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*Bridge between East and West:
Organized Crime and the Balkan Route*

Giulia Tarantini

Master of Arts MIREES
Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe

AWARDED MASTER THESIS

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Master of Arts MIREES
Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe

Awarded Master thesis
in
The Yugoslav Crisis and Its Demise

Supervisor Prof. Neven Andjelic

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FOREWORD

The International Master in Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe (MIREES) was launched in 2004 at the School of Political Sciences-Forlì Campus in cooperation with Europe and the Balkans International Network (EBIN). In 2008 it developed as a second cycle degree program, which currently delivers a joint MA awarded by the four full partner Universities of Bologna, Vytautas Magnus at Kaunas, Corvinus of Budapest and St. Petersburg State University, together with the universities of Ljubljana and Zagreb. The program is carried out with the additional support of the associate partners, as the MIREES International Alumni Association (MAiA), the Institute of East-Central and Balkan Europe (IECOB) in Forlì, the NATO Centre of Excellence for Energy Security in Vilnius, and the Institute for Democracy 'Societas Civilis' - IDSCS - in Skopje, and more recently enjoys the cooperation with the Visegrad Fund.

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Remarkable and diverse academic works, truly representative of MIREES' intrinsic interdisciplinary and multifaceted approach are made available through such cooperation. These innovative, in-depth and insightfully drafted analyses testify the authors' dedication and MIREES' competence in training outstanding researchers and analysts.

All members of the MIREES, MAiA and IECOB network congratulate the authors on their achievements.

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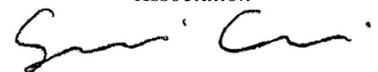


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Introduction

The main focus of the present research is on the recent developments that have taken place among different forms of organized crime in the South-Eastern European region, on the origins of such developments, on the contemporary situation and possible future perspectives.

The region has been at the centre of various studies, which have looked in turn at the debated origins of the Yugoslav wars, the economic consequences of the transition towards a market economy, the political results of the democratization process, the relations between the different ethnic groups inhabiting it and the protection accorded to them by governments, and its relations with the European Union, including whether or not some of the countries should be eligible for the EU membership. Only more recently has the analysis also focused on the powerful influence organized crime has exerted and is exerting on the region.

Such studies, however, are often based only on one aspect of the phenomenon, namely a specific type of illicit activity, on some or just one country, or on a specific historical period. The new approach brought by this research lies, instead, in the fact that it takes into consideration all the countries which are normally deemed to compose South-Eastern Europe, despite their intrinsic differences, by connecting the contemporary developments of the most widespread organized criminal activities to the historical, political and social developments of the past, going back to the time of the Ottoman Empire. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo, thus, do not only share common cultural, historical, social and religious paths, as well as often similar if not identical languages, but they all also share the common plague of organized crime.

This work aims, thus, to analyze how organized crime was born in the region, which factors contributed to its significant expansion, and how it is currently evolving. By going back to the ancient roots of the phenomenon, which grew throughout centuries of history, within empires, dictatorships and democratic states, often backed by the tacit or explicit approval of rulers and governments, the contemporary existence and expansion of the criminal organizations of South-Eastern Europe finds its explanation. Not only peculiar historical and geographical circumstances gave a fundamental boost to the birth and growth of the phenomenon, but the prompt collaboration of different ethnic groups (even when they were fighting among each other), which expanded thanks to diaspora networks and international links, guaranteed its strength and an always larger field of activity.

Looking at these territories from different perspectives ranging from geography to modern and contemporary history and from economics to criminology, can shed some light on a reality which is very often ignored.

A “Balkan Route” which crosses all the countries of the region is the main focus of the research, and will be held as symbol of the criminal connections existing among them. By linking drug producers to drug consumers, but also countries of origin of illegal migrants or persons to be smuggled into wealthy countries, carrying the burden of violent past events and characterized by porous borders, South-Eastern Europe became an ideal transit zone for several types of illicit goods, drugs and even human beings, the most recent evolution.

A historical digression into the remote past of the region will show that organized criminal groups and activities are not a new phenomenon originating from globalization or economic difficulties, but that they existed long before the formation of independent states, and expanded during and, in a certain way, thanks especially to the Yugoslav wars. Brigandage or illicit smugglings are, obviously, not a unique to this region of the world, since crime was present long before states in many parts of it, and, obviously, even a past in which lawlessness was the rule does not entail an inescapable future dominated by organized crime. However, this work is aimed at showing, in the light of the past, and of an analysis of it focused on the criminal activities which took place in parallel with other major historical and political events, how the current developments of organized crime, which still occupy a prominent place in South-Eastern Europe are also a consequence of past developments and mistakes. While foreign dominations and abuses during the past fostered the recourse to criminal activities, even as ways of survival in certain cases, the wars which broke out in the 1990s saw their major expansion and biggest profits. The Yugoslav wars, first, and the Kosovo and Macedonian conflicts, later, will, thus, be analyzed as the events, together with the process of economic and political transition which followed, which mostly contributed to the expansion of the phenomenon. While the international community was facing major historical events, from the fall of the Berlin Wall, to the creation of the European Community, violent conflicts arose in a country which had peacefully existed for more than fifty years. The responses given by states and international organizations, from the lifting of economic sanctions to military interventions, had the immediate result of creating a parallel illicit system of smuggling channels and criminal links, which came to the surface only years later.

When the wars came to an end, in certain cases, paradoxically, also thanks to the activity of criminal organizations, a reversal of the social pyramid had already taken place. Often closely connected to the political elites, common criminals experienced an upward mobility and were held as national heroes, blurring the distinction between legality and illegality, which will have dangerous consequences in the building of new, democratic states.

Inserted today in a global context, this analysis will not strictly involve only the countries of the region, but also the criminal links developed with other parts of the world, which currently have a non-negligible influence in particular on Western Europe.

While starting from Ottoman times, the research will reach our time and the most recent developments of organized crime in the region. Adding to the Balkan Route established in the 1980s for the smuggling of heroin which is still today very lucrative, another Balkan Route has been very recently identified linking Middle East and African migrants who desperately try to reach Western Europe. Deeply rooted in the territory and counting on trusted networks, Balkan-based organized criminal groups are trying to exploit the situation to the

best they can. Thanks to the analysis of very contemporary developments, often not extensively covered by media, the research is to a large extent up-to date.

Being a constantly changing phenomenon, however, which is very often properly understood long after it takes place, it can sometimes be hard to grasp in its entirety. The directions taken by the Balkan Route, indeed, might become outdated even in short periods, since organized criminal groups are endlessly looking for new ways of making illicit profits and safer ways of evading the laws.

The main difficulty of the research lied in looking for objective information, since data and statistics are rare and not always entirely reliable. Indeed, government documents can be politicized, omit certain information or even adjust certain numbers to serve their interest; researchers on organized crime often rely on informers and law enforcement agencies, without directly investigating the situation; official agencies and newspapers sometimes do not focus on the major problems concerning organized crime, but on those that capture the attention of the audience; news from different newspapers can sometimes be very different, or even contradict one another.

For what concerns the methodology employed during the research a huge variety of sources have been used and compared. As a matter of fact, the same interdisciplinarity of the topic and of its analysis implies a necessary recourse to very different sources: reports from researchers, governments or international organizations, online newspapers from different countries and in different languages, blogs and videos, European laws, international conventions and books on history, geography, criminology, economics and social sciences have been consulted.

Authors who analyzed the geographical and historical characteristics of South-Eastern Europe, but also the discussed origins of the name “Balkans”, as the region is also known, have been referred to for a general overview on it; researches made by criminologists and international conventions have been used for a general introduction on organized crime. By comparing books focusing on the history of the region and reports focusing on the developments of organized crime in the same historical period a complete historical background focusing on both elements emerged.

The research is largely based on reports prepared by international organizations, and mainly Europol, the Council of Europe and several agencies of the United Nations, which have been particularly useful to discover the nature of the criminal activities most widespread in the region, while providing also fundamental data and statistics. While they all asserted the existence of a Balkan Route for the transit of drugs, online newspapers from different countries, documentaries and investigative reports were necessary to follow the directions it took and the most recent developments organized crime is taking in the region.

An Overview

South-Eastern Europe or the Balkans

“The Balkan peninsula is a region of transition between Asia and Europe – ‘East’ and ‘West’ with their incompatible political, religious and social ideas”¹

Often associated with one another in media, as in reports, the countries which compose the South-Eastern European region, often called “the Balkans”, are in many respects significantly different.

Croatia has just recently joined the European Union, while the rest of the Western Balkans² is still on the waiting list; the name of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been a matter of dispute for long time, while the very existence of an independent Kosovo is questioned by part of the international community; whilst Bosnia and Herzegovina is all over the world considered as a single state, its three entities seem to struggle to properly act as a single one; Romania and Bulgaria are nowadays European states to all intents and purposes, nonetheless their citizens cannot freely move through the whole continent, prospect which still raises some concerns in many states of the European Union; Albania has a unique history as a kingdom, an Italian protectorate and as China’s partner and partisan of an exclusive cultural and ideological revolution, while Montenegro has shared a large part of its history with its Serbian neighbor. However, despite unquestionable differences in contemporary challenges and local peculiarities, the states of the Balkan peninsula shared political, historical, cultural and structural patterns which objectively contributed to making them a single unity in the eyes of the world.

Whilst the terms “South-Eastern Europe” or “Balkans” are nowadays mostly interchangeable in use, the latter has often been linked to negative connotations, in particular in the Western imagery.

“Balkanization” started to be used to refer to the emergence of new states after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empire, comparing this process to the previous disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. In 1918, “The New York Times” published an arti-

1 Geshkoff T. I. (1940), *Balkan Union: A Road to Peace in Southeastern Europe*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 4.

2 The region of the Western Balkans includes the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Croatia.

cle entitled “Rathenau, Head of Great Industry, Predicts the ‘Balkanization of Europe’”, a frightening event expressed through a menacing word.³ As noted by Glenny, “East Europeanization” or “Balticization of Europe” could have been similarly used to evoke the same meaning, but evidently the use of the word “Balkan” carried a clearer sense.⁴ The word has, thus, referred to more than a simple geographical space since the very beginning of its usage.

Looking at the violent events which took place in the region at the beginning of the 1990s, from revolts and revenges to the bombings of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and the Balkan wars, the association of the region with turmoil and violence does not appear so striking; association which obviously was reinforced as a result of the Yugoslav wars.

What is more striking, however, is the fact that the same ideas and clichés of the Balkans endured after the end of the wars, exerting a certain influence even today. To Mazower, the name “Balkan” has been initially attributed by geographers to the mountain range which was wrongly considered to run across the region.⁵ Few references have been made in the Western literature not only to this territory but also to the people inhabiting it, until the end of the 1880s. It was only with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the following wars that the term “Balkan” became of common use, immediately carrying negative connotations; the recent origin of such stereotypes provides, according to the author, an explanation for their enduring strength.

Goldsworthy noted how, still at the end of the 1990s, “advanced exponents of European multicultural ideals write about Albanians, Croats, Serbs, Bulgarians and Romanians with the sort of generalised open condescension which would appall them if applied to Somalis”.⁶ Whilst part of the European continent without any doubt, the region is sometimes perceived as the “Wild East of Europe”, an obscure elsewhere which evokes ambivalent feelings, ranging from attraction and curiosity to repulsion and indifference.⁷ This “inglorious coverage”,⁸ attributed by the West, which especially after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo started to consider the region as a “toxin threatening the health of Europe”,⁹ negatively influenced the self-perception of the Balkans themselves, to the point that some of the countries were and still are not so willing to be inscribed in this geographical space, especially with such a pejorative name. The European judgement of the Balkans as “the other” becomes, thus, a “nowhere” when the Balkan states themselves do not want to belong to them, as Žižek, a Slovenian philosopher, pointed out.¹⁰ Nevertheless, at the same time, “every state needs its own ‘Balkan’ for dividing itself from the others.” the mental construction of the Balkans as a very different territory to not be taken as a model in the Western discourse could, thus, have played a functional role in the construction

3 The New York Times (1918, December 20), *SEES GERMAN RUIN FOR GENERATIONS; Rathenau, Head of Great Industry, Predicts the “Balkanization of Europe*, The New York Times, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9E0CE1D-C1339E13ABC4851DFB4678383609EDE>.

4 Glenny M. (2000), *The Balkans 1804-1999. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*, London, Granta Publications, p. xxiii.

5 Mazower M. (2000), *The Balkans: A Short History*, New York, The Modern Library.

6 Goldsworthy V. (1998), *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*, London, Yale University Press.

7 Ibidem.

8 Todorova M. (1997), *Imagining the Balkans*, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 38.

9 Glenny M. (2000), *The Balkans 1804-1999. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*, London, Granta Publications, p. xxiv.

10 Tanchi (2008, November 24), *Slavoj Žižek: Every state needs its own Balkan*, *Kosmopolito*, <http://www.kosmopolito.org/2008/11/24/every-state-needs-its-own-balkan/>.

of its own identity.¹¹ Goldsworthy herself admitted that even in Serbo-Croatian, her mother tongue, she used to express “disdain or impotent rage” through the word “Balkans”.¹²

Among others, to Todorova, the Greeks have never appeared too enthusiastic about their “Balkanness”, perceiving their country as properly Mediterranean, in geographical, cultural and economic terms. For this reason, they will not be included in the present research.

Similarly, the Romanians always seemed to be more interested in being accepted as part of Western Europe rather than of its Eastern side. Their academic community is the only one in the region who substituted “Balkan studies” with a more neutral “South-Eastern European studies”.¹³

Hungary and Turkey are sometimes included in the region as well. The first, generally identifying itself as part of Central Europe, with which it shared the Austro-Hungarian legacy, is rarely associated with the Balkans; the territory of Turkey, on the other side, extends geographically partly in South-Eastern Europe, while historically was a predominant part of the Ottoman Empire. Some Turkish historians consider modern Turkey as a Balkan state, because of its continuity with the Ottoman Empire, and despite the fact that the Balkans were the first territory that the Empire started to lose, while from a geopolitical point of view its inclusion could help its integration into Europe. Nevertheless, Turkey is more often not included in the region either, due to historical and political patterns which diverged from those of the rest of the countries. After the revolution led by Atatürk in 1930s, indeed, the interests and policies of Turkey considerably differed from those of the region.

For similar reasons, Slovenia, which could geographically constitute the end of the peninsula on the north side, is excluded from the present analysis as from most studies on the region. Its economic situation, indeed, has always been more advanced compared to the rest of the region, and its links have always been directed, to a certain extent, more to Western Europe than to South-Eastern Europe, to the point that some Slovenians perceive their country as “the last threshold and barrier of the truly west-European civilization against the Balkan madness”.¹⁴

To the self-perception of the countries of being part of South-Eastern Europe, or the Balkans, or of neither, and the outside perception of their inclusion, it must be added that even geographically the Balkan Peninsula is not objectively defined. Hoffman stressed how, while the Iberian and the Italian Peninsulas are clearly delimited by mountain ranges, there is no physical barrier between this area and the central part of Europe.¹⁵ Geographers accepted the Danube-Sava-Kupa rivers and the port of Rijeka as border line on the north side, while the south extends until the Mediterranean Sea, absorbing the Greek peninsula and its islands, and its eastern side, crossed by the Balkan ranges, is delimited by the Black Sea.

Žižek defined the Sava river crossing the suburbs of Ljubljana as the “official geographical limit between Balkans and Mitteleuropa”, a border which ironically divides “horror and

11 Ibidem.

12 Goldsworthy V. (1998), *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*, London, Yale University Press, p. xxv.

13 Todorova (1997), *Imagining the Balkans*, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 49

14 Žižek S. (1999), *The Spectre of Balkan*, in «*The Journal of the International Institute*», vol. 6 no. 2.

15 Hoffman G. W. (1963), *The Balkans in Transition*, Princeton, N.J., Van Nostrand.

oriental despotism” from “Europe and civilization”.¹⁶ Geographical and mental borders intersect themselves, thus, forging the self-perception and imaginary of the Balkan people.

Without any mountain range delimiting a clear border with the rest of Europe and acting as a defensive barrier, the region has always been easily accessible from the outside and vulnerable to invasions, which has had a profound impact on it. The Danube, which passes through several countries of the region, has never represented an obstacle either, being crossed by many different people. This easy external accessibility, opposed to a rugged internal geographic environment, did not make regional exchanges and communications easy in the past. Such geographical composition profoundly influenced the political geography of the area as well, partly contributing to its political fragmentation.

Some well-defined natural passages, however, such as the corridor between the Danube and the Aegean Sea, along with its rivers and valleys, allowed the access to the very earth of the peninsula, establishing links, rather than barriers, between the region and the rest of the world. This geographic setting contributed to transforming the region into a zone of contact, a place of encounters among different cultures and civilizations, which, to Biondich, increased its vulnerability to intermittent warfare and deep insecurity.¹⁷ This permeable borderland saw the alternation, throughout history, of the Orthodox Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire and Catholic Europe, each leaving its own mark in the shaping of the region.

Situated in the middle of Europe and Asia, sometimes perceived neither as Asia nor as Europe by Western people, it is no surprise that South-Eastern Europe has always served as a corridor. If, on the one side, this gave a geostrategic importance to the area, on the other, it did not provide many stimuli to its economic development. Its greater profits, indeed, came more from its borders than from its own territory. Throughout all its history, it, thus, remained mainly a transit zone for the big powers, which did not encounter many reasons to stop there.

Aside from debates, common geographical, historical, political and cultural features make this area, to be called with the neutral name of South-Eastern Europe, a single, mixed entity, here considered to be made of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo.

Once part of large Empires, such as the Roman or the Ottoman Empire, some of these countries were united in the former Yugoslavia, and all have been part of the socialist experiment or fell under different forms of dictatorships. Some of them became suddenly famous in the eyes of the world due to the fratricidal wars of the 1990s, which gave credit to the Western idea of unstable, violent Balkans. Despite not directly involving all the South-Eastern European states, such wars undoubtedly led to disastrous consequences, to be paid by the whole region. Beyond the obvious economic losses or the massive refugee flows, many countries had to recover from the destruction of the entire political, legal and judicial system, while also facing old and new problems, such as widespread corruption and the strong legacy left by organized crime.

16 Žižek S. (2008), *Geographical limit between the Balkan and Central Europe*, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwDrHqNZ9lo>.

17 Biondich M. (2011), *The Balkans. Revolution, War, and Political Violence since 1878*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

In addition to the already known common vicissitudes, this bridge between East and West, between different cultures and values, between different historical and economic systems, also became an extremely lucrative bridge for illegal activities, which flourished undisturbed long time ago, and which have never been destroyed.

Organized Crime

“‘Organized criminal group’ shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit”¹⁸

Given the multi-dimensionality of organized crime as well as the variety of disciplines dealing with the phenomenon from different points of view, most of the literature acknowledged the difficulty in giving a clear and unique definition. A certain consensus seems to have arisen around the above-mentioned, broad definition given by the United Nations in the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, signed by 185 parties as of January 2015, and recalled by the European Union in 2008.¹⁹

The Working Group entitled to provide such a definition focused on the broadly accepted elements of the phenomenon, namely a certain organization, characterized by continuity, using intimidation or violence, pursuing profits and exercising influence on the public, on the media and on the political structure.²⁰

Some defining common characteristics can, in fact, easily be highlighted, leading to two main ways of understanding it: as a set of actors or as a set of activities. The general public more often understands it as a set of actors, referring to the most famous criminal organizations such as the Italian or Russian mafia.

Within this discourse, two main models emerged. The corporate model considers criminal organizations as highly centralized and hierarchical corporate structures, while according to the network model, they are composed of isolated networks of individuals or small groups collaborating with each other.²¹ The latter has recently gained ground both within the

18 UNODC (2004), *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto*, Art. 2, New York, UN.

19 United Nations, Treaty Status of *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*, available at https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12&chapter=18&lang=en; The Council of the European Union (2008, November 11), COUNCIL FRAMEWORK DECISION 2008/841/JHA of 24 October 2008 on the fight against organised crime, Official Journal of the European Union, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TX-T/?qid=1429887021756&uri=CELEX:32008F0841>.

20 Vlassis D. (2002), *The UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*, in: Berdal M. and Serrano M. (eds.), *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienne, pp. 87-88.

21 Cohen A. K. (1977), *The Concepts of Criminal Organisation*, in «*British Journal of Criminology*», vol. 17 no. 2, pp. 97-111;

literature and among the police (e.g. OCTA 2007 and SOCA 2008), to the point that the term “serious crime” is often preferred to the sometimes ambiguous “organized crime”. Modern and dynamic networks acting in a globalized world are substituting the old image of hierarchical, rigidly structured organized groups.

Reuters questioned the essence of organized crime to the extent of introducing the notion of a “disorganized crime” made of a huge number of extremely small criminal enterprises, marginal and ephemeral.²² Williams more recently advocated such a theory, affirming that organized criminal networks, to be analyzed with the help of sociology, anthropology and social psychology, nowadays operate through “fluid network structures”, which do not follow rigid and permanent patterns, but rather adapt themselves to the ever-changing political and economic environment.²³ Many of these patterns, in fact, are linked to local opportunities, which constantly adapt to changes in legislation and the succession of governments.

The organized side of crime therefore no longer describes the reality of the phenomenon, attracting the criticism of several disciplines, from criminology to sociology. Yet, it continues to be extensively used in policy, among the police and by the media.

Williams challenged another theory, advanced first of all by Shelling, that viewed criminal organizations, acting as enterprises, ready to use violence to reach their ultimate scope of creating monopolies.²⁴ This new theory according to which these organizations are not fighting anymore among each other for power, but are, instead, increasingly cooperating to reach a common objective is gaining more ground.²⁵ Such cooperation shapes international links which, as Sterling stated, will create a new “*pax mafiosa*” in which scattered units of criminals work together to peacefully build a global criminal market.²⁶

Globalization has, without any doubt, modified the ways in which organized criminal groups flourish and work together, involuntarily facilitating their cooperation. Criminal organizations who often gather together to deal with local realities, in certain cases satisfying specific needs, were suddenly enabled, thanks to the globalization process, to operate beyond national borders, taking advantage of improved transport capabilities and enjoying higher profits.

Smuggling definitely encounters fewer obstacles thanks to increased economic interconnectedness, easy and rapid communications and the development of new technologies. Beyond this, its profitability has grown substantially thanks to growing economic inequalities and to different systems of taxation. Such increased possibilities for transnational crime thus represent “the dark side of globalization”.²⁷

Bruinsma G and Bernasco W. (2004), *Criminal Groups and Transnational Illegal Markets*, in «*Crime, Law and Social Change*», vol. 41 no. 1, pp. 79-94.

22 Reuters P. (1985), *Disorganised Crime; Illegal Markets and the Mafia*, Cambridge, MIT Press.

23 Williams P. (2001), *Transnational Criminal Networks*, in: Arquilla J., Ronfeldt D., (eds.), *Networks and Netwars. The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, Santa Monica, CA, Rand Corporation, p. 62.

24 Schelling T. C., (1967), *Economics and Criminal Enterprise*, in «*The Public Interest*», vol. 7, pp. 61-78.

25 Williams P. (2002), *Cooperation Among Criminal Organizations*, in: Berdal M. and Serrano M. (eds), *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienne, pp. 67-80.

26 Sterling C. (1994), *Thieves' World: The Threat of the New Global Network of Organized Crime*, New York, Simon & Schuster.

27 Williams P. (2001), *Organizing Transnational Crime: Networks, Markets and Hierarchy*, in: Williams P. and Vlassis D. (eds.), *Combating Transnational Crime: Concepts, Activities, and Responses*, London, Frank Cass Publishers, p. 66.

Another side effect of the economic liberalization which globalization has brought about consists in the reduced capacity of states to properly regulate transnational activities and control their borders.

According to Passas, this inability is particularly evident among developing or transition states, exemplified by the South-Eastern European states after the end of the Cold War.²⁸ This led to an augmented unchecked flow of smuggled goods, but also of human beings, trafficked mainly to respond to labour or sex demands.

As criminal networks, trafficking routes are not stable either. “Structural factors” such as poverty, lack of options, economic inequalities, conflicts or the demand for illicit goods or activities, interact with “proximate factors” such as law enforcement, national and international legal systems and corruption in determining the characteristics of the flows.²⁹ To Shelley, the main factor influencing such changes is the rapid response of the traffickers to new political and economic conditions.³⁰ Indeed, they adapt their trafficking to evade counter-trafficking measures.

In conclusion, given the continuous changing nature of organized crime, of its patterns and of the smuggling routes it runs, the difficulty in giving a clear definition of such phenomenon and the impossibility of collecting enough objective data, this activity becomes extremely hard to firmly grasp and contain, making the possibility of a world dominated by a “global web of criminal networks” a foreseeable prospect.³¹

Organized Crime in South-Eastern Europe

“It is impossible for one interested in ‘organised crime’ and illegal markets to ignore the area of the Balkans”³²

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has surprisingly defined the South-Eastern European region as “one of the safest in Europe”, reporting relatively low rates of “conventional crime”, namely murder, rape, assault, robbery, etc..³³ The region does not match with the socio-economic standards associated with a high crime area.

28 Passas N. (1999), Globalization, Criminogenic Asymmetries and Economic Crime, in «European Journal of Law Reform» vol. 1 no. 4, pp. 399-423.

29 Cameron S. and Newman E. (2008), *Trafficking in Humans: Social, Cultural and Political Dimensions*, New York, United Nations University Press.

30 Shelley L. (2002), *The Changing Position of Women: Trafficking, Crime and Corruption.*, in: Lane D. S. (eds), *The Legacy of State Socialism and the Future of Transformation*, Rowman & Littlefield.

31 Williams P. (2002), *Cooperation Among Criminal Organizations*, in: Berdal M. and Serrano M. (eds), *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienne, p. 80.

32 Antonopoulos G. A. (2008) *The Balkans as a ‘laboratory (for the study) of illegal markets’: introduction to the special issue on ‘Illegal Markets in the Balkans’, in «Trends in Organized Crime», vol. 11, p. 315.*

33 UNODC (2008), *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries*, Vienna, UNODC, p.5.

Indeed, compared to the rest of the world, South-Eastern Europe is relatively well-developed: whilst incomes are lower than in Western Europe, and a certain income inequality persists, as well as high rates of unemployment, the population is not affected by a grinding poverty, and education levels are high. As a consequence, from a statistical point of view, the region appears to be safer than many Western European countries in terms of conventional criminal activities: the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has a lower murder rate than Portugal or Sweden, the number of small arms per capita is lower in many of these countries than in the Western ones, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania have more police per capita than England or Sweden.³⁴ The fact that such data, with the exception of the objective homicide figures, are, for the most part, gathered from police statistics opens up the possibility of under-reporting or manipulation. However, even taking into account such a possibility, and the fact that the rates of citizens reporting crime to the police are generally low, it seems that the region is suffering of conventional crime to a lesser extent than Western Europe, as emerged from the crime statistics and survey figures elaborated by the UNODC. Its report produced in 2008 showed that South-Eastern Europe is not affected by many of the factors traditionally associated with the rising of crime. The demographic situation of the region is among those, as the fact that the population is all but young, with peaks of low fertility rates in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, reduces the risk of street crimes and violence, ordinarily committed by young people.³⁵ As urban areas host by nature higher crime rates than the rural areas, the lesser level of urbanization in the region, compared to Western Europe, is an advantage in terms of criminality rates. The criminal justice system appears to be well-equipped, to a certain extent thanks to the communist heritage which left behind considerable security coverage, and a relatively efficient police system.

The discrepancy between a seemingly well-developed and safe region and the Western image of the turbulent, violent Balkans appears substantial; yet, it came out that South-Eastern European citizens are afraid of walking alone in the dark much more than Western Europeans.³⁶

As a matter of fact, the “South East hub” has been identified by Europol as the European area in which organized crime activities have most remarkably increased in recent years.³⁷ This “Balkan axis”, made up of all the South-Eastern European countries, with a strong contribution given by the Western Balkans, has recently become one of the main trafficking routes into the European Union.³⁸

Since violence or the threat of violence is considered one of the main features of organized crime by most of the literature (among others by Maltz, Finckenauer and Abadinsky), but it does not appear as endemic in the region, we must conclude that “organized crime in South East Europe must be ‘organised crime of a very special type.’”³⁹

34 Getoš A. M. (2014), *Crime and Criminology in the Balkans. A Research Concept for Southeast Europe*, in «*Criminology in Europe*», vol. 13, *European Society of Criminology*; UNODC (2008), *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 8.

35 Ralph E. F. (2013, January 2), *Babies Wanted. A look at the 10 countries with the lowest fertility rates in the world*, Foreign Policy, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/01/02/babies-wanted/>.

36 Alvazzi del Frate A. and van Kesteren J. (2004), *Criminal Victimization in Urban Europe. Key Findings of the 2000 International Crime Victim Surveys*, UNICRI, p. 19.

37 Europol (2011), *OCTA 2011. EU Organised Crime Threat Assessment*, The Hague, European Police Office, p. 7.

38 Ivi, p. 9.

39 UNODC (2008), *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 43.

Nevertheless, whilst some of the socio-economic aspects of the region do not fuel conventional crime, others can lead to opposite effects. Particularly alarming are the high levels of youth unemployment, 2.5 times higher than the European average, and the absence of decent, legal, work opportunities which creates a pool of dissatisfied young people, who can be more easily attracted by illegal activities.⁴⁰

The social and economic insecurity which has seriously affected the region since the 1990s, and which has worsened with the recent economic crisis, can also fuel the recourse to organized criminal activities and groups. A special report commissioned by the UNDP divided the countries of the region into three groups according to social and economic terms.⁴¹ Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania lead the first one, in which the levels of social and economic insecurity are the highest; both Serbia and Montenegro had to deal with recovery after the conflicts and the communist period, adopting slow and hardly functioning economic reforms; Bulgaria, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Romania share the better results in socio-economic terms, even though their job markets and economic growth are far from being stable. Weak, unstable states are by definition unable to properly maintain the rule of law and assure strict policies, as a consequence tolerating illicit behaviors.

If the security coverage appears satisfactory in terms of number of police or prosecutors per citizen, which are similar if not higher than Western Europe states, inefficiency or incompetence combined with endemic corruption can negatively influence even a well-equipped system.

All these factors have to be taken into consideration when looking at the present situation of organized crime in the region.

Whilst not famous worldwide in comparison to the Russian or Italian Mafia, South-Eastern Europe became, indeed, “one of the most important epicentre of organized crime”.⁴² Thanks to increased trafficking through the Black Sea, a never-ending demand for illegal commodities in the European Union and the increase in number of illegal migrants coming from Greece, the region has recently seen a significant expansion in several criminal activities. Due to the fact that their measurement, which is an extremely complex process, is mainly the responsibility of the State, its lack of means or capacities, if not of willingness, has to be taken into account when looking at statistics and reports. However, despite the questionable reliability of data, the region is sadly famous worldwide for its role in the trafficking of drugs, mainly in heroin. Even though this is unquestionably the biggest source of illicit profits, the local organized crime groups did not renounce to engage in other activities, ranging from the smuggling of weapons, which mainly originates from the Western Balkans, or of other illicit goods, often with high import tax rates (cigarettes, alcohol, motor vehicles) or subject to national bans, to the trafficking of human beings. According to UNODC the latter activity, which includes the trafficking of migrants as well as of unaware victims, mainly women, brought “the most opprobrium for South East Europe”.⁴³

40 La Cava P., Lytle P., Kolev A., Clert C., (2004), *Young People in South-Eastern Europe: From Risk to Empowerment., Draft Report, The World Bank Group.*

41 UNDP (1999), *Human Security in South-East Europe, Special Report commissioned by UNDP.*

42 Storajova (2007), *Organized Crime in the Western Balkans, in «HUMSEC Journal» vol. 1, pp. 91-114.*

43 UNODC (2008), *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries, Vienna, UNODC, p. 14.*

The same agency issued a classification of the main threats affecting the region in terms of illegal activities, put in order of gravity. Crimes related to drug trafficking and production, from heroin and cocaine trafficking going through cannabis cultivation and opium poppy diversion, to the drug abuse itself, occupy the first positions, while organized crime and corruption close the list.⁴⁴

Whilst not included in this list, human trafficking has become an extremely worrying phenomenon, which more recently (mainly after 1989) began to affect the region. Among the biggest countries of origin for smuggling and human trafficking, Europol included two of the South-Eastern European countries, namely Bulgaria and Romania, while Albania is classified as “very high” in the rankings of countries of origin.⁴⁵ Although different forms of trafficking exist, sexual exploitation, by far the most analyzed and discussed form of trafficking, appears to be one of the main problem affecting the region: between 2003 and 2004, 85% of the victims assisted were women and girls trafficked for this purpose.⁴⁶

As South-Eastern Europe is the main geo-economic hub linking the European Union, the Middle East, Turkey and Russia, the expansion of organized crime activities should pose a serious concern to the whole Europe. Among others, in 2002, the UK warned the other European countries about the risks this situation could involve. According to David Blunkett, a former Labour Party Home Secretary, “Balkan crime gangs are more organised than the police”, referring in particular to the growing number of Albanians and former Yugoslavian citizens illegally acting in the country.⁴⁷ “The Balkan-based organised-crime groups have gone global, and now pose a bigger threat than ever to European law enforcement”, apprised ‘The Economist’.⁴⁸

Such international awareness and concern about organized crime in South-Eastern Europe appeared relatively recently, mainly during the 1990s. It was only after the end of the Cold War, when the traditional enemy to oppose disappeared, that the specter of criminality from Eastern Europe and from the former communist states, started to gain space in Western discourses, and to be looked at as a new enemy to combat. As a matter of fact, “when ‘organised crime’ replaced communism as the ‘threat’ against the western world, the Balkans began to be viewed as a source, transit and destination area for migrating ‘organised criminals.’”⁴⁹ The illegal markets which flourished in the region were generally unknown before 1989, suddenly obliging the West to deal with a new, unexpected reality, which was going to involve them directly.

To Henderson, the Western agenda shifted, at this point, from an imminent military threat coming from the East, to a security agenda which imposed the fighting of organized crime, the restriction of illegal migration and, increasingly, combating terrorism.⁵⁰

44 Baghdoyan S. (2003), *Drug Trafficking in South-Eastern Europe, 6th Workshop of the Study Group “Regional Stability in South East Europe” on “Crushing Crime in South East Europe: A Struggle of Domestic, Regional and European Dimensions”*, Vienna.

45 Europol (2009), *Europol Annual Report 2008, The Hague, Europol Police Office*; Lee M. (2011), *Trafficking and Global Crime Control*, London, SAGE Publications Ltd.

46 Surtees R. (2008), *Traffickers and Trafficking in Southern and Eastern Europe. Considering the Other Side of Human Trafficking*, in «*European Journal of Criminology*, vol. 5 no. 1, pp. 39-68.

47 BBC News (2002, November 11), *Uk warning over Balkan gangs*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2509811.stm>

48 T. J. (2011, July 4), *Organised crime in the Balkans. A lobster pot of troubles*, The Economist, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2011/06/organised-crime-balkans>.

49 Antonopoulos G. A. (2008) *The Balkans as a ‘laboratory (for the study) of illegal markets’: introduction to the special issue on ‘Illegal Markets in the Balkans’*, in «*Trends in Organized Crime*», vol. 11, pp. 315-325.

50 Henderson K. (2005), *Perceptions of Internal Security Issues in the New Member States*, in: Henderson K. (eds), *The*

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and with the opening of borders, the West started to face a huge increase in illegal trafficking and migration from all the Eastern States. Terrorism and drug trafficking were suddenly included as new threats, while corruption began to emerge as an element hindering the democratic transition of these countries. From this time onwards, it became clear that the main problem faced by the region concerned exactly organized (or disorganized) crime, despite its low vulnerability to conventional crime. Media, politicians and international organizations seem today well aware of such situation and of the negative potential it might pose in the near future. What is interesting to be noted, however, in the light of the analysis of the term previously carried out, is that the region is still definitely more often referred to as “Balkans” rather than “South-Eastern Europe” by authors who analyze organized crime, criminality and corruption, confirming the deeply rooted stereotype which links “the Balkans” with lawlessness and violence.

The Roots

A Remote History of Banditry

“Since the days of the Ottoman rulers, informal and illicit trade networks have paralleled legitimate commerce”⁵¹

Invasions, centuries of foreign rule, the rise and fall of empires, a complex ethnographic mosaic, and the intervention of the Western big powers offered a fertile ground to the explosion of violence and, as a consequence, to transnational organized crime. As a matter of fact, ancestors of the modern, globally interconnected groups of criminals can be identified long time before the creation of independent states, when all the countries of the region fell under foreign domination.

Hupchick pointed out that “banditry was endemic in the Balkans”; present since the Byzantine times, the various regional states preceding the Ottoman conquest and then the Ottoman Empire had to deal with this plague.⁵² This is not, however, a unique peculiarity of the Balkans. The Italian region of Sardinia, for instance, has a similar ancient history of banditry: while foreign dominations of Carthaginians, Arabs and Romans were following one another, brigands, hidden in the mountains, descended to the valleys only to conduct raids; kidnappings and requests of ransoms continued to upset the island long after Italian unification during the 1970s. Robin Hood, the English outlaw who “stole from the rich to give to the poor”, main character of ballads and movies, whose real identity is still a matter of discussion, became famous worldwide, while Juro Janosik, a semi-legendary bandit who fought against injustice and oppression between Poland, Hungary and, mainly, Slovakia, is considered the Robin Hood of Central-Eastern Europe and a national hero for the Slovaks. Banditry was not, thus, endemic only in the Balkans, but present, between reality and legend, in many countries and regions in the past, which did not mean that they were destined to an inescapable future of lawlessness.

The embryonic form of banditry spread in the region, however, has been fed by the alternation of rules and rulers and, whilst it did not have a tremendous impact in the history of the Ottoman Empire, it played a part in its destabilization, drawing a parallel with what happened centuries after during the Yugoslav wars. These ancient bandits can, to a certain ex-

51 Hozic A. A. (2004), *Between the Cracks: Balkan Cigarette Smuggling*, in «Problems of Post-Communism», vol. 51 no. 3, p. 36.

52 Hupchick D. P. (2004), *The Balkans: From Constantinople to Communism*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, p.178.

tent, represent a sort of ancestors of the smugglers who enriched themselves with the Yugoslav wars or of the modern drug dealers.

Called *haidukes* in Slavic language and *klephts* in Greek, the bandits were often local rebels who looted villages and highways; with the passing of time, without encountering many restrictions from the law, the looting expanded to marketplaces and cities.

Western agents sometimes recruited them for their military campaigns at the south of the Danube, during which they plundered the Ottomans' lines of communication and the depots of their supplies. Even though these operations seemed inspired mostly by their personal greed and self-interest, the brigands became protagonists of songs and legends, being then hailed as heroes by the future Balkan nationalists.

Some of the bandit leaders of the Balkan provinces who could rely on loyal armies became *ayans*, sort of local rulers who could act in a relative autonomy from the Ottoman rule.⁵³ Among those, Hupchick recounts the story of Pasvanoglu Osman Paşa, who controlled the north-west of Bulgaria, and posed a particular threat to the Empire because of its irregular army made of brigands, janissaries and former soldiers, motivated more by the prospect of looting than by territorial expansion.⁵⁴ Irregular combatants from Albania, Bosnia and Serbia, together with the *kircali*, nomadic mercenary bandits, poured out to the present Bulgaria to join this varied army.

After having conquered the city of Vidin, of which he became governor, Pasvanoglu managed to extend his territory to reach Belgrade in 1800, while his allies were conquering the rest of Serbia.

Paradoxically, many of the Ottoman soldiers who were sent to halt such territorial expansion, were bandits themselves, again motivated more by the looting than by a nationalist pride.

A similar situation arose in Serbia. Karadjordje, a Belgrade pig farmer with a past as a soldier in the Habsburg forces, who led the First Serbian Uprising of 1804 and defeated the Ottomans at Niš in 1805, and was celebrated as patriot, was also the leader of an army made of hundreds of small groups who burned and looted Turkish properties. These bandits were known as *beskućnici*, “the homeless”, as they did not have anything to lose but everything to gain. Battles were often viewed, in fact, as a way of getting richer, while military commanders had to face lack of motivation in fighting, indiscipline and even reluctance.⁵⁵

This reliance on bandits and widespread looting was not typical of the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire alone. When Istanbul decided to face the lawlessness which hindered transport and communications in Bulgaria and Rumelia created a sort of security system called the *armatalos*: local brigands suddenly abandoned the illegal activities in which they were involved for this legal job within the Empire. The fact that they were paid by the Ottomans to monitor roads and villages and by their inhabitants as a guarantee for protection, led to a “complex and corrupt network of patronage;” a system which laid the basis of the clientelism which still negatively affects today's Greece.⁵⁶

It is, thus, clear how the entire Ottoman Empire suffered from the plague of banditry to some degree. However, a large segment of these bandits, distributed among different zones

53 Anscombe F. F. (2006), *The Ottoman Balkans, 1750-1830*, Princetown, Markus Wiener Publishers, p. 96.

54 Hupchick D. P. (2004), *The Balkans: From Constantinople to Communism*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 180.

55 Glenny M. (1999), *The Balkans 1804-1999. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers* London, Granta Books, p. 12.

56 Ivi, p. 24.

of its territory, were ethnic Albanians, known as “Mountain Bandits”.⁵⁷ The number of these bandits grew exponentially during the 1770s and 1780s, reaching its peak at the end of the century. Reports were sent to Istanbul from any part of the Empire, denouncing looting and depredation. Once again, they seemed to have little in common with the ideal image of rebels who fight to liberate their own national state from the oppression of the foreigners, instead being generally motivated by the earning of profits. The gravity of the problem was accentuated by the fact that not only many of the brigands were Albanians, but so were many of the soldiers in charge of fighting against them, which entailed cases of cooperation among the opposite factions or defections.

The prevailing presence of Albanians among bandits can be explained by the severe conditions of their country: life in pre-modern, poor states which had a huge quantity of weapons available, made brigandage appear as a reasonable alternative.

With a high density of population allocated in a rugged mountainous territory made of few arable lands, afflicted by infectious diseases and by severe poverty, life in what is now Albania (and also part of Macedonia and Kosovo) was not easy. In addition to such harsh conditions, they had to face the growing power and greed of the *ayans*. When the army of the Ottoman Empire was involved in military campaigns against the Habsburgs or Russians, they assumed a greater power, which they often exploited breaking the law with impunity. When struggles between ambitious, competing *ayans* started, during the 1770s, many of the people inhabiting the area opted for emigration or embracing the arms.

Istanbul, lacking the economic and physical means to defeat the brigands, counted on the cooperation among the *ayans* of the different provinces to eradicate the phenomenon, a strategy which did not work as expected because of their fierce rivalry. Restrictions and then a complete ban on the emigration of Albanians was imposed, to, at least, limit the problem. Worried with immediate and more dangerous threats coming from outside the Empire, the Ottomans allowed the local *ayans* to progressively expand their territory, creating new internal borders and conflicts worsening the climate of insecurity.

It was already too late to intervene, as a situation of chaos and violence, symptomatic of tensions and dissatisfaction among the society, had arisen in several parts of the Balkan provinces; a situation which undoubtedly created favorable conditions for the rise in the number of bandit gangs.

In addition to this, distinct custom zones among the territories of the empire, different taxation and the fact that precious metals and other goods were prohibited to trade, offered to the same bandits the opportunity to start to establish illegal markets, which flourished from the sixteenth century onwards.

When Istanbul, under the pressure of both internal and external threats, after several years, managed to defeat the system of the *ayans* and their power, the lawlessness and chaos had already laid the foundation for the forthcoming revolts among the Ottoman rule, first of all among Serbs and Greeks; revolts which would lead to the necessary modernization and social-reform project of the Empire during the XIX century.

As already mentioned, the presence, and in certain cases, predominance of the brigands is not peculiar to the Balkan provinces under the Ottoman rule alone, from which, thus, Cro-

57 Anscombe F. F. (2006), *The Ottoman Balkans, 1750-1830*, Princetown, Markus Wiener Publishers, p. 88.

atia is to be excluded; similar situations can be found in many territories before the formation of independent, regulated states (Italy before its unification being a striking example).

However, whilst they played a minor role in the history of these lands during the XVI and XVII century, and not all the Balkan people were equally involved in this activity, a remote past of looting, depredations and guerrilla activity can be associated with the notorious violent Balkans, constituting an interesting antecedent for modern organized crime.

The glorification of thieves as national heroes and liberators or the simple fact that their activities were tolerated when not perceived as necessary, shows how the line between legality and illegality can be blurred, especially in certain historical periods, which can leave a profound mark on the subsequent construction of independent states.

Whilst this happened long before the formation of modern states and the construction of well-defined national identities, a similar situation will be envisaged centuries later, certainly entailing more dangerous and lasting consequences.

Contemporary History

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the demise of the major empires, from the Ottoman Empire, suffering from a long crisis, to the Habsburg and Russian ones, which equally and profoundly influenced the neighboring countries of South-Eastern Europe.

National movements arose throughout all states, while external influences started to significantly extend among these relatively backward areas.

From the end of the empires to the formation of truly independent states many territorial and political changes happened in the region; together with the growing economic and social modernization of the territories, an increased interest of the Western powers in their developments emerged. The Congress of Berlin was, in fact, mainly focused on South-Eastern Europe and the Treaty of Santo Stefano of 1878 introduced major changes in its territorial settlement, with Serbia, Romania and Montenegro gaining full independence, joining an already independent Greece since 1830.

The two Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 brought new territorial changes and local rivalries, reshaping the ethnographic structure of the region and forging the Western idea of a zone of endemic violence and brutality; an idea that was then confirmed by the event which triggered the First World War, which took place in the very heart of the region. The birth of Yugoslavia in 1918, under the name of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes until 1929, which included the modern Slovenia, part of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia, modified the geographical but also political composition of the area, bringing together again different people under the same law.

The destruction brought in the region, as all over the world, caused by the Second World War, and the fragmentation it imposed on the area, were followed by the birth of a socialist Yugoslavia.

The thirty-five years during which Josip Broz Tito was in power were relatively wealthy, liberal and characterized by a substantial peaceful coexistence among the different ethnic groups. Albania was absorbed in 1947 as its seventh republic, then following a personal path of totalitarianism and isolation, which made it welcoming the end of the Cold War “with the baggage of 45 years of the most repressive totalitarian regime in Europe”.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Romania and Bulgaria entered into a state of terror built by communist dictators, which inflicted considerable damages to their economic situations.

While there is an extensive literature covering the developments of organized crime during the Yugoslav wars and after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, little research has been conducted on its role during the times of its peaceful existence. To Glenny, however, its connections with politics in former Yugoslavia were undeniable, and stronger than in the other communist countries.⁵⁹ The strict control the communist regime exercised on the citizens resulted in a well-organized security system and in an efficient internal police in which criminals took an extensive part as informants or professionals: links between criminal groups and the security apparatus have been created and developed throughout all the history of the former Yugoslavia.⁶⁰ Young criminals were recruited to spy or sometimes kill, to blackmail, rob banks and traffic in women by a security sector which enjoyed a considerable autonomy, being almost exempt from the law.⁶¹ Moreover, the non-alignment of Tito’s Yugoslavia placed the country in a strategic position: in the middle between NATO members and the Warsaw Pact ones, across which its citizens could freely travel, smuggling became an easy and far-reaching activity.

In this way corruption and the engagement in illegal activities became the normality, while criminals and corrupted officials were enormously enriching themselves. Black markets were flourishing not only in the country but in all the communist states where the population was often dealing with harsh conditions, with the tacit approval of the party officials. Smuggling was, indeed, the only way to meet the needs of consumers which the official economy could not satisfy. As a consequence, the population turned out to be heavily dependent on a class of criminals, which will not only empower such individuals but also undermine the rule of law and foster tolerance for illicit activities.

However, the strict control exercised by the communist regime prevented the creation of a large-scale organized crime, which was, instead, free to expand in the liberal Western states.

Köppel and Székely highlight a fundamental difference in the nature of organized crime between liberal and communist and post-communist societies: while in the first organized crime acts as a private enterprise, earning its profits from the scarcity of illicit goods such as drugs or prostitution, in the latter ones it often rose within the government or party apparatus, taking advantage of the lax local control.⁶²

58 Trimcev E. (2003), *Organized Crime in Albania: An Unconventional Security Threat*, in «Connections: The Quarterly Journal», vol. 2 no. 2, pp. 61-68.

59 Glenny M. (2008), *Balkan Organised Crime*, in: Batt J. (eds.) *Is There an Albanian Question?*, Chaillot Paper, no. 107, European Union Institute for Security Studies, pp. 87-103.

60 Forte R. (eds.) (2013), *Organised Crime and the Fight Against Crime in the Western Balkans: a Comparison with the Italian Models and Practices. General overview and perspectives for the future*, Policy Paper, Sapucca.

61 Bovenkerk F. (2003), *Organised crime in the former Yugoslavia*, in: Siegel D., Bunt H., Zaitch D. (eds.), *Global Organized Crime: Trends and Developments*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, pp. 45-50.

62 Köppel T. and Székely A. (2002), *Transnational Organized Crime and Conflict in the Balkans*, in: Berdal M. and Serra-

During the 1980s the process of decentralization which was taking place in former Yugoslavia, fostered the enrichment of the criminal gangs and their links with the politics, while corruption and crime became more remarkable.⁶³ While communism was beginning to show its flaws, criminals were, instead, in a favorable position, ready to exploit the forthcoming opportunities arising from the economic liberalization.

The Serbian “assassination industry”, for instance, which was responsible, among other crimes, of the killing of the Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic in 2003, certainly existed and grew during the Yugoslav times and, having survived its collapse, was then exploited by the new Serbian political elite to obstruct attempts of institutional reforms.⁶⁴ The links established between politics and organized crime during the Yugoslav times rapidly grew after its disintegration.

In Romania, instead, official sources affirmed that organized crime was going to disappear since the rigorous regime established by Nicolae Ceaușescu, who has been in power for more than twenty years, eradicated its main cause, namely economic inequality.⁶⁵ According to different sources, nevertheless, crime was a serious and growing problem still in 1989, and was mainly caused exactly by the same strongly centralized economic policy that was considered a solution by the dictator.⁶⁶ The extremely high prices and economic shortages, indeed, led to the creation of black markets and to a widespread corruption.

To Han, moreover, before the collapse of communism, the main actor behind major crime operations was precisely the state.⁶⁷ The prostitution rings which will later bring enormous gains to Romanian organized crime, for instance, existed also before 1989, but they were supervised by the totalitarian regime.

The DS, the Bulgarian secret service similar to the Russian KGB, was, meanwhile, involved in different kinds of smuggling, from arms to drugs and technological goods. Taking advantage of the geographical position of the country and of its position of power within it, in the 1960s the DS held a monopoly on the smuggling of weapons toward Africa and the Middle East, and it has been a pioneer in the smuggling of heroin from Central Asia toward Western Europe. By strictly monitoring the borders and severely punishing unauthorized drugs or weapons smugglers, they ensured the economic monopoly on the smuggling until 1990.⁶⁸

Less is known about the connections between the Albanian secret police, the *Sigurimi*, and organized crime, since during the forty-one years in which Enver Hoxha transformed the country in “one of the most inflexible totalitarian edifices of the century” it has been

no M. (eds.), *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienne, pp. 129-139.

63 Brady S. (2012), *Organised crime in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A silent war fought by an ambush of toothless tigers or a war not yet fought?*, *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project*.

64 Fatić A (2003), *Serbian Prime Minister Assassinated: Organised Crime Proclaimed the Prime Security Threat*, in «*South-East Europe Review*», vol. 5 no.4, pp.7-15.

65 Winslow R. (nd), *Crime and Society. A Comparative Criminology Tour of the World*, San Diego State University, <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/rwinslow/europe/romania.html>.

66 Ibidem.

67 Han A. (2010), *Political Regime and Organised Crime in Romania*, in: Stoychev S. P. (eds.), *Organised Crime and the Balkan Political Context*, Sofia, Risk Monitor Foundation, pp. 84-97.

68 Glenny M. (2008), *Balkan Organised Crime*, in: Batt J. (eds.) *Is There an Albanian Question?*, *Chaillot Paper*, no. 107, European Union Institute for Security Studies, pp. 87-103.

mostly engaged in the fighting against internal dissidents.⁶⁹ Even though few information on organized crime circulated during and after almost fifty years of isolation, there are evidences that this activity existed also during the communist times. The regime, indeed, seemed to tolerate certain criminal activities, and mainly those that provided additional economic funds to the state, meet the consumers' needs which the official economy could not fulfil, or even damage capitalist societies.⁷⁰ Moreover, intelligence reports discovered secret arrangements between the Albanian communist state and Italian criminal organizations for the smuggling of cigarettes to Italy.⁷¹ This agreement, according to which Italian criminals were allowed to use routes through the Adriatic Sea to escape and Albanian airports to store smuggled cigarettes, was concluded precisely by the *Sigurimi* agents and the Italian mafia, and signed by Enver Hoxha.

Despite the fact that few information which could discredit the communist regimes circulated at that time, and that no extensive research has been conducted on the developments of organized crime under the (more or less) totalitarian regimes of South-Eastern Europe, it seems clear that it existed and actively worked, whilst not enjoying a complete freedom.

This extremely short historical background which covers centuries of history aims at showing how the continuous changes in rulers and rules did not lay the foundation for a stable legal environment and a cohesive civil society in a region which faced banditry and looting since the Ottoman times.

Its geographical position, which made it a transit zone between two big empires at first, and rich big powers, later, together with harsh local geographical and economic conditions, led to an increased role performed by local groups in the smuggling of illicit goods or in the looting of the major routes.

Years of communism and totalitarian dictatorships created conditions of economic backwardness and poverty which would be soon exploited by the criminal organizations, while the security apparatus was taking advantage of its position of superiority to earn illicit profits, laying the foundations for a deeply corrupt system.

Such a turbulent history, including continuing changes in borders, significant external influences and different (more or less oppressing) political regimes, undoubtedly made the creation of a united, peaceful society, willing to cooperate to each other much harder.

Whilst at the core of the Western interests during certain phases of its history, it was at the end of the last century that the attention of the world's media was attracted by the region. The wars which broke out in Slovenia first, in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina later, and in Kosovo and in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia more recently, obliged politicians and academics to conduct a deeper analysis on the region, questioning some choices of the past. What has mostly been neglected, and only recently started to gain greater attention, is the opportunities that wars and external interventions opened up to the development of organized crime in the whole region.

69 Glenny M. (1999), *The Balkans 1804-1999. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*, London, Granta Books, p. 560.

70 Arsovska J. (2010), *Organised Crime and the Balkan Political Context: the Case of Albania*, in: Stoychev S. P. (eds.), *Organised Crime and the Balkan Political Context*, Sofia, Risk Monitor Foundation, pp. 8-35.

71 Ivi.

The Yugoslav Wars

“The Balkans are usually reported to the outside world only in time of terror and trouble; the rest of the time they are scornfully ignored”⁷²

At the center of reports, documentaries, articles, the infamous wars which involved the Western Balkans in the 1990s have been analyzed from different points of view.

To Hajdinjak, three explanations of the principal causes which led to the wars have, over time, gained more ground than others.⁷³ Among the most renowned one, ancient ethnic hatreds among the Yugoslav constituent nations have been highlighted. The propaganda for the war in Serbia and Croatia made extensive reference to this element, which seems, nevertheless, to be oversimplifying the reasons behind the eruption of a conflict. In addition to this, Jović made clear that the hatred which is often identified as triggering cause of the wars was not that ancient.⁷⁴ To him, it exploded right during the wars or slightly before them, when the political leaders were able to transform the dissatisfaction of the population with the system, into rage against the other ethnic groups, regarded as responsible for the disintegration which was taking place. This not so ancient hatred, thus, provided an alibi for the political elites, powerless in front of the natural explosion of a long repressed hatred.

A second line of thought suggests that the main responsables for the dissolution of Yugoslavia have been the political elites of the different nations, who appealed to nationalist feelings to justify their simple greed for an autonomous power. Thanks to an efficient propaganda which exploited the power of media, they persuaded the population that a war was the necessary means to reach a necessary independence. The weakness of this theory lies in the excessive power given to the propaganda machine, opposed to an overwhelming passiveness attributed to the Yugoslav citizens.

The last theory considers the failure of the socialist regime of Yugoslavia in economic, political and social terms as the basic condition for its break up. Since the economic situation was endlessly worsening, unemployment was raising, and corruption was evident, the dissatisfied population was, at that point, willing to change the system with any means. This situation, added to the quarrels between the federal government and the nationalist leaders, and their willingness to fiercely defending every small part of their territory and properties, fostered ethnic hatred and led to war.

Whichever explanation is taken as the most satisfactory, focusing on ethnic hatreds, on the failure of the Yugoslav experiment or on the role of the political elites, they all ignored

72 Geshkoff T. I. (1940), *Balkan Union: A Road to Peace in Southeastern Europe*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. xi.

73 Hajdinjak M. (2004), *The Root Cause of Instability in the Balkans: Ethnic Hatred or Trans-Border Crime?*, Sofia, International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR).

74 Jović D. (2009), *Yugoslavia. A State that Withered Away*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press.

how the competing sides financed a war which lasted several years. Money and resources can be, indeed, far more important than hatred and motivations to sustain a war.

In addition to this, the idea that the Yugoslav citizens were willing to go to war pushed by hatred fostered the misconception that they were also ready to fight to defend their ideas. The Serbian side provides a notable example: despite being the most organized and motivated one, half of them refused to fight.⁷⁵ Their reluctance to fight obliged politicians to resort to thugs and paramilitaries; a solution which was then adopted also by the other sides which, facing few alternatives, all relied on irregular soldiers.

The wars were, thus, concretely fought not by devoted nationalists, nor by normal citizens filled with hatred, but by criminals or released prisoners who were hired to undertake this task. Many criminals who had migrated to Western Europe voluntarily returned home at the beginning of the 1990s to exploit the opportunities provided by the war. Their participation entangled an escalation of violence including indiscriminate killings, rape, looting and destruction, which made Hajdinjak assume that, rather than a large-scale, incessant ethnic war, the war was more a “criminal rampage of no more than 66.000 thugs”.⁷⁶

Storajova argued that the very same origin of organized crime in the region has to be linked to the Yugoslav wars. According to her, similar to Russian organized crime which emerged when the Soviet Union collapsed, South-Eastern Europe saw the growing of the phenomenon since the end of the twentieth century and the break-up of Yugoslavia. It is acknowledged that wars, with the destruction they bring about, the difficult post-conflict reconstruction and the weakness of the restored states, create economic, political and sociological conditions which can be easily exploited by criminal groups.

Since modern times, most of the wars fought worldwide are intrastate war. To Andreas, this entails that most of these wars share a criminalized component, made up of smuggling activities and criminal actors. Without the possibility of counting on trained, well-equipped armies, and with limited financial resources, often coming from external donors, intrastate combatants often rely on looting, on diaspora remittances, on the smuggling of weapons and illegal goods, or on making profits on humanitarian aids.⁷⁷ If such conditions can be extended to different conflicts arising in different parts of the world, peculiar elements made the situation worst in the South-Eastern European region. As a matter of fact, without taking into consideration the war which erupted in Slovenia, as it lasted only ten days, the Croatian and Bosnian wars, and the later conflict in Kosovo, saw the opposition of rather unbalanced forces, which made the employment of such methods easier. The economic blockades imposed by the international community with the intent of damaging the most powerful and culpable side, namely the Serbian one, led, instead, to the opposite effect of creating parallel illegal smuggling channels and markets. Not only external circumstances gave a boost to the growth of organized crime, but also the local political elites, who

75 Mueller J. (2000), *The Banality of Ethnic War*, in «*International Security*», vol. 25 no. 1, pp. 42-70.

76 Hajdinjak M., (2004), *The Root Cause of Instability in the Balkans: Ethnic Hatred or Trans-Border Crime?*, Sofia, *International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR)*, p. 6.

77 Andreas P. (2004), *The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia*, in «*International Studies Quarterly*», vol. 48 no. 1, pp. 29-51

relied on criminals in their struggles for the formation of national states and the creation of a strong national identity as guarantee for their survival.

A peculiarity of the type of organized crime which emerged in the region during the wars concerns the fact that its groups did not gather according to a strict ethnic affiliation, but closely cooperated among each other, questioning again the ethnic hatred explanations. The hatred and nationalism which were so bloodily opposing different ethnic groups who were before peacefully living together, indeed, did not exert any influence in the hidden world of organized crime. Such prolific inter-ethnic illegal collaboration involved not only the belligerent sides, but extended throughout the region, thanks to the active participation of the neighboring countries. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Romania and Bulgaria constituted, in Hajdinjak words, an “outer ring”, which performed the role of mediator in an international system of smuggling.⁷⁸ These countries then became epicenters of organized crime of their own, stimulated by the closeness of the war but also by the economic and political transition they went through.

These criminal activities and smuggling channels became fundamental for the continuation of the war and for the survival of the population to such an extent that eradicating them after its end to restore a proper legal environment was not only extremely hard but not even perceived as totally necessary. Their ramifications for the whole territory of the region and the cooperation among different ethnic groups were so strong that their consequences are still being felt today, not only by the region, but by the entire Europe.

The Bosnian War

The war which erupted in Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 provides the most striking example of how a war and international interventions can foster the growth of organized crime before, during and after its end.

The ethnic cleansing, the high number of casualties, the investigation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the massive intervention of the United Nations and the humanitarian assistance projects made this civil war the focus of a huge number of studies and debates. Especially in the past, they were mainly based on the ethnic hatred among the three different groups inhabiting the country (Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, or Bosnian Muslims) as explanation for its origins. Among others, Ignatieff stressed the influence of nationalism,⁷⁹ Kaplan strongly supported the already mentioned idea of “ancient ethnic hatreds”,⁸⁰ and Kaufman deepened this concept finding its roots in

78 Hajdinjak M. (2002), *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy, p. 16.

79 Ignatieff M. (1995), *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

80 Kaplan R. D. (1993), *Balkan Ghosts. A Journey Through History*, New York, St. Martin's Press.

myths and symbols.⁸¹ The strong focus on ethnicity when analyzing this war is showed by the fact that the term “ethnic cleansing” became popular exactly after it. Nevertheless, all these explanations took for granted how the different factions were concretely able to wage the war, how civilians survived the economic difficulties and why the post-war reconstruction was so enmeshed with corruption and criminality. Ethno-political explanations have, indeed, often ignored the critical role that political elites, organized crime groups and corrupt state officials played in this context. On the contrary, the analysis of the “clandestine political economy of the war” throws light on fundamental aspects of this conflict.⁸² Criminal actors not only have largely profited from a situation of chaos, but they have also played a non-negligible part in the outbreak, continuation and end of the Bosnian conflict.

The Beginning of the War

After the recognition by the European Union of the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, one of the bloodiest conflict of the region erupted on the 6th of April 1992, opposing Bosnian-Serbs with Bosnian-Croats and Bosnian-Muslims, in an occasional alliance of convenience.

The international community imposed on the whole region an international arms embargo, with the aim of avoiding more bloodshed, in September 1991. The immediate consequence of this action has been, instead, the unwanted preservation of the military advantage of the Bosnian Serbs. Indeed, they could count in part on the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA), mainly composed of Serbs, and on paramilitary units made up of criminal combatants, who were covertly armed from Belgrade, geographically better positioned to access arms and other supplies. On the other side, the Bosnian government, financially weak and geographically distant from the international black markets, was completely unprepared for sustaining a war.

The unevenness in access to weapons explains the willingness of the Serbs to immediately start the war, as well as their initial rapid and easy victories, which made Nikola Koljevic, a member of their leadership, estimate that the conflict would last ten days.⁸³ The fact that things went in a very different manner is to be attributed to the sudden organization of the Bosnians’ own clandestine networks and to their greater access to black markets. Financial funds started to flock into the country, mainly from the Bosnian diaspora and from Middle East countries, sensitive to the Muslim question, while criminal leaders of the three opposing ethnic groups freely met in “business areas” to exchange oil, weapons and various commodities. Paradoxically, Bosnian Serbs sold to the army of Bosnia many of the weapons which have then been employed to kill them.

81 Kaufman S. J. (2001), *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press. Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press.

82 Andreas P. (2004), *The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia*, in «International Studies Quarterly», vol. 48 no. 1, pp. 29– 51.

83 Burg, S. L. and. Shoup P. S. (1999), *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*, Armonk, New York, M. E. Sharpe.

Consciously or not, UN peacekeepers often played a part in this system: UNPROFOR troops were sometimes unwittingly carrying gunpowder instead of oxygen to local hospitals, while Ukrainian troops mainly dealt with the smuggling of petrol, providing a fundamental source of fuel to Sarajevo.⁸⁴

To Andreas their business was so successful that some of them came back to the country after the end of the war to continue the smuggling.⁸⁵

The creation of smuggling channels provides an explanation for the survival of the Bosnian population during the Sarajevo siege, which, lasting from the 6th of April 1992 to the 29th of February 1996, is the longest in modern history.⁸⁶ The humanitarian efforts, too little to sustain the entire population for such a long period, were soon balanced with the creation of black markets crossing the front-lines, which met the basic demands of the besieged. The tunnel which was built in 1993 under the airport of Sarajevo allowed an average of 4.000 people and 20 tons of material to reach the city every day.⁸⁷

Criminal gangs, together with police forces, soon started to be recruited as combatants by the Bosnian government, substantially strengthening the Bosnian side. The distinction between war criminals and national heroes became blurred to the point that “Juka” (Jusufo Prazina), a thief and racketeer, who organized a paramilitary unit called “the Wolves” responsible for looting, robbing and for other criminal activities, became a national hero and the subject of popular songs. “Juka” was even awarded Commander of the Special Forces of the Reserve Brigade of the Ministry of the Interior and Commander of the Special Units of the Army by the government of Bosnia. Similarly, Ismet Bajramović, known as “Ćelo”, an outlaw who spent time in prison for rape, managed a huge segment of the black market of food, alcohol and weapons, while his gang controlled the majority of coffee shops and clubs which reopened after the war, occupied, until 1993, a prominent position in the Bosnian military police. Defined by ‘The New York Times’ as “the Godfather of Sarajevo”, he received by doctors, bodyguards and officials during his stay at the hospital after he was shot, the kind of attention normally granted to a prominent politician.⁸⁸

As already stated, the Serbian side made extensive use of irregular combatants since the very beginning of the war. Among the most interesting examples there is a group of paramilitaries called *Vikendasi*, “warriors of the weekend”, as they left Serbia every Friday to conduct raids in the Bosnian territory, coming back on Sunday and spending the rest of the week selling the looted goods.

The fact that the involvement in the fight was often motivated more by the huge economic gains rather than by nationalist feelings is again showed by the words of a

84 Cockayne J. and Lupel A. (eds.) (2011), *Peace Operations and Organized Crime: Enemies Or Allies?*, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, p. 36.

85 Andreas P. (2004), *The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia*, in «International Studies Quarterly», vol. 48 no. 1, p. 38.

86 Andreas P. (2008), *Blue Helmets and Black Markets. The Business of Survival in the Siege of Sarajevo*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, p. 158.

87 Andreas P. (2004), *The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia*, in «International Studies Quarterly», vol. 48 no. 1, p. 39.

88 Burns J. F. (1993, October 4), *Gangs in Sarajevo Worry Diplomats*, *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/04/world/gangs-in-sarajevo-worry-diplomats.html>.

journalist of *Vreme* who characterized the war in Bosnia as an “opportunity for low-risk robbery in patriotic costume”.⁸⁹

Looting, smuggling, robberies became, thus, an integral part of the war, which provided sustenance not only to the civilian population but to the paramilitaries and criminals as well, who greatly enriched themselves.

The End of the War and its Aftermath

“War can be a highly effective mechanism for criminalized social advancement”⁹⁰

Whilst the increased diplomatic pressure, especially from the United States, and the NATO air strikes have been fundamental in ending the war, according to Martin Špegelj, a retired Croatian army general, “what was finally decisive in ending the war was the emergence, to general astonishment, of a strong army of Bosnia-Herzegovina”.⁹¹ The access of the Bosnian combatants to weapons and funds through smuggling channels and illegal markets reduced the Serbian military advantage to such an extent that they were soon more disposed to negotiate than to keep on fighting.

However, if the Dayton Agreement, signed on the 21st of November 1995, marked the end of the war, it did not produce the same effect on organized crime. The considerable decentralization that was imposed on the country, although a solution for its political administration, and the fragmentation of society which followed, turned out to be, on the contrary, an advantage for the criminal groups, who continued to operate on an ethnic basis.

The end of the war, thus, did not mean the end of the criminal activities: while the international community was focused on restoring a stable peace and prosecuting war criminals, organized crime continued undisturbed its expansion.

The Arizona market provides a concrete example of this situation. At the beginning a zone of separation between Serbs, Croats and Muslims established by NATO, it was later provided with 40,000 dollars from the Pentagon to promote local entrepreneurship, becoming, instead, a huge illegal market, where drugs, guns, stolen cars and even prostitutes could be found.⁹²

The rich international actors who flocked into the country after the end of the war, from soldiers to trainers and legal advisers, to private contractors, gave another fundamental boost to organized crime. As a matter of fact, brothels flourished all over Bosnia and Herzegovina to

89 Komlenovic U. (1997), *State and Mafia in Yugoslavia*, in «East European Constitutional Review», vol. 6 no. 4, pp. 70–73.

90 Andreas P. (2004), *The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia*, in «International Studies Quarterly», vol. 48 no. 1, p. 49.

91 Ivi, p. 41.

92 Haynes D. F. (2010), *Lessons From Bosnia's Arizona Market: Harm to Women in a Neoliberalized Postconflict Reconstruction Process*, in «University of Pennsylvania Law Review», vol. 158 no. 6, pp. 1779-1829.

satisfy the sexual demands of the foreigners, and mainly of soldiers from the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia (SFOR), while an increased number of women started to be trafficked into the country.⁹³ Despite a lack of objective data, this situation was relatively known at the time, and sufficiently serious to the point that, to the UN, “peacekeepers have come to be seen as part of the problem in trafficking, rather than part of the solution”.⁹⁴ It was only when the soldiers started to be repatriated, because the mission was over or because of the embarrassment arisen when accusations of sex-trafficking related crimes came to the surface, that both the rate of sex trafficking and the number of brothels started to decline.

Even the introduction into the country of large amounts of money with the aim of helping its reconstruction, offered an opportunity for the enrichment of criminals. The humanitarian aid which passed unmonitored through its borders, indeed, was often taxed or plundered, mainly by Croatian criminals, who controlled the routes linking western Bosnia to its central and eastern part, generating an important source of income.⁹⁵

Such growth of criminality and enrichment of criminals left profound consequences on the social fabric of the country, although these elements have often been neglected. In Sarajevo a complete reversal of the social structure took place: as many of the most educated citizens went abroad during the war, enriched criminals, strongly tied to government members and nationalist parties, experienced an upward mobility, while the impoverished pre-war elites who remained in the city refused to get connected with nationalist causes. The post-war reconstruction was, thus, so deeply enmeshed with criminality and corruption that “a symbiosis emerged between the criminalised political economy and political elites”, hindering the proper implementation of the rule of law.⁹⁶ The elite who remained in power for almost the whole decade, and who often accepted bribes paid by criminals, did not even take into account the possibility of implementing measures to discourage criminality. Thanks to a general amnesty, war profiteers and local criminals were able to avoid prosecution, keeping on normally living their lives.

Consequently, as stated by the U.N. Special representative to Bosnia, “wartime underground networks have turned into political criminal networks involved in massive smuggling, tax evasion, and trafficking in women and stolen cars”.⁹⁷

The neglecting of the growth of organized crime in the country, not only by the local, biased, politicians, but also by the international community led to extremely damaging consequences in the near and distant future. In 2003, eight years after the war, half of Bosnia’s economy was based on the black economy.⁹⁸ The trafficking routes used during the war considerably expanded after it, as did the profits. As a transit country for the smuggling

93 Mendelson S. E., (2005), *Barracks and Brothels. Peacekeepers and Human Trafficking in the Balkans*, Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, p. 10.

94 United Nations (2004), *Human Trafficking and United Nations Peacekeeping*, UN DPKO Policy Paper, p.5.

95 Andreas P. (2009), *Symbiosis Between Peace Operations and Illicit Business in Bosnia*, in «International Peacekeeping», vol. 16 no. 1, pp. 33-46.

96 Brady S. (2012), *Organised crime in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A silent war fought by an ambush of toothless tigers or a war not yet fought?*, *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project*, p. 16.

97 United States General Accounting Office (2000), *Bosnia Peace Operation: Crime and Corruption Threaten Successful Implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement*, Washington D.C., GAO, p. 13.

98 Andreas P. (2005), *Criminalizing Consequences of Sanctions: Embargo Busting and Its Legacy*, in «International Studies Quarterly», vol. 49 no. 2, pp. 335-360.

of cigarettes, alcohol and petroleum products, Bosnia and Herzegovina became famous for the selling of stolen cars as well.⁹⁹ The extortion of refugees which took place during the war, left a legacy then exploited by different kinds of human smuggling. The trade in women for sexual exploitation and in illegal migrants, in which the police often took part by giving false documents to the traffickers, suddenly burst on the scene, generating major profits.¹⁰⁰ In addition to the smuggling of cigarettes and the transiting of drugs, which remain huge problems, corruption and money laundering, the country became also an important point for illegal entries into the European Union, especially for people coming from the Middle East.¹⁰¹

Thanks to the equal participation of the three ethnic groups inhabiting Bosnia and Herzegovina, the integration never fully achieved by the civil society and the political elite of the country has never been a problem in its criminal underworld. Indeed, the political leaders of the three ethnic groups are still struggling to adopt common strategies for the country, showed by political infightings and the slowness (or deadlock) of the political process which led thousands of people to gather around the streets protesting against the mismanagement of a corrupted country, while parents have still to choose for their children whether to let them study in Serbian, Bosnian or Croatian language, which entails a relatively different interpretation of historical events and religious precepts. Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian criminals, instead, have never encountered the same problem in living together: despite the ethnic differences, organized crime groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina (but also in all the Western Balkans), are “multiethnic, cross-border and well-integrated” and are peacefully and successfully continuing working together.¹⁰²

The Rest of the Region

*“The most striking phenomenon about organised crime in the Balkans is the way in which it pervades the entire region”*¹⁰³

The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina is particularly significant because it shows how, by ignoring the presence of organized crime during the war, its origins, developments and

99 Donais, T. (2003), *The political economy of stalemate: OC, corruption and economic deformation in post-Dayton Bosnia*, in «Conflict, Security & Development», vol. 3 no. 3, pp. 359-382.

100 Lee M. (2011), *Trafficking and Global Crime Control*, London, SAGE Publications Ltd., p. 97.

101 Andreas P. (2004), *The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia*, in «International Studies Quarterly», vol. 48 no. 1.

102 Anastasijevic D. (2006), *Organized Crime in the Western Balkans*, Paper presented at the First Annual Conference on Human Security, Terrorism and Organized Crime in the Western Balkan Region, organized by the HUMSEC project in Ljubljana, 23-25 November 2006.

103 Glenny M. (2008), *Balkan Organised Crime*, in: Batt J. (eds.) *Is There an Albanian Question?*, Chaillot Paper, no. 107, European Union Institute for Security Studies, p. 88.

ending cannot be properly understood, nor can the predominant role it played during the post-war reconstruction, even thanks to the unexpected, often accidental, collaboration of international actors. As it has been a long conflict, characterized by instances of atrocious violence and by the continuation of the illegal activities through legal means after its end, the correlation between war and organized crime is particularly evident in the country.

Nevertheless, analogous conditions and developments can be found in other countries of the region, facilitated by the geographical proximity to war zones, by similar historical patterns and strong criminal connections.

The dissolution of Yugoslavia, the wars of the beginning of the 1990s and the later conflicts in Kosovo and Macedonia, the international military interventions and the sanctions, played an undeniable role in the blooming of organized crime of such a strong type that continued to affect the region even during the years which followed.

Croatia

Although part of this turbulent area and also involved in a war lasting between 1991 and 1995, organized crime did not reach the level of the other countries in Croatia, mainly thanks to an appropriate legal response implemented at the turn of the years 2000s.¹⁰⁴ The chaos of the post-war context has been, however, widely exploited by criminal groups, involved mainly in the trafficking of weapons, cigarettes, petrol and stolen vehicles. Croatian mafia was born precisely during the 1990s, following the demise of the communist regime.¹⁰⁵

The embargo on weapons supplies and military equipment which was imposed on the former Yugoslavia in September 1991, while not significantly affecting Serbia, as already mentioned, dealt a heavy blow on the defensive resources of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a consequence, both countries started immediately to look at the international black markets for their supply of weapons. Argentina, South-Africa and the former countries of the Warsaw Pact provided them in large quantities not only to these countries, but also to Serbia in the later phases of the war.¹⁰⁶ However, thanks to a favorable geographic position, with access to the sea and to the military stockpiles of its non-belligerent neighbors, and a widespread diaspora community, Croatia was much more rapid and successful in its arming effort than Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Once the war was over, the same weapons were smuggled again to satisfy other demands, reaching, for instance, the Kosovo Liberation Army, through ethnic Albanian groups.¹⁰⁷

104 Savona E. U. and Curtol F. (2004), *The Contribution of Data Exchange Systems to the Fight against Organized Crime in the SEE Countries. Final Report for the Office of the Special Coordinator of the Stability pact for SEE*, Transcrime.

105 Dolezal D. (2010), *Organised Crime and Corruption in Croatia – A Criminological View*, in: Stoychev S. P. (eds.), *Organised Crime and the Balkan Political Context*, Sofia, Risk Monitor Foundation, pp. 59-70.

106 Anastasijevic, D. (2006), *Organized Crime in the Western Balkans*, Paper presented at the First Annual Conference on Human Security, Terrorism and Organized Crime on the Western Balkan Region, organized by the HUMSEC project in Ljubljana, 23-25 November 2006.

107 Köppel T. and Székely A. (2002), *Transnational Organized Crime and Conflict in the Balkans*, in: Berdal M. and Serrano M. (eds.), *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienne, pp. 129-139.

Between 1993 and 1995, weapons for 308 million dollars were imported into the country, thanks to the collaboration of the Argentinian President Menem who allegedly violated the arms embargo.¹⁰⁸ To Judah, the Croats were more interested in enriching their country, or, better, themselves, than in liberating it, to the point that they were often trading with their principal enemies, the Serbs.¹⁰⁹ As a matter of fact, during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croats were buying from them weapons in exchange for oil. The oil smuggling was lucrative to such an extent that Silber and Little explained the conflict erupted in 1992 between Croats and Muslim in Prozor, in the hearth of Bosnia, as motivated by the attempt by two criminal gangs belonging to these groups of seizing the oil monopoly.¹¹⁰ The clash, generally considered again as an ethnic dispute, shows, instead, how economic interests often prevailed on ethnic belongings.

Whilst today the situation of organized crime in the country is relatively under control, and one of the weakest when compared to others, during and after the war criminal activities knew their best moments. As in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the post-conflict government was deeply linked with former criminals, sometimes confused, once again, with national heroes. In addition to this, the new members of the government were, for the most part, former members of the communist party. The change in political regime did not involve, thus, a renewal in the political elite, which remained in power during the following years while corruption and nepotism dominated.

After the death of the President Tudjman, however, the government finally started to engage more seriously in the fight against the growing corruption and organized crime, and the programs implemented turned out to be much more successful in Croatia than in many other countries, as showed by its recent accession to the European Union.

Serbia and Montenegro

As already demonstrated, international interventions played a fairly significant part in the development of trans-border crime, and Serbia and Montenegro, the two most affected countries, provide a striking example. As a matter of fact, in May 1992, broad financial and political sanctions were imposed on the two countries by the UN Security Council.

If, to Comras, they represent one of the rare cases of economic sanctions which properly worked, as they played a fundamental part in the signing of the Dayton Agreement, to Glennly the same sanctions have been a catastrophe for all the countries of the region, leading to the creation of a huge “pan-Balkan mafia”.¹¹¹

108 Hajdinjak M. (2002), *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy.

109 Judah T. (2000), *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

110 Silber L. and Little A. (1996), *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, New York, Penguin.

111 Comras V. D. (2011), *Pressuring Milosevic: Financial Pressure against Serbia and Montenegro, 1992-1995*, in: Asher D.

Their immediate consequences concerned the impoverishment of an already suffering population and the progressive decline of the economies, while at the same time fostering the formation of an illegal chain of smuggling which brought immense profits to the criminal groups.

If Serbia and Montenegro could count on a sufficient reserve of food and weapons at least during the first years after the lifting of sanctions, they notably lacked oil, essential to sustain the war machine. The Serbian State Security Service (SDB), successor of the Yugoslav security service, did not wait too long before establishing smuggling channels for its refueling. Due to the large amount of oil needed, the channels and the criminal groups involved were soon diversified: one running through the Skadar Lake, between Montenegro and Albania, managed by the Montenegrin mafia, another saw the collaboration of members of the SDB with criminal gangs from Macedonia, Bulgaria and Romania, but the most trodden channel, which involved the transportation of oil through the Danube and Black Sea, was managed by Serbian state officials alone.¹¹²

While small-scale smuggling and grey markets were tolerated by the state, large-scale smuggling, such as the mentioned smuggling of oil or the smuggling of cigarettes and drugs, was strictly controlled by state officials or by criminals closely linked to the regime.¹¹³

Such involvement of the political elites in illicit activities necessary to continue the war left a profound mark in the social pyramid of Serbia as well, influencing the future political developments of the country and definitely not laying the bases for a fully democratic government. Even for a very short period, Zeljko Raznatovic, more known as Arkan, was a deputy in the Serbian Parliament in 1992, and he ran in the parliamentary elections of 1994, then abandoning politics to buy a soccer club. Leader of the “Tigers”, a paramilitary unit that took a leading role in the looting and ethnic cleansing campaigns in Bosnia and which was, according to the UN, armed and supported by the JNA, he was a bank robber known also in Western Europe, who enormously enriched himself on the black market of Belgrade.¹¹⁴ Wanted by the Interpol, he was then killed in 2000, probably for criminal motives, thus having never been judged by the International Court of Justice.

Montenegro, politically and economically heavily dependent on Serbia, became soon his “little brother in crime”.¹¹⁵ While its government fruitfully collaborated with the Serbian authorities in the smuggling of oil and, later, weapons, the country became particularly famous for its smuggling in cigarettes. This activity became prolific to such an extent that, according to Italian magistrates, fifty per cent of the gross domestic product of the country was financed through it.¹¹⁶

L., Comras V. D. and Cronin P. M., *Pressure: Coercive Economic Statecraft and U.S. National Security*, Washington D.C., Center for a New American Security, pp. 55-76; Glenn M. (2008), *Mc Mafia. Crime Without Frontiers*, London, The Bodley Head, p. 43.

112 Hajdinjak M. (2002), *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy.

113 Nenadic N. (2010), *Constitutional Systems, Governments and Key Developments in Serbia 1980-2010*, in: Stoychev S. P. (eds.), *Organised Crime and the Balkan Political Context*, Sofia, Risk Monitor Foundation, pp. 98-112.

114 United Nations Security Council (1994), *Final Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992)*, UN.

115 Köppel T. and Székely A. (2002), *Transnational Organized Crime and Conflict in the Balkans*, in: Berdal M. and Serrano M. (eds.), *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienne, p. 133.

116 Ibidem.

Behind this “heaven for illicit trafficking...a place where authorities guaranteed the passage of illicitly traded goods”, investigations found the figure of Milo Djukanovic, who served as prime minister or president of the country from 1991 to 2010.¹¹⁷ Despite the accusations, however, the most famous Montenegrin politician explained the smuggling as an activity of the past, necessary to earn money at the times of the sanctions. At that time, indeed, Montenegro became an important point for the smuggling of cigarettes primarily towards Italy, where it encountered the prompt collaboration of Italian criminal groups, and, later, toward the whole European Union.

Long before its independence in 2006, it became a transit zone also for the smuggling of heroin and cocaine, while human trafficking had just started to make inroads into the country.¹¹⁸

It is no surprise that, from this moment onward, the European Union started to consider Serbia, Montenegro, and more generally the Western Balkans as “an organized crime gateway to Europe”.¹¹⁹

Albania and Kosovo

The growth and developments of organized crime in Albania and Kosovo is more linked to the respective history of the countries, because of geographic closeness and the presence of minorities, than to the vicissitudes of the former Yugoslavia.

As far as Albania is concerned, smuggling channels have been established at the beginning by agents of *Sigurimi*, the Albanian security police forces, as already mentioned. Its abolition in 1991 led many of the former agents who lost their jobs to turn to organized criminal activities, while homicides, robberies and in general violent crimes increased disproportionately in the country.¹²⁰ Oil was smuggled in the same period mainly to Montenegro not only by the *Sigurimi* agents but also by normal citizens who used any means for its transportation.

In 1994 the smuggling reached its record, as a big channel running from Durres through Shkoder to Podgorica was opened with the alleged collaboration or at least the knowledge of the political elites of both countries.¹²¹

Thanks to a prolific collaboration with the Italian Mafia, and access to the sea, Albania became famous for human smuggling into Italy and Greece as well.

If the period right after the end of the communist regime was characterized by violent crimes, poverty and corruption, from the 1990s onward organized crime saw a constant growth in the country, facilitated by a weak government and the corruption in the security forc-

117 Sisti L. (2009, June 2), *The Montenegro Connection. Love, Tobacco and the Mafia*, The Center for Public Integrity, <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2009/06/02/2854/montenegro-connection>.

118 Albertini M. (2011, June 1), *The Adriatic Connection: Mafia Links from Italy to the Western Balkans*, Balkanalysis, <http://www.balkananalysis.com/serbia/2011/06/01/the-adriatic-connection-mafia-links-from-italy-to-the-western-balkans/>.

119 Andreas P. (2004), Andreas P. (2004), *The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia*, in «International Studies Quarterly», vol. 48 no. 1, p. 48

120 Zickel R. and Iwaskiw W. R. (eds.) (1994), *Albania: A Country Study*, Washington D.C., Federal Research Division Library of Congress, p. 232.

121 Hajdinjak M. (2002), *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy, p. 18.

es. When the pyramid saving schemes which were established in Albania and fueled with the money gained through illicit smugglings by both Albanian and Italian criminal groups were suddenly emptied in 1997, the country slid into chaos; chaos which set, once again, new opportunities for the criminal organizations, well exploited by the Albanians living in Kosovo. To Michaletos, a Greek expert of mafia, the lack of rule of law which was experienced by the country for six months was filled by violence and robbery: 700.000 Kalashnikovs, Albanian passports and any kind of weapons were stolen and resold in the black markets.¹²²

Concerning Kosovo, to Andreas, if the main reason behind the Yugoslav war was inter-ethnic tension, the country would have been the first country to experience it.¹²³ The fact that the war broke out in 1998, several years after the conflicts in Bosnia and Croatia, can be linked exactly to the availability of weapons for the ethnic Albanians. Similarly to the Bosnian citizens at the beginning of the war, ethnic Albanians did not possess enough weapons to sustain their push for independence. It was only when the Yugoslav wars came to an end, but especially after the collapse of the Albanian government in 1997, when looting of the national armories took place and the majority of the weapons were sold to the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army), that a huge quantity of cheap weapons started to reach the country. Their availability, a necessary precondition for a violent military escalation, increased to such an extent that in 1998 the price of a Kalashnikov was 150 DEM.¹²⁴

Once the conflict started, new opportunities for the local criminal groups opened up. As in the previous wars, smuggling of arms and commodities grew to a considerable extent, while money continued to enter the country thanks to the huge ethnic Albanian diaspora and to the extremely lucrative drug trade. Whilst the stated reason behind the smuggling of drugs seemed to be the liberation of Kosovo from the Serbian oppression, the reality was that the huge gains ended up entirely in the pockets of few criminal gangs who controlled the channels and the KLA members.¹²⁵

In conclusion, the economic sanctions imposed again on Serbia in 1998, as already demonstrated, created further opportunities for illicit trades and new smuggling channels.

Bulgaria, Romania, and Macedonia

Even though out of the logics of nationalism and ethnic hatred, free from wars and not directly affected by international sanctions, Bulgaria, Romania and Macedonia have been, sooner or later, involved in the smuggling channels of the fighting Yugoslav Republics. Not only the geographical proximity influenced their involvement, but also the huge economic

122 Michaletos I. (2007), *The Albanian Organized Crime: Emergence of a Dynamic Organized Crime Network Across the Euro-Land*, Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS).

123 Andreas P. (2004), *The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia*, in «International Studies Quarterly», vol. 48 no. 1, p. 47.

124 Hajdinjak M. (2002), *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy, p. 12.

125 Center for the Study of Democracy (2004), *Corruption, Contraband and Organized Crime in Southeast Europe*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy.

possibilities offered by the illegal trading with the countries subjects to sanctions, which led to the rapid enrichment of certain groups or individuals.

Macedonia faced a particularly critical situation. With the COMECON collapsing, half of the thirty per cent of the exports which were directed toward this area were lost, while the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina meant the losing of two more trading countries.¹²⁶ The sanctions against Serbia, the Republic's main trading partner, dealt another heavy blow on its economy.

Not enough, in 1994 Greece announced the lifting of a trade embargo which, by obstructing its access to the port of Thessalonica for nineteen months, caused further severe losses.

Smuggling appeared, thus, not only as an easy, gainful activity, but even as a legitimate reaction to unfavorable conditions: active part into the illegal trafficking of weapons, Macedonia turned out to be among the countries which violated the UN sanctions the most.¹²⁷

Whilst the country declared its independence in 1991, like Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the majority of the Macedonian ethnic group shares its territory with a large minority of ethnic Albanians, it escaped a war during the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Preventing an ethnic conflict became one of the priority of the international community which feared that it could spread into the neighboring countries, leading to damaging consequences. The country became, thus, the model of a possible peaceful coexistence between different ethnic groups in a democratic state in which they all took active part. Nevertheless, between 2000 and 2001 the persistent inter-ethnic tensions between the Albanian minority and the Slav Macedonian majority, remained under the surface for long time, suddenly mounted, taking international observers by surprise. Clashes between Albanian guerrilla movements and the government forces broke out, probably fostered by the conflict in the neighboring Kosovo. Various diplomatic attempts (from talks among all the parties on inter-ethnic issues, to a cease-fire agreement and the formation of a new national unity government) failed to peacefully solve the dispute: after the National Liberation Army claimed responsibility for some terroristic attacks, asking for more rights for the Albanian community in Macedonia, the government decided to launch a military counter-offensive.

South-Eastern Europe was, again, being shaken by an ethnic conflict, although of small proportions compared to the previous ones.

If difficult economic conditions, in particular among ethnic Albanians, and deeply-rooted inter-ethnic tensions partly explain such an escalation of violence, organized crime and the management of regional smuggling rings are identified by several authors as other non-negligible factors lying behind it.

To Hislope, the strength of the Albanian military forces in Macedonia is supported by three legs.¹²⁸ The first leg is Kosovo, and the conflict of 2001 is seen as a direct consequence of the war in the country in 1999. The second leg is made up of the economic and social conditions of backwardness in which the Albanians living in Macedonia lived, which facilitated

126 Hajdinjak M. (2002), *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy, p. 17.

127 Ivi.

128 Hislope R. (2004), *Crime and Honor in a Weak State: Paramilitary Forces and Violence in Macedonia*, in «Problems of Post-Communism», vol. 51 no. 3, pp. 18-26.

their involvement in a politics based on violence. The last leg involves the combined interests of the nationalist politicians and criminal organizations: the strict relationship between corrupt politicians and ethnic Albanian criminals undermined the proper functioning of the government; a situation which was exploited by the National Liberation Army to violently ask for more rights for their minority.

The primary reason behind the rebellion was, to Kim, the increased radicalism of the Albanian militant groups living in Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia, for a big part involved in criminal activities. Another important reason, however, concerned a new border agreement concluded between Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in February 2001 which, by tightening police control at the border made the life of Albanian smugglers harder, prompting the rebellion.¹²⁹

According to Hajdinjak, in the end, the war was caused by everything but ethnic hatred, being more a fight for the control of crucial smuggling routes managed by Albanians.¹³⁰ The western part of Macedonia, inhabited for the most part by Macedonian Albanians, was, indeed, a well-known center for the smuggling of drugs, at least since the 1970s.

The decision taken by both the ruling Albanian and Macedonian parties of not setting up a police force to monitor the border, after the UN peacekeeping forces withdraw in 1999, gave credit to the idea that they were, more or less actively, involved in the illicit trafficking. Tanusevci, a village on the border between Macedonia and Kosovo, became, thus, a sort of “free territory”, a transit point for the smuggling of drugs and arms and a depot of arms for the KLA during the conflict in Kosovo.¹³¹ It does not seem a pure coincidence that the fighting started exactly in this village in the 2000s, after Macedonian police were placed along the border, violating the free status of the village. Xhevat Ademi, an Albanian politician of the National Democratic Party (NDP), openly denounced the Albanian and Macedonian coalitions governing at the time of smuggling. To him not only the politicians took active part in illicit activities, but they even used the wars to expand “tobacco smuggling, oil derivatives, narcotics traffic, organised prostitution”, among others.¹³²

The situation was slightly different in Bulgaria and Romania, which have never experienced a war, and which were more detached from the events occurring in Yugoslavia.

The economic difficulties brought by the regime of Ceaucescu (1965-1989) in Romania, however, having resulted in shortages and instability, generated the same favorable conditions to the blooming of organized crime, that in other countries emerged with the starting of the war.

Since the 1970s, cigarettes, arms and drugs were smuggled into the country to obtain hard currency. The wars and the international sanctions offered, thus, plenty of opportunities to the already well-organized criminal groups, who expanded and increased their trades. Right after 1989, many criminals left Romania for Western countries, where they committed serious crimes and established new criminal links, destined to grow in the near future.

129 Kim J. (2001), *Macedonia: Country Background and Recent Conflict*, Washington D.C., Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress.

130 Hajdinjak M., (2004), *The Root Cause of Instability in the Balkans: Ethnic Hatred or Trans-Border Crime?*, Sofia, International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR), p.18.

131 International Crisis Group (2002), *Macedonia's Public Secret: How Corruption Drags the Country Down*, Skopje/Brussels, ICG Balkans Report n.133.

132 Ivi, p. 22.

Meanwhile, the national organized crime, not anymore silently managed by the communist regime, suddenly became visible and started its expansion.

Many of the smuggling channels set up in the post-communist Romania, however, were not controlled by Romanians; part of the students who migrated to the country during the 1980s pushed by the policies of Ceaucescu, mainly from developing countries of the Middle East, finding poverty and economic stagnation, often ended up doing illegal businesses.¹³³ Being a neighbor of Serbia, foreign and local criminal groups, with the alleged participation of members of the government, largely took part into the smuggling of oil and arms into the country.

Corruption remained the most important criminal phenomenon affecting the state, which prevented a substantial political progress and economic development.

Bulgaria has been, according to Glenny, a major source of weapons, not only for the countries of South-Eastern Europe, but for the entire Eastern bloc.¹³⁴ What made Bulgarian criminal groups so powerful, to the point that the situation of organized crime seriously hindered the accession of the country into the European Union in the following years, is, in the words of Bogomil Bonev, former Interior Minister "...that they were organized by the state itself".¹³⁵

Indeed, two distinct forms of organized crime were present in Bulgaria after 1989. The first one emerged precisely from the totalitarian party and grew within it, as an adaptation to new situations arising from the economic and political transition. Its origins, however, date back to the 1980s, when, facing an economic crisis of the state-planned economy, the Establishment tried to overcome it by creating channels for the smuggling of weapons and drugs.¹³⁶

As in other countries, the Bulgarian security service, in this case with the support of the Russian KGB, took the lead of such smuggling, which made Bulgarian organized crime more advantaged in technological terms. It is this form of organized crime which gave birth to powerful and durable Bulgarian criminal organizations that led to the most damaging consequences.

The second form of organized crime, instead, includes criminal organizations which formed spontaneously and which were not connected with members of the former Communist party or with the security forces. It is no surprise that the most of them did not survive for long time, and had a minor impact on the history of the country compared to the first type.

In any case, whilst the political transition took place in a largely peaceful manner in the country, it was exactly this process, which will be analyzed in the next paragraph, to exercise a major influence on its major blooming.

In conclusion, even through a brief examination of organized crime in the countries of South-Eastern Europe during the 1990s and onwards, it appears evident how wars and international interventions played anything but a small role in its growth and expansion. Inter-ethnic smuggling channels were set up in all the countries, regardless of inter-ethnic tensions, and, never dismantled after the wars, generated enormous profits only for few (crim-

133 Hajdinjak M. (2002), *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy.

134 Glenny M. (2008), *Balkan Organised Crime*, in «Chaillot Paper», n. 107, *Is There an Albanian Question?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, pp. 87-103.

135 UNODC (2008), *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries*. Vienna, UNODC, p. 48.

136 Pushkarova I. (2010), *Political Factors Fuelling the Development of Bulgarian Organised Crime (since 1980 to date)*, in: Stoychev S. P. (eds.), *Organised Crime and the Balkan Political Context*, Sofia, Risk Monitor Foundation, pp. 36-58.

inal) individuals. These illegal markets, which unquestionably led to negative consequences for the legal economy of the states and are traditionally associated with an image of violence and danger, acquired in this context “peacemaking qualities”, being the only environment in which the different ethnic groups closely collaborated, before and after the wars.¹³⁷

The violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, which had a profound resonance in the whole region and beyond its borders put an end to Tito’s ideas. To Storajova “the idea of Yugoslavian unity and cooperation embodied in the motto *Bratstvo i jedinstvo* (Brotherhood and unity), was paradoxically only maintained in organized crime activities”, the real and enduring legacy of that failed experiment.¹³⁸

The Economic and Political Transition

“Instead of the invisible hand, creating the wealth of nations, the post-communist countries of SEE have received the visible fist of the mafia dealer, of corrupt statesmen or the street racketeer”¹³⁹

Due to the violence it brings about, the suffering of the civilians, the suspension of the rule of law and of the normal functioning of governments, a war can provide easy opportunities for organized crime to spread, as already shown; a similar outcome was, nevertheless, produced by the process of economic and political transition, which was, instead, expected to bring only positive effects to the region.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, and the wars in Yugoslavia, showed the failure of the economic and political system of the East, and the victory of liberal values and capitalism. This meant, that, sooner or later and more or less successfully, all the countries of South-Eastern Europe had to embark on a complex economic and political transition toward liberalization and democracy. Such a process, not peculiar to the region alone, but here hindered by violent wars, political instability and an already well-organized system of smuggling and criminal activities, has been, without any doubt, slower and less successful than in Central Europe.

As the threat posed by criminal organizations is proportional to the vulnerability of a state, to Williams, the more the state is weak, the more it can be easily and more dangerously penetrated by them.¹⁴⁰ States in transition, with no experience of democratic government,

¹³⁷ Antonopoulos G. A., (2008) *The Balkans as a 'laboratory (for the study) of illegal markets': introduction to the special issue on 'Illegal Markets in the Balkans', in «Trends in Organized Crime», n. 11, p. 320.*

¹³⁸ Storajova V. (2007), *Organized Crime in the Western Balkans*, in «HUMSEC Journal» n. 1, p. 112.

¹³⁹ Minchev O. (2002), *Corruption and Organized Crime in Southeastern Europe: A Paradigm for Social Change Revisited*, in: Sotiropoulos D. A. and Veremis T. (eds.), *Is Southeastern Europe Doomed to Instability? A Regional Perspective*, London, Frank Cass, pp. 107.

¹⁴⁰ Williams P. (2011), *Crime, Illicit Markets and Money Laundering in: Simmons P.J and de Jonge Oudraat (eds), Managing Global Issues: Lessons Learned*, New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp. 106-150.

without an active civil society and often with rampant corruption, are, at least at the beginning of the process, weak and easily permeable by definition. Without the capacity of imposing a functioning rule of law and effective policies, the countries of the region ended up serving the interests of organized crime and corruption, while the citizens were losing confidence not only in the newly established institution, but in the whole process as well.

All the countries of the region suffered, at least in the short term, from the negative consequences ensued from the transition from an economy based on state planning to a market economy of a Western type, namely high inflation, a significant fall in GDP, financial uncertainty and massive unemployment. Since the same notion of private property was almost unknown in former Yugoslavia, as in the other communist states, it was hard to find experts on the subject, which left the country more permeable to corruption and organized crime.

Whilst an economic and political transformation was necessary, the fact that the trade across borders was liberalized overnight, without the simultaneous implementation of proper regulations which came long after, is highlighted by Hajdinjak as one of the main causes of development of organized crime.¹⁴¹ The neo-liberal belief according to which a functioning free market and a political democratic system which respects human rights will naturally lead to development and better economic opportunities resulted, thus, to not be sufficient for the South-Eastern European countries.

To Minchev, the process of privatization went in the wrong direction from the very beginning.¹⁴² In absence of an effective legal mechanism which could regulate it, a clientelist approach prevailed, and the privatization resulted in a deeply corrupt process. The increasing transfer of resources from legal economic sectors, to the illegal or “grey” ones, led, according to the author, “not only to a complete criminalization of the states’ economies but also to the region as a whole”.¹⁴³ The awaited economic transition was, thus, dominated at the beginning by illegal transactions, from the apparently less dangerous transfer of merchandise without paying fees, “the suitcase trade”, which, instead, caused massive losses to all the local economies, and in particular to Croatia, to money laundering and drug smuggling.¹⁴⁴ The new banking system, established without clear legal boundaries and controls served the interests of the old communist elites and policemen, while the normal citizens experienced a huge worsening of their socio-economic status, the rise in insecurity being among the first consequences felt by the majority of them.

State-owned companies and concession have been sold at low rates to former party functionaries who, maintaining their contacts with criminals and with the new political elite to protect their assets, created “local monopolies and shady multinational conglomerates”.¹⁴⁵ The lack of transparency which characterized the entire process allowed few individuals to accumulate enormous capital.

141 Hajdinjak M. (2002), *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy, p.69.

142 Minchev O. (2002), *Corruption and Organized Crime in Southeastern Europe: A Paradigm for Social Change Revisited*, in: Sotiropoulos D. A. and Veremis T. (eds.), *Is Southeastern Europe Doomed to Instability? A Regional Perspective*, Frank Cass, pp. 105-118.

143 Ivi, p. 108.

144 Hajdinjak M. (2002), *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy, p.35.

145 Forte R. (eds.) (2013), *Organised Crime and the Fight Against Crime in the Western Balkans: a Comparison with the Italian Models and Practices. General overview and perspectives for the future*, Policy Paper, Sapucca, p. 11.

The unbalancing effects of the process had, then, to be coupled with the supranational forces of globalization arising in the same period; both processes deeply influenced the structure and the activities of organized crime.

The transition countries were, indeed, pushed by Western advisers to pursue substantial reforms to rapidly join an increasingly global economy made of free markets and improved economic integration established by the triumph of the neo-classical economics. Unfortunately, to Andreas, many of these countries were more successful in integrating the criminalized sectors of their economy into the world economy, rather than the legal ones.¹⁴⁶ Following the advice of the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank of an economic specialization based on comparative advantages, they exported the sectors in which they were more successful, namely the smuggling of drugs and weapons and the migrant labor. Liberalization has, thus, accidentally supported illicit sectors of the global economy, helping the transformation of local criminal organizations into transnational criminal corporations.

To Hozic, whilst the Yugoslav wars and the post-transition weak states played an important part in the growth of organized crime in the region, the expansion of illicit trade should be seen more as a rational response to the creation of networks of global trade, to the point that “illicit trade may be the best way for the Balkans to benefit from globalization”.¹⁴⁷ Without taking into consideration the economic losses for the state and the risks which could arise from a widespread illegal economy, thus, the region has been able to carve out a convenient role for itself in the global economy.

Although the debate is still open, some economists found a positive correlation between liberalization and the increase in inequalities (Hurrell and Woods, and Barro, for instance). The impoverished population who was dealing with shocking social changes, had simultaneously to face the upward mobility of individuals who made huge gains illicitly, while their criminal actions were treated with substantial impunity; all this acted, to the UNODC, as another incentive to criminality.¹⁴⁸

Moreover, when the economic transformations happened together with the formation of new independent states after the wars, their borders were easily crossed by illicit goods transiting unchecked. To Serrano, it is the same establishment of borders separating states which impose different levels of taxation and which allow or prohibit the transit of different goods that create opportunities for crime, opportunities which were well exploited in South- Eastern Europe.¹⁴⁹ Several simultaneous processes were, thus, pushing a region which had still to complete its recovery, for a deep change.

While the rise in criminality is rarely considered as a direct consequence of the transition toward democracy, to Glenny the collapse of the communist states and the un-

146 Andreas P. (2002), *Transnational Crime and Economic Globalization*, in: Berdal M. and Serrano M. (eds.), *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienne, pp. 37- 52.

147 Hozic A. A. (2004), *Between the Cracks: Balkan Cigarette Smuggling*, in «*Problems of Post-Communism*», vol. 51 no. 3, pp. 35-44.

148 UNODC (2008), *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries*, Vienna, UNODC.

149 Serrano M. (2002), *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?*, in: Berdal M. and Serrano M. (eds.), *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienne, pp. 13-36.

broken links with the old security apparatuses of the new, weak democracies have been among the major factors promoting the rise of organized crime.¹⁵⁰ His argument is proven by the history of Bulgaria: the DS, the Bulgarian KGB, deeply involved in various forms of smuggling, was, at the end of the 1990s the founder of ninety percent of the new private enterprises which were created thanks to the new economic openness of Gorbachev. The nascent capitalism was, thus, still deeply dependent on the old corrupt security service. When the communist system eventually fell, together with the security system, fired policemen, members of the secret services and Special Forces commandos had to look for new jobs which, while the economy was falling down, were offered mainly, when not only, by organized crime. While the political system was completely reorganizing itself, a new, illicit system of private protection emerged to offer their services to new businessmen and companies. These “protection rackets” composed in Bulgaria of former wrestlers and boxers, soon appeared in many countries of Eastern Europe and of the former Soviet Union, laying the basis for the formation of a real mafia.¹⁵¹

In Albania, the process of privatization turned out to be extremely corrupt and disorganized from the very beginning.¹⁵² While state-owned companies were closing down, criminals took over former agriculture factories owned by the state and formed small armies with the aim of protecting their properties and exerting an influence on the Albanian citizens. Rivalries between competing criminal gangs became habitual, as well as extortions and kidnappings. The domestic situation was deteriorating to such an extent that a large number of Albanian citizens decided to migrate mainly towards Greece and Italy, in what has been the first huge exodus from the country. Meanwhile, however, many of the citizens who had previously left the country started to come back. They were “patriotic bandits” who decided to return either because of a nostalgic feeling or to reintegrate themselves in the new Albanian context, in which they could form alliances with criminals and corrupt politicians.¹⁵³

In the chaos following the change in systems, the temporary suspension of the law left, thus, room for violence and for the proliferation of illegal markets. As after the wars, the distinction between legality and illegality became blurred, while the illicit activities perpetrated during the period preceding the transition became in a certain sense legitimized.¹⁵⁴ Who benefited more from the economic and social transformations which followed the collapse of communism, have been, to Köppel and Székely, precisely the criminal groups, to the point that, to Shelley, the authoritarianism of the communist rule was replaced not by a functioning democracy, but by the authoritarianism of organized crime.¹⁵⁵

150 Glenny M. (2008), *Balkan Organised Crime*, in «Chaillot Paper», n. 107, *Is There an Albanian Question?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, pp. 87-103.

151 Ivi, p. 91.

152 Arsovska J. (2010), *Organised Crime and the Balkan Political Context: the Case of Albania*, in: Stoychev S. P. (eds.), *Organised Crime and the Balkan Political Context*, Sofia, Risk Monitor Foundation, pp. 8-35.

153 Ivi, p. 14.

154 Antonopoulos G. A. (2008), *The Balkans as a 'laboratory (for the study) of illegal markets': introduction to the special issue on 'Illegal Markets in the Balkans'*, in «Trends in Organized Crime», vol. 11, p. 317.

155 Köppel T. and Székely A., (2002), *Transnational Organized Crime and Conflict in the Balkans*, in: Berdal M. and Serano M. (eds.), *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienne, pp. 129-139; Shelley L. (1999), *Transnational Organized Crime: The New Authoritarianism*, in: Friman H. R. and Andreas P. (eds.), *The Illicit Global Economy and State Power*, Lanham, Md., Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 25-52.

The transition towards new, modern systems, did not involve only the economy and politics of the countries, but its underworld as well. The smuggling channels which flourished during the war and which were often managed by the state security service, when not by the political elite itself, were privatized as well, going from “state-sponsored to mafia-run” smuggling channels.¹⁵⁶

The nature of the smuggled goods had similarly to adapt to the new circumstances. Since the demand for weapons started to decrease, while, the prices of the commodities which were legally imported were relatively high for the impoverished population, the smuggling channels started to be crossed mainly by excise goods, often cigarettes, and later on also by drugs and human beings.

As in the previous years, the Western Balkans appeared to be the slowest in their recovery. When Bulgaria and Romania joined the European Union, which meant that they reached certain standards in economic, political and social terms, they were still suffering from the consequences of the war and of the transition, which, to Glenny, meant that the supply of illicit goods and services would remain for them the easiest way to make profits.¹⁵⁷

However, the negative side effects of the transition do not have to overshadow its positive ones, which, after more than ten years, have provided the region with a certain economic stability and democracy. By 2009, indeed, all the countries of the region achieved the major objectives of the transition to market economy, which today is substantially completed.¹⁵⁸

It must be acknowledged, in any case, that the simultaneous processes of globalization, economic liberalization and political transition, together with the devastating effects of wars hugely increased the vulnerability to organized crime for all the countries. While the population and the political elites were slowly adapting themselves to the new circumstances, the criminal organizations were much more ready to exploit the new opportunities.

For this reason, many people looked at the process of transition in former Yugoslavia as a real “robbery”, which “did more damage to the economy and post-war social structure than the war itself had done”.¹⁵⁹

156 Hajdinjak M. (2002), *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy, p. 34.

157 Glenny M. (2008), *Balkan Organised Crime*, in: Batt J. (eds.) *Is There an Albanian Question?*, Chaillot Paper, no. 107, European Union Institute for Security Studies, pp. 87-103

158 Uvalic M. (2010), *Transition in Southeast Europe. Understanding Economic Development and Institutional Change*, Working Paper n. 2010/41, UNU-WIDER, World Institute for Development Economic Research.

159 Dolezal D. (2010), *Organised Crime and Corruption in Croatia – A Criminological View*, in: Stoychev S. P. (eds.), *Organised Crime and the Balkan Political Context*, Sofia, Risk Monitor Foundation, p. 62.

The Balkan Route

“The Balkans serve as a giant, semi-regulated (or at least government-protected) territory where products that would otherwise have difficulty entering European or Western markets get recycled, laundered, or refurbished, and then are brought (back) into the West. ...It is neither a zone of safety nor a zone of danger. Rather, it is a transit zone, an area where laws are temporarily and selectively suspended to ensure proper circulation of goods through the international state system”¹⁶⁰

It appears clear at this point how the changes in rulers and borders throughout history, the series of conflicts which exploded at different times in several countries of the region, the transition toward a different economic and political system, and the necessary social transformations that followed, the international economic and military interventions, together with a favorable geographic position, provided organized criminal groups with plenty of opportunity to exploit.

Moreover, the fact that in many countries the same political elite remained in power for long time and that no legal prosecution against the criminals and smugglers of the 1990s was initiated, did not lead to a very different situation for organized crime in the post-transition states.

The economic liberalization, the process of globalization, and the recent economic crisis contributed as well to create a powerful criminal “Balkan- axis” with a direct access to the European Union, one of the most lucrative market in terms of illicit goods.¹⁶¹ The channels, routes, and techniques employed for the smuggling of goods and weapons during the wars turned out to be useful and lucrative in the post-war context, when the criminal groups readapted them to the changed conditions of the local and global environment. Indeed, “with no wars left to fight, former paramilitaries became engaged full-time in the transit of heroin, cigarettes, labour migrants and women into Western Europe”.¹⁶²

A long Balkan Route for illicit smuggling which crosses, still today, the entire region, approximately following the historical Silk Road, appeared, partly as a consequence of the historical, political, economic and geographical factors previously mentioned.

160 Hozic A. A. (2004), *Between the Cracks: Balkan Cigarette Smuggling*, in «Problems of Post-Communism», vol. 51 no. 3, p. 42.

161 Europol (2011), *OCTA 2011. EU Organised Crime Threat Assessment*, The Hague, European Police Office, p. 19.

162 Glenny M. (2008), *Mc Mafia. Crime Without Frontiers*, London, The Bodley Head, p. 55.

The Balkan Route of Drugs: Heroin

In the past dividing the Ottoman from the Habsburg Empire, then in the middle of the Iron Curtain, South-Eastern Europe happens to link, today, the world's main supplier of heroin, Afghanistan, with one of its most lucrative markets, Western Europe.

As seen in several reports issued by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Afghanistan supplies today almost ninety percent of the heroin smuggled globally, which is trafficked to every part of the world with the only exception of Latin America, a producer on its own, reaching the market of Western Europe (where it has a value of 20 billion dollars) and the Russian Federation (13 billion dollars).¹⁶³ Europe is, indeed, “probably the most profitable drug market globally”, according to the Council of Europe.¹⁶⁴

The flow of this drug, which causes the greatest damage but also carries enormous profits, can, thus, bring to some countries an illicit amount of money much higher than their own GDP; this gives to such flow a big corrupting power.

Similarly to South-Eastern Europe, but in a much more devastating manner, the history of Afghanistan has been deeply influenced by international interventions and bloody wars. The country emerged as global supplier only in the 1980s, mainly due to the fact that the opium cultivation started to be considerably reduced in other countries of South-West Asia, first of all in Myanmar, the leading producer in the past, and in Pakistan and Iran during the same period.¹⁶⁵ The Soviet invasion marked the beginning of a period of growing instability from which the country has never fully recovered, suffering from an incessant civil war. As the opium production represents one of the few economic opportunities for the insurgent groups and warlords to finance themselves, especially since the 2000s, the export of opium increased exponentially, providing new funds to sustain the war. As a consequence, eradicating its production and trafficking was a fundamental part of the NATO's plan for the defeat of the Taliban regime. Nevertheless, twelve years after the beginning of the mission, trade in opium reached a new record in 2014, proving the failure of the strategy of the organization.¹⁶⁶ The former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, used the fighting against the production of the same heroin which was killing many young British people as a key argument for the participation of British troops in the invasion of the country.¹⁶⁷ The fact that the opi-

163 UNODC (2010), *The Globalization of Crime. A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, Vienna, UNODC. - UNODC (2014), *The Illicit Drug Trade Trough South- Eastern Europe*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 6.

164 Council of Europe Octopus Programme (2005), *Organised Crime Situation Report 2005. Focus on the Threat of Economic Crime*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe.

165 UNODC (2010), *The Globalization of Crime. A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, Vienna, UNODC, pp. 109-110.

166 Standish R. (2014, November 13), *NATO Couldn't Crush Afghanistan's Opium Economy*, Foreign Policy, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/13/nato-couldnt-crush-afghanistans-opium-economy/>.

167 Tomlinson S. (2013, November 13), *Blair's reason for war in Afghanistan collapses as opium production in the*

um cultivation was all but eradicated and that criminal and terrorist groups are still earning huge profits through it, while the rich European young people are still dying for it, reveals that the destruction brought by military interventions can foster rather than stop organized crime, leading exactly to the opposite of the desired effect.

While the demand for heroin continued to increase, its prices raised as well, offering an incentive to expand this cultivation and guaranteeing to Afghanistan “a virtual monopoly on the illicit production of the drug” which, providing funds to the Taliban, poses another huge problem that the international community should face when dealing with the country.¹⁶⁸

From the 1980s onwards, South-Eastern Europe became, eventually, the main transit zone towards which the opium produced in Afghanistan, after having been refined into heroin mainly in Turkey, a fundamental anchor point, reaches its markets crossing the Balkan Route. The importance of this route increased during the 1990s and in the immediate afterwards of the wars, when the criminal groups were efficiently exploiting the even more porous and ever changing borders.

Twenty years after this transit started, the UNODC pointed out how the quantities of heroin seized in the region were worryingly low, to the point that the efficiency of all the governments of South-Eastern Europe was often lower than the efficiency of Turkish government alone.¹⁶⁹

In 2008, for instance, 2.8 mt. of heroin have been seized in the region, an immensely lower quantity compared to the heroin which was expected to have travelled across the Balkan Route in the same period.¹⁷⁰

Such inefficiency and poor controls have to be clearly attributed to widespread corruption, which the high unemployment and low salaries did not help to fight, and to a lack of regional cooperation, again consequences of the turbulent years the whole region faced. Corruption and the weakness of the state institutions pose, of course, a major obstacle to an effective fighting against the well-organized traffickers.

The transit of heroin along the Balkan Route is divided into three branches: the northern one, which goes from Turkey through Bulgaria, the country which seizes the majority of heroin in the region, and Romania to reach the European Union; the southern one, from Turkey to the Schengen Area through Greece, which, according to some observers, has recently become more important than the northern one, due to more stringent procedures on the Bulgaria-Turkey border, Albania and Italy; and the western one, involving all the Western Balkans, among which the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia plays a major role especially in heroin storage and repackaging, and it is in turn divided into two additional axes, one which goes westward through Albania and a northward one.¹⁷¹

country reaches its highest ever levels ahead of NATO troops' withdrawal, Mail Online, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2505619/Opium-production-Afghanistan-reaches-highest-levels-ahead-NATO-troops-withdrawal.html

168 UNODC (2010), *The Globalization of Crime. A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 109.

169 Balkan Insight (2010, June 24), 'Balkan Route' Addressed in UN Drug Report, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/balkan-route-addressed-in-un-drug-report>.

170 ESICS TEAM (2010, December 8), *Light on the Balkan drug routes*, European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, <http://www.esisc.net/publications/briefings/light-on-the-balkan-drug-routes>

171 Europol (2011), *OCTA 2011. EU Organised Crime Threat Assessment*, The Hague, European Police Office, p.12; UNODC (2014), *The Illicit Drug Trade through South- Eastern Europe*, UNODC.

The geographic position of Bulgaria, at the crossroads of the three smuggling routes, made it particularly vulnerable to the illegal transit not only of drugs, but also of people, contraband and money, to the point that the Balkan Route was previously called “Bulgarian Connection”.¹⁷² This name became misleading after the 1990s when, due to the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Bulgarian route had to be closed. The interruption of the traditional route caused an estimated 60% of heroin to not reach its destination, meaning that new channels had to be opened as soon as possible.¹⁷³ Shipments were trafficked from Macedonia to Albania and Italy, while Romania became one of the main alternatives for the smugglers. Another damaging consequence which the Yugoslav wars created in the whole region was, thus, the expansion of the heroin trade to encompass all of the regions’ countries. Once the war was over, however, the pre-war Balkan Route was restored also in the belligerent countries, certainly much before the rule of law was restored.

To Albertini, the political stabilization, the restored institutions and the enforcement of the police which followed, having been more successful in some countries such as Croatia and Serbia, led to the relocation of the center of illegal trades into countries where such processes have been rather less successful, like Kosovo and Montenegro.¹⁷⁴

UNODC points out how, according to the law enforcement authorities of some of the countries of the region, since Bulgaria and Romania have joined the European Union a shift occurred within the Balkan Route, where the transiting through the two countries started to be preferred due to more lenient checks at their borders.¹⁷⁵ As a consequence, Bulgaria regained its prominent place in the smuggling of the drug.

Due to its closeness to the Balkan coasts, Italy became another important transit point for the smuggling of heroin into Western Europe. The *Sacra Corona Unita*, a criminal group originating in the region of Puglia, the closest region to South-Eastern Europe, counting on an ancient, well-organized network, started a fruitful collaboration with the criminal groups of the opposite bank of the Adriatic Sea, which transformed the Italian region into “a major crossroad for illicit drug trafficking”.¹⁷⁶

To Hroni and Qazimi, the Italian criminal groups played a part also in the increased role performed by the Albanians within the Balkan Route.¹⁷⁷ While Turkish and Kurdish criminal groups were once in control of most of the branches, between 1992 and 1995 the Italian smuggling syndicates started to hire the Albanians as drug couriers. Thanks to their knowledge of the hidden routes of the region and the smuggling channels they have al-

172 Michaletos I. (2011, April 1), *Trends in Balkan Organized Crime Activities*, Wordpress, <http://www.worldpress.org/Europe/3722.cfm>

173 Storajova V. (2007), *Organized Crime in the Western Balkans*, in «HUMSEC Journal» vol. 1, p. 100.

174 Albertini M. (2011, June 1), *The Adriatic Connection: Mafia Links from Italy to the Western Balkans*, *Balkananalysis*, <http://www.balkananalysis.com/serbia/2011/06/01/the-adriatic-connection-mafia-links-from-italy-to-the-western-balkans/>.

175 UNODC (2011), *Drug Situation Analysis Report South Eastern Europe*, UNODC, Paris Pact Initiative.

176 ESICS TEAM (2011, September 13), *Italy: Drug trafficking situation and trends*, *European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center*, <http://www.esisc.org/publications/briefings/italy-drug-trafficking-situation-and-trends>.

177 Hroni S. and Qazimi P. (2007), *View from Albania - Study on the Assessment of Regional Security Threats and Challenges in the Western Balkans*, in: Gyarmati I. and Stančić D. (eds.), *Study on the Assessment of Regional Security Threats and Challenges in the Western Balkans*, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), pp. 61-70.

ready opened to break the sanctions imposed on Serbia and Montenegro in the past, they easily carved out a role for themselves within this lucrative activity.

Today the Albanian groups, who can count on several diaspora networks, perform a central role in the transportation of heroin through the route, to the point that they are the main smugglers in the Western European heroin market, also thanks to the collaboration of other strong criminal groups such as the Italian ‘*Ndrangheta*, Turkish drug kingpins and Russian and Caucasian criminals.¹⁷⁸ Inter-ethnic cooperation, together with widely dispersed diaspora networks enormously helped the smuggling of heroin to become a profitable business for the whole region. Today, it seems that the two criminal groups most active in this trafficking have reached a deal: the Albanians manage the southern part of the route, while the Turkish mafia controls the northern one.¹⁷⁹ Meanwhile Pristina, especially after 1999, became “the unquestionable narcotics capital of Europe”.¹⁸⁰

Among all the Albanian groups, dispersed throughout the whole region, the Kosovar Albanians became the most prominent actors during the 1990s. Concern grew as most of the profits went to finance the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) operating in Serbia or the National Liberation Army (UCK) of Macedonia, considered by some as terrorist organizations.

According to Pascali, it is a direct axis linking the Taliban to the Kosovo Liberation Army which manages most of the flow.¹⁸¹ While the Taliban regime was seeing a significant increase in the cultivation of the poppy seeds, allegedly al-Qaeda was also training and financially supporting the KLA: the bases for a successful illegal collaboration have been set.

According to the author, the growth of the Kosovar mafia is to be attributed in part, once again, to an international intervention. NATO, while organizing the air campaign which would have been later conducted in 1999 against Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo trained the KLA gangs of Kosovo to manage the bombing from the ground. This action hugely increased their military and financial power, transforming the KLA in the “absolute master of Kosovo”, and the Kosovo mafia into “one of the leading criminal organizations in the world”, in part thanks to NATO’s tolerance of their criminal activities.¹⁸² Although during the fighting the trafficking through the country had to be inevitably interrupted, Kosovo Albanians and Serbians did not encounter many problems in collaborating to supply Western Europe with heroin crossing Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.¹⁸³

An analysis of the situation of the country one year after the NATO bombing and the deployment of the NATO mission KFOR in Kosovo highlights how the objective of restor-

178 Hartmann A. (2012), *New trends in the expansion of Western Balkan Organized Crime*, European Parliament Directorate-General for Internal Policies. Policy Department Citizens’ rights and Constitutional Affairs.

179 Vreja L. O. (2007), *Trafficking Routes and Links to Terrorism in South Eastern Europe: The Case of Romania*, in «Connections: The Quarterly Journal», vol. 6 no. 1, pp. 27-45.

180 Michaletos I. (2007), *The Albanian Organized Crime: Emergence of a Dynamic Organized Crime Network Across the Euro-Land*, Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS).

181 Pascali U. (2001), *The ‘New Colombia of Europe’ Grows in Balkans*, in «Executive Intelligence Review» vol. 28 no. 24, pp. 24-32.

182 Ibidem.

183 Observatoire Geopolitique des Drogue, *Observatoire Geopolitique des Drogue Annual Report 1997*, cited in Hajdinjak M. (2002), *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy, p. 16.

ing peace in the country was far from being achieved.¹⁸⁴ On the contrary, the alliance seemed to have further lost control of the increased smuggling of drugs in which the KLA was involved. Supposed to be disarmed after the ceasefire in 1999, the army was, instead, receiving large quantities of weapons through the same Balkan Route of drugs, taking advantage of a situation of legal vacuum.

Once the conflict and the ethnic tensions were over, the international community had to face the transformation of the small territory of Kosovo into a “smugglers’ paradise”, which was supplying heroin not only to Europe but also to the USA, significantly defined by Nikovic, chief of the Yugoslav narcotics force, as “the Colombia of Europe”.¹⁸⁵

The most pessimistic outlook for the future, however, which saw a new boom in heroin consumption in Western Europe similar to the 1980s as a consequence of its decreasing in price and increasing in quantity, did not seem to have come true; recent data shows that its consumption is declining in the whole Europe, together with deaths from drug overdose and HIV infections through drugs, while between 2003 and 2012 the number of opiates’ users have globally declined by almost one third.¹⁸⁶

Nevertheless, South-Eastern Europe became, over time, not only a transit country for heroin, but a huge consumer on its own, to the point that the market of heroin of the entire region reached proportions similar to the four major heroin consumers of Western Europe.¹⁸⁷

Collecting data from different sources, UNODC, together with other international organizations such as the World Health Organization and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, estimated that nowadays

million people globally inject drugs, which corresponds to 0.27% of the global population aged between 15-64.¹⁸⁸ Its highest use was precisely found in South-Eastern Europe, where this percentage is 4.6 times higher than the global average.¹⁸⁹ This situation led to another worrying data: in the region the 23% of people who inject drugs are affected by HIV and half have contracted hepatitis C.¹⁹⁰

Concerning the domestic drug market consumption, however, data have to be taken into consideration carefully, as since 2011 almost none of the countries (with the exception of Croatia) conducted general population surveys.¹⁹¹ This gap, of course, hinders an exhaustive understanding of the dimensions of the problem and of the health impact that the consumption of illicit drugs is exerting on the consumers of the region.

Despite the considerable difficulties in measuring the trafficking and in collecting data, from 2010 the quantity of heroin trafficked through South- Eastern Europe seems unanimous-

184 STRATFOR (2000), *Kosovo: One Year Later*, Stratfor Global Intelligence.

185 O’Kane M. (2000, March 13), *Kosovo drug mafia supply heroin to Europe*, *The Guardian* <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/mar/13/balkans>; Pascali U. (2001), *The ‘New Colombia of Europe’ Grows in Balkans*, in «Executive Intelligence Review» vol. 28 no. 24, p. 29.

186 EMCDDA (2011), *European Drug Report. Trends and Developments*, Lisbon, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, p.11; UNODC (2014), *World Drug Report 2014*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 24.

187 UNODC (2014), *The Illicit Drug Trade through South-Eastern Europe*, Vienna, UNODC, p.116.

188 UNODC (2014), *World Drug Report 2014*, Vienna, UNODC, pp. 5-6.

189 Ivi, p.6.

190 Ivi, pp. 6-9.

191 UNODC (2014), *The Illicit Drug Trade through South-Eastern Europe*, Vienna, UNODC, p.115.

ly to have diminished, because, among other factors, of an increased effectiveness of law enforcement and a decrease in the demands of the Western and Central European markets.

Another possible explanation, nevertheless, could involve the simple fact that the smugglers are moving towards new, less monitored routes, directly crossing the Caucasus or using the “southern route” which links Europe via the Persian Gulf and Africa, going from Afghanistan through Pakistan or the Islamic Republic of Iran, or going directly from Pakistan by air.¹⁹²

To Yuri Fedotov, executive director of the UNODC, however “even though the quantity of drugs has come down in recent years, the Balkans remains the main route for smuggling from Afghanistan”.¹⁹³

In any case, some signs show that the region is trying to change for the better. Among those, for instance, a regional program for Southeast Europe which focuses exactly on the Balkan Route region in terms of illicit drug trafficking, organized crime and enhancement of justice has been established in 2012 by the UNODC.¹⁹⁴ Its effectiveness has already been demonstrated by a program launched by Albania and Montenegro directed at the control of the shipping containers. While Albania intensified the controls in the port of Durres, Montenegro drafted a new anti-drug strategy and, equally important, carried out training for the treatment of drug addicts. Serbia, a country in which the consequences of being crossed by the Balkan Route can be particularly dangerous, as with the rest of the Western Balkans, has recently encouraged a more active police cooperation not only with the other countries of the region, but also with European and extra-European states.¹⁹⁵ The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia transferred the control of its borders from the army to the police, which should lead to an easier cooperation with the police of the neighbouring states.¹⁹⁶

At the same time, the entry of three countries of the region into the European Union and the approach of the Western Balkans toward the organization and NATO made the life of the smugglers notably more difficult. Nevertheless, as stressed by Fedotov, a lot of work has still to be done, with the ultimate, ambitious objective of eradicating the smuggling of opiates from Afghanistan itself, which, instead, has again reached record levels last year.¹⁹⁷

In conclusion, even taking into consideration the decreased demand in the main consumption markets, the improvements of the law enforcement and the greatly increased attention that the media, through international organizations reports and articles, are giving to the Balkan Route, the transit of heroin through it does not seem to have been properly assessed nor has it satisfactorily been solved. Being a long-standing problem, the inability of national governments and international bodies to find an effective solution appears even more striking.

192 Ivi, p.14.

193 B92 (2013, July 7), “Balkans main route for drugs from Afghanistan”, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/crimes.php?yyyy=2013&mm=03&dd=07&nav_id=85045.

194 UNODC (2012), *REGIONAL PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK for South Eastern Europe 2012-2015. Countering Illicit Trafficking and Organized Crime for Improved Governance, Justice and Security*, Vienna, UNODC.

195 Scarabelli D. (2012), *Cleaning the Balkan Route: Elements of Police Cooperation in Serbia*, in: Majer M., Ondrejcsák R., Tarasovič V. (eds.), *Panorama of global security environment*, Bratislava, CENAA, pp. 401-424.

196 Nikolovski Z. (2008, January 7), *Regional co-operation makes drug trafficking tougher via Balkan route*, *Balkanblog*. <http://balkanblog.org/2008/01/08/drug-trafficking-tougher-via-balkan-route/>.

197 UN News Centre (2014, November 11), *Opium harvest in Afghanistan hits new high in 2014 – UN*, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49316#.VW28lkZZOih>.

Partly fostered by the wars and the exploitation of unpatrolled borders, used to finance the fighting factions or the terrorist groups, partly covered by the police or the political elites, the smuggling of heroin remains a huge problem in the region, still among the main transit zones for it and suddenly also an important consumption market. Besides the damaging consequences inflicted on the economic and social development of the region, the health of its citizens together with their health care systems are unquestionably negatively affected by such situations.

The Balkan Route of Drugs: Cocaine

While the consumption markets of heroin were lowering their demand, the all but static criminal groups operating in South-Eastern Europe started to look for new opportunities to make illicit profits. Since, according to the UNODC, the behavior of the consumers has recently changed, as synthetic opiates started to be preferred to heroin, and young people are more attracted by cocaine, opportunities have suddenly arisen exactly from this ever-expanding market.¹⁹⁸

At the same time, when the cocaine traffickers from South America started to face a decline in the consumption of this drug in the neighboring United States, they had to look for new markets, which were found in Western Europe, where the losing appeal of heroin was being replaced by this drug. As a consequence, thanks to its closeness to the area, South-Eastern Europe has recently become a transit zone also for the cocaine trafficked from Latin America.¹⁹⁹

This fact has been highlighted already in 2005 at the meeting of Heads of National Law Enforcement Agency (HONLEA), while the World Drug Report issued by the UNODC in 2007 entitled a paragraph “concerns about cocaine along the Balkan route”.²⁰⁰ Although, according to the agency, ninety-nine percent of the cocaine seized in Europe was still reaching Western Europe directly from South America, some shipments were diverting towards Eastern Europe, which raised concerns about a further expansion of the cocaine routes and threatening new drug alliances.

The threat assessment on organized crime in the EU carried out by Europol in 2011 identified as well the Western Balkans and South-Eastern Europe as new entry points for the drug coming from South America through the ports of the Adriatic and Black Sea.²⁰¹ Among others, the Sinaloa cartel, one of the most dangerous Mexican drug cartels, already with a global reach, found in the Western Balkans the entry point it was looking for to expand

198 UNODC (2008), *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 60.

199 Diaz De Mera A. (2012, September), *Drug Cartels and their Links with European Organised Crime, Thematic Paper on Organised Crime, Special Committee on Organised Crime, Corruption and Money Laundering (CRIM) 2012-2013*.

200 UNODC (2007), *World Drug Report 2007*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 77.

201 Europol (2011), *OCTA 2011. EU Organised Crime Threat Assessment, The Hague*, European Police Office, p.14.

its trade towards Europe. Far from being the only ones, Colombian and Peruvian criminal groups are also allegedly showing their interests in making new business in the region.²⁰²

The Austrian government as well mentioned a Balkan Route, which in this case does not originate from Afghanistan, but still crosses all the Balkan countries, as one of the ways in which cocaine reached the country.²⁰³ It is, thus, clear how this route started, with the passing of time, to serve a twofold purpose, satisfying the demand of both the opiates and cocaine addicted of Western Europe.

Even though this route appears, at first glance, less convenient, there are several factors which suggest the opposite. First of all, by diverting the cocaine shipments toward the region, the highly monitored routes and the strengthened controls at airports and ports, especially after 9/11 were easily circumvented. Secondly, the new traffic could count not only on well-organized and cooperative criminal networks, but also on long-established smuggling routes.

When cocaine trafficking did not pose a big concern in the early 1990s, the Southern Balkan Route was the main route followed, with Greece used as entry point; in 2005, however, evidence suggested that the Eastern Balkan Route began to be used as well, with Bulgaria becoming an important actor thanks to the growing international connections of its criminal groups. With the passing of time, the trafficking also extended westward along the Balkan Route, Albania becoming the main transit country.²⁰⁴ Lack of data, however, makes the drawing of a comprehensive map of the smuggling routes impossible.

In any case, the route proved to be highly flexible and adaptable, with necessary qualities to recover from the natural variations in supply and demand.

Among the most active and flexible groups, Albanians seem to have taken the reins also of this kind of trafficking, making their organized crime “truly poly-drug and poly-criminal”.²⁰⁵ In addition to ports in Montenegro and Albania, they are allegedly also in control of Romanian ports.²⁰⁶

Kosovo Albanians in particular are, again, identified as the main actors involved in the expansion of the trafficking. According to Ken Gallagher, head of operations for Europe of the British Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), instead, the most serious threat in the global expansion of the trafficking in cocaine is posed by criminal groups from Serbia and Montenegro.²⁰⁷ Montenegro, once a sadly famous center for the smuggling of tobacco, has, indeed, recently turned into a transit hub for cocaine with intercontinental links.²⁰⁸

A clear example of the scale that can be reached through the cooperation between a South-Eastern European criminal group and South American cartels is provided by the Šarić

202 Nicolaj N. (2012 November 9), *Mexican drug cartels penetrate southern Europe*, euobserver, <https://euobserver.com/justice/118141>.

203 UNODC (2008), *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries*. Vienna, UNODC, p. 63.

204 Kostakos P. A. and Arsovska J. (2007), *Emerging Cocaine Routes in the Balkans*, in «Standing Group for Organised Crime Newsletter», vol. 6 no. 2, pp. 3-9.

205 Europol (2011), *OCTA 2011. EU Organised Crime Threat Assessment*, The Hague, European Police Office, p.20.

206 UNODC (2005), *World Drug Report 2005*, Vienna, UNODC.

207 T. J., (2011, July 4), *Organised crime in the Balkans. A lobster pot of troubles*, *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2011/06/organised-crime-balkans>.

208 Michaletos I. (2012, July 15), *The Balkan Gate of the Transnational Cocaine Trade*, Serbianna, <http://serbianna.com/analysis/archives/1449>.

network. Šarić is a criminal holding both Serbian and Montenegrin citizenship, and head of a wide network almost unknown to the world until 2009, when 2.7 tons of cocaine which was due to be smuggled from Latin America to Europe was seized by the Uruguayan police and he was identified by Serbian authorities as responsible.²⁰⁹

Judging from the significant amount of drug, it was clear how the nexus between South America and South-Eastern Europe was already quite strong.

This operation was part of a joint investigation conducted by the American Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and some countries of the region, especially Serbia and Greece, called “*Guerrieros balcanicos*” (Balkan Warriors) alluding to the criminal fighters and mafia warlords who had become famous during the 1990s, later surpassed by powerful drug lords with international connections.

The clan was identified, thanks to this operation, as one of the major importers of cocaine in all of Europe: Serbian authorities estimated that its illegal business brought 1.3 billion euros to Serbia, but the amount could have been much higher, up to 5 billion.²¹⁰ Moreover, according to several sources, the network was even making plans to kill some officials of the Serbian state and even the Serbian President of the time, Boris Tadic, who engaged his government in a more decisive battle against organized crime.²¹¹ Šarić, who had been hiding exactly in South America since 2010, eventually surrendered to the Serbian authorities in 2014.

The cooperation of the Serbian and Bosnian authorities with the DEA shows their increased commitment to the fighting against organized crime, and drug smuggling in this case, toward which they are pushed also by the willingness of gaining the European Union membership; Montenegro, instead, seems to be following a much slower path in this terms, which is also demonstrated by the fact that Šarić remained unknown in the country up until his arrest.²¹²

Whilst this operation made the world discover the strong criminal connections which linked two different continents, and the South-Eastern European mafia was again in the public eye, it did not seem to suffer the blow for long time: in 2011 Serb criminals who were heading a drug smuggling network from Brazil to Europe were arrested by the Brazilian police.²¹³

To Michaletos, on the other side, more attention should be given to the increased role of Bulgarian criminal gangs within this smuggling.²¹⁴ They are switching, indeed, from heroin, now characterized by high prices and low demand, to the more profitable market of cocaine, and five organizations operating in the country are already dealing with it.

209 Ramsey G. (2012, May 30), *A Look at Serbian Kingpin's Latin America Connections*, *Insight Crime - Organized Crime in the Americas*, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/a-look-at-one-serbian-kingpins-latin-america-connections>.

210 Michaletos I. (2011, April 1), *Trends in Balkan Organized Crime Activities*, Wordpress. <http://www.worldpress.org/Europe/3722.cfm>.

211 Barlovac B. (2010, April 13), *Serbia: Indictment for Suspected Drug Lord Saric*, *Balkan Insight*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-indictment-for-suspected-drug-lord-saric>.

212 Albertini M. (2011, June 1), *The Adriatic Connection: Mafia Links from Italy to the Western Balkans*, *Balkananalysis*, <http://www.balkananalysis.com/serbia/2011/06/01/the-adriatic-connection-mafia-links-from-italy-to-the-western-balkans/>.

213 Associated Press (2011, May 6), *Alleged Serb drug gang swept up by Brazilian cops*, *Fox News*, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/05/06/brazil-arrests-serbians-drug-gang-crackdown/>.

214 Michaletos I. (2011, April 1), *Trends in Balkan Organized Crime Activities*, Wordpress. <http://www.worldpress.org/Europe/3722.cfm>.

Due to scattered information, few data available and a constant, rapid evolution, different sources and authors highlighted different aspects of the same phenomenon and perceive different groups or activities as more or less dangerous.

The continuous changing nature of the drug market, and the market of cocaine in this case, which has to adapt to a constantly fluctuating supply and demand and to new legislations and policies, together with the insurmountable difficulty in gathering enough, accurate information on time, makes the analysis of the phenomenon and foreseeing future developments particularly difficult.

However, today it is evident how widely the market of narcotics is evolving, to the point that the smugglers of South-Eastern Europe are able to exploit not only the roads crossing the region in all directions, from east to west and from south to north, but they are also increasingly controlling ports and sea routes, performing a proper global role.

Again, the flaws in the system and the turbulent past have given their contribution to the expansion of illicit traffickings now reaching global levels. Its consequences are felt by the entire region, which faces high rates of drug consumption and the emergence of drug production countries inside it, given the huge profits of the illicit business.

The “Adriatic Connection”

Despite the huge concerns it posed all over the world, the connection between the drug smugglers of South-Eastern Europe, and mainly the Western Balkans, and South America has not been mentioned anymore in the 2012 World Drug Reports of the UNODC.²¹⁵ As a matter of fact, a new alliance was more recently forged, carrying out, according to some authors, larger and more dangerous potential consequences. Called by the American DEA “Balkan Holy Alliance” and by the Italian mafia expert Matteo Albertini “Adriatic Connection”, this alliance links the two opposite banks of the Adriatic Sea, gathering together Italy’s major mafia syndicates and Western Balkans organized crime groups.²¹⁶ Thanks to geographical proximity and historical ties, this cooperation could have a more promising future than the inter-oceanic one.

To Albertini, and as shown by the most recent developments involving the criminal groups of South-Eastern Europe, in the middle of the last decade their structure and way of operating underwent a huge change, mainly following the example provided by the evolution of the powerful Italian neighbors.²¹⁷ As a matter of fact, the Italian mafia reacted to the increased attention it was receiving by media and the police during the 1990s by changing its way of acting: the public bombings and brutal killings which were taking place in the daylight were substituted by more focused and hidden actions, which guaranteed to the or-

215 UNODC (2012), *World Drug Report 2012*, Vienna, UNODC.

216 Hartmann A. (2012), *New trends in the expansion of Western Balkan Organized Crime*, European Parliament Directorate-General for Internal Policies. Policy Department Citizens’ rights and Constitutional Affairs.

217 Albertini M. (2011, June 1), *The Adriatic Connection: Mafia Links from Italy to the Western Balkans*, *Balkananalysis*, <http://www.balkananalysis.com/serbia/2011/06/01/the-adriatic-connection-mafia-links-from-italy-to-the-western-balkans/>.

ganizations more power and less visibility. A similar outcome took place in South-Eastern Europe at least ten years later, when, after the transition, all the countries which reached a certain political and economic stability started to perceive as necessary a more effective fighting against organized crime. Increased police operations and the arrests of several war criminals, however, did not have the desired effect of eradicating it completely, but only of pushing the criminal groups towards a change in their structure and methods. The violent warlords enriched through robbery and looting during the Yugoslav wars, thus, do not reflect anymore the reality of organized crime in the region, where, thanks to the Italian lesson, it survived by hiding into the society, to act in the least visible manner possible.

Even though the Italian mafia, and mainly the *Camorra*, a criminal syndicate originating from Naples, started a sporadic collaboration with the Serbo-Montenegrins already in the 1990s, it has been only when the mentioned changes in structure were taking place as a consequence of arrests, more incisive laws and international cooperation, that they started to urgently need reliable allies. They were found, again, in many of the clans from Serbia and Montenegro and in certain cases even in some of the newly formed governments of the region, with whom they started a collaboration in the field of tobacco smuggling. It turned out to be prolific to such an extent that the partnership, soon, broadened, involving other activities in other countries and even continents, following a path similar to the developments of the Sicilian-American mafia.

It seems that it has been another Italian criminal group, the Calabrian *'Ndrangheta* which put into contact the Colombian narcotic producers with the Montenegrin and Serbian clans. Their ability, demonstrated by the fact that they “do not step on anyone’s toes, operating without disturbing”, impressed the Italian syndicates to the point that they delegated to them the management of the supply of cocaine from South America.²¹⁸ The Italian city of Milan has been recently identified as fundamental transit zone within this triangle: after having dealt directly with the Columbian producers of narcotics, the Serbo-Montenegrins provided the Italian clans with the drug to be distributed from the north of Italy into the whole territory. To the DEA this trafficking ring is worth 25-30 million euros per year, and it could pose a serious threat to the whole of Europe.²¹⁹

In addition to the geographical and cultural proximity, some authors highlighted another, more worrying reason for which this alliance should pose serious concerns. The unexpected Arab Spring, the civil war in Syria and the turmoil all over the Middle East and Africa, with the massive flow of refugees they produce, could provide another huge opportunity for expansion to the “Adriatic Connection”. Human trafficking, could, thus, represent a new field of cooperation, which would give to the alliance not only a bigger power, but, to Albertini, even the power to exert an influence on the formulation of EU public policies.²²⁰ The new business could, at the same time, distract the international police and institutions from the smuggling of drugs, or from money laundering, another activity in which the alliance started to collaborate.

218 Zola M. (2010, November 16), *MAFIJA: Oltre cento arresti tra Nord Italia e Balcani, sulla nuova rotta del narcotraffico internazionale*, East Journal. Società politica e cultura dell'Europa Orientale, <http://www.eastjournal.net/mafija-oltre-cento-arresti-tra-nord-italia-e-balcani-la-nuova-rotta-del-narcotraffico-internazionale/3761>.

219 Albertini M. (2011, June 1), *The Adriatic Connection: Mafia Links from Italy to the Western Balkans*, Balkanalysis, <http://www.balkananalysis.com/serbia/2011/06/01/the-adriatic-connection-mafia-links-from-italy-to-the-western-balkans/>.

220 Ibidem.

The smuggling of migrants via speedboats across the Adriatic to Italy which was managed by Albanian and Italian criminal groups in the 1990s, but which was soon stopped thanks to anti-trafficking networks, could represent an infamous precedent. Today, immigration has become a real business, to the point that “immigrants are worth more than drugs” according to Italian criminal groups who already got their hands on the management of the huge flow of migrants that has recently reached Italy mainly from Africa.²²¹ Since this flow is not expected to slow down, at least in the near future, the Italian mafia could feel the need for new allies in the management of the routes from North Africa, which, again, the Western Balkans could provide. Imagining that the “Adriatic Connection” could expand from the trafficking in drugs to the trafficking in humans, does not sound unlikely at all, if this has not already happened.

The Balkan Route of Human Trafficking

When, in 1999, the Budapest Group was charged with the task of analyzing the evolution of the activities of organized crime in Europe to discover to what extent they broadened into also involving human trafficking, it defined the Balkan Route as “probably the most notorious route used by criminal organisations” during the 1990s.²²² Yugoslav citizens were identified in the same period as the main actors involved in human trafficking and illegal migration of the entire Europe.

According to the same group, it is very likely that the business of trafficking in persons is managed by criminals involved in several other types of illicit activities, like drugs or arms smuggling, burglaries or different forms of sexual exploitation. As the organized criminal groups of South-Eastern Europe have a long experience in these fields, it has been relatively easy to integrate the new activity into the old patterns. In addition to drugs, thus, a Balkan Route for the smuggling of human beings, generally trafficked either for sexual purposes, or for labor exploitation, have more recently appeared. To the US State Department, “human trafficking is the third largest criminal enterprise worldwide, generating an estimated \$9.5 billion in annual revenue”, while the UNODC speaks of “an estimated \$32 billion annually”.²²³ Whilst these are just (very different) estimates and it is impossible to have certain data, it is clear that the phenomenon is reaching a considerable magnitude. Becoming, in any

221 Sironi F. (2014, December 2), “*Gli immigrati rendono più della droga*”. *La mafia nera nel business di accoglienza*, L'Espresso, <http://espresso.repubblica.it/inchieste/2014/12/02/news/gli-immigrati-rendono-piu-della-droga-la-mafia-fascista-nel-business-accoglienza-1.190479>.

222 Study prepared by the Secretariat of the Budapest Group (1999 June), *The Relationship between Organised Crime and Trafficking in Aliens*, Vienna, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, p. 36.

223 U.S. Department of State (2013), *Trafficking in Persons Report. June 2013*, U.S. Department of State; UNODC (2012, July 19), *Human trafficking: organized crime and the multibillion dollar sale of people*, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2012/July/human-trafficking-organized-crime-and-the-multibillion-dollar-sale-of-people.html>.

case, one of the biggest sources of income for criminal organizations, this form of trafficking has recently exceeded the trafficking in weapons in terms of revenues, and it could easily surpass also the smuggling of drugs, as it is growing much faster than both these illicit trades.²²⁴

While in South-East Asia, for instance, it often takes place informally and through personal, direct links, in South-Eastern Europe the trafficking networks are based on a well-defined and organized structure, capable of using different routes and of addressing different markets. Although human trafficking is among the most ancient illicit activities undertaken all over the world, it has started to affect the region only in recent times. South-Eastern European criminals succeeded, thus, in readapting their structure and activities and the ramifications of the Balkan Route to satisfy local and international demands, by strengthening global criminal links and expanding towards new, more lucrative activities.

While trafficking in persons has been defined by the UN as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation;” to the smuggling of persons, and in this case of migrants, it was attributed a rather different meaning, namely “the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident”.²²⁵

The two types of illicit activities involving human beings are, thus, slightly different: smuggling needs the crossing of a state border, which happens, in most of the cases, with the consent of the people being smuggled, while human trafficking involves a greater form of coercion and a subsequent exploitation. In the everyday life, however, it is not so easy to make a clear distinction between these two forms, often mixed, and both present in the region.

Organized criminal groups dealing with trafficking in human beings are, to Europol, the most sensitive to changes in demand, as they have to rapidly provide persons where and when they find a need for exploitation, conforming, then, their characteristics to local necessities and environments.²²⁶

“We must become as coordinated, flexible, and effective as the traffickers”, said one of the organizers of a workshop which took place in Tekija, a village in the north west of Serbia which became famous for its exchanges of illegal goods with Romania, where activists from Western and South-Eastern Europe involved in anti-trafficking activities gathered looking for common solutions.²²⁷

224 Riley L. (2013), *Human Trafficking: Global Threat to Fundamental Human Rights*, Global Peace Convention, <http://www.globalpeaceconvention.org/component/content/article/47-global-peace-convention/238-human-trafficking-global-threat-to-fundamental-human-rights.html>.

225 UN General Assembly (2000), *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, UN, art. 3 (a); UN General Assembly (2000), *Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, UN, art. 3(a).

226 Europol (2011), *OCTA 2011. EU Organised Crime Threat Assessment, The Hague, European Police Office*, p. 25.

227 Lindstrom N. (2004), *Regional Sex Trafficking in the Balkans: Transnational Networks in an Enlarged Europe*, in «Problems of Post-Communism», vol. 51 no. 3, pp. 45-52.

As a consequence, when analyzing the routes followed not only by human traffickers but also by migration flows, and their countries of origin and destination, it should be kept in mind that they are never static nor definitive, as they continuously adapt to changing factors, much more than the routes for the smuggling of drugs or illicit commodities.

Nevertheless, even an imprecise or temporary map of such routes is necessary to develop effective anti-trafficking policies. According to the Budapest Group the most southern route crossed by the human flows coming from Eastern Europe goes through Bulgaria and Romania, then Hungary and Austria, through a famous route among traffickers and criminal groups which links Budapest to Vienna, or Czech Republic eventually reaching Germany. Another route links Bulgaria to Greece, Macedonia and Albania, to ultimately reach Italy or other Western European states, while Bulgaria became a transit country to reach Turkey mainly from the former Soviet states, from where Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian and Chechen women are smuggled for prostitution.²²⁸

While the countries of origin of the illicit traffickings are different, being Afghanistan for heroin, Latin America for cocaine, and several countries from Asia to Africa to the same South-Eastern European ones for the trafficking in humans, the Balkan Route continues to cross all the countries of the region to provide illicit markets with the desired goods, or human beings, in this case.

To Surtees, trafficking people is a particularly fruitful activity in the region, as countries like Moldova, Albania, Romania and Bulgaria remain important source countries, while Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo, which traditionally were either countries of transit or destination, are becoming also countries of origin.²²⁹

Human trafficking can be divided into different branches, such as labor trafficking, trafficking of body parts and sex trafficking; the latter being among the most common types of trafficking in the region, or at least the most discussed one.

To the UNODC, at the beginning the trafficking in women for sexual exploitation substantially followed the flow of drugs, with South-Eastern Europe used as a transit zone linking suppliers, Asian and mainly the CIS countries, to their main market demand, Western Europe.²³⁰ During and right after the Yugoslav wars, a reversal of the demand took place, due to the arrival of international peacekeepers. Whilst the connection between the presence of international actors and the increase in trafficking in persons has often been neglected, the number of women trafficked into the region has objectively increased while peacekeepers, civil servants and advisers arrived there. At the same time, when they started to leave the country, the flow of trafficked women went back in the direction of Western Europe, where the demand for them remains high, and by 2003 the number of victims of trafficking in the region sharply decreased.²³¹ Lee pointed out how thousands of soldiers and civilians, well-

228 Study prepared by the Secretariat of the Budapest Group (1999), *The Relationship between Organised Crime and Trafficking in Aliens*, Vienna, International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

229 Surtees R. (2008), *Traffickers and Trafficking in Southern and Eastern Europe. Considering the Other Side of Human Trafficking*, in «*European Journal of Criminology*», vol. 5 no. 1, pp. 39-68.

230 UNODC (2008), *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries*. Vienna, UNODC, p. 74.

231 Mendelson S. E. (2005), *Barracks and Brothels. Peacekeepers and Human Trafficking in the Balkans*, Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, p. 11.

paid to work in post-conflict countries with poor economies, can act as a driving force for the increase in trafficking.²³² This happened not only, as already mentioned, in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s, but also in Iraq and Afghanistan a decade later, where the demand for prostitution increased together with the increased presence of the soldiers.²³³

Furthermore, very often they have not been prosecuted at all, taking advantage of a “culture of impunity” widespread in South-Eastern Europe, which justified the illicit actions as natural necessities of the soldiers.²³⁴ Even though the situation has suddenly changed with their departure, international actors played a part in the expansion of criminal activities of the local criminal groups into human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

In 2010, the UNODC assessed that the majority of the victims identified in Western Europe and Central Europe came from the Balkans, the former Soviet Union or Central Europe itself.²³⁵ The actors involved in the trafficking, however, often change over time, as source countries can emerge or disappear following the changing socio-economic conditions. Albania, for instance, was among the major countries of origin for human trafficking for sexual exploitation at the end of the 1990s, while the number sharply decreased ten years later.²³⁶

Concerning the ethnic groups involved in the trafficking, once again Albanian speaking people appear on the scene, followed by Hungarian, Bulgarian and Turkish groups, and this time preceded by Romanians and ethnic Roma.²³⁷ Among those, Bulgarians and Romanians, mainly of Roma origin, pose the most serious threats to societies according to Europol. Roma people are, indeed, particularly able in this field of trafficking, thanks to their innate mobility and capacity of adaptation. Moreover, the isolation and growing racism faced by some of these communities in certain states, increased their vulnerability to be exploited by organized crime. The access of Romania and Bulgaria, where the presence of Roma minorities is particularly significant, into the Schengen Area, might, thus, opened up new opportunities for the criminal groups.

While the local traffickers are idealistically depicted as adult men who deceive unknown victims, reality happens to be much more complicated, making their identification more difficult. If men remain the principal recruiters in most of the countries of the region, and also the most active in the trafficking in countries such as Kosovo and Albania, women became unexpected recruiters in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine.²³⁸ The fact that the presence of women is stronger in the trafficking in persons than in any other form of illicit trafficking is an indicator of the necessity of building a bond of trust between the recruiter and the victim, a task which is more easily accomplished by women. Moreover, recruitments more often happen within the same nationality, and by peo-

232 Lee M. (2011), *Trafficking and Global Crime Control*, London, SAGE Publications Ltd., p. 98.

233 U.S. Department of State (2013), *Trafficking in Persons Report. June 2013*, U.S. Department of State.

234 Mendelson S. E., (2005), *Barracks and Brothels. Peacekeepers and Human Trafficking in the Balkans*, Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, p. 38.

235 UNODC (2010), *The Globalization of Crime. A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, Vienna, UNODC, p.44.

236 Ivi, p. 50.

237 Europol (2011), *OCTA 2011. EU Organised Crime Threat Assessment*, The Hague, European Police Office, p.27.

238 Surtees R. (2008), *Traffickers and Trafficking in Southern and Eastern Europe. Considering the Other Side of Human Trafficking*, in «European Journal of Criminology», vol. 5 no. 1, p. 44.

ple known to the victim, often acquaintances. Research carried out by the IOM, nevertheless, highlighted how cooperation among different ethnic groups is important to manage the flow of victims: Kosovo-Albanians, for instance, are increasingly cooperating with Macedonians in their transfer among the two countries, following the increase or decrease in police investigations.²³⁹

Like during the wars, such collaboration increases the possibilities of success of the trafficking and organized criminal groups appear more organized and collaborative than governments and anti-trafficking actors, often too focused on national schemes and limited by different legislations. The different causes and factors laying behind the trafficking of people across the state borders of the region are clearly identified by Vreja.²⁴⁰ The external root causes are, in many cases, similar those which led to any other type of illicit trafficking. First of all, the political and economic transition exerted a particularly marked effect on this type of trafficking. The simultaneous decline in the quality of life and increase in poverty severely affected women, many of whom were displaced with the collapse of the socialist system; poor and unemployed, they became perfect targets for the criminal groups. The simultaneous opening of borders marked another natural increase in their illicit crossing since illegal migration, a way out of poverty, became much easier with the lessening of controls. The same existence of already well-functioning black markets greatly facilitated the addition of human beings to the “goods” already smuggled. Finally, as already stated, the series of wars throughout the whole region and the external interventions gave the major boost to the expansion of the trafficking.

To these, in part already known causes, some other factors, more linked to the human beings, have to be taken into consideration. Social factors, for instance, assume a considerable importance in the rising of human trafficking. Among those, family appears to perform a particularly relevant role: low education, abuses or domestic violence and in general neglecting parents characterize most of the victims’ family situations. When these people also come from backward areas, with high rates of unemployment and migration, they are often unaware of the legal possibilities of migrating, which make much easier to fall in the hands of the traffickers.

The same factors exert a certain influence also on the trafficking of children, an activity in which, as researchers confirm, “poverty, alcoholism, family dysfunction, drug abuse, sexual abuse and domestic violence” hugely increase their vulnerability to being trafficked.²⁴¹ The problem arises when even children who are loved by their family, not excessively poor and have a peaceful background are found to be among the victims of trafficking.

To these, personal motivations, negative economic factors, which survived the economic transition, such as low wages and unemployment, the inadequacy of social policies and strategies, and the plague of corruption, increase the vulnerability not only to become victim of criminal organizations, but also to engage in criminal activities. It does not seem a coincidence, thus, that promises of employment appear among the most frequent causes under the deception, today like yesterday.

239 Andreani, A. and Raviv, T. (2004), *Changing patterns and trends of trafficking in persons in the Balkan region. Assessment carried out in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the province of Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova*, Geneva, IOM.

240 Vreja L. O. (2005), *Human Trafficking in South Eastern Europe*, in «Connections: The Quarterly Journal», vol. IV no.4, pp. 49-62.

241 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2008), *Child Trafficking in Europe. A Broad Vision to Put Children First*, UNICEF, p. 12

The listed factors, however, imply that positive changes in the economic, political and social environment, a decrease in unemployment and an increase in wages, together with a greater awareness of the existent legal possibilities and more efficient legal response could at least partially reduce the trend.

For the moment, it seems that the economic crisis, the uneven economic growth of the European countries, and the rise in unemployment in most of the countries which were not suffering from the problem in the past, will only contribute to the growing expansion of the South-Eastern European criminal groups.

The Balkan Route of Illegal Migration

Since the Balkan Route has more recently gained in importance also as transit channel for entering into the European Union, criminal organizations would not miss another golden opportunity. As a matter of fact, Europol stressed that, while in the past illegal immigrants were mainly reaching the area independently, often joining friends or relatives already living in one of the member states, the more effective measures in terms of monitoring borders and restrictions on illegal immigration implemented by many of them, made their travel increasingly difficult, making the recourse to criminal organizations more frequent.²⁴² While the flow of sex or labor trafficking has to be extremely sensitive to changes in supply and demand, illegal migration has to constantly adapt to changes in national legislation and international agreements.

In addition to the smuggling of drugs, Turkey has also assumed a growing importance for illegal migrants: not only Afghan heroin is massively reaching the Greek-Turkish border, but also an increased number of Afghan people. In 2010 the country was identified by FRONTEX as the most transited one by illegal migrants aiming at reaching Western Europe.²⁴³ While Afghan migrants remain among the most present nationalities, in the last years the major increase was no surprisingly found to be among Syrians and Iraqi people. This huge increase in migrants, which is clearly a function of the turmoil throughout the entire Middle East, has obviously profound consequences also in the neighboring South-Eastern Europe, a natural zone of transit. As a consequence, in 2015 the Western Balkans are facing an increase in illegal migration for the fourth consecutive year.²⁴⁴ While part of this flow is composed of nationals of the region, another huge part (45% of the migrants detected in 2014) is a secondary movement coming precisely from Turkey, and moving then toward Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Bulgaria.²⁴⁵ The route which

242 Europol (2011), *OCTA 2011. EU Organised Crime Threat Assessment, The Hague, European Police Office*, p. 21.

243 FRONTEX (2010), *FRAN Quarterly Issue 3, July-September 2010, Warsaw, FRONTEX*.

244 FRONTEX (2015), *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015, Warsaw, FRONTEX*.

245 Ivi, p. 25.

crosses the Balkans is often preferred by migrants or refugees coming from the Middle East and Asia for economic reasons but also because it is a long-established one and it is safer than travelling by sea.

The border which separates Serbia from Hungary, being the last obstacle in the path toward the European Union, even though few of the migrants aim at remaining in Hungary, can serve as an indicator of the overall flow of migrants transiting through the region. Indeed, the majority of detections were reported along this border, and increased compared to 2013, when the numbers were already high, by 129% between 2014 and 2015.²⁴⁶ This marked increase followed a change in transiting routes: while in 2012 illegal crossing of borders took place mainly from Serbia to Croatia and Slovenia, in 2013, when Hungary suspended its deeply criticized practice of detention of asylum seekers, the flow moved eastward, where safer roads and less borders to cross make access to the Schengen Area faster.²⁴⁷ Data gathered by FRONTEX shows to what extent the changing in the Hungarian asylum policy has an impact on the changing in direction of the illegal flows: while in June 2013 only 39 illegal migrants were detected between Serbia and Croatia, approximately 4100 were found between Serbia and Hungary.²⁴⁸ The immediate reaction of the Hungarian government was the reintroduction of the detention in July 2013, which redirected the flow westwards. The increase or decrease in detections in Croatia seems, thus, to have little to do with the access of the country into the European Union, not yet part of the Schengen Area, but more with the changing in legislation in another member state. It is, thus, evident how national decisions or European Union laws and policies can deeply influence the direction, composition and dynamics of the flow of illegal migrants. Meanwhile, the decision taken by the Hungarian government about the building of a fence to divide its border with Serbia aimed at stopping this overwhelming flow, could lead to further major changes in its directions in the near future.

As part of these flows is composed of nationals of the region, the political and economic changes which take place inside it cannot be ignored as well. This year, the huge increase in illegal border crossing between Serbia and Hungary represents an alarm bell of a situation of dissatisfaction and exasperation. 10.000 Kosovars who were illegally migrating were detected by the Hungarian police in January alone, whereas 6.000 were detected in the whole of 2013.²⁴⁹ Police sources reported to the BBC that that they are successful in catching only the 20% of them, while the rest just scatter through the woods.²⁵⁰ The ultimate goal of most of these migrants is to reach Germany or Austria, escaping from poverty and unemployment. While the flow from the Middle East was easily foreseeable, neither the neighboring countries nor the EU member states were expecting this sudden, huge flow, which is causing serious problems to Hungary, first of all, and to the final destination states, which have to deal with a huge increase in the requests of asylum. The European Commission stat-

246 Ivi, p. 19.

247 FRONTEX (2014), *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014*, Warsaw, FRONTEX.

248 Ivi, p. 18.

249 Sim D. (2015, February 6), *Kosovo: Thousands of illegal migrants try to enter EU via Serbia and Hungary*, *International Business Times*, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/kosovo-thousands-illegal-migrants-try-enter-eu-via-serbia-hungary-1486929>.

250 Thorpe N. (2015, February 6), *Non-EU migrants cross Hungary's 'wide open' border*, *BBC News, Hungary*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-31154596>.

ed that the number of illegal migrants from Kosovo who seek asylum in the European countries has risen by 40% since December, in this way exceeding the number of Syrian and Afghanistan asylum seekers.²⁵¹

As a consequence, it is unclear to national and international observers why this exodus started exactly in this historical moment, seven years after Kosovo declared its independence. Part of the explanation given by the migrants themselves, is linked to the lessening of the travel restrictions in Kosovo, which now allows them to cross Serbia more easily.²⁵² Most of the newspapers and analysts, however, pointed out the persisting poverty, lack of opportunities and high levels of unemployment as the main factors fostering migration. The fact that Kosovo remained the poorest country of the region, without any doubt plays a fundamental part in the decision of migrating.

The Group for Legal and Political Studies, a Kosovan think-tank, reporting the opinions of some of the Kosovars who are willing to migrate, even in the face of mounting declarations that their applications for asylum will not be accepted, stated that 88% of them point out the government of Kosovo as “the most responsible institution for their migration”.²⁵³ More possibilities of finding a decent job, increased salaries, and visa liberalization are listed among the factors which would reduce their incentives to migrate. Kosovars are the only citizens within the Western Balkans who do not enjoy a visa-free regime with the European Union. When the European Union launched such process for the Western Balkans in 2008, indeed, the country was not yet independent, but the situation did not change after its declaration. Only in 2012 it received its visa liberalization road map, but the path does not seem particularly short.

If, on the one side, the fact that not all the European Union member states recognized its independence is preventing Kosovo from obtaining it, on the other, it is its delay in adopting drastic reforms in the fighting against organized crime and corruption, which could have “a potentially severe impact on the EU’s internal security”, which forms another part of the explanation.²⁵⁴

The lifting of the free-visa regime will wait until concrete improvements, especially in the fight against drug and human trafficking, will be envisaged and, as recently declared, until the present huge influx of migrants will stop.²⁵⁵ This situation entails a vicious circle in which part of its citizens are trying and, most probably, will continue to try to migrate illegally.

Therefore, beyond escaping poverty and lack of opportunities, the Kosovars are leaving a corrupt country in which the influence of organized crime groups is still extremely strong. “The mafia controls everything in Mitrovica”, a young man who was leaving the city to reach Germany declared to the BBC, as were many of his fellow citizens.²⁵⁶ Paradox-

251 EurActive Serbia (2015, February 16), *Poverty spurs mass migration from Kosovo*, Euractive, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/poverty-spurs-mass-migration-kosovo-312131>.

252 Thorpe N. (2015, February 6), *Non-EU migrants cross Hungary’s ‘wide open’ border*, BBC News, Hungary, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-31154596>.

253 Loxha A. and Elshani D. (2015), *Potential Migrant’s Profiles: Who are the Kosovars most willing to migrate?*, Policy Analysis No. 03/2015, Prishtina, Group for Legal and Political Studies, p. 10.

254 European Commission Press Release (2013, February 12), *First Commission report on progress by Kosovo towards visa liberalisation*, European Commission.

255 Reuters Video (2015, February 18), *EU says no visa free regime for Kosovo until migrant influx stops*, Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/video/2015/02/19/eu-says-no-visa-free-regime-for-kosovo-u?videoId=363237446>.

256 Thorpe N. (2015, February 6), *Non-EU migrants cross Hungary’s ‘wide open’ border*, BBC News, Hungary, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-31154596>.

ical as it might be, however, while escaping mafia, many of the migrants are contributing to make it earn more profits, since many of the transfers are organized by these groups. Explanatory of the situation is “*Vila Lira*”, Albanian words meaning “Freedom Villa”, a hotel in Palic, a city in the north of Serbia, very close to the Hungarian border, that became a meeting point for traffickers and trafficked Kosovars who paid 200 euros for their pursuit of freedom.²⁵⁷

While Orbán, the Hungarian Prime Minister, fears that “Hungary will soon become a large refugee camp”, and advances a plan radically different from the European measures, which includes detention and repatriation of all the illegal migrants, asylum seekers included,²⁵⁸ Germany sent to the mentioned border twenty police officers to stop the illegal entries of most of the asylum seekers,²⁵⁹ and the IOM calls for a coordinated response, fearing that mass repatriation could lead to an increased recourse to illegal activities rather than to a decrease in the flow, a new concern emerged.²⁶⁰

While Italy is facing the cyclical arrival of the biggest flows of migrants coming from Africa in all its history on its southern coasts (50.000 people since the beginning of this year, 10.000 more than last year), the Balkan Route has more recently and more silently become an alternative route for a small proportion of them.²⁶¹ Whilst the majority are still preferring to follow one of the two well-established existing routes, one connecting North Africa to Italy and Malta by crossing the Mediterranean Sea, called the “Central Mediterranean Route”, and the other leading to the Iberian Peninsula through the sea or through the land route of Ceuta and Melilla, called the “Western Mediterranean route”, which led to a sharp decrease in the number of African migrants detected in South-Eastern Europe, part of them are now choosing to walk through the “Western Balkan Route”.²⁶² To the never-ending flow of people from the Middle East, thus, migrants originating from Sub-Saharan Africa, and mainly Somalia, Eritrea, Mali, Cameroon, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast, are crossing Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, after having reached Greece by boat, which is facing an increase in arrivals comparable to Italy.²⁶³ According to UNHCR data, the Greek islands have been reached by 48.000 migrants in 2015 alone, which naturally leads to profound consequences throughout South-Eastern Europe.²⁶⁴

257 Xharra J. (2015, February 17), *Kosovans risk perils of roads, forests and criminals in chase for better life in EU*, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/17/kosovans-risk-perils-of-roads-forests-and-criminals-in-chase-for-better-life-in-eu>.

258 Lestyánszky Á. (2015, February 14), *Economic refugees from Kosovo pour into Hungary*, *The Budapest Beacon*, <http://budapestbeacon.com/public-policy/economic-refugees-from-kosovo-pour-into-hungary/>.

259 Euractive.com with Reuters (2015, February 13), *German police sent to Serbia- Hungary border to stem Kosovo exodus*, *Euractive* <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/german-police-sent-serbia-hungary-border-stem-kosovo-exodus-312095>.

260 International Organization for Migration Kosovo (nd.), *Coordinated Response Needed to Address Irregular Migration Flows*, IOM, <http://kosovo.iom.int/coordinated-response-needed-address-irregular-migration-flows>.

261 Ruotolo G. (2015, June 7), *Da inizio anno 50 mila migranti sbarcati in Italia. Esodo senza fine dalla Libia, adesso è emergenza vera: ecco tutti i numeri e le mappe*, *La Stampa Cronache*, <http://www.lastampa.it/2015/06/07/italia/cronache/superata-la-soglia-dei-mila-i-migranti-sbarcati-in-italia-dallinizio-dellanno-MJ4TuyiYw9FA7aRYcEEToK/pagina.html>.

262 FRONTEX (2015), *Migratory Routes Map*, <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/migratory-routes-map/>; FRONTEX (2015), *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015*, Warsaw, FRONTEX, p. 26.

263 Pisoni M. B. (2015, April 22), *Non per mare ma a piedi: i disperati lungo la “rotta dei Balcani”*, *Rep.tv*, <http://video.repubblica.it/dossier/emergenza-lampedusa-2010/non-per-mare-ma-a-piedi-i-disperati-lungo-la-rotta-dei-balcani/198679/197720>.

264 UNHCR (2015, June 9), *Pressure growing on Greek island of Lesbos, as 2015 refugee and migrant crossings of the Mediterranean top 100,000*, <http://www.unhcr.org/5576bd836.html>.

Adrian Edwards, UNHCR spokesperson, expressed his concerns for the migrants crossing “the Western Balkan Route”, as “they remain dangerously vulnerable to violence, abuse and accidents”.²⁶⁵ Their travel, made of thousands of kilometers lasts, indeed, for weeks, and a very small part of them reach their objective.

One of the sad epilogues of this story has been the killing of fourteen migrants, probably originating from Afghanistan and Somalia, who were proceeding along the railway tracks of Macedonia.²⁶⁶ This practice is common among the people who leave Greece walking toward Western Europe, since it easily leads them to their destinations and it allows to evade police controls, but, as showed, it can also be extremely dangerous, leading to the feared accidents. Given that the Macedonian legislation prohibits the use of public transport by illegal migrants, and the state train and bus company was even banned from selling them tickets, crossing the country by foot or by bicycle appears the only possible solution.²⁶⁷ While the Parliament is considering to change this rule, others have already started to exploit the situation: an open-air market of bikes emerged at the border with Greece, where their price ranges from 169 to 225 dollars.²⁶⁸

The risk that some of the migrants are being helped by smugglers appears extremely likely: Jean Paul, an illegal migrant from Africa interviewed in an Italian reportage on the Balkan Route, admitted that he travelled for free thanks to a deal with Turkish smugglers: if he drove a boat full of migrants they would not have charged him of 500 euros, like the others.²⁶⁹ He accepted and drove, for the first time in his life and without a map, the boat which would allow him to follow his dream of reaching France. The activities and the negligence of the smugglers pose a risk not only to the lives of the migrants but also to the civil society of the whole region.

While Italy is struggling to deal with an extremely huge number of asylum requests, a constant flow of migrants, and an increasing number of dead people to be buried along its coastline, Spain fortified the fences dividing its enclaves from the rest of Morocco and introduced a deeply criticized amendment which allows the country to reject those trying to climb over it, the Greek island of Kos feels worried that boats of migrants could divert boats of tourists elsewhere, with Germany and France rejecting the EU plan of distributing the migrants according to a quota system, the EU members are bitterly struggling to agree on a common, rapid response.

At the end, the ultimate beneficiary of the indecision, passiveness and disagreement of international actors, and in this case mainly of the European Union, is organized crime, which was able, once again, to extend its tentacles filling the gaps left by the law enforce-

265 UN News Centre (2015, June 12), *Western Balkans experiencing surge in migrant, refugee crossings, warns UN agency*, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51132#.VX7YRZHEqI4>.

266 The Guardian (2015, April 24), *14 migrants killed by train while walking on tracks in Macedonia – police*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/24/several-migrants-hit-by-train-killed-central-macedonia>.

267 Westcott L. (2015, November 11), *Migrants Bike, Walk Across Macedonia in Bid to Get to E.U. Countries*, *Newsweek*, <http://www.newsweek.com/macedonia-migrants-macedonia-migrants-european-migrant-crisis-serbia-bikes-342441>.

268 Internazionale (2015, June 18), *Migranti attraversano la Macedonia in bicicletta per raggiungere l'Europa del nord*, Internazionale, <http://www.internazionale.it/notizie/2015/06/18/migranti-attraversano-la-macedonia-in-bicicletta-per-raggiungere-l-europa-del-nord>.

269 Pisoni M. B. (2015, April 22), *Non per mare ma a piedi: i disperati lungo la “rotta dei Balcani”*, Rep.tv, <http://video.repubblica.it/dossier/emergenza-lampedusa-2010/non-per-mare-ma-a-piedi-i-disperati-lungo-la-rotta-dei-balcani/198679/197720>.

ment. No surprisingly, the research carried out by the Budapest Group, highlighted how “irregular migration flows have facilitated the internationalisation of organised crime within the EU”.²⁷⁰ Not only more local groups are now engaging themselves in the smuggling of migrants, but they are also strengthening their international links, posing a more dangerous threat to Europe and beyond and increasing the risks of formation of a stronger “Adriatic Connection”, or even of an “Asian” or “African Connection”.

The sharp focus placed on the arrival of thousands of irregular migrants who do not find their place in the already over-populated and over-employed Europe, is obscuring the other side of the phenomenon, the continuous growth of criminal organizations that are increasingly controlling all the illegal routes of migration, raising concerns for the formation of a transglobal cartel.

270 Study prepared by the Secretariat of the Budapest Group (1999 June), *The Relationship between Organised Crime and Trafficking in Aliens*, Vienna, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, p. 41.

Conclusion

By looking beyond the mere historical, political or social events which occurred in South-Eastern Europe, thus, a huge, extremely active and globally connected parallel system comes to the surface. By giving credit to the questioned idea of “ancient ethnic hatreds” or considering migratory movements and illicit traffickings only as a response to negative economic trends, the whole, successful and well-organized system of organized crime, which has been fed also by neglect, would entirely be ignored.

A deeper look into how the Yugoslav wars were financed, who were their fighters, the timeline of the events, the not so transparent process of transition and the not so renewed political elites leading the newly established countries, the concrete changes that joining the European Union brought to certain countries and their citizens and into how, concretely, migrants defined illegal by an international system which does not know how to deal with them, are able to cross the region, would offer a rather different interpretation of all these processes, putting into the foreground what grew almost undisturbed underground.

In this framework, the Balkan Route can, in a certain way, be regarded as a symbol of all these developments.

The Balkans, a zone which still evokes in some cases violence and lawlessness, with a past of banditry, revolts, an alleged ethnic hatred which exploded into violent wars, followed by a chaos in which the criminal gangs made their biggest profits and the corrupted political elites were often involved in illicit traffickings, are crossed even today by a long route, a “Balkan Route” and not a “South-Eastern European Route” maybe not by coincidence, which links heroin producers to heroin consumers. The geographical direction and ramification of the route changed following the political events that took place in the region: obligatory deviations were made once conflicts erupted, leading different countries to assume the leading role in the smuggling; deviations of convenience were made when some of the countries of the region joined the EU, for instance, or when controls at the borders were more or less strict. Whilst mentioned in more and more reports, studies and articles, today such route is still crossing the entire region thanks to the collaboration of criminal groups of different ethnicity and in part also to the turning of a blind eye by some governments or officials.

If originally this name was given to the route crossed by heroin which linked Afghanistan to Western Europe, by extension all the smuggling routes which have been established by the same ethnic groups who were fighting during the day and exchanging weapons, cigarettes, oil or food in the night during the 1990s can be referred to as “Balkan routes”. Similarly, the same name can be used to include the routes crossed by any type of smuggled good which cross all the countries of the region, with the mentioned smuggling of cocaine, migrants and women occupying a central place. While the countries of origin and sometimes

also the destination countries change, the South-Eastern European countries have always been ready to adapt to external changes, thus maintaining a prominent role as transit countries in the different illicit activities.

If in the past the West was too busy with the drawing of its borders and the building of its own national identity first, with the fighting against a different political and economic system, then, and with questionable interventions aimed at stopping wars, it was only when peace was restored and reconstruction started, that, directly threatened on its own territory, “invaded” by Yugoslav criminals or reached by drugs, weapons or people transiting through South-Eastern Europe, that organized criminals coming from the region started to be considered as a serious menace to the European stability. More and more globally connected, today, they are posing a not insignificant threat to an always growing part of the world.

What raises major concerns, however, is the possibility that such routes, which survived for so long thanks to lenient controls and corruption, and their logistical infrastructure could be exploited also by terrorist groups who want to reach Western Europe. Several authors highlight, indeed, the dangerous connections which can be easily built between criminal groups and terrorist ones.²⁷¹ Whilst the ultimate objective of the two groups is rather different, as terrorists follow an ideological agenda while criminals are pushed only by economic gains, Allum and Siebert stress how the fact that making money often involves violence can become a strong point of contact between them.²⁷² A “crime-terror continuum”, thus, emerged and consolidated during the 1990s, when terrorist groups started to fund themselves through crimes such as drug smuggling or credit-card fraud, and when alliances between these two worlds emerged.²⁷³ No surprisingly, according to Makarenko, it is the international drug smuggling the field in which these alliances seem to be stronger: alleged contacts have been established between members of Al-Qaeda and Bosnian criminals in the smuggling of heroin, while Albanian mafia and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) have both benefited from one another especially in 1997.²⁷⁴ The Balkan Route could, thus, become a direct link between Middle East and Europe for terrorist groups, while Albania has expressed its concerns that some of them are already using the Western Balkan route to reach the European Union.²⁷⁵

Even though according to Anastasijevic, “transnational terrorism failed to gain a foothold in the Balkans”, as most of the local Muslims rejected contacts with extremists, even the weakest connection between organized crime and terrorism could seriously alarm the governments of the region and of the entire West, today more than ever before, frightened by the terrorist threat.²⁷⁶ Since the final step of the crime-terror continuum theory is the “con-

271 Krunoslav A. (2007), *Smuggling in South Eastern Europe*, in «Connections: The Quarterly Journal», vol. 6 no. 1, pp. 71-84.

272 Allum F. and Siebert R. (eds.) (2003), *Organised crime and the challenge to democracy*, London, Routledge.

273 Makarenko T. (2004), *The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism*, in «Global Crime», vol. 6 no. 1, pp. 129-145.

274 Ivi, p. 132.

275 West Sands Advisory LLP, Project lead: Makarenko T. (2012), *Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between terrorist and organised crime groups in the European Union. Study*, Brussels, European Parliament, p. 25.

276 Anastasijevic D. (2010), *Getting Better? A Map of Organized Crime in the Western Balkans*, in: Benedek W., Daase C., Dimitrijevic V. and Van Duyne P. (eds.), *Transnational Terrorism, Organized Crime and Peace-Building. Human Security in the Western Balkans*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 149-168.

vergence thesis”, meaning that criminal and terrorist groups could, with the passing of time, constitute a single entity in which illicit profits and violence will converge, together with the aim of making money and destabilizing governments, both the regional political elites but also the Western ones should pay particular attention to such developments.

A future hypothetical convergence between transnational organized crime, corruption and terrorism, defined by Shelley and Picarelli as “unholy. Trinity”, appears, thus, as a possible, frightening scenario in South-Eastern Europe, where at least two of the phenomena are already deeply-rooted in the territory.²⁷⁷

In conclusion, geography, history, international interventions, political, social and economic changes provided particularly favorable opportunities to organized crime which, not having been stopped for long time, created the present conditions which are being exploited by human smugglers and drug dealers, and which could lead to even more alarming situations.

However, if external dominations fed the growth of the brigandage, wars and international powers fostered illegal smuggling, while a political turnover which never happened led to the social advance of criminal segments, today a more mature civil society living in relatively functioning democracies, aiming at joining the European Union, members of several international organizations and connected to the entire world, seems to ask for the renewals and political clarity which have never taken place in the past.

Whilst not adequately reported by Western media, the citizens of Bulgaria, a country in which smuggling represents a “cultural heritage” as stated by Ivan Krastev, a Bulgarian political scientist, protested for almost a year between 2013 and 2014, not only against austerity measures, unemployment and the increase in the electronic bills, but also against nepotism and a corrupt government involved in shady processes.²⁷⁸ Students followed by thousands of people, mainly from the countryside, took to the streets of Sofia, asking for a drastic change in the way their country was governed, in what has been the first huge demonstration led by students since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.²⁷⁹

Bosnia and Herzegovina was also hit by protests last year. While the long series of institutional positions created by the Dayton Agreement made the political and bureaucratic system extremely complicated, rampant corruption and nepotism have been addressed also by Bosnian protestors as major problems which are obstructing political decisions, still anchored in ethno-nationalist rhetorics, and hindering the economic recovery of a country facing an extremely high rate of unemployment.²⁸⁰ ‘The Economist’ highlighted how the process of privatization of state enterprises recently advanced by the political elite turned out to be deeply corrupt as well, leading to the breakdown of many companies.²⁸¹ Beginning from

277 Shelley L. and Picarelli J. T. (2005), *Methods and motives: Exploring links between transnational organized crime and international terrorism*, in «Trends in Organized Crime», vol. 9 no. 2, pp. 52-67.

278 Glenny M. (2008), *Balkan Organised Crime*, in: Batt J. (eds.) *Is There an Albanian Question?*, Chaillot Paper, no. 107, European Union Institute for Security Studies, p. 89.

279 Lipkis S. (2013, December 17), *2013: The Year of Bulgarian Protest*, World Policy Blog, <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2013/12/17/2013-year-bulgarian-protest>.

280 Mujanovic J. (2014, February 11), *It's spring at last in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Aljazeera, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/02/it-spring-at-last-bosnia-herzegov-2014296537898443.html>.

281 T. J. (2014, February 10), *Spring in the Bosnian step*, *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2014/02/bosnias-protests>.

the city of Tuzla and then spreading throughout the entire country, the biggest protests since the war of the 1990s were a symptom of the dissatisfaction of the three ethnic groups inhabiting it, who were asking for more transparent processes and radical economic changes.

Corruption also pushed the citizens of Croatia to the streets back in 2011. Twenty years after its independence, they protested against a political oligarchy which have been “shattering the economy under the auspices of privatization”, while some ministers have been arrested in previous years.²⁸² Since a study issued by the Global Financial Integrity (GFI) organization estimated that illicit financial flows, namely corruption, tax evasion and crime, cost the country \$15.248 billion between 2001 and 2010, according to some the large funds which Croatia received in the same period from the European Union, and which increased in the following years, should have been suspended until such illicit activities stop.²⁸³ Being the most recent country which has joined the European Union, however, Croatia has reached the demanded standards in terms of fighting organized crime and establishing functioning and stable institutions and remains the most successful country of the Western Balkans in these terms.

More recently, protests also exploded in the capital of Macedonia, Skopje, after covert recordings revealed corruption scandals, questionable criminal prosecutions and even the concealing of a murder, which led to the eruption of the citizens’ rage against the government led by Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister for nine years.²⁸⁴

Meanwhile, Kosovo is currently dealing with its biggest exodus of migrants escaping from a country which is experiencing not only huge problems of unemployment and economic stagnation, as media extensively reported, but also of a “corruption (which) is omnipresent”.²⁸⁵ Although less extensively reported, also the failures of the EULEX mission are coming to the surface, proved by the “untouchable status of the criminal segments of Kosovo’s elite”.²⁸⁶

These recent events show, thus, not only the fact that a huge segment of the population is strongly asking for real democracies, honest politicians and fair trials, but also how, many years after all the mentioned historical, political and economic events, fighting organized crime and corruption remain a priority which almost all the countries of the region have still to achieve.

The analysis carried out in this work has, thus, demonstrated that the troubled past of South-Eastern Europe, and in particular the wars, left behind them more than ordinary economic problems, a huge reconstruction process to be undertaken and waves of refugees; they have left, indeed, an enduring legacy of an organized crime becoming more and more transnational, and a pervasive corruption.

282 Prug T. (2011, April 2), *Croatia protests show failure of political promise*, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/apr/02/croatia-protests-economic-slump>.

283 Kar D. and Freitas S. (2012), *Illicit Financial Flows From Developing Countries: 2001- 2010*, *Global Financial Integrity*; Srdoc N. and Samy J. A. (2013, January 17), *EU should stop funding Croatia’s corrupt networks*, *Euobserver*, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/118760>.

284 BBC News (2015, May 18), *Macedonia protests ‘to continue’ against PM Gruevski*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32776204>.

285 Jacqué J. P. (2015), *Review of the EULEX Kosovo’s Mission Implementation of the Mandate with a Particular Focus on the Handling of the Recent Allegations*, *Report to the Attention of High Representative/ Vice President of the European Commission Ms Federica Mogherini*, Brussels, p. 17.

286 Capussela A. (2015, April 16), *Eulex report exposes EU failure in Kosovo*, *Euobserver*, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/128343>.

Without a real political turnover happening after the wars and the changing in system, and without a proper awareness of the risks a strong presence of organized crime can entail, it has grown with the direct or indirect, wanted or not, collaboration of the political elites. After years of stalemates, it seems that the same civil society which was often considered passive when not non-existent in the region, finally woke up.

With the necessary distinctions, the contemporary situation of South-Eastern Europe does not appear that rosy in terms of stability, economic progress, transparent political processes and fighting against organized crime still today. However, whilst the present analysis focused only on the illicit processes the countries of the region are and were involved with, substantial improvements have been made since the 1990s, thanks to the commitment of the countries themselves, to connections with other European countries and to the direct and indirect pressure exerted by the European Union. Even though the most tragic prospects did not occur, it is clear that a lot of work has still to be done, with the hope that “the Balkan tendency to take two steps forward, followed quickly by three backward” does not correspond to reality.²⁸⁷

287 Corpora C. A. (2004), *The Untouchables: Former Yugoslavia's Clandestine Political Economy*, in «Problems of Post-Communism», vol. 51 no. 3, pp. 61-68.

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