

A neglected dimension of conflict: the Albanian mafia

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The Albanian mafia: a real mafia at the heart of the Balkans?

AT THE END of 1999, the Kosovo daily newspaper *Koha Ditore* decided to break the law of silence: 'Drugs are flowing into Kosovo where we are witnessing the birth of a powerful mafia network', the province is gradually becoming 'a Colombia at the heart of Europe' (*Koha Ditore* 23 December 1999). On 10 March 2000 the special UN human rights investigator returned from a ten-day tour of the Balkans. What Jiri Dienstbier said is, if possible, even clearer: 'Kosovo is in chaos', the province has become 'a mafia paradise' (RFE/RL Newline 21 March 2000).

This is not the first time that the term 'mafia' has served to describe organised crime at work throughout the albanophone area in the Balkans. But this debased word has lost so much force that now it describes any band of hoodlums. Whereas a real mafia is, on the contrary, a precise, very definite criminal entity having little in common with the 'milieu' of villains which is normally found almost everywhere in the world.

The real mafia

A mafia is a permanent secret society uniting a coalition of 'families' bound by blood or marriage; it is closed, endowed with elaborate hierarchies and rules from which one deviates only at the risk of one's life. A merciless law of silence (*omertà*) is made to surround it. A gang can be joined through affinity or friendship; but a mafia may be joined only by family or clan co-option, after an initiation. Mafias pass over but the 'family' endures – some have been in existence for centuries, whereas, if its boss is dead or locked up, a gang does not survive for long. Mafias recruit only on the basis of race or sex; thus, by cousinhood or clan. Initiation into the Cosa Nostra is only for those who are Sicilian, born in Sicily

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and male. Even if they are implicit, these rules always exist in a mafia. Able to resist the worst repression, a mafia is a state within a state with territory, subjects, laws and armed forces. 'The mafia family never dies out. You arrest two or three of them but the family remains, and if there are not enough children it co-opts even more daring men and gives them its daughters as wives' (Bocca 1993). The Cosa Nostra survived twenty years of fascism. The Chinese Triads have resisted fifty years of communism, ten of which were the 'Cultural Revolution' that claimed 30 million victims.

Is the Albanian–Kosovan–western Macedonian agglomeration a 'mafia' in the strict sense of the word? Taking strict definitions let us see if the proven facts in our possession confirm the diagnosis or not.

A real mafia? The circumstances of its appearance

Several visible signs show that Albanian crime has attained a high degree of organisation and sophistication. If this stage in itself is not enough for one to speak of a mafia, discussion is none the less eminently necessary. The signs are in the multi-criminal activity. The Albanian villains traffic in drugs, illegal migrants, arms, stolen vehicles, contraband cigarettes and alcohol. They devote themselves to pimping and burglary on a grand scale, kidnapping for ransom, contract killings, audio and video pirating, falsifying official documents (visas, etc.) and laundering criminal money.

The impressive capacity to conduct highly complex transnational operations

The secret mass transfer of migrants from the Albanian coastline to nearby Italy is anything but spontaneous and disorderly. According to a number of first-hand accounts – and the best Albanian and Italian experts – it is, on the contrary, a concerted operation aimed at making Puglia a criminal outpost in the Balkans for the European Union. At the point of departure ships are 'requisitioned' by disciplined, well-armed teams – not by panic-stricken, destitute hordes. Passengers are carefully selected on the basis of future possibilities of 'agreement' and of their hard currency funds; once on board, order is assured by armed criminals who melt into thin air in sight of the Italian coast.

There are other examples of international cooperation practised by Albanian organised crime:

- From Tirana a front company situated in Albania buys and then has delivered from the US safes, top-quality alarm and security systems. Subsequently, expert burglars from gangs come from Europe and America to train using these 'demonstration' materials.
- In the field of burglary, specialised gangs have teams variously qualified

depending on the difficulty of the target. Among them are elite elements whose operations are accompanied by a wealth of security and protection.

Consummate protection

Even more internalised than at the disappearance of the communist regime, two-thirds of the agents of the very paranoid Albanian GPU (the Sigurimi or Secret Police) were sacked; a number of them soon joined the local criminal clans. These individuals all go under the cover of pseudonyms, nicknames and false identities. Worse still, according to their local origins, Albanian hill-dwellers speak dialects crossed with slang which – even in the nearby valleys – their neighbours understand poorly. Take these difficulties together (pseudonyms and dialect) and imagine the difficulties for Italian or Swiss police who have to decipher the transcripts produced from telephone tapping.

Reliable evidence of criminal sophistication

Michael Lauber, head of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) and until 2000 head of the Centre for Organised Crime/Crime-Analyses of the Federal Police Office in Switzerland, has stated: 'The Kosovars and Albanians operate in the greatest secrecy. It is very difficult to get information from them during inquiries because they are grouped in small closed clans – almost in families comparable to the old model of the Italian mafia. Besides, they are experts in the art of using new technologies such as laptops, mobiles and the Internet' (*Le Matin-Dimanche* 15 August 1999).

An officer of the Italian ROS (the elite operations section of the Italian gendarmerie, specialising in high-risk anti-mafia actions) has said: 'The Kosovo Albanians are among the most dangerous drugs and arms traffickers. These men are determined, violent and capable of the worst. They can mobilise in a few hours a host of men at arms and have at their disposal enormous amounts of ready money. To keep in trim they burgle homes and businesses every night while constantly being on the move from one part of Lombardy to another' (*Corriere della Sera* 15 October 1998).

These facts and testimony reveal a high level of criminal professionalism, but this still does not allow us to speak of a mafia in the strict sense. Two decisive elements are lacking.

A clan society: Kanun, honour and vendetta

In Albania, and even more so in the mountainous north of the country, there survives in an almost chemically pure form (owing to the constant isolation of the country throughout the twentieth century) a traditional Mediterranean clan society, respectful of ancestral traditions of honour and vengeance. For most of

the mafias these rules and laws are implicit, passed down by word of mouth. But in Albania the code of honour or *Kanun* is written down and the brochure that contains it is on sale in newspaper kiosks.

Complex organisation, iron discipline

Up to this point all the elements which would allow us to qualify a sophisticated trans-national criminal organisation as a mafia have been listed. Only one, deciding factor is lacking, which in itself allows us to confirm or disqualify the mafia claim: the mode of organisation. For, in Corsica for example, a clan society and a very active criminal scene have produced – for the lack of an appropriate organisational model or the will to apply one – only a circle (*milieu*) rather than a mafia.

Starting at the base of the pyramid, among Albanian criminals the basic cell is a team of four to ten men from the same clan and the same village, often from the same biological family. Specialising in a distinct kind of criminal activity (pimping, burglary, various types of trafficking, etc.) and most often very ‘professional’, the team obeys a boss blindly. Several teams operate on a territory, in a given sector. In emigration, coordinating the activity of the basic cells is done by a ‘liaison coordination officer’ who operates most often under the cover of a cultural or folkloric activity. Throughout Europe the police diagnosis is the same: these teams live discreetly, without attracting attention; they systematically practice countersurveillance of the forces of order. The actions they demonstrate often have a military precision.

To ‘work’ in a cell is to belong to a distinct criminal clan; the conditions of access to this criminal clan are strict, codified, ritualised. There is one code, the *Kanun*, and one biological cadre, an extended family. There is a hierarchy in which the ties of blood win out over those of marriage – for example, tactical coordination among local teams is entrusted to a man who can have entered the criminal clan only through marriage; but for strategic planning, between branches of activity or extended geographical areas and the criminal directorate situated at home, the coordinator must belong to the clan by blood and the biological family. At the intermediate level, the second-in-command controls a geographical area or a branch of activity. Depending on place and time, the various elements of the criminal clan act separately or come together in a flexible and decentralised manner. At the apex is a boss, assisted by a directing council which determines major policies and acts as arbiter in crises. Overall the organisation is adaptable, flexible and capable of evolving. With regard to tradition and the *omertà*, personal initiative is possible – even recommended; mutations and adaptations are even better since the obedience of the troops is assured and the scorn of the bosses for the law of the country in which they operate is absolute.

Finances of the Albanian mafia

It is hard to estimate the 'turnover' of one of a secret and ferocious criminal society. Especially when the only police force which could, under the circumstances, be effective, that of the Republic of Albania, prefers most of the time to steer clear of such dangerous entities. We should note, however, that in the Croatian journal *National* (No. 287, May 2001) the Croatian minister of the interior, Mr Sime Lucin, estimated the fortune of one of the main Serb gangsters, Stanko Subotic Cane, at US\$ 500 million. And Cane's main line of activity is only trafficking in cigarettes, which is much less lucrative than drugs. Besides which it is known that most of the heroin transported along the Balkans route passes through the hands of Albanian mafia groups; that this traffic has taken off since summer 1999 (before then only 5–10 kg of heroin was being seized; since then, from 50 kg to nearly 1 metric tonne); and that 1 kg of 'good' heroin from the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, etc.) brings a wholesale price, in western Europe, of US\$ 80,000–100,000. This gives some idea of the scale of profits made by the Albanian mafia.

The deciding distinction made by Italian experts

In autumn 1999 the Italian Directorate for Anti-Mafia Investigations (DIA) transmitted to its supervising authorities a confidential report entitled 'Strategic and tactical importance of Albanian criminal organisations'. Let us recall that the DIA brings together – for a good reason – the best experts on mafia phenomena who have been confronted for years by the most ferocious and intractable criminal families in the European Union. These are specialists in observation and penetration – one might say dissection – who, moreover, have long been planted on the criminals' patch, in Albania itself. Nobody is better qualified than they to differentiate between a real mafia and a simple criminal gang.

In a text showing a high degree of analytical subtlety the DIA experts flag up from the outset a trap which must not be fallen into – and into which the Albanian mafia intends to make us fall, by urging us to confuse the disorder and chaos reigning in Albania for almost a decade and the reality of the mafia in that country. In fact for the DIA nothing would be more wrong than to confuse the Albanian mafia with 'the groups of looters leaving their trails throughout the country without being disturbed, groups with no equivalent in any European country', this 'multitude of hardened gangs operating at the local level with no link between them' which functions 'under a regime of reciprocal non-interference, without one being able to pick out [among them] dominant cells, and devoting themselves to acts of pillage pure and simple' (DIA 1999). Gangs 'whose fragmentation reflects the social and political break-up of the [Albanian] nation' (DIA 1999).

The Albanian mafia and these anarchical gangs do not mingle. Worse, these

gangs embarrass the local mafias, men of order who prefer to reach agreements with politicians in their pay and corrupt an apparently repressive police rather than evolving among the looters who threaten their profits and the peace of their (biological or criminal) family. However, on the day when, inevitably, the Albanian disorder is resolved, when an apparent calm reigns in Tirana, the usual optimists will proclaim the 'Good News' of the death of the local mafia. But on the contrary, that will be the sign that this mafia has finally imposed order on the anarchic gangs who simply cause trouble prejudicial to 'business'.

But what do the DIA experts say about the Albanian mafia itself? 'Today we can speak of a true Albanian mafia in a state of permanent evolution; it is developing in a criminal context capable of making remarkable qualitative leaps . . . The actual criminal level of the Albanian mafia has no equal in any country in the Mediterranean basin, not even in Turkey' (DIA 1999):

- The Albanian mafia in Italy 'has at its disposal there a formidable network of accomplices and supporters used to squeal on members of rival groups and assist in assassinations' (DIA 1999).
- Putting down international roots: 'The Albanian [mafia] groups operating abroad work in conditions of perfect criminal sophistication and territorial integration in the states where their members have been planted (Germany, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland)' (DIA 1999). There is 'a perfect osmosis between Albanian mafiosi residing in Italy and those living in their country of origin' (DIA 1999). We should note that certain 'globalised' Albanian mafia clans are based outside the albanophone area, for example in Turkey.
- Unity of criminal law, competition for territory: 'Groups active in Italy operate in competition and are often locked in a struggle with each other, reflecting the cleavages which exist in Albania' (DIA 1999).
- Centralisation of decision making: 'Murders committed in Italy are often a consequence of incidents which happen in Albania linked with the redistribution of the Italian, and therefore European, heroin market' (DIA 1999).
- Law of silence: 'The very pronounced mafia character of the Albanian [criminal] associations follows equally from the behaviour of its members after an arrest. There is never, even in confidence, any revealing of the features of the group to which they belong. The response is unchanging: my [biological] family is in danger in Albania' (DIA 1999).
- Finance and money laundering: 'The Albanian criminal groups show a remarkable aptitude in the matter of financial management and a theoretical ability to carry out recycling' (DIA 1999).

All the characteristics are definitely there. Albanian organised crime is a mafia, of the first rank. It is also a mafia whose activism is growing in its primary base in Europe, in Italy. Early in January 2000 the DIA published another report,

this one public, intended for parliamentarians. It is entitled 'Vitality of the Italian mafia, the rise of the Albanian mafia'. In this study the latter is described as 'particularly aggressive and determined', the experts underline that it 'has succeeded in planting its networks and logistics in the great metropolises of northern Italy and on the Adriatic coast' (DIA 2000).

Kosovo, guerillas, mafia: causality or symbiosis?

Since the public appearance of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) during 1996 the accusations and rumours have not ceased. The UCK is a narco-guerrilla force financed by heroin from the Balkans route. In an interview given to the weekly *Der Spiegel*, Norbert Spinrath, president of the association of German police officers, returning from a stay in Kosovo, declared: 'The UCK is a criminal organisation . . . the UCK sequesters, steals, loots, kidnaps, blackmails, pressurises witnesses and carries out assassinations.' In short it 'behaves like a mafia' (*Der Spiegel* 15 December 1999). Shortly afterwards, Walter Kege, head of the equivalent Swiss general intelligence police, affirmed that they have information indicating a link between drug money and the UCK. In January 1999, *La Repubblica*, a heavyweight and respected daily, ran the following headline: 'Heroin sold in Milan finances the Kosovo Liberation Army.'

As early as March 1998 commissioner Olivier Gueniat, head of the Neuchâtel criminal investigations department, warned: 'Drugs are financing ethnic war' (*Le Temps* 28 March 1998). He was referring to the war in Kosovo. Confirmation came in June 1998 when an international police operation out of Italy arrested ninety villains and broke up eight networks of drugs traffickers of which 'one group of Albanians from Kosovo was smuggling arms destined for their province which was rebelling' (AFP 9 June 1998). In total, in that single haul, 100 kg of heroin and cocaine was seized. The base of the networks is in Milan where the drugs traffickers have as cover a vast infrastructure of cafés, restaurants, garages and various companies.

But even if it seemed serious to the European media the suspicion of drugs trafficking hanging over the UCK – 'drugs are financing the guerrilla' – does not have much meaning insofar as it transfers onto the Balkan situation blueprints and values peculiar to western Europe but unknown in eastern Europe, especially in the albanophone area of the Balkans.

Our, western European, society is individualist. The individual is practically the only motor and actor in social life. Getting involved in a party, acting as a militant in a union, taking up a religion or joining an association are personal acts relevant to the political, social or religious conscience of an individual. In the albanophone area of the Balkans this is absolutely not the case. War, guerrilla, clans and the like should be less compared to western European society but

rather to, say, Lebanon during the civil war (1975–90). In the south of that country and at that time, it was not individuals who joined Amal or Hezbollah – in the same way as westerners join Republican or Socialist Parties – but whole villages, families or clans. In a society of this type the individual is nothing outside their extended family.

Returning to the albanophone area of the Balkans the clan dimension has always been a reality, and how it disguises itself according to circumstance simply a masquerade to amuse the gallery. When some western Marxist–Leninists of the 1960s idolised Enver Hoxha as a pure, tough revolutionary they missed the point that in 1962, of fifty-eight members of his Central Committee, twenty-eight came from the same clan and eight had married among themselves. The Albanian Communist Party resembled a tribal coalition – it was an affair of the extended family.

The search for material proof of a significant drugs traffic organised by the UCK itself is most likely in vain. There is no hope of finding a ‘smoking gun’ here. It may be unpalatable, but the UCK evolved in the bosom of a criminal economy, bathing in nourishing plankton of felony. This classic division of labour was explained by an (anonymous) American official posted to Kosovo as thus: ‘The Albanian mafia has played a key role in the rise of the UCK. The latter needed money, smuggling routes and contacts in the Kosovan diaspora; in exchange, the UCK gave these “patriotic” gangsters political legitimacy.’ As a result throughout Europe, from Oslo to Prague (with Princ Dobroshti), and across to Milan (with Agim Gashi – see below for profiles), mafia cells and networks are financing ‘The cause’, buying arms on behalf of the guerrillas. Even criminals in obscurity, those without rank, cooperate. In Barcelona, it is a group called the ‘Vanguardia’, a gang which burgles companies in the region and uses its booty to finance the UCK.

There remains the case of the high-level (i.e. ‘political’ and ‘military’) staff of the UCK. Even though there certainly seem to be a number of clues pointing to the assumption that they are hand in glove with the important figures in the mafia it proves difficult to carry out investigations among some of them, as *L’Humanité* emphasises: ‘What would happen if one were to find out that Hashim Thaci, the man on whom the international community has staked everything to rebuild the province, is implicated in almost all this traffic? It was without doubt in order to avoid this embarrassing question that Bernard Kouchner decided to filter out all enquiries directed against the latter.’ But in spite of these hurdles the mafia connections among some of the UCK leaders are well established, a notch above the army itself and outside of Kosovo proper, in fact what is known allows us to speak of serious criminal involvement.

Among the sixteen Kosovar delegates to the Rambouillet conference in February 1999 was Xhavit Haliti, presented as a member of the political bureau of the UCK. Close to Hashim Thaci (the political head of the UCK) this man is

influential in the Albanian diaspora in Switzerland and Germany. But this former adviser to Enver Hoxha under the Stalinist regime is nowadays linked to the special services and to the Tirana government, and is above all the link between Hasim Thaci and another Thaci (or Thaqi, according to records), first name Menduli, one of the heads of the Albanian community in Macedonia.

All experts on the Balkan criminal scene are categorical that the Albanian parties in Macedonia emanate directly from the local mafia. Several of their leaders (Midhat Emimi and Husein Haskaj) have already been convicted of arms trafficking. These experts warned the French government about this in good time, before the Rambouillet meeting. They added that leaders of these parties, like Menduli Thaci and his colleague Abdurahman Haliti, have since 1994 directed an armed community militia forming in reality a criminal bloc bound up with corrupt elements of the SHIK, the Albanian secret service, and the local mafia. This bloc operates throughout the 'Golden Triangle' on perfect terms with the heads of the UCK, thanks to the diligence of *consigliere* such as Xhavit Haliti.

After Xhavit Haliti there are evidently plenty of others in the shadows. To identify them and reveal their mafia connections would allow us to draw a criminal web at the centre of which, unsurprisingly, the heads of the Albanian mafia reign. And potentially more or less near to the centre of the web one would also be able to identify certain Kosovar politicians or military chiefs. But this last point is at best secondary; in the region there is no lack of candidates ready to get rich quick.

The two 'godfathers' of the Albanian mafia

In northern Europe: Princ Dobroshi

On 23 February 1999 Princ Dobroshi, 35, was arrested in Prague by a police special unit, the Czech equivalent of RAID. At the wheel of a BMW, the man was parking in front of the Hotel Atrium. A little later his right-hand man, Murati Limani, was in turn questioned at his home in Prague. In Dobroshi's apartment a Croatian machine-pistol, a Chinese telescopic rifle with a silencer, a Czech handgun and a banknote counter (of the kind used in banking establishments) were found. This is the usual arsenal of a drugs trafficker, which is exactly Princ Dobroshi's trade. He is a big-time drug trafficker and for the Norwegian police, Dobroshi 'controls the Scandinavian drugs market'; to be exact, the northern path of the Balkans route (Turkey–Balkans–Czech Republic–Nordic countries). Dobroshi has imported hundreds of kilograms, even tonnes of heroin into Scandinavia. Arrested in Norway in 1993, Dobroshi was sentenced at the end of 1994 to fourteen years in prison for drugs trafficking. He escaped in January 1997 from the Ullersmo prison in Oslo after bribing a guard (who was paid FF

120,000 to turn a blind eye). He got as far as Croatia where plastic surgery made him unrecognisable. He moved to Prague in 1997.

For several months a joint operation (codenamed 'Cage') between Czech, Norwegian, Danish and Swedish police targeted the Dobroshi network, forty-two members of which were questioned up to February 1999. But when its boss was arrested the 'family' quickly made it known that it would hand over the sum of FF 4 million to whomever in the Czech Republic could set him free.

Significantly, a note by the BIS (the Czech special services) stated that part of the drugs money went towards buying arms for the UCK (*Lidove Noviny* March 1999). And when the Czechs decided to extradite Dobroshi, the Norwegian police eventually chose to take him back to Oslo in a private plane as 'it would be too dangerous to transport him on a commercial flight due to his close links with the UCK' (*The Norway Post* 13 April 1999). Dobroshi was returned to his cell in Norway in August 1999.

In southern Europe: Agim Gashi

In July 1998, the special anti-mafia unit of the Italian *carabinieri*, the ROS, launched operation 'Africa'. It was aimed at dismantling an important Albanian mafia clan trafficking heroin worth 'hundreds of millions of dollars' (*The Philadelphia Inquirer* 15 March 1999). In all, 124 arrests were made, most of them Albanians, but also Italians, Germans, Tunisians, Spaniards and Turks. At the head of the 'family' was Agim Gashi, 33, an Albanian from Pristina (in Kosovo) where at the beginning of the 1990s he directed a drugs trafficking network under the cover of beauty parlours and estate agencies.

In January 1992 Gashi settled in the suburbs of Milan and married an Italian. At that time the Albanian criminal clans were active in Milan – but not yet in drugs. Their speciality then was enslaving children who were forced into begging, into becoming pickpockets or prostitution for paedophiles. Violent and pitiless, the Albanian gangsters quickly imposed themselves on the low life of Milan, and from prostitution soon moved into drugs trafficking. Gashi ruled over this traffic. From 1995 he owned beauty parlours and perfume shops in London and companies in Hungary, Germany and Norway. In Italy itself Gashi established close professional links with the Ndrangheta, the Calabrian mafia. It was a case of importing cargoes of drugs into Italy; his associate Avni I. Ademer, a wholesaler specialising in trade with Turkey, every day hid tens of kilos of heroin in his containers of nuts and cotton goods, etc.

Gashi lived the high life in a luxury villa on the outskirts of Milan, but nevertheless, as a good 'patriotic bandit' did not forget his country. 'When war broke out in Kosovo', as Carlos De Donno, commander of the *carabinieri* intelligence unit, remarked, 'Kosovar criminals planted in Italy suddenly took an interest in arms trafficking. Up till then they only trafficked in drugs' (*The Philadelphia*

Inquirer 15 March 1999). Since then the activity in Italy of the Albanian mafia and that of the overseas elements of the UCK merged, everybody lent a hand, as telephone tapping operated by the ROS proved (*Corriere Della Sera* 19 January 1999). Gashi was in talks with arms dealers from Bulgaria, Romania and Albania to buy automatic weapons, rocket launchers and grenades. In these 'business' transactions it should be noted that Gashi spoke Serbo-Croat.

Having been convicted and receiving a heavy sentence in Milan in March 1999, Gashi sows less fear. Which doubtless explains why, at the end of February 1999, his cousin and associate Ekrem Gashi was assassinated in Pristina; in the purest mafia tradition, his Mercedes was riddled with bursts of automatic gunfire.

Why was the Albanian mafia able to spread in Europe at this point?

Forgetting the criminal dimension

In April 1999 the 'seventy-eight-day war' broke out in Kosovo. A criminologist should not expound on the political or military dimension of such a conflict but should warn of the risk, if it exists, and then analyse the possible criminal consequences of the conflict. With a mind to the future the criminologist should also think preventively and see how best to integrate the notion of respect for the law into the 'specifications' of future international operations or peacekeeping actions.

What happened prior to the NATO military intervention in Kosovo?

In Europe (in France and Great Britain, but also in the United States) official experts or products of the academic world (criminologists, police, intelligence officers, etc.) warned the coalition's political and military leaders about the very specific nature of the conflict in the Balkans, peculiarities, complex and deeply rooted in history, which are impossible to fully expound upon here. But briefly, these experts insisted on:

- The hybrid nature of the conflicts in the region. These Balkan conflicts have always had a military dimension, of course, but also a strong criminal element.
- The presence in the region of authentic mafias – especially the Albanian mafia. One degree lower, these experts did not fail to emphasise the existence in the Balkans of powerful organised crime, which was rich and well armed.

Truth obliges us to say that no heed was taken of these warnings. Diplomats continued to carry on their diplomacy, politicians their policy, and the military made war. The result of this disastrous neglect of the criminal dimension of the

conflict in the Balkans is that, since then, trafficking in drugs, stolen vehicles and human beings has exploded in the region and from there has spread to western Europe.

As mentioned above Interpol notes that seizures of heroin along the Balkans Route, which were until the beginning of 1999 from 1 to 5 kg on average, have gone since the summer of 1999 to 50 kg and sometimes even 1 metric tonne of pure heroin per seizure!

Preventing such catastrophes tomorrow

What can be done to avoid international intervention fostering the spread of criminal networks – for which Europe will pay the price for a long time? What could be the role of the United Nations, in particular that of the UN Bureau for the Control of Drugs and Prevention of Crime, in the domain of crisis prevention?

One must be realistic, there will be more such serious international crises in the future, in the absence of a world order which is clear, lasting, stable and acceptable to all. In these conditions military interventions and peacekeeping missions will again be necessary. What can be done so that, in case of need, the criminal dimension of a given region can be taken into account?

In this case, clamouring for the establishment of the rule of law is not enough. Asking for the application of the law is a rhetorical demand if one does not know what laws are in question and what crimes are most likely to be committed – in short, if one ignores the criminal reality of the region concerned. In fact laws and legal procedures have, always and everywhere, one aim: to check and punish specific crimes. As long as one has no serious idea about the nature of these crimes one cannot speak seriously of restoring the rule of law. So what is to be done?

Civil and military officials tend to neglect the advice of experts – naturally, put forward in secrecy – when faced with the intense media bombardment to which they are submitted. In a time of grave crisis and serious criminal danger the warning must therefore be strong and come from the top. The community of nations should therefore have at its disposal a crime observatory allowing it to carry out with authority, responsibility and independence a criminal diagnosis of the region concerned. The mission of this observatory would be dual:

- To provide the leaders of the United Nations and the forces of order with precise and neutral information on the criminal situation in the region concerned.
- To make sure that this information is taken into account by political and military leaders involved in the operation.

This observatory could also appraise needs in terms of judges and precise juridical texts, if a crime wave was to follow intervention. It is all the more impor-

tant to have this type of 'crime X-ray' tool since the forces of justice are slow – bound as they are by laws, rules and procedures – and since, on the contrary, criminal societies are essentially opportunist and fast-moving.

Kosovo provides a clear example: since the arrival of NATO forces, from the beginning of July 1999 at the latest, the mafias were at work throughout the province. Eighteen months after the start of the NATO intervention, Kosovo and Albania had no effective reciprocal extradition agreement allowing Kosovar criminals captured in Albania to be taken back to Kosovo, and to send back the former Albanian mafias arrested in Kosovo, without complex juridical wrangling.

In concrete terms we can see that from the point of view of crime the international community is confronted by problems which are serious but few in number and similar in nature. Prior to the establishment or re-establishment of the rule of law it seems important to define a few great anti-criminal principles of universal import and accepted by all. The anti-terrorist struggle provides a concrete example here, great progress has been made in this area when the international community decided in its entirety that certain acts (indiscriminate attacks, hijacking aeroplanes, massacres, etc.) were ideologically, politically and morally unjustified and would henceforth only be considered serious crimes and inexcusable terrorist acts. These sorts of rules must be created and approved in the course of the struggle against organised international crime.

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