, intensified in 1998. The fighting, which has then started in Kosovo interrupted the traffic from Kosovo to Albania, and the Kosovo Albanian and Serbian smugglers found it surprisingly easy to cooperate to maintain a steady supply of heroin to Western Europe through Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia.⁹⁴

After becoming de facto independent from Yugoslavia in 1999, Kosovo reaffirmed its role as the center of Southeast European drug smuggling networks (see chart 7). The International Narcotic Enforcement Officers Association estimates that the Kosovo mafia handles between four and a half and five tons of heroin monthly now, which is more than double the amount before the 1999 war:⁹⁵

- Drugs enter Kosovo from Macedonia and are then sent across the virtually non-existent border between Kosovo and Albania to the ports of Durres and Vlore, from where it is only a short boat trip to Italy.

- Cannabis grown in south Albania travels in the opposite direction, from the Albanian town of Kukes to Prizren in Kosovo to satisfy the growing local demand.

Laundering of the Kosovo Drug Money

It is believed that the Kosovo drug money is being laundered within the province through the booming illegal construction industry. The clear indication of mafia involvement in illegal construction was the murder on September 11, 2000 of the director of Prishtina's Department of Planning, Reconstruction and Development, who planned to demolish many illegal constructions and prevent the building of new ones.⁹⁶

Drug smuggling is closely connected to the 2001 conflict in Macedonia. Most Macedonians, Macedonian media, but also numerous impartial observers believe that the conflict was in essence a struggle over the full control of the growing

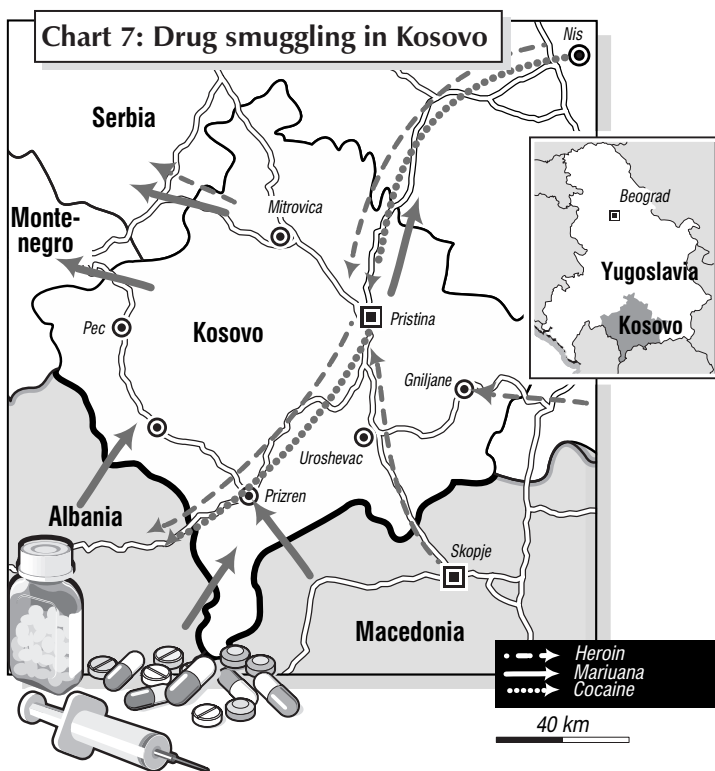
⁹³ Observatoire Geopolitique des Drogues. "Bosnia-Herzegovina." *Observatoire Geopolitique des Drogues Annual Report*. 1997. < http://www.ogd.org/rapport/gb/RP06_1_BOSNIE.html > .

⁹⁴ Observatoire Geopolitique des Drogues. "Yugoslavia."

⁹⁵ Juliette Terzieff et al. "Former Warlords in the Balkans are Building an International Criminal Empire." *Newsweek*. 21 March 2001. < <http://www.balkanpeace.org/rs/archive/mar01/rs127.shtml> > . Umberto Pascali. "KLA and Drugs: The 'New Columbia of Europe' Grows in Balkans." *Executive Intelligence Review* vol. 28, no. 24. 22 June 2001. < http://www.larouchepub.com/other/2001/2824_kla_drugs.html > .

Roslin. "After Kosovo: A Marriage of Heroin and War in the New Millennium."

⁹⁶ "Kosovo Stability Threatened by Organized Crime." *Balkan Times*. 2001. < <http://www.balkantimes.com/html/english/11845.htm> > .



Tanusevci

The connection between the KLA, the NLA (the National Liberation Army), and the drugs and arms trade is most clearly shown on the example of Tanusevci. Tanusevci is an Albanian-populated mountain village, located exactly at the border between Macedonia and Kosovo, in which the last year's fighting has started. During the Kosovo conflict, Tanusevci was used as one of the most important arms depots of the KLA, and before that, it was widely believed to be one of the centers for smuggling of drugs to and from Albania and Kosovo. During the crisis in southern Serbia, Tanusevci served as a training base for guerillas operating in the Presevo valley. Not unimportantly, Tanusevci is also the home village of Xhavit Hasani, one of the founding members of the KLA and one of its commanders. Aracinovo, another hot-spot of the last year's crisis, has also been considered for a long time to be a center for drug, cigarette and arms smuggling.

Albanian-run criminal empire. According to *Jane's Intelligence Review*, western Macedonia, where majority of Macedonian Albanians live, has been a drug-smuggling center since at least the 1970s. The obvious prosperity of the large number of people living in western Macedonia, otherwise a region with the least developed economy and infrastructure, but also one with an abundance of expensive cars and large houses, cannot be just a result of revenues from the regional wine production or remittances from relatives working abroad.

A crucial factor facilitating the proliferation of smuggling in this part of the country was the deliberate decision of the VMRO – DPA government not to patrol the border area after the withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping force in 1999. This decision, justified as a pre-cautious and confidence-building policy in a sensitive area, gives ground to allegations that the two ruling parties were in the least passively involved in illegal traffic across the border. The center of Macedonian drug and arms smuggling, the village of Tanusevci, became a virtual "free territory," together with some other villages and areas along the Macedonian border with Kosovo. The first outbreaks of violence in Macedonia were provoked by a "violation" of the "free status" of Tanusevci, when Macedonian police unit was dispatched to the village in response to the detention of a Macedonian television news crew by uniformed Albanian guerillas.⁹⁷

The stable political environment and the rule of law hinder the proliferation of smuggling and other illegal activities. In a country like Macedonia, with exceptionally high level of mistrust between various ethnic communities and in a dire economic situation, it was relatively easy for the NLA-cum-smugglers to escalate the situation marked with tensions and distrust into an armed conflict, thus creating a perfect environment for criminal activities.⁹⁸

In Romania, drug smuggling has been continuously on the rise, despite the efforts of the law-enforcing agencies. The new administration toughened the legislation on drug trafficking and production, and sentences from 15 years to life were introduced for organized possession, distribution and cultivation of narcotics. A seri-

⁹⁷ "Macedonia's Public Secret," pp. 24-25

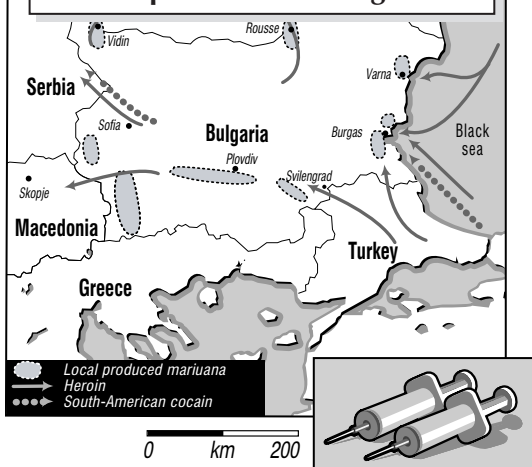
⁹⁸ Terzieff et al. "Former Warlords in the Balkans are Building an International Criminal Empire." Pascali. "KLA and Drugs: The 'New Columbia of Europe' Grows in Balkans."

"Jane's Sentinel Security Assessments: Macedonia." *Jane's Information Group*. 3 April 2001.

< http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/sentinel/sent010403_macedonia.shtml > U. S. Department of State. "1997 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report."

Bajic. "Crime and Politics in Macedonia."

Chart 8: Drug smuggling and drug production in Bulgaria



Drug Seizures in Bulgaria

Indirect indication of the scope of drug trafficking is found in the number of shipments intercepted by the competent authorities. In the first half of 2000, for instance, more than **one ton of drugs were seized** along the Bulgarian borders and 60 offenders, mainly male, were detained. The amount of heroin was over 800 kg, while the quantity of hashish and marijuana was more than 200 kg. The drugs seized include 20 kg of amphetamines, over 6,000 ecstasy and kaptagon pills, over 3,000 litres of acetic anhydrite and phenyl acetic acid. The drugs were mainly detected at the Kapitan Andreevo checkpoint, as well as the checkpoints in Malko Turnovo, Kalotina, Zlatarevo, Gyueshevo, Sofia Airport, Vidin, and Rouse.

ous police effort also led to ever increasing number of drug related arrests and of narcotics seizures, despite the hindrances such as budget restrictions, outdated and insufficient equipment, and widespread corruption. In 2001, three clandestine laboratories for production of synthetic drugs were discovered, confirming the fears that Romania has become a significant drug producing country.⁹⁹

Bulgaria continues to play a central role in smuggling of Central Asian heroin to Europe (see chart 8). One of the reasons is its location, - a junction where the three Southeast European routes (through Romania, Serbia and Macedonia) split. Judging from the increasing number of cocaine seized in the country, Bulgaria is becoming an important transit country for South American cocaine as well. There are indications that citizens of Italian, Colombian, Albanian, and Bulgarian nationality are developing non-traditional channels for the transit of cocaine. Significant quantities of precursor chemicals such as acetin anhydrite (produced in Bulgaria and/or Macedonia and headed for Turkey) have also been found. Cars, trucks, and buses are the vehicles most typically used to transport drugs. Great quantities of drugs are still transported in refrigerator trucks and trucks carrying perishable goods.

The evolution of the domestic drug market is also of interest. There has been a tendency, as observed throughout the world, for the drugs to overtake the peripheral regions of the country. According to expert estimates and surveys conducted, 50-70,000 people smoke ganja. Since the mid-1990s the number of cannabis fields discovered has been doubling each year. The largest cannabis fields were found in the regions of Blagoevgrad, Petrich, Varna, Pazardzhik, Plovdiv and Kyustendil. There are already channels for the export of cannabis mostly to Greece and Cyprus. Due to the more intense police activity in Southwest Bulgaria, the cultivation of marijuana is gradually shifting towards Northern Bulgaria. Last year vast cannabis cultivation fields were discovered in the regions of Vratza and Rouse.

Around 10,000 Bulgarians are heroin-dependent, and 40-50,000 people use pharmaceutical drugs having a similar effect (e.g. Diazepam). Due to the low purchasing power of the potential clients, the estimated value of the Bulgarian drug market does not exceed 100-150 million Euro. For this reason the black market is virtually inundated with poor quality drugs. According to the National Drug Addiction Centre, nearly 95 % of the heroin ingredients are not genuine. The expensive drugs, such as cocaine, sold at the price of 60 Euro a gram, are most popular among the members of the underground groups, who are characterized by a high rate of addiction.

⁹⁹ U. S. Department of State. "1997 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report." "For Romania to Accede to EU It Will Take Enhanced Speed of Response." *Nine O'Clock*. 7 February 2002.