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UNODC: Kosovo Albanian drug trafficking has acquired alarming proportions

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The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has warned in its latest report that the axis between South American drug cartels and the Albanian mafia have acquired alarming proportions, and reports by several intelligence agencies show that Kosovo is a distribution center on the crossroads of global routes and pathways of drug trafficking.

This presents reason for concern, primarily because of the new pathways of drug trafficking and the including of cocaine in the range of products offered by the groups that are active along the Balkan drug route, the UNODC annual report for 2007 said. The Albanian mafia has recently begun taking over the control of ports in Romania, in addition to the already solid network existing in Albania and Montenegro, the report said.

This warning by UNODC is the latest in a series of alarming reports by a number of agencies in charge of fighting organized crime, including the FBI, Interpol and Europol, which state that the Albanian mafia is the most serious criminal organization in Europe because it controls a huge part of the heroin trade in a number of European state - Switzerland, Greece, Belgium, Austria, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Norway, and, recently, in Great Britain.

The western European heroin market, of which 40-75 percent is controlled by Albanians, brings annual earnings of around seven billion dollars, which makes the trafficking in this type of narcotic by far the most profitable activity in the Balkans, western intelligence services have reported.

The territory that includes Albania, Kosovo and western Macedonia is a huge drug warehouse. Its contents are drugs measured not in kilograms, but in tons, a western diplomat posted in the Balkans said in a statement for the Tanjug new agency, explaining how intelligence sources estimate that there are at least seven tons of heroin in this region at all times, ready to be moved to the west.

Former official of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Michael Levine has said that one of the wings of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was linked with every known narco-cartel in the Middle East and the Far East, and that almost every European intelligence service and police has files on connections between ethnic Albanian rebels and drug trafficking.



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Albania and Kosovo are the heart of the Balkan drug trade route which links Pakistan and Afghanistan with Europe. That route is worth around seven billion dollars annually and around 80 percent of the heroin intended for the western European market is smuggled along this route, said a report presented to the US Congress.

International representatives in Kosovo complained in the recent years that it is difficult to estimate, in the complicated relations on the political stage of the Kosovo Albanians and ethnic Albanians in Macedonia or southern Serbia proper, whether politics controls organized crime or the mafia controls politicians.

It is also possible, however, that organized criminal groups in Kosovo in fact have no influence on the authorities because they are actually those who are in power, as Italian General Fabio Mini said on his departure from the post of commander of KFOR.