

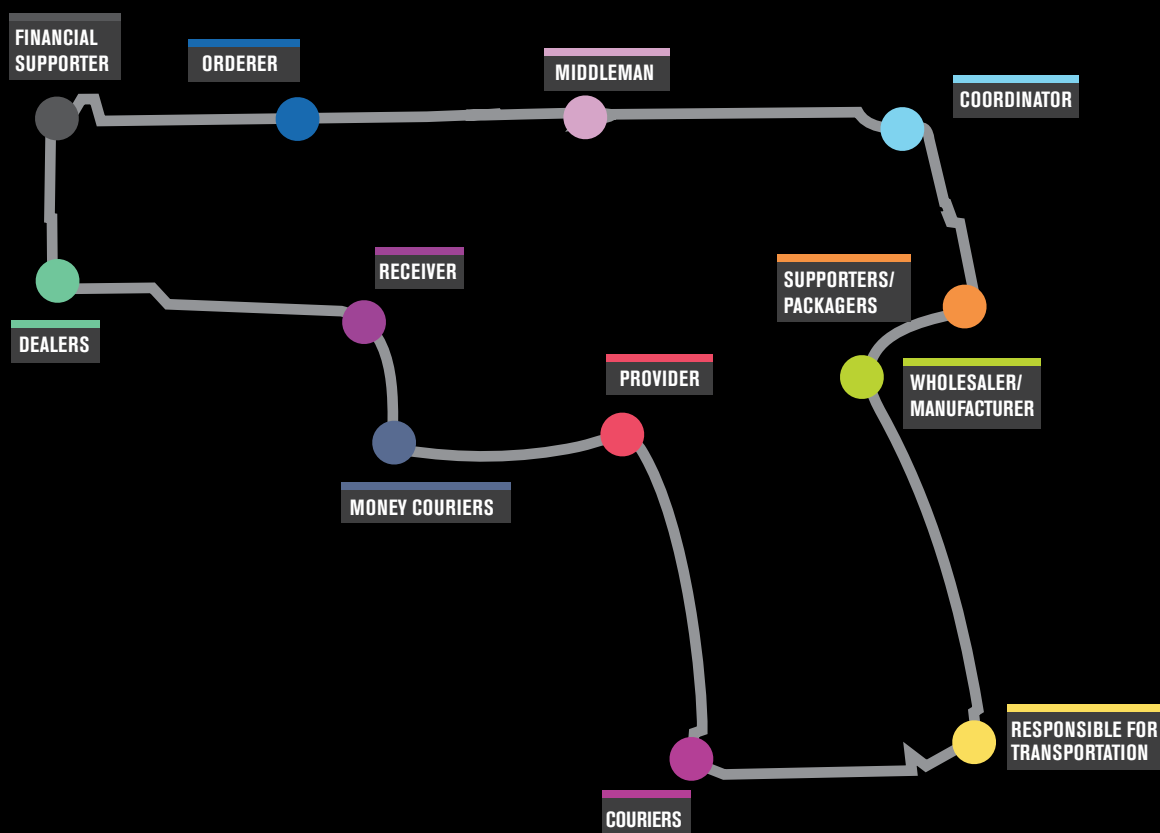
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## ORGANISED

## CRIME

### Risk Assessment in Albania

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## Acknowledgements

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“The Albanian mafia is one of the main international actors. It does not operate solely within Albania, it is mostly active out of the country, even though money is laundered and invested often in Albania [...] The Albanian mafia is very active at the international level [...] it has such an ability to connect with the Albanian diaspora throughout the world [...]. If Albania wants to become part of the European Union, it will have to address these concerns (fight against organized crime and corruption) because the European Union will not allow Albania to become part of it with so many problems.”*

*- Drew Sullivan 19/05/2014, Director of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Organization (OCCRP)<sup>1</sup>*

This study focuses on the organised crime activities in Albania, as well as those conducted by Albanian criminal networks in the region and beyond. The study analyses organised crime activities such as trafficking in persons, illicit drugs and arms, smuggling of migrants, extortion, contract killings, organised cyber-crime and money laundering. In some cases, so as to be able to clearly identify them, comparisons were made between various criminal activities and groups, despite the difficulties encountered with resources and the method applied. Various sources are used (both primary and secondary), including national official reports, and European and international agencies fighting organised crime. In addition, 44 interviews were conducted with experts that have a direct or indirect relation with the fight against organised crime, for instance, serious crime judges, prosecutors, lawyers, investigative journalists, civil society representatives and experts of organised cyber-crime. The total duration of recorded interviews is 24 hours and 12 minutes.

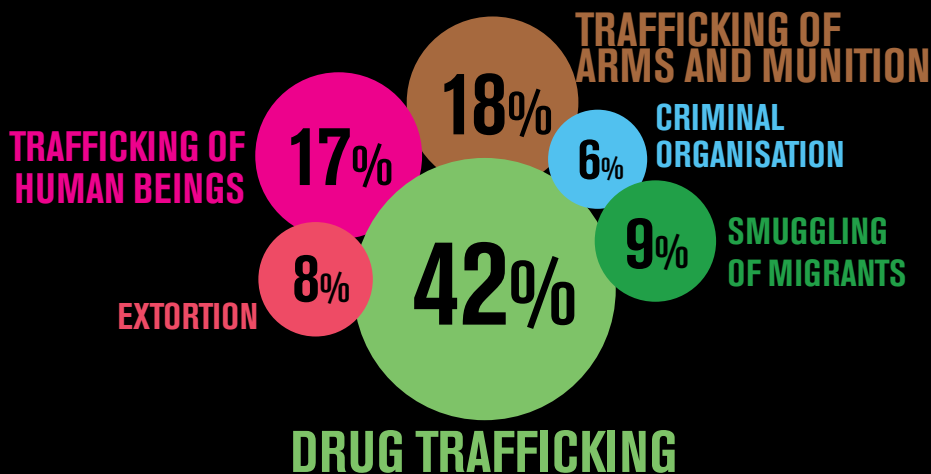
## TABLE OF INTERVIEWEES

Prosecutors	12	Judges	9
Lawyers	7	Investigative Journalists	6
Police experts	8	Cyber-crime experts	2

Moreover, four focused groups were organised with civil society representatives, students of social sciences, journalism and law in Tirana, Korça, Vlora and Shkodra. Another focused group with experts in the fight against organised crime was organised earlier in Tirana. The authors have examined 84 decisions of the First Instance Court of Serious Crimes. The decisions were selected based on the nature of illegal activities of interest to the study, the frequency of criminal episodes, the number of defendants and the scope of threat posed by these activities and their perpetrators. The court decisions are issued in the period 2006-2014 for illegal activities of drug trafficking (42%), trafficking in arms (18%), human trafficking (17%), smuggling of migrants (9%), extortion (8 %) and cases tried for creation of and participation in a criminal organisation (6%). Overall, the examined judicial decisions reach a volume of 3,793 pages.

1. “Shqip” on Top Channel (19/05/2014) <http://www.top-channel.tv/artikull.php?id=278271>

## DISTRIBUTION OF EXAMINED JUDICIAL DECISIONS ACCORDING TO NATURE OF ACTIVITIES (2006-2014)



Our findings and the opinions of the interviewees suggest that the elements that have stimulated organised crime in the country are of a social, economic and political nature:

- Transition from a totalitarian regime with a stringent policy on crime, to a fragile democracy with weak and unconsolidated institutions, and staff without sufficient education and/or experience;
- Chaotic situation post-1997 with the collapse of the pyramid schemes;
- Institutions that are subject to reform, with staff turnover due to changes in government;
- Lack of institutional independence, and endemic corruption in the police and law-enforcement agencies;
- Albania's favourable geographical position – with drug-producing and supplier countries such as Afghanistan and Turkey in the East, and high-consumption countries in the West;
- International nature of organised crime and the impact of globalisation;
- Lack of political stability in the country for more than two decades;
- Weak economy with high levels of unemployment and insufficient earnings per capita (one of the lowest in the continent);
- Dismantling of social structures, adversely affecting the family as the nucleus;
- Continuous immigration waves, importing experiences and criminal connections obtained abroad;
- Support from members of the Albanian diaspora;
- Conflicts in the region, with 'golden opportunities' to obtain money from the trafficking of arms, smuggling activities, etc;
- Use of technology and advanced communication tools.

*“We, as society, have lost the ability to denounce. Self-censorship is graver than any threats or intimidation. Nowadays, there is no need for gangs or criminals to exert pressure upon you...you know the consequences and don't take the risks. Everyone says, yes we know, here everything is known but no one speaks up. On the contrary, we are at a phase that consider this as proficiency...yes, 'he is skilful' so, this is the attitude.” (Investigative Journalist)*

Interviewees/experts have stated that the fight against organised crime is weak on the part of law enforcement agencies, and the Albanian society is reluctant to report organised-crime activities. This is due to the following:

### **SOCIETY RELUCTANT TO REPORT CASES**

- Lack of trust in institutions;
- Fear of repercussion/s (the most referred to among interviewees, although it was ranked second in importance);
- Corruption;
- “Leak of secrets”;
- Lack of effective witness protection;
- Lack of a crime-reporting culture;
- Direct link to individuals involved in organised crime (i.e. friends and family, relations/cousins). This was the least-mentioned reason.

*“What I have noticed since 2011, 2012, 2013, but specially during late 2012 and 2013 is that here is done little to investigate in order to find organised crime group or a criminal. For them it is enough to arrest some people near the borders, who for me are simply couriers...they are exploited by traffickers and the heart remains intact, Organized Crime is not fought.”  
(Judge at the First Instance Court for Serious Crimes)*

### **WEAKNESSES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ORGANISED CRIME:**

- Unconsolidated institutions and lack of institutional independence;
- Continuous changes of qualified staff with every change of government;
- Weak cooperation and lack of coordination among various agencies;
- Problems with professional capability;
- Problems relating to low remuneration and weak logistics;
- Lack of will, incrimination and corruption of individuals inside law enforcement agencies

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A MORE EFFICIENT FIGHT AGAINST ORGANISED CRIME

- Undertake a comprehensive reform – not a partial one – of the institutions that have a direct bearing on the fight against organised crime, including the Judicial Police Service;
- Enhance cooperation among various institutions: State Police, State Intelligence Service, the General Directorate for the Prevention of Money Laundering, and DGs Customs and Tax;
- Enhance professional capability through training sessions, guaranteeing stability of employment for specialists/experts, selecting individuals free of any conflict of interest and on the basis of their own merits, as well as on their moral and social integrity;
- Fight corruption in all segments of the justice system (Prosecution, the courts) and the Police;
- Provide financial support and preferential legal status to bodies fighting organised crime;
- Increase the number of confiscations of illicit assets seized.
- Establish an Investigation Directorate that would be responsible for the quality, depth and procedural side of investigations, which the experts themselves believe are weak;
- Limit abbreviated trial procedures/adjudications for some serious criminal offences;
- Revise and develop curricula on the fight against organised crime in universities so that the study of this phenomenon is not simply the prerogative of the Faculty of Law but is included in the studies of social sciences, economics and IT;
- Improve those parts of the curricula of the School of Magistrates, Police Academy and Military Academy that cover the fight against organised crime;
- Recruit to the law-enforcement agencies the most capable experts in the areas of criminology, law, psychology, statistics, IT and forensic science, etc.
- Increase public awareness about the risks of organised crime and the role and responsibility of each individual in the fight against this phenomenon;

## 2. THE TYPOLOGY OF ALBANIAN ORGANISED CRIME

*Between 1990 and 1997* Albania witnessed the emergence of hierarchical criminal structures such as armed bands, criminal organisations and structured criminal groups. At first, the armed bands appeared in various parts of the country, bands that were involved in human trafficking, the smuggling of migrants (accentuated by the self-imposed isolation of the country in the previous decades), kidnappings, extortion, and continuous rivalry due to the control of groups over particular territories.

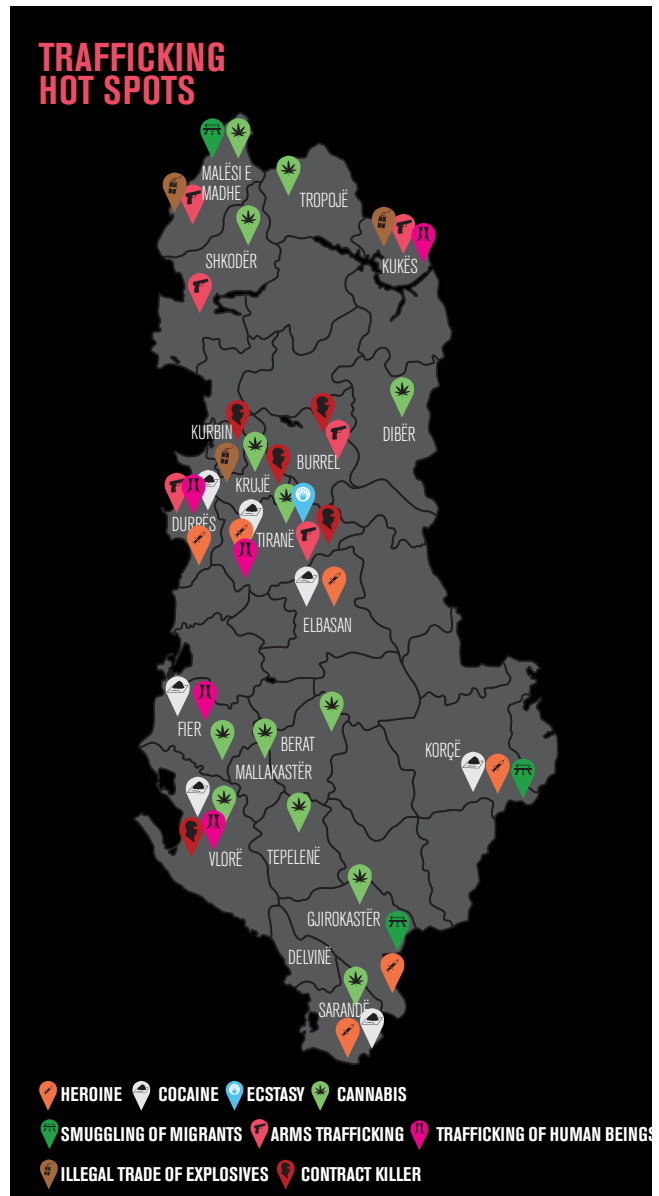
*Between 1998 and 2004*, the scope of their activities expanded, along with the way these groups were organised. As time went by, the trafficking of Albanian women for the purposes of prostitution decreased, and Albania transformed itself from a country of origin to a transit country for women solicited in various countries of Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, the trafficking of drugs and weapons flourished and became the number one profitable activity for these criminal organisations. In 2004-2005, a period which coincided with the end of the second stage of the evaluation and adaption of Albanian criminal groups, new forms of criminal organisations appeared. Certain criminal groups within and outside Albania start interacting in an active and constant manner in this network of criminals while maintaining the autonomy of the group.

*From 2005 onwards*, the criminal network was seen as the most widespread and suitable form for criminal groups to undertake various criminal activities, including the trafficking of various types of drugs, the

smuggling of migrants and organised cyber-crime. However, illegal activities such as the trafficking of human beings and extortion do not seem to be carried out as a criminal network.

### Geographical distribution

- Experts admit that organised crime extends throughout the territory of the country, thus having a direct or indirect impact on Albanian society.
- Certain regional characteristics are noted, with a clear concentration in border areas.
- The most developed areas, such as Tirana, Durrës and Fier have a higher rate of criminal activity and a higher concentration of perpetrators due to the concentration of capital and demographic movements (drugs, light weapons and explosives, prostitution running rings, internal trafficking, extortion, etc.). The regional distribution of each activity: arms trafficking in Shkodër, Kukës and Burrel (Fushë Kruja for explosives) due to their proximity to Montenegro and Kosovo. Drug trafficking in Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Vlorë, Korçë, and Fier (fiscal evasion, organised stealing of oil). Smuggling of migrants in Gjirokastrë and southern areas close to Greece, such as Korçë, Pogradec and Konispol



### 3. THE RISK ASSESSMENT: ORGANISED CRIME IN ALBANIA

Albanian criminal groups active in the territory of the Republic of Albania are generally made up of 3-4 members and include, mostly, the trafficking of narcotics, mainly cannabis. They also traffic other kinds of drugs such as cocaine and heroin to neighbouring countries, with EU countries being the final destination. Sporadic groups are involved in arms trafficking across the borders with Montenegro and Kosovo. Extortion cases are of concern as they are not reported. Neither is the use of explosives, murders by paid assassins or murders for which the perpetrator is not found, with the aim of eliminating rivals, rebalancing the market, and control of territory. There has been an increase in conflicts between businesses which in itself has brought about the proliferation of assassinations, i.e. murders for which paid assassins are used. In addition, the number of murders using remote-controlled devices



and ordinary explosives are on the rise. The majority of these murders are believed to take place over territory and competition. Extortion of businessmen is considered a real concern. Sources confirm that these cases are never reported to the Police or Prosecution Service due to the lack of trust in the justice system and the potential of repercussions/consequences. Furthermore, it is believed that organised crime invests in corrupting police officers and prosecutors. It is notable that the majority of cases that end up in court in the past few years have either been committed by single individuals, or as mere cooperation. This is a clear indicator of the low number/level of investigations. The increase in the number of extortion cases (and the fact that most businesses pay up) along with other powerful criminal organisations and assassins has brought about their sophistication. Experts warn that harsh confrontations over control of territory and businesses may be allowed to return. In certain cases, this has already been seen in the form of violent public clashes on the part of criminal organised crime, in particular in Tirana. In this context, we note efforts to rebalance markets and rivalry in the criminal world. Cooperation with criminal groups in neighbouring countries, in particular Albanian groups in the EU, has strengthened them financially and made them more dangerous. The work of law-enforcement agencies is made increasingly difficult due to the application of the so-called ‘code of silence’, and the use of psychological rather than physical violence, or ‘partnership with the victims’. Albanian organised crime groups invest in illicit revenue in various areas of the legal economy, construction, tourism, processing plants and concessions. The large amount of construction work happening is due to the injection of considerable funds (illicit earnings) in the economy of the country. Albania offers a favourable terrain for Albanian-speaking criminal rings to move to Albania from abroad.

Furthermore, there is a risk of members of organised criminal rings taking revenge on prosecutors, judges and police officers, who had ensured that the criminals got 25 years’ imprisonment, but the sentences were later reduced by a third due to summary trial (Article 403-406 of the Albanian Criminal Procedure Court) – some of these criminals are expected to get out as early as 2017.

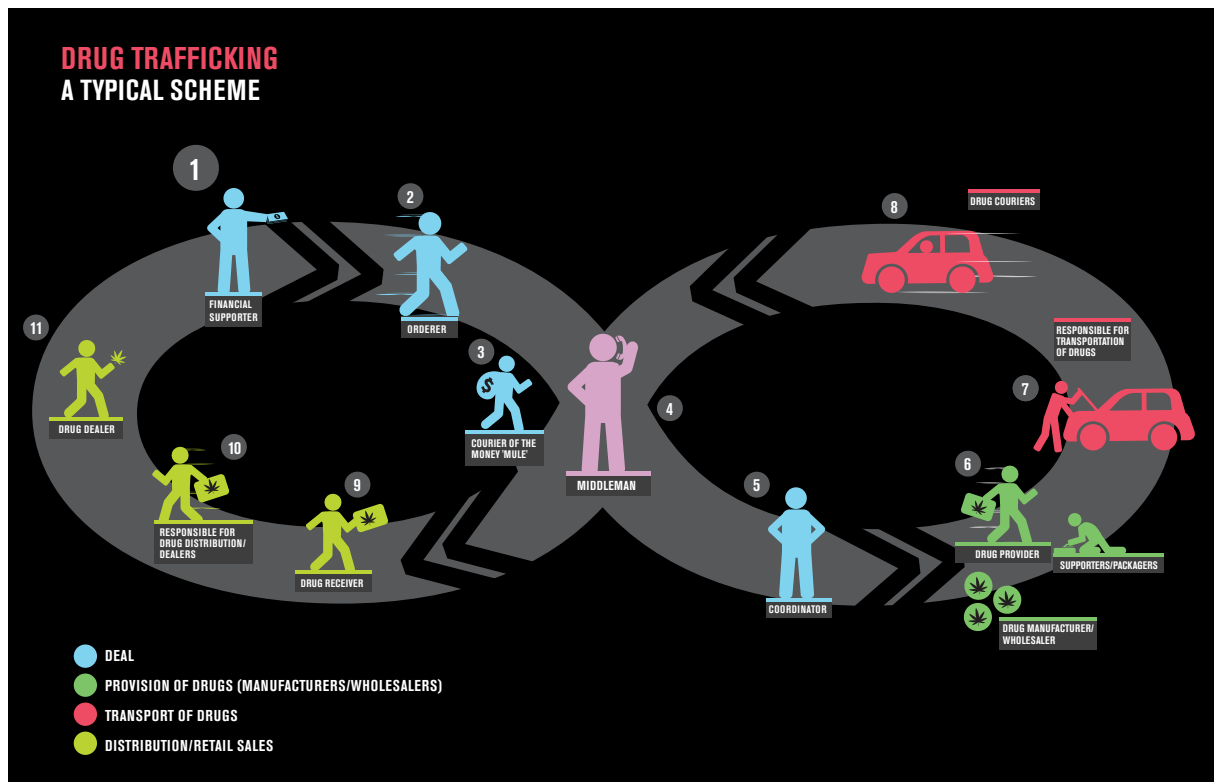


Figure 1

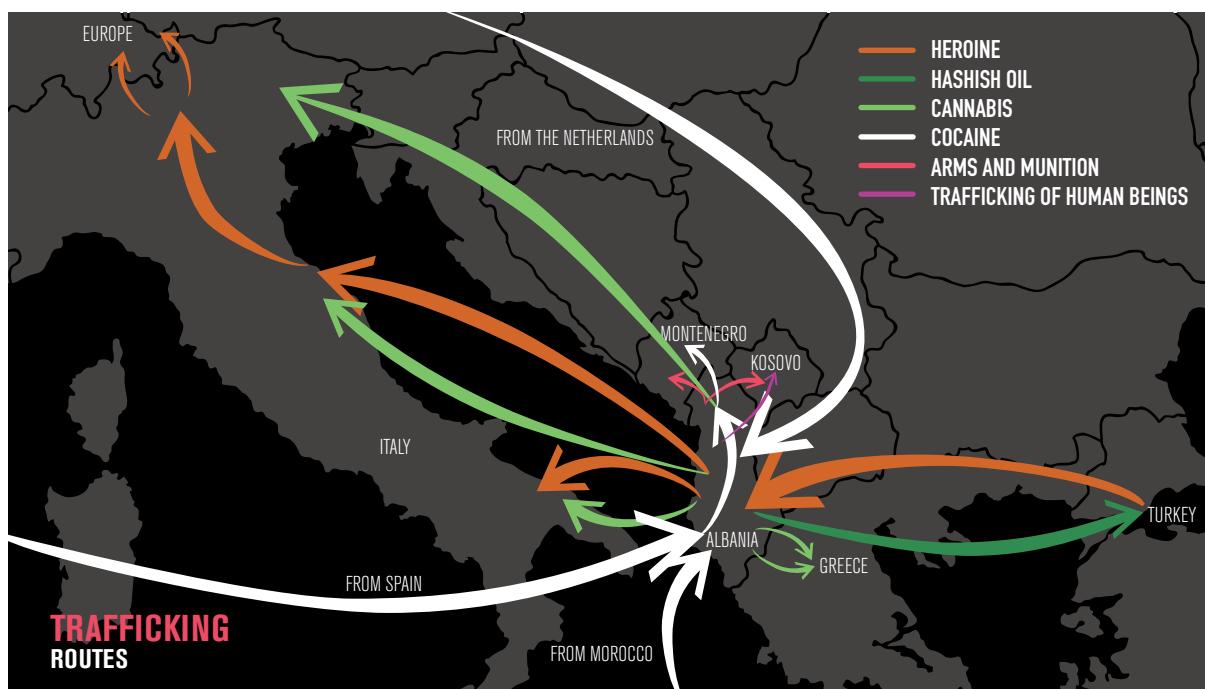
### 3.1 Risk assessment for each organised criminal activity

#### 3.1.1 Powerful drugs (heroin and cocaine)

The way heroin and cocaine are trafficked in Albania is very similar. It is done by sea, road or air, primarily through conventional means of transport. There are at least three types of groups involved in trafficking hard drugs. The first group includes those that were involved from the outset in the trafficking of human beings and, as such, already have contacts with organised crime in the EU. The second group is made up of Albanian criminals recruited by organised crime in Eastern Europe (some of whom they got to know during their spell/s in prison), who subsequently made contacts locally or regionally through 'The Balkan Route'. The third group is made up of local groups led primarily by Albanians who have been involved in crime and have established contacts there. Organised crime groups dealing with the trafficking of hard drugs are more sophisticated and are thought to have established strong links with individuals within law enforcement agencies, the political elite and the judiciary.

#### 3.1.2 Cannabis and synthetic drugs

Cannabis is primarily trafficked to Greece via the green border or by hiding it in trucks going through the Kapshtica or Kakavija Border Crossing points. Amounts of cannabis are also hidden in private vehicles or international transport lorries and trafficked to Italy either via ferry boat or the road system through Montenegro. There is an increasing trend of trafficking cannabis through Montenegro and Kosovo to Central and Western European countries. Other types of drugs are also produced and trafficked, such as marijuana, hashish oil, 'chocolate' and 'skunk', which is a hybrid between Cannabis Indica and Cannabis Sativa. These are used for sale but also in exchange for strong drugs. Although official statistics on the number of cannabis users are lacking in Albania, the number is believed to be high. The use of this drug is considered to be the first step towards the use of stronger drugs. Albania has reported the presence of synthetic drugs, although not in considerable amounts. Despite the lack of an internal market, amounts of amphetamine and ecstasy have been brought into the country from Serbia and Bulgaria. According to some reports, 15-18-year-olds have experimented with ecstasy secured in Tirana (see Map 1).



Harta 1

### 3.1.3 Trafficking of human beings

At the end of the 1990s, Albania was considered a 'hot spot' for the trafficking of human beings. Although there are no accurate figures as to the exact number of Albanian victims trafficked abroad, it is reported that many women and children were trafficked to Italy, Greece and other EU Member States. In addition, the country was used as a transit location for females of other nationalities who were sold, exchanged and trafficked by sea to Italy. The present situation with trafficking is different. Albania is no longer a transit country but remains a country of origin, albeit not at the levels of the past. When compared to the total population numbers in the country, the number of victims exploited within the country is a cause for concern. Females from various parts of the country are exploited sexually in premises such as villas, apartments, hotels, motels, etc. There are also reports of exploitation for prostitution of young girls known as 'luxury prostitutes'.

The sexual exploitation and forced labour of women and minors rises during the summer season in coastal areas. The situation of street children who are exploited for begging purposes, and are considered potential victims of trafficking, is of great concern.

### 3.1.4 Smuggling of migrants

The preferred destinations of clandestine migrants from Albania at present are the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). Unfortunately, there has been loss of life in the past year during migrants' attempts to reach the UK. Albania is being used by international smuggling networks as a transit country for nationals from Syria, Sudan, Congo and other countries. Entry into the territory of Albania is done mainly through the southern border of the country but also through Rinas International Airport. In some cases, this illicit activity has been facilitated by corrupt officials at border crossing points.

### 3.1.5 Trafficking of weapons

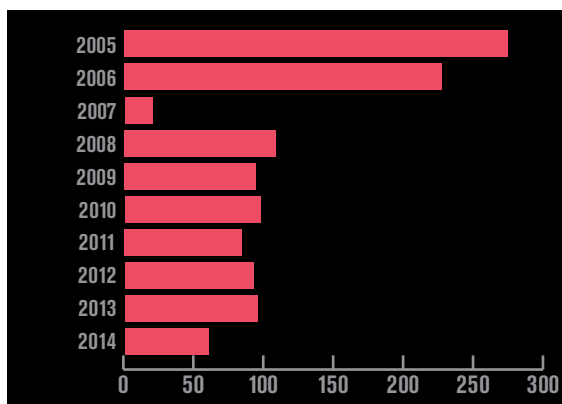
At present, the trafficking of weapons from, through and into Albania is rendered by criminal groups of 4 to 6 members each. Albania is a country of origin for Kalashnikovs, munitions and explosives. Machine guns, Kalashnikovs, composite parts and munitions go to Montenegro, Kosovo and Italy. They also reach Austria, Germany and Nordic countries, etc. through the various bus routes between Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro. Weapons and parts of weapons are concealed in private vehicles on board ferries to Italy. Kalashnikovs and handguns (pistols) which pass in transit through Albania are trafficked to Greece through the green border and border crossing points. Arms traffickers use haulage/transport companies for their own purposes by bribing and/or coercing the drivers. Handguns (pistols) and semi-automatic guns are trafficked into the country from Montenegro and Kosovo.

**TABLE OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (2005-2014)**

Year	Nr. of victims (VoT)	Nr. of criminal proceedings	Nr. of convictions
2005	274	51	54
2006	227	62	57
2007	20	49	7
2008	108	22	26
2009	94	31	11
2010	97	29	11
2011	84	27	5
2012	92	11	2
2013	95	24	2
2014	60	7	10
Total	1151	313	185

Source: *Trafficking in Persons Report (2005-2014)*,  
U.S. Department of State

**GRAPH OF THE TRENDS IN THE NUMBER OF TRAFFICKING VICTIMS IN ALBANIA IN THE LAST TEN YEARS**



The postal service is used for the trafficking of weapons and their parts from far-off lands. The regions that are most affected by trafficking and the illicit trade of weapons are border areas such as Shkodra, Kukës and the port city of Durrës, along with the capital. The area of Fushë-Kruja also seems to be problematic in the illicit trading of explosives.

### 3.1.6 Extortion

Extortion is not widespread in terms of numbers but it is nonetheless highly advanced. The forms used seem to be ever more sophisticated. There are two categories of criminal groups using extortion in Albania – unorganised small groups and well-organised groups. The most widespread is the predator scheme (see Figure 3), although there are criminal groups that go for the more sophisticated form of extortion which is the ‘symbiotic’ form (see Figure 4) in some of the main cities in the country, Tirana in particular. There is an increasing trend towards extortion on the part of criminal groups against businesses, but these are not so evident as they are not reported to the authorities. Links have been noted between criminal groups and powerful businesses for the purposes of illicit gain. Businesses blackmail their competitors in exchange for money or the involvement of criminal organisations in their businesses. There has been an increase in extortion by groups of minors who copycat similar forms used by adult criminal groups. An increase in online extortion has been noted, in particular among youngsters.

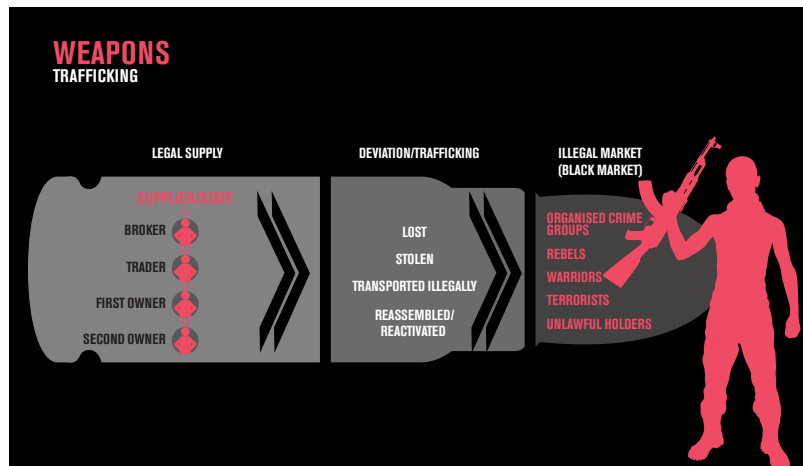


Figure 2

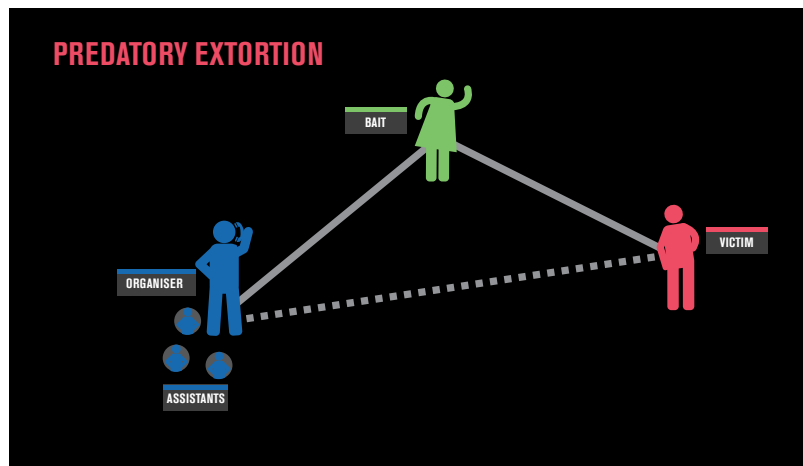


Figure 3

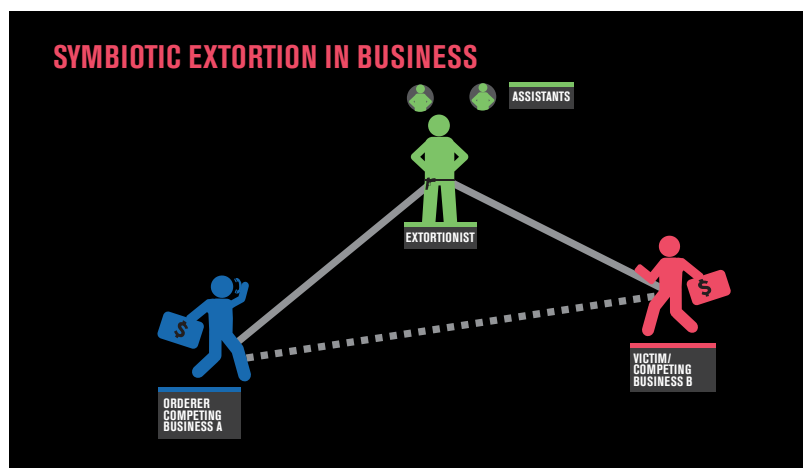


Figure 4

### 3.1.7 Contracted killers

Since 2011, there has been a sophistication of paid assassins. The most problematic category is that of 'professional killers' (see Figure 5). This category of assassins is gradually taking on the organised form of criminal networks, in which the role of middleman seem to be the most organised. There has been an increase in cooperation between businesses and paid assassins who are used for security by businesses or in order to eliminate their competitors.

There are two types of professional killers: mobile ones, in other words individuals who are resident in an EU country, and resident killers, those who have returned to Albania. What has been noted recently is that criminal groups are recruiting teenagers whom they are grooming to commit murder, and this seems to be a new approach. The youngsters recruited come from families with a criminal past, or young offenders serving a term for offences such as stealing or pick-pocketing/burglary. The latter make contact with known criminals in prison, who are then used for threats.

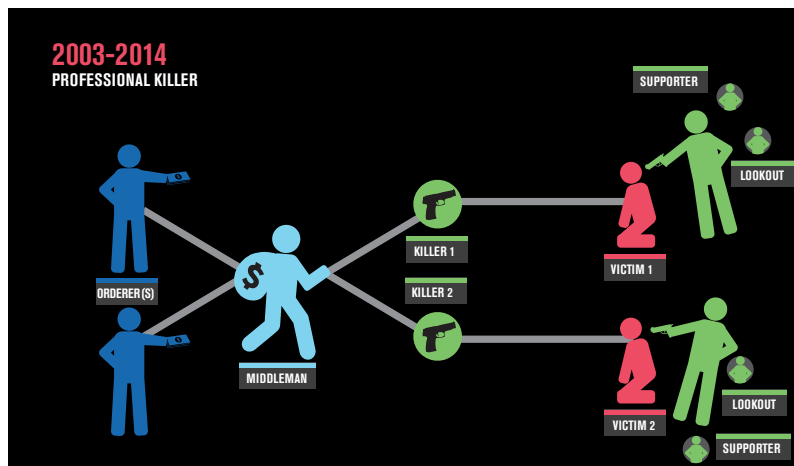


Figure 5

### 3.1.8 Cyber organised crime

Cyber organised crime is becoming increasingly sophisticated, although organised structures are not very clear. Albanian criminal groups are flexible and they can move from one type of crime to another with ease depending on the criminal activity (see Figures 6 and 7). There is a trend towards small groups getting together based on contacts made primarily online but also through friends. They are made up of members coming from large and

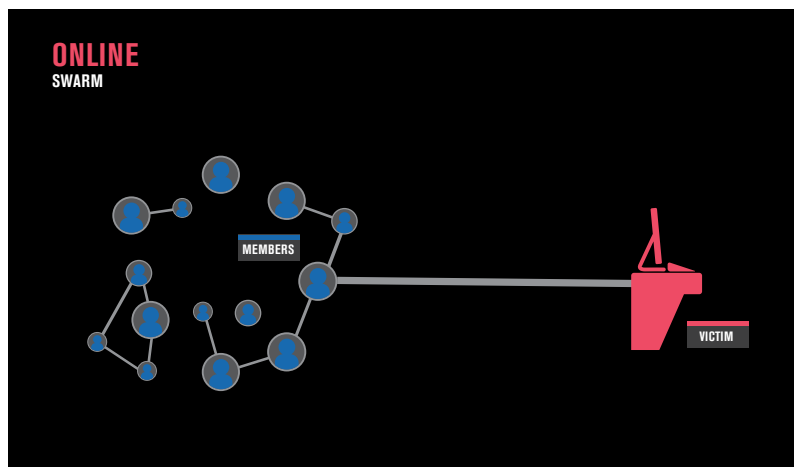


Figure 6

small cities with a mix of online and offline activities (see Figure 8). Members of these groups are aged 18-35. A characteristic of the groups is that they set up close contacts with hackers in the region, in particular Kosovan ones. Albanian hackers have become members of forums/blogs, administered by international criminal groups, and may be subcontracted for criminal activities against banks or public institutions. There is a risk that international criminal groups that distribute pornographic material of minors online may contract paedophiles resident in Albania to produce pornographic material with Albanian minors.

### 3.1.9 Money laundering

Money laundering is closely linked to organised crime. It has infiltrated and influenced the economic, political and social life of the country. The main areas where money of criminal origin is invested are the construction industry, modern processing plants, the gaming industry, mines, energy production, the oil industry (fuels), and tourist/travel agencies, as well as in licences and concessions from the state. The most typical ways of presenting 'dirty money' in the legal economy are through multiple transactions in secondary-level or high street banks, loans from these institutions, transfers through money transfer agencies and through the use of the identity of family members and friends. In 2014, the value of seized assets from organised crime groups and criminals was over 10 million euros. The main concern is the low number of confiscations and the revocation by higher courts of decisions in favour of confiscation, along with the low number of sanctions for this offence. The more powerful organised crime groups become through money laundering, the more crime is generated, with more illicit earnings, corruption and impunity.

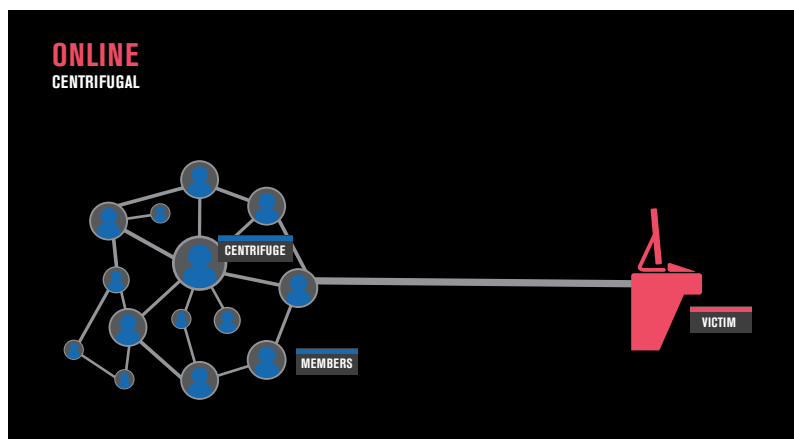


Figure 7

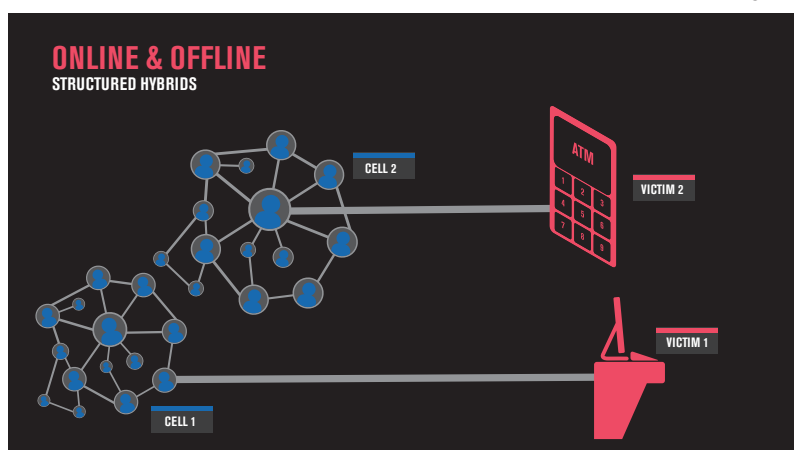


Figure 8

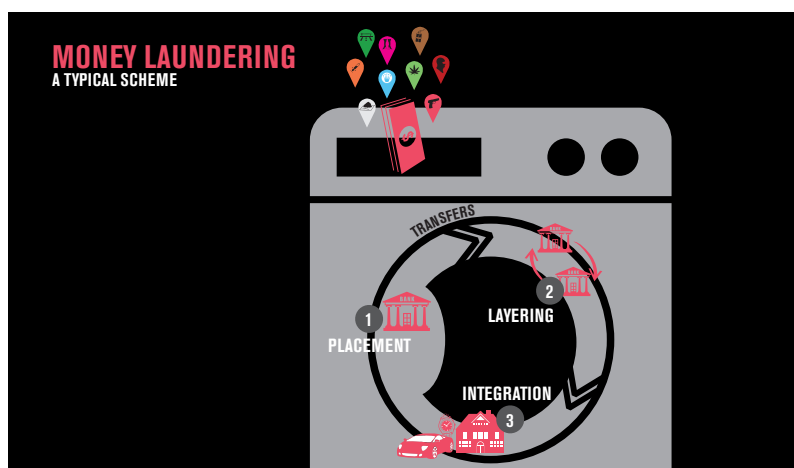


Figure 9



