

THE ALBANIAN ORGANIZED CRIME: EMERGENCE OF A DYNAMIC ORGANIZED CRIME NETWORK ACROSS THE EURO-LAND

Ioannis Michaletos

(RIEAS Junior Analyst and Coordinator at World Security Network Foundation Southeastern Europe Office)

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The past 15 years have brought the Balkan Peninsula in the world headlines, often for the worst reasons. War, conflicts and embargoes go hand by hand with the developments in the Balkans. The dramatic expansion of organized crime poses a great challenge for the security and intelligence forces that need to cope with the changing landscape and construct a framework upon which they would be able to comprehend the Balkans scene and at the same time successfully manage the perils involved. This report will explore the progress and current status of the Albanian organized crime activities in the Balkans and beyond. It is worthwhile to mention that the material is mostly prepared by researching and exploiting the Open Source Intelligence – OSINT- sources, whereby readily available material from media sources, research institutes and public hearings are used in order to present a real-life, balanced and objective outlook of the matters involved¹.

In contrast with the more or less stagnant Cold War era, nowadays the developments occurring in the Balkans and in Europe call for agile, rapid and continuous flow of information along with a well-formed system of information analysis. Especially for the intelligence community it is important to stress the high importance of OSINT material that is immense in sheer size, as well as, vital for a conclusive analysis. Through the use of a multitude of information channels and hubs, it is more or less achievable to create a sustainable portrait of the challenges ahead and be able to grasp the details needed for the task involved. Moreover the use of historical research, knowledge of the social-political foundations of every examined region and the presence of well-trained personnel with a first-hand local knowledge are also very important, thus reaching the ideal condition whereby the intelligence cycle² is conducted in a speedy and accurate way without compromising the operation and keeping the important remarks and conclusions free of political or any other influence that might alter the original scope and the essence of it.

¹ OPEN SOURCE SOLUTIONS, Inc; International Public Information Clearinghouse; White Paper (1997), By Robert D. Steele, "Open Source Intelligence: What Is It? Why Is It Important to the Military?" Web Site: http://www.oss.net/dynamaster/file_archive/040320/fb893cded51d5ff6145f06c39a3d5094/OSS1997-02-33.pdf

² FBI Publications (2007), "The Intelligence Cycle". Web Site: http://www.fbi.gov/intelligence/di_cycle.htm

The Albanian Organized Crime groups

The so-called Albanian mafia³ or the Albanian organized crime is very active since the collapse of the Communist rule in this country that opened the way for various indigenous gangs to spread their wings further and take part in one of the most profitable commerce of all times, namely drugs. A leading French criminologist Xavier Raufer⁴ has extensively dealt with the issue of the Albanian mafia. He considers the Albanians as the only true “Mafia” in the Balkans due to the peculiar social structure of their society in the Northern parts of the country “The land of the Genghis”.

An isolated society with very firm beliefs in issues of honor and manhood pride coupled with severe social problems and a culture of vendetta; has been transformed into a huge international crime network. Various reports⁵ indicate that roughly 70-80% of the heroin distributed in Europe is under Albanian control, a really impressive percentage for a nation of just 6 million people. Moreover in the Balkan route –In reality three distinct routes-, the Albanian mafia plays a vital role in safeguarding the interests of the world drugs trade by having its “Soldiers” and “Capos” along the way and protecting shipments from police and official interruption. In 2003, the ex-Greek Police Director of the anti-narcotic Agency, “Mr. Rahovitsas” reported in the annual police report, that “Albanian groups deal at least 85% of heroin sold to Greece, whilst they were virtually non-existent 8-10 years ago”.

Most criminal activities in Kosovo & Metohija are conducted by members of the family clans (“fis”) who control their respective territories. The clans that are numbered 15 in total- With many subgroups- are connected and closely cooperate with similar criminal groups from other European countries, especially from Turkey, Albania and Bulgaria, due to the fact that the main smuggling routes run through these countries.

The family structure is characterized by a strong inner discipline, which is achieved by a means of punishment for every deviation from the internal rules, so that the fear should guarantee an unconditional loyalty to the clan, with the provisions of the official laws considered to be secondary, not important and non-binding. Due to the fact that the clans are based on the blood ties, which is a factor that restricts the number of the clan members, the bonds between them are very strong, which makes getting close to and infiltrating into them almost impossible. Members of other ethnic groups can be accepted only to execute certain one time or secondary jobs. Moreover, the Albanian mafia families are organized in 3-4 or more levels, which enable them to preserve the

³ BBC News Europe (03/08/2000), “Albanian mafia steps up people smuggling”. Website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/863620.stm>

⁴ Website of Xavier Raufer: <http://www.xavier-raufer.com/>

⁵ The Washington Quarterly Journal (09/1999), By Frank Cilluffo & George Salmoiraghi. Website: <http://www.twq.com/autumn99/224Cilluffo.pdf>

organizational action capability even in case some of its members or groups are captured⁶.

Moreover, according to Interpol reports, trafficking in women and enforced prostitution have become important for the Albanian mafia in 1999 when thousands of women left K&M and went to Albania because of armed conflicts in the region. The Albanian prostitution networks increasingly involve women of other nationalities, such as women from Romania, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries. The pimps usually state that they originate from K&M in order to obtain the status of political refugees although actually most of them come from Albania and not from K&M. Some Albanians control these operations from abroad, where Belgium is the seat of some of the bosses of this activity⁷.

Specialization on narcotics trade

Furthermore Albania as a country is a major producer of Cannabis⁸, which is mainly exported to neighboring Greece and Turkey. The narcotics traded is placed along the trafficking and illegal immigrant smuggling⁹ operations that have seen the Albanians gaining the fame as the most powerful and dangerous criminal group in South Eastern Europe. In Greece alone the revenues from prostitution run at around 7.5 billion USD¹⁰, a large portion of that being controlled by Albanian criminal groups. Trafficking of women from Albania is one of the main ways to establish a “War chest” for the organized crime, in order to invest its wealth in the drugs trade.

In essence the first stage for every respectable organized crime unit, is to establish a prostitution ring, make easily large amounts of cash, and then invest them for the drugs trade by constructing the expensive logistics bases, fake companies, pay corrupted officials and so on. Therefore when looking into the different aspects of organized criminal activity, one should note that all forms of that activity are interconnected and that each one leads to the other. That actually is one of the differences of organized crime from the other forms of criminality¹¹.

⁶ <http://www.kosovo.net/albterrorism.html>, Kosovo Net paper on the Albanian organized crime

⁷ www.organisedcrime.info/index.php?mode=12&id=26, Article by the Organized Crime Online Publication, on the Albanian groups

⁸ EUROPOL Publications (2005), “EU Report on drug production and drug trafficking 2003-2004. Web site : <http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/SeriousCrimeOverviews/2005/SC2Drugs-2005.pdf>

⁹ CEMES Institute (2004), “Balkan trafficking report”. Website:

<http://www.cemes.org/current/ethpub/ethnobar/wp1/wp1-d.htm>

¹⁰ Sisyph Organization (02/2005), By Prof. Richard Poulin, “The legalization of prostitution and its impact in trafficking of women and children”. Website: http://sisyphe.org/article.php3?id_article=1596

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Maltz D. Michael, "Defining Organized Crime", in: Robert J. Kelly et al. (eds.), Handbook of Organized Crime in the United States, Westport/London 1994, 21-37. ALSO for the particular Modus Operandi of the Albanian criminal groups see: Raufer, Xavier avec Stéphane Quééré. “La Mafia Albanaise, une Menace pour l'Europe: Comment est née cette Superpuissance Criminelle Balkanique” P. 12-124, Lausanne, Favre, 2000.

Relating to the activities of the Albanian criminal groups, the recent history illustrates the existence of a hybrid criminal form¹², meaning the interconnection between criminal activities and terrorism. The Albanian groups that are mostly active in the North of the country have been associated with the preparations of the U.C.K guerilla forces in the late 90's, as well as, with their arming and training¹³. The troubling 90's in South Eastern Europe saw the convergence of the drugs trade along with the formation of radical Islamic groups and the pervasion of corruption in the upper echelons on the countries involved. In the Albanian case the past decade it is assumed that the country is facing a virtual take over of its institution by the organized crime that in its turn has been linked with international terrorism, with Al Qaeda withstanding¹⁴.

Albanian organized crime groups are hybrid organizations, often involved both in criminal activity of an organized nature and in political activities, mainly relating to Kosovo¹⁵. According to the UN Information Service, "It has become more and more difficult to distinguish clearly between terrorist groups and organized crime units, since their tactics increasingly overlap. The world is seeing the birth of a new hybrid of "organized crime -- terrorist organizations", and it is imperative to sever the connection between crime, drugs, and terrorism now"¹⁶. The interrelation between crime and terrorism has its own international and regional ramifications as an attack against the USA Embassy in Athens-Greece revealed last January, that seems to originate from the triangle between Kosovo-Tetovo-Albania and the arms smugglers networks there¹⁷.

The main role of the Albanian Mafia in the narcotics trade is the one of wholesale distributor of Afghan heroine. Along the Balkan route and especially the one passing through Southern Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia; the Albanians import heroin and then dispense it to Italy, or Bosnia- Croatia to Austria and Central Europe. After 1999 and the consequent Albanian dominance in Kosovo, Pristina has become the unquestionable narcotics capital of Europe¹⁸. A traditionally provisional city in the midst of the Balkans is nowadays the epicenter of all drugs deal of an area encompassing Central Europe, Balkans, and Middle East.

The lack of law coupled with the existence of a society reluctant to pursue organized crime, has created a "black hole" in the centre of the Balkans that primarily lives on criminal activities and the remittances of the Kosovo-Albanian Diaspora¹⁹. The latter is

¹² United Nations Information Service in Vienna (09/2004), "Nexus between drugs, crime & terrorism". Website: <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2004/uniscp500.html>

¹³ Xavier Raufer (2002), "At the heart of the Balkan chaos: Albanian mafia". Website: http://www.xavier-raufer.com/english_5.php

¹⁴ BIA -Security Information Agency- (09/2003), "Organized crime in Kosovo & Metohija". Website: <http://www.decani.org/albterrorism.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.russianlaw.org/Mutschke.htm>, CONGRESSIONAL STATEMENT OF RALF MUTSCHKE-Assistant Director, Criminal Intelligence Directorate International Criminal Police-

¹⁶ <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/soccp311.doc.htm>, UN Information Center in Vienna Briefing

¹⁷ http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_politics_100012_07/02/2007_79818, Article by the Kathimerini Newspaper on the terrorist attack against the USA Embassy in Athens-Greece

¹⁸ National Post (04/2000), By Patrick Graham, "Drug wars: Kosovo's new battles". Website: <http://www.balkanpeace.org/index.php?index=article&articleid=7582>

¹⁹ Wikipedia (2007), "Albanians". Website: <http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albanians>

strategically located in countries such as Switzerland, Austria, Germany and Denmark and dominates the European heroin trade. Despite the fact that Albanians are relatively newcomers to the European organized crime scene-Like the old-timers Sicilians, Corsicans and Irish- the have already taken over the entire European heroin market and make large advances in the sectors of trafficking, racketeering, arms smuggling and illegal gambling²⁰.

Transnational networks and agility

The first and foremost criminal group in Southeastern Europe that can be to an extent classified as a “Mafia” is the Albanian organized crime²¹. Its geographical spread is in and between the triangle Pristina (Kosovo) – Tetovo (FYROM) and Tirana (Albania). During the 1999 and the NATO campaign against Serbia, it was a common secret amongst the members of the international community that the KLA army was financed and assisted by the organized crime that hoped to achieve a safe haven in the Kosovo area²². The importance of Pristina is mainly associated with its use as a transit point in the infamous Balkan drugs route. Moreover the capital of Kosovo is a massive hideout for heads of crime syndicates across the Balkans and beyond²³.

Furthermore the high unemployment rate in the region along with the chronic industrial decay, have forced masses of the population to remain tolerant –at least- in the practices of illegal activity²⁴. The capital flowing from heroin trade mostly, have helped towards the revitalization of the local economies. To that point it is interesting to note that 4/5 of the heroin flowing to Europe from Asia (Afghanistan) is being transferred by Albanians that have established bases all across Europe from Oslo to Barcelona and from Budapest to Rome²⁵. The Albanian organized crime as Xavier Raufer has pointed out operates on a dual basis²⁶. That means it has also the function of a strong societal force that virtually governs peripheral areas of Albania, mostly in the North, as well as, Kosovo currently. The Albanian crime syndicates work in close contacts with their American-Albanian counterparts that are mainly located in New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia²⁷. Since

²⁰ Observatoire Geopolitique des Drogues Foundation; Annual Report (1996) "The World Geopolitics of Drugs".Page 61-75.

²¹ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate (30/10/2003), Testimony by Grant D. Ashley, Assistant Director, Criminal Investigative Division, FBI, "Eurasian, Italian, and Balkan Organized Crime". Website: <http://www.fbi.gov/congress/congress03/ashley103003.htm> ALSO see more on: Galeotti, Mark. 2001. "Albanian Gangs Gain Foothold in European Crime Underworld." Jane's Intelligence Review 13(11, November): 25-7.

²² CIAO organization, interview of Mark Edmond Clark in CIAO, "Terrorism and organized crime". Website: http://www.ciaonet.org/special_section/iraq/papers/clm10/clm10.html

²³ The Center for Peace in the Balkans (06/2003), "Humanitarian bombing vs. Iraqi freedom". Website: <http://www.balkanpeace.org/index.php?index=/content/analysis/a14.incl>

²⁴ Global Policy Forum (2004), "Kosovo". Website: <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues//ksvindx.htm>

²⁵ Gus Xhudo. (1996) "Men of Purpose: The Growth of Albanian Criminal Activity." Transnational Organized Crime. 2(1). Spring: 1-20

²⁶ Website of Xavier Raufer: <http://www.xavier-raufer.com/>

²⁷ Wikipedia (2007), "Albanian Mafia". Website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albanian_mafia

1991 quite a few Kosovo-Albanians have managed under not-so-legal ways, to immigrate to USA and act as liaison with the European community.

This highly sophisticated criminal network has been able to control much of the drugs trade in Europe and also the trafficking of women and children from the Balkans to Western Europe. Both of these activities are complementary to each other and frequently criminal groups switch from one activity to the other²⁸. In order to thrive, the Albanian criminal syndicates involved in the Balkans narcotics trade need friends in high places. Smuggling rings with alleged links to the “Turkish deep State” are said to control the trafficking of heroin through the Balkans cooperating closely with other groups with which they have political or religious ties. In this new global financial environment, powerful undercover political lobbies connected to organized crime cultivate links to prominent political figures and officials of the military and intelligence establishment.

On the continent of Europe, the Albanians from Kosovo hold more than 80% of the heroine trade, their dealers are located in at least half the European countries and they smuggle 4 to 6 tons of heroin monthly amounting to two billion US dollars a year. The Interpol data show that in 1999 the Albanian mafia earned 38 million dollars from the drug trade, in 2001 fifty and in 2002 seventy million US dollars. The Interpol statistics also shows that during 1997 out of all arrested heroin smugglers, Albanians accounted for 14%, but that the average amount of heroin found on non-Albanian dealers was 2 grams, while the Albanians were found in the possession of 120 grams on the average²⁹.

Furthermore the rise in opium production in Afghanistan over the past 5 years have most certainly assisted in the expansion of narcotics smuggling interests of the Albanian OC groups, that further empowered their abilities and distribution networks. According to the UN News Center, “Opium production in Afghanistan, a \$3-billion-a-year trade accounting for more than 90 per cent of the world’s illegal output, could rise again this year after a nearly 60 per cent increase in 2006, due to the ousted Taliban using the trade in the raw material for heroin to fund their war”³⁰. One has to take note that the total profit from the opium production is immense because of the metamorphosis of opium into heroin. Therefore, “The street value of the 2005 harvest should be roughly twice the street value of the 2002 harvest, about 173 billion USD”³¹. That is just a pointer of the importance of Organized Crime groups in the international financial system and the key role of the Albanian ones in Europe in particular³².

The narcotics and more specifically heroin trade is a major concern for the security authorities across Europe, and the role of the Albanian OC groups is formidable over the past decade or so. Dr Mark Galeotti reports that “Two Albanian-run heroin processing

²⁸ USA Department of State (2006), Trafficking in person’s reports”. Website: <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/>

²⁹ The information published in the "National Post" on April 13th 2000

³⁰ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=21752&Cr=afghan&Cr=> , Briefing by the UN News Center on the international organized crime

³¹ http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/2005_Afghan_opium_harvest_begins, WIKI News briefing on the Afghani opium harvest-2006-

³² www.amazon.com/Terror-Incorporated-Tracing-Dollars-Networks/dp/1583226737, Book by Loretta Napoleoni, “Terror Incorporated”

facilities in FYROM. Ethnic Albanian communities in Europe provide street-level distribution networks”. He also adds that “This is especially important in Belgium (with a concentration in Brussels), Germany, Switzerland and Greece (which has absorbed an estimated 300,000 illegal Albanian immigrants since 1991). Some 70 per cent of the heroin reaching Germany and Switzerland is now reckoned to have been transported through Albania and/or by Albanian groups, and the figure for Greece may be closer to 85 per cent”³³. In general some 70-80% of heroin being distributed in modern day Europe is Albanian –managed, along with the close collaboration with Turkish groups and to a further extent with the opium producers in Central Asia and Afghanistan. This constitutes a transnational set of connections par excellence that resembles a sophisticated corporation.

The narcotics trade nonetheless uses respectable banks to launder large amounts of dirty money. While comfortably removed from the smuggling operations per se, powerful banking interests in Turkey but mainly those in financial centers in Western Europe discretely collect fat commissions in a multibillion dollar money laundering operation. These interests have high stakes in ensuring a safe passage of drug shipments into Western European markets³⁴.

Key events & milestones

The ethnic conflicts in Former Yugoslavia, provided ample opportunities for weapons smuggling that reached unprecedented proportions in 1997. The same year a civil unrest in Albania, led to the overthrow of the government and the lack of the rule of law for almost 6 months. During this period 700,000 Kalashnikov and about 200,000 Albanian passports were stolen³⁵, along with 38,000 hand-guns, 25,000 machine-guns, 2,400 anti-tank rocket launchers, 3,500,000 hand grenades, and 3,600 tons of explosives.

Consequently a large portion of the above was sold to criminal groups in the Balkans and in Europe, whilst there are many allegations of terrorist connection whereby Al Qaeda members were able to obtain Albanian passports and an easier access to the European Continent³⁶. Even though organized crime groups were probably unable to "control" the situation, it seems clear that they did profit from the chaos by acquiring a great number of weapons. Albanian organized crime also profited from the financial pyramids which they seem to have used to launder money on a large scale. Before the crash, an estimated 500 to 800 million USD seem to have been transferred to accounts of Italian criminal

³³ http://www.janes.com/security/law_enforcement/news/ipi/ipi0268.shtml, Report by Dr Mark Galeotti on the Jane's Intelligence Journal, on the Albanian Organized Crime

³⁴ <http://www.heise.de/tp/r4/artikel/2/2743/1.html>, German online archive data base on Balkan organized crime

³⁵ Albanian-Canadian organization (2006), “Dateline of Albanian history”. Website: <http://www.albanian.ca/datehistory.htm>

³⁶ Serbianna News Agency (19/04/2005), By M. Bozinovich, “Al-Qaeda in Kosovo”. Website: <http://www.serbianna.com/columns/mb/035.shtml>

organizations and Albanian partners consequently this money was then reinvested in Western countries³⁷.

The Kosovo experience has been up to date, a great disappointment for the international community. The UN administered territory has not been able to withstand the all-pervading influence of the organized crime. Despite numerous acts of violence and a very high homicide rate; very few convictions have been handed out to culprits, none of those was a member of the organized crime either. Nowadays the existence of regular heroin supply from Afghanistan, and the control by the “Albanian Mafia” of the Balkan route³⁸, has enabled it to obtain a large capital base that is laundered mainly through the construction centre in Albania and the use of offshore financial centers. Actually the largest enterprise in terms of sales and profits in South Eastern Europe is the Albanian organized crime³⁹.

Current trends

In Italy, Albanian organized crime gangs appear to control the car trafficking market. One method they employ is to deliberately drive into a car and then when the driver stops to assess the damage to his vehicle, they take the car by force. The cars are then exported to Tirana. A car stolen in central Italy in the morning can be in Albania with its new owner that same evening⁴⁰. In Italy, the so-called “Highwaymen” are causing panic because they have begun holding up motorists and stealing their cars. The method of the robberies is simple but highly effective. These groups of criminals, thought to be mainly Albanians, crash into high value cars. When the driver pulls up to assess the damage, the gang immobilizes him before taking his car by force. According to the Italian police, it takes 14 hours to deliver a stolen car from central Italy to Tirana, where there is a growing demand for cars, especially high value cars⁴¹.

What's more is the sheer size of the economic dynamism that organized crime is able to produce in this small Balkan state. According to Albanian economic reviews since 2003, legal investments average some 200 million euros, while illegally invested funds are in excess of 1 billion, a ratio of one to five. According to Transparency International, 80 percent of the Albanian economy is a "parallel one"; for every 100 euros of documented capital, another 80 euros are never accounted for, most of it from organized crime

³⁷ <http://www.russianlaw.org/Mutschke.htm>, CONGRESSIONAL STATEMENT OF RALF MUTSCHKE-Assistant Director, Criminal Intelligence Directorate International Criminal Police-

³⁸ Interpol official publication (2006), “Heroin production”, Website: <http://www.interpol.int/Public/Drugs/heroin/default.asp>

³⁹ Italian Parliament Publications (29/03/2006), Report by Senator Alberto Maritati, “Organized crime in the Balkans with a reference to Albania”. Website: www.cespi.it/Rotta/Ascod-criminalità/maritati.PDF

⁴⁰ www.organisedcrime.info/index.php?mode=12&id=26, Article by the Organized Crime Online Publication, on the Albanian groups

⁴¹ http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/Serious_Crime_Overviews/overview-Motor_vehicle_crime_2006_1.pdf, Research Report by EUROPOL, on the vehicle theft networks in Europe

activities⁴². The figures presented could only be contrasted with those of Montenegro & Kosovo two other Balkan regions with a dramatic presence of organized crime-led economy. Needless to add that the sheer dynamism of the “Parallel economy” hinders substantially the efforts of the politicians and the judicial authority to curb crime, due to the immense pressure exerted by informal interests that have developed a well-footed infrastructure in the state and have penetrated the executive, and the state apparatus.

An example of the international cooperation that is needed in order to raid this kind of networks is a routine operation that was carried out by certain European police forces. According to Europol, "A closely co-coordinated operation between the law enforcement authorities in Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands has led to the simultaneous arrest of 28 persons. The arrests were based on extensive observations against an ethnic Albanian organized crime group, exchange and subsequent analysis of investigative details and coordination both at police and judicial level. The arrests were carried out on 23 and 24 October in execution of arrest warrants issued by the Prosecutors Office of Brescia (Italy)"⁴³. Another example of the expanding pace by which the Albanian origin organized crime expands, is the example of Florence-Italy and the Toscana eparchy. According to local reliable sources and field research; the local illegal drugs market is monopolized by the Albanians, a development that occurred in just 3 years between 2000 and 2003. In parallel narcotics use increased and parts of the city became inflicted by the presence of armed men and the assorted perils for the ordinary social activity in the city. The most recent briefings by the United Nations Observatory on narcotics reveal a stronger bond between South American gangs and the Albanian ones, related to cocaine trade in Europe. The Calabrian mafia, known as “Drageta” is assumed to be involved as well, and the recent homicide of 6 leading member of it in the city of Duisburg, is most probably related to the above lucrative trade.

Experts from regional security forces and organized crime specialists, point out towards the difficulty in penetrating the Albanian OC teams due to the inability to penetrate the close-knit structure and the lack of willing collaborators from within. It is interesting to note that even police telecommunication interception, are not of much use, because the OC groups tend to communicate using rare local mountaineer dialects of Northern Albania –Ghegi dialects”, virtually unknown in Europe and without a special consideration for the time being.

In lieu of a conclusion

The dynamics of the Albanian Organized Crime seem large enough to alarm not just the Balkan region but further beyond in a Pan-European and international level. The negotiations in Kosovo have barely touched this critical aspect, that is all-pervading and create an imminent threat to social and political stability. In a nutshell there could be not tangible solution to the problems concerning South Eastern Europe, if the international

⁴² <http://www.worldpress.org/Europe/2705.cfm>, Article by the Wordpress.org , on the EU-Albanian security cooperation

⁴³ <http://www.europol.europa.eu/index.asp?page=news&news=pr051029.htm>, Briefing by the EUROPOL on an operation against an Albanian OC group in Europe

community does not invest considerable political capital in combating with the threat that Albanian groups pose. There might not be a state, albeit they form one of the most important aspects when one wants to assess in a balanced way the actual state of affairs in the Balkans.

The Albanian Organized Crime groups constitute one of the most expanding and networked criminal groups in contemporary Balkans & Europe. Further, their role in the political developments in relation to the Kosovo issue, or the domestic Albanian events should be assessed as well. It is more than certain that any move towards Kosovo independence is strongly supported by them, in order to expand their bases in a newly formed state, thus legalizing to an extent the underworld realm on which they thrive nowadays.

Moreover the emerging nexus between crime-terrorism and political aspirations creates a complex situation that requires sine qua non international cooperation, intelligence exchange and continuous improvement of the security and international agencies. The common European market and an eventual European political Union will be greatly affected by the ability of the former to enforce the rule of law in its territory and bypass the possible peril of becoming a gigantic political unit that will nurture all kinds of organized crime activity. The presentation of some forms of the Albanian OC, is a clear – cut example of how the new age of lesser border controls, looser immigration vetting and the expansion of transnational networks; can facilitate in the formation of a formidable criminal network in the space of less than one generation.