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# EVOLUTION OF THE ALBANIAN ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS

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FABIAN ZHILLA

BESFORT LAMALLARI



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research on organized crime in Albania has been very scarce because of the difficulty and dangerousness that they pose in terms of data collection. This research study is the first of its kind. In this context, special thanks go to all the collaborators of this project - the prosecutors, lawyers, judges, representatives of civil society organizations, investigative journalists as well as State Police representatives who had the courage to agree to contribute to this research with their experience. We would also like to thank the Open Society Foundation for Albania for supporting this research study and particularly Executive Director Mr. Andi Dobrushki and Program Manager Ms. Ilda Bakshevani for the coordination, assistance and high-quality feedback in the course of the research but also on the final draft. A significant contribution to the quality of this research study came from reviewer Nita Shala and other reviewers who, because of their profession, asked to remain anonymous. We would also like to thank the Canadian Institute of Technology (CIT) for the expertise it provided and particularly the students of this university for the contribution to the organization and presentation of the research findings.

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**June 08, 2016** – Members of the Çapja family shoot at police in Elbasan.

**May 20, 2016** – the review of self-declarations by Members of Parliament shows that there are five MPs of the left-wing coalition and five MPs of the right-wing coalition that have criminal records.

**May 15, 2016** – The Albanian Police declare as wanted the former Director of Road Transport of Saranda, Klemend Balili, known by the media as “Escobar of the Balkans”.

**April 18, 2016** - Emiliano Shullazi, Blerim Shullazi and Gilmano Dani arrested on charges of “Forcing through blackmail or violence to give out the property” and “destruction of property by explosives”.

**February 03, 2016** – three people killed and five others wounded in a bar in Elbasan by unidentified persons dressed in police uniforms.

**January 14, 2015** – Cocaine laboratory discovered in Xibraka, Elbasan.

**June 24, 2015** – Rapid Intervention Police Officer Ibrahim Basha killed in Lazarat.

**September 05, 2015** – Socialist MP Grup kicks out MP Armando Prenga for his involvement in an armed incident in the city of Laç.

**September 08, 2015** – SP MP Arben Ndoka relinquishes his MP mandate for reasons related to a criminal record in Italy.

**November 26, 2015** – a former MP of the Democratic Christian Party, Mark Frroku, relinquishes his mandate until the completion of a trial relating to some criminal offences in Belgium.

**January 25, 2014** – Julian Sinanaj, suspect in the execution of 27 paid killings, arrested

**June 26, 2014** – Mafia-style execution of banker Artan Santo at the former Block area in Tirana.

**September 09, 2011** – Judge Skerdilajd Konomi loses his life after a TNT explosion in his vehicle in the main street in Vlora.

**October 25, 2010** – Chair of Tërthorë Commune in Kukës, Remzi Veseli, killed.

**May 02, 2009** – SP MP Fatmir Xhindi killed near his house in Roskovec, Fier.

**June 18, 2009** – Chair of Christian Democratic Party in Malësi e Madhe Aleks Keka executed by explosives in his car.

*‘Politics’, ‘business’ and ‘organized crime’ – are the key denominators of the above episodes, which, like many other similar ones, have been blows against public safety and a challenge to the state. Such episodes have always been followed by harsh debates, political rhetoric or even political or legal action. Attention has tended to focus closely on the consequences rather than the circumstances that created the space and opportunity for the criminals to use excessive violence. Unfortunately, acts such as the above are not a new phenomenon; executions from bullets, explosives or beheadings by criminal gangs have happened previously and have left their mark on the collective memory. However, in Albania, history continues to repeat itself.*

In December 2015, Albania approved one of the harshest criminal laws in Europe against the involvement of incriminated persons in politics and decision-making. The so-called law on “decriminalization” was an effort to correct a phenomenon that had flourished because of the favourable terrain created over the years in this country. In order to better understand these factors and the nature of criminal organizations in Albania, from their emergence to the present day, we collected, processed and analysed qualitative and quantitative data of a social, economic and political nature, from 1990 to date. From a review of a considerable number of judicial decisions from the courts of different districts, instances and periods, we were able to provide a clear overview of the emergence, development and sophistication of 50 organized criminal structures operating in the form of armed gangs, criminal organizations and structured groups. Various experts such as judges, prosecutors, lawyers, police officers and investigative journalists provided their views on the nature and features of the different criminal organizations. This research, which was carried out on a national basis, is supported by five case studies of criminal organizations operating in different localities and periods.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of this research is to highlight the emergence and evolution of organized criminal structures during the period 1990-2015 through a better understanding of the typology of Albanian criminal organizations, from their emergence at the beginning of the 1990s. This research aims to show the degree of sophistication of organized crime and the current situation in some of the country's main cities. The research study also identifies and analyses some of the economic and social factors that expose Albanian society to organized crime.

This study is essential to further research in this field but also serves as an analytical platform to inform policies that fight organized crime at the national and international level. This study comes at a critical moment with the "transition" that the rule of law is going through in Albania, such as the approval of the constitutional package of justice reform and the need to approve over 40 other laws in support of the reform. Recently approved have been *"On the legitimacy of persons elected, appointed or exercising public functions"* and *"On the organization and functioning of institutions in the fight against corruption and organized crime"*, as well as the Independent Investigative Unit. At the same time, of special importance has been the creation of bodies for the investigation of crime such as the National Bureau of Investigation.

In order to understand the circumstances in which the first forms of organized crime in the country emerged, we analysed various social, political and economic factors that were present after the change of the political system. Factors such as low per capita income (less than 20 dollars per month per capita in 1992), the almost threefold shrinkage of active enterprises (from 6,607 before 1993 to 2,759 in 1997), the weakness of state institutions in the face of rising illegal activities (average coefficient of criminal offences for the period 1994-2014 was estimated at 170.7<sup>1</sup>), the presence and collapse of pyramid schemes (a total of 1.5 billion dollars invested), and the looting of armaments depots (550,000 weapons freely circulating) caused a massive wave of emigration (a shrinkage by 10 per cent of the general population during 1994-2014), chaos, feelings of insecurity, the establishment of parallel structures ('rescue committees'), corruption, criminality and the flourishing of organized criminal structures. Those who benefited from this favourable terrain were individuals with criminal backgrounds and armed gangs, which operated in a complex relationship with politics and business.

The study, after highlighting forms of organized crime from the time of the communist regime, such as the special unit "101K" for the smuggling of cigarettes, explains how former agents of the communist secret service - the Sigurimi, military officers, police officers, drivers who had had the opportunity to travel abroad as well as former sportsmen exploited their education, knowledge and connections with the diaspora to benefit from illicit activities such as smuggling and trafficking. Certain state and political segments, whether directly or indirectly, also became part of these illicit channels. In the course of the political transition, criminal organizations started to display different features over time, moving gradually towards sophistication.

Because of the special features of the evolution of criminal structures over the last few decades, the research is divided into two time periods (1990-2003 and 2004-2015) to aid understanding of their characteristics. The most dangerous criminal structures that operated in Albania until 2003 were reviewed in order to comprehend their nature as well as the factors that allowed and encouraged their emergence and rise. An analysis of judicial decisions against the leaders and members of these criminal structures provided an overview of certain characteristics such as knowledge/ties between them, the level of armaments and violence used, their interaction with law enforcement agencies, the prosecutor's office and the courts, as well as other features. Moreover, statements by experts and written sources testify to their ties with certain political parties and politicians in the country during the period

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1. The criminality coefficient is a parameter that measures criminality in a given environment in relation to the population of that environment; in other words, it shows the degree of criminal offences (crimes or wrongdoings) against the number of people. As a rule, it expresses the number of crimes per 100,000 inhabitants. This is a calculation by the author based on data from the Ministry of Justice (Statistical Yearbooks 2004-2014) on the number of crimes and criminal offences, as well as on data from INSTAT on the population (which has been calculated based on population projections from the 2011 census data).

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under analysis. Political party affiliation and interaction with politics was apparent with some of the armed gangs operating in regions such as Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Vlora, Korça, Berat, Fier, Lushnje and Tropoja.

Around 2003, the early forms of organized crime in the country began to evolve and adjust to the renewal of institutions, the enhancement of investigations, prosecutions and the fight against them. Predominantly after 2005, the former structures of armed gangs and criminal organizations were replaced gradually by criminal networks made up of autonomous groups that were very efficient and fluid, with roles and responsibilities in certain segments of illicit criminal activity.

## Risk Analysis (2004-2015)

From 2003, organized criminal structures in the country started to become more sophisticated in response to the gradual strengthening of state institutions.

Some indicators of sophistication included the diversification of illegal activities they were involved in, the adjustment of horizontal patterns in the form of criminal networks, the increasing use of coded language, the use of special mobile phone numbers activated only for carrying out trafficking and the use of different couriers.

Later, from 2008 onwards, there was a noticeable strengthening of the position of Albanian groups in international trafficking networks, especially narcotics networks. Trafficking networks started to include roles not encountered before 2003, such as the guarantor (ensurer) and the funder (investor).

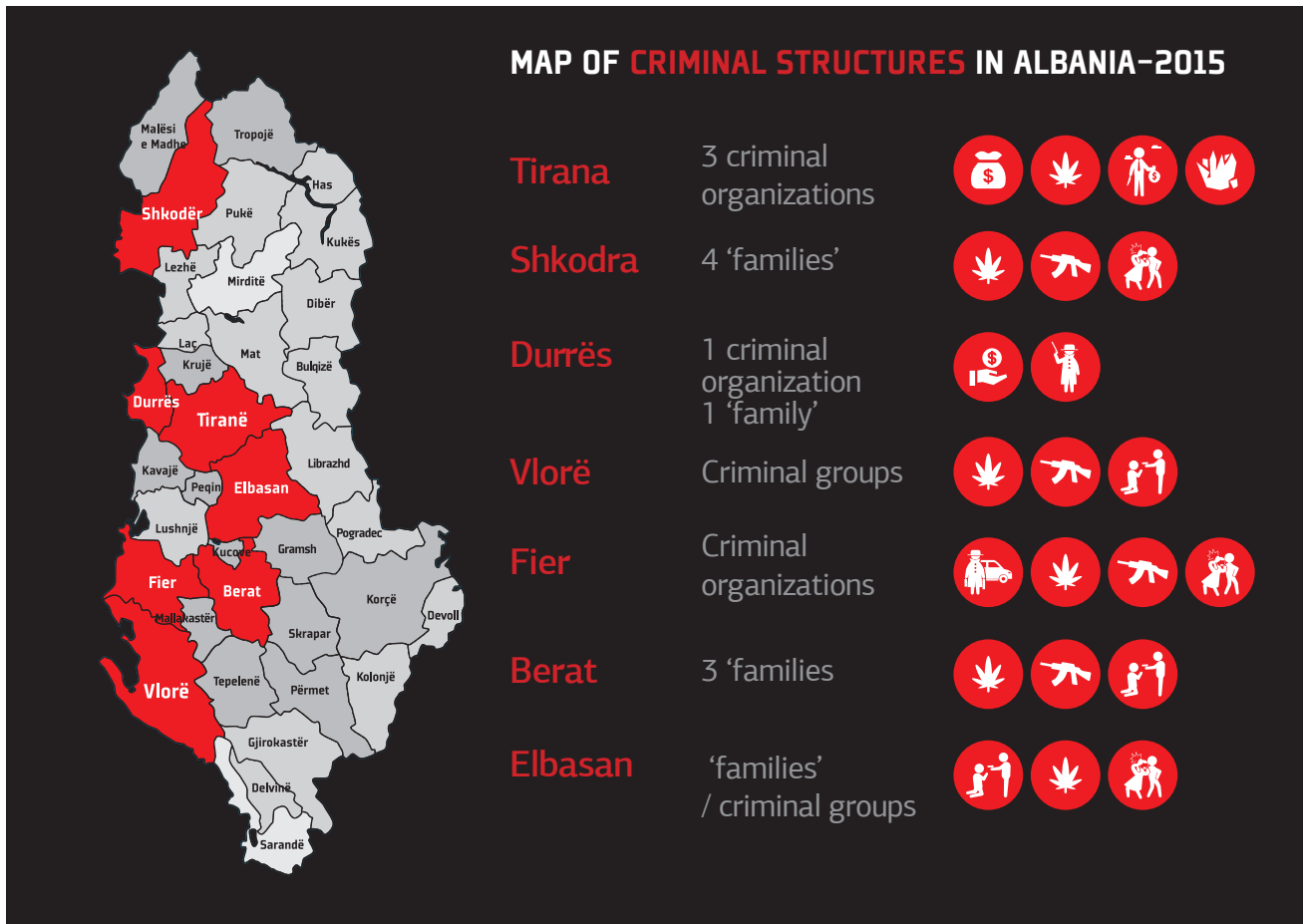
Another characteristic that appeared at this time was the use of legitimate businesses by organized crime as protective “façades” to hide and mask the trafficking of cocaine and other drugs.

During the period 2005-2015, one of the most widespread forms of cannabis trafficking was transporting it by small fishing boats in the open sea. Considerable amounts of cannabis were also transported via air routes, with instances of the use of light sports planes being documented in the media.

Another tendency towards sophistication was the shift from criminal groups targeting and striking against state institutions to creating strong ties with state segments, thus influencing both local and national politics.

Another aspect of the sophistication of criminal organizations was the integration of their criminal proceeds into legitimate businesses and their involvement in policymaking. The funding of elections with proceeds from illicit or suspicious activities warrants serious attention from political actors, law enforcement institutions and Albanian society.





## Map of Organized Crime Groups (2015)

This research also gives an overview of the current criminal situation (2015), highlighting the most problematic criminal organizations in the country's main cities. The research study points out that almost all of the main cities of the country have structured criminal groups that have territory control and focus mainly on the trafficking of narcotics, extortion and debt collection (loan sharking).

Based on findings from interviews with experts and those informed about organized crime at the local level, the research study provides a description of the most powerful criminal organizations that currently operate in some of the main cities of the country.

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## Tirana

It is thought that there are at least three very powerful structured criminal organizations in Tirana that began their criminal activity early on and managed to resist arrest because of the sophistication of their ties with business and corrupt segments of the state. The first organization reportedly had its beginnings in 1994 with the main object of its activity being the laundering of criminal proceeds of international mafia. The second organization is suspected to have at least 27 members and its main target is the trafficking of narcotics, extortion and debt collection for third parties. The third organization is thought to have fewer members and to be less active, but with significant investments in minerals.

## Shkodër

It is believed that there are at least four large “families”<sup>2</sup> operating in the city of Shkodra that are involved in criminal activity. These four families are mainly involved in the trafficking of narcotics, arms and human beings. Experts suspect that Shkodra may become the future “hangar” for growing cannabis and that this change may lead to the further strengthening of these criminal organizations. This empowerment could seriously jeopardize the stability of this area, given the fragile social equilibrium in the district.

## Durrës

It is alleged that many criminal groups from all over the country have investments in the city of Durrës, and the city serves to some extent as a meeting point or even shelter for many of them. It is thought that a criminal organization run by individuals with a criminal history may have been reactivated. It is also believed that Durrës is home to a known “family” in the crime world, with influence not only in commercial activities, but also social ones.

## Vlora

A characteristic of criminal groups from the city of Vlora is that, unlike groups that were active between 1992 and 1999 (Zani Çausi, Kakami, Gaxhai, etc.), there are no more divided territories. It has been noted that while murders in the city of Vlora are numerous, they are generally not over turf issues but over areas of influence in international trafficking networks for narcotics and arms to EU countries, mainly Spain and Italy.

## Fier

Criminal organizations operating in the city of Fier, according to the majority of interviewees, are thought to be among the most sophisticated and most sustainable throughout the history of political transition in Albania. It is supposed that criminal groups in Fier, unlike those in other cities, are based not only on blood and social ties, but above all on community ties (e.g. Kosovar and Cham communities). It is thought that recently, high profile figures of organized crime with a criminal history and known leaders of criminal organizations in EU countries (Greece, Italy, Belgium and Spain) have invested their criminal proceeds in the city and are thought to be considerably expanding their influence in political parties, especially small ones.

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2. The term “families” used in respect of organized crime indicates those criminal groups whose leading organizational structure is based on family ties according to a family hierarchy, starting from the head of the family (father or elder brother), followed by the younger brothers and cousins, down to social circles that mainly rely on neighbours.

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## Berat

The city of Berat is considered to be a city where organized crime has invested for a long time and continues to be present. It is suspected that criminal organizations in the city are mainly local and based mainly on strong family and social ties. It is rumoured that at least three “families” with strong criminal backgrounds have influence in the city.

## Elbasan

The murders of February 2016 showed that the city of Elbasan remains a hot spot where the activity of organized crime is still present despite the dismantling of the two notorious gangs of “Mandela” and “Tan Kateshi”. A dangerous trend noticed in the city is that organizations of criminal groups there are being imitated by groups of youths in the surrounding rural areas. Considering the economic situation and education in the suburbs, there is a risk of a shift of criminal organizations with hierarchical structures to rural areas.

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# Summary of Main Findings

- Research on organized crime presents difficulties with the collection of data because participants in interviews are often reluctant to collaborate.
- There is a lack of data, research studies and official reports with regard to organized crime in Albania that has been made public.
- Low per capita income (under \$20/month per capita in 1992), the threefold reduction in active enterprises, the tripling of unemployment levels, the shrinkage by up to 10 per cent in the general population due to massive emigration fluxes, oil smuggling during 1992-1996, the disappearance of about \$1.5 billion from the pyramid schemes and the looting of armaments depots in 1997, have all induced feelings of public insecurity and encouraged illegal activities to flourish, including those relating to organized crime

- At the beginning of the 1990s, corruption and the infiltration of organized crime into weak Albanian institutions ensured the untouchability of figures involved in organized crime. A large number of these had worked in the past as secret service agents, officers of the Republican Guard, or even drivers or sportsmen during the previous regime.
- Organized crime, business, and politics have become intertwined in a complicated relationship of common interests and exploitation for mutual benefit.
- Criminal organizations have ties with politics, and the latter interferes by neutralizing law enforcement agencies through the appointment of trusted persons or party militants.
- The best known form of cooperation between criminal organizations and state bodies is corruption, especially in the justice system. According to interviewees, this is not a local phenomenon but is widespread in all those districts where organized crime is problematic.
- The following represent some of the nuances of the relationship between politics and crime, which has become more sophisticated over the years: extortion of revenues from businesses through fines or “protection” from other gangs; support for political candidates or scaring opponents in elections; the spoiling of opposition party rallies; the manipulation of votes and the funding of electoral campaigns in exchange for immunity from criminal prosecution as well as other benefits. Political parties have benefited from funds from criminal network figures.
- There is a disturbing trend of criminal organizations using business as a “façade” to hide criminal activity. This phenomenon appears more widespread in the area of cocaine trafficking.
- In different regions of the country, rivalry between armed gangs, although with turf control as the main motive, has often displayed political leanings. Members of criminal groups have served as commissioners in voting centres. In spite of the lack of investigations or judicial decisions, MPs and ministers have been the target of public accusations over their ties with organized crime.
- Organized crime has managed to neutralize society even in terms of freedom of speech, thus seriously violating the culture of reporting wrongdoings.

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- Although judicial decisions may refer to the luxury vehicles, assets and arsenals of sophisticated arms possessed by and used by defendants, it is disturbing that investigations and judicial decisions do not go deeper into the sources of such income, even though members of these criminal organizations have mainly been convicted of criminal offences such as murder and serious injury.
  - In the city of Tirana, at present, it is thought that at least three very powerful criminal organizations have been operating and extending their criminal activity for many years.
  - In the city of Shkodra, it is suspected that at least four large “families” are involved in the trafficking of mainly narcotics, arms and human beings. This district may replace “Lazarat” in terms of becoming the future “hangar” of cannabis cultivation.
  - In the city of Durrës, it is alleged that many criminal groups from all over the country may have investments, and that the city serves to some extent as a meeting point or even shelter for many of them.
  - Criminal organizations operating in the city of Fier are thought to be among the most sophisticated and sustainable organizations throughout the course of political transition in Albania.
  - In the city of Berat, it is suspected that at least three “families” with strong criminal backgrounds are exerting their influence.
  - It is suspected that numerous murders in the city of Vlora have been committed over areas of influence in international networks of narcotics and arms in EU countries, mainly Spain and Italy.
  - In Elbasan, it has been noted that groups of youths from surrounding rural areas are imitating criminal group organizations in the city.
  - Lastly, criminal organizations dealing with trafficking of hard drugs are using legitimate businesses to “cover up” their criminal activity.

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# Recommendations

1. Consider the possibility of intervening in the Criminal Code in order to introduce a new provision that condemns any form of mafia-type association (similar to Art 416 of the Italian Criminal Code) whose members try to benefit from the intimidating power of their connections in order to secure incomes and benefits such as monetary sums, control of businesses, licences and concessions, as well as securing votes during electoral processes.
2. Reform legislation to do with political parties and funding of electoral campaigns and political parties, in order to prevent funding from organized crime or suspicious sources.
3. Establish special interdisciplinary “anti-mafia” bodies to include experts from different fields (lawyers, finance specialists, IT specialists, etc.).
4. Strengthen investigations at the local level and include a serious crime prosecutor’s office in every district prosecutor’s office.
5. Strike corruptive forms and infiltration by organized crime at all levels, from those by public employees at the basic level, to those in managerial positions, leading officials and policymakers.
6. Establish databases with regard to the activities of organized crime and intensify investigations, increasing the effect of sequestration and confiscation decisions on assets of criminal origin; manage seized assets more efficiently and effectively.
7. Intervene immediately with facilitating and favourable socio-economic policies for the areas most affected by organized crime activities, as well as those that are the most remote and the most vulnerable.
8. Strengthen cooperation between state agencies and civil society to raise awareness about and prevent organized crime.
9. Build partnerships of specialized state agencies with experts and independent organizations in order to conduct research and analysis and draft evidence-based policies against organized crime.
10. Establish and update a unified database that prosecutors and judges can consult regularly on criminal precedents that should be taken into consideration and influence the level of punishment.
11. Review existing non-transparent internal regulations and practices in order to guarantee as complete access as possible to judicial decisions and files, especially when they are sought for research purposes by higher education institutions, civil society, the media and specialists in the field, while ensuring the anonymity of data to the extent that it is legally necessary.
12. Review the Criminal Code, specifically articles 237 and 238, to include as a criminal offence any physical or psychological attack against investigative journalists/civil society/researchers who carry out investigations or reports/studies in connection with corruption and organized crime. This is based on the fact that the role of civil society and the media are public roles when they concern issues in the public interest.

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# Methodology

It should be noted from the outset the difficulties encountered during the collection of data for this research study. From the standpoint of research experience, the interviews highlighted that criminal organizations today have managed to create a situation of fear in the community and this serves to weaken the culture of reporting wrongdoing in society and to neutralize law enforcement agencies. At present, there are criminal organizations that have managed to engage in politics, business, media and even social and education activities. Many of them control territories, have considerable investments and influence Albanian politics in an active manner. This means that powerful segments of organized crime are able to monitor and control appointments and, therefore, information too. As a result, many individuals who were asked to be interviewed hesitated or provided general responses, or refused. Others sent their responses electronically in order to avoid identification. In other words, the influence of organized crime has managed to neutralize society to the level of freedom of expression, thus seriously impeding the culture of punishability.

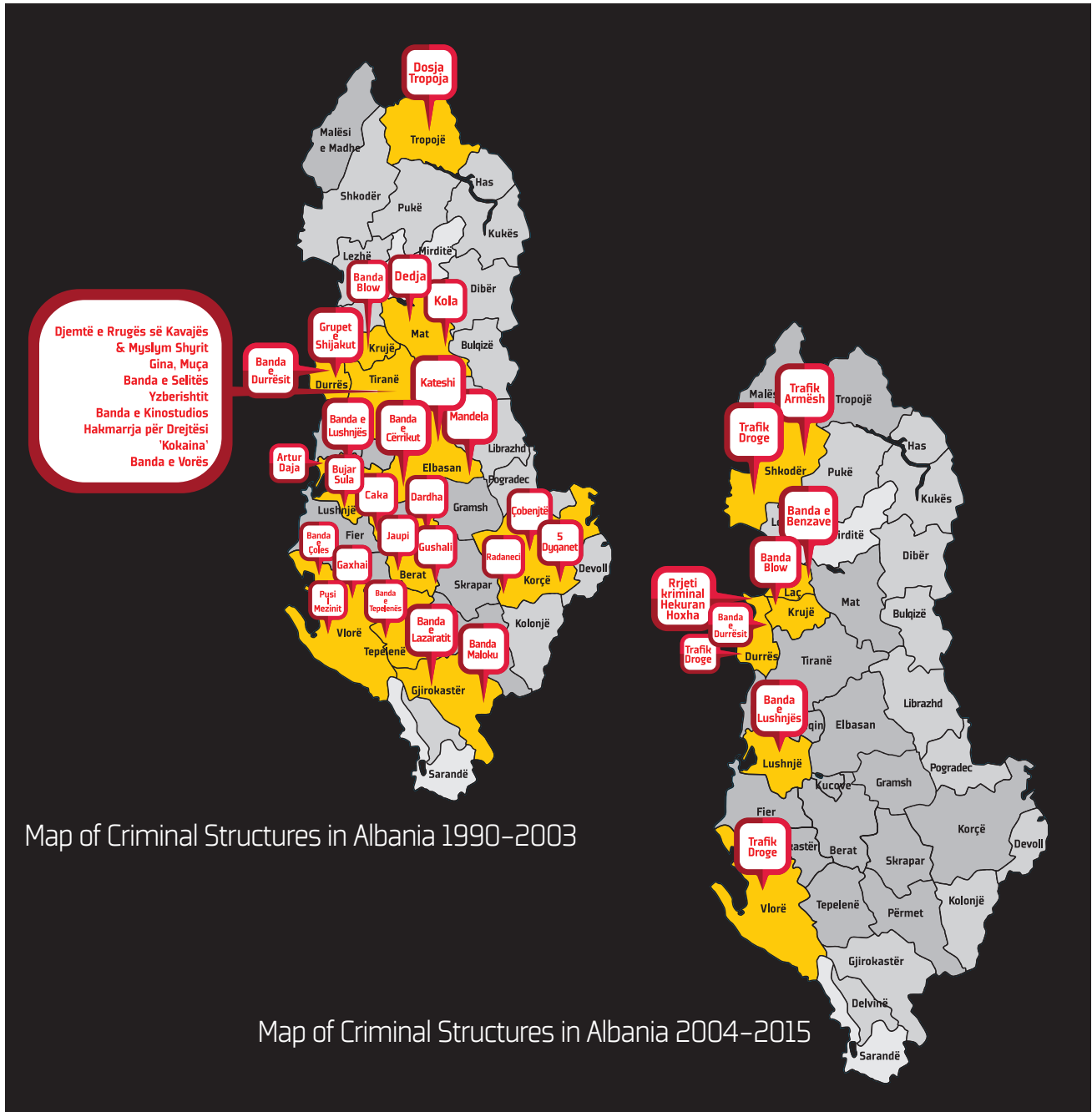
The study relied on qualitative methods in order to collect data that would enable enhanced knowledge of the context and sophisticated social factors that it would not be possible to capture through quantitative methods. Nevertheless, qualitative methods also present difficulties that may affect the analysis, such as small samples or the dependence on interviewees.

## The research relied on three main resources:

- 1)** Analysis of 71 decisions of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes for about 50 criminal structures, based on geographic and time divisions that would allow a complete analysis of the development of organized crime during the period 1990-2015. We chose to analyse 25 criminal organizations operating in the period 1990-2003 and 25 criminal organizations operating in the period 2004-2014. It should be noted that for these periods, the research study refers to the date the court decisions were issued. In other words, the activities of these criminal organizations would be somewhat earlier than when the decision was issued (e.g. the decision on one organization was issued in 2012 but its operations extended over the period 2007-2009). At present, there are many criminal groups that are still under adjudication and are not included in this report, such as the “TNT Gang” and the “Gang of Paid Killers”.
- 2)** Analysis of about 84 interviews, 44 of which were conducted in 2014. These were supported by 40 special semi-structured interviews over the period 2015-2016 with experts (judges, prosecutors, lawyers, former judges, and former police officers), investigative journalists, and representatives of civil society in the cities of Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Shkodra, Korça, Lushnja and Vlora.
- 3)** Analysis of five case studies on specific groups based on criminal organizations belonging to the two research phases (1990-2005 and 2005-2015). In order to better comprehend the social context and dynamics of the time, these cases were taken from five different regions of the country: Shkodra (North); Elbasan (Midlands); Korça (Southeast); Lushnja and Vlora (Central/South).

# Map of Analysed Criminal Structures (1990–2015)

Below is a map of criminal structures, based on the analysis of 71 judicial decisions for the two analysed periods.





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# Theoretical Definition

With regard to the theoretical definition of organized crime, the research relied on the work of Klaus Von Lampe (2016) “Organized Crime: Analysing Illegal Activities, Criminal Structures, and Extra-Legal Governance”. It should be noted that there are numerous discussions and definitions in the literature with regard to the categorization of criminal organizations. At present, there is no agreement on an accurate typology of the criminal organization. This is because criminal organizations are fluid and diverse depending on the criminal activity and are very much influenced by the political and social context in which they develop. Nevertheless, Von Lampe (2016: 96-101), in reference to the current literature, notes that there are four categorizations of criminal organizations that can be made according to:

- 1) Structure** (*standard hierarchy, local hierarchy, grouping hierarchy, central grouping and criminal network*);
- 2) Activity** (*adventure, specialty, project and business*);
- 3) Socio-political context** (*the structure of these organizations depends on ties with communities and state bodies*). The organizations that create ties with state institutions go through three phases: a) *predatory (relying on the use of violence)*; b) *parasite (they corrupt state institutions to circumvent the law)*, and c) *symbiotic (the criminal organization is integrated into legitimate business and political systems)* (Von Lampe 2016:99);
- 4) Function** (*entrepreneurial; associational; quasi-governmental*).

In the analysis of Albanian organizations, the research has relied mainly on the fourth categorization (function) as this analytical approach is better able to direct the research in order to understand the risk level of the criminal organization and its organizational patterns. It should be stressed that the three typologies divided by function for analytical purposes have their common points and characteristics. According to Von Lampe (2016: 101-103), the characteristics of each type are as follows:

The criminal organization of the *Entrepreneurial type* is a structure that enables its members to take part in a “market” of criminal activity and create material revenues through unlawful forms and means.

Criminal organizations of the *Associational type*, unlike the entrepreneurial type, have as their main purpose the strengthening of ties between group members, to improve the status of the organization and to serve as organizational platforms based on illegal principles. In other words, the main difference between the first and the second type is that in the first the organization is only for purposes of material gain, while in the second, the purpose of the organization is to strengthen ties between members and serve as a protection tool against their opponents.

The *Quasi-governmental* criminal organizations are more structured organizations that operate in the given territory that they control. One of the distinguishing features of this type of criminal organization is the “quasi state” function that it assumes by offering services through criminal tools such as violence, pressure, murder, etc., in order to secure control of the territory in which it operates. This will include the implementation of deals through violence, provision of security for businesses, extortion, resolution of conflicts between parties, and paid killings. These organizations create ties with the political elite and law enforcement agencies in order to circumvent the law and neutralize the state’s hits against them

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According to Von Lampe (2016:104-106), there are three basic structural forms that regulate relations between members, according to which criminal organizations function. In order to avoid conceptual confusion, the above division by function is useful for understanding the goals that to some extent orient the operational structure of the criminal group, which we discuss below.

**First**, the Market operational form creates a closed cycle in the form of a market whereby participants in the market collaborate and conduct commercial exchanges of criminal services and products which are nonetheless independent of one another. It is precisely this freedom that individuals have to negotiate with one another, without being conditioned by the rules of the organization, that creates the operational form of a market of illegal goods and services.

**The second** operational form is known as Hierarchic. In this organizational form, the members of the organization operate according to a certain order and agenda, depending on the instructions of the leader. The members of the organization do not act on their own behalf but only for the purposes of and on behalf of the criminal organization. Nevertheless, there are also small organizations that are run in a collegial form, whereby duties and roles are divided jointly.

**The third** form of interaction between members of an organization is known as the Criminal Network. This is very similar to the operational form of the Market, because individuals here come together or interact in an autonomous manner for criminal purposes. However, the essential difference between the two is that in the Criminal Network the members or small criminal groups that take part in these networks give priority to preserving the cohesion of the criminal network and not their own personal interests.



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# **CHAPTER 1.**

BEGINNINGS OF CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION  
IN ALBANIA (1990 - 2003)

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# 1. 1. CRIMINAL STRUCTURE

At the beginning of the political transition, ties between state structures and organized crime began to emerge and strengthen in the country. Thus, the international embargo imposed on the former Yugoslavia in 1992 was exploited as a golden opportunity to benefit from oil smuggling through the northern border of the Republic of Albania. Criminal elements, segments of the state administration and politicians hurried to benefit as much and as fast as possible from the opportunity that had emerged. Oil, cigarettes, coffee, aluminum profiles, livestock and many other goods were smuggled every single day also through the border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece. The opening up to the West was accompanied immediately by massive waves of emigration, smuggling of clandestines and trafficking of women for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Since the 1960s, in agreement with the Italian mafia and with the approval of the Political Bureau of the communist regime, agents of the Sigurimi (the communist secret service) and officials of Border Police had smuggled cigarettes across the Adriatic Sea. For this purpose, a special unit of border police officers had been established and functioned; the “101K” Special Unit was settled in the village of Rrashbull, Durrës, which was also where the warehouses for preserving smuggled cigarettes were located. Later on, the dissolution of the Sigurimi in July 1991 led to about two thirds of its agents losing their jobs and seeking alternative ways to make a living and secure a source of income. Some of them drew the attention of Europol, which reported the involvement of former officers of the military, police and informative services in activities of organized crime in European Union countries. A part of the new economic elite in the country included persons who had worked as drivers of different institutions during the previous regime. In collaboration with elements of the Albanian diaspora, they continued freely to smuggle different goods. It has been reported, for instance, that drivers of the state-owned transport company “Exports’ Park,” which used to transport agricultural goods, minerals and cigarettes, were transporting different goods under the nose of state authorities<sup>3</sup>. Interviewees affirm that part of this contingent included even former sportsmen of different disciplines, such as wrestling, etc<sup>4</sup>. One thing that all these persons had in common was their specific knowledge, previous contacts with the West and Albanian diaspora, as well as the mental and physical preparation, all of which were necessary and favoring conditions for the involvement in dangerous organized crime activities. The loss of previous jobs, status and privileges was another incentive. Former convicts of ordinary crimes, mainly theft, also established contacts with the organized crime world abroad. In the face of longtime poverty, the opportunity for fast profits exposed to and involved in oil smuggling inhabitants of the northern border areas.

In 1992, the state founded the company “Shqiponja” (‘The Eagle’) and its director was the former Minister of Health during 1993-1996, Tritan Shehu. Under international pressure, the company was shut down in 1996 because there was information that the company had secured a monopoly over oil smuggling toward the former Yugoslavia until 1995, in violation of the international embargo. Revenues from this illegal business, which had first been initiated by the Serbian Secret Services (Služba državne sigurnosti), reportedly went to the Democratic Party accounts, although financial balance sheets were never discovered<sup>5</sup>.

During the same period, it was estimated that about 1.5 billion dollars were invested in the pyramid schemes operating in the country. Of that amount, 500 to 800 million dollars, which belonged to Italian and Albanian criminal organizations, were withdrawn immediately thus provoking the fall of these financial schemes<sup>6</sup>. Their collapse in 1997, accompanied by the looting of armaments from military depots, and later on the fighting in Kosovo and Macedonia, transformed the country into an ungoverned area, with plenty of opportunities for illegal profits. Swamped in chaos and a sense of personal and public insecurity, the terrain appeared very favorable for

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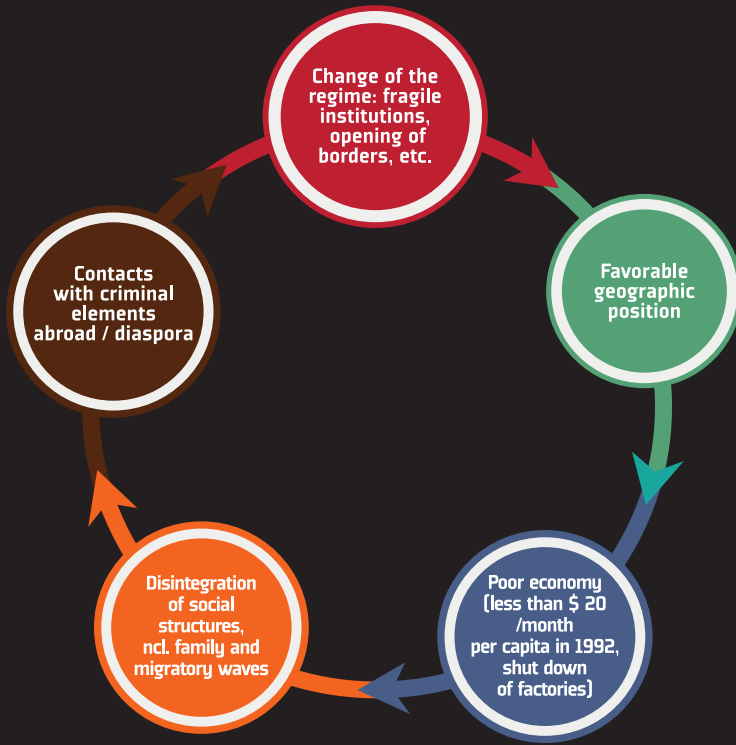
3. Arsovska, J, (2015) “Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization” p.25-27, University of California Press

4. Interview with a Lawyer (code 82), Tirana, January 2016.

5. Arsovska, J, (2015) “Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization” p.31, University of California Press

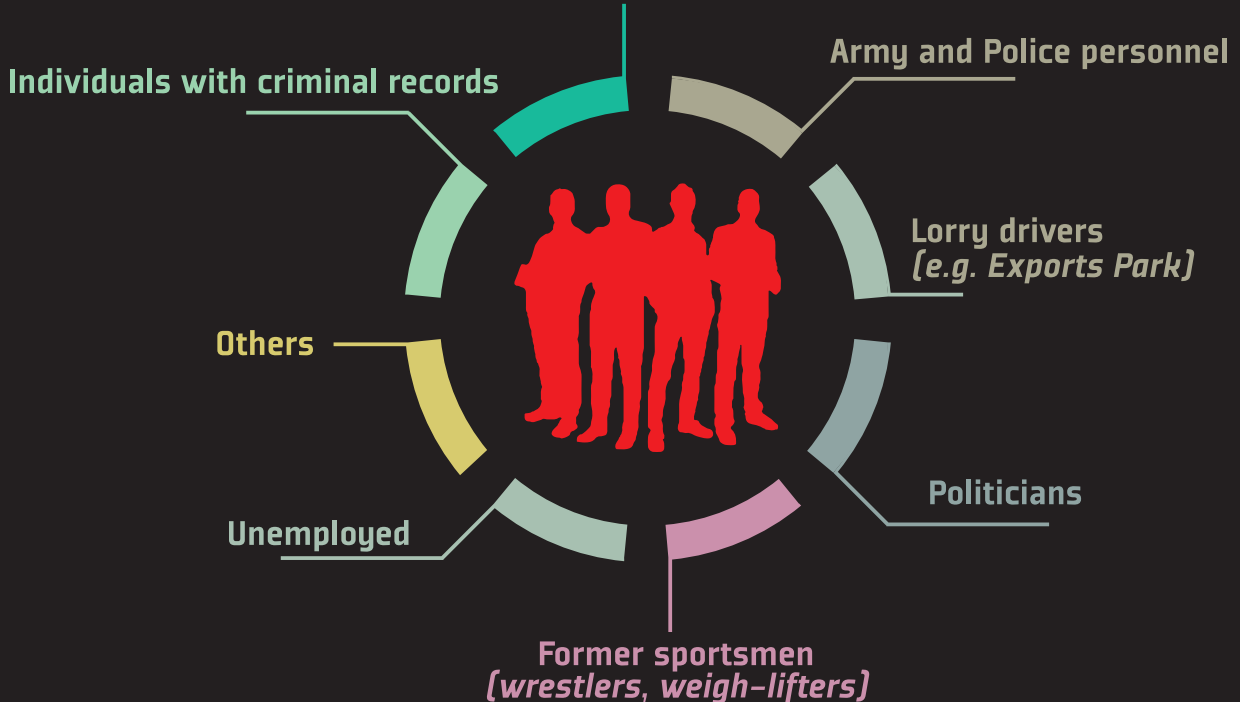
6. Zhilla, F and Lamallari B, (2015) “Organized Crime: Risk Assessment in Albania,” p. 64, Open Society Foundation for Albania, Tirana.

# Beginnings of criminal organization



## Early Criminal Structures

### Former agents of *Sigurimi* (Special Unit "101K")



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the flourishing of illegal activities, corruption and organized crime ties with politics. The country was parceled into territories controlled by armed gangs. Known as supporters of one political side or another, criminal gangs challenged the state openly.

This chapter devotes special attention particularly to the armed gangs that generally dominated until the beginning of the new millennium, to then adjust to the gradual strengthening of institutions by turning into structured criminal groups. Initially, we analyze the geographic spread of organized criminality, and the favorable socio-economic and political circumstances that allowed the emergence and development of armed gangs and criminal groups in Albania. After that, we continue with a review of the characteristics of the members of these groups, their features and evolution until 2003.

## 1. 2. GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD

Initially, the areas most affected by the new forms of organized criminality were the border areas, which were exploited for smuggling of goods and migrants, as well as for trafficking in human beings, mainly women, for the purpose of exploitation for prostitution. Certainly, the capital and the large cities, including the coastal ones, were most exposed to the new dynamics of unlawful groups and activities because of the greater opportunities they provided. Nevertheless, the barren situation in which the entire country was at the time in the face of the weakness of institutions to address shortcomings and the urgent needs for intervention, led to the emergence of these illegal groups and activities throughout the territory.

Taking advantage of the geographic position, criminal groups of the border districts in the northeast and southeast of the country engaged mainly in the smuggling of different goods such as cigarettes, alcohol, coffee, electric appliances, aluminum window frames and cattle with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece. At the same time, heads of these groups exploited for prostitution women that had been trafficked to Italy and Greece. In different cities of the country, there were also reports about abductions, hostage-taking and extortion of businessmen.

In the north of Albania, the smuggling of oil and weapons was conducted massively on the border with Montenegro and Kosovo. The smuggling of oil bloomed after the imposition of international sanctions on the former Yugoslavia. For the first and maybe only time, gangs of the north collaborated with those of the south, which exploited their ties with criminals in Greece to smuggle oil from there toward the north of the country<sup>7</sup>. A few years later, the fighting in Kosovo and later in Macedonia transformed the northern towns of Albania, such as for instance Bajram Curri, into public markets of weapons of different calibers.

In the south of the country, in Vlora, a large number of individuals and groups that smuggled migrants emerged in the second half of March 1997. Persons arriving from different areas of the country, mainly men, were being transported toward Italian shores aboard old and overloaded ships as well as speedboats. It was reported that an owner of speedboats headed to Apulia managed to earn up to 10,000 dollars every night<sup>8</sup>. Groups of smugglers also exploited the shores of Durrës and Shëngjin for smuggling migrants and trafficking women towards Italy. Albanian and foreign women, mainly from the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, were sold and exchanged as if they were commodities in the coastal areas before being sent to Italy. The trafficking of women reached its peak at the end of the 1990s, when it was estimated that about 30,000 Albanian women were exploited for prostitution outside the country<sup>9</sup>.

The most concentrated reach of armed gangs and criminal groups was in the cities of Vlora, Fier, Berat, Lushnje, Elbasan, Tirana and Durrës. Harsh armed clashes between rival gangs were also seen in Korça<sup>10</sup>.

7. Arsovska, J. (2015) "Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization" p.25-27, University of California Press

8. Hysi, V. 'Organised Crime in Albania: The Ugly side of capitalism and democracy', p 548 (citing Renton 2001: 20) in Paoli L, Fijnaut C 'Organised Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond' 2004.

9. U. S. Department of State, "1999 Country Report on Human Rights Practices – Albania." Victims of Trafficking in the Balkans, pp. 51-52.

10. For more about armed gangs in Korça see the relevant case study.

## Geographic spread of organized criminal activities



### NORTH

Smuggling of oil and weapons (Montenegro, Kosovo)



### East/South-East

Smuggling of aluminium, home electronics, coffee, alcohol, migrants, trafficking of women and children (Greece, Macedonia)



### WEST

Trafficking of persons, arms, and smuggling of migrants (Italy)



### CAPITAL AND LARGE CITIES

(Durrës, Fier, Vlorë, Elbasan, Korçe, etc) – armed gangs



## 1.3. ARMED GANGS

### Social, economic and political circumstances

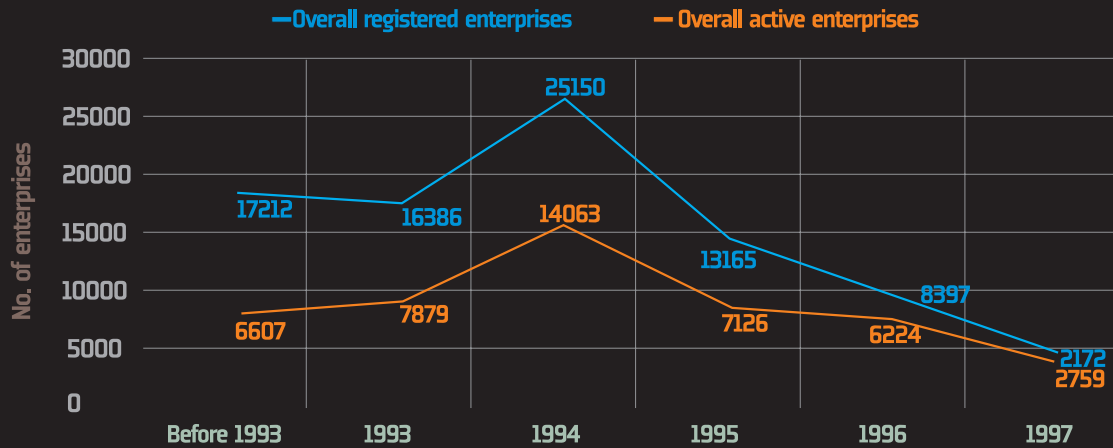
In 1992, Albania counted about 3.2 million inhabitants, with an average income reaching not even 20 dollars per month per capita<sup>11</sup>. Registered and active enterprises in the country received a serious blow after the change of the system. Referring to official statistics, the country had a total of 17,212 enterprises nationwide before 1993. Gradually, the number was getting smaller to reach the lowest figure in 1997 with only 3,172 enterprises registered in all of the country's prefectures. The number of active enterprises throughout the country in this year was actually 2,759, approximately three times less than before 1993 (6,607 such)<sup>12</sup>. The shutting down of enterprises caused an increase by three times of the level of unemployment, which reached 26 percent at the end of 1992, compared to 9.1 percent the previous year<sup>13</sup>. This meant that 34 percent of women and 23 percent of men who lost their jobs had more time on their hands for unuseful, if not harmful, activities for the individuals themselves and the society. This contingent of the society appeared to be vulnerable in the face of alternative ways, and even unlawful ones, for earning a living. They were directly exposed to activities such as smuggling, trafficking or migration abroad.

11. Council of Europe (1992), Rapport sur l'exode de ressortissants albanais. Document of the Parliamentary Assembly No.: 6555 (Ref. 1402-27/1/92-2E), 27 January 1992.

12. INSTAT, Statistical Yearbook 1991-1999, Tirana 2002

13. Ibid.

## Number of registered/active enterprises until 1997



Graphic: Data obtained from INSTAT, Statistical Yearbook 1991-1999, Tirana 2002

In the absence of incomes from legitimate sources such as work, individuals are faced with the possibility of securing living means through migration, even clandestine, or the involvement in profitable unlawful activities. In criminology, the strain theory is known and argues that the evident mismatch between cultural norms around what is considered a success in life (goals) and the cultural norms around the appropriate ways to achieve these goals (means), pushes the society to produce more criminality. The pioneer of this theory, Robert Merton, based his idea on the concept of *'anomie'* of Durkheim, which referred to a situation in which the cultural norms of a society undergo a collapse because of fast changes, including economic ones. According to Merton, one of the ways in which the individual/society reacts to the discrepancy between means and goals is rebellion<sup>14</sup>. In this context, rebellion is an expression of dissatisfaction toward the failure to fulfill aspirations and blaming for it the authority toward which the act of rebellion is directed. In post- communist Albania, the forms of rebellion toward the social situation were different and, in practice, were embodied in the so-called 'Public Rescue Committees' and armed gangs.

In the pursuit of a better life, many Albanians immediately exploited the opening up of the country to developed western countries in order to emigrate toward them, legally or in a clandestine manner. From July 1990 until the end of December 1991, more than 200,000 Albanians had left the country<sup>15</sup>. The declaration of the state of emergency in Italy and the closing of borders to Albanian emigrants in 1991 led many of them to turn to smugglers to make it across to the shores of the neighboring country. Thus, about 200 up to 300 thousand other citizens left the country between 1993 and 1996<sup>16</sup>.

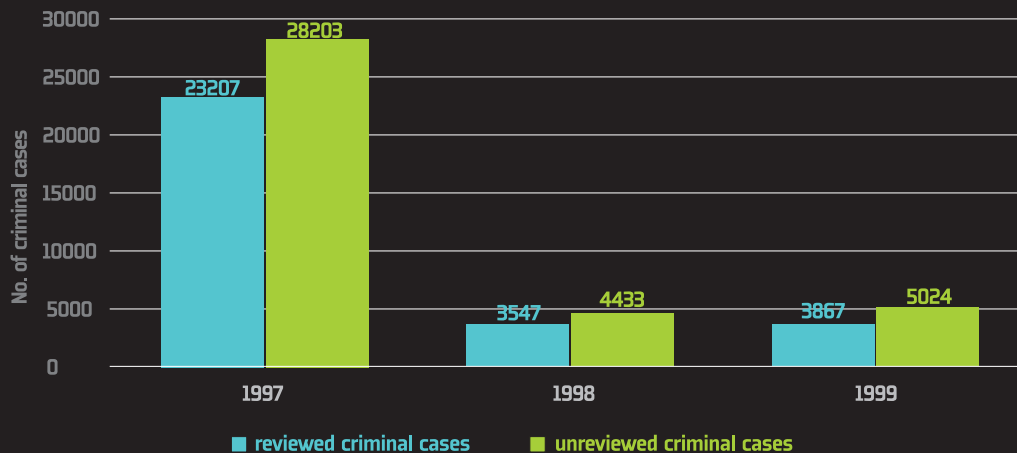
14. Merton, R, (1938) "Social Structure and Anomie", Harvard University.

15. Council of Europe(1992), Rapport sur l'exode de ressortissants albanais. Document of the Parliamentary Assembly No: 6555 (Ref. 1402-27/1/92-2E), 27 January 1992.

16. European Stability Initiative (2008) "Mass Exodus",



## Criminal cases in all district courts 1997–1999



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics 2012 | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Between 1993 until 1996, some pyramid firms operated in different cities of Albania, securing about 1.5 billion dollars.<sup>17</sup> Most of the investments were savings of citizens or money generated from the sale of homes and other property. In spite of the warnings by the International Monetary Fund, the government allowed these firms to continue their operations. In fact, a series of government officials were involved and personally benefited from these schemes<sup>18</sup>. Their collapse in January 1997 caused violent demonstrations and a chaotic situation, which was aggravated by the looting of armament depots in March of the same year.

It is estimated that the figures of weapons believed to have been looted from depots of armaments of the military and the police were approximately 550,000, of which 38,000 were hand guns, 226,000 were Kalashnikovs, 25,000 were machine guns, 2,400 anti-tank rocket launchers, 3,500,000 hand grenades and 3,600 tons of explosives. Of these, at least 6,000 AK-47s (Kalashnikovs) were traded and sent to Kosovo<sup>19</sup>.

The direct and collateral effects of the opening of the weapons depots were reflected in the heightened levels of criminality in general, and the extremely high number of murders, in particular. According to data from the Ministry of Order of the time, the number of murders reached 1,542 in 1997, which was an increase by 520 percent compared to the previous year; in other words, there had been 50 murders for every 100,000 inhabitants<sup>20</sup>. This was an extremely high figure, compared to the average of recorded murders for the period 1995-2010, which was 9.2 murders per every 100,000 inhabitants<sup>21</sup>. In the same year, first district courts were inundated with an unprecedented wave of criminal cases. Thus, in 1997, all first instance courts across the country had reviewed 23,207 criminal cases in total and 28,203 awaited hearing in the same year. Compared to a year later, the difference was 544 percent higher<sup>22</sup>.

17. Marshal. "CIA and the Balkans." referred in Hajdinjak.M. 'Smuggling in Southeast Europe: The Yugoslav wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans'. Center For The Study Of Democracy 2002: 33.

18. Arsovska, J, (2015) "Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization" p.25-27, University of California Press

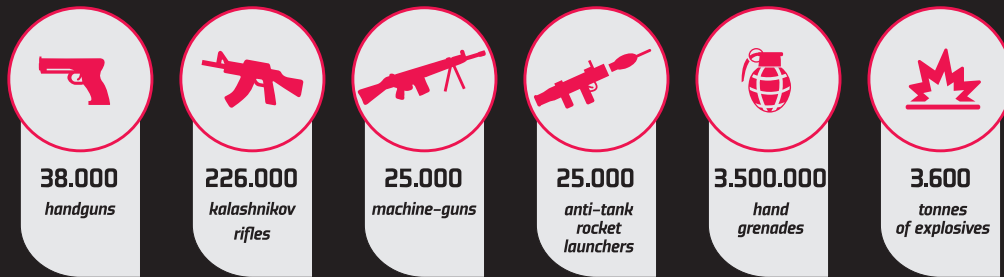
19. Zhilla, F dhe Lamallari B, (2015) "Organized Crime: Risk Assessment in Albania," p. 66, Open Society Foundation for Albania, Tirana.

20. UNDATA, "Intentional homicide, number and rate per 100,000 population", <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNODC&f=tableCode%3A1>

21. Open Data Albania, "Criminal murder cases in Albania, 1995-2010," <http://open.data.al/sq/lajme/lajm/lang/sq/id/634/titull/Ceshtje-Penaleper-Vrasjene-Shqiperi-19952010/Ceshtje-Penale-per-Vrasje-ne-Shqiperi.-1995--2010>

22. INSTAT, Statistical Yearbook 1991-1999, Tirana, 2002. (See Appendix)

## Looted arms in 1997



**An estimated 550.000 arms is believed to have been looted from the army and police depots.**

In a context characterized by stark social and economic problems, massive demographic moves, arming of the broad population, alarming levels of criminality expressed both in the number of registered criminal offenses (e.g. murders, abductions, etc.), but also with the blooming of profitable illegal activities (e.g. the black market, arms trade) as alternative manners for securing incomes, dangerous criminals who had escaped from prisons or had returned from Greece and Italy, gathered in armed gangs that carried out looting, abductions, murders and acts that spread terror. Meanwhile, from the very start of March, the Public Rescue Committees had formed in the south of the country and they served as parallel governments. The continued threat of a further worsening of the situation and the clash of committees with the government led to an international protection force coming to Albania. It was established *ad hoc* through a resolution of the United Nations Security Council<sup>23</sup>. During the parliamentary elections of June 1997, many members of the Rescue Committees participated in the race in spite of their previous statements to stay away from politics. Besides public committees, armed gangs also openly challenged the authority of the state and its control over the territory. In some cases, members of the armed gangs were also members of the rescue committees.

The political dimension represents an important aspect of the activity of these gangs and the rivalry between them. The political partisanship of the armed gangs' leaders represents an already well-known fact for different experts, researchers or even citizens who were aware of their activity or knew them personally. Nevertheless, the relations or cooperation of political figures with leaders of these gangs has never been part of judicial review, thus remaining at the level of speculations by different actors or even public accusations by convicted members or leaders of the armed gangs.

The gang led by Myrteza Çausi (in short, Zani), otherwise known as the "Çole's Gang," was formed in the neighborhood bearing the same name in the city of Vlora. Zani was a person who had been convicted to 101 years of imprisonment for murder in Greece; he had escaped from prison and returned to Albania in February 1997. After forming his armed gang of 15 members, most of whom with criminal precedents, Zani collaborated with the Vlora Rescue Committee<sup>24</sup>. In April 1997, he met with the Italian Prime Minister of the time, Romano Prodi. While Zani was a supporter of the Socialist Party, rival gangs such as those of 'Gaxhai' (Gazmend Braka), 'Kakami' (Alfred Nebiu) and the 'Well of Mezini', were supporters of the Democratic Party. As a result of armed clashes between them, all members of the Gang of the Well of Mezini were killed<sup>25</sup>.

23. United Nations, Security Council "Resolution 1101 (1997), Adopted by the Security Council at its 3758th meeting, on 28 March 1997", <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N97/084/37/PDF/N9708437.pdf?OpenElement>

24. Shqiptarja.com, "Vlorë, masakra në Çole, larje hesapësh mes bandave si në '97", 8.04.2015, <http://shqiptarja.com/home/1/vlor--masakra-n--ole-larje--hesapesh-mes-bandave-si-n---39-97-283974.html>

25. Arsovska, J. (2015) "Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization" p.39, 131, University of California Press

**Photo:** Myrteza Caushi  
(Zani of Vlorë)  
voting in the 1997  
general elections



**Source:** <http://www.mapo.al/2015/08/video-vlore-1997-zani-caushi-voton-me-smoking-dhe-mitraloz>

Harsh divisions between criminal gangs were also noticed in Berat. The gang of Altin Dardha, the cold-blooded murderer who is believed to have personally carried out 63 executions of the 120 that had been committed by the gang overall, was the main rival of the main gang of the “tough of Berat,” Lulëzim Caka. Dardha was a supporter of the Socialist Party while his opponent supported the Democratic Party<sup>26</sup>. The latter joined the gang of his aunt’s son, Bujar Sula, otherwise known as ‘Loshi of Karbunara,’ who was murdered by ‘(Mile Çami)’<sup>27</sup>. Known as the ‘tough of Fier,’ Çami is suspected of having ordered the murder of the mother of Lulëzim Caka, in revenge for the murder of his brother by Caka<sup>28</sup>.

Of the many other gangs operating in the Western Plains triangle Lushnje-Fier-Berat, the most dangerous was the so-called ‘Lushnje Gang.’ Considered by the court ‘a criminal organization,’ - the most sophisticated form of a criminal organization, it was formed by the former officer of the 326 Special unit Alfred Shkurti, otherwise known as Aldo Bare. Through criminal activities guided by the so-called “Commissariat no. 2,” which functioned as the headquarters of the organization, the gang openly challenged the state from 1997 until 2003<sup>29</sup>. The gang leader, whose family had lost the status and privileges of the past following the change of the regime, earned support because of initial engagement with the rescue committees, but especially for fighting Artur Daja, an extremely dangerous, untouchable criminal who had ties with the rightwing<sup>30</sup>. The harsh rivalry between these two gangs, which is estimated to have caused the murder and disappearance of about 25 persons, had inter alia strong political connotations.

In the southeast region, in Korça, the interaction between politics, local government and armed gangs is proven by the statements of interviewed experts (former police officers, prosecutors) as well as by authentic documents. Of the three main gangs known in the city, ‘5 stores,’ ‘Radeneçi’ and ‘Shepherds,’ the first two, particularly that of the ‘5 stores’ openly supported the Democratic Party, both during the organization of rallies, spoiling the rallies of the Socialist Party or even interference with ballot boxes. As a reward, the gang of the ‘5 stores’ won tenders from the municipality for cleaning up the city and for immunity vis-à-vis law enforcement. Experts also confirm that their rival gang, that of the ‘Shepherds’ had support from the Socialist Party, although to a much more moderate and not so evident degree. The reconciliation act between the two gangs, signed on March 16, 1997, in the premises of the

26. Sot news agency, “15 gangs created in ‘97 were the absolute ‘powers’ causing terror, crimes, looting and war among themselves,” 08.03.2013, <http://sot.com.al/dossier/15-bandat-e-krijjuara-n%C3%AB-%E2%80%99ishin-%E2%80%99pushtetet%E2%80%99D-absolute-q%C3%AB-b%C3%ABnin-terror-krime-pla%C3%A7kitje-e>

27. Decision of the Lushnja Judicial District Court, no. 80, dated 03.06.2008

28. Decision of the Fier Judicial District Court, Nr 175, datë 11.05.2000

29. Decision of the First Instance Court for Serious Crimes, no. 17, dated 28.03.2011

30. For more, see the case study on the Lushnje Gang

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municipality by the Mayor of the time was at least an expression of the powerlessness of the state to punish serious violations of the law. Moreover, a request for a pardon for the 37 members of the rival gangs was sent on that same day to the President by the Chair of the District's Rescue Committee. One year later, many of the gang members benefited considerably from Law no. 8202, dated 27.03.1997 "On amnesty," which dropped the criminal prosecution for "Serious intentional wounding committed in collaboration with others" and for "Illegal possession of arms."<sup>31</sup>

In central Albania, Elbasan, two were the most dangerous gangs: the 'Gang of Tan Kateshi' and the 'Gang of Mandela.' Although no conflicts were reported between these two gangs, they were in constant conflict with other gangs. Eduart Peqini, otherwise known as Mandela, was in a conflict with Arjan Toska of the 'Gang of Cërrik.' The members of the latter were sentenced by a court for the murder on May 23, 1997, of 6 Republican Guard officers and the injury of 16 others<sup>32</sup>. Two of the members of this gang, sentenced as organizers and co-executors in the incident, were local leaders of the Socialist Party. On the other hand, the Gang of Tan Kateshi, which had confirmed control of the city by subduing other smaller gangs, began to be contacted by politicians, mainly of the left wing, for electoral purposes<sup>33</sup>.

In Tirana, criminal structures during the '90s were numerous and were usually known as the 'lads' or the 'tough ones' of certain streets (e.g. of Myslym Shyri, Durrës Street, Kavajë Street, Bardhyl Street), or gangs of different areas of Tirana (e.g. of Selita, Kinostudio, Yzberisht, etc.). During the 1997 turmoil, the gang of Nehat Kulla, otherwise known as the 'General' earned special attention. Kulla had known the former Chairman of the Socialist Party Fatos Nano during his time in prison at the end of 1996 and the beginning of 1997<sup>34</sup>. Kulla is now serving a 20-year imprisonment sentence for the murder in 1998 of the driver of former Minister of Interior Halit Shamata<sup>35</sup>. The intermittent arrests and the disputable judicial decisions during the period 1999-2004 enhanced suspicions of his ties with power<sup>36</sup>. Some years later, precisely on March 29, 2003, the murder of Fatmir Rama, known as "Miri of Xhike" at his business premises 'Cartodrome 2000' would be followed by a series of accusations about his ties with politicians of the left. One of the most rumored names in the Albanian business sphere at the beginning of the years 2000, Miri of Xhike had returned to Albania in 1998, escaping an international arrest warrant and a sentence of 28 years of imprisonment by the Milan Court for leading and participating in a criminal organization that trafficked drugs. The contacts of some key politicians were found registered in the memory of his phone while some others actually participated in his funeral ceremony<sup>37</sup>.

Criminal groups in Durrës, very dangerous and in control of the heroin trafficking route from Turkey to Italy and other EU countries, have been reported for having strong political ties with the highest levels of governance. There have been reports about friendship ties between some figures of the leftwing and rightwing governments with the gangs of Durrës and Shijak<sup>38</sup>.

In the north of Albania, the Haklaj brothers drew the attention of law enforcement authorities, courts and the media for years in a row. The Haklajs were there main contact point for the fighters in Kosovo for supplies of weapons arsenals. The Haklaj brothers were the first supporters of the Democratic Party in Tropoja, but abandoned it after the arrest and imprisonment of Hamdi and Halil for 6 months under charges of a murder with hard objects in Tropoja<sup>39</sup>. Accusations of a double murder that took place in August 1993 and those for another murder in February

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31. For more, see the case study on the Gangs of the city of Korça and copies of original documents in the Annex.

32. Decision by the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, No. 70, dated 20.12.2011

33. For more, see the case study on the Gangs of the city of Elbasan in the Annex.

34. Gary Kokalari, "Fatos Nano Drug Allegations", Albanian Canadian League Information Centre, 01.12.2006, Aksesuar online në Maj 2016, <http://www.albca.com/aclis/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=1109>; "Gang of Nehat Kulla," Wikipedia (see photo of Fatos Nano with Nehat Kulla), [https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banda\\_e\\_Nehat\\_Kull%C3%ABs](https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banda_e_Nehat_Kull%C3%ABs); World History Archives, "On the political assassinations, arrests and persecution of the opposition by the neo-communist regime in Albania", accessed online in May 2016, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/62/index-gb.html>

35. Decision by the Kavaja Judicial District Court, No. 109, dated 14.10.2008

36. Voice of America, "Nehat Kulla captured in Tirana 2001-09-18", <http://www.zeriamerikes.com/content/a-30-a-2001-09-18-1-1-85597172/421000.html>

37. Ashta, A "Ties of Crime with Politics", 31.03.2003, <http://www.edsh.org/diskutime/vieethread.php?fid=6&tid=1809&action=printable>

38. Kokalari, G (2007), "Mafia Report in Albania", Albanian Canadian League Information Service, <http://www.albca.com/aclis/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=1264>

39. Hoxha, A "Tropoja File", Jungle show, 2013 <http://www.forum-al.com/showthread.php?p=331337>

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1998 were proven as perpetrated by Hamdi Haklaj a few years later by the Tirana Court<sup>40</sup>. However, this person, sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment, has been living in Sweden ever since with the status of a political asylee. During the elections of 1997, the Haklajs supported the candidate of the Socialist Party in Tropoja for member of parliament, and with the rise to power of the leftwing government, the former Minister of Order appointed Fatmir Haklaj as chief of the police commissariat<sup>41</sup>.

The murder of businessmen and members of the Albanian parliament are an indicator of the complex relations between politicians, businessmen and organized crime<sup>42</sup>. The statements by participants in this research, who have had a relatively long experience as judges, prosecutors and lawyers, confirm the above. Some of them are of the opinion that the ‘organized crime – politics’ connection is in line with the definition of the Italian criminal legislation “*concorso esterno in associazione mafiosa*” (external collaboration with Mafia groups)<sup>43</sup>. Some other experts are of the opinion that these ties are stronger and evident. According to them, the entry of some pseudo-businessmen in politics, the winning of concessions and tenders, the election as members of the parliament and lobbying for certain laws are a strong indicator of the sophistication of criminal organizations and their ties with business and politics.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, political rhetoric in the country during the period being analyzed (1990-2003), but also in the present days (2015-2016), has been characterized by mutual accusations and media reports about ties of certain politicians with organized crime. Ministers of Interior have been especially subjects to accusations of support for armed gangs and certain criminal groups. It is suspected that such support went to the criminal groups of Berat until 1997<sup>45</sup>, an armed gang in Elbasan and in Tropoja<sup>46</sup>, criminal groups in Tirana and Durrës as well as members of criminal groups in Shijak, who appeared also as members of electoral commissions on behalf of a candidate of the Democratic Party<sup>47</sup>. Scaring political opponents, spoiling rallies of the opponent party, interference with vote counting or even the funding of electoral campaigns are some of the ways used by heads of criminal structures to secure impunity from law enforcement agencies<sup>48</sup>. Political parties in Albania benefited funds even from persons convicted abroad for illegal activities. Such is the case of an Albanian criminal network, adjudicated in Dendermonde, Belgium, for trafficking and smuggling of persons toward the United Kingdom. In this case, the persons accused by the Belgian Federal Prosecutor Service, with the initials G. and M., had worked in the past in the secret services and the Guard of Republic, and lived in Brussels with a diplomatic visa and a visa obtained through bribe from a foreign embassy in Tirana. The persons accused as organizers of some criminal activities in Belgium had strong connections in Albania, and it was proven that funds had been transferred on behalf of them toward a political party inside the country<sup>49</sup>.

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40. Decision by the Tirana Judicial District Court, No. 209, dated 21.02.2011

41. Hoxha, A “Dosja Tropoja”, Jungle show, 2013 <http://www.forum-al.com/showthread.php?p=331337>

42. Arsovska, J, (2015) “Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization” p.40, University of California Press

43. Interview with a prosecutor, code 28, June 2014.

44. Interview with a judge, code 55, February 2016; prosecutors codes 23, 24, June 2014; judges codes 34, 35, June 2014

45. Arsovska, J, (2015) “Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization” p.32, University of California Press

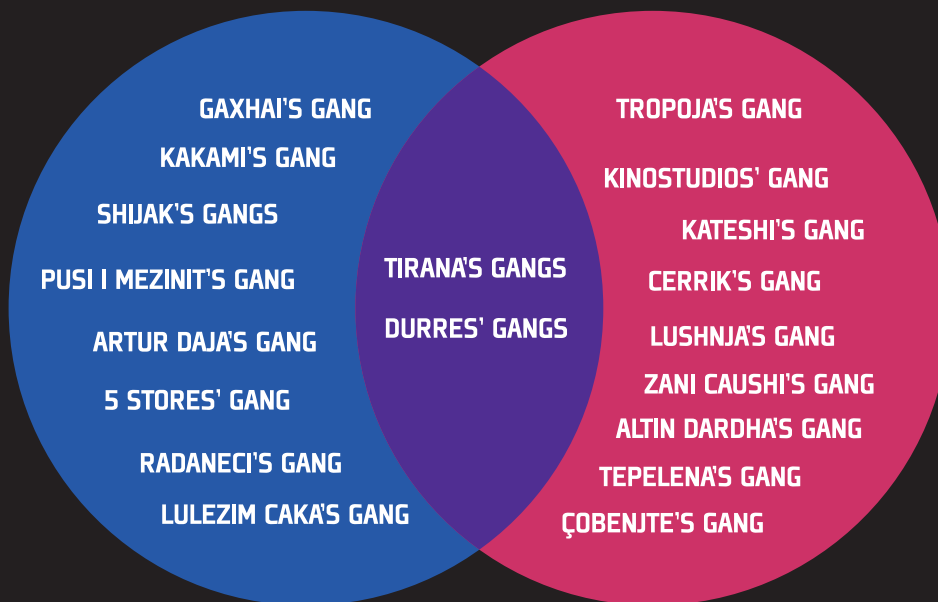
46. See case study of Elbasan; Hoxha, A. “Tropoja File,” Jungle show, 2013 <http://www.forum-al.com/showthread.php?p=331337>;

47. Kokalari, G (2007), “Mafia Report in Albania”, Albanian Canadian League Information Service, <http://www.albca.com/aclis/modules.php?name=Neës&file=print&sid=1264>

48. Interview with an investigative reporter, Tirana, 2016. See also the case studies of Elbasan, Korça and Lushnja.

49. Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (CEOR, 2005), “Trafficking in Human Beings: Annual Report, Belgian Policy on Trafficking in and Smuggling of Human Beings: Shadows and Lights” p.103, Brussels. CEOR Publication

## Party bias and interaction with politics of armed gangs



**Illustration:** Political affiliation and interaction of armed gangs with politics during the period 1994-2003

## 1. 4. CHARACTERISTICS OF CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS IN ALBANIA

The reasons for the creation, leading and involvement in criminal structures may be different for every person. Fast and abundant incomes, a better social status or political power are the most common reasons that may draw the members of armed gangs, organizations or structured criminal groups in illegal activities. Challenging legal obstacles and institutions, possessing money, luxury and weapons are also strong attractions for many young people who are prone to adventure and the urge to appear as manly as possible.

It is not possible to provide accurate numbers of the members of armed gangs or criminal groups that operated in Albania during the period 1990-2003, which is the period analyzed by this section. According to a report of the Council of Europe, in 1999, there were 25 up to 100 criminal groups operating in Albania, with a total of between 500 and 2,500 members<sup>50</sup>. In reference to judicial decisions, we will realize that the real number of persons taken in as defendants is smaller than the real number of collaborators in the criminal activities that were being adjudicated. This may have to do with the poor quality of investigations, the sentencing of some members abroad or even the

**50.** European Committee on Crime Problems (CDCP), Group of Specialists on Criminal Law and Criminological Aspects of Organised Crime, Report on the Organised Crime Situation in Council of Europe Member States, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, December 2000, p. 25, accessible at: <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/cooperation/economiccrime/organisedcrime/Report1999E.pdf>

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loss of life by one or several members before the gang was adjudicated. The use of several identities or failure to fully identify the generalities further enhances the discrepancy. As an illustration, we may refer to the gang of 'Mandela' (Eduard Peqini); 13 defendants were adjudicated as members of the gang although it is believed that the gang had about 40 members<sup>51</sup>. Another example is the adjudication of 8 members of the criminal network labelled 'Kompas,' out of 48 persons identified during wiretapping in Italy that had to do with heroin trafficking in the years 2000-2001<sup>52</sup>. According to the statements of a prosecutor, the reason why only a limited number of persons of the "Kompas" operation were prosecuted has to do with the fact that a good part of them were prosecuted in Italy, while for the other persons the process had been suspended for reasons of a procedural nature that have to do with the notification of persons under investigation<sup>53</sup>.

According to the criminologist Xavier Raufer, *'the base of the Albanian criminal pyramid consists of a group of men from the same kin or village, often from the very same biological family.'*<sup>54</sup> Unlike other similar claims that have considered Albanian criminal structures as relying considerably on family or kin relationships, according to this research study, familiarity and connections between members of criminal organizations are diverse. Based on the analysis of data in this research study, it appears that familiarity involves social, family, gender, neighborhood, friendship relations, and acquaintances because of work or business partnerships, acquaintances of the past or in prison. Starting from 2000, we notice that young men exploited as drug couriers have been recruited also through subordinate relations at work (e.g. workers in a factory or waiters) and attraction through incomes (e.g. hefty tips for carwash workers). Family relations between members of criminal organizations have been present in certain cases, but not to such an extent as to generalize it. Thus, family and kin relations dominated the "Mandela Gang," which consisted at least of the 5 Peqini brothers, 2 relatives and many other cousins. Blood ties, mainly brotherly ones, may be encountered also in cases of trafficking and exploitation of women for prostitution. However, in the case of other gangs, such as that of Gaxhai, Zani, Kateshi, and many others, social or area connections (from the same neighborhood or village) appear predominant.

With regard to age, in general, members of armed gangs in Albania belonged to relatively young ages, 20 to 35 years. Later on, criminal groups operating around the years 2000-2005 demonstrated a trend of persons in leading positions being born in the 1960-'70s, while the younger persons being the newer members of the group, recruited mainly as couriers of drugs, money, etc<sup>55</sup>.

Referring to court decisions, most of the defendants appear to have no previous criminal records. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that the persons accused of leading criminal organizations do have criminal precedents, inside or outside the country. However, shortcomings in official data books through the years, alongside the poor exchange of information with authorities of other countries, do not allow for an accurate view of the criminal background of the defendants. For instance, the head of the Lushnja Gang is believed to have shot to death a citizen in Durrës during the time he was an officer of the Rapid Intervention Unit in 1992. One year after that, he left for Greece and the charge was never proven legally<sup>56</sup>. The investigations and judicial processes of criminal gangs and organizations in Albania often do not include the profitable criminal activities that the defendants are suspected of having committed. Although judicial decisions may refer to luxury vehicles, properties and sophisticated weapons arsenals that the defendants possess and use, it is disturbing that investigations and judicial decisions do not go deeper into the sources of these incomes, which may not be justified through criminal offenses such as murder or injury, which

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51. Decision of the Elbasan Judicial District Court, no. 105, dated 29.09.1999; Shqip newspaper, "Horrible gang leader of '97, 'Mandela' arrives in Albania," <http://www.arkivalajmeve.com/Kapobanda-i-tmershem-i-97-s-Mandela-mberin-ne-Shqiperi.342156/>

52. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 3, dated 11.01.2008

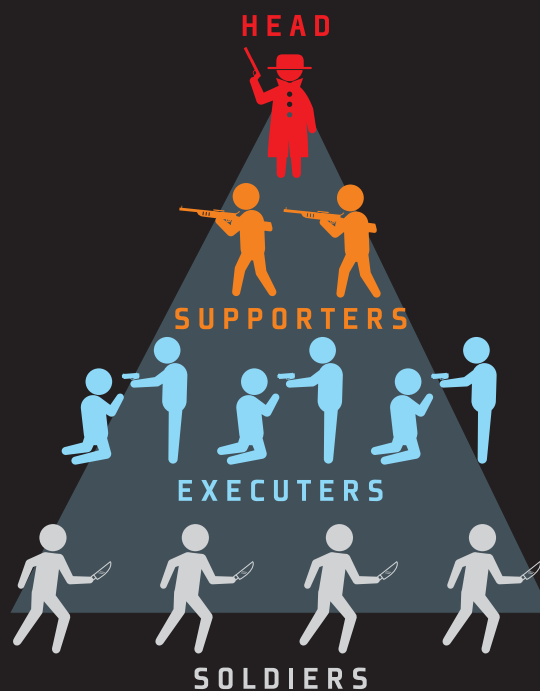
53. Statement by a Serious Crimes Prosecutor, Tirana

54. Raufer, X, (2003) "A Neglected Dimension of Conflict: The Albanian Mafia." In: J. Koehler and Ch. Zürcher In Potentials of Disorder: Explaining Conflict and Stability in the Caucasus and in the Former Yugoslavia. New Approaches to Conflict Analysis, edited by J. Koehler and K. Zürcher, 1st ed \* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 62-75.

55. Information obtained from judicial decisions on persons of armed gangs: Zani Çausi, Gaxhai, Tan Kateshi, Mandela, Shepherds, 5 Stores, Tropoja, Cërniku and the gang of Nehat Kulla; Zhilla, F dhe Lamallari B, (2015) "Organized Crime: Risk Assessment in Albania," p. 25, Open Society Foundation for Albania, Tirana.

56. Hoxha, B, "Crime and anti-crime: the history of criminal gangs," TiranaOmbra GVG, 2008.

## ARMED GANGS (HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE)



these gangs have been mainly convicted of. Namely, the members of the Durrës Gang were only sentenced for murder, illegal possession of weapons and abductions, in spite of statements by justice collaborator Dritan Coli that the gang had been involved in the activities of trafficking of drugs, women and oil smuggling<sup>57</sup>. Also, it is thought that the origin of the Bare-Daja conflict has to do with control over the drug market in Italy or the exploitation of prostitution. It is a fact that other members of the Lushnja Gang (e.g. Dondollaku) were sentenced to 188 years of imprisonment by the Turin Court in Italy for trafficking of heroin and cocaine<sup>58</sup>. Furthermore, fines on businessmen by members of armed gangs or structured criminal groups are not often highlighted in judicial decisions, but are stated by non-official or media sources.

With the passing of years, we notice a tendency of higher education levels of members of criminal structures in Albania. Thus, while the average education level of members of criminal gangs used to be the compulsory education, members of later criminal structures completed high school education, and some of them even higher education. The interviewed magistrates and lawyers are of the opinion that this increase is formal and has to do with the liberalization of higher education in the country<sup>59</sup>.

Because of the looting of armament depots in 1997, all gang members possessed and used weapons of different calibers. Weapons varied from the lighter ones to the heavier ones, including handguns, automatic rifles, machine guns, anti-tank launchers, explosive ordinance, etc. One criminal organization that operated during the period 1993-1996 possessed a large arsenal of weapons and auxiliary equipment such as police uniforms: police head masks, boxers, pants, jackets and hats; colonel rank police officer jacket, police bullet-proof jackets, hand-held

57. Decision by the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 1, dated 16.01.2012, p. 475. For more, see the case study with regard to the Lushnja Gang.

58. Penal decision of the Turin Court of Appeals, Italy, no. 1735, dated 22.04.2008; Panorama, "Enver Dondollaku of the Lushnja Gang extradited from Italy," 19.12.2013, <http://www.panorama.com.al/ekstradohet-nga-italia-enver-dondollaku-i-bandes-se-lushnjes/>

59. Zhilla, F dhe Lamallari B, (2015) "Organized Crime: Risk Assessment in Albania," p. 26, Open Society Foundation for Albania, Tirana.



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radios, binoculars and handcuffs<sup>60</sup>. This speaks about the sophisticated level of armaments and preparation of the members. The earliest forms of Albanian organized crime were characterized by extreme levels of violence. The displayed aggressiveness and the used violence were of special significance for the armed gangs, which placed under control and preserved parts of the territory through the use of weapons. Armed conflicts and brutal blows against opponents were a strategic tactic for gang leaders who, through the dangerous reputation they had built for themselves, easily dominated other surrounding gangs. Violence was used not only toward opponents, but also toward members of law enforcement agencies and their victims (kidnapped businessmen and women exploited for prostitution). However, after 2003, one notices less use of physical violence, which according to interviewees, was replaced to some extent by psychological violence. In their opinion, the more moderate use of physical violence may be explained by the low-level need for 'turf control' and the care shown to not draw police attention through violent acts of this organization. Around the end of the '90s, armed gangs began to be increasingly less present inside the country. In order to adjust to the gradual strengthening of institutions, criminal organizations evolved and became more difficult to infiltrate, more flexible and with a clear entrepreneurial character. Unlike the past, control over certain areas within the country was of no interest. Structured criminal groups that have been created in the past few years focused evidently on illegal profitable activities. The trafficking of different drugs, such as cannabis, heroin and cocaine posed fewer risks and led to much greater profits. The attention of new criminal structures focused on drug trades in the European Union countries.

In order to escape investigations, prosecution and convictions of many years of imprisonment, members of criminal structures executed, threatened and corrupted police officials and officers, prosecutors and judges. Justice witnesses or collaborators have even mentioned names of judges paid by criminal organizations in the country, but none of the magistrates in Albania has even been investigated, prosecuted or convicted for such serious accusations<sup>61</sup>. According to one interviewed prosecutor, "the lack of convictions and a database of data in this regard makes such accusations remain at the perception level even for us who are inside the system."<sup>62</sup>

At present (2015-2016), different groups, which have been responsible for certain roles and segments in the trafficking of drugs, are now collaborating in the form of 'criminal networks.' Securing drugs from farmers and countries of origin, packaging, transport, reception and sale in the retail market in European cities is conducted by different groups that are autonomous and not subjected to any vertical command structure. The following chapter looks extensively at these criminal organizations that began to transform in response to the renewal and reaction of state agencies, starting from 2004 until 2015.

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60. Decision by the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 44, dated 01.07.2008.

61. Refugee Review Tribunal, 'RRT Research Response - Albania', 5.12.2007, Australia <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4f40de2e2.pdf>

62. Interview with a prosecutor (code 28), June 2014

the  $z$  axis is the  $z$  component of the force,

$$F_z = \frac{\partial W}{\partial z} \quad (11)$$

and the  $z$  component of the torque,

$$\tau_z = -\frac{\partial W}{\partial \phi} \quad (12)$$

where  $\phi$  is the angle of rotation.

For a rigid body, the work done by the forces and torques is

$$dW = \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r} + \boldsymbol{\tau} \cdot d\boldsymbol{\phi} \quad (13)$$

where  $d\mathbf{r}$  and  $d\boldsymbol{\phi}$  are the infinitesimal displacements.

For a rigid body, the work done by the forces and torques is

$$dW = \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r} + \boldsymbol{\tau} \cdot d\boldsymbol{\phi} \quad (14)$$

where  $d\mathbf{r}$  and  $d\boldsymbol{\phi}$  are the infinitesimal displacements.

For a rigid body, the work done by the forces and torques is

$$dW = \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r} + \boldsymbol{\tau} \cdot d\boldsymbol{\phi} \quad (15)$$

where  $d\mathbf{r}$  and  $d\boldsymbol{\phi}$  are the infinitesimal displacements.

For a rigid body, the work done by the forces and torques is

$$dW = \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r} + \boldsymbol{\tau} \cdot d\boldsymbol{\phi} \quad (16)$$

where  $d\mathbf{r}$  and  $d\boldsymbol{\phi}$  are the infinitesimal displacements.

For a rigid body, the work done by the forces and torques is

$$dW = \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r} + \boldsymbol{\tau} \cdot d\boldsymbol{\phi} \quad (17)$$

where  $d\mathbf{r}$  and  $d\boldsymbol{\phi}$  are the infinitesimal displacements.

For a rigid body, the work done by the forces and torques is

$$dW = \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r} + \boldsymbol{\tau} \cdot d\boldsymbol{\phi} \quad (18)$$

where  $d\mathbf{r}$  and  $d\boldsymbol{\phi}$  are the infinitesimal displacements.

For a rigid body, the work done by the forces and torques is

$$dW = \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r} + \boldsymbol{\tau} \cdot d\boldsymbol{\phi} \quad (19)$$

where  $d\mathbf{r}$  and  $d\boldsymbol{\phi}$  are the infinitesimal displacements.

For a rigid body, the work done by the forces and torques is

$$dW = \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r} + \boldsymbol{\tau} \cdot d\boldsymbol{\phi} \quad (20)$$

where  $d\mathbf{r}$  and  $d\boldsymbol{\phi}$  are the infinitesimal displacements.

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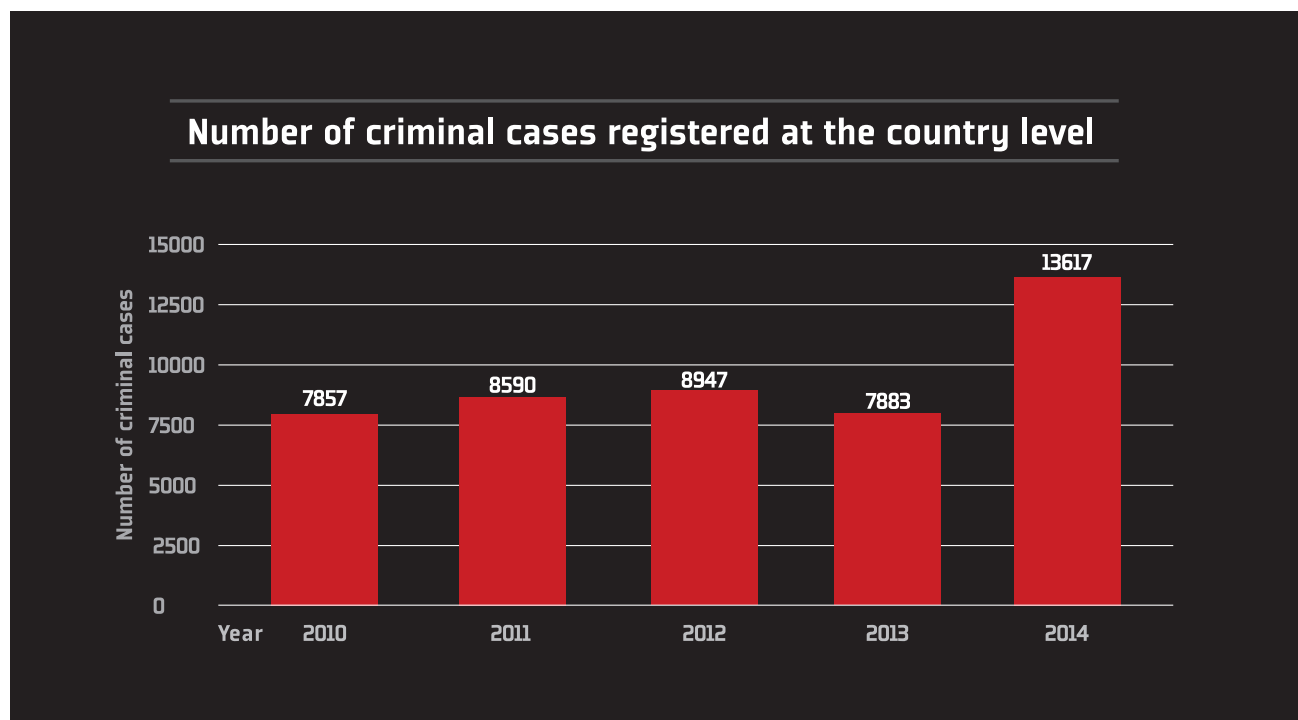
# **CHAPTER 2.**

## STRUCTURE OF ORGANIZED CRIME (2004-2015)

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Even after 2004, the indicators of the situation of criminality and the social factors that favor crime remain problematic. On a national scale, the number of criminal cases has doubled from 2010 until 2014, namely: in 2014 (13,617); in 2013 (7,883); in 2012 (8,947); in 2011 (8,590), and in 2010 (7,857). Meanwhile, for the period 2004-2009, there was almost the same tendency. Thus, criminal offenses during this period were: in 2004 (7,068); in 2005 (6,796); in 2006 (7,088); in 2007 (6,268); in 2008 (7,349); and in 2009 (6,929).<sup>63</sup>

The number of criminal cases registered during the period 2010-2014 increased in all cities in the country<sup>64</sup>. The percentage of the logging of cases in the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes also followed the same pace. In other words, from 118 cases logged in 2011, the number almost doubled in 2014 with 221 cases<sup>65</sup>.



The figures for criminal groups are also disturbing. Based on data that have not been confirmed officially, it is thought that the number of criminal organizations in 2014 was 116 (419 persons), increasing by almost 100% in 2015, with about 252 such (about, 1,036 persons). Meanwhile, the number of murders has dropped by almost 43% within one year, during the period 2014-2015. In any event, this positive indicator saw visible worsening in 2016 as during the first week of January 2016 alone, the rate of murders was almost a person per day. Furthermore, social and economic factors appear to experience evident worsening. The annual average of the unemployment rate in Albania from 1993 is 15.3%, while in the third quarter of 2015 unemployment reached 17.5%<sup>66</sup>.

63. See Statistical Yearbooks of the Ministry of Justice, accessed at <http://www.drejtesia.gov.al/dokumente/statistika>

64. See, 2014 Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Justice, accessed at [http://www.drejtesia.gov.al/files/userfiles/statistika/VJETARI\\_2014\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.drejtesia.gov.al/files/userfiles/statistika/VJETARI_2014_FINAL.pdf)

65. See, 2014 Serious Crimes Court Statistical Yearbook, accessed at [http://gjkr.gov.al/previewdoc.php?file\\_id=25](http://gjkr.gov.al/previewdoc.php?file_id=25)

66. See data from Trading Economics, accessed at <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/albania/unemployment-rate>

## Criminal cases 2010–2014

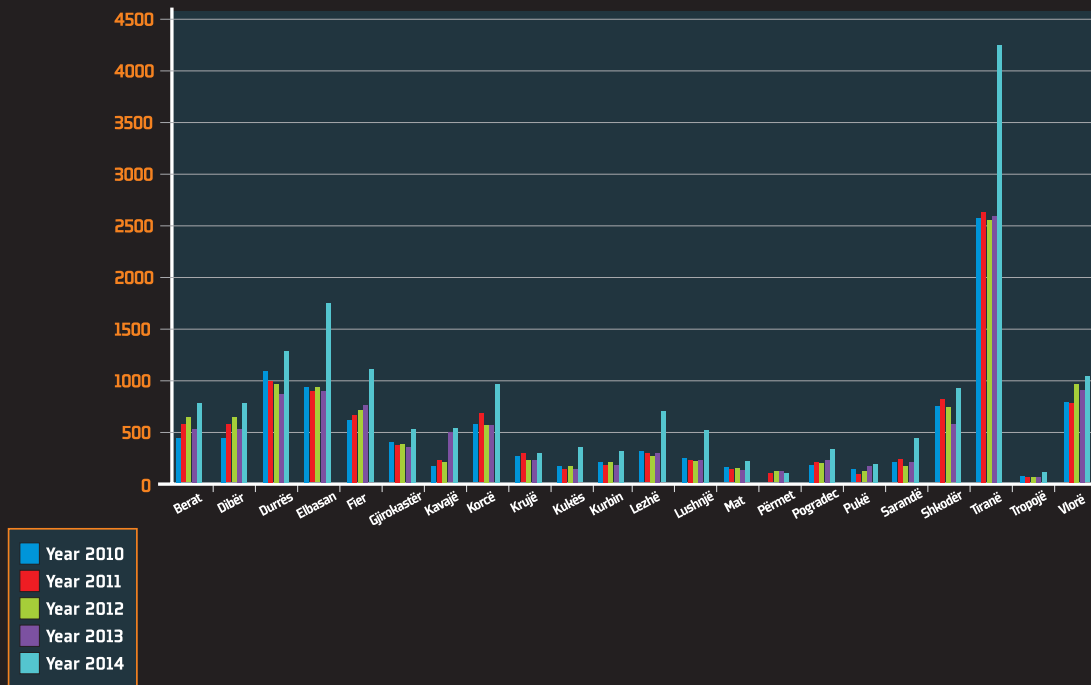


Table of Criminal Cases Registered by District Court of First Instance <sup>69</sup>

Meanwhile, the unemployment average rate for the EU in 2014 was approximately 10%<sup>67</sup>. The level of poverty also increased from 12.5 in 2008 to 14.3 in 2012<sup>68</sup>. A detailed analysis of social and economic factors in the relevant chapter in this research study shows that the criminogenic factors create fertile ground for the development of organized crime also for the period 2004-2015, especially in the country's main cities. Further down in this chapter, the research study focuses more on the analysis of the typology of organized crime, starting with a map of the spread of criminal organizations in the country, in those cities where organized crime is more disturbing at present (2015-2016).

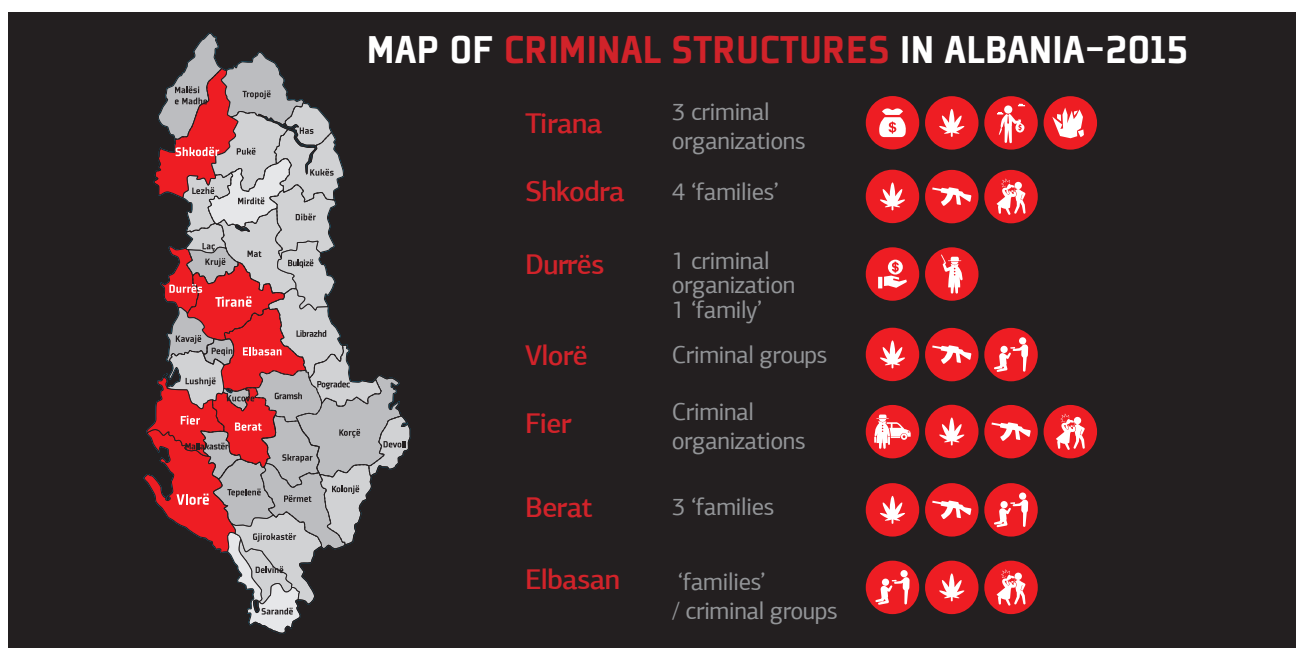
67. See Eurostat data at [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics#Unemployment\\_trends](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics#Unemployment_trends)

68. See INSTAT data about the level of poverty by prefecture <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/niveli-i-jetes%C3%ABs.aspx?tab=tabs-5>

69. See Statistical Yearbook on 2010-2014, accessed at <http://www.drejtësia.gov.al/al/dokumente/statistika>

# Map of criminal organizations

It is difficult to make an accurate or exhaustive definition of the typology of Albanian criminal organizations of this period (2004-2015). The organizational structure, operations and peculiarities of the composition of these organizations are closely linked with their illegal activities. The latter is an important defining qualifier of the category of organizational form, sophistication standards of the organization and its integration into the society, politics and the economy. Based on interviews with experts and persons knowledgeable of organized crime at the national and local level, the spread of some criminal organizations active in the Albanian territory appears to be quite dynamic. This research study tried to comprehend the spread and structure of the main criminal organizations operating at present in the country's largest cities, in order to create an idea about their features and characteristics by area: North (*Shkodra*); Middle Albania (*Tirana, Elbasan and Durrës*), and South/Center (*Fier, Berat and Vlora*).



## Tirana

It is suspected that in the city of Tirana, there are presently at least 3 criminal organizations that are very powerful and structured. Their lifespan of criminal activity extends from early on and they have managed to resist time because thanks to their sophistication and ties with business and the corrupt segments of the state. It is rumored that one of these organizations (1), which is also the most powerful, has a very sophisticated hierarchical structure. It is thought that the beginnings of this organization date back to 1992. In its early days, the organization was characterized by violence, different forms of camouflage, team work and the lack of clear hierarchy. It is thought that this organization, unlike other criminal organizations, also had political motives behind its creation. One of the main characteristics of the actions of this organization in its beginnings (1992) was the use of symbols of official institutions that deal with the protection of public order, such as State Police and the Armed Forces. On the other hand, robberies, stealing, murders or even explosions, unlike the other organizations of the time, were committed during the day. These types of schemes are apparently being used by another criminal organization (2) that operates in the district of Tirana since 2005 and that will be addressed further below.

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The cupola of this organization (1) is suspected to rely on blood ties (brothers, cousins and close social circles) and to have ties with former high-level functionaries of the communist regime<sup>70</sup>. It is thought that the organization has inherited the ties and organizational skills from them. It is thought that this organization also includes representatives from other criminal groups, turning it into some kind of a cupola of other smaller organizations, which operate mainly in the Tirana-Durrës segment. The organization is thought to be part of international criminal networks and to have relations with the Italian (Sacra Corona Unita), Romanian and Israeli mafia. Through these ties, it is suspected that the organization launders its money in Albania through casinos, betting points and investments in gas and construction industries. Although it is thought that in its beginnings (1993-2003), the organization was very violent, at present it is suspected to have become quite sophisticated by not exposing itself in petty conflicts or murders. It is thought that the organization focuses on laundering the money of international mafia and the assets of corrupt politicians in Albania.

It has also been alleged that this organization tried to turn Albania into a place for the production of cocaine by creating strong ties with drug cartels in Latin America (Venezuela and Ecuador), forming closed trafficking cycles (controlled by it from the origin to distribution). It is also suspected that the organization invested in tourism, mainly in the city of Vlora. It is rumored that the organization also invested in the media. It is assumed that the organization has strong ties with relatives of politicians inside all political camps. Although it does not have a center or territory of activity, the organization is suspected to have its main “headquarters” in Tirana. As one interviewee put it, *“this typology of organization is everywhere and nowhere, and given how it has progressed [...] it is also the scariest.”*<sup>71</sup>

Another criminal organization (2) is suspected to be very active and the one that hides behind many high-profile crimes in the cities of Tirana and Durrës in recent years. Differently from the above organization, this organization is more violent, less sophisticated, but not less dangerous. The organizational structure of the criminal group is based on social ties and is run by a cupola of three or four persons with known criminal precedents. This organization has its beginnings in the international trafficking of heroin in Italy and began to consolidate after 2005. The composition of the organization is diverse, with individuals mainly from the districts of Tirana, Durrës and Fier and includes young people (20 to 40 years old). It is rumored that the leading structure consists of four members, with each having a role in a certain direction (murders, investments, recruitment and drug trafficking). The organization uses very sophisticated communication and coded language. The criminal organization uses middlemen as couriers in order to communicate with third parties. This criminal group tries to recruit segments from within the State Police in order to extract information but also their expertise, which helps it neutralize police operations. In order to eliminate opponents, the organization’s “shooters” or paid “killers” are used. This organization is thought to have created a strong alliance with one of the criminal groups that has begun to become active recently in the city of Durrës<sup>72</sup>.

It is thought that the number of the members of this organization goes above 30. The organization is also “poly-criminal” and operates mainly in the Tirana – Durrës – Fushë-Krujë triangle. It is suspected that the organization is engaged in trafficking of narcotics, extortion, loan sharking, conflict resolution, and recently in the emergence or registration of immovable properties<sup>73</sup>. The organization is suspected to have strong ties with criminal groups across the country and is very fluid. It focuses mainly on the trafficking of hard drugs and is part of international networks of narcotics trafficking in Italy and the Netherlands. Although it is difficult to establish a territory of control for this organization because of the flexibility that characterizes it, the organization is suspected to have influence at “Kavaja Street,” “Former Bus Park,” and “Kombinat.” It is rumored that this organization, because of strong ties with persons with political power, is presently one of the most active criminal organizations in the Tirana-Durrës axis.

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70. Interview with a journalist (code 18), January 2016.

71. Interview with civil society representatives in Tirana (code 17), January 2016.

72. Interview with a journalist (code 18), January 2016.

73. Interview with civil society representatives in Tirana (code 17), January 2016

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Another criminal organization (3) with a lot of influence is the competitor of the above organization (2). These two organizations have been in permanent conflict with one another over turf control and revenge since 1999. Their clashes have been very harsh especially after 2011, whereby murders on both sides were almost on monthly bases. This organization (3) is mainly active outside Tirana and has investments inside the city and has some kind of influence in the capital's northern part. It is thought that its strongest influence and control is on businesses on the right side of the Tirana-Durrës highway as far as close to Rinas Airport. It is suspected that the organization is run by a family whose head served a prison sentence and managed to run the organization even during the time he was in prison. The organization relies on blood and regional ties but is also suspected of having ties with early figures of the crime world in Tirana who are still active. With the head of the organization's getting out of prison in 2012, the organization is thought of intensifying its activity. It is rumored that the organization has mainly invested in the area of minerals. The organization has a very good protection and surveillance system and at the moment is thought to have withdrawn and focused on striking opponent gangs<sup>74</sup>. This organization has a considerable number of members, thought to be approximately 27 persons.

## Shkodra

It is necessary to explain first the meaning of criminal organizations relying on close family relations ("Family"), a characteristic of the criminal groups of the country's northern area. By "families" involved in organized crime we will define those criminal groups whose leading organizational structure is based on family ties according to family hierarchy, starting from the head of family (father or eldest brother), followed by younger brothers, relatives and going down to the social network that relies mainly on neighbors. It is thought that there are at least 4 large "families" involved in criminal activities in the city of Shkodra. There are allegations that these "families" resisted time because of strong family ties, violence and ties with politics. Their beginnings start to appear in the end of the '80s when in Shkodra, as in other major cities of the country, groups of violent youngsters began to form in certain neighborhoods of the city, known as "neighborhood tough guys," such as: the "Rusi Group," the "Xhabije Group," or "Kirasi Group." Among these groups, there were boys who belonged to "families" that are suspected to dominate crime in the city of Shkodra at present. Members of these families were known for participation in criminal activities even before and during the communism period. In other words, they had a history of family members being involved in criminal activities in the past as well. These criminal groups are mainly based on family ties and control certain areas. Their empowerment began with the smuggling of oil, which flourished in the Shkodra district after the break of the United Nations' embargo imposed on the former Yugoslavia in May 1992, as well as the armed conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.<sup>75</sup> Afterwards, these "families" engaged in trafficking of human beings and narcotics. These criminal activities enabled them to create connections even with international criminal networks. Gradually, these families became financially powerful and integrated gradually in important commercial activities in the city of Shkodra and beyond. Another empowering factor were the ties that some of these families established with "Italian mafia families" in the south of Italy, but also the presence of the latter in Montenegro. This state is known as one of the main ports of tobacco smuggling in the Balkans, directed by the Sacra Corona Unita. Until 2012, Montenegro was considered by international media a "mafia state."<sup>76</sup> The above families in the city of Shkodra are thought to have consolidated their positions in the city centre and the suburbs through violence and blackmail, but also through extortion of businesses. The latter was a disturbing phenomenon in Shkodra even after 2005<sup>77</sup>.

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74. Interview with civil society representatives in Shkodra (code 17), January 2016

75. Read the study of the United Nations (2008) "Crime and its impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries", United Nations, Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed at [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Balkan\\_study.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Balkan_study.pdf)

76. Mackean, L and Jones, M., (2012) "Documents tarnish Montenegro's EU Bid", BBC, 29 May 2012, accessed at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18237811>

77. Interview with a lawyer (code 03), July 2014.



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The organization structure of these “families” supposedly looks like a “family business,” whereby the criminal organization operates on behalf and for the good of the family or family clan. Usually, the head of the organization is the head of family who, after his death, is replaced by the eldest brother. As mentioned above, hierarchy then descends depending on the closeness of blood relations to the organization head and this determines also the importance and roles. Thus, first cousins, second cousins and so on are at the lower levels. The organization also includes individuals who have social ties with the main members of the organization as well as neighborhood boys where the organization is headquartered. These “families” control certain territories and have their trafficking lines. In general, these “families” are careful to not interfere with the territories of one-another as that allegedly cost over 20 victims to two of the families that were in a conflict during the period 1999–2013. After the murder of Edmir Koçia in 2012, it is alleged that there is a restructuring of the city’s control by these families. Koçia was considered until 2012 to be one of the most dangerous individuals and a leader of the organization that had the most influence in the city. He was suspected of a series of murders, among which also the murder of Çim Cafi<sup>78</sup>. One year later, Gjon Gjeka<sup>79</sup> was eliminated too, and he is suspected to have been executed by the same hand and orderer, because of the very similar style of the killing. After these murders, it is thought that the city’s dominating “families” established a situation of peace.

Presently, these “families” have divided their territories clearly, and the businesses or economic activities in each of the areas are under their protection. Each of these families has its own characteristics. One “family” (1) is thought to be closer to politics and to have strong influence on local government regarding issues related to construction permits or employment in official institutions. Moreover, the family is also believed to be involved in the trafficking of strong drugs (heroin and cocaine). Another “family” (2) is rumored to have influence and control over an area that starts from the city center, toward Dobraç, as far as the suburbs and a part of Dukagjin. This “family” is suspected to control light drugs (cannabis) and is involved in international narcotics networks, mainly in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden. It is also alleged that this “family” engages in usury in the black market and is involved in clandestine smuggling to the United States of America<sup>80</sup>. This “family” (2) is suspected to have ties also with one of the criminal organizations of the Tirana district that was addressed above and that mainly operates in Tirana, Durrës and Fushë-Krujë. Lastly, it has been rumored that this family (2) is engaged in the so-called “loan sharking” (different businesses, unable to collect loans, pay a tariff to criminal organizations that in exchange collect debts from debtors), similar to the “pizzo” of the Italian mafia, mainly the Sicilian one<sup>81</sup>. It is thought that this “family” is the largest family in numbers and in blood ties compared to the three other “families.”

Another family (3) that shares territory control in the city with “family” (2) above, has considerable influence and is thought to have influence on a territory that starts from the center of town and then continues in the known neighborhoods of Xhabije and Zdrale. It is rumored that one of its main activities is the security it offers to the businesses in the area it controls through a monthly payment. This “family” is careful and sophisticated; it doesn’t expose itself to petty crime and is smaller in numbers than the other families. It is also suspected that it has ties with a very active organization in the district of Tirana that was addressed above. Another family (4), which does not have the influence of the previous ones, is suspected of having influence in the Kiras area and is thought to have strong ties with criminal organizations in Kosovo. The number of members of this organization is thought to be considerable and generally consists of persons with blood and social ties of the neighborhood where the leaders of the organization live. It is thought that the heads of this “family” smuggle narcotics and are engaged in the traffic of prostitution in Sweden and Denmark.

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78. E. Lata “The so-called ‘tough’ of Shkodra ambushed,” *Shekulli Newspaper*, November 30, 2012, accessed at <http://www.shekulli.com.al/p.php?id=9801>

79. E. Lata “Shkodra, the tough of Bardhaj ambushed,” *Shekulli Newspapers*, February 17, 2013, accessed at <http://www.shekulli.com.al/p.php?id=16704>

80. In 2014, police arrested a network that smuggled migrants to the United States; it stretched over at least 6 cities, two of which were Shkodra and Malësi e Madhe. See A. Cena, “\$24,000 to send persons to the U.S., 15 members of the gang caught,” *Shqiptarja.com*, May 13, 2014, accessed at <http://shqiptarja.com/aktualitet/2731/24-mije---per-t--39-i-cuar-ne-shba-kapen-15-shqiptaret-e-bandes-214401.html>

81. See Paoli, L (2008) *Mafia Brotherhoods: Organized Crime, Italian Style*, Oxford University Press.

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In general, criminal groups of the Shkodra district are “poly-criminal” and extensively use the area of Velipoja, the port of Shëngjin and the ports of Montenegro for drug trafficking. This trafficking is done mainly in containers or fishing ships that take the “goods” to open sea where it is later withdrawn by other criminal groups that operate in the EU. Criminal organizations in the district of Shkodra have also increased their activity in arms trafficking, which they transport from Montenegro, through their connections, to Malësi e Madhe. Arms, together with narcotics, are suspected to be transported to the EU through speedboats that leave from the delta of the Buna or the Vilun valley in Velipoja.

After the attack on “cannabis” in the village of Lazarat, it is alleged that one of the greatest “hangars” for its growth, in a concentrated manner, will be moved to the area of Dukagjin, mainly in Pult, Shal and Shosh<sup>82</sup>. This tendency of cannabis production threatens to bring new developments of criminal organizations in the district of Shkodra. It is rumored that the proceeds from the already increased price of cannabis in the international market will enable these organizations to have not only a considerable increase in economic power but also considerable access to international mafia. Taking into consideration also the strategic position of the city of Shkodra, the relatively poor combatting force of the state and the cultural and religious equilibriums, the “Capital Center of the North” risks turning into one of the main “poles” of the most dangerous criminal organizations in the country in the coming years.

## Durrës

The city of Durrës is the city where criminal activity is very diverse also because of the access provided by the Durrës Port, the largest port of the country, to international markets. Also, the city is the crossroads for criminal networks spread around the country. Many criminal groups, coming from across the country, are thought to have made investments in Durrës. The city is to some extent also a meeting and even housing point for many of them<sup>83</sup>. Therefore, it is difficult to establish which “autochthonous” criminal organizations operating in this city are. It is a characteristic that groups dealing with trafficking of narcotics in Durrës have a small number of members and mainly deal with trafficking of narcotics to Italy. It is noticed that recently, there have been clashes between these groups for deals which went bad<sup>84</sup>.

On the other hand, very dangerous criminal groups are rumored to be active in the areas around the city. These groups are structured and rely on family and social connections. They have clearly defined territories that they control and have ties with powerful criminal organizations that operate mainly in Tirana, Durrës, Kavaja, Peqin, Elbasan and Kruja. It is thought that at present, Durrës has seen the reactivation of a criminal organization consisting of individuals with previous criminal records. This organization is alleged to have established cooperation with one of the most dangerous organizations (2) operating in the city of Tirana, described above<sup>85</sup>. This criminal organization is suspected to be active mostly in loan sharking of businesses and in real estate. It is also supposed that the city of Durrës has seen for a long time now the activity of a known “family” for the crime world that has influence not only on commercial operations but also in social activities (i.e. sport).

## Vlora

This city remains one of the most problematic city in terms of the operations of criminal groups. In Vlora, just like in Durrës, there is a presence not only of criminal organizations from the city and the surrounding villages, but also of other organizations which invest their proceeds of crime. Other criminal organizations come from the cities of Fier, Berat, Tepelena and Tirana. This finding was also confirmed by the Prosecutor General in the annual

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**82.** Mapo Newspaper “Dukagjini II” Police destroys 10,000 cannabis plants,” August 20, 2015, accessed at <http://www.mapo.al/2015/08/dukagjini-ii-policia-asgjeson-edhe-10-mije-rrenje-kanabis>

**83.** Interview with civil society representatives in Durrës (code 83), February 2016.

**84.** Musaj, L. “Murder in Durrës for drug deals, perpetrators avoid security cameras,” Panorama Newspaper, December 22, 2015, accessed at <http://www.panorama.com.al/detajet-vrasja-ne-durres-per-pazaret-e-droges-autoret-shmangen-kamerat-e-sigurise/>

**85.** Interview with a journalist (code 54), January 2016.

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performance review of the Vlora Appeals Prosecutor's Office in 2016<sup>86</sup>. Organized crime in Vlora is mainly focused on the trafficking of narcotics and money laundering, with investments mainly in the field of tourism. A characteristic of criminal groups in the city of Vlora is that, unlike groups that were active in the years 1992-'99 (Zani Çausi, Kakami, Gaxhai etc.), there are no more groups operating in divided territories. Vlora, just like Durrës or other port towns, serves mainly as a transit area for the trafficking of narcotics toward the EU. However, aside from narcotics, the areas around the city and particularly those along the Vlora River, have been used also for the cultivation of cannabis and its transport, including trafficking by small sports planes<sup>87</sup>. According to interviewed experts, "the division of cultivation areas is done by the geographic background and origin of the group leaders."<sup>88</sup>

It is noticed that killings in the city of Vlora are numerous and in general they are not for territorial issues, but for areas of influence in international market of drugs and arms in EU countries, mainly in Spain and Italy. Vlora remains one of the most problematic cities with regard to organized crime. A prosecutor interviewed about the hotspots of organized crime in the country noted that, "*I cannot leave unmentioned Vlora, both in terms of factual findings but also in terms of the cases that have been tried or the setbacks that have been dealt.*"<sup>89</sup> It is rumored that for a long time, Vlora was a "favorite" city of the Italian mafia and it is thought that this mafia has invested in the city mainly in restaurants and gambling. In 2010, Albino Prudentino, one of the leaders of the Sacra Corona Unita was arrested in the city; one year later, Giuseppe Simonelli, one of the leaders of the Italian "Ndragheta" was also arrested<sup>90</sup>.

## Fier

Criminal organizations operating in the city of Fier, according to most of the interviewees, are thought to be the most sophisticated and the most sustainable organisations throughout the history of political transition in Albania. Although in 2005, there was a very successful intervention to attack criminal organizations throughout the country, the so-called "Fier Groups" were almost not touched. It is thought that criminal groups in Fier, unlike those in other cities, are based not only on blood and social ties, but above all, on community connections (Chams, Kosovars). This has caused some kind of territory division of these criminal organizations, which have control in those areas where their communities are also settled. According to experts, there are at least four influential organizations in the city, divided by neighborhoods: 1) The Group of "Kosovars," which operates at "Sheqi Bridge;" 2) Group of "Chams," which operates near the city's main high school; 3) Group of "Labs," which operates in the suburbs and the Levan area, and 4) Group of "Fierakeve," which has influence on the city's central area but also in Patos. It is thought that some of the main reasons that make these organizations resistant and powerful are the community ties, which serves as protection, the strategic position of the city of Fier, strong ties with politics and involvement in the trafficking of narcotics and prostitution from the very early years of democracy and the investment of dirty money in legitimate businesses. As one of the interviewed prosecutors highlighted, "*while until 2000, organized crime in Fier used the basic forms of money laundering, i.e. moving property to family members, now they are investing directly in formal businesses.*"<sup>91</sup>

It is thought that the first laboratories for heroin and cannabis in the country were established precisely in the city of Fier<sup>92</sup>. On the other hand, it is alleged that the criminal organizations of this city had a lot of influence also on organizations operating in the city of Vlora. In fact, allegations go as far as claiming that the brain of criminal networks operating in the south is precisely in Fier. The Fier groups have good cooperation with the groups of Berat, Lushnje and Vlora. It is rumored that there are at least two very powerful organizations in the city that manage to have influence even on appointments in the public administration and State Police.

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86. Koci, H. "Lalla, criminal incidents in Vlora, related to those in other cities," Shekulli Newspaper, January 15, 2016, accessed at <http://www.shekulli.com.al/p.php?id=375026>

87. Interview with a prosecutor (code 22), June 2014.

88. Interview with civil society representatives in Vlora (code 50), January 2016.

89. Interview with a prosecutor (code 29), June 2014.

90. Read Panorama Newspaper "Ndragheta boss, a casino in Vlora," August 08, 2011, accessed at <http://www.panorama.com.al/bosi-i-%E2%80%9Cndrangheta%E2%80%9D-s-kazino-ne-vlore/>

91. Interview with a prosecutor, (Code 23), June 2014.

92. Interview with civil society representatives in Fier, (Code 47), January 2016.

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In fact, it is alleged that one of the leaders of this organization had open conflicts with one of the best-known MPs in the south with regard to control over Albpetrol. Recently, high-level organized crime figures with criminal precedents and known as heads of criminal organizations in EU countries (Greece, Italy, Belgium and Spain)<sup>93</sup> are suspected to have invested their criminal proceeds in this city and are thought to be considerably expanding their influence even on political parties, especially smaller ones.

## Berat

Berat is thought to be a city where organized crime has invested for a long time and where it continues to be active. Criminal organizations in the city are mainly local, relying on strong family and social ties. It is rumored that there are at least 3 “families” with past criminal records. One of the most influential families (1) in the city is suspected to be located in the so-called the “6-kateshi area.” The family is thought to have dealt from the start of the transition period with exploitation of prostitution, mainly in Italy and the Netherlands, and has invested mainly in urban transport lines, in entertainment activities and other real estate assets. It is alleged to have close ties with high-level functionaries in the local government and uses this influence to benefit tenders with public funds. This family functions as a commercial company, whereby its members are employed in leading roles in the businesses that the family possesses.

Another organization with influence in Berat (2) is thought to have strong ties with politics. It is rumored that the heads of this “family” have former criminal records in trafficking of narcotics, mainly in Belgium. It is thought that members of this “family” have had ties even with the known gang led by Altin Dardha. The influence of this “family” is rumored to be considerable in real estate, hotels, tourism and real estate. It is supposed that this “family” is sophisticated and tries to avoid clashes on trivial matters also because it is interested to engage in politics. It is suspected that its area of influence is mainly the city center and the surrounding areas.

Another family (3) with influence and numerous criminal records in the city is suspected to be an organization whose leaders have dealt with trafficking of heroin and prostitution in Italy. This “family” too has tried to create strong ties with political parties. This “family” is rumored to have diverse investments in hotels and gambling. They are known as a violent organization and, unlike the other “families,” have numerous criminal records inside and outside the country. The area where they have more influence is supposed to be around the neighborhood of “Murat Çelebiu.” It is rumored that the city of Berat also hosts members of international cocaine networks who have created sustainable ties in Venezuela. It is thought that Berat may be another destination of closed cocaine trafficking networks transiting Albania to the EU in the future<sup>94</sup>.

A characteristic of the “families” with numerous criminal precedents in the city is that they avoid clashes among themselves and also try to avoid unnecessary conflicts, providing security for family members and acquaintances. It is also rumored that many of the members of these “families” have been very active in the local elections of 2013. Their ties with politics are thought to go beyond local government and this has helped them avoid extraditions requested by INTERPOL.

## Elbasan

The killings of February 2016 showed that the city of Elbasan continues to remain a hotspot where the activity of organized crime continues to be present even after the dismantling of the two notorious gangs of “Mandela” and “Tan Kateshi.” The clashes of over 10 years now between the families “Çapja” and “Mema” displays the nature and characteristics of organized crime in this city. There are at least 9 victims since 2005 when the revenge between

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93. Interview with a prosecutor, (Code 23), June 2014.

94. Interview with civil society representatives in Berat (Code 81), January 2016.

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the families began to claim lives<sup>95</sup>. It should be noted that it is difficult to understand whether this clash between the “families” was because of drug deals gone bad or revenge, because data collected by the interviewed experts note that criminal organizations operating in this city try to be in harmony with one another, a characteristic also of the city of Berat. Another feature of these groups is that they have civic relations with the community and try to provide assistance and make favors<sup>96</sup>.

As in other small towns, organized crime groups in Elbasan also rely on family and social ties. The consolidated groups are mainly those dealing with drugs. Elbasan is known as a key city for the warehousing and trafficking of heroin that comes along the Turkey-Macedonia line. However, there have been attempts for the heroin lines to be used also for cocaine trafficking by criminal networks that are headquartered and operate in Tirana. In January 2015, one of the largest laboratories of cocaine was seized in the village of Xibrakë, leading to the arrest of 8 persons, among whom two Columbian “chemists,” and the seizure of about 19.5 kg of pure cocaine<sup>97</sup>. Meanwhile, other criminal networks have operated in Elbasan as well, mainly in the trafficking of weapons and artworks, which had connections with other groups in Fier, Vlora and Shkodra, but which do not have the sustainability of the drug groups and therefore were dismantled quickly. According to experts, what has made criminal groups of narcotics trafficking in Elbasan more resistant is that they are sophisticated, not conflict-mongers, and have no conflicts over turf. This is the case because the narcotics are traded in EU countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Great Britain, Italy, Germany and Switzerland). Elbasan is used as a transit point but also as a trading point for internal consumption. One dangerous trend being noticed in the city is that the organizational forms of criminal groups are being imitated by groups of youngsters in the surrounding rural areas. Considering the economic situation and education in the suburbs, there is a risk of seeing a shift of hierarchic criminal organizations in the rural areas in this city.<sup>98</sup>

## 2. 1. Time cycle of criminal organizations

The analysis of this research study relies mainly on the decisions of the Serious Crimes Court and interviews with experts and local NGO which have information about organized crime. However, it should be noted that the typology and cycles of development of criminal organizations, referring to court decisions, should be taken with caution because it is difficult to establish whether these decisions have adjudicated all members of the organization or just its leaders. As an interviewed criminal lawyer notes:

*“In no case, whether the criminal groups that smuggled clandestines abroad, [...] or structured criminal groups like the gang of Lul Berisha, or the drug ones, automatically and unfortunately at the same time, have we adjudicated the heads rather than the couriers and ordinary members.”<sup>99</sup>*

On the other hand, the content of information in court decisions is not abundant and does not provide much detail about the criminological conditions that enabled the sophistication and shift from simple criminal groups to structured criminal organizations. Another methodical difficulty in accurately establishing the beginning of criminal activity by criminal organizations has to do with the fact that court decisions rely on the dates when their criminal acts were committed and not when the organization began the activity. The date of commission of a criminal act occurs after the criminal organization has had considerable time to form and determine to carry out the criminal activity. In this context, the beginnings of criminal organizations are earlier than the time of documentation of their first criminal offense proven in court by the prosecutor’s office.

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95. Read the chronology of murders in Panorama Newspaper “Eight murders in 10 years, the history of the Elbasan massacre,” February 05, 2016, accessed at <http://www.panorama.com.al/kronologjia-tete-vrasje-ne-10-vjet-historia-e-masakres-se-elbasanit/>

96. Interview with civil society representatives in Elbasan (Code 81), February 2016.

97. Koha Jonë newspaper, “Elbasan, drug laboratory – largest in Balkans – discovered. 121 kg of cocaine seized. Enver Hoxha’s nephew arrested,” February 11, 2015, accessed at <http://www.kohajone.com/2015/01/14/elbasan-zbulohet-laboratori-i-drogues-me-i-madhi-ne-balkan-kapen-121-kg-kokaine-arrestohet-nipi-i-enver-hoxhes/>

98. Interview with civil society representatives in Elbasan (code 81), February 2016.

99. Interview with a lawyer (code 03), Tirana, February 2014.

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It should also be noted that this section of the report takes into consideration also organizations that have resisted the different stages through which the rule of law has passed in Albania. Such are the early periods of the political transition in the years 1990-1994; the period of social and political conflict caused by the pyramid schemes in the years 1993-1998; and the subsequent periods that see a strengthening of the rule of law but were also accompanied by the lack of political and economic cohesion, addressed in the entry chapter of this research study. These factors have become more visible during the political elections of the years 2005, 2009 and 2013. Thus, this section of the report relies on the analysis of criminal organizations with a lifespan extending almost throughout the Albanian political and economic transition, such as for instance the case of the “Lushnja Gang.” The latter is known for criminal activity that is thought to have had its beginnings from 1997 and that continued until 2005.<sup>100</sup>

For the purpose of this report, this section in the first part makes a distinction into two categories of organized crime, oriented by the time span of their activity. Thus, criminal organizations have been divided into two categories: “long term” criminal organizations and those that are “short term.” In the last part of this section, the report focuses on the analysis of the typology of the “criminal network,” which is the most widespread form of criminal groups after 2005.

## “Long-term” criminal organizations

The beginnings of ‘long-term’ criminal organizations are very much linked with the local context, because their entire activity is more widespread in the areas where they have control. The reasons for the formation of the organization vary. There have been cases when the structuring of a criminal group in the form of a criminal organization was done for reasons of self-defense from clashes with other organizations. There are also cases when some small groups have merged into a larger organization in order to fight against the rival group. This organization would dismantle after the goal was achieved, i.e. the head of the rival gang was eliminated. For instance, in the case of the so-called “Durrës Gang,” the organization was created from the merge of two different groups operating in the city of Durrës in 1998<sup>101</sup>. It should be noted that in the case of the creation of criminal organizations that are the result of merges of some smaller groups, the divisions and features of leadership are preserved. In other words, there is no total merge in the leadership and orientation of a single leader or merge among members. There is just a synchronization of actions for the common goal, which is the elimination of the rival gang or protection from it.

Another typical cause that turns into the main motive for the creation of the “long-term” criminal organization is revenge. In these cases, usually the starting point of the criminal organization is the murder of a relative of the future leader of the organization by another group and the “damaged” party creates a criminal organization in order to eliminate the other group. So, the criminal organization operates as a “protecting” social structure. A typical illustrating case is the “Lushnja Gang” or the “Group of guys of Alfred Shkurti.”<sup>102</sup> The purpose of the creation of this organization is thought to originate from a clash between two former friends, Alfred Shkurti and Artur Daja in Greece for the murder of a common friend, Besnik Tahiri, in the period 1990-’93<sup>103</sup>. Afterwards, the conflict escalated into consecutive murders, starting with the killing of Alfred Shkurti’s brother, Ramadan Shkurti, in July 1997. Immediately after the incident, Alfred Shkurti organized his own group in order to kill Artur Daja, who was thought to be behind the murder. The murders lay the foundations for the formation of one of the most dangerous criminal organizations in the past 25 years. This criminal group has been sentenced to 104 years of imprisonment by Albanian courts and 108 years of imprisonment by Italian courts<sup>104</sup>.

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**100.** See case study below on the Elbasan Gangs for a more enhanced approach.

**101.** The group led by Lulëzim Berisha merged with the other group being led by Klodian Saliu in order to face and protect against the rival group run by Marsel Sotira. The collaboration continued for a 10-month period, from October 16 or 17, 1998, until 22.08.1999, after the murder of Marsel Sotiri. For more, see Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, dated 16/01/2012, Act no. 17/06/2007.

**102.** See also Zhilla F and Lamallari, B (2015) “Organized Crime: Risk Assessment for Albania,” Open Society Foundation, p. 23.

**103.** Interview with a person knowing the organization (Code 73), Lushnje, June 2015.

**104.** See in greater detail the case study of the “Lushnja Gang” in the relevant section.

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## “Short-term” Criminal Organizations

Unlike the “long-term” criminal organizations, the “short-term” ones begin to appear after 2005, as is the case of the so-called “Blow Gang” (arms trafficking) or that of the “Palm Oil” (drug trafficking)<sup>105</sup>. Among the essential differences between “long-term” and “short-term” ones is that the former are characterized by a large number of members, have a vertical structure in small towns, but their structures in larger cities such as Tirana and Durrës assume horizontal form. The territory of their activity is mainly located in those areas where they live or where they have blood or social ties and carry out some criminal activities (such as drug trafficking, extortion, robberies, trafficking of arms, etc.). The “short-term” criminal organizations are focused on one criminal activity (e.g., arms trafficking) and are much more fluid and consist of few members. The territory of their activity is mainly oriented based on “demand” and “supply” in the domestic market, but also in the one outside the country’s borders.

Nevertheless, after 2001, it is noticed that the dynamics of criminal organizations goes through a transit period from criminal organizations with hierarchical features to criminal organizations in the form of a “criminal network” or “hybrid” form. The latter are units with a considerable number of members that have one leader, but are part of international organized crime networks. Typical cases of hybrid organizations may be considered the “Tirana Gangs,” which are thought to be active even at present<sup>106</sup>. The period after 2005 may be considered that of the fading away of the cycle of criminal organizations with a hierarchical character and the emergence of hybrid, specialized and very flexible organizations that are part of international criminal networks.

In the case of “short-term” criminal organizations, it is difficult to establish an accurate date for the beginnings of these groups as the lifespan of their criminal activity is very short, from a few months up to 1-3 years. For instance, in the case of the criminal group “Go West,” one of the members of this group is proven to have committed criminal activity (supplying with falsified documents for travel abroad) for 3 months, August-October 2005<sup>107</sup>. Based on the labeling, these organizations look more like structured groups and are part of national or international criminal networks, depending on the case and type of criminal activity. However, there are also other cases when the criminal organization was created from the start by following a gradual growth process, depending on the type of criminal activity, the political conditions in which the organization operated, but also the level of the rival criminal group. However, it should be noted that criminal organizations have assumed a push both in structural as well as organizational terms when they clashed with rival groups and afterwards, for security reasons, were structured and involved in criminal activities, as is the case of the “Dritan Dajti Group.”<sup>108</sup> In general, the collapse of organizations takes place when their leaders are caught. In hierarchical organizations, the arrest of the leader of the organization leads automatically to its crumbling. Nevertheless, the breakdown of the organization does not mean that its members escape from the crime world, but rather they may be “recycled” inside or outside the country by “emigrating” and getting involved in criminal activities elsewhere.

## Connections with State Institutions

Based on data from the interviewed experts, it is highlighted that criminal organizations, especially “long-term” ones, have had a sustainable relationship with corrupt segments inside the police, the justice system and politics. It is precisely this “connection” that has given them the guarantees to develop, sophisticate, invest in business and then in politics. As a Serious Crimes prosecutor underscored:

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**105.** It should be noted that this label has been obtained from the media according to the police operation that made possible the arrest of the criminal group. Therefore, to avoid confusion, these criminal groups in the study will be referred to with the case term, e.g., case “Last Turn,” while the term “Gang” will be used to refer to criminal organizations that have labeled themselves as such or were known as such in public, e.g. “Lushnja Gang.”

**106.** E.g., one of the eyewitnesses of the murder of judge Konomi in 2011 was asked by the police whether the killer looked like Emiliano Shullazi. See article of Panorama newspaper, based on “Jungle” TV show of journalist Artan Hoxha, “Witness: I saw judge Konomi’s murderers when Sinanaj was caught,” 15/12/2015, accessed at <http://www.panorama.com.al/deshmitari-vrasesit-e-gjyqtarit-konomi-i-pashe-kur-u-kap-sinanaj6/>.

**107.** Decision by the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes dated 29/07/2008 with Act no. 14/40/1998.

**108.** Read that although wanted since 2003, Dritan Dajti moved along the Tirana-Durrës axis without being noticed, “Dritan Dajti’s stronghold designed for escape,” Albeu, 09.08.2009, accessed at <http://www.albeu.com/shqiperi/fortesa-e-dritan-dajtit-e-projektuar-per-aratisje/10954/>

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*“Of course, this is a phenomenon that is worth discussing even theoretically, but even practically there have been cases when we have found or identified certain police officers who either were an integral part of them or served to supply information to them or through omission, tolerating and not obstructing them in their activity...”<sup>109</sup>*

The best-known form of collaboration between criminal organizations and state bodies is corruption, especially in the justice system. This too, according to interviewees is not a local phenomenon, but one that is spread in all those districts where organized crime is problematic. Thus, according to one prosecutor, the interaction of officials with crime is *“corruption, i.e. the benefits created from certain positions that have certain functions, these officials being the police or other sectors of the law.”*<sup>110</sup>

The interviewees also noted that criminal organizations have ties with politics and that the latter intervenes by neutralizing law enforcement agencies through the appointment of trusted people or of party militants<sup>111</sup>. In the case studies of the gangs of the cities of Korça and Elbasan (Annex), this relationship is clearly highlighted.

## Cooperation with other organizations

Albanian criminal organizations have a preference to preserve a status quo of their domination and do not prefer to merge with the other organizations. This is also a result of the characteristics that have mainly to do with the traditions/customs and the region where these organizations operate. In the central and southern areas of Albania, organizations rely mainly on social ties while in the northern part, they rely on blood and family ties. Organizations are familiar with one another and may collaborate only on certain cases or to make favors to someone by intervening with another organization.<sup>112</sup>

# 2. 2. Typology of criminal networks

## Features

As mentioned at the start of this section, the structure of criminal organizations depends on the type of criminal activity. However, we notice that after 2005, there is a tendency for criminal groups to function in the form of “Criminal Networks.”<sup>113</sup> This operational form is noticed both in criminal networks operating 1) inside the country, but also in those that have operations 2) inside and outside the country, mainly in border areas, but also with 3) Albanian organizations that are involved in international criminal networks and that use the Albanian territory as a place of transit, recruitment and to carry out the investment of criminal proceeds. This ‘*modus operandi*’ gives them the opportunity to be much more operational because of some features:

**First**, criminal networks, not having a hierarchic leadership structure, avoid the “bureaucracies” of taking decisions and this gives them the opportunity to act quickly and on time, thus maximizing profit and minimizing risk.

**Second**, autonomy and individuality are a characteristic of the criminal network and this enables individuals to have the necessary liberty to give solutions to problems of the moment that may arise, without the need for planning that is readable by law enforcement agencies. Individuals maneuver and act depending on the situations and provide ad hoc solutions, which makes it difficult to discover and combat them.

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109. Interview with a prosecutor (code 23), June 2014.

110. Intervistë me Prokuror (kod 23), qershor 2014.

111. Arsovska, J (2015) *Decoding Albanian Organised Crime: Culture, Politics and Globalisation*, University of California Press, USA.

112. Interview with a prosecutor (code 22), June 2014.

113. Zhilla F dhe Lamallari, B (2015) “Organized Crime: Risk Assessment for Albania,” Open Society Foundation, p. 24



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**Third**, aside from knowledge because of the criminal activity, individuals do not have other acquaintances (e.g., social or family ties) that would expose them even more toward law enforcement agencies. Thus, they interact with one another only when they need to carry out something together (e.g. drug trafficking). The case of the “Last Turn” is the typical form of functioning of a “criminal network.”<sup>114</sup> However, while in the case of the “Last Turn” the “criminal network” was based on almost spontaneous familiarity with individuals, it should be noted that there are cases when there are small groups that function in a hybrid form. In other words, the organization functions also as a group, engaging in a criminal network with tasks and roles that have been divided and assigned in advance, before the criminal group enters negotiations and, at the same time, the members of the group may “trade” individually. Thus, the members of the group may enter into direct agreements with the members of the other group or other individuals in the “criminal network and act entirely for their own personal interests, independently from the other members of the group and the interests of the group in general. Thus for instance, in the case of the “Olive Grain,” the criminal group that carried out arms trafficking consisted of three Albanian citizens, L.M., B.Ç. and A.P., but it expanded depending on the distribution and quantity of arms requested by the buyer<sup>115</sup>. This type of “criminal network” belongs to the second category (a network operating inside and outside the country). The group carried out arms trafficking with different Greek groups and citizens and the ties were either through the group or individually and directly with Greek buyers. According to police wiretapping, the prosecutor’s office noted that the Albanian group “*both jointly, and in coordination with one another, but also alone, carrying out direct ‘errands’ for Greek citizens.*” The Greek group, which then traded the weapons in Greece, also operated with the same operational structure.

**Fourth**, the roles are not clear and are divided according to the type of the “order” and according to the agreement that the parties make. For instance, in the case of the “Olive Grain,” these individuals who collected arms were in some cases the same who sold them. At another moment, the roles were more specified. Thus, a person serving as a “middleman” first found the “buyers” who placed the order. Then, the “middleman” would order the arms, which then the “buyer” would buy from the “seller” with the mediation of the “middleman.” The arms were either collected in one spot, usually in the city of Elbasan, or the “buyer” would go directly to the “seller,” as was the case of the arms purchase in Fier. To hide their traces, payments were done in cash or through Western Union transfers. In order to make it difficult to find the perpetrators, payments were done in the name of third parties, but the phone number in the sender was of the real creditor.

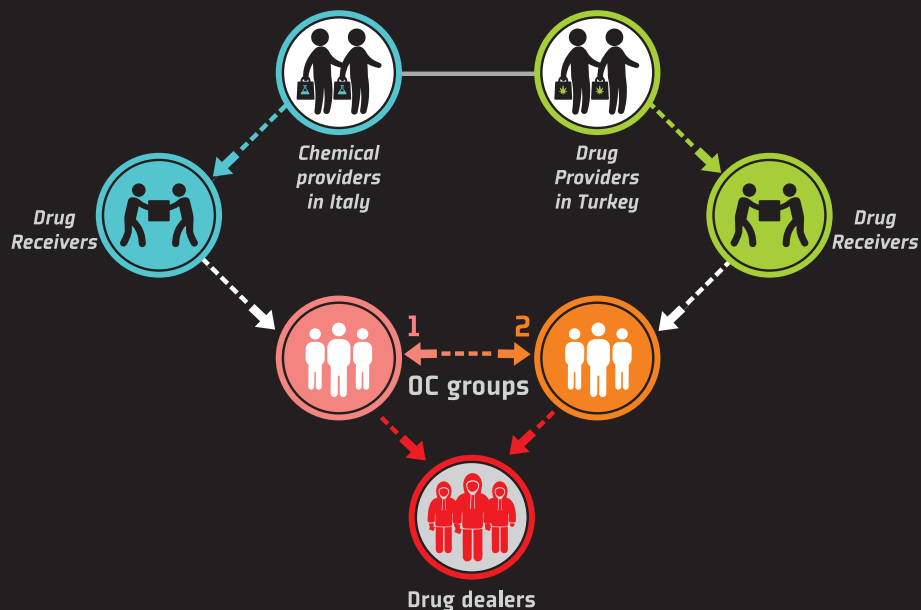
However, the role of the “organizer” in the “Criminal Network” is very important because he is the one that makes all the connections between the network points. In the case of the “Olive Grain,” according to the prosecutor’s office, defendant L.M. had the main role and “is one of the organizers and executors of finding, securing, sending and selling of arms and munitions that have Greece as a destination.” The important thing to stress in the “Criminal Network” is that there is not always an organizer but in most cases, there are several such. For instance, there is an “organizer” who finds the sale market but there is also a contact (“middleman”) who may enable the purchase. Then, the “middleman” is the one who organizes the entire purchase process up to the transportation of the goods

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**114.** In this case, the defendant Kapllan Shehu first found the buyer who would buy an amount of narcotics with the price 12.000 Euro/kg. Defendant Shehu also knows where that amount may be purchased and seeks the cooperation of a third person, Gazmir Tershalla, who has connections with the first hand sellers, an Albanian-Macedonian Arim Osmani. After agreeing on the price and the manner of transport, on the day and at the time the exchange would take place at Qafë Thanë, controls by Border Police on the Albanian side had been intensified as a result of an inspection by the General Director of State Police. Both sides communicated by telephone and underscored that it was impossible for the goods to be taken across the border. Immediately, the person who secured the drugs on the Macedonian part thought immediately of another solution that would be carried out through the Ohrid Lake. After the narcotics were taken across the lake, it was transported by a vehicle that was then stopped by police. What should be underscored is that in a criminal network, individuals reach typical agreements with all details, such as the type and quality of goods, price, form of transport, location, persons to carry it out, and the means. As this case shows, autonomy in decision-making of individuals who enter into negotiations enables them to adopt to dangers and give solutions for obstacles that may arise. For more, see Decision of the Court of First Instance of Serious Crimes dated 14.11.2007, Act no. 85.

**115.** Decision by the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, dated 02/11/2007, Act no. 64.

## Structure "Criminal Network" (Heroin Trafficking in Italy)

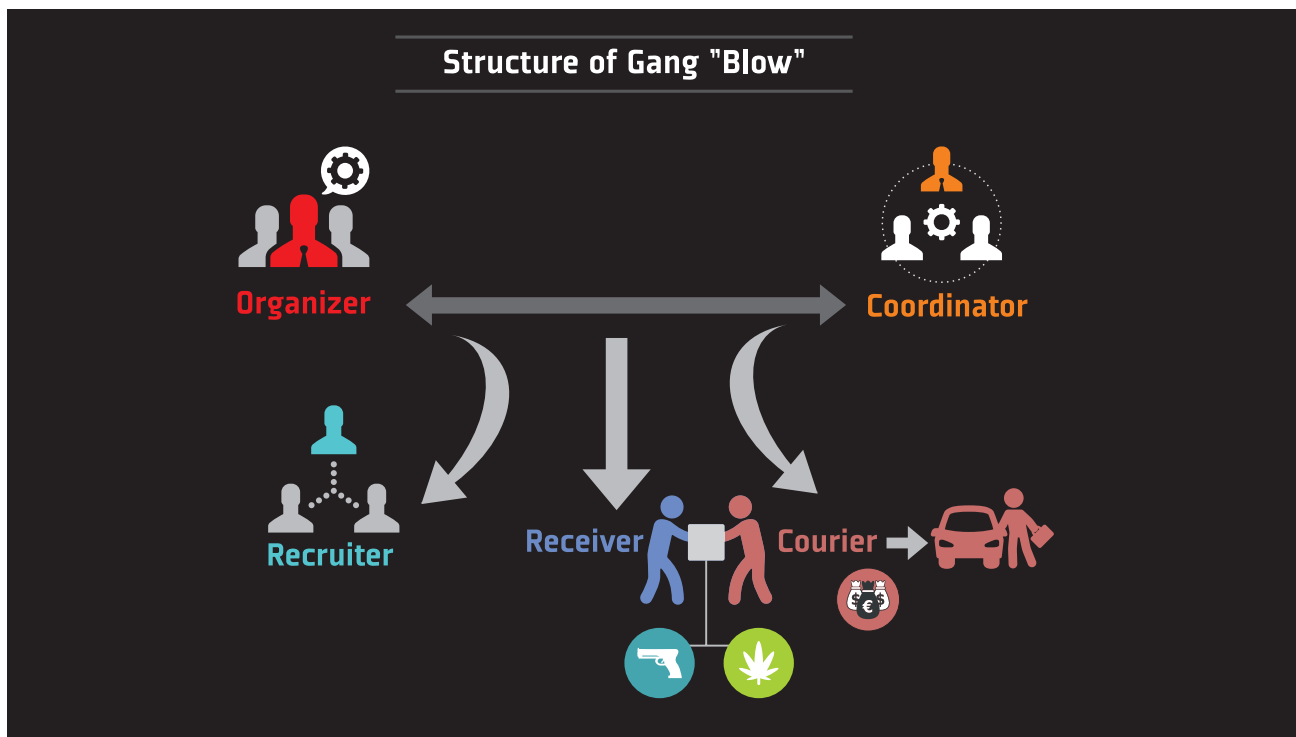


to the “orderer” who will then sell it to the “buyers.” Thus, in one case of narcotics trafficking from Albania to Greece in 2012, the organizer was the “orderer” M.B.<sup>116</sup>. The latter lived in Greece and asks his brother A.B. (Roni) and a friend of his A.D. to find in the Albanian market about 20 kilos of cannabis sativa and send it to him in Greece. The amount of narcotics was then secured through acquaintances in Lazarat, Gjirokastra, from a friend of the “orderer” and another citizen, E.Rr. The Latter would transport the drug to the city of Saranda. The narcotics would then be delivered to two other citizens L.H. and K.S. who would pass it on to Greece. In this case, the duties and roles are completely separate and there is no organizer that coordinates all the elements of the network. As may be seen from this case, the chain of actions is realized by different persons and this makes it difficult to discover the entire network. Thus, internal transport from Lazarat to Saranda was organized by other persons and the transport from Albania to Greece was organized by other individuals.

What needs to be underscored is that those Albanian criminal groups that are involved in international criminal networks with operations mainly abroad are much more advanced and more sophisticated than those operating inside the country or that have collaboration with only one organization in neighboring countries (category 3, explained at the start of this section). Criminal networks of the third category are characterized by features that distinguish them from the other categories. They are much more flexible and have a broader territory of operation. They require an almost closed cycle for the entire activity. In other words, the criminal structure takes upon itself the full cycle of the trafficking. For instance, in the case of drugs, the organization takes upon itself the ordering, reception of the goods, the distribution and the sale. One typical illustrating case is that of the so-called “Gang of Emiliano Shullazi.”<sup>117</sup> In 2005, this organization was part of the international trafficking network of heroin from Turkey to the EU through Albania.

<sup>116</sup>. Decision by the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, dated 04/07/2013, Act no. 67.

<sup>117</sup>. Decision by the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, dated 28/05/2007, Act no. 76.



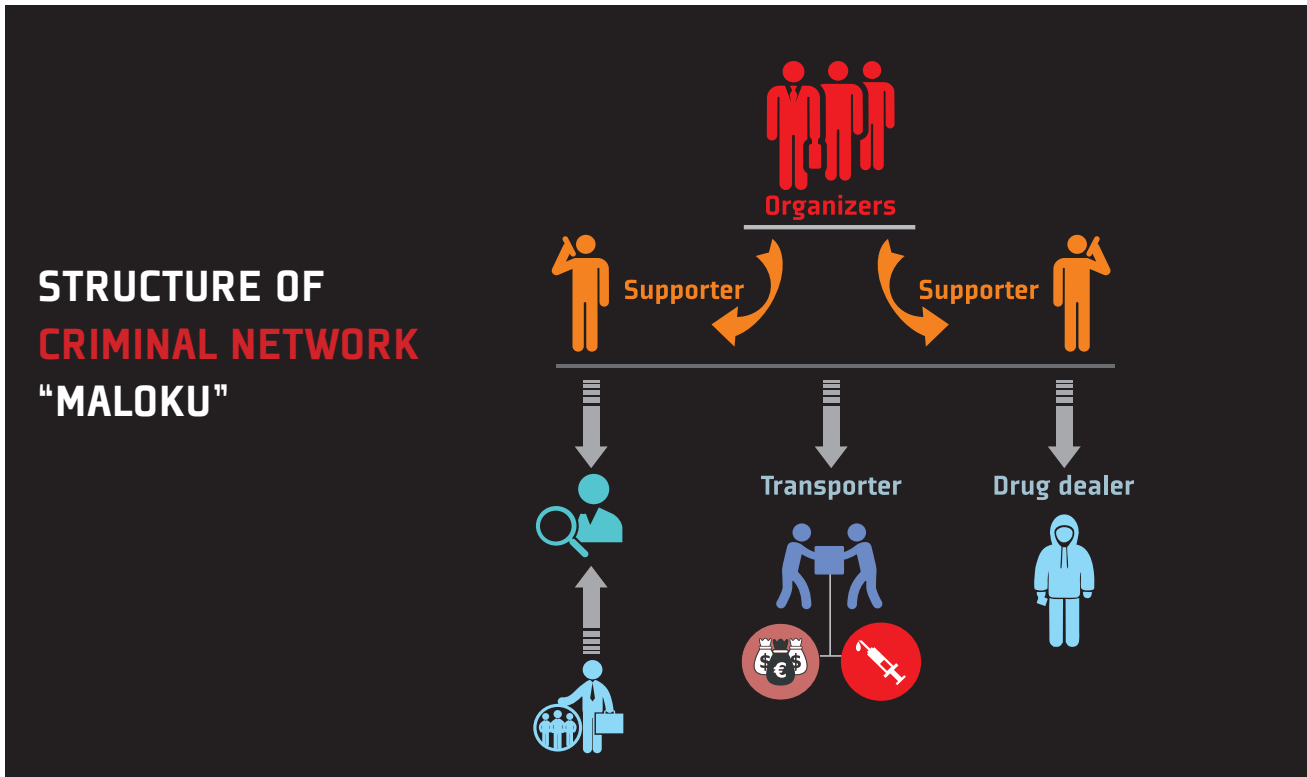
## Division of Roles

The division of roles depends on the operational structure of the criminal organization. Before 2005, the organization and division of roles in criminal organizations was more centralized and generally commanded by one or two leaders who divided roles and assigned duties and objectives. The most typical case is the "Lushnja Gang" and the "Durrës" one. After 2005, criminal organizations are oriented more toward fluid structures, i.e. criminal networks whereby the most typical illustrating case is that of the "Gang of Emiliano Shullazi."<sup>118</sup> In the case of "network" structures, the organization looks more like a criminal "market," where parties agree on concrete terms. This usually happens when structured groups participate in criminal networks. For instance, in the case of the "Blow Band," the division of roles is done based on the interaction of parties in the transaction. One side, which may be one, two or three individuals, secures the arms and the other party buys them. In the concrete case, each party has its own criminal "network" behind, whereby the "seller" is made up of individuals who establish contacts to find the arms and the "buyer" has his own criminal network for distributing to those who buy them wholesale or retail. Usually, in the case of "criminal networks," the coordinator or "middleman," who has good connections with both sides, takes up an important role.<sup>119</sup>

Another role that emerges rarely in the analysis of Albanian criminal groups after 2005 is that of the "guarantor." This person plays the role of the moral and financial guarantor. Usually, the "guarantors" are individuals who have strong ties with state structures and access to border points. There are cases when the "guarantor" has been a former police officer and has used his connections with law enforcement agencies to neutralize investigations. This case is illustrated in a detailed manner in the case study of the Shkodra district – Annex. However, the role of the

<sup>118</sup>. See also a group that operated in the district of Fier in Decision no. 1164, 2006, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

<sup>119</sup>. In the case of the "Blow Gang," the main group consisted of two main persons who were mainly the liaison and the organizers, respectively HB and JS. The latter played also the role of the middleman, as was the case for some "buyers" in the city of Durrës. The three other persons, NM and BS secured the arms in the area of Fushë-Krujë. Another supplier was AA.



“guarantor” depends on the type of criminal activity, circumstances as well as the position of the “guarantor” in the organization. If he does not have an important role in the criminal network, then his role is sporadic. Thus, in the case of the “Blow Gang,” we see that the role of the “guarantor” is minimal because the “guarantor” does not have an active role between the parties but rather only acts at the moment of discussion of the price and quantity, whereby he asks parties to be correct. Some other members of the gang in criminal networks assume secondary but important roles, such as securing vehicles for travel, for accompanying middlemen between the “buyer” and “seller” on a case by case basis, as well as other roles that help cover the criminal activity.

Another feature of the division of roles of these criminal structures is that often, the group organizers are one or two and then they recruit 3 or 4 other individuals who play secondary roles and have a more passive role. In these cases, the criminal groups are focused on and specialize in only one criminal activity. The time of creation of the organization is not brief, but extended over time and entirely for the purpose of material benefits. Thus, in the case of the so-called case “Maloku,” (a group that dealt with migrant smuggling), the criminal structure consisted of 5 members (E.R., H.Ç., A.S., K.B. and L.Ç.). The organizers were A.S. and E.R. who had recruited the other 3 members. What distinguishes the organizers from the roles of other members is not only the organizational, coordinating and recruiting aspect, but also their participation in all key moments. For instance, A.S. and E.R. (was a judicial police officer in the sector of the fight against economic crime) appear in all the episodes that have been documented as criminal offenses, while the other members appear in different episodes in assisting roles<sup>120</sup>. In drug trafficking, especially in groups that trade it in EU countries, the group that is involved in the criminal network is very fluid and the division of roles between the leadership part of the group does not appear very clearly because there is a mixture of roles. While the role of “organizers” is more visible and is played by one or two individuals, the other roles are done by the same organizing person on a case by case basis. The fixed roles of the criminal structure are the roles of the ‘receiver,’ ‘liaison,’ and ‘recruiter’ (the latter is usually played by the organizer but also the one

120. This was the case for L.M., E.K., E.G. and K.G., who in one or two cases had played assisting roles in the illegal border crossing.



responsible for finding, e.g. the courier, money transporter, receiver or other individuals for assisting roles).

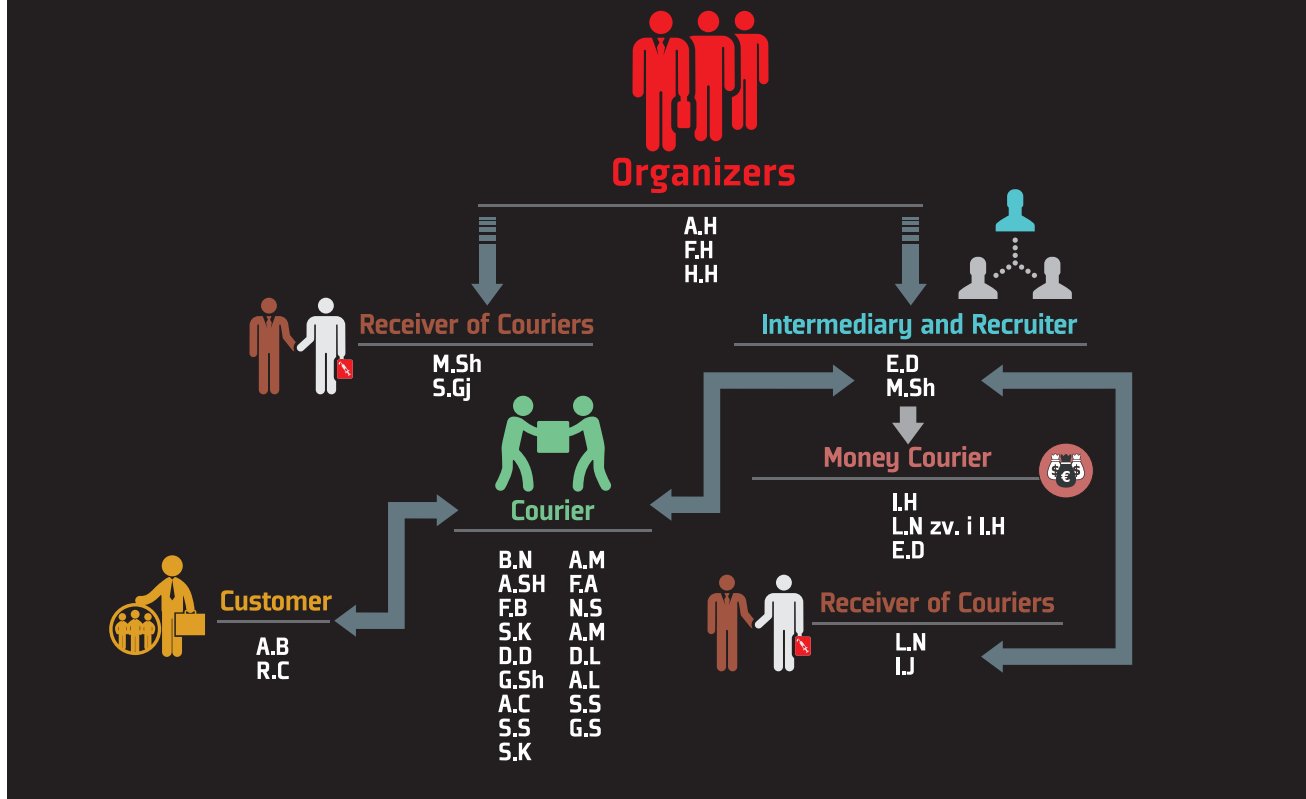
Thus, in the case of a criminal structure that trafficked heroin to Italy during 2003-2004, A.H., F.H. and H.H. were the ‘organizers,’ while the other stable members (M.S.H. and S.G.J.) had roles such as “courier receivers’ and other auxiliary roles<sup>121</sup>. Meanwhile, other participants in this criminal network take part in episodic roles, such as ‘mediators’ and ‘recruiters,’ ‘couriers,’ such as from Albania to Italy, but also as ‘transporters’ inside Italy, courier receivers,’ and ‘buyers.’ Couriers are given the phone number of the receivers and the latter are notified by the organizers. Then the couriers contact the receivers one day in advance or some hours before the delivery. Criminal organizations try to avoid ‘couriers’ knowing ‘receivers’ in order to hide traces and avoid the threat of investigations. The rapport between ‘suppliers’ and ‘buyers’ is generally stable and parties maintain close contact. Albanian criminal organizations prefer to close the cycle (suppliers from Albania – buyers in Italy) among Albanians. In the case of the “Gang of Emiliano Shullazi” for instance, the ‘supplier’ was a Turkish citizen, who brought the ‘goods’ to Albania or Italy directly and from there, the process was controlled throughout the line by Albanians.

The case of this organization shows that the organizers, aside from organizing the trafficking, have acquaintances and access to customs points where the drug or money couriers will go through.<sup>122</sup> It should be noted that the organizational structure is also affected by the type of criminal activity. Thus, in the case of trafficking in human beings, the operational structure is simpler. Generally, there are two organizers, whereby one plays the role of the

121. See Decision no. 10, 2010, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

122. See part of the decision of the court “Citizen Eduart Daiu, asks defendant Fatbardh to activate to allow his brother to pass through customs controls, indicating that the latter had money on him that was of illicit origin... defendant Fatbardh, in these circumstances, secures the interlocutor saying that he has sent two trusted persons to the port [Durrës to Ancona, Italy] to help him to go smoothly through the customs border.”

## Division of roles (Heroin trafficking in Italy 2003–2004) <sup>124</sup>



liaison with the mediators who find the clients needed to be trafficked as emigrants abroad, and the other the role of the falsifier of documents. In the case of “Go West,” N.Ç. and E.B. were the organizers. The latter plays the role of the liaison with mediators (E.Ç., A.F., S.M. and P.K.).<sup>123</sup> Meanwhile, the role of the other organizer, Nikolin Çano, was to equip the persons secured by the middlemen with fake documents. Then the persons were transported by the “Transporter” (A.L.) to the Rinas Airport or the Kapshtica border crossing. This criminal network had recruited police officers as “guarantors” who worked at border crossing points, such as E.C. (*Specialist in the Sector against Money Laundering and Economic Crime at the Rinas Commissariat*), with the attributes of a judicial police officer and Altin Flamuri, who had the duty of the controller at the Rinas Airport. The same scheme is designed in the assignment of roles also in arms trafficking. Here too, there is a network where the divided roles are the buyer (Z.K.); the middleman (Rr.D.), and the transporters/receivers (A.F., A.A.).

<sup>123</sup>. See Decision no. 50, 2008, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes

<sup>124</sup>. See Decision no. 37, 2009, of the of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

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## 2.3. Characteristics of Criminal Organizations

### Weapons

Criminal organizations use weapons to neutralize and eliminate opponents, carry out blackmail and use pressure and psychological violence on the community surrounding them. Weapons have been used also for security and self-defense. The weapons mainly used by Albanian criminal organizations are light arms such as pistols type TT, Zastava, Walther<sup>125</sup>, Beretta, Makarov and Scorpion<sup>126</sup>, automatic rifle models 54 and 56, rifles model 63, 26 56, 1020, heavy machine gun model 53<sup>127</sup>, hand grenades, etc. It should be emphasized that after 2003, criminal groups increased the diversity of weapons used, especially in cases of paid killings. Thus, only Florian Vila, the paid killer of the ‘Lushnje Gang,’ was found with 5 kilos of remotely controlled (100m) explosives, able to cause the death of living beings up to 4m away and cause material damage up to 100m away. Besides the explosives, police seized from the organization a series of pistols with 7.65mm caliber such as Walther, Browning, Czechoslovakian ÇZ, Zastava, Beretta etc<sup>128</sup>. After 2005, the Albanian market also saw arms of smaller calibers and even modifiable arms such as the handguns “Blow Mini Mod 2003” and “CAL 8 mm”<sup>129</sup>. Criminal gangs used also other auxiliary tools, such as mobile phones and radio equipment with antennas<sup>130</sup>, not to mention handles, head covers, neutralizing spray, etc.

### Connections, Civil Status, and Education

The composition of criminal groups depends on the type, reach and location of the leaders of the criminal organization. In criminal groups functioning as ‘criminal networks,’ the composition is heterogeneous and the critical mass of the group includes more members from one area or villages close to the area they live in. For instance, in the case of the “Blow Gang,” the criminal network consisted mainly of members from the villages of the Durrës district (Xhafzotaj, Rrushbull) and the surrounding areas such as Fushë-Kruja, but there were collaborators even from the Vlora district.<sup>131</sup> It should be noted that in the majority of cases, ties between members of the criminal organizations are either blood ties or social ties based on location. The latter rely mainly on ties from the same village or villages close to one another, the same neighborhood when in cities, or ties that are determined by the possibility of finding the goods, as in the case of arms trafficking<sup>132</sup>. In general, education is 8-year or middle level.<sup>133</sup> However, with regard to education, there is a tendency to have criminal networks dominated clearly by members with higher education and high school education. In the case of the criminal network “Maloku,” which dealt in trafficking of migrants in the south of the country, the majority of the members were from Gjirokastra and 5 members had university education, 3 had high-school education and only 1 member had 8-year education, all of them without previous criminal precedents.<sup>134</sup> It should be noted that in general, the education of persons committing criminal offenses is dominated by the compulsory education level (9-year).<sup>135</sup>

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125. Among many weapons, this type of large caliber 9mm gun was found at the Lushnja Gang. See Decision no. 42, 2010, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

126. These weapons were used by the Lushnja Gang.

127. See Decision no. 47, 2007, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

128. See Decision no. 38, 2006 of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

129. See Decision no. 48, 2006, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

130. These tools were found from the “Shullazi Gang.”

131. See Decision no. 48, 2006, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

132. See Decision no. 47, 2007, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes. The members of the criminal network that deals with arms trafficking are from the district of Korça (villages of Vashmi and Zerec) and the district of Fier (Patos and Seman Farm).

133. Interview with a prosecutor (code 22), June 2014.

134. See Decision no. 11, 2009, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

135. See Bulletin of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of September 2016, whereby 51% of those prosecuted had elementary education, followed by 31% with high school education, and 13% with higher education. Accessed at [http://www.punetebrendshme.gov.al/files/programs\\_files/Buletin\\_Mujor\\_Shtator\\_2015.pdf](http://www.punetebrendshme.gov.al/files/programs_files/Buletin_Mujor_Shtator_2015.pdf)

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What one notices is that the age of the members of criminal networks dealing with arms trafficking is higher than that of other organized criminal activities.<sup>136</sup> On the other hand, members of the organization or the network who have criminal records also have leading and organizational roles.<sup>137</sup> In criminal networks of narcotics trafficking, one notices that here too, the network consists of members coming from the same district or city and where connections are based on social acquaintance. The tendency in these criminal networks is that the age of members who participate is very young; in most cases come from rural areas (villages), only have elementary education (8-year), are unmarried and generally without previous criminal precedents. The average age in narcotics trafficking is on average about 25 years old. However, this age shows a marked downward trend and might reach an average age of 20, as is the case of the so-called “Lazarat Group,” which was convicted in 2016 by the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes to 83 years of imprisonment.<sup>138</sup> In the case of the group led by the “Aliko Brothers,” also from the Lazarat village, the average age of the members of the organization, which is being tried, goes down between 17 and 21 years old.<sup>139</sup>

In criminal organizations functioning in hierarchical form and have sustainability, as is the case of the “Lushnja Gang,” the education of members is low (8-year), and the majority are unmarried. The tendency of the education level and marital status of members of criminal organizations of this nature is changing. For instance, while in the “Lushnja Gang” almost all members were in a young age, unmarried and with 8-year education, in the “Durrës Gang,” many of the members, especially the main ones, had high-school education and were married. In both cases, the characteristic of the hierarchic organizations is that in general, many of their members had previous criminal precedents.<sup>140</sup>

## Forms of Violence

Albanian criminal organizations are known for the fact that one of the instruments that makes them “successful” in the crime world is the violence. The use of violence is present both in criminal networks and in hierarchical ones. The most violent cases are seen in hierarchical organizations and are present in the cases of fight against opponents or clashes between different fractions. All criminal organizations have used a diversity of violent forms, such as beating with hard objects and inhuman torture. They are usually used against their opponents or extorted persons or who have been robbed by violence. Torture and violence are used to scare and blackmail. Thus, one form of torture of the “Lushnja Gang” was the handcuffing and then the severe beating. Violence was also used as a form of psychological pressure on the victim or the relatives of opponents. Some such forms are for instance: kidnapping of relatives, burning of houses, businesses or threats at gunpoint.

Another form of violence was the forceful snatching of the business, property or violent transfer of shares. One typical case was the transfer of the shares of 90 shareholders of a fishing company in Karavasta, Lushnje, in the name of Alfred Shkurti (Gang Leader) through 90 notary acts signed in one day. Another specific of the use of violence is when the criminal organization takes advantage of the weakness of individuals or businesses that are suspected to have direct or indirect ties with their opponents. This fact is used as an excuse to exercise violence and extort victims. The trend of violence is heading toward sophistication. Thus, gradually, criminal organizations are avoiding physical violence and are using psychological violence more, so that they can make their exposure to law enforcement even more difficult.<sup>141</sup>

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**136.** Average age in arms trafficking varies between 35-45 years. For more, read Zhilla F and Lamallari, B (2015) “Organized Crime: Risk Assessment for Abania,” Open Society Foundation, p. 24.

**137.** Interview with a judge (code 31), June 2014.

**138.** See Reporter.al “Lazarati I”, the Gate Mahmutaj group sentenced to 83 years of imprisonment,” BIRN, 18.01.2016, accessed at <http://www.reporter.al/lazarati-i-grupi-i-gate-mahmutajt-denohet-me-83-vjet-burg/>.

**139.** This group opposed with weapons the RENE forces and killed one police officer among them in June 2015. Gorica, “Group Inspired by Mafia,” Shekulli Newspaper, 27.06.2015, accessed at <http://www.shekulli.com.al/p.php?id=277401>.

**140.** See Decision no. 1, 2012, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

**141.** Interview with a judge (Code 23), Tirana, June 2014.



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## Forms of Killings

Acts of murder are mainly committed through firearms and are committed to create terror among opponents, usually in public places in order to convey messages. In hierarchic organizations, one notices that all members participate in most of the murders. This was typical as in the “Lushnja Gang” and the “Durrës Gang.” This scheme of involvement is used to create solidarity and unity in the organization and gives guarantees as it criminalizes all members of the organization. All kill the same people and all have the same enemies. Thus, a kind of solidarity in crime is created. After the years 2000, criminal organizations began to imitate the killings of Italian mafia organizations, shooting opponents mainly in the head and chest, without many traces, as was the case of the killers Dritan Vila and Julian Sinanaj recently.

After 2011, the sophistication of murders begins through the increasing use of paid killings. Killings are clean and executions are generally efficient. There is also a considerable increase in killings by explosives, as the latter eliminates traces and makes it easier for the perpetrator to get away from the scene. On the other hand, it creates the effect of terror, a message that criminal organizations often want to convey to their opponents. We notice that sophisticated killings through the use of explosives, snipers and paid killings, have been used to eliminate not only opponents but also businessmen. The latter have often contracted organized crime to eliminate one another.<sup>142</sup>

## Number of Members

It is difficult to establish an average of membership in Albanian criminal organizations. However, it is supposed that hierarchical organizations tend to have a greater number of members; meanwhile, it should be noted that criminal networks too appear to engage a considerable number of members. The essential difference is that in hierarchic organizations, members belong to a criminal structure, while in criminal networks, the only sustainable structure is the organizational one, which on average varies between 2 and 5 members. On the other hand, the number of members of criminal organizations with hierarchical form varies from 7 to 20 members, depending on the number of members sentenced by the court.<sup>143</sup> One notices that the criminal networks that are part of international networks of narcotics trafficking and smuggling of migrants have or engage a large number of individuals. For instance, in the case of the “Go West Gang,” the number of involved persons reached about 11-15 persons, with only the structured criminal group consisting of 9 persons.<sup>144</sup>

## Recruitment

In hierarchic criminal organizations that operate in defined territories, the organization tries to recruit depending on the positions and the moment. For instance, the “Lushnje Gang” recruited mainly youngsters without family support and who were mainly orphans for the role of soldiers. At the time of consolidation, this organization began to bring closer members from large families, with connections and businesses such as the Taullai family. The latter had 5 brothers and managed a gas station.<sup>145</sup> It is to be noted that Bajram Taullai mentions as members of the family only the males (which shows what is considered a family in a situation of almost war, i.e. only those who can use a weapon). But if someone did not agree, the person was either asked to leave town or was eliminated altogether.

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142. Zhilla F dhe Lamallari, B (2015) “Organized Crime: Risk Assessment for Albania,” Open Society Foundation, p. 87-88.

143. See the Lushnja Gang and the Durrës Gang.

144. See Decision no. 50, 2008, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

145. Interview with a prosecutor (code 72) Tirana, July 2015.

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In recent years, one notices a new trend, with a large mass of recruits being individuals who have returned from emigration in Greece because of the economic crisis, in adult age, without a job and with debts or other social problems. This contingent of individuals has been recruited by criminal networks that operate mainly in Greece and Italy. These individuals are used in Albania as transporters, receivers or couriers to transport narcotics and cash on behalf of Albanian organizations and work outside the country.<sup>146</sup> Another phenomenon that is noticed is that criminal networks, mainly those of narcotics trafficking to EU countries (Great Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Belgium) recruit individuals with a very low economic and educational status in poor areas of Albania as couriers of drugs, distributors, guards of houses where cannabis is grown in home conditions, etc.<sup>147</sup> Criminal organizations have grown stronger already and have managed, as mentioned above to recruit even foreign citizens (Italians, Greeks, Germans, Turks, etc.), including women, mainly in the role of couriers or transporters by air (pilots of sports planes). Air transport of narcotics is a phenomenon that has just begun to appear after 2012.<sup>148</sup>

## Involvement of women

We notice an increase in the involvement of women in various roles, especially in criminal organizations that deal with narcotics trafficking. They generally play secondary roles, such as couriers, distributing, hiding money<sup>149</sup> and to expose opponents in a murder ambush.<sup>150</sup> One of the reasons for the rise in the involvement of women in organized crime, according to interviewed experts, has to do with the difficulty and unpredictability of their movements by law enforcement agencies. Women have been extensively used in extortion cases.<sup>151</sup> Depending on the criminal activity, women have participated also in the main crimes of the organization, such as for instance the falsification of documents in migrant smuggling.<sup>152</sup>

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**146.** Interview with a judge (Code 23), Tirana, June 2014.

**147.** On February 23, 2016, a group of about 20 Albanians were arrested who dealt with the trafficking of strong drugs in Manchester, Great Britain. Read Osuh, Ch, "Detectives who smashed Albanian dial-a-drug gang try to trace three other men", Manchester Evening News, 23.02.2016, accessed at <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/albanian-drug-gang-manchester-wanted-10936079>, 03/04/2016.

**148.** Read the report by the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on the issue of the "air transport by sports planes" of narcotics, led by Socialist Party MP Ermonela Felaj in 2014 at Binjaku, F "Drug planes, evidence of trafficking in Gjadër at the time of the DP," 01/06/2014, accessed at <http://www.panorama.com.al/publikohen-sot-faktet-per-trafikun-e-droges/>, 03/04/2016.

**149.** Used by the "Shullazi Gang."

**150.** Scheme used by the "Lul Berisha Gang."

**151.** See Decision no. 27, 2011, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes

**152.** See Decision no 50, 2008, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

## Communication Codes

Albanian criminal organizations are known for the use of inferred language as a tool to avoid wiretapping by law enforcement agencies. There can be no unique lexicon that may be used by all organizations as each of them, depending on the criminal activity, employs its own inferred language. Below are some codes used by reviewed criminal organizations:



### ARMS TRAFFICKING

**Codes for automatic weapons, rifles, pistols and cartridges:** *motorcycles, lumber; longs; shorts; small; big; iron behind; wood behind; Russian; Chinese; locally made; olives.*



### NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING

**Codes for drugs:** *“Money,” “Euro,” “dollars,” 10 kilos as “10,000 Euro;” “shoes,” “whores,” “old ladies,” “good friend,” when transported to Albania “design for an apartment building.”*

**Code for amounts:** *“54 tyres (drugs) should come today, but it’s a problem as good ones are needed.” The term “square” is used to mean double the amount of narcotics.*

**Code for the arrest of the courier:** *“...he broke his leg...,” “...my uncle was hospitalized”*

**Code for suppliers:** *“Architect”*

**Code for hiding goods in the vehicle:** *“Dismantle back door and tie the loudspeaker wires so you can hear better.”*

**Code for policemen:** *“the black ones”*

**Code for receivers:** *“the in-laws (orderers) have arrived. Because of the car they didn’t come to pick up the bride (drug) as it’s bad weather...”*

**Use of nicknames for couriers:** *“Villager,” “Bone,” ...*



### MIGRANT SMUGGLING

**Code for capture of migrants by border police:** *“...those persons were ‘tired’”*

**Code for Albanian passports:** *“Eagles”*

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## Territory of Activity

The analysis of court decisions shows that criminal organizations that do not have a hierarchical structure in fact have flexible structures and are part of criminal networks and do not have a defined territory. They operate on a case-by-case basis and depending on the sale and purchase market. For instance, in the case of criminal organizations that deal with arms trafficking, the territory of operation depends on the collection of weapons coming from districts in the north (Kukës, Malësi e Madhe, Shkodra) but also in Central Albania (Fushë-Krujë, Durrës, Elbasan), southeast (Korça) and in the south (Fier, Vlora).<sup>153</sup> Meanwhile, criminal groups dealing with the narcotics trafficking inside the country have a more definite territory in the case when they are criminal structures with few members (3-5 persons). Nevertheless, there are cases when criminal structures move based on possibilities and access to border crossings or even on the buyers. For instance, if the buyers are from Kosovo, the Morina border crossing in Kukës is used, but if the buyers are from Macedonia, the Morina, Qafë Thana and Tushemisht (Pogradec) border crossings are used.<sup>154</sup> Meanwhile, the territory of criminal organizations that are part of international networks or whose activity is mainly outside Albania is more definite and Albania is used as a place of transit. For instance, an organization dealing with heroin trafficking was focused on Regio Emilia and Milan.<sup>155</sup> The drug (heroin) is transported by small vehicles with a double bottom while the cocaine is usually hidden in containers. The movements too are within a certain perimeter. Albania is mainly used to recruit couriers and to transport the financial means that are then used in commercial activities.

It should be noted that the type of criminal activity is an important determinant of the territory of operation of the criminal organization. The trafficking offenses (of human beings, migrant smuggling, arms and narcotics) have a more expanded territory of operation, while some other activities such as extortion have a more defined territory.<sup>156</sup> On the other hand, besides the type of criminal activity, the territory of operation is also determined by the connections that the criminal organization has with the terrain. As mentioned above, hierarchical organizations have a definite control area as was the case of the Durrës Gang, the Lushnja Gang and some criminal groups operating mainly in the district of Shkodra.

On the other hand, the air and maritime border crossing also play an important role in the territory of operation. Throughout the territory of Albania, one characteristic is that the ports and border crossings are very close to the main urban areas and areas with high criminality, such as Tirana, Durrës, Shkodra,<sup>157</sup> Korça, Gjirokastra and Vlora.<sup>158</sup> This closeness between the largest urban areas and the border crossings has some level of impact on the criminalization of border towns as criminal networks often recruit local inhabitants to secure services related to corrupting public administration employees that deal with managing border crossings.

The trend for the territorial reach of criminal activities is toward fluid structures and a market of services. This is the case especially in the activity of narcotics trafficking. Considering the considerable profits from narcotics, we notice that after 2012 even legitimate businesses are using their commercial activities to carry out narcotics trafficking. And, in the context of a “criminal network of services,” it is difficult to define a criminal territory. For instance, in one drug trafficking case, in 2014, that was hiding behind the trade of decorative stones mentioned above, the trader had hired a driver from the city of Vlora; the narcotics had been bought not from a criminal organization but from a “villager with a mule;” the vehicle had been loaded and packaged in Skrapar; it had stopped on the Tirana-Durrës highway so the driver could take it and had headed for the port of Durrës and then to Italy.<sup>159</sup> With regard to maritime trafficking, another specific is that besides the passage through shipments on ships of goods, another

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153. See Decision no. 47, 2007 of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes and Decision no. 48, 2006.

154. Decision no. 50, 2007, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

155. See Decision no. 10, 2010, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

156. See Decision no. 27, 2010, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

157. On the territory of organizations that deal with arms trafficking in the northern areas, mainly onto Kosovo, see Decision no. 37, 2009, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

158. With regard to the Districts of Gjirokastra and Saranda, see Decision no. 64, 2013, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

159. See Decision no 4, 2014, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

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form is that of putting criminal products at open sea to be then taken from Albanian criminal groups in Italy or from Italian criminal organizations. One such case is described in one drug trafficking case through Vlora, where the “vessel, ship ‘Serena di Mare,’ had obtained the narcotics at sea, from across the beach of Zvërnec, the spot known as Petrolifera, on 07.11.2012 in the morning, to send it to a spot known by sailors as ‘Batlla of Seman,’ north of the Sazan island.”<sup>160</sup>

## 2. 4. Risk assessment / tendencies

The sophistication of criminal organizations began to be more visible after 2003. Some features of the sophistication include the use of coded language, special mobile phone numbers activated only for trafficking purposes, and the use of different couriers.<sup>161</sup> After 2005, it is noticed that Albanian groups enhanced their positions in international trafficking networks, especially the narcotics ones. It is also seen that the trafficking networks include roles that were not seen before 2003, such as the role of the guarantor or the funder. Members of known criminal organizations carry out these roles. Their influence is very large even when they are isolated in institutions where they serve imprisonment sentences. Thus, in the case of a criminal network for trafficking of strong narcotics from Albania to Italy, led and funded by I.B. and Sh.B., the guarantors for the distribution of the narcotics in Italy were E.D., J.XH. and E.T., who were a fraction of the “Durrës Gang.” Endrit Dokle played the role of the guarantor although he was in pre-trial detention.<sup>162</sup>

Albanian criminal organizations were involved in international cocaine trafficking, as suspected in the case of Klement Balili in May 2016.<sup>163</sup> Involvement in these networks has led to the sophistication in their manner of operation. In the case of cocaine trafficking, one feature that is noticed has to do with the use of the business as a protective “façade” for hiding and masking the trafficking of cocaine both for domestic use in Albania, processing and even transiting. This feature is seen clearly in the publicly known case of “Palm Oil.”<sup>164</sup> In these cases (when the business is used as a protective ‘umbrella’), the individuals are hidden and play a double role, taking the goods hidden as a commercial shipment and using different commercial companies for maritime or land transport to destination. This makes such actions go through different links, which at first sight appear quite legitimate and for commercial purposes.<sup>165</sup>

The chain of actions in international trafficking looks a lot like the principle of money laundering, whereby the frequency of actions is used to distract and avoid suspicions of authorities. This makes discovery difficult as the authorities find it hard to distinguish whether the activity of the commercial company is criminal or just commercial. The criminal network may use several businesses for this purpose. The case of the “Palm Oil” shows quite well that an operation of this standard and organization is much more sophisticated, requires the involvement of legitimate business, money laundering and individuals who do not leave a negative impression in the community. This is

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**160.** See Decision no. 39, 2013, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

**161.** See communication techniques of the above organization in Decision no. 10, 2010, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

**162.** See Decision no. 45, 2011, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

**163.** Erebara, Gj. (2016) ‘Suspected as drug ‘lord’ Klement Balili declared wanted in Albania,’ Reporter.al, 11/05/2016, accessed at <http://www.reporter.al/i-dyshuari-si-baron-droge-klemend-balili-shpallet-ne-kerkim-ne-greqi/>

**164.** See Decision no. 73, 2012, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

**165.** This part of the court decision explains all the actions carried out by one individual and explains the symmetry of transactions and steps followed from the source of the goods (Columbia) to the final destination, which is Albania. “It results proven in the adjudication that the defendant Dhimitros (Vullnet) Harizaj, from December 2010 negotiated with citizen Arjan Lazaj and citizen Kristaq Kotro to bring ‘Palm Oil’ to Albania. Defendant Dhimitros (Vullnet) Harizaj had full information about the origin and movement of the goods and is concretely the person who ordered the shipment, made the payment for the goods ‘palm oil,’ gave the money for the payment of rent and penalties for the container in Belgium, which has been proven as made by citizen Erjona halili, an accountant at the firm “INTER-KRISS” Sh.p.k. This defendant took care of finding the transport company that would make it possible to transport the container from Belgium to Albania. To that end, he spoke personally with the representative of an Albanian company, citizen Altin Bitincka. The latter did not have the possibility himself to realize such a transport but found a Macedonian company that took upon itself to transport the container. It was personally the defendant Dhimitros (Vullnet) Harizaj who gave citizen Altin Bitincka the payment for the transport.”

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the case also because drug trafficking through the “criminal network,” whereby Albania is used as a transit and processing country, does not represent any threat of conflict over turf issues between criminal organizations. This tendency began with the classic criminal organizations such as the “Lushnja Gang,” which invested in different businesses in the Karavasta Lagoon, Sport Club Lushnja, the city bingo and in other businesses. The members of the organization carried out different duties in these businesses. The current trend of criminal organizations is the investment in real estate and the hiding of assets under the name of relatives of members of the organization or trusted people in social circles. These businesses are used not only to launder money, but also to participate in public tenders.

On the other hand, it is noticed that criminal organizations connected with Columbian drug cartels try to use as a “façade” transport companies in order to sneak in and hide the goods. Thus, the Mexican mafia negotiates with different transport companies in Europe to sneak in the goods against a payment and then the goods move to the warehousing points for processing and sale in small amounts. In the case of the “Cocaine Lab” in Xibrakë of Elbasan, the warehouse belonged to a private company while it was suspected that other warehouses had been used in the past, hidden as private businesses. Hiding drug trafficking behind businesses has been noticed as a phenomenon that is used also by criminal networks with less reach than that of the “Palm Oil” case. In general, criminal groups use or collaborate with companies that deal with import or export of goods abroad. Usually, trafficking hidden behind businesses is done either in collaboration with them or by lying to them. The chosen commercial operations are those dealing with goods that enable the hiding of narcotic substances. The cheating is done not only to use the company to purchase or transport, but above all to use its name in the certificates accompanying the goods. Thus, in 2012 for instance, a company in Sukth dealing with the trade of decorative stones to Italy was used and the brother of the defendant shared a similar case whereby a brick company in Manëz of Vora had been deceived through the same scheme.<sup>166</sup> It should be underscored that Albania as a destination has come back to the attention of international cocaine networks since 2008, establishing direct connections with Albanian criminal organizations. This tendency has returned since the early case of “Cocaine” (Durda and Bërballa) in 2001.

It should be noted that the phenomenon of trafficking schemes using private businesses has been employed also in the trafficking of cannabis.<sup>167</sup> A very similar case appears in 2014 when the narcotics trafficking was hidden behind trailers transporting decorative stones to Italy. In this case, the traffickers used a borrowed driver who worked in another company. This case shows, at least according to the testimony of the defendant, that not only are businesses cheated or lied to but they also engage with full consciousness in the narcotics activity and those most active in this regard appear to be the companies for the transport of decorative stones purchased in Skrapar and transported to Italy.<sup>168</sup>

In the last five years, one of the most widespread forms of hashish trafficking has been transport through fishing ships to open sea and then the drugs were taken by a ship waiting there or by small and fast speedboats.<sup>169</sup> Tendencies of sophistication are noticed also in efforts by criminal networks to avoid investigations or prosecution by law enforcement agencies. These tendencies are noticed after 2001. Some of the characteristics noticed especially in the “Shullazi Group” are the use of nicknames or other names by gang members, change of names in the civil

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**166.** See Decision no. 45, 2014, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes. “According to the person making the statement, in one of the days set for meeting with his brother in the prison premises, he accidentally met with a woman whose husband was in jail. Based on the conversation with her and her son, Lirim Sula, learned that her husband, who had a firm for the production of decorative bricks in Manëz had been deceived in the same circumstances as his brother Lulzim. The person who had placed the order with Lirim’s father was citizen Dritan Memoçi from Vora, who presented himself as Arben Maloku. The person who had purchased bricks from Lirim Sula, and the person who had presented himself as Brahim Koliqi, did not show any interest in the quality of bricks or stones, but just purchased quickly.”

**167** See Decision no. 38, 2012, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

**168.** Decision no. 04, 2014, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, whereby defendant Viktor Shkoza declares, “After solving the problem of the driver, I went to Skrapar and asked about the stones. In conversations with inhabitants who worked on trading stones, I found that it was spoken almost openly even about the issue of narcotics that, in their opinion, especially this year were being traded wholesale and that many persons were abandoning trading of stones to work with hashish. That is where I got the idea to try and send through this route narcotics to Italy as the cover would be very good and the possibility for controls would be very small because of the shipment.”

**169.** Decision no. 38, 2012, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

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registry office, the use of fake identities, the use of coded language, avoidance of direct communication by the main members of the criminal networks with the “couriers” used as middlemen; the transport of drugs was done by bicycle inside the city, etc. The forms of communication currently have become even more sophisticated. Thus, telephone conversations have been entirely avoided; communication is done only through messages that are conveyed through couriers (mainly in young age), or through SIM cards that are used only once.<sup>170</sup> Lastly, according to the interviewed experts, there is a tendency for criminal organizations to expand in numbers and be larger compared to the gangs that flourished in 1997.<sup>171</sup>

Another tendency toward sophistication is the move from the phase when criminal groups attacked state institutions to the phase when they create strong ties by influencing both local and national politics. Thus, there is a shift from the period of direct clashes as was the terrorist act of the “Lushnja Gang” in the stadium of the city in 2000, to corrupting and cooperating or recruiting in criminal activity police officers or officials of local government. Thus, the “Maloku Gang,” which operated in 2007, had two recruits from law enforcement agencies (Hodo Çorro, former chief of Border Police, and Erges Rabaj, judicial police officer in the Directory for the Fight against Economic Crime). Even in the case of the criminal network of drug trafficking in 2010, it is noticed that the leading group had corrupted port police officers that provided access to couriers to transport the money or the drugs.<sup>172</sup> Criminal organizations had managed to have access even to the issuance of visas (during the period when Albania was not part of the Schengen program).<sup>173</sup> The transcripts of the “Durrës Gang” show ties between members of this organization with known businessmen with influence in the high levels of local and national politics. Another evident aspect of the sophistication of criminal organizations is that according to an interviewed prosecutor, they “*have moved to a higher level of camouflage of economic proceeds,*” which enables them to hide and then integrate these incomes in legitimate businesses. This has led recently to a high empowerment of organized crime.<sup>174</sup>

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170. Interview with a journalist (code 17), Tirana, January 2016.

171. Interview with a prosecutor (code 24), Vlora, June 2014.

172. Decision no. 10, 2010, of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes.

173. For instance, Shullazi had secured several times the issuance of a German visa

174. Interview with a prosecutor (code 25), Durrës, July 2014.





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**CHAPTER 3.**  
SOCIAL ECONOMIC ANALYSIS  
OF CRIMINALITY IN ALBANIA  
[1994-2014]

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The analysis of social-economic indicators is an important instrument in the effort to comprehend/explain the degree and nature of crime in the Albanian environment. The economic development of a country surpasses the “dry” indicator of the real GDP growth by assuming meaning only through the increase of the spectrum of goods and services offered and the full access to the fulfillment of needs for all members of the society. Thus, social inclusion, employment, increase of incomes, divorces or level of education, etc., are like shock absorbers for reducing or minimizing crime in society.

In order to ensure the best possible evaluation of the intensity, causes and kinds of crimes in the Albanian space, we tried to make a detailed analysis of a series of social, economic and political determinants for certain districts, in order to come as close as possible to the issues. However, it should be taken into account that the collection and processing of data by specialized institutions at the district level has marked problems, leading to some extent to an infringement of accuracy of judgment. Thus, we thought of conducting the analysis of data over two main periods: 1994-2003 and 2004-2015. The model of division was after two symmetrical time periods, during the first period of which there was technically an absence of data at the city level; therefore, the analysis was conducted at the national level; for the second decade, the analysis was conducted at the regional level.

## 3.1. Period 1994-2004

Demography is the social “dough” where the development of a society in general is prepared and, therefore, the capture and analysis of all its (absolute/relative) dimensions enables us to correctly comprehend the contours of the potential of the other indicators. Albania embarked upon the start of major changes with a population that had 3.259.814 inhabitants<sup>176</sup>, which began to get smaller quickly due to the massive exodus of the population abroad.<sup>177</sup> Only during the period 1991-1995, the population decreased by 7%, shrinking in absolute value by 222.714 persons. This process continued throughout the entire 1994-2004 decade and the population of Albania, on average, according to INSTAT data, shrunk by 0.38%. As mentioned above, this phenomenon was mainly the result of emigration abroad and the normal population growth rate, which made up somewhat for the emigration of the population.

Another phenomenon of a social character that followed the changes in the structure of the population and its movements, with an indirect but very large impact on the increase of criminality of the population was the destruction of the family. Thus, according to data from INSTAT, the number of divorces increased on average by 5% a year for the period 1994-2004.<sup>178</sup> The average coefficient<sup>179</sup> of divorces for the same period was 76,8 with a contrast from 70 to 120 respectively for the years 1994 and 2004, which expresses clearly the rising tendency of this indicator. In these conditions, when the number of divorces rises while the population shrinks, the phenomenon of division becomes more widespread and more disturbing. Its impact on the criminalization of the society although not immediate, remains quite high.

Meanwhile, with regard to the average and minimal wage<sup>180</sup>, both these indicators have seen continuous growth. Due to the low starting base, growth rates have been higher in the beginning of the ‘90s and then kept becoming

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**176.** Source: INSTAT, Statistical Yearbook 1995-2004, population for the years 1995-2000 was calculated on the basis of population projections from the population censuses of 1989 and 2001

**177.** <http://www.gazetatema.net/ceb/2015/06/26/sinjali-i-ktheses-eksodi-i-shqiptareve-me-2-korrik-1990/>

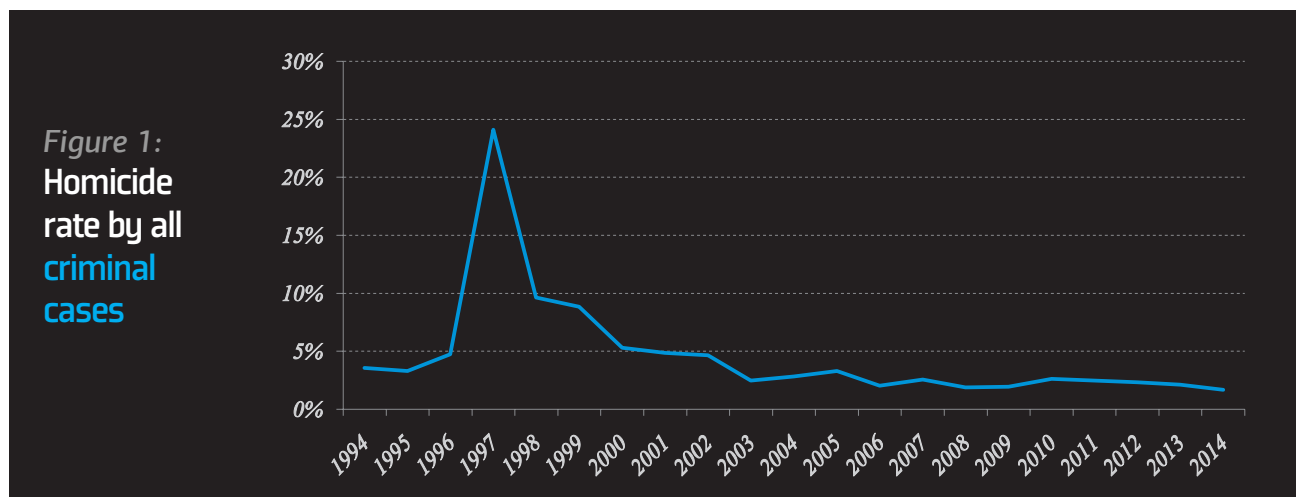
**178.** Source: INSTAT, [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/12753/martestat\\_dhe\\_divorcet\\_\\_1990\\_\\_2014.xlsx](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/12753/martestat_dhe_divorcet__1990__2014.xlsx)

**179.** Source: INSTAT [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/12753/martestat\\_dhe\\_divorcet\\_\\_1990\\_\\_2014.xlsx](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/12753/martestat_dhe_divorcet__1990__2014.xlsx); Calculations of the author of the nr of divorces per 100,000 inhabitant

**180.** Source: INSTAT, Statistical Yearbook 1991-1999, Statistical Yearbook 1995-2004

more moderate. Thus, the average salary in the state sector for 1994 saw an increase of 73% and the increase saw a reduction to 14.4% for 2004. The same phenomenon was demonstrated with the minimal wage, which in 1994 saw an increase by 103% and in 2004 a growth rate of only 0.2%, except for 1997 when the growth was 0%, which is the only year without a raise. However, to understand the difference of the minimal wage in Albania compared to other countries of the European Union, we'll bring the case of Greece (as a neighboring country), where the minimal wage was 1003 USD for 2000 and 1057 USD for 2004.<sup>181</sup> Meanwhile, the respective salaries in Albania according to the average annual exchange rate of the Bank of Albania for the same years were 49.14 USD and 106.58 USD.<sup>182</sup> Changes to the level of the minimal wage remain 10 times higher even with Greece. In the conditions of a low level of incomes, the pressure on the Albanian society to criminalize during this period remains considerable although the rate of growth of these two very important indicators has been continuously positive and quite high. A similar situation developed also with regard of the average monthly salary in the state sector in Albania during the same period.

Another element of an economic character, with a direct impact on alleviating the phenomenon of criminality, is per capita income. They have increased an average of 23% per year for the same decade, except for 1997 when the GDP per capita declined by 28%. During this year, there is an evident correlation between the reduction of income and the increase to a maximum level of crimes, especially murders. However, this phenomenon was not encountered before that year or in the following years. Thus, as in the case of the other economic indicators, the very low base of this indicator creates the illusion of a healthy and sustainable growth of the economy. Meanwhile, a fundamental characteristic of this period was mainly the restructuring of the economy and the change of conceiving the model of economic growth, leading to a high polarization in the distribution of income (to some extent, healthy for economic growth), but very dangerous as it pertains to the criminalization of the society. On the other hand the legal and law enforcement vacuum, the import of criminal phenomena together with foreign investment, which exploited high profit rates (in the context of just as high risk), in the face of a "naïve" society in terms of entrepreneurship, increased the risk of social criminalization during this period.



Thus, with regard to the coefficient of criminality for the period 1994-2004 its average value was 181.73. The tendency of this coefficient declined from 231.82 for 1994 down to 138,29 for 2004, with an increased amplitude of 207,05 for 1997, which in terms of the level of criminality coincides with the period 1994-1995. Nevertheless, a distinguishing feature between these years is the change in the high number of murders, which vary from 265 for 1994 to 1,592 for 1997. The number of murders during 1997 is the highest compared to the entire period, from 1991 onwards, because of three main factors.

181. [https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=AV\\_AN\\_CAGE](https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=AV_AN_CAGE)

182. [https://www.bankofalbania.org/ceb/Arkiva\\_e\\_kursit\\_te\\_kembimit\\_2372\\_1.php](https://www.bankofalbania.org/ceb/Arkiva_e_kursit_te_kembimit_2372_1.php)

**First, the vacuum created by the lack of law enforcement institutions.** During the chaos created throughout the country, state institutions for a moment ceased to exist, but even later there was a very clear sense of their weak functioning; their force to act was very limited geographically speaking. This created a favorable terrain for the development of criminality.

**Second, the intensive influence of politics on the worsening of the situation,** especially after the politicization of the protests organized for the money lost in the pyramid schemes.

**Third, but no less important, the massive dissemination of weapons in the hands of the civilian population,** which made the commission of murders even easier.

Thus, as may be seen in Figure 1, the part of murders in the total of criminal offenses reached its climax in 1997 and remains relatively high even during the following years 1998 and 1999, namely at 10% and 9%. This kind of rate may otherwise be considered a negative “quality” of crime. In the opinion of this Research Study, the higher the “quality” of the criminal activity, the stronger the inertia of preserving the weight of serious crimes in the total of crimes. The multiplier effect that murders have in Albania, also because of the lack of justice and the phenomenon of blood feuds, have led to a preservation of high murder rates during the years immediately after 1997, until the increase and strengthening of the activity of state law enforcement institutions. Further on, the average of this indicator for the entire period does not go above 5%.<sup>183</sup>

As pertains the other indicators of an economic character, which may have affected the structure of crime for that period in Albania, it is worth considering the Gross Domestic Product (GDP/capita). Thus, in 1997 this indicator fell by 28.4% compared to the previous year.<sup>184</sup> However, it should be stressed that the situation of 1997, due to the insecurity that was created, may be considered at the same time both a cause and a consequence of the negative growth of the GDP and, as a result, of per capita income. Thus, the reduction of entrepreneurial activities, the departure of foreign investment from the country, the increase in the unemployment level (22%) have been the result of the insecurity that was created, but at the same time, the GDP recession, unemployment and reduction of income led to the increase of insecurity in the country.

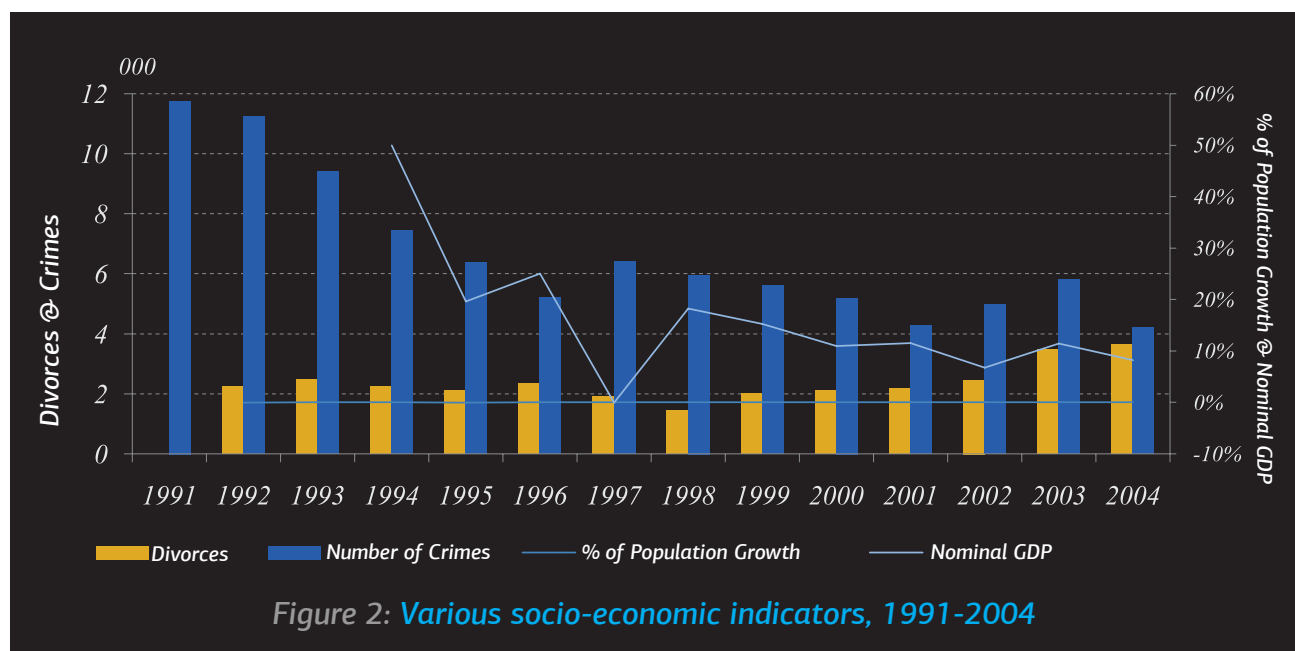


Figure 2: Various socio-economic indicators, 1991-2004

183. Source: Calculation by the author based on administrative data from INSTAT (Statistical Yearbook 1991-1999; Statistical Yearbook 1995-2004) and Ministry of Justice; <http://punetebrendshme.gov.al/> <http://www.drejtesia.gov.al/files/userfiles/statistika>

184. [www.financa.gov.al](http://www.financa.gov.al) (Treguesit Fiskalë sipas Buxhetit të Konsoliduar, qershor 2015 \_paraprake)

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Another social-economic element that deserves special attention due to its direct influence on the level of criminality in the society is without doubt unemployment. Although some authors argue that the role of unemployment remains unclear with regard to its impact on the crime coefficient,<sup>185</sup> we believe that the unemployed undoubtedly remain a potential contingent for crime. Thus, in Albania, the average unemployment rate for the period 1994-2004 was 15.65%. It should be understood that the beginning of the '90s is directly related with the transit from a centralized economy to a market economy. This process was accompanied by structural unemployment, which is more stable in time and more difficult to correct. In these circumstances, without taking into consideration the registration of the self-employed in rural areas and the emigration "valve," the unemployment rate and impact on the level of criminality are very high.

Meanwhile, the average growth of income per capita during the period 1994-2004 appears high at 23%, not including the data from 1997. For 1994, this indicator reaches the high value of 62.7%, which was the result of the low income base, the population shrinkage, the change in the methodology of GDP calculation, and the activation of private entrepreneurship.<sup>186</sup> We notice a light positive correlation between the increase of per capita income and the coefficient of crime, as presented in Figure 2. As mentioned above, the increase of income has been systematic, as has been the reduction of the crime coefficient. However, there is a paradoxical situation with regard to the "quality" of crime. The weight of murders in the total of criminal offenses for the period 1994-1996 is almost the same with that of the period 2000-2002 although the level of incomes was on a constant increase. One explaining element maybe could be the inertia of the war in Kosovo, the increase of informal activities, the installation of corruption, and the restraint of entrepreneurial activity because of the energy crisis.

## 3. 2. Period 2004-2014

Because of the specifics of Tirana, we thought that the analysis of the city for the period 2004-2014 should be done separately and the other districts, from a methodological standpoint, should be analyzed comparing them to Tirana.

### Tirana

Tirana is the country's main center of economic, political and social activity, also because of the concentration of the most important institutions that lead the country. Tirana has seen constant population growth. In spite of population migration, the resultant of the average annual population growth in it has been positive by 2-3% for the entire 2004-2014 period. According to INSTAT data, the population of the district of Tirana has increased by 75% during the period 2004-2014 (10 years) with an annual average of 6.5%.<sup>187</sup> It is worth pointing out the fact that the district of Tirana vis-à-vis the city has seen greater relative growth. Meanwhile, together with the natural population growth, internal migration has played the main role in the process of population growth for the district of Tirana. This situation shows not only the change in the population structure, but also the poorer "quality" of the district structure with regard to the civil and education level. The period of population adjustment (minimally one generation) arrived from less developed areas generates social pressure for criminalization. Official data indicate that the situation of criminality for this district has worsened. From 2004, we notice that the coefficient of criminal offenses and the coefficient of serious crimes have undergone consecutive growth. Thus, the criminality coefficient<sup>188</sup> grew from 173.3 for 2004 to 244.6 for 2014.

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185. <http://www.economics.uci.edu/files/docs/thdçorkshop/ç10/klee.pdf>

186. Source: INSTAT, and calculation by the author

187. Calculations by the author based on population data 2001-2014

188. Calculations by the author based on data from the Ministry of Justice (Statistical Yearbooks 2004-2014) for crimes and criminal offenses, and on INSTAT data on the population (which has been calculated based on population projections from the 2011 population census data)

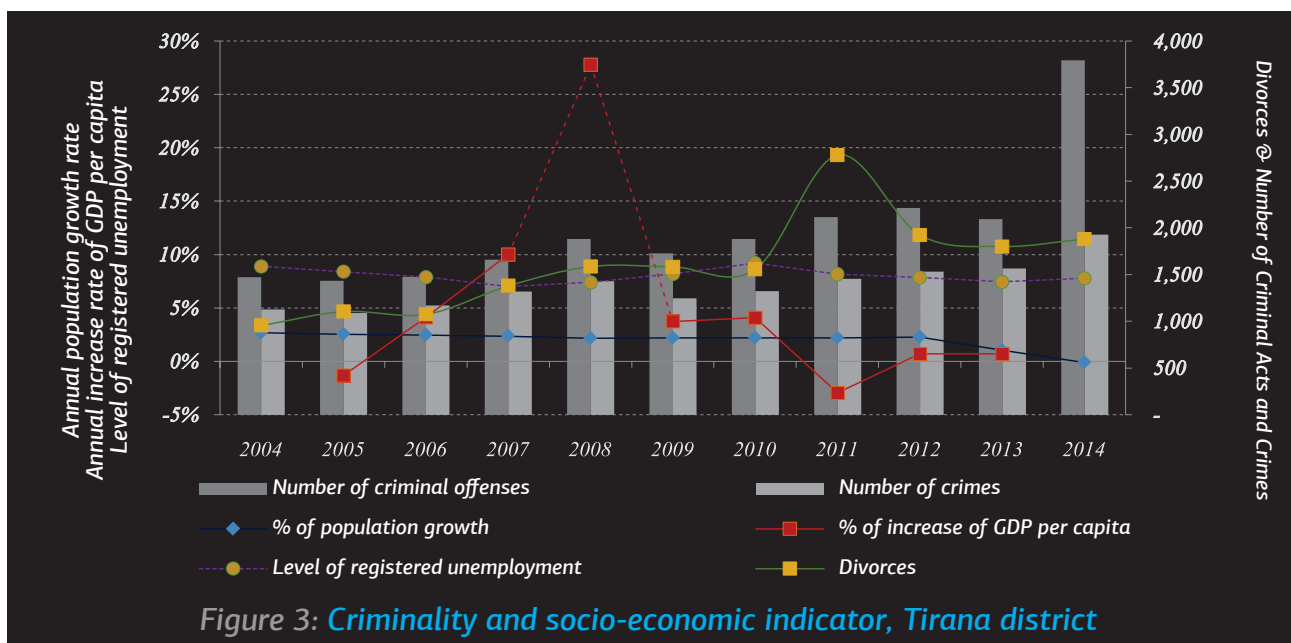


Figure 3: Criminology and socio-economic indicator, Tirana district

In the conditions when the population in this period grows with only 176,000 inhabitants, there is a spread of crime within the same social structure or in other words a “criminal satiation.” In other words, we don’t have to do with an increase of the number of crimes because of the increase in the number of the population and, in this context, the situation appears even more disturbing. For the period 2004-2014, the number of serious crimes and criminal offenses have undergone a continuous upward trend. Thus, as may be seen in Figure 3, the average of the increase in the criminality coefficient for the district of Tirana has been 3.6%, with a more marked increase in the recent years.

Meanwhile, the specific weight of serious crimes in the total of criminal offenses for the same period is 72%,<sup>189</sup> which shows not only the quantitative increase of crime, but also the increase of the negative “quality” thereof. Thus, the average of the coefficient for criminal offenses calculated by the number of the population at the district level (INSTAT population) reaches 268.7 criminal offenses per 100,000 inhabitants, demonstrating an inclination for growth during recent years. The situation appears similar also with regard to the specific weight of crimes (72%) against the total of criminal offenses for the district in the period 2004-2014.<sup>190</sup>

In order to explain the high criminality level in the district of Tirana, it is very important to analyze the economic factors. However, referring to per capita income for the period 2004-2014, it has increased with an annual average of 5%. It should be highlighted that from 2008, INSTAT changed the methodology of calculating the GDP and therefore there is a break in the time column. Thus, the interpretation of this average should be done with reservations. Incomes, in terms of absolute figures, have seen considerable growth for the period 2004-2014.<sup>191</sup> The main problem with regard to the impact that income has on the criminalization of the society in general, and the district of Tirana in particular, has to do with the Gini coefficient. As has been explained above, the polarization of the society in terms of income per capita is high. So, theoretically, we have an increase of per capita income (in spite of the population growth rate for Tirana by an average of 2% through the years), but in terms of the real distribution of per capita income, one part of the society possesses more wealth. In these circumstances, the pressure for the criminalization of the society grows, especially when thinking of the high profit rates in illegal enterprises.

189. Calculation by the author based on data from the Ministry of Justice – Statistical Yearbook 2004-2014

190. Source: Ministry of Justice <http://www.drejtesia.gov.al/files/userfiles/statistika> INSTAT, <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/192229/t2.xlsx>

191. Source: INSTAT, <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/logaritë-kombetare.aspx>

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Another element, very important for understanding the impact of income on the amortization of criminality, is the difference in the level of income for Albania compared to the EU countries. This reality is the same for Tirana as well, even in the conditions when the income of its population is the highest in the country. Thus, given that the income level is low and disproportionately distributed, the psychological pressure to urge Albanians of young ages toward the path of crime remains high. This picture of the district of Tirana is completed even more by the level of unemployment in Albania, whereby according to INSTAT data (on registered unemployment), it goes from 20% in 1998, 8.9% in 2004, and 7.8% in 2014. The average registered unemployment rate for Tirana during the period 2004-2014 has been approximately 8% per year. Normally, the capital has the highest number of registered enterprises, which is translated into more entrepreneurial activity and jobs. Therefore, the unemployment indicator is more satisfactory compared to the other districts, but the figure needs two general explanations:

**First**, we need to understand that the clarity of the level of unemployment in Albania is undone because of self-employment figures, mainly in the agriculture sector. Thus, the real mass of the army of the unemployed is many times higher than official statistics, which represents a quantitative element of the increase of criminality

**Second**, it should be understood that the level of unemployment in the 15-24 age group is much higher and not only because of the economic crisis. Thus, in Central and South-Eastern Europe countries, including Albania, the unemployment rate among youth varies from 20 up to 30%.<sup>192</sup> This age group of the population makes up the main supply for crime in the country.

Meanwhile, the average salary level has undergone growth through the years at a rate of 8.5% from 2004 to 2014, although because of the tax policy in 2014, the average salary in Tirana saw a decrease of 4%. We should understand that even when we talk about the average salary level, the situation coincides with that of per capita income in the region and beyond. Thus, the difference in per capita income compared to the countries of the region, in spite of the constant increase, remains considerable and represents an additional factor that generates criminality.

Another very important factor of a social character that explains the escalation of criminality in the district of Tirana is the education level. According to INSTAT data, the number of persons with a university diploma increased during 2001-2011 by 109% for the district of Tirana.<sup>193</sup> This shows the satiation of the Tirana population with university diplomas, thus presupposing an opportunity for the reduction of the level of criminality for the district. Why then is there such an inverse correlation between education and the level of criminality in Tirana? First, as is known, the problem of the fabrication of diplomas by many universities in Albania has led to the quantitative increase of graduates, but all of that to the detriment of quality. Thus, diploma bearers are not necessarily bearers of appropriate training and education, which allows room for criminalization, as it deprives them of the labor market, of income and relevant prestige that would coincide with their level of education. .

Second, a very important element that explains the non-qualitative structure of graduates in Tirana may be the migration of the population. As was explained above, the internal population migration is the main pillar in the formation of the social structure of the Tirana district. Thus, because of the economic aggravation, the ratio of internal immigrants with internal emigrants for the district of Tirana until 2012 is 8.7. Meanwhile, internal population migration moves according to a “bottleneck,” from the suburbs to the center (capital), which means that the more educated (in some cases also the richer) move toward the center. The departure of a high number from the capital, according to the same bottleneck model, means that we have a brain-drain from the capital toward the more developed centers (cream) while the process of internal migration continues (i.e., the population increases). The increase of the number of graduates is a later process, at a time when the graduation “factories” flourished, in a new structure changed mainly because of the newcomers (remaining) and not because of the natural population growth. Thus, the increase of graduation did not translate necessarily into a qualitative process of training. If we add to this

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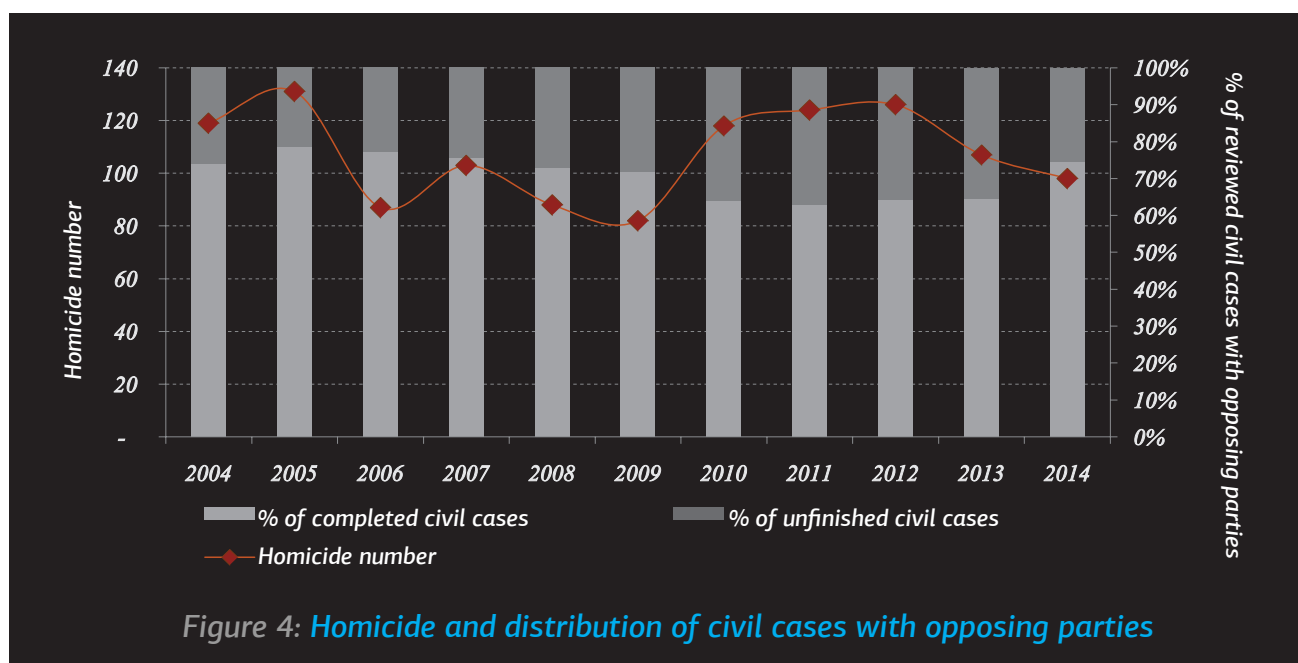
192. <http://www.transmonee.org/databases.php> (Country profiles 2015)

193. INSTAT, Census 2011, <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/census/census-2011/të-dhënat-e-census-2011.aspx>

picture a high number of persons, about 52,000 persons leaving the country after the '90s, then it is much more complete.<sup>194</sup> Thus, juxtaposing the level of education in Tirana and the economic level of Tirana, compared to the country, we realize that in this case, the “brain-drain” phenomenon may explain to some extent the not so satisfying education of the remainder of the population of Tirana. Divorces represent another important element of a social character, with direct impact on the increase of criminality. During the analyzed period, this indicator showed an annual increase rate of 10%.<sup>195</sup>

This element harms the basic unit of the society (family), weakening the family from an economic, psychic and psychological standpoint. On the other hand, failure to create children the conditions to grow up in the necessary economic comfort and parental love, combined with the above factors, increases the chances for them to commit crimes in the future.

Furthermore, a just as important element in the reasoning for the criminalization of the Albanian society is the malfunctioning (corruption) of the justice system.<sup>196</sup> In order to provide a qualitative review of the functioning of the justice system, we have referred to cases registered in court and those tried by the court. Thus, the average specific weight of civil lawsuits that have ended up in court against the total of civil lawsuits against opponents registered is about 70% for the period 2004-2014.



This means that about 30% of civil cases do not find a solution through the justice system. The rate for the same period regarding property ownership cases does not go beyond 60%. In other words, almost half of property ownership issues do not find a solution at the court, thus reducing the trust in the justice system. The number of registered lawsuits on property ownership issues has dropped on average by 23% for the period 2004-2014 (Figure 4).

194. Calculation by the author with the data from the Living Standard Measurement Survey 2012, [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/224610/lsm\\_s\\_2012\\_alb.rar](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/224610/lsm_s_2012_alb.rar)

195. Calculation by the author based on INSTAT data on marriages and divorces [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/12753/martesat\\_dhe\\_divorcet\\_1990\\_2014.xlsx](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/12753/martesat_dhe_divorcet_1990_2014.xlsx)

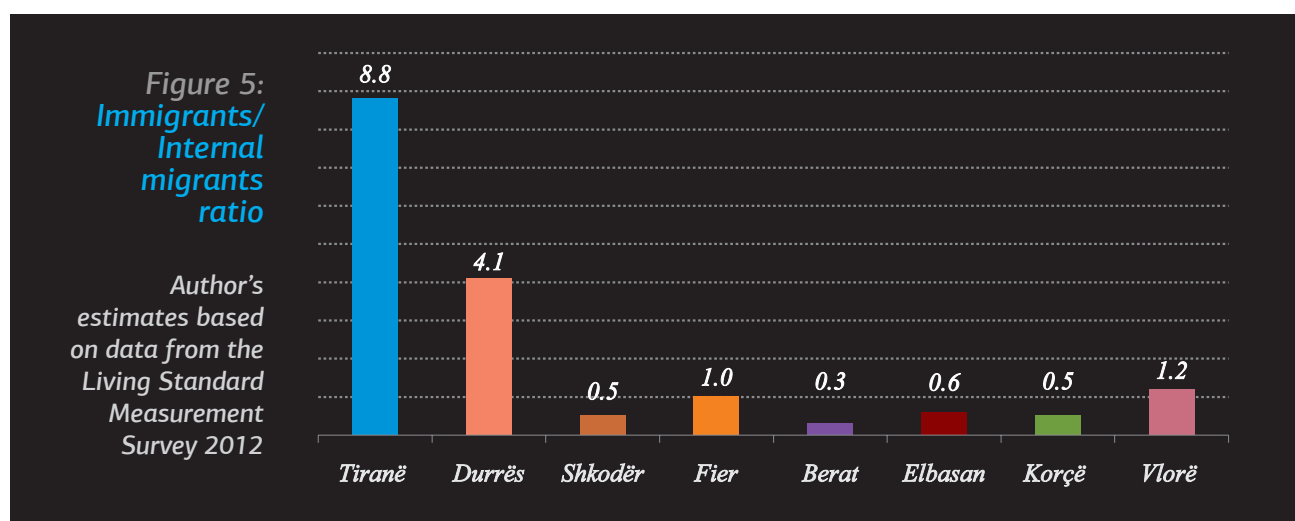
196. Fabian Zhilla, (2011) “Organised crime and judicial corruption in the Western Balkans: Are customary norms playing any role?”, *Journal of Financial Crime*, Vol. 18 Iss: 4, pp.387 - 404



It is worth emphasizing that at the foundation of these cases lie mainly economic interests and because there are opponents, they tend to easily turn into generators of conflict or murder. In such circumstances, the pressure for self-justice increases and one instance of its reflection could be the annual average of murders. Thus, the indicator of murders for the period 2004-2014 is on average 106 persons per year.<sup>197</sup> Taking into consideration the fact that Tirana makes up the main mass of economic activity in the country, we may conclude that this tendency is much more marked for this district. For 2014, one interesting correlation is the fact that the percentage of property ownership lawsuits against the total of registered lawsuits coincides with the percentage of murders for property ownership reasons against the total of murders.

## Other districts

The situation in the main districts of Albania appears different compared to Tirana with regard to population growth. Thus, its average growth for the period 2004-2014 is positive only for Durrës (0.87%), while for all the other districts such as Korça, Fier, Berat, Vlora, and Shkodra, average population growth has been negative, respectively -1.13%, -1.46%, -1.21%, -1.91%, -0.57%.<sup>198</sup> The phenomenon of population shrinkage has come as a result of two main fluxes of population movements inside and outside the country. The main mass in this movement is that of external emigration, especially for the period 2001-2012.<sup>199</sup>



This is explained with the increase of the global financial crisis pressure and the opportunity that visa liberalization provided for movement toward the Schengen area. The impact of emigration abroad on the amortization of criminality in these cities is not direct. Mainly, emigration serves as a security valve that may help reduce poverty and the level of poverty because it produces remittances. Both these elements have a positive impact on the reduction of criminality, although this situation does not appear in the analyzed districts. In other words, in spite of increased external migration, criminality remains high.

Meanwhile, the peak of internal emigration was in the period 1998-2000 and this mainly due to the situation of insecurity created after the events of 1997. With regard to the data obtained from the Living Standard Measurement Survey 2012, among external emigrants, about 50% of them went outside the country during the period 2001-2011.

197. UNDATA, "Intentional homicide, number and rate per 100.000 population", <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNODC&f=tableCode%3A1>

198. Calculation by the author and INSTAT, <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/192229/t2.xlsx>

199. Calculation by the author with data from the Living Standard Measurement Survey 2012, [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/224610/lmsms\\_2012\\_alb.rar](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/224610/lmsms_2012_alb.rar)

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An exception is the district of Vlora for which the main mass of external emigration was during the period 1991-2000.<sup>200</sup> Thus, this entire period of time (1991-2000) was accompanied by the worsening of the population structure of these districts, not only due to the reduction of the work force (as a key factor in the production process), the shrinkage of demand and reduction of entrepreneurial activity, but also because of the departure of financial and intellectual potentials. It is precisely the reduction of entrepreneurial activity that was translated into higher unemployment norms registered in the districts with negative growth of their populations. Thus, the average level of registered unemployment,<sup>201</sup> for the period 2004-2014 goes from maximally 24.8 for Shkodra down to 11.3 for Korça. It is clear that registered unemployment norms have been increasing after 2010, due to the global economic and financial crisis. Meanwhile, the district of Durrës, much like that of Tirana, has seen an average unemployment rate of 9,65%. The main cause for the high employment rates in this district is the intensity of economic activity as the district is considered the second largest economic center after Tirana. Also, while serving as the entry gate for maritime routes, Durrës has turned into a second gravitation center for economic and social activity. Nevertheless, the situation remains paradoxical as Durrës follows Tirana with regard to the level of criminality and mainly serious crimes.<sup>202</sup> In fact, the indicator of the ratio between serious crimes and criminal offenses has been on the rise for all districts (excluding Durrës), but that does not indicate a reduction in criminality, but just a greater increase of the coefficient of criminal offenses for this district. It is worth mentioning the fact that the average of the coefficient of crimes for the period 2004-2014 is higher for port cities like Durrës and Vlora, respectively 217.5 and 200.3.<sup>203</sup> This indicates high intensity of the internationalization of criminal activity – criminal structures using ports for their illicit activities.

Another important element with regard to the level of criminality in the districts are the incomes. Unlike the population and unemployment indicators, average per capita income has seen a clear upward annual trend in all districts. The highest rate of 12.67% was in the district of Fier and for the other part, the rate does not go above 7%. High growth rates for average income vis-à-vis Tirana come as a result of the low base of income level that the suburbs have compared to the capital. In other words, in spite of high growth rates, in absolute value, per capita income remains still far from the level of EU countries. This double difference off income in the population of the districts compared to the capital and the EU further increases the pressure for the criminalization of the society. As in the case of Tirana, the unjust distribution of incomes also generates pressure for the criminalization of the population, mainly the young people living in these districts. Even the average monthly salary in the state sector has seen sustainable growth for the period 2004-2014. Thus, on average, salaries for these six districts have increased 2.45% every year, a figure that is close to that of the district of Tirana.<sup>204</sup> These two important macroeconomic indicators have an inverse impact on the criminalization of the society, but the country's economic development level and the high informality rate alleviate the impact of these indicators. Thus, in the circumstances whereby there is increase of incomes and at the same time an increase in the criminality coefficient, another reason that explains the increase of criminality is the high level of informality of the economy. This phenomenon includes the black and grey economies, which are sources of serious crimes, particularly in the case of the black economy. According to the most optimistic estimates by the Central Intelligence Agency (2015),<sup>205</sup> the level of informality of the Albanian economy varies from 35% up to 70%.

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200. Calculation by the author with data from the Living Standard Measurement Survey 2012, [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/224610/lsms\\_2012\\_alb.rar](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/224610/lsms_2012_alb.rar)

201. Source: INSTAT, <http://www.instat.gov.al/publications/librat/2015/vjetari-statistikor-rajonal,-2015-.aspx>

202. Source: Ministry of Justice, <http://www.drejtesia.gov.al/files/userfiles/statistika>

203. Calculation by the author based on data from the Ministry of Justice (Statistical yearbooks 2004-2014) for the number of crimes and criminal offenses, and on INSTAT data on population (which is calculated based on projections for the population from the 2011 population census)

204. INSTAT, 'Salaries and Labor Costs,' <http://www.instat.gov.al/themes/pagat-dhe-kosto-e-pun%C3%ABs.aspx?tab=tabs-5>

205. <https://www.cia.gov>

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## 3.3. Summary

The situation with regard to criminality in Albania has not seen improvement during the past 20 years. The average coefficient of criminal offenses for the period 1994-2014 has been 170.7. The growth rates of this indicator have varied from a minimum of -28% for 2004 up to a maximum of +17% for the years 2002, 2003 and 2008. It is an important fact that in 2014, this indicator reached the level of 1997, i.e. the situation with regard to the commission of criminal offenses is considerably worsening although the specific weight of murders in the total of criminal offenses has been at an average level of 4% for the entire analyzed period (not including 1997, when the indicator reached 24%). Meanwhile, the level of criminal offenses in Albania appears to be the lowest compared to all other countries of Southeastern and Central Europe,<sup>206</sup> but this situation does not reflect reality for two reasons. First, there is a partial registration of the number of criminal offenses for the purpose of improving statistics and, second, there is a lack of trust in the justice system in general, which derives from the small number of cases that end up in court (about 60%) and the high level of corruption in the justice system.

A series of factors of social and economic character have influenced the reality of Albanian criminality. Albania's population has seen a continuous decline throughout the period 1994-2014, shrinking by 10%. The main reason for the reduction of the population is emigration abroad,<sup>207</sup> accompanied by a declining rate of natural growth from 16.7% for 1994 to 5.3% for 2013.<sup>208</sup> Nevertheless, the situation for certain cities has been different because internal migration of the population from depressive cities to the centers of economic development has led to a positive ratio for Tirana and Durrës. Thus, the ratio of internal immigrants to that of internal emigrants appears 8.76 times higher for Tirana and 4.09 times for Durrës, leading the population of these districts to increase vis-à-vis general population tendencies.<sup>209</sup> With regard to the situation of criminality, it is an important fact that the demographic composition of all cities of Albania has changed, producing social tension and a polarization of social strata during the adaption period because the demographic vacuum of cities has been mainly filled by immigrants coming from rural areas, reducing their demographic "quality." The social structure has also experienced the problems of education. In spite of the increased number of the educated, the quality of real education leaves much to be desired, thus weakening its influence with regard to the reduction of criminality. Thus, although Tirana appears to have the highest number of graduates, ranks second with regard to the situation of criminality. Divorces are another factor of a social character that have seen steady growth throughout the 20-year period, having an indirect impact on the criminalization of society and especially of minors. In fact, it is difficult to capture the correlation in time of the impact of divorces as its effects are shifted to a time different from the separation of the family. However, according to data published by UNICEF, the weight of crimes committed with the participation of minors is relatively high, about 9%<sup>210</sup> for the period 2000-2007, while divorces increased by 52%. Divorce is a growing phenomenon, present in all cities of Albania. Thus, for the period 2004-2014, the number of divorces increased by 67% for Elbasan, 97% for Tirana and up to 114% for Durrës.<sup>211</sup> In these circumstances, the pressure for the criminalization of the society grows even higher under the pressure of unemployment. High unemployment rates (including even Tirana) have accompanied in a permanent manner the country's economic development from the beginning of the '90s. Thus, the annual average for the period 1994-2004 has been 16%, and for the ensuing years, it falls by 3%. In spite of the declining trend, the main concern of unemployment vis-à-vis criminality remains its high level (20-31%) for the age group 15-24 years, as well as the unemployment map. While in cities like Tirana and Durrës, the unemployment rate are more stable and have a downward trend, in cities like Shkodra, it reaches 20%. Nevertheless, the criminal situation does not match

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206. TransMonee, '2015 Databases: Country Profiles 2015', Akesesuar online më 05.05.2016 në: <http://www.transmonee.org/databases.php>

207. Source: Instat, See online [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/241762/migracioni\\_ne\\_shqiperi.pdf](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/241762/migracioni_ne_shqiperi.pdf)

208. <http://www.transmonee.org/databases.php> (Country profiles 2015)

209. Calculation according to LSMS 2012

210. <http://www.transmonee.org/databases.php> (Country profiles 2015)

211. Cáceres-Delpiano J., Giolito E., The Impact of Unilateral Divorce on Crime, IZA DP No. 3380, March 2008 <http://ftp.iza.org/dp3380.pdf>

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the indicators for unemployment and incomes, by city. Thus, the highest coefficient for criminal offenses has been that of Durrës, followed by Tirana. The average coefficient of criminal offenses in Tirana (173) has been close to that of Vlora (184) for the period 2004-2014, while the average unemployment rate has been respectively 9% and 15%. On the other hand, we notice a moderate synchronization of rates for the criminal offenses coefficient through the years in some cities in Albania, which may speak to a spread and connection of criminal structures.

The same situation is noticed with regard to the influence of incomes on the situation of criminality. Thus, per capita income and the average salary have grown in a systematic fashion ever since 1994. In the first years, because of the low starting base, growth rates were relatively high (103% for the minimal salary; 62.7 GDP/ per capita for 1994) and then they decreased (0% for the minimal salary; 3.5% GDP/ per capita for 2014). Nevertheless, their increase is not harmonized with the coefficient of criminal offenses or serious crimes for specific cities. Large differences for the minimal salary levels and incomes from EU countries have led to the impact of their growth rates to be minimal with regard to the criminal situation in Albania. On the other hand, the distribution of incomes<sup>212</sup> has created extreme polarizations with regard to the level of incomes, increasing social tension and pressure in favor of society criminalization. It is also worth mentioning official data on real incomes of Albanians in the circumstances of high informality of the functioning of the Albanian economy.<sup>213</sup> This leads to the GINI<sup>214</sup> coefficient of Albania to be not only higher than the official figure, i.e. polarization to be even more stark, but also to a difficulty of identifying income sources especially due to the informality that dominates what is considered the black economy. This kind of economy is not only considered an illegal economy in itself, but on the other hand, is the cause for other mainly serious crimes, such as murders or kidnappings. On the other hand, the informal economy, in the absence of a possibility for conflicts to be resolved through the formal system (prosecution/courts), becomes a cause for the increase of self-justice.

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212. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/income-gini-coefficient>

213. [http://www.uamd.edu.al/new/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Dizertacion\\_Brunela\\_Trebicka.pdf](http://www.uamd.edu.al/new/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Dizertacion_Brunela_Trebicka.pdf)

214. Coefficient of income distribution in a society

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# CHAPTER 4.

## CASE STUDIES

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In order to have as broad a view as possible at the national scale of the operations and development of organized criminal structures through the years, the research study contains five case studies that present an enhanced analysis of some of these criminal organizations that operated in the cities of Lushnja, Vlora, Korça, the country's northern area and the city of Elbasan. These case studies are an added value for the research and are the contribution of local collaborators who come from academia and the justice area. In writing up these case studies, the authors pursued a certain methodology, consulted continually with the Organized Crime Research Center at the Open Society Foundation for Albania, and relied on very diverse primary and secondary data. In order to guarantee the anonymity of the primary sources, due to the sensitive nature of the research study in general and every case study in particular, the authors used specific codes for each of the interviewees. The author of the case study on the Lushnja Gang preferred to not be referred to by name. It should be noted that the cases studies in areas where organized crime is problematic represent considerable difficulty for the researcher. Especially in those cases when the criminal organizations are "autochthonous," i.e. are integrated into the society and have a considerable network of acquaintances. As a result, many interviewees did not agree to be identified and some of them decided to step aside and not cooperate on the research study. In this research, there were cases when the researcher was faced with problematic situations. As was emphasized in the "Main Findings" of the research, organized crime has managed to seriously harm the culture of reporting wrongdoing at the local level.

## 4. 1. History of the Lushnja Gang

*Author: Anonymous*

The Serious Crimes Court issued four life imprisonment sentences and 104 years of imprisonment in different decisions on one of the most notorious criminal organizations that ever operated in Albania since 1997. Meanwhile, the Turin Court in Italy<sup>215</sup> issued decisions of 188 years of imprisonment on some of the members of the gang involved in an international narcotics trafficking history that enabled the transfer of hundreds of kilos of cocaine from Albania to Italy. Among the convicts sentenced to life imprisonment by the Albanian court is the charismatic and indisputable leader of the organization, arrested in Turkey on the basis of an international arrest warrant, following police cooperation among three countries. "A character of absolute importance in the criminal geography that controlled an extensive criminal activity thanks also to persons involved in Albanian politics," as described by Italian deputy prosecutor Maurizio Laudi.<sup>216</sup>

### Geographic and socio-economic context

The known criminal organization has its beginnings in 1997 in the city of Lushnja. The Lushnja district lies in the country's southwestern part in an area of 712 km<sup>2</sup>,<sup>217</sup> in the Western Plains area. At the time of the events, it was the second largest district in terms of its population (approximately 144933 inhabitants),<sup>218</sup> in the Prefecture of Fier. The economy of the district relied mainly on the private agricultural sector. Those employed in the state sector and the non-agricultural private sector made up only 13% of the economically active population. Unemployment reached up to 16% of the labor active force,<sup>219</sup> whereby the majority belonged to the age group of 20-34 years and had 8-year education.<sup>220</sup> The profound tremor of political stability in the years 1996-1997, accompanied by the

215. Vendimi penal nr. 1735, datë 22.04.2008, i Gjykatës së Apelit Torino – Itali.

216. Gazeta "La Repubblica", "Preso il boss delle teste mozzate", artikull i datës 16.05.2006.

217. INSTAT, Vjetari Statistikor 1991-1999, Tiranë 2002.

218. Ibidem.

219. INSTAT, Zhvillimi I tregut te punes -1990-1999.

220. UNICEF, Vleresim I Situatës Sociale & Ekonomike Në Rajonet E Shqipërisë, Tiranë 2000, fq. 60.

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massive crumbling of the financial pyramid schemes, followed by violent demonstrations with dramatic political repercussions, seriously harmed economic growth in the entire Prefecture of Fier. Of 2,481 enterprises registered in 1994, the number fell to 798 in 1996, to drop into just 226 in 1997.<sup>221</sup> All of the above factors, in a district like Lushnja that ranked fifth in the country with population density of 204 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, led to the increase of social problems such as emigration and the increase in the number of criminal offenses. While comparing criminal cases heard by the First Instance Courts of the judicial districts, for 1998 and 1999, the Lushnja district takes up 8th place in a total of 29 districts.<sup>222</sup> This is an indicator of the high level of criminal offenses in those years in a district that is viewed in Albania as a calm area with hardworking people.

## The Beginnings

The leader of the organization who changed his identity in 1998 is recognized by the decisions of the Serious Crimes Court as the founder of the gang and its indisputable leader. For the members of the gang, he was known as the “professor” or the “big” one. An inhabitant of the city in the Myzeqe area, Bare came from a family that was “quite educated and that enjoyed great respect in the city also because of their status.”<sup>223</sup> Facts show that even after all the events, they did not abandon the city but rather continued to live calmly in it. From before the ‘90s, his father was engaged in the State Police forces, while his mother had a store (general items) in the same city. His sister had been a high school teacher whereas the brother had been an ambulance driver. After the changes of the 1990s, his family was jobless and lost the status and privileges they had enjoyed before.

The leader of the gang himself had been a police officer in the rapid intervention forces in Durrës until 1992. In 1993, he left for Greece also “because he was a suspect for the murder of a citizen in the city, but that was not proven legally.”<sup>224</sup> After that, he settled in Italy until 1997, a time when he returned to his hometown. During the 1997 revolts, he began to engage and organize with the rescue committees or similar structures created at the time after the collapse of institutions. He appeared determined to get rid of the “regime” that he viewed as responsible for the loss of the status and privileges that his family enjoyed before.<sup>225</sup> “In fact, the right-wing never pardoned him for the ‘97 events because it accused him as an organizer of the protests and the incident that happened in the Lushnje city to one of the senior leaders of the Democratic Party.”<sup>226</sup>

In spite of these facts, he would not have become known had he not clashed with another known subject of the crime world in those days, Artur Daja, who was leading one of the most dangerous gangs in the same city. The latter had been registered by police as a person with criminal precedents because in the beginning of the ‘90s, three young men had died in an ambush he set up against a person he had a conflict with. After he was declared wanted by police, he crossed the border and stayed in Italy to return to the Lushnje city in the period of the March ‘97 turmoil. From a talented wrestler, he turned into a very dangerous criminal, a prostitution trafficker and very provocative person. He was a man of the moment, very impulsive, and one of the most violent persons in town.<sup>227</sup> He had inspired great antipathy and fear in the city also because of the myth that had been created that he was an unpunishable person.<sup>228</sup>

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221. INSTAT, Vjetari Statistikor 1991-1999, Tiranë 2002.

222. Ibidem

223. Interview with a city inhabitant, Lushnja, 05.07.2015.

224. Bujar Hoxha, “Crime and the anti-crime: the history of criminal gangs,” Tirana, Ombra GVG, 2008.

225. Interview with a prosecutor (code 72), July 2015, Tirana.

226. Interview with relatives of one of the gang members, Fier, on 30.06.2015.

227. Interview with an inhabitant of the city, Lushnje, on 05.07.2015.

228. In her testimony before the court in the case hearing against Aldo Bare, citizen Luiza B., confesses that before being trafficked to Italy, she was raped by Artur Daja in the offices of the state enterprise where she worked and nobody was able to help her, in spite of her calls.

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It is not known for sure what the basic motive was for the conflict between the two town boys who had known one another from before. According to police suspicions, prostitution or drug dealings gone wrong in the neighboring country were the main motive, but there are also voices that state a murder in the neighboring country was at the foundation of the conflict. One thing is clear: the continuation of the conflict after the return home and the flow of ensuing events led to the formation of one of the most consolidated criminal organizations in Albania.

A key moment would be the incident that took place in the first days of July 1997. During an exchange of fire, one person of one of the sides was killed and the brother of the organization leader was killed and a friend of his from the other side. The execution of the two wounded persons and the surrounding of their bodies for about four hours, not allowing anyone to intervene in order to take them was a strong push toward retaliation. Revenge pushed the gang leader to start organization in order to hit the leader of the opposing group and the murderer of his brother.

## Recruitments and initial organization

Immediately after the incident, in view of the threat and organization of the opponent, the person who would soon turn into an indisputable leader began to collect around him a group of persons to form his own gang. Persons with different connections would join the group and they had different kinds of connections with one another, both family ties with the gang leader as well as social ties. Young people from the neighborhood where he lived and where the gang's headquarters were were also recruited.

The ones to group first were some relatives of the group leader as well as relatives of the wife of the killed brother. One of the latter had been convicted in the past for a murder in the district of Kuçova and was hiding with his relatives in Lushnja. At 22, he joined the group and began carrying out the first commissioned executions against payment. He turned into one of the main hitmen of the gang because of his cold-bloodedness and his full obedience to the orders. In one of his statements as a person under investigation for one of the murders, he said, *"...at this time, a four wheel drive came from the high school toward us... there were two persons inside whom I had never seen and as soon as the vehicle came by... I opened fire at once and used all the bullets of the pistol... I went behind an apartment building and began rolling a cigarette of hashish... then I waited for one of the members who gave me 20,000 Lekë."*<sup>229</sup> The brother of the friend who was killed in the July clash also joined the group. The feeling of revenge brought these persons and together and around the gang leader.

The second group to join the gang was that of persons with social ties with the gang leader and with conflicts with his opponents or a member of the group. Thus, a known person in the city who in fact was in conflict with and had been wounded by one of the friends of the opponent also became part of the group. Three close friends of his also became members of the group, very young in age (16-18 years old). After his wounding, they accompanied him and kept guard at his house. On the basis of social ties, a 22-year old also became part of the gang; he lived in the same neighborhood with the gang leader. The strong sportsman character of the latter made him listen to and obey only the leader. "He consulted with others but received orders from none," a witness of the incidents of the time said of him.<sup>230</sup>

The group also recruited boys of the neighborhood where the gang leader lived, which is where he also established the basis of the group. Such were two boys of the neighborhood, very young in age at the time - 18 and 22 years old - who came from very poor families. One of them became one of the closest collaborators and was seen as the right hand of the organization leader. A 17-year old orphan who lived in the same apartment building as the gang leader also became part of the gang. He ran without any doubt every errand, "turning into one of the scariest

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<sup>229</sup>. Decision no. 38, dated 22.09.2006, First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, Tirana, p. 22.

<sup>230</sup>. Interview with an inhabitant of the city, Lushnja, on 05.07.2015.



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persons, with the reputation of a violent and unmistakable killer. Only his name was enough to keep order and calm in later activities controlled by the gang.”<sup>231</sup>

Except for maybe some rare case, almost all members of the gang had only completed 8-year education and had no support; in fact, some of them were orphans. These factors were also the reasons why they saw the gang leader as indisputable. “For them, he was an idol. They viewed him as such because of his age, because he was older, and authoritarian. He was a professional in their eyes, had a sportsman’s body and the experience of a special unit police force who now was organizing them.”<sup>232</sup> Very soon, a hierarchy was established within the organization with the head and absolute leader at the top. One of the members, who with time turned into his right arm, and then his two closest collaborators, came after. All the others only played the role of ordinary members, covering roles of an executive character.

From its beginnings in 1997 until October 1999, the members of the organization had their center in a place near the city’s Police Commissariat, otherwise called as “Commissariat no. 2.” The premises were surrounded by a high wall and watched by guards. Behind the large iron gate, there was a yard, at the end of which there was a one-storey building that was only divided by a wall from the city’s Police Commissariat. The members of the organization usually stayed inside the premises and defended it with arms and did not allow any other persons come close. The premises were used to summon different people, use pressure of all kinds to collect information about the whereabouts of opponents. One of the persons who was kept for some hours in the gang’s premises told us: “After asking who I was and where I came from, they brought out a large photo album with pictures and asked me about the persons in the photographs.”<sup>233</sup>

## Main purpose – Revenge

The main purpose of the “gang” in its beginnings was revenge, through the physical elimination of the main opponent and of any person who was believed to have close social ties with him. In eliminating physically the persons who might have connections with the opponent, the “gang’s” sole purpose was to weaken the group’s force and resistance, until it achieved extermination. The first blow was dealt on August 3, 1997, against Albanian-Macedonian citizen known by the nickname the “Kosovar,” because he was accused of having helped the opponent. He was ambushed at the entrance to town and was executed in the presence of his wife and two children.

Unable to find the location of the main opponent, the objective of the gang was now one of his close friends. On February 13, 1998, on the road connecting Lushnja with Fier, members of the organization dressed in camouflage and police uniforms ambushed the car in which their objective and two of his friends were traveling. One of the friends died in the ambush but the main target and the other friend escaped. The latter though was not to be lucky twice. Only a few days later, February 22, 1998, he was traveling to a village where the relatives of his friend, now the main target of the gang, lived. The “gang” members who kept under surveillance every relative of the opponents ambushed him on the way back and this time they would not miss. Together with him, another citizen, happening to be in the same vehicle, was also killed. On August 18, another friend of the main opponent was taken from his house and was executed.

Weakened because of the blows against his friends, the opponent remained hidden and organized his counter-response, which came on August 22, 1998, when together with some members of his group, he would shoot with an anti-tank missile against the vehicle where the gang leader and some of his men were traveling. Because the van they were traveling in was armored, the consequences of the attack were negligible. The response of the “gang” did

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231. Interview with a prosecutor (code 72), July 2015, Tirana.

232. Ibid

233. Interview, person held for some hours by the gang, Fier, on 30.06.2015.

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not take long; that same evening, some of the gang members entered the home of an inhabitant of the city whose vehicle had been seen in morning attack site. Unable to find the citizen and his son, the gang members set the house on fire and burned it entirely.

The toll would worsen with killed or disappeared individuals, some assassination attempts, tens of kidnappings and tortures inside and outside the premises where the “gang” hung out, as well as lots of explosions at homes or economic objects of connections of the main opponent. However, the “gang” managed to achieve its main goal only after a few months, when Artur Daja was killed in mysterious circumstances. On October 21, 1998, his corpse was found, without a head and in pieces due to an explosion. Then, his head was taken to every corner of town, thus putting an end to the rivalry between the two groups and at the same time returning the “honor” for the murder of the gang leader’s brother. After the murder of the opponent, in November 1998, another close friend of the opponent was executed. He is thought to have been the person who surrendered his friend to the “gang” in exchange for guarantees for his own life.

In spite of the crimes and the gruesome scene of the cut head that horrified citizens, for the most part, the leader and members of his organization would not be seen in those years as ordinary criminals, but as real guarantors of order and calm in the city. In fact, it was not only the feeling of fear and terror that the organization imposed itself with in the city in those years, but also that of the myth of the city “saviors” from the gangs that had been terrorizing it since long ago. For quite some time now, violent characters of crime, such as the main opponent of the “gang” and his friends, had terrorized the Lushnje town. Artur Daja, who had connections with two important families of the city, had created the myth of the unpunishable and was identified as connected to the power of the time. Precisely for the support given to them, the organization did not refrain from executing former public officials, such as the deputy mayor of the town at the time and former head of SHISH until 1997. Connections with the right-wing power, accusations for participation in vote manipulation, impunity and the powerlessness of the State Police to restore the order that had collapsed from the 1997 events, created a popular antipathy and hatred against the main opponents of the “gang” leader and their friends.

Precisely these factors were exploited by Aldo Bare who turned the personal conflict in the eyes of citizens into a clash among the tough ones of the “regime” and the supporters of the new state that emerged from the 1997 elections. The hits against the rival gang would be realized immediately after the elections when it was thought that the opponents were losing the support they had enjoyed. It is no coincidence that the “gang” headquarters would be identified with the label “Commissariat no. 2,” in order to demonstrate that the “gang” was on the side of the state for the establishment of order and calm. In spite of the killings, in the eyes of many citizens who had fresh in their mind the popular revolts of 1997 that began precisely from this town, the gang members emerged as “saviors” of the city. *“After the murder of the main opponent, the entire city rejoiced and applauded him for the murder. Not only that, but the leader pushed away also all the other groups operating in the city. The entire city applauds the gang leader for the establishment of order and calm in the city, not the police. Had he given up at this moment, he would have preserved a good reputation in the city” – one inhabitant of the city said of the activity of the “gang.”*<sup>234</sup>

However, the criminal activity had now consolidated the “gang,” turning it into a criminal organization, with clear hierarchy and well-defined roles inside it. After the establishment of the criminal organization, the purpose of the organization onwards would be its strengthening, membership growth, imposition of its authority, and the expansion of criminal activity in other areas and above all economic empowerment. After the elimination of the opponents, the organization established total control in the city. During the years 1998-1999, it managed to infiltrate its people in the State Police Commissariat and all structures of local government. The location near the police commissariat, the demonstration of force, armed movement of its members, using even police uniforms, armored vehicles, the aggressive actions in public places through the demonstration of force, gave public opinion the impression that

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234. Interview with an inhabitant of the city, on 05.07.2015.

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they were untouchable, the state itself, and that their actions could not be opposed by anyone for any reason. The members of the organization figuratively said they had subdued institutions and that everything having to do with the city should be approved by them and not by the city's legitimate institutions.

## Violent reaction toward law enforcement institutions.

Until 1999, the organization carried on with its activity undisturbed. But precisely in 1999, in October, the reaction of state structures to strike down the organization began. During a police operation, 11 of the organization's members were arrested but none of its leaders, who were declared wanted. The counter-response of the organization members was immediate. On February 25, 2000, an assassination attempt was carried out against the chief of the city's police commissariat and fortunately nobody was hurt. The latter, after his appointment to Lushnja was turning into a problem for the organization. The determination to strike down the organization and the frequent patrols in the city to demonstrate the force of the state were seen as a threat to the organization's authority. However, fate was not as kind for one of the inspectors of criminal police. He was executed in April 2000, at the entrance of his fiancé's apartment building. His execution was carried out after he had begun investigations into the gang's activities and the organization of an operation that led to the arrest of one of the key figures of the organization, but one of its leaders got away because of negligence of the team on duty. After the success of the arrest of gang leaders, the inspector of the criminal police was very exposed. *"He was a young crime officer, just out of the police school and full of passion, but he did not have much support from the older police officers. One interesting fact is that when he delivered one of the members of the gang to the police commissariat after the arrest, for about two hours, the older officers said they did not know who he was."*<sup>235</sup> Meanwhile, plans continued for the elimination of the Chief of the Commissariat, who was seen as the main problem. On the morning of March 25, 2000, at the entrance of the city stadium, guards discovered 5 kilos of TNT ready for remote detonation. The amount of explosives was positioned precisely where, on match days, the Chief of the Commissariat parked his car. In the meantime, TNT was placed in the house of another crime inspector and on April 19, 2001, a 60 year old was executed near his house solely because he was the father in law of a police agent who lived in the same neighborhood with the murdered inspector. The organization would try to execute its vengeful decisions against police officers that continued investigations even in 2005. Even after seven years, the organization sought to take revenge against police officers that, in their opinion, had led to arrest by justice bodies. The objective this time was going to be a chief commissar of State Police, former Director of Criminal Police at the Ministry of Public Order in the years 1999-2000 and former Police Director in the District of Fier for over one year, now an inhabitant of Tirana. To carry out the execution plan, a member of the organization who had been out of the radar of the state structures for some time was summoned. He had left the city in 1998 to take shelter in Greece, thus staying out of the operations of the organization. The execution failed because very close to the apartment building that was the target of the explosion, the explosive went off accidentally and killed the organization member himself.

In spite of the efforts of part of the public order forces to investigate and detain the organization members, the organization remained powerful until 2005. Some of its leaders left the country due to sentences issued first by the Elbasan Court and then the Durrës one. The head of the organization himself moved freely in Macedonia, Romania and Turkey using fake identities. While until 1999, the organization imposed openly every decision of the local government in the city, between then and 2005, it continued to influence in different ways the legitimate local government. This took place through its persons infiltrated in the Police Commissariat or those who it had hired through the years in almost all local government institutions.

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235. Interview with a prosecutor (code 72), Tirana, on 15.07.2015.

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**Two examples illustrate this fact quite well:** “In an assassination attempt in 2002, where one person was injured, the organizer told the executor to not worry for not making it to the organization because the next day, rumors would be spread that the victim had been shot by some drug junkies of the neighborhood. In fact, that was the official version that the police gave for the incident. In 2005, after an assassination attempt realized by the relatives of the victim that led to the killing of the organization’s hitman, the Municipal Council of the city issued a decision to change the name of the city stadium into Adem Jashari. In fact, a good part of the inhabitants of the city knew quite well that it had nothing to do with the Kosovo hero (Adem Jashari), but rather with the fact that this was one of the nicknames that the killer was identified with by the organization leaders because of his bravery, which was compared to that of the Kosovo war hero. However, the decision did not receive the approval of the Fier Prefect.”<sup>236</sup>

## Economic activities

The economic activity of the organization initially relied on the city’s Bingo. The organization soon took over control of the football club and city stadium. Extortion of businesses turned into another activity that generated economic income for the organization. During the trial hearing, some persons testified about the manner in which members of the organization took from them considerable amounts of money through pressure and threats. During his testimony, one witness confessed how the organization had imposed fines on his family, which possessed a gas station, during the period 1997 – 2005, the year in which one of the organization’s hitmen murdered his elder brother. However, sources from inside the Serious Crimes Prosecutor’s Office, noted that the family was considered more an opponent of the organization than a business to take advantage of. The younger brother, who had served a prison sentence from 1993 until 1997, the year the prisons opened, was a friend of Artur Daja. Meanwhile, the older brother was one of the main funders and engaged with the Democratic party. He was also accused as being responsible for the manipulation of voting in 1996.<sup>237</sup> His execution in 2005, precisely on election day during celebrations of results that showed the Democratic Party a winner of the general elections, does not seem a complete coincidence.

To cover up the illicit activities, the organization began to invest also in legitimate activities. Thus, it decided to alter the ownership on one of the largest fishing reserves in the country. Within one day, 90 notary acts were completed that enabled the transfer of shares from the 90 shareholders of the Fishing Company to the members of the organization, paying the shareholding workers a very low amount for their shares. According to sources from inside the Serious Crimes Prosecutor’s Office, the lagoon also served as a base for warehousing the drugs that the organization was now trafficking from Turkey to Albania and then onto Italy.

The organization began to show an interest also in large public works tenders. After kicking out the firm that was filling one of the main road axis whose construction had begun in the country, through firms – created legal entities, the organization inserted itself as a subcontractor for the construction of the road. But it is precisely a tender that would lead them toward a clash with another group in the country. This is about the city cleaning tender, the procedures for which began at the end of 2001. The first obstacle for winning the tender was the firm that had the contract at that moment. In order to avoid its being represented in the tender, in September 2001, an assassination attempt was organized against its administrator. Two of his companions, relatives of one of the “tough guys” of the area, were killed. Another obstacle emerged for the organization now. In the same tender, another firm presented itself with two co-owners, one of which was the uncle’s son of the two brothers accused by Albanian justice as the leader of another organization that operated in Albania. The firm had the exclusivity of collecting taxes for the city’s market and had begun to show an interest in the tender for cleaning up the city. Faced with pressure, the local authorities did not have the power to declare a winner, while both firms claimed they were the winner. The conflict became inevitable and in 2002 led to three persons killed and three others wounded, among whom the closest friends and collaborators. In spite of that, it is not clear why the organization decided to withdraw from the tender.

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<sup>236</sup>. Sources from the Serious Crimes Prosecutor’s Office

<sup>237</sup>. Interview at the Serious Crimes Prosecutor’s Office, Tirana, on 20.07.2015.

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“Maybe in front of it there was a stronger organization or maybe they had reached a deal,” sources from the Serious Crimes Prosecutor’s Office alluded.

## Drug trafficking

International drug trafficking was turning into the main economic activity of the organization. It turned into one of the most important links in the chain of international trafficking involved in the movement of heroin from Turkey toward Western Europe, through Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, and Albania and then on to Italy. Through the years, the organization built a large drug distribution network in Italy. Until 2002, drugs were transported by speedboats to Italy and after stronger border control was enabled by Albania and Italy, it began to be transported by trucks or cars landing in the ports of Ancona and Bari. The organization used Italian and foreign couriers, among whom a Turin citizen who was detained in 2002 with 13 kilos of heroin in the fuel tank of his car. In spite of detentions and other sequestrations by Italian anti-narcotics structures, the organization did not halt. Only during December 2002, the organization transported to Italian shores narcotics substances estimated to be worth 635,000 Euro.<sup>238</sup> The first logistics base was Turin. With time, the organization would divide Italy into two operational parts, one with Milan as a base, run by one of the members of the organization (the former president of the city’s football club) and the other base in Rome, run by the right arm of the organization’s leader. Meanwhile, the organization also exploited three “laboratories” in the cities of Turin, Monza and Brescia, which were used for warehousing and mixing the narcotics. After many years of investigations, numerous telephone and environment wire tapplings, the Anti-mafia and Anti-narcotics sections managed to discover almost the entire network of the organization, which was run by a person now located in Turkey. It would take the involvement the services of Italian intelligence (SISMI) to identify that the person with the nickname the “Professor,” who was running the entire network from Turkey, was precisely the leader of the organization that had been founded in the Lushnje town. At the end of the operation, after the seizure of 319 kilos of heroin, 2 kilos of cocaine, 155 kilos of mixers, the Italian court issued 34 arrest warrants, among which one for the head of the organization. A total of 200 years of imprisonment were ordered for the 15 defendants and among them is the right arm arrested in Italy and leader of the Milan branch, sentenced to 13 years, who was detained in 2009 in Albania after an international arrest warrant issued for on behalf of Italian justice.

## Justice attacks

With the change of government in 2005, the organization was at the center of strikes by law enforcement bodies. The killing of one of the main members of the organization in 2005 and another one in 2006 as well as the subsequent arrest of its members, weakened the organization. Loss of support in state institutions further enhanced the weakening. This led to the organization not being able any more to guarantee international trafficking routes. Another severe blow came from Italian justice, whereby among the many arrestees and convicts, there was also the person who had been seen for a long time as the right arm of the organization’s leader. In 2006, the organization known as the “Lushnja Gang” was dealt serious blows by Albanian justice. 27 persons, including the leader of the organization and his right arm, sat at the defendant’s bench. The first was now sentenced to life imprisonment and the second to 25 years. Bare himself was arrested in March 2006 in Turkey through the cooperation of forces of three countries, but especially after assistance from Turkish and Italian intelligence services. His extradition, claimed also by Italy, was realized to Albania in November 2009. In December 2013, Italy extradited to Albania his right arm, who after serving his sentence in Italy, began to serve his sentence of 25 years in Albania. Together with the organization members, law enforcement also targeted its assets, which were sequestered because of their criminal origin.

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238. Gazeta “La Stampa”, “La storia Banda S., fiumi di coca e teste tagliate Il boss della banda di albanesi corrieri della droga”, Torino, 23.03.2007.

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It took a total of ten years to strike the essence and head of this criminal organization, maybe the only one created like many gangs founded in the troubled year 1997 but that survived for many years and turned into a well-structured and dangerous criminal organization. Although many years have passed and almost all organization's leaders have been given and are serving severe sentences, talking about it in the city where it emerged, one still feels the fear that it has incited among inhabitants of the city through the years. For many of them, the feeling of fear is still present and it is seen in their hesitation to respond to our questions about the gang. It seems like the gang or elements thereof are still present and ready to reactivate.

*"It cannot be said with confidence that the gang is not active any more. It would take a profound investigation into who presently manages the assets or former assets that the gang had in possession,"* said for this research sources from the Serious Crimes Prosecutor's Office.

## 4. 2. Case study of narcotics trafficking in Vlora

*Author: Anonymous*

### Introduction on the object of the research

After the '90s, with the fast transformation of the society toward new "democratic" forms and the natural opening up toward the West, Albania began to see the creation of great room for the favorization of some illicit activities that, with the passing of years, crystallized and became more sophisticated, seriously challenging the democratic order and the country's social security. In this context, the cultivation and especially the trafficking of narcotics inside and beyond the territory of Albania represents a special subject of examination in order to point to all the essential characteristics of this illicit activity that, particularly in recent years, has assumed extraordinary development, also thanks to high "demand" provided by western markets for such forbidden substances. In particular, the cultivation and trafficking of marijuana (*cannabis sativa*) represents a main concern for law enforcement agencies in Albania, which have the assistance and advice of Western counterparts. In this brief research, we will not address the trafficking of strong drugs, known as "import" drugs, but will focus only on the issues of trafficking of light drugs.

The case being studied for this research took place in Albania in the years 2010-2012. Cooperating with one another, 6 (six) inhabitants of the district of Vlora committed the criminal offense of attempted "Trafficking in narcotics (the type *cannabis sativa*)", inside and outside the territory of the Republic of Albania. Through this case, we will demonstrate how these types of criminal groups are created, operate and develop from their genesis to the peak of the criminal activity, which in the majority of cases, has been interrupted or discovered thanks to very effective work by Albanian police and other involved state agencies.<sup>239</sup>

The case in question has been tried at both levels (first instance and appeals) by the Serious Crimes Court in Tirana (precisely in 2013 and 2014) and, after the request of the defendants (now convicted) for abbreviated adjudication, all persons involved in carrying out this criminal activity have received sentences that, depending on the role and involvement in the criminal offense, vary from 6 to 10 years of imprisonment. The study of the relevant judicial

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**239.** In fact, according to official data from State Police, in 2013 there was an increase in the discovery and identification of trafficking in light narcotics by 15% more than the year before, but, as is noted in the official report, the attention of police focused on the south of the country, thus leaving unjustifiably forgotten other problematic areas in Middle and Northern Albania. See, *Annual Analysis of State Police. Report by the General Director of Police, Tirana, 2013, p. 9*

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decision and the processing of data obtained through interviews or conversations with judges, prosecutors and other persons involved directly or not therein, reaches some conclusions that appear very interesting and meaningful for understanding the very widespread phenomenon of trafficking of narcotics of the type *cannabis sativa*.

## Criminal activity and group characteristics

This is about a criminal group consisting of 6 persons whose purpose was the commission of the criminal offense of trafficking of narcotics of the type *cannabis sativa*, with the destination being the territory of other countries, to be more precise Italy. The main operations of this criminal group extended generally in the district of Vlora, including not only the territory of the city but especially rural areas north of the district, where most of the convicts were also from. The entire criminal activity that is the target of investigation and adjudication analyzed in this narrative article coincides with the years 2010-2012, a time period that stands out for high production of cannabis in the south of Albania as well as in the northern regions.<sup>240</sup> The not so good road infrastructure of the south of the country, where the group in question operated, in fact favored their criminal activity while making difficult the discovery by police forces. During the research of the judicial decision and facts collected from conversations with well-informed persons about the case, it results that the group members moved freely in their territory, which was rural and undeveloped, thus enabling an almost natural habitat for their activity.

It should be clarified that we do not have to do with an organized Mafioso-type group or any harsh and rigid hierarchy that conditioned the activity of the group in a capillary manner.<sup>241</sup> The main activity of the group was the trafficking of cannabis and its delivery dispatch toward different destinations: mainly and initially toward Italy. Its purpose is not the creation of any Mafia organization according to the traditional Italian, Russian or Asian model; to the contrary, we have to do with a typical, ordinary, Albanian or Balkan phenomenon.<sup>242</sup> The criminal group in question does not rely on rigid indisputable or indecipherable rules. As will be seen further on, the characterizing and connecting element of the group is the common interest for fast economic profit through completely illicit manners, but that in the period in question found extensive application among such criminal groups in Albania. This kind of group represents the Albanian part of the complete chain of the international narcotics trafficking: it is just the next link in the criminal chain of cannabis trafficking.<sup>243</sup>

## Area of spread and genesis of activity

The research of the case shows that the familiarization between the members of the group is mainly social with a rural basis and partially family based. Indeed, two members of the same family were involved who initially for different reasons but interconnected in the economic aspect, participated in this criminal activity of narcotics trafficking. The uniting element of all members of the group is the origin or living almost together in the same rural area north of the city of Vlora at the time of the commission of the criminal offense or the course of events.<sup>244</sup> We are talking about very poor rural areas of the district of Vlora, which have been starkly forgotten by the Albanian state

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**240.** Free flow conversation with Prosecutor P 1, on 12/06/2015

**241.** Interview with local journalist, LJ 1, on 22/07/2015

**242.** According to official statistics from the Prosecutor General's Office, the offense of narcotics trafficking for 2013 saw an increase of 30% compared to the previous year and the general number of this criminal offense at the national level represents about 38% of the total number of criminal offenses registered in Albania in the same year. For more information, see Annual Report of the Prosecutor General "On the situation of criminality for 2013", p. 195.

**243.** Interview with former Judicial Police Officer in Vlora JP 1, on 18/07/2015.

**244.** It should be stressed that the area that covers the Vlora Prefecture (i.e., including Saranda), on the basis of statistics of the Prosecutor General's Office, takes the first place for the highest coefficient of criminality per 100,000 inhabitants, precisely 1,591 crimes against 1,051 in Tirana (second) and 822 of the Berat Prefecture (last). For this purpose, see Annual Report of the Prosecutor General "On the situation of criminality for 2013," Tirana, especially p. 40-41.

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and where there is a continued lack of development and infrastructure.<sup>245</sup> These are not areas that stand out for the production of cannabis, although in the past there have been such “sporadic” cases. Because they are next to the Vjosa river – a relatively calm and navigable river – the areas have assumed great significance for narco trafficking toward Italy<sup>246</sup> through fast vessels, which in the technical language of traffickers are known as “rubberboats” or “speedboats.”<sup>247</sup> Precisely during the investigation and adjudication of the case in question, it emerges that one of the preferred means of the criminal group is the transport by rubberboat, which would be hidden during the days of waiting in the land of an area farmer in exchange for a reward determined by circumstances and practicality of the location.<sup>248</sup> The sheltering spot is of great importance because it influences the time needed for preparation and the departure toward the final destination and reduces considerably the risk of getting caught by police forces in the event of a potential operation.<sup>249</sup>

## Education and economic–social conditions of the group members

Another common factor that appears from the research of all available materials is the very low level of education of the group members, a common denominator of all groups of this kind. The 9 and 12-year education is probably a decisive factor that may have affected the increasing spread of this phenomenon among the group’s young members.<sup>250</sup> Given that the group members’ ages vary from 25 to 45 years old, one notices that only one of them did high school and higher education: with all other members, 7 or 8-year education dominates.<sup>251</sup> Above all, the group’s certified and accepted leader is the one with the highest illiteracy – 8-year education. Although with very low education levels, none of the group members had been convicted in the past and this may be explained with the fact that during this period, this kind of criminal activity assumed such massiveness that it attracted even persons without a criminal past also because of the high profit rate guaranteed in the case of success. In a conversation between two young members of the group, held in the pre-trial detention premises immediately after their arrest, one notices the regret of one of them (with high school education) for not continuing higher education and destroying his life with this wrong choice.<sup>252</sup>

The spread of the phenomenon of light drugs’ trade toward other countries among young people during the period in question may be explained also with the fact that Albania during this time had benefited from the removal of the visa regime with countries of the European Union and the opportunities to enter the European market increased thanks to alternative transport means through especially modified vehicles, especially toward Italy and Greece. In this concrete case, a failed attempt to trade, albeit in small amounts, cannabis toward Italy in two separate instances was proven. In both arrests carried out against two members of the group while attempting to transport cannabis to Italy via car boarded on a ferry, it becomes evident that the group preferred to disperse risks and not focus only on the trafficking by sea via ferry or speedboat. The disadvantage of transporting drugs with cars through ferries is in the fact that it is not possible to transport large quantities and the relatively high costs and danger of transport, which are avoided through transportation by rubber boat.<sup>253</sup>

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**245.** “Stark economic problems accompanied by high unemployment are premises for orientation toward illicit actions for survival. Education of the younger generation is very deficient, unoriented and represents one of the most acute problems not only for the present but also for the future of the society. A large part of them wander the streets without education, without jobs, without parental care and even less social care.” Annual analysis of State Police. Report of the General Director of Police, Tirana p. 2

**246.** One of the factors that has directly impacted the increase of the criminality coefficient in the area of Vlora is the so-called phenomenon of “crime export,” which means that such border or coastal areas are easily “tempted” by foreign criminal models while also being very near the foreign market and gaining experience from organizations across the border. Such a fact is admitted in the Statistical Yearbook of the Ministry of Justice (Tirana) of 2012 and 2013, p. 11-12

**247.** Conversation with former anti-narcotics police officer in Vlora PO, 2, on 16/07/2015.

**248.** First instance court decision, p. 35.

**249.** Interview with local journalist, LJ 1, on 22/07/2015

**250.** According to statistics of the Prosecutor General’s Office, the education level of the defendants involved in such criminal offenses committed during the four years 2009-2013 is mainly 9-year. See Annual report of the Prosecutor General “On the situation of criminality for 2013,” especially page 201 and onwards.

**251.** First instance court decision, p. 23.

**252.** Free conversation with prosecutor, P. 1, on 12/06/2015.

**253.** Conversation with the former officer of anti-narcotics, PO 2, on 16/07/2015.



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One also notices that only one of the 6 members of the group was not married and all the others had been married and had children. This common marital status of all those involved in the criminal activity is an indicator that these kinds of illicit activities are found among all individuals, in spite of their different marital status. The despair from difficult economic conditions, unemployment of heads of families and the general inability to secure sufficient income for the families pushes family persons, without criminal precedents, to undertake such initiatives that would later have undesirable consequences for them and their families.<sup>254</sup> Three of the group members, before the announcement of the Court ruling, spoke openly of repentance over the committed acts and publicly asked for mercy in the name of family and economic difficulties they were in at the time.

## Hierarchy and internal rules of operation

With regard to the division of roles and leadership responsibilities within the group, the only indisputable element that clearly emerges is the primary role of the group leader, the eldest in age among all the members and the person with the greater economic possibilities among them. It should be noted that the older age is not a decisive factor for being group leader, but economic possibilities and good knowledge of the market of this kind of activity are indispensable qualities for holding such roles. All other members of the group followed rigorously the instructions of the leader although in some cases, there may have been different opinions on certain issues. The group leader places all financial and logistical resources necessary at the group's disposal for achieving the purpose of the group's activity. Anytime the members need financial support for carrying out the assigned duties, the group leader finds the way and the time to meet his obligations and, even in operations with modest and insignificant monetary value. The vehicles, rubber boat, small truck and four wheel drives are made available to the group and the leader is careful to ensure that the logistics are not the cause of failure of their activity.<sup>255</sup> Immediately after the capture of the first members of the group by police, the leader, before being arrested and convicted, takes care to secure legal protection and expenses for prison living for the captured members. The leader also tries to find the fastest way to communicate himself with the arrested although these were in an isolation facility after the arrest.

Strong ties of the group leader with strong characters of organized crime found in Albanian prisons but also strong contacts outside prisons make it possible for the group leader to have telephone conversations with the arrested group members. One notices the ease with which the group leader manages to find the right persons who would help him establish contact with the arrested members of the group and realize even direct telephone conversations, aside from the exchange of messages through the telephone number of a very important convict in the prison.<sup>256</sup> The circumstance, aside from the good organization of the group, also shows a general element of the Albanian criminal world: the ease with which criminal groups or specific individuals manage to secure modern and fast communication means to maintain contact with the outer world even inside Albanian prisons.

Another important piece of data obtained from the research of the case in question is the convincing or participation in the group of certain members: the full investigation of the case certifies that the person who had taken upon himself to shelter the rubber boat that would go to Italy with a considerable amount of hashish did not have the courage to denounce this fact to competent bodies because of fear and the threats by members of the group. Economic needs had forced him to shelter the empty rubber boat of the criminal group but not to enable the sheltering of the hashish together with the hashish. The regret shown during the trial hearing by the shelter provider, who was an elderly man, shows that when convincing methods or financial rewards did not function, the criminal group used threatening methods to achieve its goals.<sup>257</sup>

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**254.** Conversation with inhabitant of Mifol village (Vlora), M.V., on 23/08/2015

**255.** Interview with Judge, J. 1, on 12.06.2015

**256.** Judicial decision, p. 30 and onwards.

**257.** *Ibid.*, p. 33-34.

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## Criminal and social reasons for the creation, development and sophistication of the criminal group

A review of the entire material available indicates the real dimension of the group in the broader context of narcotics trafficking of light drugs from Albania to Italy. The fact of a small number of group members, their almost rural dimension compared to other very active and “successful” operative groups in this activity, the modest means available to the group to achieve the wanted results and the not-so-advanced infrastructure and logistics they had secured, which means that the sample selected as a case study is not representative of the phenomenon in its broad sense. It is no coincidence that such a “modest” and ordinary criminal group was selected to comprehend a trafficking phenomenon much more complicated and consolidated that necessarily applies to the strong drugs that transit Albania from the Middle and Far East toward certain western markets. The reasons for the examination are more sociological and research-based than criminological or juridical.

The factors that most affect the creation of such criminal groups are of a multitude of origins. First, there are the insatiable needs of the European market for Albanian cannabis, which is easily transportable also because of the geographic proximity to these markets. The favorable ratio between the average end sale price in European cities and the effective cost of its production in interested Albanian areas makes this kind of activity flourish in a country like ours, whereby control by law enforcement agencies throughout the country’s territory is questionable and not fully guaranteed.<sup>258</sup> Geographic proximity to end markets, the extremely favorable climate for the cultivation of the plants, the unfavorable and inadequate road and logistical infrastructure of the Albanian state and the long experience of Albania with international trafficking in general (recall the trafficking in human beings after the ‘90s) lead to certain parts of the Albanian society not resisting the temptation of fast and immediate profit that this kind of illicit activity provides.

One of the essential elements that affects the creation of such groups is no doubt the poor economic condition in which a large part of the Albanian society is, with the heavier weight falling on youth and its problem with high rates of unemployment.<sup>259</sup> The detailed analysis of the judicial file and the events occurring in the course of the activity of this criminal group, we notice that unemployment is a common denominator of the majority of group members, except for the case of one transporting young man who had managed to get hired as a driver at a state institution.<sup>260</sup>

In such circumstances, it is impossible to not reach the conclusion that while economic-social reasons are not the sole basis for the creation of the group, but they do have an extraordinary impact and play a decisive role on the participation of youth in such criminal groups for the purpose of trafficking light narcotics substances. In order to ensure the best possible understanding of the reasons that lead these youths to join such phenomena, it was necessary and even indispensable to make a real analysis of economic and social conditions in which individuals are in general and youth in particular in these rural areas north of the district of Vlora. The village or villages in question, where the majority of these persons originates from and lives in, provide a panorama of poverty that is truly horrendous and very desperate.<sup>261</sup> At the social-community level, the joint infrastructure of these communities leaves a lot to be desired. Not only are there no instruments or mechanisms to alleviate the social plight that these

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**258.** Interview with local journalist, LJ 1, on 22/07/2015

**259.** According to official data provided by INSTAT on the GDP per capita, for the four years during 2010-2014, the region of Vlora ranks fifth out of 12 such, but in any event, the regional GDP is lower than the national average, thus making a negative contribution to the average national growth of the GDP per capita. For more, see INSTAT, *Statistical Yearbook 2010-2014*, Tirana 2014, p. 86 and onwards.

**260.** See judicial decision, p. 29.

**261.** One notices very markedly and strangely that the level of poverty in the coastal areas (where the area in question also belongs) has increased considerably during the four years between 2008 and 2012. As a result, according to official statistics, poverty in coastal areas increased from 13% in 2008 to 17.6% in 2012. The increase of the poverty level affects a lot the rural coastal areas, but recently even coastal urban areas have been affected, thus reducing considerably the poverty gap between them. For more information, see INSTAT, *Albania, Poverty trend 2002-2005-2008-2012*, Tirana, 2013, p. 3 and onwards/

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communities are in, but there are really no signs of improvement or trend toward the alleviation of these problems.<sup>262</sup> The extreme poverty affecting these areas is very high and unemployment, especially among youth, is at alarming levels.<sup>263</sup> From conversations realized in the areas in question with their inhabitants, one notices surrender to poverty and a stark loss of hope for the future. All interviewees and persons we talked with, without exception, underscore the fact that they feel abandoned and forgotten by the state “of yesterday and of today,” as they persistently emphasize. In conversations, one notices a determination in their opinions but also a kind of non-acceptance, at least openly, of the fact that such areas are affected by the phenomenon of trafficking of light narcotics. Maybe they feel insulted if identified with the real (or major) traffickers and justify very casually the sporadic participation of their “boys” in these kinds of activities with the need to survive through a “job that everybody does.” The ease with which they respond to inquiries about the spread of these kinds of activities in their areas becomes even more natural when you hear that they do not feel guilty about what has happened and that they are just a very small link in the long chain of international trafficking of cannabis drugs. They don’t even want to hear about heroin, cocaine or other similar things.<sup>264</sup>

It also comes out that parents are unable to stop their children from joining such criminal groups given that their perception of these kinds of activities is not at all negative or categorically prohibiting. Dealing with trafficking or mediating the trafficking of narcotics is not seen as very serious by a good part of the area inhabitants; in fact, there is a kind of startling naivety that “they are neither stealing nor killing.” Naturally, the level of sensitization about the social and criminal threat posed by such criminal offenses has increased considerably in recent times, but for the period in question (2010-2012), the phenomenon was sufficiently massive and disturbing for state institutions tasked with discovering and tackling it.<sup>265</sup> On this occasion, it is worth mentioning a very meaningful episode that clearly demonstrates the perception of the phenomenon of cannabis trafficking in these rural areas. At the time the members of the criminal group asked a farmer in the area to secure the temporary hiding and sheltering of the rubberboat that would be used for transporting the “goods” to Italy in the lands that the farmer possessed, the latter not only did not report them to relevant bodies, but freely accepted a monthly reward for the provided service. In fact, the farmer did not report it even when the hidden rubberboat had some hundreds of kilos of cannabis, although he claimed that he had been openly threatened by the group leader. For these actions, the farmer in question was declared guilty by the court and convicted with the minimal sentence envisaged by the relevant provision because he benefited from alleviating circumstances of the case.<sup>266</sup>

The above fact is meaningful because, in other normal circumstances, the first action that an “ordinary” citizen would do would be to report to the competent bodies. The surprising “good faith” with which the Albanian farmer handles this illegal act as “acceptable” is an indicator of the surreal perception addressed above that characterizes a good part of the Albanian society, especially rural, during the post-’90s transition. This means in no way any capillary criminalization of the Albanian society with regard to crimes in general or certain offenses. We are just seeking to explain the impact of social-economic in favoring and the flourishing of “low” criminality that finds very fertile ground among unemployed youth and that part of society that is prey to poverty and difficult economic conditions.<sup>267</sup>

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**262.** Interview with local journalist, LJ 1, on 22.07.2015

**263.** According to statistical research by INSTAT, youth unemployment (for the 15-29 age groups) in Albania, for the years 2013-2014, reached 27-32% of the general population of this age group. See, INSTAT, Statistical yearbook 2010-2014, Tirana, p. 70 and onwards.

**264.** Conversation with an inhabitant of Mifol village (Vlora), M.V, on 23.08.2015

**265.** GThe Serious Crimes Court in Tirana, during 2012-2013 saw an increase of 13% compared to previous years in the adjudication of offenses of trafficking of cannabis sativa. Cases of drugs (light and strong) at this Court rank first among adjudications in general for the three years between 2011 and 2013. Only for 2013, about 46% of the requests for wiretapping by the Serious Crimes Prosecutor’s Office had to do with drug trafficking, mainly light ones. See Ministry of Justice, Statistical Yearbook 2013, Tirana, 2014.

**266.** See judicial decision, p. 31.

**267.** Interview with local journalist, LJ 1, on 22.07.2015

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## The favorable geographic position of Vlora and the South of Albania

We should recall that throughout the period of transition in Albania, the area of Vlora in particular and the southwestern part of Albania in general “stood out” for an inclination toward the activity of trafficking in general.<sup>268</sup> Initially, Vlora was self-affirmed as the capital of trafficking, first of human beings immediately after the ‘90s; thus, because of its natural and geographic proximity with Italy, it turned into the most important knot for trafficking in human beings in Albania. This “experience” created with the illegal profession of trafficking through maritime routes by rubberboats or speedboats was used and exploited as a very strong starting point in the service of a new mission: trafficking of narcotics to Western Europe, through Italian shores. Vlora had and has the great advantage of being close to all the actors of this well-organized trafficking: it is geographically very close to the centers for the production of marijuana in southern Albania (Vlora, Fier, Tepelena and Gjirokastra) and is the closest geographic point through the sea with the coast of Puglia in Italy. There about 45 to 60 miles between Vlora and the Salento coast and that is an extraordinary advantage for traffickers of narcotics plants.

In Vlora, there is also appropriate infrastructure for the production or import of fast navigation vessels that are used for the trafficking of these substances: especially fast rubberboats and speedboats. The cost of their purchase, according to research in the field and confirmed by operators of the field, depending on the size and speed, varies between 50,000 and 100,000 Euro or even 150,000 Euro for super large rubberboats of smuggling that manage to transport up to 1500 to 2000 kilos of marijuana. It should be stressed that the entire international trafficking of narcotic plants toward Italy by rubberboat or speedboat is conducted through the coast of Vlora and, in very rare occasions, of Saranda.<sup>269</sup> The criminal group in question, as seen from the examination of the judicial file and the conversations with the case prosecutors at both instances of the adjudication, attempted to smuggle to Italy considerable amounts of narcotics through the above mentioned method of rubberboats, but was stopped at the right moment due to the determined intervention of competent law enforcement bodies. The fact that besides the manner of transport through rubberboat, the criminal group had created the possibility of transporting the narcotics through especially modified vehicles, for maritime transport on the Vlora-Brindisi ferries, shows that although a not-so-sophisticated or organized group from a criminal standpoint, we have to do with financial capital made available to this activity in considerable amounts.<sup>270</sup> Based on conversations with local investigative journalists of the time who dealt with issues of light narcotics trafficking, it results that according to the calculations of potential costs covered by this “modest” criminal group, the amounts go up to the hundreds of thousands of Euros which, thanks to the excellent work of competent authorities, did not manage to convert into and fund the wanted criminal activity.<sup>271</sup>

It should be added that the great length of the Vlora district coastline facilitates and enables narcotics trafficking by sea through powerful rubberboats or speedboats. The trafficking network is extremely sophisticated and specialized also because of earned prior experience with trafficking in human beings. Usually, the Albanian side, in liaison with the Albanian or mainly Italian interlocutor across the Adriatic, guarantees securing and transporting the goods to the Italian shores. If the trafficking network is very professional and organized, then the transport of goods should be conducted to the final destination in specific cities in Italy or elsewhere in Europe. Otherwise, and this was happened with the case in question, if the group does not have this capacity of distribution, transport is secured up to the Italian shores, where it is taken by other Albanian mediators or foreign buyers.

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**268.** “We are conscious of the fact that there is considerable and organized criminal activity for the cultivation and trafficking of cannabis sativa toward European countries, which includes even members of police structures and other law enforcement agencies. For us, this is an unacceptable situation that represents one of the greatest and most important challenges that Albanian police will face and will win.” State Police, Annual Performance Review of the State Police. Report by the General Director of Police, Tirana, 2013, p. 8

**269.** Conversation with the former anti-narcotics officer in Vlora, P.O. 2, on 16/07/2015.

**270.** Conversation with Prosecutor, P. 1, on 12/06/2015.

**271.** Interview with local journalist, LJ 1, on 22/07/2015

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As was explained very clearly by persons who know this phenomenon quite well in the city of Vlora, there is also a second manner of transport by rubberboat to Italy that seems extremely interesting. It is known quite well that not all traders of narcotic plants have the possibility to directly purchase fast rubberboats for transporting drugs to Italy for several reasons, among which is the financial and material inability to possess such means. In these circumstances, they either merge capital with other “traders” in the same position as them by purchasing a joint boat or, as is often the case, they turn to the so-called “taxi service;” in other words, owners of fast rubberboats that transport the drugs, in most cases are not able to fill the boat with their own goods and are obliged to agree to transport goods also on behalf of third parties. Thus, they incredibly reduce the cost of the transport while also creating solid alliances with other trafficking groups.<sup>272</sup>

Until before the police intervention in Lazarat in 2015, as a result of which the cannabis price saw an almost speculative hike, it was estimated that the cost of transport for every kilo of cannabis went up to 50% of the purchase and transport price up to the Vlora shores, before being sent to Italy. Unofficially, we learned that during the period when the criminal group in question was operating, the price of cannabis per kilo, without the cost of transport to Italy, was about 400 Euro. Factoring in the cost of transport of 200 Euros per every kilo transported to Italy, we reach clear conclusions about the costs that these criminal groups need to afford in order to achieve their goals. So, if a small rubberboat may transport up to 300-400 kilos of cannabis, the total cost of the transport operation goes from 60,000 to 80,000 Euro and in these cases, the amount is higher than the cost of the rubberboat (in small dimensions for these cases). These large earned amounts, in certain cases and circumstances may even justify the abandonment of the rubberboat on Italian shores upon conclusion of the mission. In the case of transport by large rubberboats, the profit but also the risk is greater; this is so because the danger of being stopped by Italian patrol vehicles (Guardia di Finanza) is extremely high for those who possess the goods and those who possess the rubberboat. In the case of “success” in trafficking by large rubberboat, the profits are high and they enable the accumulation of extraordinary capital for funding other operations of the same kind.<sup>273</sup>

## Transport through the ferry to Italy

Another manner of transport, customary now for the trafficking of cannabis (but also of other drugs), is that through modified vehicles and their travel on ferries to Italy that operate directly from the Vlora Port. In the concrete case study, during 2012, there were two attempts of such trafficking toward Italy, both of which were unsuccessful, thanks to preventive work by competent bodies.<sup>274</sup> The two young men, part of the criminal group, that were caught in two separate cases in the Port of Vlora while attempting to go to Italy with the cannabis hidden in the floor or special spots created in their vehicles, are the already clear example of the new tendency preferred by narcotics traffickers for the smuggling of cannabis toward Italy. This manner has been simplified a lot also by the removal of the visa regime for Albanian citizens to Schengen countries and the creation of room for criminal groups whose purpose is the trafficking of narcotics.

An analysis of the facts on the group it emerges that the packaging and hiding of cannabis in special parts of the relevant vehicles had been done not very “professionally” and this may be explained with the limited capabilities of the group to find more sophisticated hiding methods. Controls at Albanian border and customs points, both on exit and entry, are increasingly more frequent and harsh and thus narcotics traffickers have to seek higher perfection of the techniques for hiding and transporting the cannabis. We need to add to this the preventive operational work of Albanian police, which leads to very limited success of trafficking through such methods. Moreover, traffickers who

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272. Ibid

273. Ibid

274. Conversation with Prosecutor, P. 1, on 12.06.2015.

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use such methods, usually do not risk themselves but rather use “drivers” or “special couriers” that can be easily found on such occasions. In the case in question, the trafficking did not succeed because the preventive activity of competent bodies yielded results and both couriers were detained and isolated accordingly.<sup>275</sup>

## Conclusions

The analyzed criminal group represents an extensively present phenomenon in the geography of the ordinary narcotics trafficking in Albania although it is not the real example of major criminal groups that are well-organized and sophisticated and that intend much more dangerous activities than those committed by the group in question. The selection of this “modest” sample of mid-level but organized narcotics trafficking criminality seeks to highlight and return the attention of the society and our institutions toward increasing issues such as that of illicit activities becoming massive and that in the common social conscience are viewed as “normal” or not very dangerous.

On the one hand, competent law enforcement bodies manage to prevent and discover serious criminal phenomena, thus leading to immediate negative reaction by the entire Albanian society. On the other hand, average or “ordinary” phenomena of criminality, mainly linked with light narcotics trafficking, are difficult to tackle solely through police or judicial activity. Because of the very nature of the creation, development, and transformation, they require the contribution of a series of social and institutional actors in order to highlight the negative social consequences that this wrong culture of semi-justification of such entirely illicit activities produces in the mentality of the society, especially younger generations.<sup>276</sup> In discovering, aside from the real criminal activity, also the economic-social causes that push Albanian youth to embrace and not report such socially degrading and compromising tendencies, while tackling the criminal phenomenon tout court, it is possible to also achieve satisfying results towards the education, sensitization and emancipation of young generations.<sup>277</sup>

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275. Conversation with former anti-narcotics police officer, PO. 2, on 16.07.2015.

276. Interview with a judge, J. 1, on 12.06.2015.

277. Interview with local journalist, LJ. 1, on 22.07.2015

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## 4. 3. History of organized crime in the district of Korça

Author: Albens Tabaku<sup>278</sup>

### Introduction

This research study makes an effort at analyzing criminal structures in the District of Korça. On the other hand, it analyzes also the social-economic and political factors that impacted the creation, development and dismantling of these structures. The research is divided into three parts. Each part addresses the main criminal structures that operated at different time periods in Korça. The first part of the research analyzes the *armed gangs* that operated in Korça during the period 1990-97, the emergence of initial criminal groups and their evolution. The second part focuses on the identification of auxiliary factors for the shift from armed gangs to more advanced structures, maybe criminal organizations. The last part of the research analyzes the dismantling of criminal organizations and the emergence of criminal groups crystallized in the form of *criminal network*, which operate from the end of the second period to the present day. There has been a lack of specific investigations and analysis of criminogenic factors, e.g. local, ethnic, religious factors as well as the characteristics of geographic areas where criminal structures operate and their impact on them.

### Methodology

This research relies on two primary sources, semi-structured interviews with experts and the analysis of court decisions. With regard to court decisions, there were difficulties because they are limited in number and impossible to use because of legal limitations. Likewise, interviews with lawyers, journalists, prosecutors, former police commissars have been limited because there is a kind of silent refusal by the persons who were contacted. This leads us to understand that a code of silence prevails due to reasons like fear, potential compromise, or an urban culture that exists in Albanian reality about the lack of social engagement against negative phenomena.<sup>279</sup> These objective difficulties have impacted the collective of quality data; however, a concrete overview, based also on my work in the judiciary, is provided on the phenomenon being studied and provides the contours for a more profound project in the future.

This research has tried to analyze to the extent possible the tendency of crime in the city of Korça. Its contribution is modest. However, the research does point to the general concern and criticism that exists among public opinion today on the phenomenon of criminality in the city of Korça. The research tries to present the reasons why criminal organizations and their structures have affected public, economic and political life of the city in the social and political context.

### Brief history of criminal groups in the city of Korça

The city of Korça lies in the South-Eastern part of Albania. The region where the city is part of is a border one, bordering Greece and Macedonia, and as a result has relations with these two countries. Criminality in the city has been at low levels compared to other cities also because of the following factors:

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<sup>279</sup>. Raimonda Moisiu "Society silence urges violence," Tirana Observer newspaper, 16.01.2013.

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**Economic factors.** The city of Korça has been one of the most industrialized of the country during the totalitarian regime.<sup>280</sup> Industry was developed and focused mainly on mechanic industry, the Instruments Plant, advanced textile industry, lumber, Sugar Plant (unique in the Balkans), food industry probably the most advanced in the country, etc.<sup>281</sup> As a result, there was a large contingent of qualified employees.<sup>282</sup> The destruction of industry after 1990 was painful for the city; nevertheless, certain industrial nuclei remained and created relative employment opportunities. Also, foreign investment (mainly Greek as a neighboring country) and scarce Italian investments in the former privatized enterprises that survived destruction were an opportunity for employment for the local population, compared to<sup>283</sup> other regions of Albania where economic collapse created an almost total ruin. Also, emigration was a factor of employment for a long time, mainly in Greece. A positive factor were also agricultural resources (the large field and the climate), as well as the work culture that prevails generally in the rural areas. Emigration of the entire area, not just the city of Korça, has been a factor of economic and cultural development. Emigration from the 1920-1930s was oriented toward the U.S., Australia, Argentina, Greece.<sup>284</sup> These factors made the area undergo economic and social development as well as a cultural openness that was relatively better than in other regions of the country.<sup>285</sup>

**Beginnings of criminal structures in the city of Korça.** Criminality in the city and district of Korça has been present since the time of the totalitarian regime, notwithstanding the moderate criminal situation compared to certain parts of Albania. Before the 1990s, ordinary crime was usually the genesis of criminality that would ensue during the years of democracy. Particularly in the first years of the transition (1990-'93), features of persons dealing with criminal activity and known by public order forces began to emerge. They would go to certain bars. Also, Korça had a characteristic of people gambling secretly since the time of the communist regime and such individuals were involved in this activity although it was illegal at the time. Groups had begun to take shape while the regime was in its last breath.

The political system and the regime in power, even when degrading, was more sensitive and reacted toward criminal offenses of a political character<sup>286</sup> than ordinary ones, which in truth, were somewhat 'underestimated' at the time.

*"Initially, the emergence of gangs in Korça was the result of the initial criminal groups that got even with one another. The beginnings are from the time of communism with the group of "Luli Kapurani" with the killing of "Sotir Peci" as a first offense." Likewise, "Don's Gang" was also known (the latter was the starting point of the gang of 5 stores;" they were in rivalry and conflict with one another."<sup>287</sup>*

*"First in Korça there were the criminal groups that did not have leaders, accountants, i.e. without any clear structure but just groups of young men. First these were neighborhood groups that hung out together, stole and committed light street crime. These groups were: 1) Group of Shepherds, 2) Group of 5 Stores, 3) Radeneci Group (name of the Radenec neighborhood), 4) St. Trinity Group (name of the neighborhood near the city cemetery)."<sup>288</sup>*

### **The most known gangs**

The city of Korça has had two known criminal groups: the gang of "5 stores" and the "Gang of Shepherds." Both gangs' members had previous criminal precedents with a criminal background from before the 1990s.

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280. See "Geography of Albania" at <http://gjeografiaerepublikesseshqipërisë.blogspot.al/2009/03/rajoni-juglindor.html> accessed in September 2015.

281. For more, refer to Wikipedia, [https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajoni\\_Juglindor](https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajoni_Juglindor) accessed in September 2015.

282. Refer to [archive.rec.org/albania/Projects/.../LEAP\\_Korca.pdf](http://archive.rec.org/albania/Projects/.../LEAP_Korca.pdf), accessed in October 2015.

283. Recall here Laç with the Superphosphate Plant, Fier with Alpbetrol, Elbasan with the Metallurgical Plant, Poliçan with the Weapons Plant.

284. See Wikipedia at <https://sq.wikipedia.org/ëiki/Kor%C3%A7a>, October 10, 2015.

285. Tonin Firoku "An obelisk in the valley of tears," accessed at <http://www.shekulli.com.al/m/post.php?id=273804ar>, October 10, 2015.

286. See PhD Topic by Fehmi Sulaj at [www.doktoratura.unitir.edu.al/.../Doktoratura-Femi-Sulaj](http://www.doktoratura.unitir.edu.al/.../Doktoratura-Femi-Sulaj), accessed on November 5, 2015.

287. Interview with a lawyer and former investigator in the Internal Affairs Branch, Korça, September 2014.

288. Interview with Former Police Director of the Korça District, September 2014.



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**Gang of “5 stores:”** According to interviewees, this gang was organized, had a regular structure and acted in a disciplined fashion. According to the interview with a former lawyer in Korça and that knew the group:

*“The Group of 5 Stores began its activity in 1991-1992. It was a consolidated group, with about 20 persons, with regular structure, with a leader that they obeyed and the members were disciplined. They had nine vehicles from their beginnings, stolen vehicles (remember the chaos of 1991). The initial activities were armed robberies, extortion of businessmen, drug trafficking, robbery of houses and vehicles. They operated in the city of Korça as a territory but also in the villages.” In terms of familiarization, they were inhabitants of three neighborhoods<sup>289</sup>--The “Gang of 5 stores” had their executors who finalized the decisions made by them. They were also narcotics users with a very great pride. They had ties in Tirana.”<sup>290</sup>*

The gang of “5 stores” dealt very little with narcotics trafficking compared to the “Gang of Shepherds.” The latter dealt continuously with narcotics trafficking and is still dealing with it as it has now accumulated considerable wealth. Extortion was one of the activities of this gang. The gang of “5 stores” was known for the extortion on the Korça iron businessman who was later eliminated in unclear mysterious circumstances in Tirana, Florian Vila.<sup>291</sup> The gang had its list of businessmen that it fined at the Kapshtica customs in 1997. There were offenses such as light and serious injuries as well as beatings, fewer murders.<sup>292</sup> *“Members were young, part of them with previous criminal precedents for penal offenses against the person.”<sup>293</sup>*

**Gang of “Shepherds:”** This too was one of the most dangerous organizations that operated in the city of Korça in the beginning of the transition period. According to interviewees:

*“As a group, it consisted of 20 persons, but when needed, many more could gather; however, the essence consisted of 20 persons. The organization dealt mainly with house stealing, robberies, stealing of cars, trafficking of expensive stolen cars, trafficking of women in Italy, Greece, and Germany, trafficking of refugees, trafficking of children, trafficking of drugs in the Netherlands (they had ties with foreign mafia groups). They had ties with gangs in the neighboring countries. Inside Albania, they had bases in Tirana. They had established ties with the gangs in Tirana especially after meeting them in prison. Many vehicles were stolen in EU countries, targeting mainly vehicles rented out by locals in the EU or in cooperation with specific persons who had expensive insured vehicles. Fake documents were prepared for the vehicle sold to members of the gang. After arriving in Albania, the foreigner reported the vehicle stolen in Albania and obtained insurance money in their own countries. The foreigner came to Albania as a visitor and sold the car in Albania to the gang members and filed a report with the Albanian police.”<sup>294</sup>*

*The same argument is used by another expert on this gang; he underscores, “...the shepherds were more refined and more moderate, they did no open things. The “gang of shepherds” was active with groups outside Korça. They dealt with trafficking and falsification of visas, drug trafficking, etc. The “Shepherds Gang” would also get in touch with the Macedonian and Greek mafia. Dishonest Greek businessmen found support in the gang.”<sup>295</sup>*

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289. Interview with a former Police Director, Korça, September 2015.

290. Interview with a Lawyer, former Leading Official of Investigations at the Internal Affairs Branch, Korça, September 2015.

291. Read Balkanweb <http://balkanblog.org/2008/05/01/mihal-delijorgji-und-der-bandën-mord-um-florian->

292. Interview with Lawyer, former Leading Official of Investigations of the Internal Affairs Branch, Korça, September 2015.

293. Interview with a former appeals prosecutor, Korça, September 2015.

294. Interview with former Police Director, Korça, September 2015.

295. Interview with Lawyer, former Leading Official of Investigations of the Internal Affairs Branch, Korça, September 2015.

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The age of the gang members varied from 14 years old to 25 years old. The average age was 25. There have been some older figures as noted above, but the dominating age was young. There were even members 13 to 14 years old who played the role of informers or watches.

*“Education was poor; first there were adolescents and the others up to 25 years old. Gangs had elements with criminal precedents from before 1990, but the increase in the number of murders came after 1997; the ease and display of weapons and the weakening of the state made the gangs assume more consolidated character.”<sup>296</sup>*

The criminal activity of the criminal gangs generated incomes. However, there are no certain data about how and where the money has been spent. It is supposed that their financial resources went to different construction businesses: *“The gang of 5 stories got tenders for cleaning the streets. They took the tender as firms and sold it to other firms, ghost firms that sold them to other firms.”<sup>297</sup>*

here are reasonable doubts that figures of the gang of shepherds founded firms or are business owners (the heads) and carried out public investments with Municipal tenders, maybe even the last investments realized in the city. Supposedly important members of both gangs possess: gambling halls, betting businesses, service bars, luxury hotels, etc. This unproven statement should be the target of law enforcement and anti-money laundering bodies and others in order to reach categorical conclusions. Below, we will turn once again to the social and cultural situation in order to understand the new circumstances in which criminal organizations were formed and developed in the city of Korça.

## Socio-cultural Conditions

In Korça, following the collapse of the atheist system, the first divisions of a religious character began to show. Ethnic divisions have been artificially exaggerated. Being on the border with Greece and Macedonia, the city had influences from these neighboring countries and minorities of these countries. Albania has admitted the existence of the Macedonian minority officially since during communism. They live in the Prespa area. As per the Greek minority, there have been constant debates. While the number is not what Greece claims, according to Albanian authorities there may be a certain number of persons of Greek descent as a result of movements through the centuries between neighboring populations, but also due to influences for certain interests. A part of the Vlach ethnic-cultural group has continuously claimed Greek nationality. In their opinion, the nationality was denied unjustly during communism, while according to researchers and state authorities, the claims has been artificially encouraged by certain circles in Greece. Part of them have not accepted being Greek.

Religious beliefs have varied, but two main ones prevailed, the Orthodox and the Muslim ones. Traditionally, the city of Korça, from the time of the Ottoman invasion was divided into Muslims and Orthodox.<sup>298</sup> The Muslim population was smaller in number and lived in the part of town called Kasaba. It consisted of 5 neighborhoods: the River, the Clock, the Corner, Radanec and the Ash Tower. It mainly practiced agriculture (inhabitants of Radanec), administered the Temple of Iliza Mirahori (Mytevelins), or they were officials of the administration of the Ottoman Empire. The market was between two parts, Varosh and Kasaba. The Christian population lived in Varosh neighborhood. It was organized in the Orthodox Committee, which was run by an elected forum, the Council of the Elders. Varosh consisted of 9 neighborhoods: Penço, Manço, Mando, Mano, Qiro, Barç, Barç of the Vlachs, New, Lower Varosh and the St. Mary neighborhood. So, the religious division had been inherited since the time of the Ottoman Empire. The spread of the relevant religious populations continues to preserve the contours since the time of the Ottoman Empire.

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**296.** Interview with Lawyer, former Leading Official of Investigations of the Internal Affairs Branch, September 2015.

**297.** Interview with former Police Director in the District of Korça, September 2015

**298.** See official website of Korça Municipality at [bashkiaKorçe.gov.al/images/revista/.../4\\_qyteti\\_im](http://bashkiaKorçe.gov.al/images/revista/.../4_qyteti_im) , accessed on October 11, 2015.

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As may be seen from the names, the “Neighborhood of the Vlachs” carried the name of the ethnic cultural group that was on the City Hills east of it. The position is more or less the same today, a part where members of the Vlach ethnic group live and where they are more concentrated. At present, they are spread throughout the entire city. The Neighborhood of the Muslims is still in “Radeneç” even today, the Neighborhood around the mosque, or Neighborhood 7 and Neighborhood “Radeneç” southwest of the city. Until the 1960s, the neighborhoods of the Muslims and the Christians were divided by the Korça River, which was also the physical dividing border. Later on, during the communist system, (maybe even for ideological motives to eliminate the division in memory), the river was deviated and instead the “Stalin Boulevard,” presently the “Fan Noli” promenade, was built. In 1927, the Orthodox were also present throughout the territory of the country, except for Kosovo/Kukës, being concentrated more in Berat, Korça, Vlora and Gjirokastra.<sup>299</sup> According to INSTAT,<sup>300</sup> the Orthodox are in Korça (16 percent) in 2011. In fact, the figure has been contested by the Albanian Orthodox Church and there has been tension with regard to the accuracy of the count, giving rise even to relative religious tension.<sup>301</sup> However, the city culture and the first part factors have absorbed these tensions for the most part.

Citizens of Korça have been historically tolerant toward the respective religious faiths. Any comment would be redundant on this fact.<sup>302</sup> *“If we admit today that there is tolerance and coexistence between the religious communities, this should not be interpreted at a superficial plain, says for Radio “Deutsche Welle” in Albanian Prof. Dr. Zyhdi Dervishi,<sup>303</sup> “Albanians have stood out through the centuries for unique inter religious tolerance, which has to do with the very history of the presence and coexistence of different religious faiths in the areas inhabited by Albanians as a result of the division of Christianity administratively into two parts, the Roman ritual (western) and the Byzantine one (easter) through the Theodosius line,” which runs somewhere between the rivers Shkumbin and Mat of Albania, and as a result of the embracing of Islam mainly to resist the assimilation by Slavs and Greeks at the end of the XVIII and beginning of the XIX century.”<sup>304</sup>*

There are some views that the communist system had an impact on this issue by completely banning religion and encouraging interfaith marriages.

*“Korça in general has had good interreligious relations between the Christians and Muslims, but there have there have also been concepts that people of one religion have excluded the other in an underground manner. During the time of the dictatorship, marital relations were encouraged to happen between people from different faiths, so the dictatorship, somehow, connected people together, leaving no religious divisions in this regard. This has not been in the interest of politics after 1990.”<sup>305</sup>*

There were efforts by political parties to rely on the city’s religious affiliation. It is likely that religious tolerance was harmed somewhat in spite of peaceful public statements in the name of religious tolerance. There are sporadic data that that there were tendencies to harm values that are delicate, sacred and unique for the city of Korça and for Albanians in general.<sup>306</sup> Specific research would be needed for this.

*“Concretely, the Democratic Party had some kind of support or tolerance toward the gang of the Five Stores, who for the most part were in the Muslim neighborhood (as confirmed above). Interested religious segments influenced both sides. It was no coincidence that the gang of ‘5 Stores’ was in the traditional neighborhood of the Muslims, where their mosque was; even the DP headquarters were in this neighborhood. The “Shepherds” were in the district of the Christians and the SP headquarters were in this neighborhood. The gang of “Shepherds” only had Christians and*

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299. See Gjergj Erebara in Open Data, accessed at <http://open.data.al/sq/lajme/lajm/lang/sq/id/670/Popullsia-sipas-religjionit-1923-2011> on October 15, 2015.

300. Enkelelda Cami “Details on Population by District,” 21.05.2013, INSTAT, accessed at [objektiv.al/instat-detaje-mbi-popullsine-sipas-qarqeve](https://objektiv.al/instat-detaje-mbi-popullsine-sipas-qarqeve), October 20, 2015.

301. [www.e-zani.com/.../kisha-ortodokse-reagon-ndaj-cens.20.12.2012](http://www.e-zani.com/.../kisha-ortodokse-reagon-ndaj-cens.20.12.2012) aksesuar ne tetor 2015

302. See photos and comments from the Blog Traditional Korça at [korcatradicionale.blogspot.com/.../FOTO%20NGA%20...](http://korcatradicionale.blogspot.com/.../FOTO%20NGA%20...), accessed on October 15, 2015.

303. See also on Wikipedia accessed at [https://sq.wikipedia.org/.../Harmonia\\_fetare\\_në\\_Shqip](https://sq.wikipedia.org/.../Harmonia_fetare_në_Shqip), October 20, 2015.

304. Read Genc Myftiu “Religious Faiths,” accessed at [http://www.shqiperia.com/tr/besimet\\_fetare.php](http://www.shqiperia.com/tr/besimet_fetare.php), October 21, 2015.

305. Interview with former appeals prosecutor of Korça, September 2015.

306. Gilles De Rapper. Religion in post-communist Albania: Muslims, Christians and the concept of ‘culture’ (Devoll, South Albania). *Anthropological Notebooks*, 2008, 14 (2), pp.31-45.

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that of the 5 stores had mostly Muslims, with some rare exception. They also had private social ties among them and for that the political parties sacrificed them.<sup>307</sup> Two other interviewees provide the same opinions. “The gangs inside the territory of Korça had also some kind of religious outline, Muslims and Orthodox. It is known that there was a clash over the construction of the Orthodox Church in the “Vangjush Mio” Park. In fact, the Gang of 5 Stores wanted a mosque built in the spot, which it considered to be in its own territory, its area of influence. However, this definition of the religious aspect is not absolute; there have been exceptions with some gang figures having different religious affiliation.”<sup>308</sup>

Nevertheless, there have been somewhat disturbing data with regard to the involvement of these gangs in elements of terrorism, but these elements need to be verified for their credibility.

*“The Shepherds Gang was of the Orthodox faith and a good part of them of the Vlach ‘nationality.’ It was not easy to verify whether the “Shepherds” had ties with religious figures. The Orthodox Church did not influence and did not bring these guys closer, but in religious holidays, there were cases when the ‘shepherds’ managed to get their hands on religious assistance to disseminate to people at the time. (there is hesitation for further explanations by the interviewee).”<sup>309</sup>*

This was a convinced statement but without further explanations by the interviewees. “There has been some kind of interreligious support for each group.”<sup>310</sup> However, the conclusion that we are seeing even today is that the citizens of Korça understood religious faith by seeing it as a value and not as a social difference. Intellectuals, people with influence in the city, but even the educated population of the city did not ever manifest extreme positions openly. The fact is that there is almost total interreligious harmony and political parties no longer have expressed interreligious interests except for ceremonial religious visits.

There are sporadic data also of the influence of foreign services on the activity of these gangs. The activity of the gangs kept growing more sophisticated in the economic aspect, “One Gang member hooked up with the Greeks, dealt with trading of icons, gold smuggling, smuggling of ancient artifacts, in the ‘Boboshtica cemetery scandal’ and the person went into hiding in Greece.<sup>311</sup> According to a journalist, even for the person who was heading the National Rescue Committee “there are suspicions that he was involved in intelligence and criminal trafficking activities.”<sup>312</sup> This person called upon the President of the Republic in 1997 to pardon about 40 members of the rival gangs in Korça. The person is involved in politics as a figure of one of the political parties in emigration in a neighboring country. The person had also been an employee of the State Sigurimi.”<sup>313</sup>

## Institutional factors favoring criminal structures in the city of Korça

Law enforcement bodies in the beginning of the 1990s took longer to adapt to the new approaching circumstances. The performance of these bodies may have been affected by the structural shock in the course of reforms that followed the change of the system. Likewise, reforms undertaken by previous governments were not all successful. Political reforms of the early 1990s led to a political fight that consisted in the reshuffling of law enforcement personnel, according to political affiliation, and the dissolution of law enforcement bodies. The time needed to create the new structures and make them operational led to a vacuum that criminality perceived quickly and took advantage of as room for their actions and lack of risk to them. The new reformed structures appeared often inefficient.

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307. Interview with a former appeals prosecutor of Korça, September 2015

308. Interview with lawyer, former Leading Official at the Internal Affairs Branch, September 2015

309. Interview with the former Director of Police of the Korça District, September 2015

310. Interview with former appeals prosecutor of Korça, September 2015

311. Interview with lawyer, former Leading Official at the Internal Affairs Branch, Korça, September 2015

312. Read Urim Gjata “Former socialist ex-communists honor Serb UDB inspectors,” at <http://www.waklapi.net/t845-urim-gjata-ish-komunistet-socialist-nderojne-inspektoret-e-udb-s-serbe>, 29/01/200

313. Interview with journalist, Korça, September 2015.

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*“Police operative work was lacking. There was lack of cooperation with collaborators because they leaked information. In the past, we worked with infiltrated persons and the collaborator in the gang was very valuable. It took 5 to 6 months to build the necessary trust from the inside. Intelligence services were and are weak” ...Infiltration is very necessary. It is clear that there is no criminal prosecution for “drugs in collaboration” as an offense because the offense is reduced to ‘drugs in use’ and not transport or ‘trafficking of narcotics.’ There is a lack of professionalism. I have reservations for judicial police and the organic connection Judicial Police – Prosecutor’s Office is lacking as is efficient interaction with Order Police; work is done without responsibility these days ...”<sup>314</sup>*

So, there is concrete data that law enforcement agencies because of certain factors mentioned above were weakened and this led to crime finding logistical and economic room for connections and collaboration with crime outside the border. It is possible to draw a relative conclusion: the new reality after the change of systems found Albanian law enforcement bodies almost unprepared.

*“The 6-month lawyers had a negative influence. 21 persons came to Korça as Judicial Police Officers. A part of them accepted money, ruined evidence at crime scenes. For instance, when they (the 6-month lawyers) were removed, in 1996 they left behind 60 murder cases that needed to be resolved. The 6-month lawyers had damaged the evidence and the files were often sent back to complete investigations. They massively harmed investigations at the time.”<sup>315</sup>*

*“Criminal structures and gangs had to have a long period of time and a large number of members, thus committing a large number of crimes. In the practice of our work, we did not look at them this way, as criminal organizations.”<sup>316</sup>*

The above is also seen in the fact that groups of scoundrels that committed light and simple crimes did not survive long – they were dissolved; the new reality required sophistication of crime. The groups that adapted to this reality underwent root-deep transformation of their structure, organization and activity.

*“For instance, the ‘St. Trinity’ Group did not function for long. Their crimes were light ones or actions going against other groups that harassed them, as rivalry among them. The group was entirely destroyed in 1998 and the members of the gang were not recruited by other gangs.”<sup>317</sup>*

A new phenomenon, unknown in the past (under communism), was the collaboration of state structures with these criminal groups. Political support and support by certain state segments impacted criminal groups, leading to a new phase of reorganization, with them becoming more dangerous. These groups assumed a regular form and structure, with leaders, deputies, executors, middlemen, accountants, informers, typical functions of criminal organizations, expanding their network. The greater threat they posed, which also led to greater public sensitivity, was the direct access of these organizations on law enforcement bodies: Court, Prosecutor’s Office, Police, certain Ministries, etc.

*“The members, in the mid-‘90s had ties with senior officials of the Ministry of Public Order, from where police actions were leaked. I realized this fact when I took information and members of the gangs boastfully told me on the street, ‘You sent x information about us...,’ like some kind of pressure, “...there are also others above you; leave us alone or you’ll see.” The gang of the “Five Stores” had police handheld radios and listened in on our activity, had their persons inside the Police and often our operational actions failed.”<sup>318</sup>*

*“They had direct access to the police; in fact, there were cases when in certain incidents, gang members would come and influence the police officers at the time, even tampering with evidence and manipulating witnesses.”<sup>319</sup>*

*“Order bodies of the police and investigation bodies and the collection of operational data (SHIK) did not perform well. They did a poor job of discovering factors, collaborators and properly getting evidence from incidents. The*

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**314.** Interview with lawyer, former Leading Official of Investigations at the Internal Affairs Branch, Korça, September 2015.

**315.** Interview with a former Police Director, Korça, September 2015

**316.** Interview with former Appeals Prosecutor, Korça, September 2015.

**317.** Interview with a former Police Director, Korça, September 2015.

**318.** Interview with a former Police Director, September 2015

**319.** Interview with lawyer, former Leading Official of Investigations at Internal Affairs Office, Korça, September 2015.

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lack of professionalism was evident. In fact, even criminal procedure tasked with investigations a police officer that had not graduated from law rather than an investigator. A good part of the staffs of law enforcement bodies did not have the training or experience in the method of discovery, collection, administration and handling of all data. There were stark weaknesses, beside direct political pressure. That is why the criminal offenses by these gangs were qualified as offenses “in cooperation with others” and not as “criminal organization,” while there was room to treat them as such.”<sup>320</sup>

“These groups, especially the ‘5 stores,’ have had powerful influence on the Court (they would even undertake interferences to resolve certain issues even not criminal ones, but had less influence on the Prosecutor’s office. They had less influence because the Prosecutor’s Office was a centralized body and with ties with the police, but still there was some influence. With the lawyers, there were powerful ties, almost friendly, such that these would go to the funerals of gang members who had been killed.”<sup>321</sup>

“In the judiciary, there were people who were close to these groups. In fact, lawyers of rival gangs had lawyers with the opposite political influence, for instance a lawyer known to be an SP supporter defended the gang of the 5 stores. Thus, even in their unfavorable political times exploited rival political resources.”<sup>322</sup>

“In the judiciary, groups clearly had access to certain segments. I’m not going to say the court is corrupt, but rather influenced. When a murder happened, it was difficult to find evidence, no efforts were made to protect the eyewitness or fix his statements at the right time. It was evident that the gangs had more influence on the prosecutor’s office and the police than the courts.”<sup>323</sup>

Also, in the years 1990 until the middle 200, there were marked shortcomings of inter-institutional cooperation, to the extreme, for instance, “there have been cases when the Civil Registry Office at the Ministry of Justice produced clean background certificates for a defendant, member of a gang (EG) around 1998 when it was known by everyone that he had been prosecuted and convicted for criminal offenses as an active member of the gang. Maybe that was due to data organization or computerization or intentional manipulation – it is not known for sure.”<sup>324</sup>

Also, the legal framework and by-laws approved by the parliament and the executive at different times have had an entirely negative impact. The legal framework directly impacted the aspect of addressing criminal offenses or preventing them, therefore leading to increased performance of criminal activity by criminal networks. One typical example is Law No. 8202, dated 27.03.1997 “On Amnesty.” Because of the consequences of this law, courts made legal concessions for almost all gang members, especially those convicted for wounding, illegal possession of weapons (most of the offenses by criminal groups in Korça were in such conditions).

To illustrate, we’ll quote Article 2 of this Law: “All persons who were under criminal prosecution or had been convicted for committing crimes mentioned in article 1, were pardoned 1/3 of the sentence if they returned voluntarily to jail within 12.4.1997, and the sentence of those convicted to life imprisonment or death sentence would be transformed into 20 years of imprisonment.” Many convicts sentenced for serious crimes, such as murder, etc., were released because of this law and the criminal prosecution of many others was reduced, benefiting from<sup>325</sup> legal manoeuvres or interpretations with double meanings by the courts.<sup>326</sup> For instance, a murder and serious injury leading to death needed to be analyzed carefully in order to separate the very thin ‘dividing line’ as to which offense actually happened. However, “tactically,” the offense could be qualified as the latter (injury leading to death) and therefore enjoy the legal benefit of the amnesty.

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**320.** Interview with a former appeals prosecutor, Korça, September 2015.

**321.** Interview with a former police director Korça, September 2015.

**322.** Interview with a former appeals prosecutor, Korça, September 2015.

**323.** Interview with a lawyer, former Leading Official of Investigations at the Internal Affairs Branch, Korça, September 2015.

**324.** Interview with a journalist, Korça, Korça, September 2015.

**325.** Decision no. 356, dated 03.09.1997 of the Tirana Appeals Court (lessens sentences for members of the five stores gang)

**326.** Anila Rama “Amnesty benefits 300 convicts <http://www.webalbania.com/News/print/sid=1297.html>

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All criminal offenses “Serious intentional injury committed in collaboration with others” and “Illegal possession of weapons” envisaged by articles 88/1-25, 278/2 of the Criminal Code, due to the amnesty of Law no. 8202, dated 27.03.1997 “On amnesty” were dropped. The effect of the law was felt immediately after the turmoil of 1997. Even judicial practice was extensively confused. There were cases when persons convicted abroad for criminal offenses committed abroad were transferred to Albania. This took place based on the Council of Europe Convention “On the transfer of convicted persons,” and the bilateral Convention of 17.5.1997 between Albania and Greece and the convicts in these countries sought a lessening of their sentences or even release. Many of them really benefited. For these reasons, the Criminal Courts of different instances released persons convicted abroad and who found the possibility to escape afterwards again to EU countries. In noting the above phenomena, the Constitutional Court issued a Unifying Decision no.154, dated 08.12.1999, which unifies ‘confused’ judicial practice with regard to the extent of the Albanian criminal law in time and space, in the case of criminal offenses committed by Albanian citizens in a foreign country,<sup>327</sup> cutting off any legal room for these persons. However, there is no data as to what the number of persons with a criminal “background” who benefited from the case until the implementation of the above Unifying Decision.

## Direct involvement of politics and their structures in criminal structures

There is a public perception in the city of Korça about the involvement of the main political forces with criminal groups. This was so public that these criminal groups such as:

*“The gang of ‘5 stores’ and the gang of the ‘Shepherds’ and some of their family members signed a reconciliation act at the Municipality of Korça on March 16, 1997 in the presence of the Mayor of the time.”<sup>328</sup> The connection with politics was open. With the change of the system, existing delinquent groups from the time of communism (5 stores and the Radeneci gang) were positioned on the side of the DP because this party itself did not bring clean people in this area but this category of people that it used during the transition period, to distribute the economy, for privatizations, sales, the robbery of enterprises being destroyed. They were used for blackmail, political pressure on ordinary citizens, and extortion of businesses or ‘shields’ for right wing businessmen. For instance, one businessman with “right-wing” inclination, when transporting cigarettes with vehicles, because streets were insecure at the time, took about 5 members of the gang with weapons to guard the transport of goods. Extortion worked through threatening letters, psychological terror to scare people. Right-wing politicians were openly exposed and members of the gang came to DP meetings, organized the rallies of this party and caused problems for SP rallies.”<sup>329</sup>*

It is a known fact that the father in law of one of the main members of the gang of “Five Stores” (E.G.) died of a heart attack in a rally where the President of the time was participating, of which he was a fanatic fan; the cause of death were the emotions in the meeting.

*“Both gangs had connections in the municipality. At the time, it was the DP that had them more and the SP less. The gang of Five Stores especially had strong ties with the Municipality employees and administration. The gang got the main tenders for the streets and for cleaning. They got the tender as firms and sold it to other firms, i.e. phantom firms and sold them to other firms. This support was achieved by them because the top of the municipality might change, but the administration changed little. This was generally a characteristic of the DP.”<sup>330</sup>*

*The “Shepherds” had political support from the SP. But they did not have the same type of access like the “5 Stores” did; thus, the SP was more moderate and more withdrawn in their support and not so exposed (Interview with a former police director, September 2015). “In the villages, the gangs were involved with the local authorities, but*

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327. Read Juridical Magazine Gajus at [gajus.qendra-list.org/.../Revista\\_GAJUS\\_EKSTRA\\_2.p](http://gajus.qendra-list.org/.../Revista_GAJUS_EKSTRA_2.p).

328. Interview with a journalist, Korça, September 2015.

329. Interview with a former police director, Korça, September 2015.

330. Intervistë me Avokat Ish Drejtues Hetuesie ne Degën e Punëve të Brendëshme, Korçështator 2015.

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not as much as in Korça Municipality. The “5 stores” could intervene to get people hired. MP R.B. had very close cooperation; in fact, he was at their rank (opinion of the interviewee).<sup>331</sup>

“Both sides were convincingly involved in politics and political support. The gang of “5 stores” was instructed systematically by MP R.B. He convened them intentionally before elections. The gang of “5 stores” took the ballot boxes and stuffed them with ballots, thus being used by politics for election manipulation. The gang members were first in their rallies and even in causing problems for the rallies of opponents. This was a characteristic of both sides, but especially the “5 stores” were more cruel and consistent. They collaborated also with the Egyptian community of the “Radeneç” neighborhood.”<sup>332</sup>

In fact, it was not difficult to see the activation of these gangs because their members exposed themselves without fear in the vote counting commissions at voting centers. There are reports that until the last municipal elections, former members of the gangs, not organized but sporadically, appeared in the role of party sympathizers near the headquarters of the parties.

*“Politics attacked police about 10 to 15 times while I was there. They appointed leading officials without integrity and incapable. I felt the pressure of politics directly. Once, I caught 8 murderers in one day (it was hard and great risk for the time) and Tirana would not undertake to cover the transport of those caught. Today, I live in conditions close to poverty; even my wife was dismissed from her job.”<sup>333</sup>*

This kind of statement is made even by professionals of a higher level; namely, there are two statements such as: “At the prosecutor’s office there were political interferences by political figures, even pressure; influence was direct and indirect, but especially with the police”<sup>334</sup> The open involvement of political parties with crime structures was known. Criminal structures were involved in political rallies, counter rallies, pressure on rival militants, elections, commissions and in the case of the latter, exposure was high. No matter how much the connection of politics with crime is denied, it is impossible for the public to have a different perception when the exposure was open and factual in the eyes of the citizens of Korça. Pressure on professionals was open and evident, with an impact on work and professionalism. The same holds for the appointment of law enforcement professionals.

*“The 5 stores were with the DP and the Shepherds with the SP. Politics exploited their ignorance, revenge and rivalry among them to benefit.”<sup>335</sup>*

The analysis of this research leads to a hypothesis that the groups, so-called gangs, had a level of structure and organization that fits very much the definition by the Italian researcher, writer, journalist, politologist and sociologist Michele Panteleone (1911-2002). The issue is that there is a need for more profound research to reach more categorical conclusions.

## Current situation

At present, their criminal activity is not felt openly in the city of Korça. Many gang members have traveled abroad, were eliminated by rivals or are minding their own lives

*“The group of 5 stores exists but presently its weight has fallen a lot; they’ve been hit, eliminated, and put in jail. However, there is still a good part who are not convicted, semi-withdrawn, but not at all like at the time of their bloom in 1996-1997-1998 until 1999, which were their climax.”<sup>336</sup>*

*These groups presently in Korça have completed their cycle and are closed. I do not think they are in a latent mood, silently dangerous or explosive in the future. There has been over 10 years and there are no similar cases of revenge*

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331. Interview with a lawyer, former Leading Official of Investigations at the Internal Affairs Branch, Korça, September 2015.

332. Interview with a lawyer, former Leading Official of Investigations at the Internal Affairs Branch, September 2015

333. Interview with a former police director, Korça, September 2015.

334. Interview with former appeals prosecutor, Korça, September.

335. Interview with former appeals prosecutor, Korça, September 2015.

336. Interview with former police director in the district of Korça, September 2015.



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between groups. Now the members have grown old and has had its toll; the circumstances that nourished them are no more and are not favorable to them in Korça.”<sup>337</sup>

“Now, part of the gangs are finished, degenerated due to their loose life, some have left, have changed their identity or are hiding abroad. Only their heads have their businesses...Nevertheless, in Korça, criminal structures are generally over. Yet, drug trafficking exists and, in fact, in the villages of Korça, e.g. in Pojan, there has been a very well organized group. Police professionalism is lacking; they can’t get them in the act, but only while attempting.”<sup>338</sup>

“In the Korça district, until 1994, there was massive cultivation of cannabis plants in an organized manner. Then the police went in, door to door, starting criminal proceedings even against the elderly. But it was a massive phenomenon in mountainous villages and those at the foot of mountains. Today, it may be 1/100 of what it was in 1994.”<sup>339</sup>

However, based on current developments, we can’t claim that no new criminal structures are created. According to experts, we have a generation of new groups, especially in rural areas.

“Now there are new groups. For instance, a new active group is the “Voskop Group” (name of a village 8 km from Korça.” The group has been known for about five years; they are from Voskop. Most of them have dealt and deal with drug trafficking, human beings, arms trafficking. The Voskop gang has had ties with the DP, then the LSI; moved to the SP once but now are again with the LSI.”<sup>340</sup>

Recent data show a negative trend for the city of Korça. For the first time, there was talk about a drug lab in 2015.<sup>341</sup> “The anti-narcotics operation named the ‘Professor,’ in September 2015 ended with the arrest of four persons in Korça and the seizure of a quantity of drugs, weapons and equipment for mixing hashish oil.” Criminal activity related to narcotics trafficking is seen as renewed.<sup>342</sup>

Korça police, in the context of the successful finalization of the operation called “Sport 1,” made possible the seizure of 12 kilos of cannabis sativa and the arrest of 5 persons that possessed it; one citizen was prosecuted while at large. According to police, the detained dealt with the criminal activity of selling and distributing the narcotics in the city of Korça. The narcotics was found hidden in the home of T.P. and, during the control, 2 electronic balances, 7 mobile phones and one vehicle type Alfa Romeo were seized as material evidence.”<sup>343</sup>

## Conclusions

At present, there appears to be an activation of criminal groups of narcotics trafficking, which coincides with a problematic situation in Albania in this regard. Further research might provide more data on the trend of this activity. The chances are that criminal structures have transformed, merged with those in latent form, or new ones have emerged that may be exploit the experience of old structures. The structures have assumed new forms, adapted to current economic, social and political conditions.<sup>344</sup> Maybe even in the form of classic Mafia.

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337. Interview with former appeals prosecutor, Korça, September 2015.

338. Interview with lawyer, former Leading Official of Investigations at the Internal Affairs Branch, September 2015

339. Interview with former police director in the District of Korça, September 2015

340. Interview with former police director of district, September 2015

341. Read Flashnews 24 “Lab for cannabis oil, drugs and weapons, 4 handcuffed in Korça,” 23/09/2015 accessed at <http://al.flash24.neës/kronike/laborator-pr-vaj-kanabisi-drog-dhe-arm-4-n-pranga-n-kor-nbsp/>, October 20, 20-15.

342. <http://shqiptarja.com/m/home/Korçë-sekuestrohen-12-kg-kanabis-arrestohen-5-perso> (edition of July 26, 2015)

343. Read at Ora News, “Ambush, Korça, 800 kilos of cannabis seized, 4 possessors arrested,” 28/09/2015, accessed at <http://www.oranews.tv/vendi/korce-sekuestrohen-800-kg-kanabis-arrestohen-4-poseduesit/>, October 15, 2015.

344. Read at Mapo Newspaper the statement of Arben Gaçi “We defended the vote with influential people in the face of DP bandits,” 14/09/2015, accessed at [www.mapo.al/.../mbrojtem-voten-me-njerez-influente-](http://www.mapo.al/.../mbrojtem-voten-me-njerez-influente-), October 20, 2015.

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## 4. 4. Trafficking of narcotics in the North: Criminal Network “Old Path”

*Author: Fatjon Taipi*<sup>345</sup>

### Introduction

In 1999, approximately 836,000 inhabitants of Kosovo were displaced from their home toward neighboring countries such as Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and toward countries of the European Union as a result of the war and the NATO attacks on Yugoslav army based. The inhabitants were welcomed by Albanian citizens in these countries and their relatives in European countries.<sup>346</sup> In this spirit of solidarity, new friendly and commercial relations were created between these inhabitants with the citizens who welcomed and sheltered them. After the end of the war, return to Kosovo began but the dynamics of life had changed. The displaced inhabitants found it difficult to reintegrate because social economic conditions were not favorable.<sup>347</sup> The main hosts were the Albanians from the north of Albania who were still suffering from the social problems that the year 1997 had created.<sup>348</sup> In this situation of an absence of order and social stability, many individuals had engaged in illicit activities, mainly in the cultivation of narcotics substances.<sup>349</sup>

Statistical data secured from State Police present a continued increase of encountered and discovered cases with the apprehension of criminal offense perpetrators for trafficking of narcotics substances. In the “Dukagjini” police operation alone in 2014, a total of 136,468 narcotic plants were destroyed.<sup>350</sup> The District of Shkodra includes remote areas that are far from inhabited centers and represent favorable locations for the cultivation of narcotic plants. The areas have also favorable climate conditions, especially heavy rainfalls and numerous water resources. The cultivation of narcotics in the north of Albania begins to appear as a phenomenon in 1996 and then it spreads throughout the area of the North.<sup>351</sup> Individuals who previously had dealt with smuggling of cigarettes, coffee and iron with Montenegro were now involved in trafficking of narcotic substances. Then other groups were created that collected and smuggled it into countries of the European Union (EU).<sup>352</sup> The groups of the ‘North’ are not groups involved only in trafficking of narcotic substances, but dealt also with trafficking of weapons inside the country and in Kosovo.<sup>353</sup> Cultivators of narcotic plants were initially ordinary farmers who, aside from other agricultural work, cultivated narcotic plants for economic profit.

Cultivators after 2004 were fewer. Individuals who dealt only with this job engaged in cultivation during the period 2004-2014. After becoming stronger economically, they began to specialize in the techniques for growing and drying the narcotic substances. They began to group in small groups that had family ties and friendship ties. They cultivated narcotics in deep remote areas and in plots of land without owners. The empowerment of cultivators is seen in the response to police forces in the “Dukagjini” operation in 2014. The cultivators sold their product to persons they

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**346.** Oxford University Press. 2000. The Kosovo report, p. 90.

**347.** Revised strategy for the reintegration of repatriated persons, Pristina, May 2010, p. 8.

**348.** Dita Newspaper, Tirana, April 17, 2014, Majko’s confession about the exodus of the Albanians of Kosovo.

**349.** Organized crime in Albania. Risk Assessment. Zhilla, F; Lamallari. B. Tirana 2015. p. 47.

**350.** Results of the operation in Dukagjin, State Police, Tirana 22.08.2014. <http://www.asp.gov.al/index.php/rezultatet-e-operacionit-ne-dukagjin>

**351.** Interview with police officer, Puka Commissariat, Shkodra, July 2015.

**352.** Interview with serious crimes judge, Tirana, September 2015.

**353.** Interview with Serious Crimes Judge, Tirana, September 2015.

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had friendship or ties with. In this line of work, narcotics groups were not aggressive because trafficking took place within a circle of trust and acquaintances. Meanwhile, friendship ties, within the circle of trust, also minimize violent clashes but also reporting to the police. As mentioned above, narcotics usually target the European market as a destination and that is done through collaborations of the buyer with groups of Albanians or foreigners. Cultivators do not have knowledge of international trafficking “routes” or the destination. Trafficking toward the EU market was done through the relatives of the traffickers living in European countries or through friendly ties with other groups inside Albania. a typical illustrating example is the so-called “*Old Path*,” which will be analyzed below.

The criminal network in the trafficking of narcotic substances in the police operation “Old Path” appears as one of the most telling networks about the manner in which criminal networks of the north operate. The network consisted of individuals of Kosovo, Albanian, Macedonian and Swiss citizenship. The network operated by purchasing the narcotics from producers in northern Albania and selling it in the Switzerland market. In this research study we paused on analyzing this trafficking network by focusing on the psychological and social profiles of the members, criminological factors and the history of how this group was created and organized in its mission.

The **methodology of this research study** was built on three main resources. First, we reviewed the decisions of Courts on groups of narcotics trafficking in the north of Albania. After the review, we decided on the group to be studied and obtained the ruling of the Serious Crimes Court.<sup>354</sup> The second resource is the review of police statements on the operation called “Old Path,” stories by periodical newspapers on the police operation and the investigations of journalists on the group. The third resource is information obtained from the interviews with experts who were involved and provided valuable information about the narcotics trafficking network. For the research, we conducted 6 semi-structured interviews. We interviewed one judge, member of the panel of judges of the case, two members of the investigative group from the police, an inhabitant of the area, the defense lawyer of some members and a local journalist who wrote about the narcotics trafficking network. At the end of collecting the data from these resources, we carried out the analysis of qualitative data and the description of the group.

## History of the “Old Path” network

The “Old path” network had its beginning in 2009 in the Albanian territory, but parts of the network had been functioning for some years in the Swiss market.<sup>355</sup> The network was called the “Old path.” It assumed the name from the police due to the operation “Old path” that led to the arrest in flagrante of six members of this network on February 14, 2011.

The Serious Crimes Prosecutor’s Office, in collaboration with the Police Directorates of, Kukës and Tirana, as well as with Swiss authorities, following a long investigation, finalized successfully the international operation “Old path.” The operation led to the arrest of Aldo Morini, Bashkim Elshani, Burim Dervishaj, Murat Osmanaj, Flurim Elshani and Goran Zivkovic.<sup>356</sup> After the operation, three Albanian citizens were arrested: Kolë Nika, born and inhabitant in the village, Albert Tuci, born and inhabitant of Fushë-Arrëz and citizen Alfons Tuci, born and inhabitant in Fushë-Arrëz.<sup>357</sup> The criminal group has its genesis in Switzerland, where Aldo Morini had received his compatriots during the Kosovo war in his house. Aldo Morini had sheltered Bashkim Elshani for a long time after the end of the war and had preserved friendly relations. With passing of years, their friendship had turned into a commercial relationship, whereby they had projects for the opening of a chain of bars in Kosovo and in Durrës.<sup>358</sup> Bashkim Elshani was old friends with Burim Dervishaj and Murat Osmanaj, because they were from the same region of Kosovo. The individuals were under investigation by Zurich police authorities as members of a narcotics trafficking network

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354. Decision no. 38, 25.05.2015. Serious Crimes Court, Tirana.

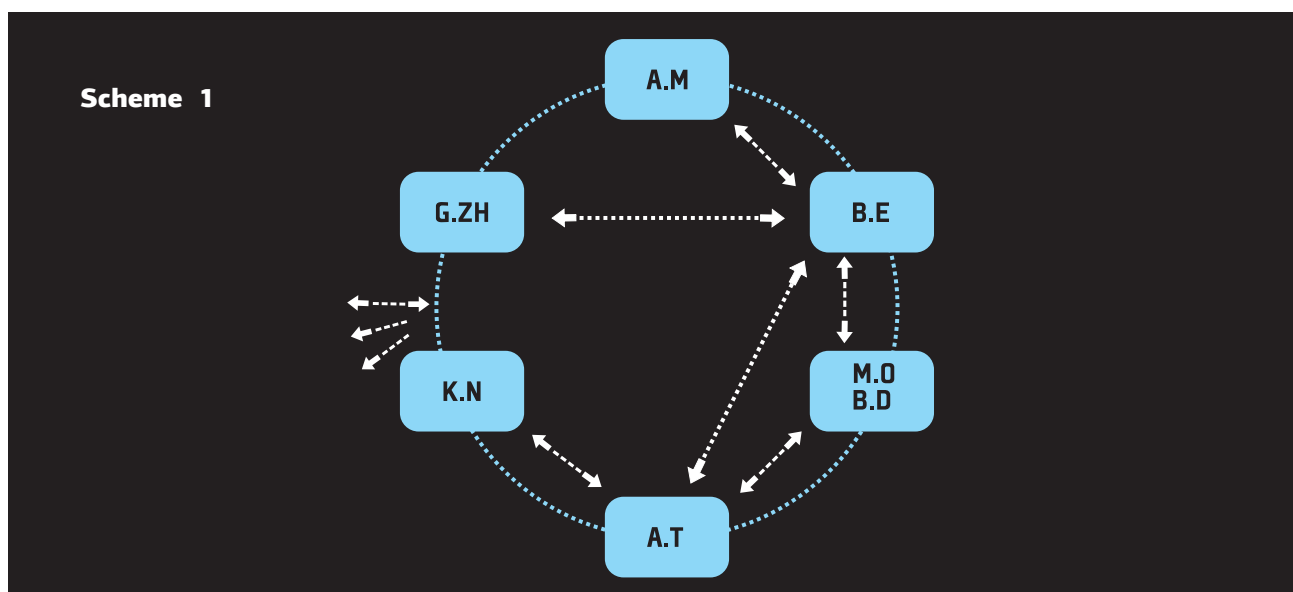
355. *Ibid*, p. 35.

356. NOA News Agency, on15.02.2011

357. Decision no. 38, 25.05.2015, Serious Crimes Court, Tirana.

358. Interview with defense attorney, Tirana, August 2015.

originating from and based in the Western Balkans.<sup>359</sup> Kosovo citizens Burim Dervishaj and Murat Osmanaj had early friendly relations with citizen Albert Tuci, who had been a police officer in the Puka Commissariat. Bashkim Elshani got to know Macedonian citizen Goran Zivkovic in Switzerland because they had transported some house stuff and furniture from Switzerland to Macedonia and then to Kosovo. Albert Tuci knew the cultivator of the narcotics from Krye Bushat, Kolë Nika, because they were remote relatives. Scheme 1 presents the friendship and commercial ties of the members of this network. Only the boxes connected by lines indicate the ties explained above. As may be seen, the group has members that do not know everyone else in the group, but the connection line is the trafficking of narcotics.<sup>360</sup>



## Functioning of the network

The cannabis produced in the District of Shkodra was trafficked toward Switzerland. The persons ordering the cannabis and the organizers of the network were Swiss citizens Aldo Morini and Bashkim Elshani, who communicated with the Kosovo citizens for finding the narcotics in Albania. The latter had relations with Albert Tuci who played the role of the mediator with the producer for a percentage of the profit. The transport took place through the Port of Durrës by Macedonian citizen Goran Zivkovic who had a transport license with his vehicle for the countries of the European Union and did not present direct ties with any of the network members. The Macedonian citizen was the courier of the narcotics for a fixed payment he received from Bashkim Elshani. The narcotics went through Italy toward Switzerland, where the sale was done in large quantities to distributors. In this trafficking network, it is an interesting fact that the majority of the members does not know one another directly but use friendship and regional connections to achieve their goals. The lack of direct ties between the members made the group communicate frequently with mobile phones, which was the weak point in the operations of the network.<sup>361</sup> The network had been established based on immediate economic profit and they had built a temporary operational structure. The group would last for as long as there would be economic benefit for all the members of the group. The activity of the group was focused on realizing shipments in large quantities and rarely because the cost of the trafficking was high due to the percentages and payments that the different links in the chain received. Payments were made in cash so that there would be no traces through bank transfers. The organizers were interested in transporting quantities beyond 100 kilos per shipment.

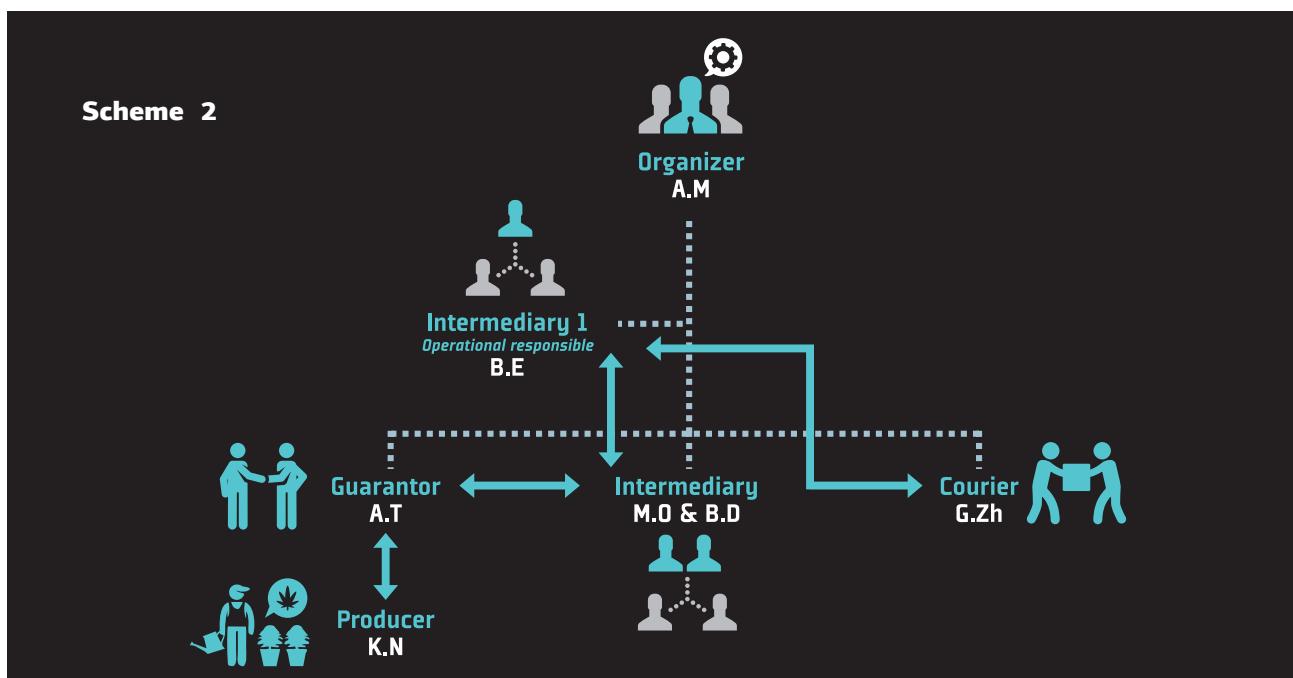
<sup>359</sup>. Decision no 38, 25.05.2015, p. 36, Serious Crimes Court, Tirana.

<sup>360</sup>. Interview with police officer, September 2015, Tirana.

<sup>361</sup>. Interview with police officer, Tirana, September 2015.

## Group Structure

The narcotics trafficking groups are mainly divided into two categories: a) in Albanian criminal groups for the trafficking of narcotic substances, whereby operations only take place within the territory of Albania,<sup>362</sup> and b) mixed criminal groups consisting of members from Albania and other neighboring and European countries, whereby Albanian members have the duty of supplying the narcotics, but in many cases are also organizers.<sup>363</sup> The “Old path” trafficking network had a structure that fit the manner of operations. The group structures were active as long as they had a function. The entire concept of the trafficking had been designed by Aldo Morini who was referred to inside the group as the “Old man.” It was easy for Aldo Morini, born and living in Switzerland, to travel to Albania and Macedonia. Also, on the basis of investigations by Zurich police, he had connections with individuals involved in trafficking and sale of narcotic substances in Switzerland. As an organizer, he would not be implicated in any of the direct interactions in Albania but followed the narcotic substances from a distance until the moment it reached the destination – Switzerland. As a Serious Crimes Prosecutor will underscore in an interview for this research, “The narcotics trafficking groups have a vertical structure, which means there is an organizer, then the helpers who may be one or several and in the end, the executor of the activity who in many cases is the organizer himself or a close companion of his.”<sup>364</sup> Aldo Morini’s right hand man was Bashkim Elshani, who was the helper and facilitator of the process of trafficking the narcotic substances. Bashkim was the recruiter of the human resources for the network because he established the connections with the Courier structure (Goran Zivkovic), the Macedonian citizen, and the Kosovar mediators (Murat Osmanaj & Burim Dervishi), who had connections with an individual who guaranteed the quantity and ensured the quality of the narcotic substance. The guarantor (Albert Tuci) had the structural function of receiving the orders from the Kosovar citizens and contact the producer (Kolë Nika) to prepare the quantity of narcotics, without getting directly involved in its transportation, for a percentage payment. Below is a schematic presentation of the group’s functioning.



362. Organized crime in Albania, Risk Assessment. Zhilla, F; Lamallari. B. Tirana 2015, p. 21.

363. Alketa Elezi. PhD thesis, Tirana 2012.

364. Quote from interview with a Serious Crimes Prosecutor, Tirana 2015.

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As may be seen from the scheme and based on analysis of data obtained from the interviews, the ‘organizer’ is very little involved in the dynamics of the trafficking process. The organizer (Aldo Morini) has close ties with mediator 1 (Bashkim Elshani), whom he instructs how to transport the narcotics to Switzerland. The organizer deals mainly with the narcotics after it reaches the destination. He also deals with securing the technological tools needed for pressing and packaging the narcotics that will go through several customs checks before reaching the destination. The entire operational work is organized by the ‘**mediator 1,**’ who is responsible for all operations and recruitments through acquaintances with individuals who may secure the narcotic substance. He carries out this responsibility by recruiting individuals who know ‘**guaranteeing suppliers**’ of narcotics in Albania. These individuals (mediators M.Osmanaj & B.Dervishi) have the role to establish connections between mediator 1 and the guaranteeing supplier of the narcotics, make sure the price and quality. Also, these individuals carry out the payments to the supplier. The guarantor (supplier) is the individual who secures the narcotics and its quality for the executors on the one hand and on the other ensures the ‘**producer**’ get his money and have no problem with the police. The producer of narcotics has connections only with the guarantor who provides guarantees for the sale of the product. In this case, the guarantor also uses some satellite ‘**helpers,**’ to assist mediators to fix the narcotics in the vehicle of the Courier. The satellites of the guarantors and producers are usually minors or elderly men who take the responsibility for the narcotics amounts against payment.<sup>365</sup> Satellites are persons who are relatives of or close to the Guarantor and who are paid by him.

The ‘**courier**’ (Goran Zivkovic) is the structure that has no friendship or social ties with the other structures. He is an individual with experience in going through customs and does not raise suspicions with the police because international transport is part of his daily work. The structure is selected carefully so that in cases of failure as in the “Old path,” the other structures would have the possibility to leave until the courier might begin collaborating with the police. The courier is interested in the longevity of the group. He is recruited to provide a service and he may provide that service to another network, at a different time and different place. The payment of the courier was done at the moment the narcotics reached the destination. The producer of the narcotics is interested in the quantities he has produced to be sold quickly, but mainly have guarantees that his product will reach final destination without being tracked by the police. In this context, the guarantor is interested in being a credible individual, “tough”<sup>366</sup> in carrying out actions and with social power. The guarantors are usually individuals who come from among police forces or individuals known to have a high social economic status and with ties with state structures.<sup>367</sup> This entire organization needs a financial budget, which is covered by Aldo Morini, who is interested that the payments between the links of the chain are executed at the time each does his own job and bears no debts from his network.<sup>368</sup> This structure established by this criminal network makes investigation difficult and increases the functional longevity of the group. The links in the chain of this structure do not have frequent interaction. They become active when transportation needs to take place. Communication between group members is within friendly circles and this helps keep the network structure from being exposed, remain dormant and turn active only when the transportation of the narcotic substances needs to take place.

## Communication within the Network

In order for narcotics trafficking networks to function, it is indispensable that the members are in continued communication. The communication of the network focused on telephone conversations and rarely in meetings.<sup>369</sup> Telephone conversations transcribed by the investigative process and the prosecutor’s office makes one understand the level of sophistication in communication through messages with double meanings. This was done to not be

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365. Interview with Police Officer of anti-trafficking sector, Tirana, September 2015

366. Interview with police officer of anti-trafficking sector, Tirana, September 2015

367. Alketa Elezi. PhD thesis, Tirana, 2012, p. 97

368. Decision no. 38, 25.05.2015, Serious Crimes Court, Tirana, p. 23

369. Interview with police officer of anti-trafficking sector, Tirana, September 2015

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traced by police but also to have the possibility to defend against any potential investigation. The group had legal and police knowhow with regard to the manner of communication.<sup>370</sup> They were informed about how wiretapping was conducted by the police and that is why they used language with double meanings. The first meaning of the words in case of capture by police would be an excuse and a strong basis for defense by their lawyers. The members, being mainly from the north of Albania, presented the trafficking of narcotics as a wedding event in telephone communications. The middlemen from Kosovo were the ‘In-laws’ who through the ‘Matchmaker,’ who was the guarantor, would look at a candidate ‘bride’ from Kryebushat to get her engaged in Kosovo. The bride was the amount of narcotics. The producer of the narcotics would show them the bride. In fact, Civil Registry data show some marriages between Albanian citizens and those from Kosovo during the years 2008-2011. This fact was used by the network for their trafficking purposes, in order to avoid investigations by the police, but also to protect against any chance of investigations. The speaking in dialect was a priority for the group in cases of wiretapping. Communication with the courier by Bashkim Elshani was in Slavic language and often through a common friend. Communication of the members of the network was frequent in the periods when the date for the shipment of narcotics approached. The communication was done by different mobile phones and from numbers not registered in the names of members. The communication numbers were in possession of persons who had no connection whatsoever with the members of the network. The numbers used by Aldo Morini were under the possession of inexistent identities in Zurich. In many cases, the members were called by nicknames, with Aldo Morini called the old man because he was the eldest, Burim Dervishaj was labeled the “doctor” and Bashkim Elshani was “Baki.” The network members did not respect one another much and in their conversations used denigrating expressions toward group members. Guarantor Albert Tuci was called the “commander” because he had worked in the police before and he coordinated the movements of Kosovar members toward the narcotic substance. The label ‘Commander’ was left also from the high status he enjoyed in the area.

## Regional characteristics in the functioning of the network

The network consisted mainly of members located in the North of Albania and Kosovo. As mentioned above, the narcotics trafficking groups in the ‘north’ mainly consist of members with family relations or close friendly relations,<sup>371</sup> but in this case there are members who have no direct kin relations.<sup>372</sup> There is a remote kin relationship between the producer and the guarantor, but the essential characteristic is that of the “tough” guarantor.<sup>373</sup> Criminal networks seek at any rate that the role of the guarantor is taken by a person of a distinct social status, who also has shown an ability to solve by himself any troubles that may occur during the trafficking process. The guarantors are persons who know the area and know the police structures; they are individuals that are in a good economic situation and are known as persons who keep their word and do not raise suspicions that might lead the trafficking to fail because of them.<sup>374</sup> In the northern areas of Albania, during the period 1997-2007, a lot of narcotic plants have been cultivated in plots of land without owners; in fact, according to unconfirmed sources, narcotics was consumed freely in the center of town and in the main cafés in Puka.<sup>375</sup> The great amount of narcotics produced facilitated the creation of trafficking networks in the area. This trafficking network did not have problems with the quality of the narcotic substance or the insecurity of payment as the guarantor, through his “given word” was responsible. Albert Tuci, being an inhabitant of the area and a former police officer, knew how to respect requests of members from Kosovo and the producer. He reviewed the conditions and interests of every party and, when giving the word that the narcotic substance would be purchased, he gave guarantees that they would have no problems with the security and quality of the substance. His given word was a guarantee that the trafficking inside his area would be successful

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370. Interview with a judge, Serious Crimes Court, Tirana, September 2015

371. Alketa Elezi. PhD thesis, Tirana, 2012, p. 100

372. Organized crime in Albania, Risk Assessment, Zhilla,F; Lamallari. B. Tirana 2015, p. 25

373. Interview with police officer of the anti-trafficking sector, Tirana, September 2015

374. Ibid.

375. Interview with area inhabitant, Bushat, October 2015

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and based on the tradition of the Kanun. As a rule, the group adhered to the institution of the given word, a tradition in the northern area. This “given word” was clear-cut and non-negotiable. It provided social, cultural and economic guarantees. The network also had several individuals of the area that provided transportation but were not directly involved knowingly in the trafficking of narcotics. These individuals were hired as loading workers by the guarantor at his business, but at the moment of trafficking exploited them to upload the narcotics on the vehicles that would transport the drugs toward the destination. There is no data that these individuals were aware of what substance they were loading because it was pressed and packaged.

## Psycho-social profiles of the members

The members of this network have different origin and backgrounds, with most being inhabitants of Kosovo or originally from Kosovo and inhabitants of Switzerland. The age of the network members is around 30-40 years, except for the organizer Aldo Morini who was over 50 years old. The network members had created their own families and did not belong to the poor or needy groups of society. They had businesses or worked and received on average 45,000 ALL per month. These incomes are above the area average, in comparison to data published by INSTAT.<sup>376</sup> They had begun trafficking of narcotics influenced by the economic-social situation. The producer of the narcotics lived in the village, on agriculture, but during these years also worked on the cultivation of the narcotics plant Cannabis Sativa.<sup>377</sup> He had invested the profits from this activity in building a house. He had a regular family and presented no problems for the inhabitants of the Bushat area. The Swiss citizens of Albanian descent were individuals who had training and knowledge about the trafficking of narcotics and used the “Old path” to maximize profits, given that the narcotics could be bought in northern Albania at a low price, about 400 Euro per kilo and it was sold in Switzerland for 2,200-2,500 Euro per kilo.<sup>378</sup> The earned money was circulated in Switzerland and recently they sought to open a furniture business in Durrës. They were married and had a normal family life.

The guarantor was an individual with a high reputation in the area of Puka because he had been a police officer. He enjoyed this reputation also with his former colleagues in the police, which considerably reduced the possibility of police controls on him. Also, his training as a police officer was helpful for him to have information about the surveillance methods by the police; so he had built a strategy to evade surveillance. He had a café that he had rented out and lived on the income from that business. The income also went to support his family and the profits from the trafficking of narcotics paid for the expenses and costs of frequent trips to Tirana and the expensive capital life. He spent part of the time in Tirana.<sup>379</sup> Albert Tuci played several times the role of the mediator successfully. This helped him gain a kind of self-confidence, which also harmed him because he communicated a lot on the phone; that led to the discovery of his position in this international network of narcotics trafficking.<sup>380</sup>

The Macedonian citizen was of Serb nationality. He played the role of the courier and had a secure economic life because of his job. The large amounts that the group trafficked shows that the individuals were not doing it for a better life, but to profit large amounts of money that they would later invest in different commercial activities such as furniture and cafés.<sup>381</sup> There are no clear data on the economic status of the middlemen from Kosovo, but they traveled often from Kosovo to Puka, Tirana and Durrës, which made them be in contact with the market and information in the country’s north and beyond. These individuals find their likes in every corner or region of Albania because they have experience in recognizing common interest.<sup>382</sup> The main characteristic of this narcotics trafficking network is that the members have high-school education and knowledge about surveillance techniques

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**376.** INSTAT. Tirana, 2011. <http://instat.gov.al/themes/t%C3%AB-ardhurat-e-familjes.aspx?tab=tabs-4>

**377.** Interview with an inhabitant of the area, Bushat, September 2015.

**378.** Interview with a police officer of the anti-trafficking sector, Tirana, September 2015.

**379.** Ibid

**380.** Interview with police officer of the anti-trafficking sector, Tirana, September 2015.

**381.** Interview with defense attorney, Tirana, August 2015

**382.** Interview with police officer of the anti-trafficking sector, Tirana, September 2015



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of the police. Also, the members of this network have legal information about how to behave in case of detention by the police in order to ensure that punishment is as minor as possible.

## Economic and social conditions

During the years 2009-2011 when the network was in operation in the north of Albania, social change was very dynamic. Albania's population had an average age of 32 years (30.08 among males).<sup>383</sup> Unemployment among youth was at 32.8%.<sup>384</sup> In 2012, the gross domestic product per capita was \$8,200, the lowest level in the region.<sup>385</sup> During this period, as a result of the economic crisis of 2008, remittances from Italy and Greece had fallen by 15%.<sup>386</sup> Although economic conditions were not favorable, there is an investment by Albanian families in the education of children. In the academic year 2009.2010, there were 116,292 students enrolled in public and private universities in Albania.<sup>387</sup>

In the prefecture of Shkodra, during the years 2008-2011, about 25% of business investments were in the field of construction,<sup>388</sup> with youth who had graduated not preferring to be employed. Unemployment increased also because of the lack of strategies for the integration of inhabitants from the surrounding villages and the inhabitants returned from the countries where they had emigrated. During the period 1997-2010, the city of Shkodra increased by 14,000 new inhabitants from the surrounding areas.<sup>389</sup>

The activity of this group was encouraged by this economic and social situation. First, the lack of controls on the economic activity of the members led to them finding it easier to hide the incomes from the trafficking of narcotic substances. Second, corruption and impunity had created a social perception among inhabitants of the north of Albania that all illegal activities may be overlooked through bribes for the police, prosecutor's office and courts.<sup>390</sup> Third, the opportunity for the movement of Albanians without visas in the Schengen area created an easier opportunity for cooperation with the members of networks operating in the European Union. As is seen by the analysis of this network, the transition years have created new social values, such as fast enrichment and earning wealth through illegal ways. These new values have become part of the identity of a part of the society and are not opposed by social morals; on the contrary, they are seen as skills.

The lack of higher education makes these individuals not be in leading roles in the society they live in, while during the years 1997-2000, they had leading roles as a result of the lack of order. This made some of them get used to another social status and economic empowerment through trafficking made them resume the social status they were losing.

## Group ties with state structures

This trafficking network had its beginnings early in the years after the Kosovo war, but during the years 2009-2011 assumed a more stable structure. The members of the group were not always the same; for instance, couriers changed for different shipments. The organizer of the network was of Albanian origin but was born and lived in Switzerland. He did not have any business or activity in Albania and knowing different structures of the state were

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**383.** See data of the World Bank on Albania, at <http://data.worldbank.org/country/albania>

**384.** INSTAT. January 2014.

**385.** CIA. Factbook 2014. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

**386.** Ibid

**387.** OpenDATA. Development of higher education during the period 1991-2011, Tirana 2012, p. 2.

**388.** Bresena Koplaku. PhD thesis, Tirana 2013, p. 106.

**389.** Ibid, p. 108.

**390.** Legal study "Duraj," "Corruption in Albania: causes, consequences and the fight against it through the enforcement of legislation," Tirana 2012.

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very difficult, which is why had taken care of involving in his group individuals who had connections and acquaintances among these structures. Similar groups of narcotics trafficking networks corrupt members of the police in order to avoid periodic inspections and customs controls.<sup>391</sup> In many cases, what happens is that for economic profits, certain segments of the police through inaction allow opportunities for trafficking of narcotics.<sup>392</sup> The narcotics trafficking network “Old path” had created ties with Albert Tuci who was an individual with ties to the police and other local government structures in order to avoid threats to their activity. His acquaintances were of a friendly character and this allowed him to obtain information about potential controls that the police might conduct. He took advantage of his reputation in the Fushë-Arrëz area and used it in electoral campaigns to secure votes for individuals he was friends with and who facilitated his job as a guarantor. This network operated in long time intervals, but the amount of narcotics was large, which showed that they were certain of successfully concluding the passing of the narcotics from the north of Albania up to Switzerland through Italy. The members had invested the money earned from such trafficking partly in Kosovo and were seeking to invest also in Albania to start a furniture business in Durrës, so that the income from trafficking could be covered up by their commercial activity.

## Challenges of the research

The study of organized crime in the area of the North is a new field that encounters numerous difficulties. The first difficulty is the lack of previous research and the tradition in investigating organized crime. Interviewees provide police and journalistic information without going deeper into the analysis of criminological phenomena.

Criminal groups of narcotics trafficking are equipped with legal knowledge that they employ to avoid maximal convictions by the courts. They have information from the experience of other adjudicated networks but obtain such knowledge mainly from members who have experience in the police. The trafficking of narcotics trafficking in many areas of the north of Albania, from a cultural aspect is not punishable and even goes in line with a new social ‘value’ that is fast enrichment. This fact represents an obstacle in obtaining information, given that the community sees trafficking of narcotics as something normal.

On this journey of studying organized crime, the information that comes from journalists and the media is not analytical and investigative, but rather reflective of police statements. The difficulty in obtaining information in this area also has to do with the fear of revenge of persons who are part of organized crime; especially in the north of Albania, this fear is enhanced by pressure on the family.

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**391.** Interview with a judge, Serious Crimes Court, Shkodra, September 2015.

**392.** Interview with police officer of the anti-trafficking sector, September 2015.

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## 4. 5. Elbasan Case Study: Kateshi Gang

Author: Robert Gajda <sup>393</sup>

Elbasan of the '90s was one of the largest cities of Albania both in terms of the number of inhabitants and in terms of its stretch.<sup>394</sup> During this period, the city's population underwent demographic changes in terms of internal movements and in terms of emigration. In reference to internal migration, we notice an increase of the population because of the stabilization of inhabitants in the rural areas and in surrounding cities (*Peqin, Librazhd, Cërrik, etc.*), but at the same time, there is a move of the local population toward other cities, mainly in Tirana. Numerous intellectuals, professionals of various fields, as well as entrepreneurs who had just begun their commercial initiatives, head toward Tirana. Emigration abroad did not present any special characteristic that might distinguish it from the other cities. It focused mainly in Italy and Greece, and a considerable part in the United States. The city's economy displayed all the problems that characterized the Albanian economy of the time and consisted of three main components: industry, small and medium businesses, and state institutions.

The industrial aspect has become an identifier of the city as Elbasan, from the years '60-'70, which coincide with the opening of the Metallurgical Plant, is known as an industrial area. Besides metallurgy, the city had a Cement Factory, Brick Factory, Lumber Plant, Conservation Plant, large Vehicle Park, etc. The presence of such an industry encouraged medium enterprises and businesses that focused on the production of raw materials for construction but also on food and textile production. Small businesses identified more or less with those of other cities: stores, bars, gaming halls, artisans, or different workshops, etc.<sup>395</sup> The third component that naturally added to the economy were those employed in different state institutions – schools, hospitals, enterprises, the public administration, etc., including the “Aleksandër Xhuvani” University created in 1971 as a Higher Pedagogical Institute,<sup>396</sup> focused more on training of teachers.<sup>397</sup> From a social aspect, in spite of the major changes of the regime and the economic problems, Elbasan was considered a calm and non-problematic area. In fact, besides an industrial city, Elbasan also has an image related to education and university, which for the time gave the city another status compared to other cities, considered “*the cradle of education.*”<sup>398</sup> With regard to the social composition of the city population, it should be said that Elbasan has a diversity of components. In terms of background, aside from the local population, a considerable part belongs to those coming from other areas, cities, and historical contexts that form stable communities in time: Vlachs, Chams, Roma, Egyptians, from Dibra, Kosovars, etc. Besides the inhabitants of these backgrounds, Elbasan has also a lot of newcomers for employment and economic reasons from other towns, especially because of the industry in general and the metallurgic plant in particular. In a way, this has made the city turn into a conglomerate of people of different backgrounds, which has contributed to the enrichment of the city both from a cultural aspect and a civic aspect, creating a city not closed within itself, but open to others.

Some communities are identified even with certain territories of the city, for instance the Vlachs, concentrated mainly in the city's southern area, the Roma in the eastern part, the Kosovars in the southwestern part, etc.

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**394**. In 1999, Elbasan was the third city for the number of inhabitants (116,466) after Tirana and Durrës and the second district in terms of the population (225,174) after Tirana – Civil Registry Office records, 31.12.1999.

**395**. At the prefecture level, the Elbasan Prefecture ranked third in terms of the number of active enterprises and sixth in terms of the number of registered enterprises. See: INSTAT, Statistical Yearbook 1991-1999, Tirana 2002

**396**. In 1999/2000, Elbasan ranks second after Tirana per number of students, a total of 6,059.

**397**. An interesting fact to highlight is that Elbasan ranks first at the prefecture level for the number of 8-year schools.

**398**. Manjola Hatellari, Elbasan Congress and Normal School in the history of Albanian education and culture, Acts on the National Conference regarding the 100th anniversary of the creation of the Albanian State, Elbasan, 2012..

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Territorial identification is also used for the local population, but relying on religious affiliation. Historically, the city has recognized two main religions: Orthodox Christians, whose population is concentrated in the castle area (Castle Neighborhood)<sup>399</sup> and the larger part of Muslims, spread out in the areas outside the city Castle. In this context, it would be useful to make a territorial division of the city, not formally into administrative areas, but into labels of areas or neighborhoods as known in the city. Thus we may mention the Train Area (Train Station – western part); the Fushëmbret Neighborhood (Skënderbej, west); Namazgja Neighborhood (Cërrik crossing, southwest); Ring Area (Old Sport, south); Chinese Neighborhood (southeast); Stadium Area (east); New May 5 Neighborhood (city's largest neighborhood, northeast); Hospital Area (north); Institute Area (north); New Neighborhood, Shelters (northwest); Zaranika Area (northwest); Zaranika Bridge (west); Lopar Field (southwest). The center also has its own divisions into the Gurabardhi Neighborhood, the May 1 Square area, the Kristoforidhi and Dinamo crossings, Pedagogical Area, Fountain Area, Spahi Korra Neighborhood, New Road, Castle Neighborhood, etc.<sup>400</sup> In the context of our research, the city's territorial division is very important because historically (in the '80s, '90s), first groups of individuals creating problems in the city emerged from groupings of youth in a certain neighborhood, known as '*neighborhood boys*.' In a way, these established some kind of authority in the neighborhood they lived in by appearing aggressive toward inhabitants of other neighborhoods and at the same time as protectors of their own territory (neighborhood).

Thus, from the end of the '80s and the beginning of the '90s in Elbasan, some areas began to be identified as problematic or with high criminality as the Shelters, Institute, Spahi Korra Neighborhood, Pedagogical School Area; for a moment, the 'boys of 41' (apartment building number) turned into one of the areas with a high density of confrontations and insecurity. It should be noted that the reach of groups was territorial, mainly the neighborhood, and generally they did not have a family character, although there was no shortage of cases of family connections. Families with many children, being also poor, tended to produce problematic elements and in different groups one could find brothers or first cousins. Neighborhoods time after time clashed among them and, not very rarely, there were harmed or wounded, by hard objects such as sticks, rocks, iron handles, knives and even fire arms produced in non-conventional ways. The main activities targeting the economy focused on robbing apartments, stores, bicycles and even robberies inside and out of the country. In many cases, the cause for clashes that emerged among them were not economic, but rather for issues of honor, pride or very weak motives, e.g. stealing pigeons, etc.<sup>401</sup>

This structure focusing mainly on the neighborhood underwent change during '94-'95 both in terms of how the grouping was formed, and in terms of economic benefits. With regard to the structure, it changes and in these years it evolves around two families that had the main figures, each one having one of their children as leaders. It is worth noting that these families do not have patriarchal characteristics with the father of the family being at the top, but the real power was with one of the children who was not necessarily the eldest among the other brothers. In fact, these are not just ordinary thieves, but are known also as murders and are characterized by the establishment of a group in a solid manner with clear and concrete objectives. At the same time, the entire family and social base revolved around the figures of these persons who imposed themselves mainly through fear, brutal manners of imposing their will and a kind of charisma they exercised on the younger generations. The history of these two families concludes with numerous murders on both sides, including even the leader and some of the brothers of one side.

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**399.** In the Castle Neighborhood, historically there is the greatest concentration of Elbasan inhabitants of the Orthodox faith but there are also other areas of the city, especially in the southwestern area of Shën Koll Neighborhood and the northern area in the Hospital area concentrated around the St. Thanas Church.

**400.** For more detailed demographic, territorial, social and economic information about the city of Elbasan after the '90s, see Strategic Plan for the City's Development 2010-2020, drafted by Elbasan Municipality in April 2011. Also, see Elbasan, the legacy and present of an Albanian city, publication of the Chamber of Commerce and Trade of the district of Elbasan, Tirana, 1999; and the Encyclopaedia of Elbasan, Sejko, Elbasan, 2003. Lastly, for a clearer overview after the year 2000 and divided by the different economic, social and demographic fields, see also <http://www.instat.gov.al/home.aspx>; and <http://www.sociale.gov.al/>; and lastly <http://www.elbasani.gov.al/>.

**401.** Elbasan was known at the time for raising pigeons and the races between them were one of boys' most favorite activities. With regard to this, see also Astrit Bishqemi, Looking up high, Naim Frashëri, Tirana, 1986. Often, there were conflicts even about the stealing of pigeons or because they were caught. One of the origins of the conflicts between the boys, one of whom would later become a member of the Kateshi Gang, appears to have been over pigeons, (Interview with lawyer, code 001, of July 29, 2015).

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In terms of the economic benefits, a golden opportunity appeared for the different problematic groups and it had to do with the city industry. Numerous thefts began to appear in the Metallurgical Plant, in other plants, and especially the Cement Factory, with the stealing of huge amounts of cement to then sell in other cities of the country. On the other hand, the first generation of emigrants had begun to return and in many cases, they had amassed considerable amounts of money from their illegal activities and were now investing in houses, stores, bars and gambling halls. Gradually, these groups were transforming from groups of problematic individuals that engaged in conflicts and stealing, into more stable unions with specific interests and concrete objectives, the realization of which sought some kind of organization. Nevertheless, there appears no connection or close cooperation between these problematic individuals and politicians, of the central and the local government. These individuals generally stay away from state institutions, the administration, the courts, without creating any intensive ties for common interests. At the same time, on the other hand, many other citizens had begun to enrich themselves in legitimate and illegitimate ways, in the first case through the trade of different products and the second especially through smuggling. Often, the two ways merged with one another, but it is a fact that in the city there were rich people who time after time incited the interest of problematic individuals. The latter pursued two ways for taking money from traders or rich entrepreneurs: sometimes by threatening them not by arms but through aggressive behavior, and other times by offering them protection or security from other problematic individuals. The second manner appears the most used in fact. With the passing of time, the level of criminality increased and the first primitive forms of organization between the two conflicting families in '94-'95; even here though, we can't talk about a war of powerful economic interests or ties with people in power or politicians. Nevertheless, before 1997, the majority of the groups of problematic individuals were in conflict with one another and had their origins both inside the city and in emigration. With the opening of the arms depots in March 1997, many of these individuals rushed to the numerous military bases around the city and equipped themselves with different weapons. Because of the insecurity and total chaos that ensued, many of the 'groups of boys' who were now united and had different criminal precedents found it possible to organize further for the purpose of defending themselves and eliminating opponents.

These structured groups that assume the form of Armed Gangs were embodied in two such in Elbasan: 'Mandela Gang,' which did not operate inside Elbasan<sup>402</sup> and consisted mainly of Roma individuals, and the 'Kateshi Gang,' which was structured and operated entirely inside the city.<sup>403</sup> The latter entered into conflicts with almost all other groups operating inside the city. That is the one that will also be the subject of our research. The Kateshi Gang was not formed with the premediated purpose of creating a sustainable group for carrying out criminal activities, but had as a main motive self-protection from other problematic groups that had been created recently. Thus, the genesis of tension was on the evening of March 17, 1997, when after a murder in the Shelter Neighborhood that had been fortified and was patrolled by neighborhood boys between 14 and 22 years, there is a large gathering of armed persons around the house of Dritan Kateshi (D.K.). He lived in the center of the city, not farther than 150 m from the Police Station, which at the time was looted and detainees had escaped. Throughout the night, this large group of youngsters, even in the presence of police officers who found it impossible to stop them or intervene, fired toward the house of D.K., which was on the 5th floor of an apartment building. The reason for the siege was that the "boys of the Shelter" accused precisely D.K, his brother in law and two friends of his who had been in the car for the mentioned murder. According to them, they did not want to allow him to go through their neighborhood and he had killed the young man in order to go through. It is not known how, but D.K., his brother in law, his friends and family members managed to escape from the house.

Nevertheless, this is not the moment that marked the creation of the Gang. After one month, on April 20, 1997, a double murder occurred and a third person was wounded. The two victims, Alfir Sadushi and Arben Shkodrani, and the injured Kastriot Dervishi, were friends and part of the social group of Dritan Kateshi and his friends. This caused a reaction and made Tan Kateshi and his friends, among whom Kastriot Dervishi (Oti of Sala) and Çajup Kasa (Çupi),

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**402.** This gang operated from the city's southern area toward the rural areas (Shkumbin Bridge and surroundings) and had the main conflict with what came to be called the Cërik Gang.

**403.** For a description of the gangs that operated in Elbasan and their activities and rivalries, see:

<http://www.sot.com.al/dossier/krimi-i-rug%C3%ABs-kontrolloi-shtetin-n%C3%AB-vitin-1997-%C3%A7do-shqiptar-ishte-%E2%80%9Cshitet-m%C3%AB-vete%E2%80%9D>

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feel in even greater danger. Thus, these decided to unite and include in their group other motivated individuals, such as for instance the brother of Alfir Sadushi, Ndrëçim Sadushi (Çike) or previous friends such as Taulant Balliu (Ilaci), etc. In this context, it should be mentioned that this relationship is not created necessarily at a given moment through a meeting where this is decided; the manner of communication and the mentality of boys does not allow for structured decision making. The insecurity of the situation, seeing themselves as a target vis-à-vis the other groups in the city, the weapons, the feeling of revenge and the determination to get even, led to the creation of a stable group, which needed other people and economic resources in order to act.

Thus, the first element of the establishment of this armed gang was his initial reliance on the instinct of self-defense and the impulse of revenge against other groups. We should not forget that one of the victims (Alfir Sadushi) was not just their friend but also the brother of one of them, Ndrëçim Sadushi alias Çike. The latter is one of the main actors of the Kateshi Gang and at the same time the host of the other gang members. His house turned into a fortress and with it, the surrounding territories and the entire neighborhood around it. It stretches in the southern part of the city and includes the Chinese Area and the ring road part. In fact, for a certain period after the creation of the Gang, the area was impossible for others to go through who would not be allowed to circulate without having an authorization or acquaintances in these territories. Testimonies show that the fortification was organized. The streets where cars could pass were blocked by armed individuals who would not allow anyone to go through without permission. You could see individuals armed with automatic rifles and machine guns atop roofs and balconies around the fortress of the Gang. To render an even more serious and structure character to this protection, many of the individuals there dressed in different military uniforms, mainly ‘camouflage,’ and used radios to communicate with one another.<sup>404</sup> The building itself too was filled with armed people who guarded 24 hours and were on full alert.<sup>405</sup>

Based on this, we may say that the Gang was structured at two levels: the higher level involved the creators of the Gang who possessed large amounts of money and the lower level that consisted of a large number of other boys, not from just the neighborhood, but even friends of the leaders or even coming from other towns. The latter settled for good in Elbasan and lived in the homes of other members of the gang. We may mention Arben Rrapi (Labi) from Vlora, Arben Topi from Peqin or even young people coming from Fier or the surrounding areas. The second level then may be divided into those who may be considered “soldiers” and deal with the daily aspects of the gang: watch, drive vehicles or be on alert; and some other members who stood out for aggressiveness or for facing difficult situations, thus representing one of the most active and dangerous parts of the group. In many cases, these were participants in robberies, murders or fighting of the gang and may be considered the “executors” of the gang. It should be specified that many times, the leaders of the gang were also the executors.

The so-called Gang Leader was Tan Kateshi, although the headquarters of the gang were in the house of Çike. According to some testimonies and interviews, it results that the selection of Tan Kateshi as a leader of the gang was not a choice or decision of the other members of the gang, but rather had been influenced mostly by the impression that his role in the gang made.

In fact, in his past, Tan Kateshi was not known as an aggressive, violent person or a murderer. He was considered a “tough guy” before 1997, but not like those “toughs” who stood out for marked criminal activity. It should also be noted that his family did not have previous problematic individuals. The father and mother were hard-working and respected persons; his brother was not a problematic person either. His physical appearance and the surrounding of his house for one entire night, an event that drew a lot of attention in the city and was referred to as ‘the war at Tan Kateshi’s house’ were additional factors in positioning him as gang leader. In a way, his looks legitimized the figure of a Leader and gave him the necessary charisma to consider him such.<sup>406</sup> With regard to the number of

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404. Interview of September 1, 2015, with police officer, code 005.

405. Interview of August 18, 2015, with police officer, code 004; interview of September 1, 2015, with police officer, code 005.

It should be mentioned that the fortification of houses and their protection in an organized fashion had turned into a characteristic of some families or other areas. The fortification of the base where the Mandela Gang stayed had been organized in the same fashion; the same was true about the house of one of the most dangerous persons before 1997, leader of one of the families in conflict in '94-'95, Dashamir Kolgjini. Also, other neighborhoods or certain areas were fortified too, as the case of the Shelters, etc

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gang members, at its height it had 30 members, but it might have been even higher. Young individuals of the age 16-20 years old preferred to become its members because of the money they could make, the status and the cars they could get to drive.

The gang began its activity after April 1997. However, the activity intensified from the end of May until the middle of August. One of the most immediate problems for the gang was to secure the necessary economic resources to keep this large number of members near. Although initially they possessed incomes because of their illegal activities, especially out of the country,<sup>407</sup> such a large number of members, nevertheless, created difficulties for affording daily expenses. This need was expressly admitted even by the Gang members during their statements in court.<sup>408</sup> Among the first criminal activities was extortion on traders or other rich individuals of the city, who might happen to be also “tough guys.” The methods used involved life threats or kidnappings of them or their family members. Some of these actions ended up being successful for the Gang while others turned into a source of bloody conflicts. Based on interviews, it appears that this was the main economic activity of the Gang, while there are no reports of drug distribution or sale, weapons sale or exploitation of prostitution inside Albania.<sup>409</sup>

After reaching some economic consolidation, the Gang began to go after other groups, especially in the Shelters Neighborhood, who were considered responsible for surrounding Tan Kateshi’s house and for killing the brother of Çike. In this sense, the first killings and injuries of the Gang had revenge as a reason. The first murder relates to an inhabitant of the Shelters neighborhood and the wounding of his friend on May 29, 1997, but the harshest retaliation was the siege by the Gang of the house of Erion Derraj (Roni) who was killed in his house together with his cousin about a month after. The surrounding of the apartment building and their execution was done publicly so as to show the force of the Gang and with the purpose of retaliating against those perceived as their opponents. In fact, on June 21, 1997, there were present many members of the Gang who fired with all possible weapons, including an anti-tank. The incident terrorized the entire area and especially the inhabitants of the apartment building where Roni and his cousin lived. After this act, the Gang of Tan Kateshi earned the reputation of the gang that “ruled” the city. As the police appeared powerless in the face of the gang,<sup>410</sup> many other groups joined their activity. There were no reports of conflicts or clashes with the other very active and dangerous gang, that of ‘Mandela.’ On the other hand, there were groups or families that not only did not obey Tan Kateshi’s Gang but also had open conflicts with it.

One of the problematic and fortified areas was that in the Institute Neighborhood, because there was the house of one of the most dangerous tough men in the years before 1997 and the leader of one of the families in conflict in '94-'95, Dashmir Kolgjini or Dash Gjini. This family, having many problems in the past, decided to fortify its house and the area around it with people, cement blocks and machine guns in 1997, mainly for protection reasons. Its organization model appeared more or less the same: a considerable group of youngsters who were stood by as “soldiers” around his house to protect him. The Tan Kateshi Gang was in a conflict with this group and this is seen in the killing of two young men who stood near Dash Gjini’s family. Only that in this case, the conflict was not open as with the boys of the Shelters Neighborhood, but hidden and silent. Even the elimination of the young men did not happen publicly as in the case of Roni and his cousin, but in a secret fashion and not according to the Gang’s typical methods. In fact, around July 1997, two young men around 20 years old were declared lost and they used to be collaborators/soldiers at Dash Gjini’s house. The last time they had been seen was inside a car that was found burned down some days later in the Krraba Hills. After about a month, their bodies were found half buried in

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**406.** Interview of July 29, 2015, with lawyer, code 001; interview of August 5, 2015, with journalist, code 002; interview of September 11, 2015, with journalist, code 003.

**407.** One of the activities carried out abroad by these members, aside from stealing and robberies, was exploitation of prostitution. Interview of August 5, 2015, with a journalist, code 002; interview of September 11, 2015, with a journalist, code 003

**408.** Decision by the Durrës Judicial District Court, no 30, 15/2/2000. Interview of August 18, 2015, with police officer, code 004; interview of September 1, 2015, with police officer, code 005.

**409.** Interview of July 29, 2015, with a lawyer, code 001; interview of August 5, 2015, with a journalist, code 002; interview of September 11, 2015, with a journalist, code 003.

**410.** In many cases, it appears that the police was present but did not intervene. Even when it had the possibility to contact members of the gang, it tried to communicate without resolving problems through conflict. Interview of August 18, 2015, with a police officer, code 004; interview of September 1, 2015, with a police officer, code 005

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the Shkumbin river shore, very far from where the burned car was found. At the time, the double murder was not attributed to the Tan Kateshi Gang as their conflict was not known but also because Dash Gjini had had conflict with other people. The authorship of this crime was proven in the decision of the Durrës Judicial District Court, which according to the ballistic analysis of the shells found at the execution spot and the weapon seized from the Gang, made the connection between the murder and the Gang.

Around June-July, the gang was at its height and had about 40 members. In terms of force, the gang was considered the largest and the strongest in the city. As a result of the executions, the revenge, the establishment of authority, the subjugation of traders to pay, the gang was swamped in a feeling of immense euphoria and self-confidence. Now, discussions were not about revenge or finding incomes, but about enriching themselves. The threatening activity and the abductions increased a lot during this period and the gang's target included any person who was thought to have money, both inside the city and the surrounding areas. The goal of enrichment pushed the Gang toward another dimension, that of ties with politics; on the other hand, it became the cause of very major conflicts that went beyond the real capabilities of the gang. According to interviewees,<sup>411</sup> because of considerable empowerment and the authority that the gang enjoyed throughout the city, its leaders began to be seen by politicians of different forces as a tool for securing votes. The moment coincides with the elections of June 29, 1997 and the entire pre-electoral situation. Political figures, mainly belonging to the left-wing spectrum, contacted members of the Gang and its Leader. In this regard, the close rapport with one of them stands out in particular, someone who was both a citizen of Elbasan and the representative of a medium size political force for the time: the Democratic Alliance Party. Proof of this was one of the plenary sittings of the time when the Chair of this party was accused directly as being connected to the Tan Kateshi Gang as well as the letter the latter published from the Peqin Prison, where he now remains under high security rules. Tan Kateshi himself speaks about his ties with politics and about how the latter wanted to exploit precisely criminal gangs in order to get as many votes as possible. The accusations become even more serious if we consider that in his letter, Kateshi mentions the fact that these politicians did not want the use of force only to get votes, which is in itself punishable and speaks about the concept of democracy that the leading politicians of the time had, but also to eliminate their political opponents.<sup>412</sup> On the other hand, the accusations are even more serious if we note that the accused of ties to the armed gang became Interior Minister in the period of the end of 1997 and the beginning of 1998.

As mentioned above, the Gang had created its own identity and authority and had experienced growth both in terms of the number of members and in terms of the territories it possessed. At the same time, this growth impacted the psychology of the Gang members who now felt stronger and more powerful. This made them increase the intensity of looking for money, also because now their objective was to enrich themselves, thus engage more in extortion on many traders or entrepreneurs. These were not the only ones because they also targeted emigrants who had just returned or their family members. The activity was not confined to just threats but also abductions that were accompanied by maltreatment and even torture. On the other hand, whoever refused to pay would face the wrath of the Gang, which would not hesitate to fire at their houses or even against them when running into them.

One such situation was created involving a family of traders of the city of Elbasan. From the beginning, members of the Gang had asked them for money and had taken hostage one of the members of the family but the situation first had been closed in the way the Elbasan boys do, through acquaintances. However, because of the great wealth that the family had accumulated and the feeling of power that had captured the Gang, the situation had become more aggressive and some members insisted that the family should by all means pay the requested amount. After repeated refusals and after one of the family members was saved from a hostage situation, the Gang decided to punish them publicly to make known to everyone not only its force, but also the message: this is what happens to everyone who does not pay. Thus, on August 14, 1997, main leaders and many members of the Gang rushed and surrounded members of the rival family in their house, near the Fushëmbret and Ring area. A real war took place

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411. Interview of August 5, 2015, with a journalist, code 002; interview of September 11, 2015, with a journalist, code 003.

412. See a letter by Dritan Kateshi published in Tema newspaper, but whose authenticity needs to be confirmed.

Accessed at <http://albania.dyndns.org/Presse/2004/12082004ceka.htm>



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that day because the Gang was shooting with every weapon it had, without sparing even large caliber ones, such as heavy machineguns and anti-missile launchers, grenade launchers and anti-tank shells. The siege lasted for hours until the evening. Gang members kept shooting from different cars, building roofs or from homes nearby against the targeted house.

The toll of August 14, in spite of the huge mess created by the Gang, was that 5 members of the Gang were killed and 4 others injured, including even Tan Kateshi himself. Strangely, although the siege was frightful and carried out by a large number of well-armed persons, the Gang was dealt a severe blow that, in a way, publicly meant that it lost its force in the citizens' perceptions. On the other hand, the incident highlighted the poor organization and non-professionalism of the Gang members whose greatest strength was terror and crude violence. It may be said that this is the moment when the Gang took the first and final blow; afterwards, in a way, it was dissolved and many of its members moved to different directions. Tan Kateshi himself, injured in his eye, first moved to other cities and then outside Albania.

After the dismantling of the Gang, the elimination of some of its members and arrests in the beginning of 1998 by the police, which was taking the situation in its hands little by little. One of the most famous arrests is that of one of the most important members of the Gang, Çajup Kasa. After being arrested, he was found hung in his cell in suspicious circumstances. Tan Kateshi himself was arrested in Tirana, at a rented house he was staying in and after some time other important members of the gang were arrested, such as Taulant Balliu, Gjergji Dedja, and in 2011 Ndriçim Sadushi or Çike, etc. Because of the great fear and pressure on judges, the trial process was transferred to Durrës and it concluded with the sentence of life imprisonment of Dritan Kateshi, Taulant Balliu, Ndriçim Sadushi and the sentencing of other members to 10, 13, 20 years of imprisonment, etc.<sup>413</sup>

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413. Decision of the Durrës Judicial District Court, no. 30, 15.02.2000.



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# **CHAPTER 5.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consider the possibility of interventions into the Criminal Code in order to introduce a new provision that would punish any form of association of the Mafioso type (similar to Art. 416 bis of the Italian Criminal Code), whose members try to benefit from the intimidating power of their connections to secure incomes and benefits such as monetary, control over businesses, licenses, concessions, and through the involvement in securing votes during electoral processes.
2. Reform legislation that has to do with political parties and the funding of electoral campaigns and political parties, for the purpose of preventing the financing from organized crime or dubious resources.
3. Establish special anti-mafia structures consisting of experts of different fields (lawyers, financial experts, IT experts, etc.).
4. Strengthen investigations at the local level and involve a Serious Crimes prosecutor in every district prosecutor's office.
5. Tackle corruptive forms and infiltration of organized crime into all levels, from those by public employees of the basic level to managerial levels and even leading officials and policymakers.
6. Establish databases with regard to activities of criminal organized crime, intensify investigations and increase the number of sequestrations and confiscations of assets of criminal origin. More efficient and effective management of seized assets.
7. Immediate intervention with facilitating and favorable social-economic policies for the areas most affected by the activities of organized crime, as well as the most remote and vulnerable ones.
8. Strengthen cooperation between state agencies and civil society on increasing awareness and prevention of organized crime.
9. Build partnership of specialized agencies with experts and independent organizations for the conduct of research studies, analyses and the drafting of policies against evidence-based organized crime.
10. Establish, update and regularly consult prosecutors and judges on a unified database regarding criminal records that should be taken into consideration and affect the level of punishment (sentences).

# ANNEX

## Summarizing Table of Analyzed Criminal Organizations

**Table 1: Criminal Structures 1993-2004**

No.	Name of Criminal Structure	No. of Members	Operational Form	Period of Activity	Criminal Activity	Territory of Activity
1	Revenge for Justice	11	Criminal Organization (Case returned for rehearing by High Court in March 2016)	1993-1996	Murder, armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorist act	Tirana, Vlora
2	Dedja Gang	+3	Armed Gang	Before 1997	Murder	Burrel
3	Gaxhai Gang	13	Armed Gang	March-August 1997	Murder, violent robbery	Çerkovina, Vlora
4	Mandela	Rreth 40	Armed Gang	April-September 1997	Murder, Kidnapping, Torture, Violent robbery	Elbasan
5	Zani Çausi Gang	18	Armed Gang	1997	Murder, Kidnapping, Violent robbery	Vlora
6	Kateshi	20-30	Armed Gang	1997	Murder, Extortion, Kidnapping	Elbasan
7	Mile Çami	3-4	Criminal Group	1997–2000	Murder	Fier, Lushnja
8	Çërrik Gang	9	Armed Gang	1997	Murder, wounding	Çërrik
9	“Kokaina”	+6	Criminal Organization	1997-2001	Cocaine Trafficking	Albania-Columbia
10	Altin Dardha Gang	6	Criminal Group	1997-1998	Murder	Berat
11	Tropoja File	5	Armed Gang	1997-1998	Murder	Tropoja
12	Children Traffickers	4	Criminal Group	1996-2001	Child Trafficking	Albania-Greece

**Table 2: Criminal Structures 2005-2015**

No.	Name of Criminal Organization	No. of Members	Operational Form	Period of Activity	Criminal Activity	Territory of Activity
1	Criminal Network Isuf Bunaj	9	Criminal Network	2008-2011	Narcotics Trafficking	Tirana
2	"Mountaineer Gang"	36	Criminal Network	2005-2014	Narcotics Trafficking	Italy
3	Criminal Network Hekuran Hoxha	5	Criminal Network	2003-2010	Narcotics Trafficking	Durrës
4	"Go West"	9	Criminal Network	2005-2008	Document Fraud	Tirana
5	"Southern Wind Gang"	5	Criminal Group	2005-2006	Narcotics Trafficking	Tirana
6	"Pyramid Gang"	1	Criminal Group	2006-2007	Fraud	Tirana
7	"Narcotics Trafficking"	15	Criminal Network	2006--2009	Narcotics Trafficking	Vlora
8	"Weapons Trafficking"	4	Criminal Group	2007-2009	Weapons Trafficking	Shkodra
9	"Narcotics Trafficking"	7	Criminal Network	2011-2015	Narcotics Trafficking	Shkodra
10	"Narcotics Trafficking"	2	Criminal Group	2012-2014	Narcotics Trafficking	Arrested in Vlora
11	"Narcotics Trafficking"	7	Criminal Group	2012	Narcotics Trafficking	Vlora District
12	"Durrës Gang"	18	Criminal Organization	1998-2005	Murder, Narcotics Trafficking	Durrës

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# Reviewed Judicial decisions on organized criminal activity

1. Decision of the Durrës Judicial District Court, no. 30, 15.02.2000
2. Decision of the Durrës Appeals Court, no. 76, 19.04.2000
3. Decision of the Tirana Judicial District Court, no. 90, 02.02.2009
4. Decision of the Vlora Judicial District Court, no. 58, 17.04.2000
5. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 69, 23.11.2009
6. Decision of the Appeals Court of Serious Crimes, no. 37, 02.07.2010
7. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 114, 30.04.2006
8. Decision of the Appeals Court of Serious Crimes, no. 26, 22.05.2006
9. Decision of the High Court Penal College, no. 64, 07.07.2006
10. Decision of the Fier Judicial District Court, no. 175, 11.05.2000
11. Decision of the High Court Penal College, no. 75, 07.03.2012
12. Decision of the Tirana Judicial District Court, no. 209, 21.02.2011
13. Decision of the Tirana Judicial District Court, no. 988, 07.07.2008
14. Decision of the Tirana Judicial District Court, no. 1426, 11.11.2009
15. Decision of the Tirana Judicial District Court, no. 1340, 13.01.2012
16. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 71, 28.05.2007
17. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 10, 26.03.2010
18. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 1, 16.01.2012
19. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 17, 28.03.2011
20. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 38, 22.09.2006
21. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 42, 25.11.2010
22. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 45, 27.07.2011
23. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 28, 27.06.2006
24. Decision of the Elbasan Judicial District Court, no. 89, 05.05.2006
25. Decision of the High Court Penal College, no. 33, 16.02.2011
26. Decision of the Durrës Court of Appeals, no. 10, 18.01.2007
27. Decision of the Tirana Court of Appeals, no. 91, 01.02.2012
28. Decision of the High Court Penal College, no. 217, 10.07.2013
29. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 3, 11.01.2008
30. Decision of the Vlora Judicial District Court, no. 143, 04.07.2003
31. Decision of the High Court Penal College, no. 370, 01.07.2009
32. Decision of the Kavaja Judicial District Court, no. 109, 14.10.2008
33. Decision of the Durrës Court of Appeals, no. 85, 17.03.2009
34. Decision of the High Court Penal College, no. 540, 26.05.2010
35. Decision of the Tirana Judicial District Court, no. 122, 04.02.2011
36. Decision of the Tirana Court of Appeals, no. 1322, 30.11.2011
37. Decision of the Lushnja Judicial District Court, no. 80, 03.06.2008
38. Decision of the Fier Judicial District Court, no. 117, 24.04.2013
39. Decision of the High Court Penal College, no. 86, 06.03.2013
40. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 44, 01.07.2008

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41. Decision of the Appeals Court of Serious Crimes, no. 40, 07.07.2009
  42. Decision of the Durrës Judicial District Court, no. 670, 01.11.2010.
  43. Decision of the Elbasan Judicial District Court, no. 105, 29.09.1999
  44. Decision of the Vlora Court of Appeals, no. 272, 16.12.2008
  45. Decision of the Tirana Judicial District Court, no. 356, 14.04.2003
  46. European Court of Human Rights, Case 'Groni vs. Albania,' 07.07.2009
  47. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 59, 30.10.2009
  48. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 30, 15.05.2008
  49. Decision of the Tirana Judicial District Court, no. 999, 24.09.2007
  50. Decision of the Tirana Judicial District Court, no. 1216, 06.12.2006
  51. Decision of the Tirana Judicial District Court, no. 1164, 30.11.2006
  52. Decision of the Tirana Judicial District Court, no. 741, 12.06.2007
  53. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 19, 05.04.2006
  54. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 50, 19.12.2006
  55. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 48, 13.12.2006
  56. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 40, 05.10.2006
  57. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 11, 16.02.2009
  58. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 37, 17.06.2009
  59. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 7, 01.02.2007
  60. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 47, 02.11.2007
  61. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 50, 14.11.2007
  62. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 50, 29.07.2008
  63. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 03, 11.01.2008
  64. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 45, 14.04.2014
  65. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 39, 22.04.2013
  66. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 73, 06.11.2012
  67. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 38, 25.12.2012
  68. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 70, 20.12.2011
  69. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 27, 16.05.2011
  70. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 38, 25.05.2012
  71. Decision of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes, no. 109, 13.12.2013



A K T - P A J T I M I

Me dt. **16.03.1997** qyteti i Korçes, pas ngjarjeve trënditese të datave 13 dhe 14, përjetoi një ngjarje jo të zakonshme për qytetin tonë.

Sot, këtu në selinë e Bashkisë grupet rivale që për një periudhë të gjatë kohë kishin hyrë në grindje me njëri tjetrin, bënë pajtimin. Këto grindje për disa vjet kishin sjellë si pasojë fyerje, plagosje deri në vrasje nga sejcila palë. Me inisiativë, edukatën qytetare, perkushtimin e qytetarëve të thjeshtë dhe deri në titullaret e pushtetit lokal u bë i mundur një pajtim midis grupeve.

Ky xhest i math, sa njërezor aq dhe human, gazoj pa masë përveç familjeve të tyre dhe gjithë popullin e qytetit tonë.

Në këtë pajtim ishte dhe familja e Feridun Babanit dhe familja e Leonard Bakallit.

KRYETARI BASHKISE

(DHIONIS KOKALIC)



Korce, me, 16.3.1997

Z. SALI BERISHA  
PRESIDENT I REPUBLIKES SE SHQIPERISE  
TIRANE

KERKESE PER FALJE

Ne situaten qe ndodhet qyteti i Korces, ne mbashtetje te Qeverise se  
Pajtimit Kombetar, nga nje takim i perfagesuesve te qytetareve te Korces  
per shqetesimin disa vjecar midis dy grupeve te njohura te qytetit te  
majtura "Grupi i 5 dyqneve" dhe i "Cobeneve", u arrit pajtimi midis dy  
grupeve.

Ne keto kushte, ju kerkojme te ushtroni te drejten tuaj te faljes  
per personat e poshteshenuar, te denuar per krime te ndryshme te bera  
midis dy grupeve.

1-FERIDON MUHAMER	BABANI	19-PANDELI VASIL	CIKO
2-FERDINAND ZENEL	BAZELLI	20-PETRIKA THOMA	TRIFONI
3-ILIR MUSTAFA	SHUKULLI	21-PATOS RAMADAN	PILLAHA
4-ARBEN PERPARIM	SADIKAJ	22-VASPI CAKE	BEDULLA
5-GENCI SEPER	AGOLLI	23-PESTIM CAKE	BEDULLA
6-IBRI EMIN	LENAKU	24-LEONARD LEFTER	KUQALI
7-MIRGEN ADEM	DEMCE	25-ILIR RUSTEM	TAIPI
8-FREDERIK SHABAN	ARIFI	26-GENTIAN DHIMITRAQ	PECI
9-GENCI SHERAF	SELIMAJ	27-ERION AGIM SATELLARI	
10-DANIEL MUSTAFA	PINO	28-MYRTEZA DYLIBER	MAKSUTI
11-GENTJAN HAJRI	MUSTAFAI	29-ARTAN DYLIBER	KOSOVA
12-EDMOND STEFAN	PORECI	30-ARTUR	GJOKA
13-LEONARD SOTIRAQ	KAMBURI	31-TOTILA KRISTAQ	BELBA
14-KROSTAQ ANDREA	CACA	32-ARDIAN PANDI	TOLE
15-MICULIN PETRIKA	LARA	33-ARDIAN THEODHOR	ILO
16-BILAL	HYSI	34- BILAL	MULLALLI
17-ALTIN KRISTAQ	ZHARANJAKU	35-EDMOND ISUF	SELIMLLARI
18-THIMI VASIL	SHOLLA	36-PETRIKA PANDI	TEGO
19-		37-ENDRI BEKRET	BILBILI

KRYETARI I SHPETIMIT TE RRETHIT  
( G U R I )



**ÇËSHTJET PENALE TË TRAJTUARA NGA GJYKATA E SHKALLËS SË PARË (SIPAS RRETHEVE GJYQËSORE)**  
**PENAL CASES REVISED BY THE FIRST INSTANCE COURTS (DISTRICT COURTS)**  
 (1997 – 1999)

Tab. 5

*( në numer / in numbers )*

nr. no.	Gjykatat District Courts	viti 1997		viti 1998		viti 1999	
		Për gjykim For judgement	Shqyrtuar Revised	Për gjykim For judgement	Shqyrtuar Revised	Për gjykim For judgement	Shqyrtuar Revised
1	Berat	1006	680	149	98	218	159
2	Bulqizë	163	157	74	62	67	59
3	Dibër	421	369	91	81	82	68
4	Durrës	2377	2099	314	257	359	318
5	Elbasan	1815	1585	203	167	204	165
6	Fier	1620	1288	300	184	543	352
7	Gjirokastrë	1244	1069	71	60	67	54
8	Gramsh	64	39	69	52	74	64
9	Kavajë	873	796	92	85	79	60
10	Kolonjë	199	178	26	26	15	9
11	Korçë	2443	2098	257	197	270	227
12	Krujë	445	392	102	86	112	93
13	Kukës	474	456	177	124	180	119
14	Kurbin	1023	939	86	68	102	67
15	Lezhë	309	287	92	77	126	90
16	Librazhd	158	134	103	96	68	62
17	Lushnjë	845	644	124	97	146	120
18	Mat	348	312	85	83	105	100
19	Mirditë	303	261	79	54	71	53
20	Përmet	120	87	37	34	39	30
21	Pogradec	32	14	81	71	96	75
22	Pukë	283	235	82	55	131	100
23	Sarandë	325	208	43	30	77	62
24	Shkodër	1054	780	122	72	371	245
25	Skrapar	162	146	33	26	34	30
26	Tepelenë	78	24	66	53	66	50
27	Tiranë	7999	6647	1262	1076	1106	880
28	Tropojë	193	142	35	28	37	27
29	Vlorë	1827	1141	178	148	179	129
	<b>Gjithsej / Total</b>	<b>28203</b>	<b>23207</b>	<b>4433</b>	<b>3547</b>	<b>5024</b>	<b>3867</b>

– Burimi: Ministria e Rendit

– Source: Ministry of Public Order

**NDËRMARRJE GJITHSEJ TË REGJISTRUARA / REGISTERED ENTERPRISES**  
(1993 - 1999)

**Tab 1**

Prefektura Prefectures	para / before 1993	Viti / Year							Gjithsej Total
		1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	
BERAT	1301	1297	1186	536	394	90	276	563	5643
DIBËR	318	404	1556	444	318	72	111	59	3282
DURRËS	1056	1282	1848	780	723	272	452	541	6954
ELBASAN	618	732	2916	943	292	62	131	101	5795
FIER	1667	1477	2481	980	798	226	670	386	8685
GJIROKASTËR	657	574	976	625	470	81	250	141	3774
KORÇË	1120	1588	2317	1066	811	177	834	628	8541
KUKËS	312	327	522	241	155	62	60	31	1710
LEZHË	440	772	958	359	365	168	169	224	3455
SHKODËR	1019	1007	1469	729	480	176	194	335	5409
TIRANË	7533	5035	6054	5240	2880	1660	2183	3075	33660
VLOBË	1171	1891	2867	1222	711	126	425	374	8787
<b>Gjithsej / Total</b>	<b>17212</b>	<b>16386</b>	<b>25150</b>	<b>13165</b>	<b>8397</b>	<b>3172</b>	<b>5755</b>	<b>6458</b>	<b>95695</b>

**NDËRMARRJE AKTIVE SIPAS PEFKATURAVE / ACTIVE ENTERPRISES BY PREFECTURES**  
(1993 - 1999)

**Tab. 2**

Prefektura Prefectures	para / before 1993	Viti / Year							Gjithsej Total
		1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	
BERAT	671	701	650	316	268	77	247	559	3489
DIBËR	229	282	930	254	260	58	101	59	2173
DURRËS	927	1130	1678	684	680	260	415	531	6305
ELBASAN	236	284	2234	776	249	54	128	100	4061
FIER	269	297	409	286	318	151	589	380	2699
GJIROKASTËR	419	380	696	557	432	76	250	140	2950
KORÇË	251	439	545	338	357	114	700	624	3368
KUKËS	294	312	390	207	143	59	60	31	1496
LEZHË	215	367	370	168	237	100	142	224	1823
SHKODËR	327	343	429	290	202	109	121	335	2156
TIRANË	2448	2789	5120	2942	2838	1637	2179	3075	23028
VLOBË	321	555	612	308	240	64	278	374	2752
<b>Gjithsej / Total</b>	<b>6607</b>	<b>7879</b>	<b>14063</b>	<b>7126</b>	<b>6224</b>	<b>2759</b>	<b>5210</b>	<b>6432</b>	<b>56300</b>





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**EVOLUTION OF THE ALBANIAN  
ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS**

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