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Heroin bust in Kosovo's smuggling heaven

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Kosovo police seized 10 kilograms of heroin and arrested five people charged for involvement in an international drug trafficking ring along the so-called “Southern Balkan route” which is widely seen as a major artery for heroin smuggling from Asia to Western Europe and the U.S.

The drug bust was conducted in eastern Kosovo, just across the administrative line from the Albanian-populated village of Veliki Trnovac in southern Serbia, police said, adding that arrests followed a five-month-long investigation. Smugglers have hidden heroin in two cars with Swiss license plates.

In one of the cars, police found three children, believed to be used as a cover for the smuggling operation.

The Albanian mafia, with its branches spread throughout Balkans, is believed to be responsible for providing nearly 70 per cent of heroin designated for Western European markets, in an underground operation estimated at some 7 billion dollars annually.

Meanwhile, social tensions are reaching an alarming level in Kosovo, as the province’s market experts reported that prices of food on local markets hiked some 50 per cent since the beginning of the year.

Kosovo faces a serious threat to its stability, not from Belgrade’s quest to keep the troubled province within its borders, but rather from social unrest caused by the fresh burden to extremely low average salary of less than 200 euros, local economists warned.

“The increase of prices of food, in particular flour and cooking oil, directly influence a deterioration of the standard of living”, Pristina-based economist Safet Grdaliu said.

Combined with the record high unemployment, estimated at between 35 and 70 per cent, food prices could turn out to be a key factor which would determine the success of Kosovo’s progress strongly politically backed by the West, but without crucial financial injection to the local struggling economy.

Kosovo's deputy prime minister Hajredin Kuci said that the “dire social situation” has not been a secret to the government, but said that Hashim Thaci’s cabinet made a plan to improve overall economic situation and social care for the most threatened part of province’s 2 million population.