

# Kosovo: Europe's Mafia State. Hub of the EU-NATO Drug Trail

Kosovo's Prime Minister Accused of Running Human Organ, Drug Trafficking Cartel

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In another grim milestone for the United States and NATO, the Council of Europe ([COE](#)) released an explosive [report](#) last week, "Inhuman treatment of people and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo."

The report charged that former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) boss and current Prime Minister, Hashim Thaçi, "is the head of a 'mafia-like' Albanian group responsible for smuggling weapons, drugs and human organs through eastern Europe," [The Guardian](#) disclosed.

According to a draft resolution unanimously approved December 16 in Paris, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights found compelling evidence of forced disappearances, organ trafficking, corruption and collusion between criminal gangs and "political circles" in Kosovo who just happen to be close regional allies of the United States.

The investigation was launched by Dick Marty, the Parliamentary Assembly for the Council of Europe (PACE) special rapporteur for human rights who had conducted an exhaustive 2007 [probe](#) into CIA "black fights" in Europe.

The PACE investigation gathered steam after allegations were published by former chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Carla Del Ponte in her 2008 memoir.

After it's publication, Ms. Del Ponte was bundled off to Argentina by the Swiss government as her nation's ambassador. Once there, the former darling of the United States who specialized in doling out victor's "justice" to the losers of the Balkan wars, was conveniently silenced.

A series of damning reports by the Center for Investigative Journalism ([CIR](#)), the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network ([BIRN](#)) and the BBC, confirmed Del Ponte's allegations and spurred the Council to act.

Reporting for the [BBC](#), investigative journalist Michael Montgomery learned that political opponents of the KLA and Serb prisoners of war "simply vanished without a trace" into a secret prison "in the Albanian border town of Kukes."

According to sources who feared for their lives, including former KLA guerrillas, the BBC

revealed that disappeared civilians “were Serbs and Roma seized by KLA soldiers and were being hidden away from Nato troops. The source believes the captives were sent across the border to Albania and killed.”

In an uncanny echo of Nazi practices during the period of the Third Reich, [The New York Times](#) reported that “captives” were “‘filtered’ for their suitability as donors, based on sex, age, health conditions and ethnic origin. “We heard numerous references to captives’ not merely having been handed over, but also having been ‘bought’ and ‘sold,’” the special rapporteur told the *Times*.

“Some of the guards told investigators,” the *Times* reports, “that a few captives understood what was about to happen and ‘pleaded with their captors to be spared the fate of being chopped into pieces’.”

Mercy was in short supply however, behind KLA lines.

The report states: “As and when the transplant surgeons were confirmed to be in position and ready to operate, the captives were brought out of the ‘safe house’ individually, summarily executed by a KLA gunman, and their corpses transported swiftly to the operating clinic.”

Once organs were removed from the victims they were auctioned off to the highest bidder and sold by a global trafficking ring still operating today.

The former prosecutor further alleged, *The Guardian* reported, that “she had been prevented from investigating senior KLA officials” who she claimed had “smuggled captive Serbs across the border into Albania, where their organs were harvested.”

In a classic case of covering-up the crimes of low-level thugs to protect more powerful criminals, Del Ponte has charged that forensic evidence gathered by ICTY investigators at one of the northern Albania death houses was destroyed at The Hague.

## **International Network**

This brisk underground trade didn’t end in 1999 however, when the break-away Serb province was occupied by NATO troops; on the contrary, operations expanded and grew even more profitable as Kosovo devolved into a protectorate of the United States.

In fact, a trial underway in Pristina has revealed that “desperate Russians, Moldovans, Kazakhs and Turks were lured into the capital ‘with the false promise of payments’ for their kidneys,” [The Guardian](#) reported.

It was a “growth industry” that fed on human misery. According to *The Guardian*, recipients “paid up to €90,000 (£76,400) for the black-market kidneys [and] included patients from Canada, Germany, Poland and Israel,” EU prosecutor Jonathan Ratel told the British paper.

“Donors” however, were left holding the bag, lucky to escape with their lives.

At the center of the scandal is the Medicus clinic. Located some six miles from downtown Pristina, Medicus was allegedly founded by university hospital urologist Dr Lutfi Dervishi, and a former permanent secretary of health, prosecutors claim, provided the clinic with a false license to operate.

Two of the accused, *The Guardian* revealed, “are fugitives wanted by Interpol: Moshe Harel, an Israeli said to have matched donors with recipients, and Yusuf Sonmez, perhaps the world’s most renowned organ trafficker.”

Prosecutors believe that Harel and Sonmez are the brains behind Medicus and that Shaip Muja, a former KLA “medical commander” who was based in Albania, may have overseen operations at the “clinic.”

Muja remains a close confidante of Thaçi’s and, in an macabre twist, he is currently “a political adviser in the office of the prime minister, with responsibility for health,” *The Guardian* reports.

Investigators averred they had “uncovered numerous convergent indications of Muja’s central role [in] international networks, comprising human traffickers, brokers of illicit surgical procedures, and other perpetrators of organised crime.”

Besides lining the pockets of Albanian, Israeli and Turkish criminals who ran the grisly trafficking ring, whose interests might also be served in covering-up these horrific crimes?

### **A Gangster State, but which One?**

The veil of secrecy surrounding KLA atrocities could not have been as complete as it was without the intervention of powerful actors, particularly amongst political and military elites in Germany and the United States who had conspired with local gangsters, rebranded as “freedom fighters,” during the break-up of Yugoslavia.

As in Albania years before NATO’s Kosovo adventure, organized criminal activities and “the trade in narcotics and weapons [were] allowed to prosper,” Michel Chossudovsky wrote, because “the West had turned a blind eye.”

These extensive deliveries of weapons were tacitly permitted by the Western powers on geopolitical grounds: both Washington and Bonn had favoured (although not officially) the idea of a ‘Greater Albania’ encompassing Albania, Kosovo and parts of Macedonia. Not surprisingly, there was a ‘deafening silence’ on the part of the international media regarding the Kosovo arms-drugs trade. (“The Criminalization of Albania,” in *Masters of the Universe? NATO’s Balkan Crusade*, ed. Tariq Ali, London: Verso, 2000, pp. 299-300)

The consequences of this “deafening silence” remain today. Both in terms of the misery and impoverishment imposed on Kosovo’s citizens by the looting of their social property, particularly the wholesale privatization of its mineral wealth which IMF economic “reforms” had spawned, and in the political cover bestowed upon Pristina’s gangster regime by the United States.

In the intervening years NATO’s “blind eye” has morphed into something more sinister: outright complicity with their Balkan protégés.

Virtually charging the ICTY with knuckling under to political pressure from the Americans, the PACE report states that “the ICTY, which had started to conduct an initial examination on the spot to establish the existence of traces of possible organ trafficking, dropped the investigation.”

“The elements of proof taken in Rripe, in Albania” during that initial inquiry investigators wrote, “have been destroyed and cannot therefore be used for more detailed analyses. No subsequent investigation has been carried out into a case nevertheless considered sufficiently serious by the former ICTY Prosecutor for her to see the need to bring it to public attention through her book.”

This is hardly surprising, considering that the ICTY was created at the insistence of the Clinton administration *precisely* as a retributive hammer to punish official enemies of the U.S.

Hailed as an objective body by media enablers of America’s imperial project, with few exceptions, while it relentlessly hunted down alleged Serbian war criminals—the losers in the decade-long conflagration—it studiously ignored proxy forces, including the KLA, under the operational control of German and American intelligence agencies.

The report averred that human organ trafficking was only a part of a larger web of crime and corruption, and that murder, trafficking in women, control over global narcotics distribution and money laundering networks were standard operating procedure for Thaçi and other members of the “Drenica group,” the black widows at the center of the KLA spiders’ web.

For his part, Thaçi has called the PACE report “libelous” and the Kosovo government has repudiated the Council’s findings claiming that the charges “were not based on facts and were construed to damage the image of Kosovo and the war of the Kosovo Liberation Army.”

While one can easily dismiss prevarications from Kosovo’s government, the White House role in covering-up the crimes of their client regime should have provoked a major scandal. That it didn’t only reveals the depths of Washington’s own venal self-interest in preventing this sordid affair from gaining traction.

In all likelihood fully-apprised of the Council of Europe’s investigation through any number of American-friendly moles implanted in European institutions as WikiLeaks [Cablegate](#) files have revealed, last summer Thaçi met with U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden at the White House.

Shamelessly, Biden “reaffirmed the United States’ full support for an independent, democratic, whole, and multi-ethnic Kosovo,” and “reiterated the United States’ firm support for Kosovo’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” according to a White House [press release](#).

Indeed, the vice president “welcomed the progress that Kosovo’s government has made in carrying out essential reforms, including steps to strengthen the rule of law.”

An all too predictable pattern when one considers the lawless nature of the regime in Washington.

## **The Heroin Trail**

As I reported more than two years ago in “[Welcome to Kosovo! The World’s Newest Narco State](#),” the KLA served as the militarized vanguard for the Albanian mafia whose “15

Families” control virtually every facet of the Balkan heroin trade.

Albanian traffickers ship heroin originating exclusively from Central Asia’s Golden Crescent. At one end lies America’s drug outpost in Afghanistan where poppy is harvested for processing and transshipment through Iran and Turkey; as morphine base it is then refined into “product” for worldwide consumption. From there it passes into the hands of the Albanian syndicates who control the Balkan Route.

As the [San Francisco Chronicle](#) reported back in 1999, “Kosovars were the acknowledged masters of the trade, credited with shoving aside the Turkish gangs that had long dominated narcotics trafficking along the Balkan Route, and effectively directing the ethnic Albanian network.”

As the murdered investigative journalist Peter Klebnikov reported in 2000 for [Mother Jones](#), as the U.S.-sponsored war in Kosovo heated up, “the drug traffickers began supplying the KLA with weapons procured from Eastern European and Italian crime groups in exchange for heroin. The 15 Families also lent their private armies to fight alongside the KLA. Clad in new Swiss uniforms and equipped with modern weaponry, these troops stood out among the ragtag irregulars of the KLA. In all, this was a formidable aid package.”

Despite billions of dollars spent on failed interdiction efforts, these patterns persist today as more than 106 metric tons of heroin flow into Europe. So alarmed has the Russian government become over the flood of heroin penetrating their borders from Central Asian and the Balkan outposts that some officials have likened it to American “narco-aggression” and a new “opium war, researcher Peter Dale Scott [reported](#).

Scott avers: “These provinces” in Afghanistan, “support the past and present CIA assets in the Karzai regime (headed by Hamid Karzai, a former CIA asset), including the president’s brother Ahmed Wali Karzai, an active CIA asset, and Abdul Rashid Dostum, a former CIA asset. In effect America has allied itself with one drug faction in Afghanistan against another.” Much the same can be said for CIA assets in Pristina.

As the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) published in their 2010 [World Drug Report](#):

Once heroin leaves Turkish territory, interception efficiency drops significantly. In the Balkans, relatively little heroin is seized, suggesting that the route is exceedingly well organized and lubricated with corruption. ... Another notable feature of the Balkan route is that some important networks have clan-based and hierarchically organized structures. Albanian groups in particular have such structures, making them particularly hard to infiltrate. This partially explains their continued involvement in several European heroin markets. Albanian networks continue to be particularly visible in Greece, Italy and Switzerland. Italy is one of the most important heroin markets in Europe, and frequently identified as a base of operation for Balkan groups who exploit the local diaspora. According to WCO seizure statistics, Albanians made up the single largest group (32%) of all arrestees for heroin trafficking in Italy between 2000 and 2008. The next identified group was Turks followed by Italians and citizens of Balkan countries (Bulgaria, Kosovo/Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and to some extent Greece). A number of Pakistani and Nigerian traffickers were arrested in Italy as well.

As has been documented for decades, U.S. destabilization programs and covert operations

rely on far-right provocateurs and drug lords (often [interchangeable players](#)) to facilitate the dirty work. Throughout its Balkan campaign the CIA made liberal use of these preexisting narcotics networks to arm the KLA and then provide them with targets.

When NATO partners Germany and the U.S. decided to drive a stake through Yugoslavia's heart during the heady days of post-Cold War triumphalism, their geopolitical strategy could not have achieved "success" without the connivance, indeed *active partnership* forged amongst Yugoslavia's nationalist rivals. As investigative journalist Misha Glenny has shown,

Most shocking of all, however, is how the gangsters and politicians fueling war between their peoples were in private cooperating as friends and close business partners. The Croat, Bosnian, Albanian, Macedonian, and Serb moneymen and mobsters were truly thick as thieves. They bought, sold, and exchanged all manner of commodities, knowing that the high levels of personal trust between them were much stronger than the transitory bonds of hysterical nationalism. They fomented this ideology among ordinary folk in essence to mask their own venality. As one commentator described it, the new republics were ruled by "a parastate Cartel which had emerged from political institutions, the ruling Communist Party and its satellites, the military, a variety of police forces, the Mafia, court intellectuals and with the president of the Republic at the center of the spider web...Tribal nationalism was indispensable for the cartel as a means to pacify its subordinates and as a cover for the uninterrupted privatization of the state apparatus. (*McMafia: A Journey Through the Global Criminal Underworld*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008, p. 27)

Thaçi and other members of his inner circle, Marty avers, were "commonly identified, and cited in secret intelligence reports," published by the German secret state agency, the Bundesnachrichtendienst or BND "as the most dangerous of the KLA's 'criminal bosses'."

Trading on American protection to consolidate political power, thus maintaining control over key narcotics smuggling corridors, the special rapporteur writes that "having succeeded in eliminating, or intimidating into silence, the majority of the potential and actual witnesses against them (both enemies and erstwhile allies), using violence, threats, blackmail, and protection rackets," Thaçi's Drenica Group have "exploit[ed] their position in order to accrue personal wealth totally out of proportion with their declared activities."

Indeed, multiple reports prepared by the U.S. DEA, FBI, the BND, Italy's SISMI, Britain's MI6 and the Greek EYP intelligence service have stated that Drenica Group members "are consistently named as 'key players' in intelligence reports on Kosovo's mafia-like structures of organised crime."

As the Council of Europe and investigative journalists have documented, northern Albania was the site not only of KLA training camps but of secret detention centers where prisoners of war and civilian KLA opponents were executed and their organs surgically removed and sold on the international black market.

"The reality is that the most significant operational activities undertaken by members of the KLA—prior to, during, and in the immediate aftermath of the conflict—took place on the territory of Albania, where the Serb security forces were never deployed."

The report avers, "It is well established that weapons and ammunition were smuggled into parts of Kosovo, often on horseback, through clandestine, mountainous routes from

northern Albania,” the site of secret NATO bases, “yet only in the second half of 1998,” Marty writes, “through explicit endorsements from Western powers, founded on strong lobbying from the United States, did the KLA secure its pre-eminence in international perception as the vanguard of the Kosovar Albanian liberation struggle.”

“What is particularly confounding” Marty writes, “is that all of the international community in Kosovo—from the Governments of the United States and other allied Western powers, to the EU-backed justice authorities—undoubtedly possess the same, overwhelming documentation of the full extent of the Drenica Group’s crimes, but none seems prepared to react in the face of such a situation and to hold the perpetrators to account.”

While the special rapporteur’s outrage is palpable, the ascension of a political crime family with deep roots in the international drugs trade and other rackets, including the grisly traffic in human organs, far from being an anomalous event conforms *precisely* to the structural pattern of capitalist rule in the contemporary period.

“What we have uncovered” Marty informs us, “is of course not completely unheard-of. The same or similar findings have long been detailed and condemned in reports by key intelligence and police agencies, albeit without having been followed up properly, because the authors’ respective political masters have preferred to keep a low profile and say nothing, purportedly for reasons of ‘political expediency’. But we must ask what interests could possibly justify such an attitude of disdain for all the values that are invariably invoked in public?”

Marty need look no further for an answer to his question than to the “political masters” in Washington, who continue to cover-up not only their own crimes but those of the global mafias who do their bidding.

As we have seen throughout the latter half of the 20th century down to the present moment, powerful corporate and financial elites, the military and intelligence agencies and, for lack of a better term, “normal” governmental institutions are suborned by the same crooked players who profit from war and the ensuing chaos it spawns to *organize crime*, thereby “rationalizing” criminal structures on more favorable terms for those “in the loop.”

In this regard, the impunity enjoyed up till now by Thaçi and his minions merely reflect the far-greater impunity enjoyed by the American secret state and the powerful actors amongst U.S. elites who have profited from the dirty work allegedly performed by Kosovo’s Prime Minister, and others like him, who are counted amongst the most loyal servants of imperial power.

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