

2. STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF DRUG DISTRIBUTION IN BULGARIA

The first part outlined the development of the Bulgarian drug market, from its genesis circa 1990, through its maturity at the end of the 1990s. This section will examine the current situation of the drug market, focusing on the size and structure of demand. Four major groups of drug users have been identified (for a more detailed discussion see Part 3), constituting three main markets: heroin; “soft” and synthetic drugs; and the marginal market of cocaine, LSD, and other less frequently used psychoactive substances. These markets are practically independent of each other and are largely tinted by regional and local peculiarities.²⁷

2.1. THE HEROIN MARKET

Among the various parts of the Bulgarian drug market, the heroin market is by far the most significant, defining all other sectors of the drug market. In light of the fact that after 1998 **drug-related crime grew to be the backbone of organized crime**, before examining the soft and synthetic drug markets, we will analyze the organization of the heroin market.

The analysis of drug distribution in Bulgaria reveals no single coherent domestic drug-market. Rather, the largest cities—Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, and Bourgas—operate as independent, **local markets**. Each of them is dominated and shared by **three to four big criminal organizations**. Based on the controversial accounts of policemen, drug-dealers, and drug-users, a certain general model of the organizational structure of these big drug markets can be outlined. Sofia, estimated to constitute about half of the country’s drug market, has a five-tiered hierarchy, while in cities like Varna, Bourgas, and Plovdiv, the drug distribution has four levels. The smaller towns typically are served by the local networks operating in the major Bulgarian cities. The size of each town or village predetermines its place in the hierarchy. For instance, dealers in small towns like Radomir are in subordination to a middle level drug-boss in Sofia. Larger towns like Rousse, Stara Zagora, Pleven, Sliven, Vratza, Yambol, Pernik and others, have their drug-bosses subordinated to bosses at the top of the national hierarchy (i.e., the bosses of the three or four dominating drug organizations).

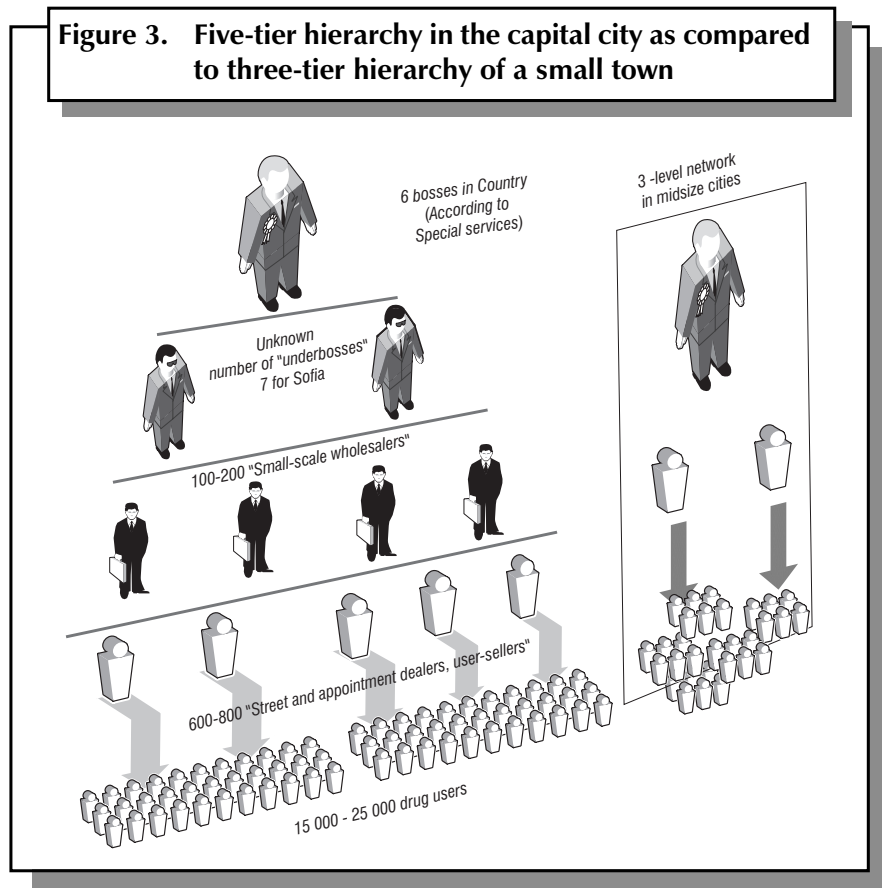
These four and five-tier hierarchies come extremely close in functional terms to the classical six-tier structure of distribution in the New York heroin market proposed by Preble and Casey in 1969.²⁸

²⁷ Each of Bulgaria’s large cities has its own specifics.

²⁸ Edward A. Preble and John J. Casey, Jr., “Taking Care of Business-The Heroin User’s Life on the Street,” *International Journal of the Addictions*, 4 (March 1969)

The typical drug organization is governed by two operational principles: hierarchy (see Figure 3) and sectorization (see Figure 5). Our analysis is based on the most developed market, Sofia. At the same time, wherever possible, comparisons are made with other, less developed drug networks in the country.

Figure 3. Five-tier hierarchy in the capital city as compared to three-tier hierarchy of a small town



Source: CSD Estimation

The **first tier, "heroin addicts"**, is our starting point in the description of drug distribution in Sofia. Many international studies prove that the transition from an end-user and a seller of heroin is a natural process. Surveys in Bulgaria confirm this model, too. Interviews with long-term addicts prove that, in over 50% of the cases, they have traded as street dealers at some point in their history. Thus, the first tier is the major source for recruitment of street dealers. When there is a "job opening" due to arrests or some other reason, it gets filled within hours by drug addicts who choose to avoid the trouble of searching and paying for their daily doses.

Second tier, "street dealers"²⁹. We can calculate the number of street dealers by extrapolating from the estimated number of 15,000 to 25,000 drug users in the country (see for more detail Part 3). According to recent studies, in Sofia and other large cities, a dealer supplies an average of 25-30 users. Thus, the total number of retail sellers of heroin is approximately 600-

800, out of which 300-400 operate in Sofia. The number of customers served by each dealer may vary from five or six to 50 or so, depending on the area, the quality of the drug offered, the organization of supply, etc. There are dealers who earn their living from no more than ten customers, but they are either "beginners," (to whom customers are initially sent, and who are expected to broaden their base), "retiring" dealers (withdrawing from the market), or ones servicing only the more important, well-off clients.

The figure of the dealer resembles that of the "trade agent"—good ones look for better places to sell and can change their bosses (the networks owners). Experienced dealers have usually worked for five or six bosses. The old type of dealer was typically a drug-abuser, and his main motive to be on the street was to provide for his personal consumption needs. As a result, at the lowest level, the principle underlying and

²⁹ "Dealers" is the definition for anyone selling to end users (drug-users). Apart from those selling in the streets, there is a relatively small number of dealers selling from their homes, or regularly offering drugs in their stores/cafes/recreational establishments.

supporting the whole organization of drug-distribution is that of “**dilution**”³⁰ of the substance. In order to have enough for himself, the street dealer dilutes the substance as much as possible. This mechanism is at work on all levels. Thus, for instance, if on the fourth level “the boss” (the owner) of the network receives from the big boss one kilogram of heroin at a certain price, or is allowed to import three kilograms, he profits not only from “passing” the heroin down to the lower level at a higher price, but also from doubling, or tripling its quantity through dilution before passing it down. On the third level, the participants’ income again depends upon increasing the quantity via dilution, and profit results from the difference in the quantities purchased and those sold. On the second level, the street dealer continues to dilute the substance, but at the same time he must act with care, as he faces two threats: The first, is to “lose” customers who are dissatisfied with the poor quality of the substance. If the dealer has diluted the substance too much, the drug-addict will immediately look to find “a new seller with better stuff.” Often within the same area, a full turnover takes place within a month, with drug-addicts switching between two and three sellers, and then going back to the first. The second threat is related to the control exercised by the drug networks. In “better areas,” the area “supervisor” may impose fines for poor quality. To control the quality, some drug-addicts may be asked to assess the substance in supply. Sometimes control is exercised simply for the sake of collecting the fine, as an additional income for the local supervisors. Apart from testing the quality of the heroin, dealers are controlled through the monitoring of their cell phone, which comes with a pre-paid card.

After 2001, both the distribution pattern and the profile of the dealer changed significantly. While the old type of dealer typically sold from home, or at public places (squares, parks, recreational establishments, etc.) where drug-addicts got together, after the advance of mobile phones, and especially with the introduction of pre-paid cards, over 95 % of the sales were carried out “over the phone.”³¹ Pre-paid cards secure anonymity for the dealer, and the phone number can be changed easily. Usually the dealer establishes different meeting places out of the sight of the police. There are various techniques for safely exchanging the heroin doses. For instance, the dealer has the “stuff” in hand and, shaking hands, takes a banknote in exchange for the substance. Since a dealer is most vulnerable if caught with a number of doses, he tries to have as little substance on him as possible, keeping the rest in safe places. Needed stock is packaged in a special way so that it can easily be disposed of. A popular approach is to put the “stuff” in the mouth, each dose wrapped as a plastic capsule. If a bust takes place, the doses are swallowed and, on release from detention,³² the dealer waits for the capsules to exit the body naturally.

³⁰ Known variants to dilute vary. From rough imitations like chalk, powder sugar, grind brick, to medicines to boost action (codeine, glutetamide, etc.) There are even substitute products, in dealers’ use, the most popular of which is the so-called “Dutch mix”.

³¹ Dealers were selling “over the phone” as early as the mid 1990s, but this practice never became widespread due to the under-developed market, low police activity in public places, and the possibility to track the owner of the phone.

³² As per Penal Procedure Code, if charges are not pressed up to 24 hours, or 72 hours (when the person has been detained for harsh crime), the detainee is released.

Hand-to-hand exchange is considered unsafe, and attempts are made to come up with more secure techniques, like working in micro-teams of two and three players. Usually each player is assigned a specific role: one arranges the sale on the phone, another takes the money, and a third person places the stuff at a pre-set safe location. Another precaution is the involvement of under-aged dealers, who are less vulnerable to criminal prosecution and are easier to *bail out* by lawyers. A recent development is that network owners recruit “clean dealers” (non-abusers of drugs) and replace them if they “get hooked.” This practice succeeds in confusing the police, and a certain number of dealers remain out of their sight.

The reality of the drug-trade market, however, proves that despite the efforts of drug bosses the networks continue to operate in their old routine. Dealers are still predominantly drug-users, and the micro-teams fall apart within weeks. Due to the psychological instability of drug-addict dealers, “security rules” are not followed consistently, and doses are exchanged in the old way. In many areas of Sofia, although the sales take place over the phone, drug-addicts sustain direct contact with their dealers at certain hangouts. Often, dealers are not concerned with safety because they have “bought” their security from district police officers. It is a public secret that dealers know in advance about police busts. To divert suspicion that police are covering for them, less fitting or random dealers are sacrificed.

Pertinent to the operation of the system is the question of how much a street dealer earns. As reported by the dealers themselves, their earnings in 2003 range from 50 to 150 BGN per day (the equivalent of US\$30-\$90). From this amount, however, they have to pay for their own heroin doses. If many of their customers are “short,”³³ the dealers claim, “you go down to 50 BGN, and after paying for your doses you are left with nothing.” Data from different sources suggest that the amount of 150 BGN per day, or 4500 BGN per month, is within reach of very few of the dealers (old sellers with special status). Interviews with Sofia dealers support the conclusion that the average daily amount is between 70 and 80 BGN, while the monthly income rarely exceeds 1500 BGN, due to many “bad days.” For the sake of comparison, in the mid 1990s the average income of a dealer working at a good place was above \$200 a day, but then, too, there were places where the daily earnings were as low as \$15.

The dealers’ identity varies wildly across cities. For instance, in Plovdiv most of the dealers are ethnic Roma taxi drivers, in Bourgas the sellers are ordinary looking youngsters, distinguishable by their *tattoos* only—each drug-boss marks his people in this way. Apart from showing they belong to a dealers’ network, the tattoos also point to the dealer’s rank in the hierarchy. They most often represent mythical creatures and Eastern plants. Thus the dealers mark their territories, and the clients know that they are dealing with the right person.

Passing on to the higher tiers in the hierarchy, it must be noted that there are no clear-cut demarcation lines between the levels. Chaos, continuous fluctuation, and intricate entourage networks make any categorization provisional. Along these lines, the tier of the “street dealers” stands out as the most clearly defined compared to higher levels.

³³ This is the slang for drug users who instead of the average 6 BGN per dose in Sofia (2003) continue paying the old price of 5 BGN. Elsewhere across the country a dose keeps selling for 5 BGN, in Varna reportedly going down to 3 BGN.

The third tier in the Sofia market does not have a clearly defined function, as has already been emphasized, probably due to poor organization and a lack of discipline within the drug-networks. One would expect that those who supply the substances to the dealers, and those who collect the cash from the sales, would fall into this tier. The obscure role of the third tier players is best illustrated by the fact that we failed to find an accepted street jargon name for them. Labels vary from “base” to “dealer” (the latter being the name for dealers proper as well). Therefore, there is a possible overlap between the roles of the street dealer and of the “supplier.” According to former third level players, they were better paid than the dealers and their functions also included collecting money and calling the bosses if problems occurred with some of the dealers. Based on evidence of how dealers pay their drug network “bosses” and the police, it can be assumed that the third tier collects the dues as an intermediary. The amount received by a “supplier” is in proportion to the sales made by the dealers who are supplied by him. The scheme works out in the following way: a “dealer” orders the needed quantity and buys by the gram. The most frequently ordered quantities are 5 or 10 grams. In Sofia during the summer of 2003, one “street” gram cost about 40 BGN (20 EUR), that is the retail dealer must pay 200 BGN, or 400 BGN respectively. The official profit made by the “supplier” is 10% on the price paid by the dealers, but according to the “principle of dilution” instead of 5 grams the dealer receives only 4 grams of substance, thus leaving one gram, or 40 BGN, for the supplier. With an average of three to six dealers buying from the same supplier a total of 15–30 grams daily, the supplier’s earnings can reach 200–300 BGN per day. Often the figure of the “supplier-dealer”—who can sell while having dealers to work under him, or is ready to take additional risk—comes into play. Tentatively it can be said that supplying the dealers is the first step up the drug-hierarchy. Whether at this level the supplier would be assigned “managerial” functions, or would just be a “depot,” depends upon his performance and qualities.

With the appearance of mobile phone dealers, a new type of organization emerges where the supplier acts as a coordinator and manager of the dealers. Customers call him directly on his phone, and he delegates which of the dealers will supply the substance. A variety here is the “mobile supplier”—typical examples are the taxi drivers in Plovdiv.³⁴

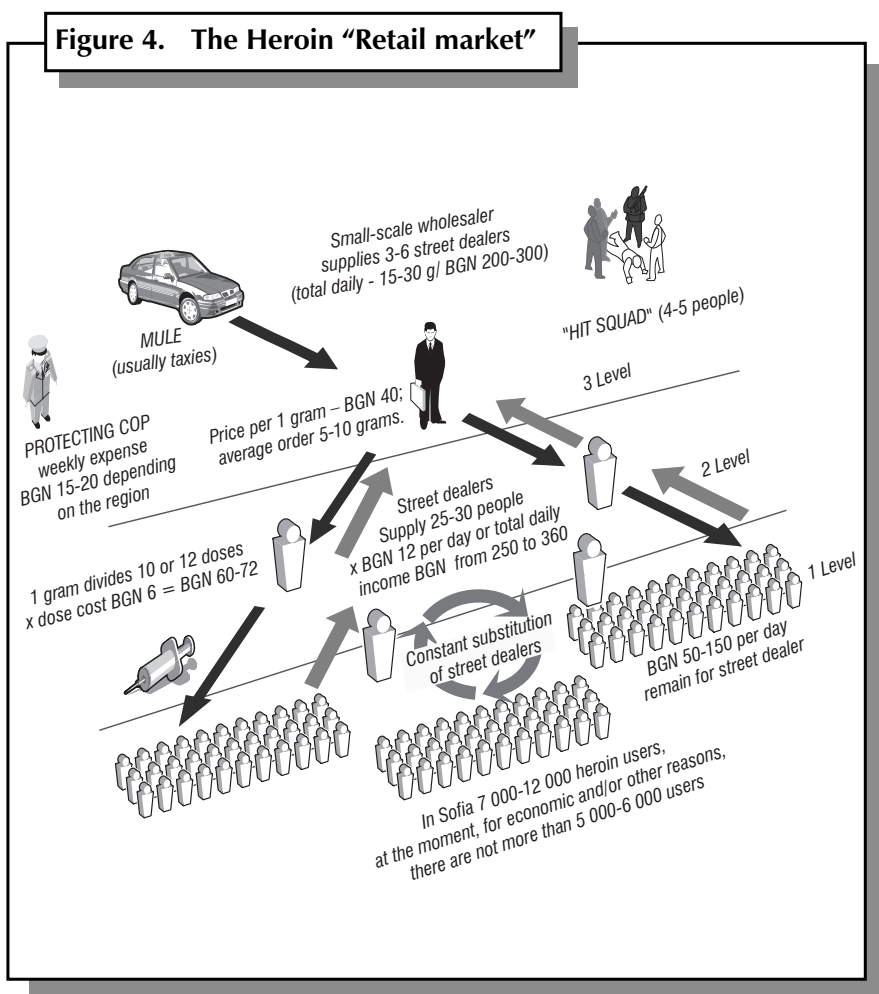
The “supplier” tier is sometimes “skipped” by the network executives. The option to hire an outsider to deliver substances for a substantially smaller commission than a regular supplier is often a tempting option. There is evidence that shops, news stands, cafes, and other commercial outlets working long hours have been used for distribution. The daily amount paid to these sellers is between 10 and 20 BGN. Generally speaking, though, this model dates back to the mid-90s, and is currently considered unreliable. There are also networks, especially outside of Sofia, where someone from the boss’s close entourage (usually the supervisor) supplies substances to the dealers.

Tracking the interaction between the second and third levels shows that from a regular “six” (a dose costing 6 BGN) 45% remain with the dealer and some 20%, with the supplier (see Figure 4). As already pointed out, “customer pressure” generates harsh competition among the dealers. In the past two years, as a result of the extremely low

³⁴ The special role in organized crime played by taxi drivers and some taxi companies, not just in Plovdiv, but across the country, is worthy of a separate survey.

quality of street heroin, dealers operate in constant conflict. A dealer may lose customers over greater “dilution” on the part of the supplier and, hence, look for a replacement. If that is the case, the area “boss” is the one to take measures. Substances can only be obtained from a replacement supplier when the regular one has fallen out of stock, and only then within the same “firm” (i.e. from suppliers reporting to the area boss). In the case of a dealer obtaining substances from a source outside the area (see below for area distributions), he is performing “shano” and liable to serious punishment.

This term has been introduced as a name for those working outside of the networks: the so-called *shano* is a “free player,” who typically disregards domestic drug organizations and uses uncontrolled channels for drug supplies. At present, Arabs are prevalent among this category, as are residents of neighboring Balkan countries (who are importing for their own use). They buy some 100-200 grams of the substance, which is considerably cleaner than what is sold on the streets. The shano works on his own behalf, and is a lucrative target for hit squads. Usually his property is seized by the members of the hit squad. Elimination takes place through a devastating fine, and through beating or even crippling in more stubborn cases.



A special type of network participant on the third level should be pointed out—the figure of the “mule” (this term is used by analogy with drug-trafficking, without having an exact counterpart in the domestic market in Bulgaria). The function of the mule is to secure substances for the supplier. Various schemes are applied. For instance, the mule brings stuff to the street, or gives an “address” to the supplier to get it. Usually, very “reliable” people, with long crime records, are employed as mules. To minimize the risk, taxi drivers, drivers supplying commercial outlets, and even policemen are employed (as was the case in the town of Sliven).³⁵ When arrested, such people have been found to carry between 100 and 200 grams of heroin.

Then there are the so-called “warehouses,” where all substances for the month are kept. It is known that in the capital city there are two or three large storage locations. The bust of a “large warehouse” in Sofia in August 2002 found some 5 kilograms of heroin.

Source: CSD Estimation

³⁵ See “Domestic news” - BTA 25.09.2002 and daily newspaper “Sega” 03.09.2003.

Interviews cast light on the fact that dealers do not communicate directly with their bosses. Usually, the dealer knows the “area boss” personally, and yet, he only has contact with his deputies. Most probably, these surrogate bosses also perform the role of suppliers whenever necessary. Hence, these “deputies” should also be classified as belonging to the third tier. According to our interviewees, the bosses “do not lay hands on” the stuff, yet exercise consistent ‘operational’ control over the network through their deputies. As reported by former and present dealers, meetings between big bosses and the second tier take place occasionally, or when there is a crisis in the system.

The fourth tier, “area bosses,” does not have a clearly defined role and identity, similar to the third tier. The controversial relationships among area bosses in Sofia demonstrate that there is no established organizational pyramid. Often a network has a couple of bosses “sharing power,” with no clear-cut subordination among them.

The current structure of the fourth tier in Sofia, as of 2002-2003, is the result of continuous clashes and agreements between separate groups. The final redistribution of power occurred after the assassinations of Poli Pantev³⁶ in the spring of 2001 and Lyonya Djudgeto (“The Dwarf”) in the autumn of 2001. Up until then, every sale in Sofia was controlled by a particular “boss,” who was in charge of his respective areas. A typical organization included a “boss” having between 5 and 20 street dealers along with their suppliers. These organizations belonged to one of the two groupings formed around the former VIS and SIC companies. Notably, until the summer of 2002, despite periodic tensions between the two groups, balance has always been struck. Negotiations among fourth and fifth tier bosses led to **the principle of zoning, with areas of influence coinciding with the police district structure.** Each dealer was assigned to a particular area and “reported” to the area boss. Selling in someone else’s area, even within a range of 100 meters or so, obtaining stuff from outsider sources, or working for another area boss was punished (punishments ranged from battery to crippling).

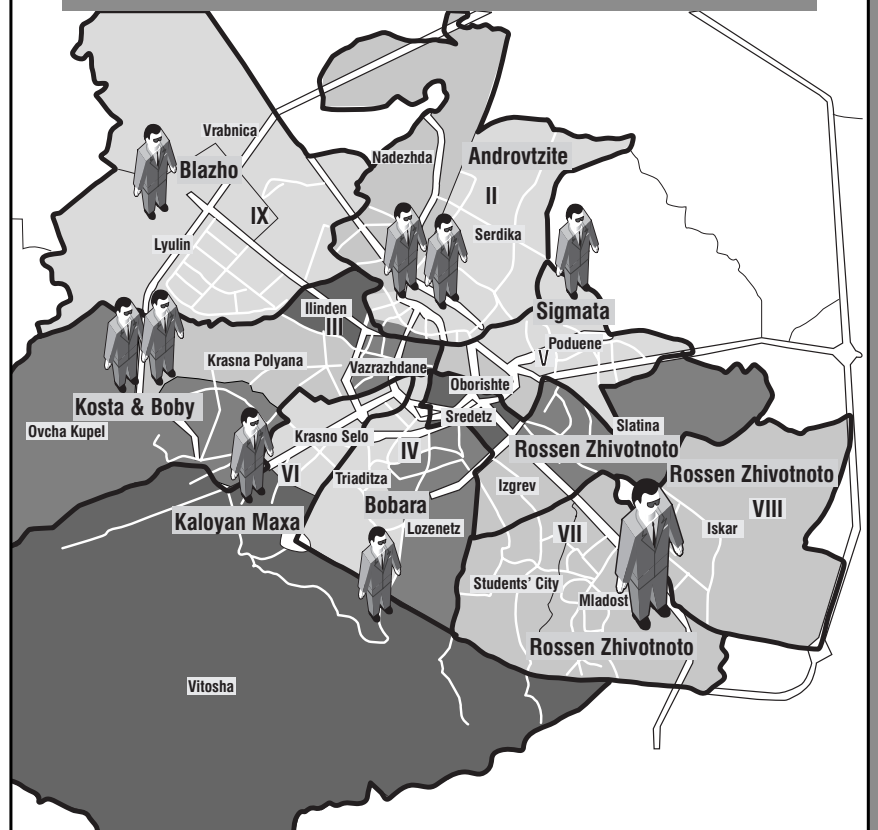
It is not by chance that the zoning principle in the capital city follows the police department districts. According to dealers, this is a direct reflection of the key role played by the police in distribution within the market.³⁷ Without proper contacts in the respective police district, it is impossible to defend a “territory.” A typical fee for a police boss in charge of drugs in a district police department is roughly 15-20 BGN per dealer per week. The amount that an “area boss” gives on top for keeping the system intact depends upon the personal arrangements with the “police executive,”³⁸ but amounts range between 10,000 and 20,000 BGN annually. It is known that, beyond general agreements dealers, suppliers and bosses pay extra in case of

³⁶ Poli Pantev was shot on 9 March 2001 on the island of Aruba. He was believed to control heroin and cocaine supplies before his death, but was not involved with the domestic drugs market.

³⁷ Corruption in law enforcement agencies is key for the evolution of crime in Bulgaria. This issue has been researched in a specific survey by *Coalition 2000* – see <http://www.anticorruption.bg>. It is also widely discussed at the top level in the Ministry of the Interior.

³⁸ 2nd and 3rd tier dealers allude to various police officers involved, starting with heads of District Departments in Sofia and ending with a former head of the Narcotics Department with the National Police Service. Some of the quoted names were confirmed to have been internally investigated by the Ministry of the Interior.

Figure 5. Sofia Distributions by known “persons in charge” on the 4th level in the hierarchy



Source: CSD and Sofia Directorate of Internal Affairs

“incidents”. For instance, when a dealer is caught between 500 and 1000 BGN is paid for each packet caught. Seizure of 200-300 grams on the third level can cost a “fee” of as much as 10,000—15,000 BGN. Data on arrangements with the police is fragmentary and mainly relates to Sofia’s 3rd, 4th and 6th district police departments (according to police insiders, these departments are notorious as the “most infiltrated”). Infiltration into the police departments occurs at different levels. If the boss is out of reach, his subordinates are then approached for negotiations. With a staff of three to four officers per division, it is possible that some officers are not corrupt, but typically at least half of their subordinates benefit from their position. The usual penalty for police officers who have been proved to abuse their position is only a transfer from one district department to another.

Based on accounts of dealers, policemen and special services experts, at present the capital city is roughly divided into nine areas, mirroring the structure of the district police departments. These are the bosses controlling each of the nine areas: (see Figure 5).

- Area 1 – Rossen Zhivotnoto (“The Animal”)³⁹ is now in Italy. His deputies are Goundi and Lacho.
- Area 2 – Androvztite (“The Andreis”) are two bosses. Curiously enough, whoever comes as the new second is called “Andro” – short from Andrei.
- Area 3 – Kosta and Bobby
- Area 4 – Bobara (“The Beaver”) was preceded by Hamstera (“The Hamster”) and Nasko but today they report to him.
- Area 5 – Sigmata.
- Area 6 – Kaloyan Maxa (before him was the notorious Ilyan Versanov).
- Area 7 – Rossen Zhivotnoto (“The Animal”).
- Area 8 – Rossen Zhivotnoto (“The Animal”).
- Area 9 – Blazho (there have been several attempts to replace him since spring 2003).

One of the important functions of the fourth tier is to manage the so called “*black lawyers*” and “*hit squads.*” These two groups play a critical role in the overall operation of the networks.

³⁹ Wherever concrete individuals are mentioned, their media nicknames will be used.

Unlike their fellows employed by regular commercial companies, lawyers working for the drug-structures, also known as **“black lawyers,”**⁴⁰ come typically from the Ministry of Interior system, or have experience as criminal investigators, criminal prosecutors, or judges. Usually the “black drug lawyers” attack the system on all levels, from the district police department, where detentions take place, through the preliminary investigation, and as far as prosecutors and judges—i.e. they try “to crack” the case at every single stage of pre-court and court procedures. Thus, they not only represent and defend their clients, but also perform a particularly visible intermediary function. Their fees are typically calculated as percentages of what would have had to have been paid for saving the respective member of the organization. The more difficult the cases, the larger the amount, and the more substantial the fees charged. Black lawyers function as a “network.” Cases are assigned depending on the respective lawyer’s “influence” in various districts or levels of the law enforcement system. For instance, one lawyer who has previously worked as an investigator in Sofia’s 3rd district, is now representing defendants in that district, another having served in the police force of the 4th district, specializes in cases in that district, etc. In Sofia, most of the cases are covered by some twenty lawyers. Black lawyers perform additional intermediary services, for instance, arranging “victims”⁴¹ with the police, as well as PR services like handling information to go out to the media, etc. Notably, apart from coverage by district, the hierarchy here is relatively clear—ordinary dealers are handled by junior members of the lawyers community. Unlike their ordinary colleagues, black lawyers risk physical punishment over lack of success. In general, though, lawyers’ role in the sustainability of the network is huge. Loyal street dealers are aware that even if they commit a mistake, they stand a fair chance to evade legal consequences.

Uniquely important for the enforcement of the hierarchy and zoning principles is the role played by the **“hit squads.”** The violent force exercised by these special groups makes it possible to control the delivery of substances, as well as territorial trespassing. According to available data, large hit squads—similar to those back in 1994-1997—are already difficult to sustain. Instead, each area boss has three to four people (“a car full”) who take care of discipline. One or two of them may be the boss’s personal bodyguards. It typically takes two to three to intimidate a dealer, and when “more serious measures” are to be taken, a total of ten or so are summoned from up to four areas. Usually the hit squads get other assignments as well—to collect interests, punish pimps, shop owners, etc.

Punishments can provisionally be ranked on three levels. 1) Fine—depending on what kind of violation, fines range from several hundred to several thousand BGN; 2) Battery—again there are degrees of beating, yet breaking bones and heavy injuries are avoided; 3) Crippling—ranging from breaking fingers to breaking elbows and knee caps (i.e. bones that are hard or impossible to heal).

⁴⁰ The term “black lawyer” has also a wider meaning, referring to lawyers related with gray and black economy, who are experienced in various cases of harsh violations of the Penal Code.

⁴¹ To avoid suspicion that a given district police department is not doing their job properly, arrangements are made with the covering police officers to sacrifice a certain number of street dealers at the second level.

Analysis shows that a participant in a small-team hit squad earns about 300 BGN a week plus *fringe benefits*: car, mobile phone, “full board drinking and eating at the boss’ restaurants,” “prostitutes from the boss’ entourage,” and so on. Fines and other possessions taken away from the dealers become property of the hit squad. The boss of the hit squad gets a weekly salary of about 1500 BGN. Furthermore, bosses of hit squads enjoy a special status and may own a share in business operations. It may seem paradoxical that a hit squad member gets less than a street dealer, but most sources confirmed this information. One explanation here would be that the market of “power services” has shrunk and their pay levels have to take into account the salary levels in ordinary security firms, which are still half to one third of what members of the hit squads are paid.

Significantly, frequent changes take place on this fourth level—one can move up or down within months. Along with the area bosses there are always at least one or two “lesser bosses” whose hierarchical position is not clearly defined.⁴²

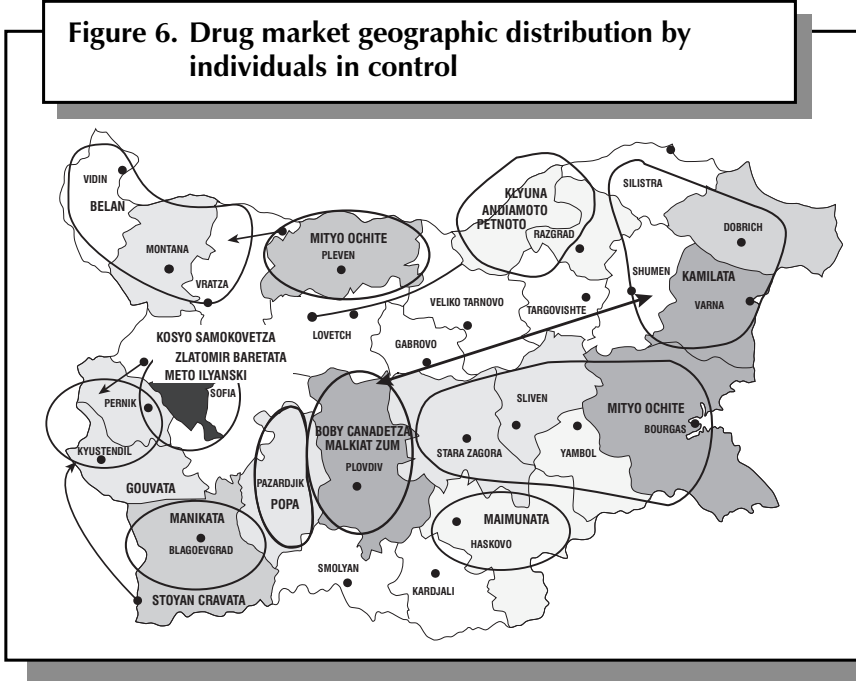
In the fifth tier are the so-called “big bosses.” Media, police, and politicians alike often mention the long criminal records of these top players, yet for many reasons which are outside the scope and ambitions of the present survey, they remain “untouchable”. **The single most important feature of their operation is that they have sustainable legal businesses securing considerable income. At the same time, their legal operations are related to “gray” and “black” economic activities, thus securing huge supplementary financial, organizational and human resource for expansion.** Pressure in the “black” or “gray” sector of operation may cause a reduction, or even a stoppage of activity in the line under threat. **This constant transition along the “white-gray-black” line makes it really hard to reach the real bosses of the fifth tier.** For them, drug distribution is just one of many lines of business. They normally do not get involved in any operational decisions such as who stands where in the hierarchy, who contributes how much, who is to be punished. They negotiate and agree on area distributions and set development goals (for instance, currently small towns are being developed). Along these lines, it is noteworthy that according to participants in the drug networks, the perceived rivalry between former VIS and SIC “employees” is rather a myth that covers the actual collaboration. Special service experts confirm this observation. As they see it, the Bulgarian drug-market is moving towards cartelization. It is widely believed that since early 2002, the old division into VIS people and SIC people has become irrelevant. As of now they have “merged” to the point of being indistinguishable.

Media investigations, also confirmed by police sources, divide the country into three big local organizations: Sofia, Varna and Bourgas. About the “three on the top,” there are only widespread rumors. The media reported that the “three big bosses” were Konstantin Dimitrov (“Kossyo Samokovetsa”), Meto Ilyanski and Zlatomir Ivanov.⁴³ On December 6, 2003 Dimitrov was murdered in the center of Amsterdam.

⁴² This duplicating and triplicating of levels is reflected in dealers’ interviews like this: “I worked for Botse, Mitko Babata is under him.” On the other hand, it turns out that Botse, who is a boss, worked for Mitko Rouski (“The Russian”), who himself “had worked it out with Klyuna” (“The Beak,” area boss).

⁴³ These names appeared in over 300 publications in the past 2 years. See “168 Chassa” weekly of 23.05.2003 and of 31.01.2003, “Capital” weekly of 17.08.2002 and of 11.01.2003.

Figure 6. Drug market geographic distribution by individuals in control



At the end of November 2003 Ilyanski disappeared. Reportedly Dimitrov's share of the drug market will be most likely taken over by Klyuna (Anton Miltenov, "The Beak").⁴⁴ Some other identifiable high-level players are Ivo Guela in Varna and Mityo Ochite in Bourgas.

It is widely believed that until this point Klyuna was the executive in charge of the Sofia market. (See box on page 33) Another frequently mentioned name is Dembi (Dimitar Voutchev, "The Fat Guy"),⁴⁵ the stand-in for Klyuna. These two were the main characters in multiple media publications, while interviewee dealers and police officers confirmed that they are veritably the ones who have been running the capital city in the past 1-2 years. The most convincing evidence as to their strength

Source: CSD and National Service for Combating Organized Crime

is that they are capable, if need be, of summoning the "most powerful hit squad" from all areas, which can include up to thirty hit men. It has already been mentioned that such hit squads do not go into extremes. They are employed to scare and punish (see the three levels of punishment described above), but not for killings. In the few cases when such groups used firearms, they were inefficient. It is thought that for extreme cases bosses on the fourth and fifth level usually hired either "Old Dobri's group" or foreigners.⁴⁶ To sum up, old dealers know people like Klyuna and Dembi in person, but the real top guys remain unknown.

As for those hovering somewhere between fourth and fifth tiers, like Dembi and Rossen Zhivotnoto ("The Animal"), they demonstrate the poor discipline typical for the middle level, well-known from the time of the "power groupings" in the period 1994-1998. It is believed that after the end of the "spill out" period (when heroin was left in Bulgaria in exchange for assistance in trafficking substances through Bulgarian territory), and the transition to mainly direct purchasing from Turkey, mid-level people began to operate on their own more often.

⁴⁴ "Boyko Borisov: Klyuna will Inherit the Business of Samokovetza," *Dnevnik*, December 8, 2003.

⁴⁵ See "Trud" daily of 19.08.2003, "24 chasa" daily of 21.8.2002, "Tema" weekly magazine of 26.8.2002, "Monitor" daily of 14.9.2002, "Banker" weekly of 28.6.2003.

⁴⁶ In interviews dealers gave details about the exclusive specialization within the group and the harsh discipline. It is hard to say how far these were stories inspired by hands-on experience, or by what was published in the media. A case in point is "Old Dobri's" group that became media popular after the arrest of Nikolay Dobrev and five more in late August 2002. Detainees were former special services officers and at the time of their arrest they had at their disposal large amounts of weapons, ammunitions and explosives. The Prosecution called this group "a murder factory." While investigation was under way it became clear that many of the charges would not hold in court. Court trial is upcoming.

Size of the heroin market. Having revealed the structure of heroin distribution and the overall operation of the heroin market, the question arises of how much money this market generates. The estimated size of the Bulgarian heroin market varies significantly due to considerable variances in initial assumptions. If the average daily consumption is 10-15 BGN per person, and there are 5,000 to 25,000 drug-addicts on the heroin market, the annual revenue ranges **between 55 to 135 million BGN**. This estimate may prove to be quite exaggerated, since addicts do not always manage to take their daily dose of heroin—most of them quit time and again in attempts to overcome their addiction.

Crisis. The described structure and operation of the drug network in Sofia supports the conclusion that the drugs market has reached a mature stage. However, changes that took place from the fall of 2002 on, give grounds to the belief that the existing drug organizations were beginning to fall apart. There are numerous symptoms that testify to a **systematic crisis in the distribution of heroin**. The changes occur extremely quickly, and whether the current structure remains relevant depends largely upon developments in the second half of 2003. The catalyst of this crisis appears to have been many internal and external events. The external factors include changes in consumer behavior in some big Western-European drug markets, namely the transition from heroin to cocaine. It is difficult to predict how this “shift” would affect the heroin traffic via Bulgaria, and consequently the domestic heroin market. Another important change is the increased activity of the Turkish special services (resulting in a series of disclosures), which supposedly created difficulties for the Bulgarian drug importers in maintaining their contacts with Turkish heroin laboratories.

While external changes are hard to identify, evidence about internal turbulence on almost all levels is readily available. An outline of these changes follows.

On the first level, a general and continuous drop in the number of heroin users has been observed. There are several reasons for that.

Demographic slide – due to continuously declining birth rates in the 1980s, there are fewer and fewer young people entering drug-use age (i.e. the size of peer groups, people born in the same year, is shrinking year after year).

Experience gained in heroin abuse. As a result of the “heroin outbreak” since late 1990s, horrifying evidence of the consequences of drug abuse is to be found in almost every school and every neighborhood in big cities. Therefore, even kids with deviant behavior prefer **to refrain from heroin experiments**.

Due to the **deteriorating quality of the street heroin** (confirmed by data from chemical analysis), smaller numbers of new addicts are being recruited. Indications are there that the number of those who “get hooked” after their first try has dropped abruptly.

Unlike the period 1993-2000 when drug networks were growing every year, the current trend is of shrinking revenue from drugs trade. **“Pressure from below”** creates powerful tensions within the drug networks—as confirmed by both street dealers and current police data. Since early 2002, the average number of customers serviced by one street dealer is going down (from 30-40 to 20-25 in mid-2003), resulting in poorer earnings. As a consequence, the recruitment of new dealers

becomes problematic, and permanent conflicts among them arise. The “human resource crisis” in the street network is described by old dealers like this: “in the past year some areas were served mainly by young novices who got busted all the time.”

“**The crisis from below**” coincides with a “**crisis at the top**,” which, on the fourth and fifth levels, according to police and dealers alike, started after the death of Poli Pantev and became even worse after the murder of Lyonya Djudjeto (Leonid Fotev, “The Dwarf”).⁴⁷ Up until then, Lyonya Djudjeto maintained the balance between the various groups in the drug-networks of Sofia, which were divided into two camps - VIS and SIC. In the summer of 2002 the situation went out of control. Judging by many signs, it can be assumed that the crisis started after a fight among the fourth and fifth tier bosses over unsettled payments—the legalization of their capitals in the autumn of 2001 and the spring of 2002 took the form of an overinvestment in tourism.⁴⁸ What added fuel to the crisis was the shooting of one of the fourth tier bosses—Ilyan Versanov, who confessed to the police in order to protect himself from execution.

Following his testimony, a lawsuit was started against Klyuna (Anton Miltenov, “The Beak”), and after a search, it was announced in the autumn of 2002 that most on his team/hit squad were arrested: Dimitar V. (“Dembi”), Redjhan R. (“Roko”), Bisser I., Alexander V. (“The Cabbage”), Kiril K. (“The Tip”), Tzvetan D. and Rossen P. On 10 September, 2002 Georgi N. was arrested after forensic evidence proved that he was the one who had shot Versanov with an automatic machine gun Kalashnikov, provided by Rossen P.

The shooting was said to be Klyuna’s response to a previous sniper attack against him on 27 June, 2002, when he was shot on the balcony of his house in the Knyazhevo area around Sofia. He turned himself in to the police investigation office on 21 January, 2003 and spent some time in prison.

At present, Klyuna is free on a bail of 4,500 BGN, confirmed by Sofia City Court on 9 May. Also on the loose—bailed out for 3,000 BGN—is Dimitar Vouchev (“Dembi”). According to the latest data, only one out of seven members of Klyuna’s group is in detention.

The charges pressed against Klyuna and his people include “attempted murder of Ilyan Versanov in a manner and means threatening the lives of many, and conducted by preliminary arrangement.” In addition, Bisser I., Rossen P. and Georgi N. will be charged for illegal possession of arms. Court sources quote the evidence collected so far on the case as sufficient to convict the drug-dealers.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Murdered on 16 September, 2001 by Petar Petrov-Kyustendiletsa, who was under cocaine intoxication.

⁴⁸ The widely accepted explanation among “crime and gray” bosses is that early August 2002 made it clear that the return from tourism has been overestimated, and high interest rates of “black credits” turned out unserviceable (unavailability of regular bank credits had allowed crime structures to lend at very high interest rates). Furthermore, the consequences from “investing white” are manifold. According to lawyers in service to the leaders of “shadow” structures, the main underlying problem lies in ill-defined “oral contracts” and the absence of tradition to observe agreed upon contracts. Conflicts arise not only over debts, but also over property concession, partnerships with competitors, etc.

⁴⁹ *Banker* weekly 02.08.2003 r.

Similar charges were pressed in Bourgas, and the detention of key figures like Klyuna and Mityo Ochite (“Mityo the Eyes”) and their entourage had a negative effect on discipline among the players of the big drug-markets. Their continuous absence from “operational coordination” led to fourth tier bosses starting to work on their own. In this respect, it is revealing that since the crisis of the summer of 2002 street dealers **are no longer given ready-made doses of heroin**—a method used to avert dilution.⁵⁰ Discipline has slackened to near collapse in the second and third levels, and fast and loose use of “hit squads” in the summer of 2002 and 2003 deteriorated the situation even further. The crisis at the top was exacerbated by the attempts of big bosses to drop out of the drug business. The trend to transfer capital from the “black sector” and invest in the “white” leaves the drug market with less and less financial resources. The result is the extremely low quality of heroin bought from Turkey. According to the NSBOP, purity of wholesale heroin has been slashed to 10-12%, which was the grade of heroin offered on the second level in 1999-2000. Now the street dose of heroin is usually at 4%, but can drop to as low as 2%.

2.2. THE SOFT DRUG MARKET

After the big criminal organizations entered the “soft drug” trade (marijuana, hashish, and other forms of cannabis) at the end of the 1990s, the market in 2003 remains split between independent small dealers, working directly with producers and selling to “circles of friends,” and the criminal organizations. Naturally, organized crime was not happy to share the market. Therefore, regular attempts were made to oust or bring under control the independent dealers. According to police data, in most of the country’s large cities **big criminal structures periodically gain control over “the street” (the public selling places of grass)**. Various methods for securing this control are known, like marking the substances⁵¹ or “checks” of the users at public places where grass is smoked. According to independent dealers, a portion of the police campaigns against the dealers are triggered by “purposeful signals” to the police, with the purpose of clearing the area. Examples in Sofia include operations against sales in “Studentski grad” (Students’ City) and the centrally located green areas (the Monument to the Soviet Army, the monument to Patriarch Evtimii, and elsewhere). Despite all effort, this market continues to be difficult to control on the part of organized crime. The main reason is that the “entry threshold” for an independent dealer is very low, thanks to easy access to raw substances, and low prices. Typical are stories of high school, or university student sellers of “soft drugs,” who supply themselves from a piece of land they have found, “so that not to pay thick-necked thugs” (the so-called “mutri”). Having met their personal needs, they start making money by selling surplus drugs within their own closed circles. There are also the “young entrepreneurs,” who enter the market for profit’s sake only. Clash with organized criminal structures usually takes place when the “circle of friends” expands, or the respective criminal group “captures” a user from the independent dealer’s circle.

⁵⁰ To limit the possibility of dilution on the 1st and 2nd level, doses are pre-packaged in the form of the so-called “straps.” Doses come stuck to a strap and a 1st level dealer gets a strap with the respective number of doses, depending on the number of his known customers, and the respective cash amount is owed. Straps are also an efficient control mechanism on the 2nd level. As different from Sofia, ready-made doses keep being used in smaller towns, where large amounts have been confiscated (in Rousse and Pleven).

⁵¹ In Sofia the practice is to put stamps on paper bags that contain grass, and sometimes even on the rolling paper.

Notably, along with the number of “dealers to friends,” there is a significant portion of users who grow their own cannabis, helped by the favorable climate and already developed seed market.

Organized crime has also to consider the relatively **small size of the soft drug market**. Based on experience in other countries, confirmed to be relevant for the Bulgarian market as well, some 90% of the overall consumption of soft drugs is attributed to regular users. Therefore, approximately 4,000-5,000 kilograms are consumed per year. With retail prices ranging from 800 and 1,000 BGN per kilogram, the estimated size of the market is 3.2 million to 5 million BGN. Besides the relatively small market, dealers working for criminal groupings cannot take advantage of the security offered by mobile phone sales. The low price of soft drugs makes mobile orders too expensive at this point.

On the other hand, **the country’s organized crime cannot afford to abandon the “soft drug” market altogether**. First of all, this is the largest market in terms of number of users. Analysis of demand (see Part 3) demonstrated that the users of “soft drugs” number around 30,000–50,000 regular users, and about just as many accidental ones. In comparison with Western Europe and the former socialist countries like Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, the 1.5% penetration (those who “have tried”) is low, and stable growth can be expected in the near future. Such expectations are confirmed by registered levels of penetration in high schools (as high as 30% in some cities). Secondly, earnings from heroin are expected to continue to decline, thus making soft drugs more attractive to organized crime.

2.3. THE SYNTHETIC DRUG MARKET

As shown in the first section, the manufacturing of amphetamines in Bulgaria has a long history, and after 1998—with the focused effort of organized crime—this group of psychoactive substances began to gain grounds on the mass domestic market. Just like the heroin trade, the trade in synthetic drugs is practically fully controlled by the big criminal structures. Domestic consumption is mainly satisfied by domestic output and one can safely assume that it is dominated by the same big criminal structures. On the other hand, some of the apprehended traffickers and workers in drug laboratories, belong to relatively small criminal organizations exporting amphetamines to the Middle East. **Two parallel systems for manufacturing synthetic drugs seem to co-exist**. One, which is part of Bulgarian organized crime and targets the internal market, and a second, focusing on exports, consists of single criminal entrepreneurs. Comparisons of quantities seized at the border with data on internal consumption shows that **export production is several times higher than the domestic market**. Therefore, this production has to meet the requirements of the Middle East market for very low prices, which in turn leads to very low quality. This is probably the main reason why the quality of synthetic drugs offered in the country is so low.

Developments in early 2003 signal a very dangerous tendency. With the decline of heroin consumption, organized crime groups focused upon increasing the supply of synthetic drugs. A series of in-depth interviews with long-term heroin addicts, carried out in the spring and summer of 2003, made it clear that the **wave of**

combined use of heroin and amphetamines is sweeping. On the other hand, while up until mid-2002 adolescents typically took powder or pills, it is becoming more and more common at present to “sniff” amphetamines in imitation of techniques learned from cocaine use. The active substance is divided into parts, shaped into lines, and sniffed through a straw.

A comparison is possible with Western Europe in this respect. In the past couple of years, users of heroin have been switching to cocaine. For a country like Bulgaria such a “shift” would hardly work, due to the very high price of cocaine. Therefore, amphetamines become a natural, cheap surrogate, or as some experts call it, “the cocaine of the poor.”

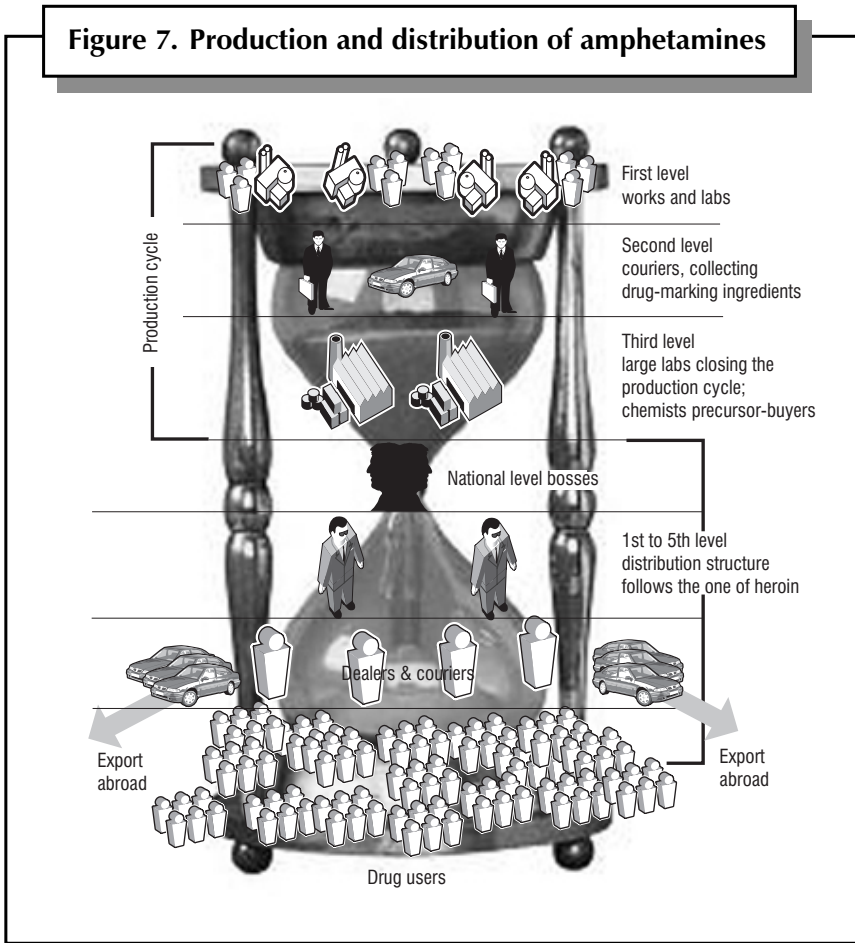
Data about “switching” from heroin to amphetamines is as yet too scarce and fragmentary. According to police and special services (who are also registering such a trend) the “heroin crisis” forced many fourth and fifth level bosses to “remake” their heroin networks into those that distribute amphetamines. Before early 2003, the heroin market and the market of synthetic drugs were very different, and “physically” separate. For instance, amphetamine dealers offered their substances mainly at restaurants and cafes, while heroin dealers—as mentioned above—took orders over the phone and delivered the drugs at arranged meetings. At present, as evidence from police analysis and interviews with drug-users show, in certain big cities these two distinct networks are beginning to merge. Bulgarian drug-related organizations are trying to make use of the existing manufacturing and human resource potential.

Police busts in the summer of 2003 suggested that the architects of these industries are trying to “close up” the production-distribution process by cutting out the expensive and risky part of the system abroad.⁵² What is innovative and different is that with their new manufacturing capacity, the aim is to expand the number of participating laboratories as far as possible. Drug organizations have not only mastered old, existing technology for the manufacturing of amphetamines, but they have also tried to make them mass-producible, turning drug production into a technology as “simple as alcohol distillation, practiced on a mass scale by Bulgarians.” The aim is to set up several hundreds of laboratories that will deliberately work on an irregular basis—in order to minimize the risk. **The structure created by the architects of the system resembles that of the renowned cocaine “sand clock” scheme.**⁵³ According to this scheme, the widest upper part of the inverted triangle is occupied by the “workers,” hundreds of people, who receive cheap equipment, precursors, and accurate instructions (to minimize errors via simple technology). Below them are several dozens of couriers handling the shipping of precursors, sub-products, and the amphetamine output. The second to last level is taken by those organizing the import of precursors,⁵⁴

⁵² For the first time laboratories have been discovered that produce predominantly for the Bulgarian market. Up until 2003, 13 laboratories were found whose output went for export. Similar is the tendency with captured couriers shipping amphetamines bulk.

⁵³ Peter Reuter, “Do Middle Markets for Drugs Constitute an Attractive Target for Enforcement” (2003).

⁵⁴ There is strong evidence suggesting that to avoid the risk of crossing borders, production facilities have been set up in Bulgaria for the “total synthesis” of precursors.

Figure 7. Production and distribution of amphetamines

Source: CSD and National Service for Combating Organized Crime

chemical engineers,⁵⁵ while the bottleneck of the scheme is saved for the bosses. At this point, the regular pyramid starts, which is similar to that of heroin distribution (see Figure 7)—upper levels for distribution bosses, then the suppliers, hundreds of street dealers, and finally the widest section of the pyramid made up by tens of thousands of users. What is new is that expensive qualified chemical engineers do not assume risk any longer. The whole point of the “sand clock” scheme is that the risk is greatest for those at the bottom of the hierarchy—the laboratory “workers” who function similarly to the street dealers, and are easily replaceable without incurring significant financial losses. Therefore, laboratories are scattered all over the country in small towns producing several kilograms of sub-products, or at the end-units, producing several kilograms of amphetamines. A key role for the operation of this structure is played by “hit squads” and “black lawyers,” described above in the discussion of heroin distribution.

It is extremely difficult to estimate the earnings generated from synthetic drug use. Due to the recent abrupt growth of amphetamine use, the data collected by representative surveys is outdated. Besides, patterns of use are highly irregular, depending on the season, particular events, etc., and prices vary significantly by place and time (from 0.50 to 15 BGN per dose).

⁵⁵ According to special services experts, many indications are there that some of the most prominent Bulgarian chemists have been put under pressure and recruited by members of organized crime. Particular attention was paid to those who had taken part in developing technologies for the production of captagon. In proof of this assertion come the ostentatious killing of the daughter of a famous chemist, and the detention of several individuals working with non-controlled chemicals that are suspected to be used in exotic technologies for the production of amphetamines.

2.4. BULGARIAN DRUG-RELATED ORGANIZED CRIME AND POSSIBLE SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE OF DRUG-DISTRIBUTION IN THE COUNTRY

At the early stages of this survey, our hypothesis was that—despite media and public opinion—the perception that there exists drug-related organized crime, and even a mafia, was false, and that the reality of drug-distribution would prove those beliefs have little to do with reality. Our hypothesis was supported by studies and analyses in Western and Eastern Europe proving that even in countries like Italy and Russia, with traditionally strong organized crime, drug-traffic and drug-distribution are predominantly the domain of small organizations and individual players.⁵⁶ Analysis of primary information, police, and special services data showed that drug-trafficking and distribution in Bulgaria is carried out by a **special alliance of three to four big criminal drug networks**.⁵⁷ As demonstrated in our discussion of the hierarchy of drug organizations, this “alliance” has divided the market internally on the principles of zoning and hierarchy in the structure of supplies. The operation of such an organization is made possible by implementing various negotiating mechanisms for assigning control over territories among the existing criminal groups, and also by maintaining specialized units to exert pressure (“hit squads”) and to protect the players at each level from prosecution by the state (“lawyer networks”).⁵⁸

⁵⁶ PAOLI, L. (2002): Flexible Hierarchies and Dynamic Disorder: The Drug Distribution System in Frankfurt and Milan. Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy. “The “Invisible Hand” of the Market: Illegal Drug Trade in Germany, Italy, and Russia”, Venice: 12th Annual Conference of the European Society of Social Drug Research, 5.10.2001 (Paoli); K.Krajewski “Drug Trafficking in Poland”, Cross-Border Crime in a Changing Europe (2001).

⁵⁷ Bulgarian drug organizations resemble the organizational schemes of South-American heroin organizations (loose confederations of several organizations and dealers), which smuggled and sold in the USA during the new heroin wave in the 1990s.

⁵⁸ The response to the question of why Bulgarian drug trafficking and drug distribution became part of organized crime is related to the genesis of organized crime. This text is unable to consider the details of the emergence and development of existing forms of organized crime. For the sake of better understanding the interpretation of drug distribution schematically offered here, the prerequisites for the genesis of big Bulgarian criminal structures will be outlined below. 1) The structure of the judiciary established in the Bulgarian constitution at the start of transition included three fairly independent units—court, prosecution, and investigation. Given that the balance between units is disrupted and legal mechanisms are imperfect, the prevention, disclosure, and penalization of criminal acts or breaches of law could not be wholly efficient. 2) Existence of a “natural backbone” for organized crime in the face of large and solid sports communities (trained in the special network of sports schools formerly supported by the state). 3) Unique opportunities provided by the embargo against Yugoslavia (imposed because of the war there) This plays the role that “prohibition” did in the USA. This facilitates the criminal groups with huge financial resources and international channels. As a result apart from enormous contraband in former Yugoslavia, many side lines are developed ranging from car thefts and smuggling mass consumption goods to power insurance. 4) Bulgaria was among the weakest states in Eastern Europe through the years of 1990-1997 and the new political elites had neither the time nor the resources to counter big criminal leaders. 5) After the state became stable in 1997-1998, the condition of law enforcement and the judicial system allowed for the big organized structures to adapt, and to redirect their capital into “gray and pure white enterprises.”

Historically, police, and special units monitoring drug related crimes around the world have been able to collect the most information about the lowest levels (e.g. the retail sellers), less information about the “suppliers” (the middle level), while data about the highest layers of the drug hierarchy is scarce and hypothetical. During the collection of primary information, we came across the following Bulgarian paradox. A lot was known about all “layers” of drug-distribution practically by everybody—drug-addicts, dealers, suppliers, police, and even journalists. It turned out that the higher the level in question, the clearer the picture. The reason for not having accurate information about the lowest level is pretty simple—the great variety of players and the general state of chaos, exacerbated by high rates of turnover among the dealers and constant organizational changes affecting the middle layer. In addition, there is a certain overlapping of functions, and a lack of clearly defined “roles.”⁵⁹

Our initial assumption that the stories about the “highest levels” of the drug hierarchy are the product of journalistic imagination was again proved untrue. Drug-dealers and police officers alike confirmed—with no precautions—which of the big drug bosses controls what territory and what their status is in the overall organization. In reality, everybody spoke about everybody and everything, and the major problem appeared to be how to decide where reality ended and imagination came into play. Evidently, factors like the **country’s small size** (its overall consumption equals that of a German or American town with a population of 200,000), **the transition from one social model to another** (after the collapse of the Soviet system), **the traditionally nepotistic society, “the culture of gossip,” and other socio-cultural specifics create a unique atmosphere of “know” and “feel no consequences.”**

Although those at the top of the Bulgarian drug-business seem to have been known for years, there is no evidence of their activity—hence, there are no consequences for them. This probably preconditions their behavior—they avoid extreme actions and explain the whole situation in terms of, “let us all do our business; we satisfy certain market demands; the police talk to the media about us; the media write and sell their circulations, etc.”

We may need to focus further on the specifics of Bulgarian organized crime. We believe that organized crime of the Italian, Latin American, Russian, Caucasian, Turkish, and other types, as described in textbooks, could not possibly exist in Bulgaria, mainly due the country’s size. In order for a big criminal organization **to survive in a “shallow” and “primitive” market** (there is hardly any high tech production left), **it has to operate as a network of many small organizations.** Certain member organizations function as regular commercial companies, performing a variety of roles, from criminal to fully legal ones. In the peculiar Bulgarian cultural environment, purely market relations are intertwined with friendly, kinship and clientele relationships, making it hard to draw a line between the gray and the black.

⁵⁹ However paradoxical it may seem, this traditional Balkan chaos creates possibilities for a special kind of flexibility and adaptability of the country’s drug distribution.

The typical model used by big criminal structures has bosses from the top participating in dozens of commercial companies of various configurations, including (as partners) people at their level, as well as middle-level people. These firms own other firms, and they, in turn, own others, thus forming a network of which small parts may be sacrificed without losing the whole. When a certain section of the network is destroyed, its functions are taken over by other sections. There are many cases when, after dozens of dealers and their bosses have been arrested, the drug trade in the affected area is restored at its previous level within several days. A prominent Bulgarian boss with mathematical background compares his organization to “the operation of the Internet.”

We must emphasize that Bulgarian drug distribution is not simply one of the many sectors of organized crime.⁶⁰ Compared with the other forms of organized crime in Bulgaria, **it is the best integrated into the international criminal organizations, it has the largest number of participants, and it has accordingly developed as the most sophisticated hierarchical criminal structure in the country.** Bulgarian drug-related organizations are also well-linked to the remaining forms of organized crime in the country—from the traffic of stolen automobiles to illegal emigration and the export of archeological artifacts. On the other hand, there is no evidence so far confirming the hypothesis that the drug networks use or have used their considerable resources to exert systematic influence on Bulgarian judicial and political elites.⁶¹ **Therefore, no grounds are there to define the existing network of drug organizations as mafia.** Nevertheless, from what has been said, conclusions can be drawn that **drug-related crime in Bulgaria determines the structure of the Bulgarian organized crime** and deserves special attention.

The future of drug distribution can be traced into three most probable scenarios, which naturally may not cover all existing possibilities. The first scenario, provisionally called “**optimistic**,” assumes that state and civil organizations will propose massive methadone programmes in the capital city and in the most inflicted towns. They will be very likely to push out of the “drug market” a significant number of drug addicts and will abruptly cut down the profits of organized drug-related crime. This will

⁶⁰ Academic and political debate has not arrived at a unanimous definition of *organized crime*. American and North European scholars often equate organized crime to the provision of illegal goods and services: Frank Hagan claims that a consensus exists among American criminologists that organized crime involves a continuing enterprise operating in a rational fashion and focused toward obtaining profits through illegal activities (Hagan, 1983). If this definition is accepted, it is obvious that illegal drug production and trafficking represents a form of organized crime. However, many scholars and particularly politicians interpret *organized crime* not so much as a set of illegal activities, but rather as a set of large-scale organizations that are either illegal per se or are predominantly involved in illegal activities. This second interpretation is well illustrated by the following definition: “organized crime consists of organizations that have durability, hierarchy and involvement in a multiplicity of criminal activities. The Mafia provides the most enduring and significant form of organized crime” (Reuter, 1985, p. 175). In our discussion of the specifics of Bulgarian drugs distribution we have applied this second definition of organized crime.

⁶¹ Some very drastic examples should not be missed here, which give rise to doubts among crime experts. The most outstanding case here was the “Opitzvet case” over which the court decided that 330 kg of ready amphetamine base and 666 kg of benzilmetilketon discovered (see first part for more detail) were meant for “personal use.”

additionally deepen the “crisis in heroin distribution” and lead to the collapse of the already loose confederation of drug organizations, weakened by the constantly degrading quality of street heroin. At the same time the bodies responsible for fighting drug distribution will manage the ongoing restructuring to set up an efficient system to respond to new drug-related threats. As a result, the risk related to drug abuse will subside.

The second, “**realistic**” scenario, takes as its starting point that the current crisis in the heroin related market is a normal cyclical event similar to recurring crises observed in the USA and Western Europe. Unfortunately, a large heroin market has already been established, and it will not take long to reinvest and secure its old, high profits. The major problem of countries like Bulgaria is that geographically it stands on the heroin road to Europe. The close proximity of big heroin producers makes the fast import of quality drugs possible, which can bring about a new heroin outbreak within months.⁶²

The third, “**pessimistic**” scenario draws on the already described possibility of an outbreak of synthetic drugs. If we accept that a “normalization” of the heroin distribution is possible and that it accomplishes the establishment of a new big “market of amphetamines,” it can be expected that the relatively low drug use in our country will reach the levels of the most affected countries in Eastern Europe (e.g. the Czech Republic). Further contributing to this pessimistic prognosis is the fact that few have managed to “walk out” of the high levels of organized crime in Bulgaria. The reason, as demonstrated by Bulgarian experience, so far has been that former drug bosses manage to sustain their “white business” only by keeping “one foot back in the black one.” Developments in the past two to three years have proved that going out of the “black zone” only enables new players to gain access to abandoned resources; and the least that could happen to the former drug boss would be to lose a “white” business secured with so much effort. Along these lines, it can be hypothesized that, given the present condition of the Bulgarian state, the black sector is the guarantee for access to the power instruments without which there is no survival for anyone with a gray-black past.

⁶² Afghan poppy fields and Turkish heroin laboratories.