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INTERNATIONAL EFFECTS OF ALBANIAN ORGANIZED CRIME

by

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This thesis investigates Albanian organized crime with a focus on the transnational crime of trafficking cannabis cultivated in Albania. It argues that the illicit cannabis market has flourished due to a difficult transition from communism to democracy, and efforts to combat the market, until recently, have been largely an afterthought by government officials. Additionally, organized crime has infiltrated portions of Albanian politics and its economy, which has had significant negative effects on Albania, its citizens, and its candidacy toward European Union (EU) membership.

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INTERNATIONAL EFFECTS OF ALBANIAN ORGANIZED CRIME

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requirements for the degree of

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This thesis investigates Albanian organized crime with a focus on the transnational crime of trafficking cannabis cultivated in Albania. It argues that the illicit cannabis market has flourished due to a difficult transition from communism to democracy, and efforts to combat the market, until recently, have been largely an afterthought by government officials. Additionally, organized crime has infiltrated portions of Albanian politics and its economy, which has had significant negative effects on Albania, its citizens, and its candidacy toward European Union (EU) membership.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFPC	American Foreign Policy Council
DP	Democratic Party
EU	European Union
EUFOR	European Union Force
EUISS	European Union Institute for Security Services
Europol	European Union's police force
FARC	Colombia Revolutionary Armed Forces
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GDP	Gross domestic product
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KIPRED	Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
LSI	Socialist Movement for Integration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OCGS	Organized Crime and Gang Section
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
SOCTA	Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment
SP	Socialist Party
TOC	Transnational organized crime
UDA	Ulster Defense Association
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis explores the following question: How does organized crime in Albania affect its relationships with neighboring countries, the European Union (EU), and other institutions, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)?

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Albania is a member of NATO and a candidate for EU membership. Albania is arguably one of the most pro-Western (i.e., Western Europe and the United States) Balkan states. When Albania joined NATO in 2009, all major political parties supported membership and as many as 96 percent of its citizens did as well.[1] A 2015 study showed that 92 percent of citizens viewed EU membership as beneficial to Albania.[2] Albania is pro-West, but it remains an extremely poor country that has historically been susceptible to political corruption and crime. This makes Albania an intriguing subject considering that Albania's strong desire to join the EU and adopt Western political models directly contrasts with the state's dysfunctional democratic institutions and uneven rule of law.

The research question takes into account the complexities of Albanian integration with the West while focusing on the country's struggle to combat organized crime, an extremely broad category of activity in Albania. To avoid an overly broad analysis, this thesis focuses on the illicit Albanian markets of cannabis production and trafficking. Cannabis is unique because the level of actual harm the drug is responsible for is heavily debated. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) argues that this debate has resulted in inconsistencies in the severity of cannabis laws and cannabis law

[1] Vincent Morelli et al., *NATO Enlargement: Albania, Croatia, and Possible Future Candidates,* CRS Report No. RL34701 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 14, 2009), https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34701.pdf, 5.

[2] Klodjan Seferaj et al., *National Survey on Perceptions and Exceptions towards a Potential EU Membership of Albania* (Tirana, Albania: Open Society Foundation for Albania, 2015), http://www.osfa.al/sites/default/files/powerpoint_presentation_en.pdf#overlay-context=ngjarje/anketimi-kombetar-mbi-perceptimet-pritshmerite-drejt-anetaresimit-te-mundshem-te-shqiperise-ne-be.

enforcement.[3] As a result, the drug has become a uniquely suitable product for transnational organized crime. If Albanian organized crime has indeed hurt the country's relations with European governments and international organizations, as evidence suggests, this thesis investigates how severe the impacts have been and the role the illicit cannabis market has played in this respect.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Efforts to Define Organized Crime

Jana Arsovska, the author of *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime*, provides a detailed account of many Albanian criminal groups, but she rejects the idea of a singular Albanian mafia.[4] Her skepticism about the existence of an Albanian mafia, in conjunction with acknowledgment of Albanian organized crime, brings up an interesting question. How does organized crime function in Albania without a mafia-like command structure? The answer lies in the applicable definition of the mafia and organized crime.

The term "mafia" originates from Sicily, but its exact meaning and origin are contested among historians and scholars.[5] Public acknowledgement of Italian mafia-related crime in the United States dates back as far as 1890, but it was not until after World War II that federal agencies identified, and began to develop policies to combat, a nationwide criminal organization referred to as the mafia.[6] Following the release of the novel and movie *The Godfather*, in 1969 and 1972, respectively, the "mafia" became a familiar word in American households. Since then, the word has developed many variations and is often used haphazardly to describe any group engaged in organized crime.

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[3] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2006* (Vienna, Austria: United Nations, 2006), http://www.unodc.org/pdf/WDR_2006/wdr2006_volume1.pdf, 155–57.

[4] Jana Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

[5] Letizia Paoli, *Mafia Brotherhoods: Organized Crime, Italian Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22–40.

[6] Letizia Paoli, "The Paradoxes of Organized Crime," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 37, no. 1 (2002): 51–97.

This common misapplication of the term "mafia" adds confusion in the larger debate on how to define organized crime.

In reviewing definitions of organized crime, Jay Albanese wrote, "there seem to be as many descriptions of organized crime as there are authors."[7] The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following definition:

> organized crime *n*. crime which is deliberately planned and not petty or opportunistic; *spec*. crime which is planned and controlled by powerful groups and carried out on a large scale; the groups who perpetrate this kind of crime.[8]

Using the Oxford definition, the term organized crime appears fairly self-explanatory. That is, it consists of crimes that are organized and committed by groups. However, among many scholars, the definition of organized crime begins with distinguishing whether organized crime is defined by the criminal groups involved, or by the specific criminal activities.[9] In other words, is organized crime defined by the perpetrators or by the severity of their offenses? The Oxford definition combines crime participants (i.e., "powerful groups") and crime severity ("large scale").

The definition of organized crime can be viewed as a spectrum which ranges from precise to vague characteristics. The Oxford definition applies required traits to organized crime and can thus be thought of as a precise definition. In a similar fashion, the scholar Howard Abadinsky identifies eight attributes which indicate the illicit activities that qualify as organized crime.[10] On the other side of the spectrum, scholars such as Letizia Paoli have argued that, contrary to popular belief, organized crime often happens in disorganized ways.[11] Furthermore, she acknowledged that while large powerful groups (e.g., the mafia)

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[7] Jay S. Albanese, *Organized Crime in America* (Cincinnati, OH: Anderson Publishing Company, 1985), 4.

[8] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "organized crime," accessed August 8, 2017, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/132457?redirectedFrom=organized+crime#eid33332775.

[9] Letizia Paoli and Cyrille Fijnaut, "General Introduction," in *Organized Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond*, C. Fijnaut and L. Paoli (The Netherlands: Springer, 2004), 7.

[10] Howard Abadinsky, *Organized Crime*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Inc, 1990).

[11] Paoli, "The Paradoxes of Organized Crime."

do exist, they rarely operate as a single unit. Paoli notes the challenge to assigning a one-size-fits-all definition of organized crime, which aligns her with the scholars who believe the term can often be vague and subjective.[12]

Despite the disagreements about defining organized crime, combatting it has become a top priority throughout the world. For example, the U.S. Department of Justice employs its Organized Crime and Gang Section (OCGS) against organized crime,[13] the UNODC promotes a global response to organized crime,[14] and the European Union's police force (Europol) publishes the Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) to address major crimes.[15]

Ironically, with all the attention organized crime receives, rarely do institutions define organized crime in the same way even if they use precise definitions. Law enforcement agencies benefit from a specific definition because it provides them with precise attributes to measure and target. That being said, these institutions narrow their focus in different ways. For example, both the EU and the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) specify that organized crime is perpetrated by structured groups. While the EU is specific on minimum group size, the FBI is not.[16] Moreover, the FBI lists specific offenses that are typical of organized crime while the EU does not specify any particular crimes. Rather, the EU lists applicable punishments. In summary, even specific definitions of organized crime will have elements of subjectivity.

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[12] Both book chapters discuss the difficulty and subjective nature of defining organized crime, Paoli and Fijnaut, "General Introduction"; Felia Allum, "Introduction," in *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, F. Allum and S. Gilmour (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1–15.

[13] "Organized Crime and Gang Section (OCGS)," The United States Department of Justice, August 18, 2016, https://www.justice.gov/criminal-ocgs.

[14] "Organized Crime," United Nations Officer on Drugs and Crime, accessed February 16, 2018, https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro.html.

[15] "Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA): Identifying the Priorities in the Fight Against Major Crime," EUROPOL, accessed February 16, 2018, https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/serious-and-organised-crime-threat-assessment.

[16] The EU definition refers to a structured association of "more than two persons" where the FBI definition gives no number. Allum, "Introduction." 6–7.

2. The Effects of Organized Crime

If organized crime is defined differently by institutions, it stands to reason that the perceived effects of organized crime will also differ from region to region. In the case of the EU, a group of fewer than three people engaged in extortion, by definition, does not qualify as organized crime. However, in the United States, the same group may be charged with engaging in organized crime because the FBI definition does not define group size. As a result, the documented effects of organized crime in the EU can contrast with those in the United States because of a different definition.

Studying the effects of something that is not easily defined poses a challenge to scholars. In order to circumvent this challenge, many scholars avoid trying to establish a firm definition of organized crime, and instead, use case studies to explore how organized crime is defined, opposed, and measured by individual states.

In the case of the Netherlands, Edward Kleemans reports that organized crime was not addressed until the 1990s, but upon the determination that it was a concern, the state overreacted.[17] Rather than study the issue empirically, it was assumed that organized crime was made up of Dutch criminal syndicates, capable of taking over economic sectors and political institutions, and that it could potentially affect the stability of the state. After further review, these assumptions proved inaccurate, and it was discovered that criminal networks in the Netherlands were primarily active in the trafficking of illicit goods. The networks were developed largely from the diverse immigrant population in the Netherlands. Specifically, immigrants who emigrated from countries that are now sources for illicit products (e.g., heroin from Turkey or hashish from Morocco) were often involved in the trafficking of those products. These "transit crimes," as they are described by Kleeman, are largely aided by the social ties between the immigrants and criminals in their countries of origin. The crimes are unlikely to destabilize the Netherlands, but their cross-border nature has international implications.

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[17] Edward Kleemans, "Crossing Borders: Organized Crime in the Netherlands," in *Organized Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond*, C. Fijnaut and L. Paoli (The Netherlands: Springer, 2004), 303–31.

France, like the Netherlands, began to address organized crime in the 1990s, but France has had an almost opposite reaction. Nacer Lalam observes that historical research has uncovered evidence of two periods after World War II of French organized crime that resembles family or clan structures.[18] Although the research indicates that similar structures continue to exist in France today, according to Lalam, in the public debate, France views organized crime as a threat from foreign mafias. He also states that in French academia, "the subject of organized crime has never gained full legitimacy."[19] Lalam describes an overall pessimistic attitude in France towards the notion of French organized crime groups and potential investments of illegal profits in the legal economy. Without more focused efforts, determining the effects of French organized crime will remain challenging.

A further extreme, beyond France, is found in Spain, where there was almost no state-sponsored research on organized crime and no organized crime legislation as of 2004.[20] In contrast, Italy has specific laws targeting criminal organizations; and countless books, articles, and other scholarly works have investigated the effects of Italian organized crime inside Italy's borders and beyond. The same cannot be said for Albania. However, due to the sharp rise in Albanian drug trafficking since the 1990s, the country has received a significant increase in attention. Reports from the UNODC, the EU, and other international institutions are plentiful and help to analyze the domestic and international effects of Albanian organized crime.

3. Organized Crime as an Economy

Many studies of organized crime explore how the activities of criminal groups work inside and outside legally regulated state activities. One way of studying this phenomenon

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[18] Nacer Lalam, "How Organised Is Organised Crime in France," in *Organized Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond*, C. Fijnaut and L. Paoli (The Netherlands: Springer, 2004), 357–85.

[19] Lalam, 357.

[20] Alejandra Gómez-Céspedes and Per Stangeland, "Spain: The Flourishing Illegal Drug Haven in Europe," in *Organized Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond*, C. Fijnaut and L. Paoli (The Netherlands: Springer, 2004), 387–412.

is to treat organized crime as a business. In his "criminal enterprise approach," Jay Albanese treats organized crime as analogous to legal enterprises, stating that both share the goals of survival and profit.[21] In this model, the illicit enterprise experiences the same factors as a normal business. Both enterprises (legal and illegal) have suppliers and customers, and must contend with regulators and competitors. This model helps one conceptualize scenarios in which illegal and legal businesses meet. For example, an illegal enterprise may invest profits in legal businesses to circumvent regulators. In another example, a legal enterprise may purchase stolen goods at discounted prices, allowing it to sell the goods at lower prices than its legal competitors.

Albanese's economic approach has utility in evaluating for-profit crime, but some scholars maintain that not all organized crime is economically driven. Arguments have been made that the Italian mafias, Cosa Nostra and N'drangheta, the Chinese Triads, and the Japanese Yakuza have never viewed illegal trade and profit as primary goals but instead prioritize their social status and the traditions associated with membership.[22] Additionally, while terrorist organizations are viewed as entities separate from organized crime groups by the United Nations (UN) and other institutions,[23] some scholars have found it useful to study terrorist organizations for insight on organized crime. Scholars have explored commonalities between the organizational structures of both types of groups and investigated operational links between the two entities.[24] These studies provide additional insight as to what motivates criminals, but that does not render Albanese's model irrelevant. Even if the ultimate driving force behind certain types of organized crime is not profit, profit is still an inevitable requirement to maintain a functioning organization.

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[21] Jay S. Albanese, *Transnational Crime and the 21st Century: Criminal Enterprise, Corruption, and Opportunity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54–57.

[22] Letizia Paoli, "Organised Crime in Italy: Mafia and Illegal Markets - Exception and Normality," in *Organized Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond*, C. Fijnaut and L. Paoli (The Netherlands: Springer, 2004), 274.

[23] See UN definition of organized crime in Felia Allum, "Introduction," 7.

[24] William J. Chambliss and Elizabeth Williams, "Transnational Organized Crime and Social Sciences Myths," in *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. F. Allum and S. Gilmour (New York: Routledge, 2011), 52–64; Angela Gendron, "Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism: Global Networks in Pursuit of Plunder; Global Alliances in Pursuit of Plunderers," in *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. F. Allum and S. Gilmour (New York: Routledge, 2011), 403–17.

By focusing on economics, as Albanese does, some case studies of Russian organized crime have identified interactions of legal and illegal functions in the state. A common narrative in these studies is one in which entrepreneurial groups, both criminal and non-criminal, took advantage of an unregulated market and weak law enforcement practices in the late 1980s to the early 1990s, as Russian society transitioned from a planned economy to a market economy.[25] The transition period from communism to capitalism left a void in the economy that was filled by non-state groups active in operating industries, establishing private bank services, and investing in public foundations, all outside the limits of the law. By the time substantive laws and regulations were established for the new political-economic structure, illicit organizations had deeply infiltrated the Russian economy and were capable of influencing politics, law enforcement, and social institutions.

Albania's story has been similar to that of Russia; organized crime rose during the volatile transition from a planned economy to a liberal market economy. However, the stories diverge because, unlike Russia, Albania was not an industrial power. Therefore, while the stories told in Russian case studies are ones of supply, Albanian case studies are ones of demand. Criminal groups in Russia were able to capitalize on the transition by infiltrating or duplicating the vast legal economic activities of the state. The transition to a market economy in Albania resembled that of a collapsed state, in which criminal groups benefited from demands for economic and social institutions that essentially were non-existent.[26] Therefore, while the Russian case studies focus heavily on economic driving factors behind organized crime, the Albanian cases appear to represent a hybrid involving economics, politics, and basic social needs.

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[25] Serguei Cheloukhine, "Transnational Organized Crime in Russia," in *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. F. Allum and S. Gilmour (New York: Routledge, 2011), 111–26; Louise Shelley, "Contemporary Russian Organised Crime: Embedded in Russian Society," in *Organized Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond*, C. Fijnaut and L. Paoli (The Netherlands: Springer, 2004), 563–84; Vadim Volkov, "The Russian Mafia: Rise and Extinction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime*, ed. Letizia Paoli (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 159–76.

[26] Vasilika Hysi, "Organised Crime in Albania: The Ugly Side of Capitalism and Democracy," in *Organized Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond*, ed. C. Fijnaut and L. Paoli (The Netherlands: Springer, 2004), 537–62; Jana Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 29–30.

4. Transnational Organized Crime

Transnational organized crime (TOC) is a combination of two concepts that are difficult to define: organized crime, and transnational crime. As previously discussed, organized crime is difficult to define because the levels of sophistication, the size of organizations, and the seriousness of offenses vary from group to group. Transnational crime, which crosses borders, is sometimes confused with international crime. The difference (which is somewhat counterintuitive) is that international crime does not need to cross borders. In Albanese's words, "International crimes are crimes against the peace and security of mankind based on international agreements or based on legal precedents developed through history."[27] An example of international crime is an act of genocide, which can be committed within the borders of one state but violates international law.

By combining the two terms into one, the concept of TOC can take on multiple forms ranging from human smuggling to terrorism depending on how one views organized crime and transnational crime. Terrorism is often excluded by institutions that view the pursuit of financial profits as integral to organized crime. The UN is an example of such an institution. The UN defines organized crime and then explains the context in which organized crime becomes transnational. The UN definition of organized crime has four elements: structure, duration, crime severity, and financial motivation.[28] Some elements are specific while some are vague. The UN states that organized crime becomes transnational when it meets any of the following criteria: it is committed in multiple states, it is planned in one state and committed in another, it is committed by an organized criminal group operating in multiple states, or the effects of the crime cross state lines.[29] However, if one considers Paoli's argument that organized crime is sometimes done to attain (or

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[27] Albanese, *Transnational Crime and the 21st Century: Criminal Enterprise, Corruption, and Opportunity*, 3.

[28] United Nations, "United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (New York: United Nations, 2004), http://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf, 5.

[29] United Nations, 6.

maintain) social status rather than to pursue profits,[30] the distinction between terrorism and TOC can become less obvious.

Despite the debate surrounding the terms that make up TOC, the term itself has achieved global attention. Concerns about TOC have been expressed by diverse institutions, including the EU, the UN, and the FBI. The origins of these concerns are often credited to the United States for the public acknowledgment of the Italian mafia in the last half of the 20th century, and for vocal suspicions of the mafia's transnational activities.[31] While many scholars criticize the U.S. reaction to the mafia as overly sensationalized by politicians and the media, most scholars of organized crime point to globalization as a key driving force behind organized crime graduating to transnational organized crime.[32]

By 1994, the UN had placed the term TOC on the international stage by acknowledging it at the World Ministerial Conference in Naples, Italy.[33] Since then, the UN has refined its definition and adopted the *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto.* The convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000. It entered into force in 2003, and 188 countries are now party to it.[34]

5. Organized Crime in International Relations

Research into how both organized crime and TOC affect international relations has naturally evolved as international institutions have voiced concerns about illicit activities that cross borders between states. Scholars have argued that organized crime in Russia is involved in the economics and politics of the state.[35] They insist that this involvement not

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30 Paoli, *Mafia Brotherhoods: Organized Crime, Italian Style*, 65–67.

31 Paoli, "The Paradoxes of Organized Crime," 53–57.

32 Allum, "Introduction," 1.

33 Letizia Paoli and Cyrille Fijnaut, "Introduction to Part I: The History of the Concept," in *Organized Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond*, C. Fijnaut and L. Paoli (The Netherlands: Springer, 2004), 38.

34 "United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html#Fulltext.

35 Shelley, "Contemporary Russian Organised Crime: Embedded in Russian Society."

only concerns states that have relationships with Russia, but that it also hurts Russia's standing in international politics. Similar arguments have been made about Italy, where the mafia has infiltrated businesses and political structures in the state. While the Italian state has ratified conventions to tackle transnational crime, some experts hold that the state did so under pressure and does not have the proper social conditions (e.g., low unemployment and a low level of corruption) to fully enforce the new measures.[36]

With regard to Albania, organized crime is a recurring theme as the state aspires to achieve EU membership and is examined annually by the European Commission.[37] Arsovska does not deny that Albanian organized crime has spread globally, but she maintains that the perceived threat of Albanian transnational crime is overstated in Western societies.[38] Nevertheless, Albania is singled out routinely by institutions like the UNODC and described as a major actor in the trafficking of illicit goods and services in European states, complicating the country's attempts to engage with the global economy.[39]

D. HYPOTHESES

This thesis puts forward the following two hypotheses:

First, there exists a significant level of organized crime within, and emanating from, the Albanian state. Albanian organized crime is not formed by a rigid hierarchical group with a few powerful bosses like the Italian mafia. Rather it is similar, in some respects, to the Netherlands model, in that social and ethnic ties based on national origins help form criminal networks that produce and traffic illicit goods. Additionally, Albanian organized crime has also benefited from a lack of governmental attention and serious law

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[36] Armando D'Alterio, "The Fight Against Transnational Organized Crime in Italy: What Can We Learn?," in *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, F. Allum and S. Gilmour (New York: Routledge, 2011), 470–82.

[37] "European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations," European Commission, June 12, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/albania_en.

[38] Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 232–235.

[39] An examples is Albanian cannabis smuggling noted in the following reports: UNODC, *World Drug Report 2006*. 165. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Market Analysis of Plant-Based Drugs: Opiates, Cocaine, Cannabis," World Drug Report 2017 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017), https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/field/Booklet_3_Plantbased.pdf, 40.

enforcement, much like organized crime in Spain. Political corruption and weak state institutions have allowed criminal markets, notably cannabis production and trafficking, to become a substantial factor in the Albanian economy; and an elimination of the cannabis market may lead to complex economic consequences if social safety nets and employment opportunities are not available to fill the economic void.

Second, Albanian transnational crime will continue to be a primary concern for international institutions and for national governments that view it as a threat to their borders. The trafficking of Albanian cannabis complicates the drug enforcement efforts of many countries throughout the globe, and drug trafficking profits can also fund other illicit activities that cross state borders. NATO and the EU have interests in the stability of Albania and the honesty and effectiveness of its state agencies, considering its membership in NATO and its potential membership in the EU. Therefore, the harmful and destabilizing nature of the cannabis market is of particular interest to these international institutions.

II. ALBANIAN ORGANIZED CRIME

This chapter argues that the fall of communism in Albania and its turbulent transition to democracy left Albanian organized crime largely unchecked for many years, leading to TOC and a massive illicit cannabis market. The cannabis market in Albania has had numerous negative effects on Albania externally and internally. Externally, there is international pressure on the state because of its illicit trade. Internally, the state suffers from destabilizing effects such as corruption, political power struggles, and an informal economic system—termed a "gray economy"—that creates a cycle in which crime and corruption lead to economic harm, which further promotes dishonesty and graft.

A. THE RISE OF ALBANIAN ORGANIZED CRIME

As Albania started down the turbulent path of democratization, organized crime spread rapidly. The removal of communism eliminated the economic safety net of the planned economy that was supporting many Albanians. Albania was Europe's least developed nation in the 1990s, leading to significant unemployment and inflation.[40] Crime became a way for many Albanians to obtain wealth in the struggling economy. In the early 1990s, there was a sharp increase in violent crime as well as other organized crimes involving stolen cars, prostitution, and drugs.[41] Viselike Haysi argues that in the first years of the transition, increasing organized crime was mostly ignored because the primary focus of the Albanian people was on state building.[42]

The unimpeded spread of organized crime in Albania was primarily due to political corruption, an outdated criminal code, and inadequate law enforcement. Corruption in Albanian politics in the 1990s was partly due to politicians that were supported by clans. According to Arsovska, if a member of a clan ran for a political position, he would receive

[40] Nicolas J. Costa, *Albania: A European Enigma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[41] Hysi, "Organised Crime in Albania: The Ugly Side of Capitalism and Democracy,"540.

[42] Hysi, 541.

support from every clan associate.[43] If the politician was elected, he was then bound to support all clan members (including criminals) in return.

On a larger scale, since democratizing, Albanian politics have been dominated by two parties: the right-wing Democratic Party (DP) and the left-wing Socialist Party (SP). Additionally, since 2004 a third party, the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI), has served as a coalition partner for both the DP and SP to establish a majority.[44] Concerns over links between Albanian politicians within the major parties and organized crime have been numerous. In 2009, U.S. Ambassador John Withers stated, "the three major parties, the Democratic Party (DP), the Socialist Party (SP) and the Movement for Social Integration (LSI), all have MPs with links to organized crime."[45] These links were a catalyst to the spread of organized crime in Albania and have had destabilizing effects on the state which will be discussed later.

The outdated criminal code was due to distraction followed by slow adaptation. Due to the focus on democratization, the concept of organized crime was not even discussed in Albania until 1993.[46] Until that point, and for the following two years, Albania used a criminal code that was created by the former communist regime in 1977.[47] When the new Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania was established in 1995, it required multiple amendments because it was immediately obsolete. The criminal code addressed sexual exploitation of women and children, but it had no punishments for the traffickers or facilitators of the crime.[48] Punishment for arms trafficking was also lacking. Arms

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[43] Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 32.

[44] Fred C. Abrahams, *Modern Albania: From Dictatorship to Democracy in Europe* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 281–8.

[45] Abrahams, 289.

[46] Hysi, "Organised Crime in Albania: The Ugly Side of Capitalism and Democracy," 542.

[47] Vasilika Hysi, "Organized Crime Control in Albania: The Long Difficult Path to Meet International Standards and Develop Effective Policies," in *Organized Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond*, ed. C. Fijnaut and L. Paoli (The Netherlands: Springer, 2004), 967.

[48] Hysi, 968.

trafficking was not amended to the criminal code until 2001.[49] This was excessively late, considering that the economic collapse in 1997 led to large scale looting of military weapons. Estimates of looted weapons in 1997 range from ½ to 1 million small arms and 800 million to 1.5 billion rounds of ammunition as well as 16 million explosive devices.[50] With such an extreme number of weapons in the hands of criminals and looters, it would have been prudent for the government to anticipate an increase of arms trafficking. Instead, it took the government four years to respond.

Albania has built up its criminal code, albeit slowly, and has ratified numerous international conventions on organized crime and TOC. However, the laws mean little if they cannot be enforced. A 2003 European Commission report stated, "Albania's capacity and determination to fight organised crime remains limited."[51] The report also observed that police capability is limited, and that co-operation between police and departments within the judicial institution was lacking. In 2017, the Council of Europe issued a report commending Albania for recent constitutional amendments to reform the judiciary but still remarked, "the insufficient independence and impartiality of the judiciary in Albania and the political pressure and interference on it have been longstanding concerns of the Assembly."[52] Regardless of how many laws Albania has drafted, organized crime has easily spread due to lack of enforcement.

B. ALBANIAN ORGANIZED CRIME ACROSS BORDERS

The steep rise in organized crime in Albania is typically correlated to the volatile transition from a planned economy to a liberal market economy in the 1990s. Although this is correct, some Albanian organized crime roots were in place well before the state

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[49] Hysi, 971.

[50] Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 34.

[51] European Commission, "Albania Stabilisation and Association Report 2003," Commission Staff Working Paper (Brussels: Commision of the European Communities, 2003), https://www.parlament.al/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2003_progress_report_en_23382_1.pdf, 32.

[52] Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe, "Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Albania" (Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, 2017), http://website-pace.net/documents/19887/3136217/AS-MON-2017-01-EN.pdf/18d44e70-977b-4888-ad14-50d57996cf87, 9.

democratized. Furthermore, much of the criminal activity that predates democracy was transnational because it took place beyond the borders of the small communist state. Arsovska cites multiple reports about the Albanian communist security agencies using professional criminals, typically in Western Europe, for a variety of service**s,** including informing, assassinations, and smuggling weapons and oil.[53] She also discusses evidence showing that the secret police—the Sigurimi—had government-approved agreements with the Italian mafia to provide safe havens and assistance with cigarette trafficking in order to raise profits for Albania. Arsovska points out that many of the government officials and Sigurimi involved in these activities were removed from service as the democratic party came to power. She argues that without employment, many of them turned to TOC, which they were already proficient in, to support themselves financially.

Albanian TOC was also found in New York before the democratization of Albania. Albanians who had escaped their communist homeland came to the United States in large numbers in the 1960s.[54] Arsovska reports that some Albanians began importing heroin from Yugoslavia.[55] The drugs were distributed through neighborhood stores, and evidence suggests that by the 1980s the Albanian criminals began cooperating with the Italian mafia.

Organized crime within Albania in the early 1990s also began to cross international borders. Albanian TOC groups have been active in human smuggling, human trafficking, and the trafficking of weapons, cars, and drugs.[56] Arms trafficking became popular after the 1997 economic collapse. Arsovska argues that many of the weapons looted in 1997 were trafficked to the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) during the Kosovo conflict, and that additional weapons were transported to the ethnic Albanians responsible for the Macedonia insurgency in 2001.[57] Illegal export of stolen automobiles was also a crime that

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[53] Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 25–29.

[54] Arsovska, 100.

[55] Arsovska, 100–101.

[56] Hysi, "Organised Crime in Albania: The Ugly Side of Capitalism and Democracy," 546–555.

[57] Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 217.

experienced an increase in the late 1990s.[58] Additionally, drug cultivation and trafficking became a rapidly growing industry during the democratic transition of the country. Albania acts as a transit state for many drugs, and cannabis has become a major product produced in Albania and trafficked abroad.

C. THE ALBANIAN CANNABIS MARKET

According to multiple sources, Albanian cannabis production and trafficking began in the 1990s as the People's Republic of Albania dissolved.[59] Jana Arsovska provides evidence that many dismissed members of the Sigurimi turned to smuggling drugs as a source of income, but cannabis is not specifically mentioned.[60] A 1999 International Crisis Group (ICG) report asserts that, initially, individual farmers engaged in cannabis cultivation and sales, and the business later expanded as drug traffickers from Italy invested in the market.[61] Nonetheless, whether the Albanian cannabis market was initially a product of organized criminal groups, or simply local farmers, the general consensus is that the market dates back to the start of the 1990s.

The increase of the Albanian cannabis market since the 1990s has attained global recognition. Before government eradication efforts in 2014, the southern Albanian village of Lazarat was referred to as "the drug capital of Europe."[62] In addition to many news agency reports, the cannabis market has been noted by multiple international institutions. In 1999, the ICG wrote that "Albania has become the epicentre of a new Golden Triangle that has formed in south-eastern Europe for the transit and production of drugs."[63] The UNODC acknowledged Albania as "a major exporter of herbal cannabis" in 2006.[64]

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58 Hysi, "Organised Crime in Albania: The Ugly Side of Capitalism and Democracy," 552.

59 Examples of this argument can be found in the following: Linda Pressly, "Europe's Outdoor Cannabis Capital," *BBC News*, December 1, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38111945; International Crisis Gorup, *The State of Albania* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 1999).

60 Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 28–29.

61 International Crisis Gorup, "The State of Albania," 5.

62 Pressly, "Europe's Outdoor Cannabis Capital."

63 International Crisis Gorup, "The State of Albania," 4.

64 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2006*, 165.

Additionally, the European Union identified Albania's cannabis market in its 2016 review on the state.[65]

Attempts to combat the cannabis market have been historically inconsistent but have increased significantly in the last four years. In 1995, Albanian police destroyed approximately 100,000 cannabis plants.[66] In 2002, Albanian police seized 13,717 kg of cannabis herb and 155,678 plants.[67] Efforts then began to recede on both fronts. Data from the UNODC shows that cannabis herb seizures fell dramatically over the next two years and plant seizures also declined.[68] According to the UNODC's figures, it was not until 2008, when plant seizures climbed to 145,000, that Albanian authorities nearly reached 2002 levels. However, cannabis herb seizures, which had slowly been climbing since 2005, decreased by more than two thirds. Over the next four years, the UNODC's figures show that the situation essentially reversed as 2012 plant seizures fell to 33,000, while cannabis herb seizures jumped to over 20,000 kg. Albania has since dramatically increased its efforts to combat the cannabis market. In 2014, Albanian police seized over 100 tons of cannabis herb, which equated to more than all the cannabis seized in the previous 9 years combined.[69] In late 2016, police reported that they had destroyed 800,000 cannabis plants in 2015, and they had already doubled that number in the first nine months of 2016.[70] However, despite the increased efforts of Albanian officials, the UNODC still identified Albania as the main European source of cannabis in 2017, along with the Netherlands.[71]

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65 European Commission, "Albanian 2016 Report" (Brussels: European Union, September 11, 2016), https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_albania.pdf, 76.

66 International Crisis Gorup, *The State of Albania*.

67 Hysi, "Organised Crime in Albania: The Ugly Side of Capitalism and Democracy," 554.

68 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *The Illicit Drug Trade Through South-East Europe* (New York: United Nations, 2014), https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Illicit_DT_through_SEE_REPORT_2014_web.pdf, 99–101.

69 Austrian Regional Chair of the Dublin Group, *Regional Report on Western Balkans* (Brussels: European Union, 2015).

70 Elvis Nabolli, "An Albanian War on Drugs," *Balkan Insight*, November 16, 2016, http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/an-albanian-war-on-drugs-11-15-2016.

71 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Market Analysis of Plant-Based Drugs: Opiates, Cocaine, Cannabis."

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama takes issue with reports like the one from the UNODC and has claimed that cannabis cultivation is nearly extinct. In a March 2018 interview, Rama downplayed the concerns raised by international institutions like the UNODC and claimed that Albania had defeated cannabis.[72] This announcement followed numerous incidents when Rama had boasted about his government's success in fighting cannabis production. For example, after the 2014 police raids in southern Albania, Rama posted pictures on his Facebook account showing destroyed cannabis plants as evidence that cannabis production was on the decline.[73] The following year Rama praised the police following an announcement by the Albanian Interior Minister that 99.2 percent of cannabis grown in Albania had been destroyed. In July 2017, Rama announced that cannabis would be eradicated from Albania by the end of the year[74]—a goal that was not achieved. Instead, Italian authorities reported in November 2017 that aerial surveillance had found 88 suspected cannabis plantations remaining in Albania. That figure represented a reduction of nearly 2,000 plantations since 2016, so Rama used the report as an opportunity to praise the "major progress" achieved by Italy and Albania in the quest to prevent "cannabis production in Albania once and for all."[75]

It is fair to argue that Rama and his government have historically exaggerated their achievements in eradicating Albanian cannabis, but it remains a fact that Albanian outdoor cannabis plantations are on the decline. The UNODC report paints a less optimistic picture than the Italian aerial surveillance report, but it must be noted that the annual UNODC drug report is a large undertaking which requires significant lead-time before the mid-year publishing. For that reason, statistics in the 2017 report are likely to reflect the realities of

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72 "Debati në Channel One - Edi Rama, Kryeministri I 33-të i Shqipërisë," YouTube video, 1:37:05, ChannelOneAl, March 2, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPPawXdg30Q; "Rama Still in Denial over Drug Trafficking," Exit, March 3, 2018, https://exit.al/en/2018/03/03/rama-still-in-denial-over-drug-trafficking/.

73 Valentina Dimitrievska, "Albania Hails Success on War on Drugs, but Will It Be Enough?," *IntelliNews - Albania Today*, September 28, 2015.

74 "Tirana to Wipe out Large-Scale Cannabis Cultivation by End-2017, PM Says," *IntelliNews - Albania This Week*, July 9, 2017.

75 "Albania PM Welcome Italy's Report of Declining Marijuana Cultivation," *Bne IntelliNews - Albania Today*, November 5, 2017, http://www.lexisnexis.com.

previous years more than those of the current calendar year. This is evident in the 2018 UNODC drug report. The 2018 report is the first to acknowledge Albania's high rate of cannabis eradication, but it does so by referencing 2016 statistics.[76] The Italian report, based on up-to-date surveillance, provided a more current snapshot of the situation in Albania in late 2017. It clearly showed that outdoor cultivation of cannabis had been significantly reduced, but it also showed that cannabis had not yet been eradicated completely from Albania.

Cannabis is still trafficked from Albania despite the reduction of plantations. Two weeks after the November 2017 Italian surveillance report, Prime Minister Rama wrote a letter to the *Financial Times* stating that the remaining cannabis plantations had been destroyed.[77] However, two months later, an Italian investigator speaking about Albanian cannabis was quoted as saying, "the flow of drugs from Albania across the Adriatic has not let up."[78] In May 2018, a newspaper article in the *Sunday Times (London)* stated that the raids on cannabis plantations had driven the production means underground.[79] As an example, the article described a hay barn, recently discovered by police, which had been converted into an indoor cannabis growing facility. In the same month, police found a warehouse containing 671 kg of cannabis in Vlora.[80] It is apparent that the criminals involved in the cannabis market are adapting to the destruction of outdoor plantations, and this has reinforced concerns that criminals receive support from corrupt police and government officials.

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[76] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Drug Problem and Organized Crime, Illicit Financial Flows, Corruption and Terrorism," in *World Drug Report 2017*, No. E.17.XI.6 (New York: United Nations, 2017), https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/field/Booklet_5_NEXUS.pdf, 40.

[77] Edi Rama, "Albania's Drug Crime Is Now a European Problem," *Financial Times - Beyondbrics*, November 20, 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/fc552324-cac1-11e7-ab18-7a9fb7d6163e.

[78] Tom Kingston, "How Albania Turned into Cannabistan," *Times (London)*, January 6, 2018, 1 edition, sec. News p.36.

[79] Andrew Byrne, "PM on the Front Line Against Albania's Cocaine Kingpins," *Sunday Times (London)*, May 13, 2018, 2 edition, sec. News p.18.

[80] "671 Kg Cannabis Seized in Vlora," Exit, June 5, 2018, https://exit.al/en/2018/06/05/671-kg-cannabis-seized-in-vlora.

D. DESTABILIZING EFFECTS

1. Political Corruption and Power Struggles

As previously mentioned, the rise and sustainment of organized crime in Albania correlates with the country's turbulent transition to democracy. What has not been discussed is how a constant battle for power between corrupt political parties is largely to blame for the difficult path to democracy that Albania has followed over the last three decades. The struggle for power between the DP and SP has often taken precedence over managing the state, resulting in exploitation and neglect of various institutions, as well as involvement with organized crime entities.

Albanian democracy may have begun with fair elections, but shortly following them, the DP began to consolidate power. In April 1992, presidential elections were held. DP leader Sali Berisha, the only candidate, became the first non-communist president of Albania.[81] Ironically, Berisha, who had led the DP to victory while expressing anti-communist rhetoric, was a member of the Party of Labor (the name for the communist party) less than a year and a half before his election to president.[82] According to Fred Abrahams, Berisha and the DP quickly resorted to a communist model of government.[83] He explains that, in order to limit presidential power, Albanian law prohibited the president from party membership. Berisha's allies in parliament argued that the law only prohibited the president from acting as the party leader of the majority. Therefore, Berisha was able to remain in the DP as a member of the Steering Committee, and he turned the chairman position over to Eduard Selami. On the surface, it appeared that Berisha had relinquished control of the DP to act as head of state, but in reality, everyone knew he was still the party leader. Thus, Berisha commanded the majority of parliament and the presidency simultaneously.

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[81] "Albania Elects New President," *Herald Sun*, April 10, 1992.

[82] Phil Davison, "Vote Ends Albania's 'Long, Dark Night,'" *The Independent*, March 24, 1992, sec. Title Page 1.

[83] Abrahams, *Modern Albania: From Dictatorship to Democracy in Europe*, 113–15.

Berisha's talent for manipulation was not limited to his fellow Albanians. Leading up to the 1992 election, Berisha had requested radio equipment from the International Media Fund to use for campaigning.[84] The International Media Fund naturally wanted to support the pro-democratic-free-press position of the DP, and the equipment was donated under an agreement that it would be used for an independent media source post-election. Instead, after the DP's victory, the equipment remained in government custody and was used to broadcast Voice of America (VOA).[85] This was a well-calculated move by Berisha. At the time, the United States was in full support of the new democratic Albanian government, and Berisha knew the VOA broadcasting would be complimentary to his party.

From 1992 to 1997, the young Albanian democracy desperately needed smart fiscal policies—and proper enforcement of those policies—to ensure a successful shift from communism to capitalism. Under a new liberal market economy, the state would no longer provide the same level of social safety nets that were guaranteed by the old planned market system. Citizens would need jobs in order to be self-sufficient and to simultaneously stimulate the economy. The best chance of success would have come from the leaders in Tirana promoting strong economic institutions. Instead, corruption ran rampant throughout Albanian politics, and the new economy collapsed.

Under Berisha and the DP, Albania had three main sources of income: foreign aid, the illegal trafficking of oil and other illicit goods, and remittances.[86] Berisha's quest to maintain power through authoritarian-like activities would lead to a decrease in foreign aid. As explained by Paolo Tripodi, shortly after assuming office Berisha turned Albania away from Italy—which was overwhelmingly the state's largest contributor of foreign aid—in hopes of soliciting investments from the United States, Germany, and Turkey.[87] He was initially successful in persuading the United States to invest by pledging his

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[84] Abrahams, 135.

[85] Abrahams, 135.

[86] Abrahams, 170.

[87] Paolo Tripodi, "Operation Alba: A Necessary and Successful Preventive Deployment," *International Peacekeeping* 9, no. 4 (2002): 89–104.

dedication to democracy. However, his use of secret police, his removal of opponents in the judiciary, and his party's obvious interference with elections in 1996 led to the eventual withdrawal of political support from the United States and the cutting of significant American investments in Albania.

The DP was also complicit in various illegal activities, most notably, the illegal smuggling of oil into Yugoslavia during the UN embargo from 1991 to 1996. Arsovska and Abrahams discuss ties between criminal smugglers, politicians, and legal businesses. Arsovska explains how Albanian organized crime groups in northern and southern Albania worked together along with criminals in Greece to move oil up to and across Albania's northern border with Serbia.[88] Abrahams discusses how a legitimate oil import company owned by the DP was importing oil at rates that far exceeded domestic demand. This allowed excess supply to be sold off to smugglers at a profit which could then be used for party funding. Abrahams also cites evidence that the opposition SP was engaged in similar endeavors.[89]

The desire for public support caused Berisha and members of the DP to ignore the negative effects that remittances were having on the new market economy. Remittances were, and continue to be, a major factor in Albanian economics. The population of Albania is 2.87 million, while the population of the Albanian diaspora (Albanians and descendants living outside the borders of Albania) is estimated at 1.15 million. The remittances the diaspora provide to Albanian citizens are valued at nearly 10 percent of the Albanian gross domestic product (GDP).[90] The movement of capital from neighboring states into Albania in the 1990s was initially positive for the economy, but little of the money was imported through official channels.

According to an article in the magazine *Finance and Development* by Christopher Jarvis, the reason for this was that an increasing number of bad loans issued by private

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[88] Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 130.

[89] Abrahams, *Modern Albania: From Dictatorship to Democracy in Europe*, 139–42.

[90] Argita Frashëri et al., *Remittances: A Support for Development* (Tirana, Albania: Bank of Albania, 2018), https://www.bankofalbania.org/rc/doc/Remitancat_Revista_eng_12103.pdf.

banks in the early 1990s forced the Bank of Albania to limit credit.[91] In response to the money shortage, remittances began to fund an informal credit market providing unregulated cash to Albanian citizens. Jarvis explains that with new money available to the public, private deposit-taking companies began to surface promising high levels of returns, but the companies did little investment. Instead, the deposit-taking companies relied primarily on new deposits to pay existing debt, thus creating pyramid schemes. Albanian citizens began taking out loans at increasing levels and selling off assets to invest in the schemes, and by 1996, it was clear that the system would not sustain itself much longer. However, by that point the pyramid companies had become enormously popular, and they were endorsed heavily by the DP, which was receiving campaign contributions from some companies. When the Bank of Albania attempted to regulate the system in 1996, Berisha and members of the DP provided no support. The SP was also unwilling to intervene, partly due to its involvement with the schemes and largely due to the political backlash such an intervention would incite. In November 1996, the first pyramid companies began to default, and by 1997, the entire Albanian economy collapsed.

Ironically, Albania was saved by Italy—the very country that Berisha had been attempting to reduce its dependence on. Initial reactions from NATO and EU countries to the sudden economic collapse of Albania were of surprise, followed by disagreement on what action to take. Initially, a proposal for an EU-sponsored military stabilization operation was rejected.[92] Proposals for UN and NATO intervention also received little support.[93] With no consensus on a solution to the problem, Rome decided to intervene with the support of any other interested states. With UN blessing in the form of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1101, Italy led a Multinational Protection Force

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91 Christopher Jarvis, "The Rise and Fall of Albania's Pyramid Schemes," *Finance and Development*, March 2000, https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2000/03/jarvis.htm.

92 Ettore Greco, "New Trends in Peace-Keeping: The Experience of Operation Alba," *Security Dialogue* 29, no. 2 (June 1, 1998): 205.

93 Greco, 206.

(MPF) into Albania on a peacekeeping mission named Operation Alba.[94] The operation allowed for an interim government to function while new elections were held.

Rome continued to make substantial commitments toward keeping Albania intact. Italy began by pledging L210 billion to establish a three-year plan (1997-1999) with new political institutions in Albania.[95] Additionally, Italy set the stage for Albania's EU candidacy that would come later in the 21st century. This was done by convening multiple meetings with Albania and other European countries in 1997 to establish a roadmap for Tirana to follow; the aims were political normalization, economic reform, and internal security.[96]

Albania had joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994 by its own accord,[97] but it was Italy that would ensure that Albania attained membership in the alliance. As Operation Alba completed its mission in August 1997 and the coalition troops redeployed home, the Italians maintained some of their forces in Albania. Italy's goal was to ensure that the Albanian Armed Forces (AAF) developed to Western standards, which, given the conditions of the Albanian state at the time, was not a simple task. Rome nonetheless created the Italian Delegation of Experts (IDE) and undertook the 16-year activity (from 1997 to 2013) of training the AAF to achieve and then maintain NATO standards.[98]

Despite its large investment in Albania, Rome could not control the corrupt politicians who used the 1997 disaster as an opportunity to shift the governmental balance of power in their favor. Berisha's defiant attempts to remain in power in 1997 were

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94 Greco.

95 Federico Eichberg, "Sunrise or Sunset?: Albania Is One of Italy's Problems," in *Italy and the Balkans*, Significant Issues Series (Washington, D.C.: The CSIS Press, 1998), 50–61.

96 Eichberg.

97 "NATO's Relations with Albania," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, August 24, 2014, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics_48891.htm.

98 "Conclusion of the Italian Delegation of Experts Mission in Our Country," Republic of Albania Ministry of Defence, July 26, 2013, http://www.mod.gov.al/arkiv/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2294:conclusion-of-the-italian-delegation-of-experts-mission-in-our-country&catid=330&Itemid=674.

responsible for escalating violence throughout the state, but the members of the SP did not go out of their way to try to calm the violent anti-DP groups that had surfaced. In fact, the SP was actually linked to some violent anti-DP offenders, including gang leader Zani Myrteza Çaushi. According to Arsovska, Çaushi led multiple armed Albanians in an uprising against the government in March 1997 and was a supporter of the armed non-state group, the Salvation Committee of Vlore, which backed the SP.[99] Çaushi also acted as a bodyguard for an SP politician during the June 1997 elections. After the SP gained power in the elections, Çaushi was indicted for multiple crimes in 1997 and 1998 but served no jail time. It was not until 1999, following a violent shootout, that Çaushi was eventually sentenced to jail after the media began to report on his possible ties to the SP and its prime minister, Fatos Nano. This is just one of many examples Arsovska cites linking criminal entities and SP members, and it explains why trust in the new SP government showed little improvement over the recently deposed DP. Reinforcing this point is a 1998 World Bank report that found the Albanian public was well aware of corruption among public officials and stated, "[in Albania] corruption is deeply institutionalized."[100]

The SP had promised Albanians a new and honest government during the elections of 1997, but little changed beyond the name of the governing party. Citizens were still furious over the pyramid schemes which had stolen their savings. In order to quell public outrage toward the government, a commission was formed to investigate the pyramid schemes. The purpose was to demonstrate transparency and hold the politicians who had aided the schemes accountable, but it became clear that politicians on both the right and the left were accomplices in the catastrophe.[101]

The SP enjoyed control over state-run media, allowing it to keep reports of its involvement in the pyramid schemes off television, but it held no monopoly over print media. Therefore, the SP turned to alternative means to minimize the voice of its critics. A

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99 Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 38–9.

100 The World Bank, *New Frontiers in Diagnosing and Combating Corruption*, Report No. 7 (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1998), http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/185671468029363673/pdf/18572-BRI-REPLACEMENT-premnote7-PUBLIC.pdf. 3.

101 Abrahams, *Modern Albania: From Dictatorship to Democracy in Europe*, 227.

2002 Human Rights Watch report on Albania explained in depth how the government stifled the free press through intimidation, defamation trials, and the misuse of state advertising.[102] Intimidation was a tool used by government officials and corrupt police officers or criminals who did not want journalists reporting on their activities. Defamation trials were brought against journalists and media institutions that were critical of the government, and the misuse of state advertising funds allowed the government to punish its media critics financially. According to the report,

> state advertising is critical to the financial survival of many Albanian dailies, … financial leverage over the press can be easily abused by the government, … [and] mechanisms that can effectively ensure the fair and non-discriminatory allocation of state advertising…do not exist or are inadequate in Albania.[103]

As Albania entered the 21st century, political competition escalated to new heights. News articles and reports describe the usual bitter power struggles that took place between the SP and the DP, but they also describe infighting that occurred within the SP up until 2003.[104] Much of the division that took place within the SP was due to various party members attempting to distance themselves from the corruption and criminal allegations that had engulfed so much of the government. Nano accused fellow party members of corruption and criminal connections while conveniently disregarding his own questionable past. Nano's actions were successful at restoring him to power within the party, but he, like the rest of his party, had lost the trust of the Albanian citizens. The DP took advantage of the public loss of confidence in the SP. Leading up to the 2005 elections, the DP newspaper *Rilindja Demokratike* referred to members of the SP as communists,[105] and accused SP

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[102] Darian Pavli, *The Cost of Speech: Violations of Media Freedom in Albania*, vol. 14, No. 5 (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002).

[103] Pavli, 47–8.

[104] Examples of the conflict between the Democratic and Socialist Parties are discussed in the Mici article while both the Mici article and the Human Rights Watch report give indepth analysis on the infighting within the SP. Sokol Mici, "Albania: Catharsis or Corruption," *Worldpress.Org*, April 18, 2002, https://www.worldpress.org/Europe/527.cfm; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2003: Events of 2002* (New York, Washington, London, Brussels: Human Rights Watch, 2003), https://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k3/europe.html.

[105] Muje Bucpapaj, "Islami Like Ramiz Alia: Accept Us for What We Are," *Rilindja Demokratike*, February 12, 2005, sec. Commentary p.3.

candidates of corruption and criminal activity, stating, for example, that "Nano's black candidates smell of smuggled cigarettes…and, certainly, of drugs."[106]

Frustration with the SP was so strong among the Albanian public that the citizens were willing to let Berisha, and the party which had destroyed the entire economy just eight years earlier, back into power. The July 2005 election resulted in the DP winning a majority of seats in parliament with fifty-six to the SP's forty-two.[107] Considering the devastation the country experienced under Berisha and the DP during the 1990s, it is safe to assume that the 2005 elections were generally a vote by Albanians *against* the SP rather than a vote *for* the DP.

Little improved in Albanian politics over the next decade. Berisha was quick to re-establish his old ways despite his anti-corruption campaign promises of coming into office "with clean hands."[108] Thus, history repeated itself in 2013 when frustrated Albanians chose again to vote *against* the majority party rather than *for* the opposition.

Contrary to years past, the elections of 2013, which placed the SP back into the majority, appeared to have been relatively fair. Both the OSCE and the EU gave their blessing to the results in a way that implied that the elections were still not up to Western standards, but they were more than acceptable for Albania, considering its past elections.[109] The SP party head, Edi Rama, became Albania's new Prime Minister. Three days after the elections, Berisha made an uncharacteristic statement by congratulating his opponent and resigning from his party's functions.[110] Albania seemed to have made significant progress in the quest for a functioning democracy.

Rama, like many Albanian politicians before him, campaigned against governmental corruption, but eliminating corruption was an enormous challenge in 2013.

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106 Astrit Patozi, "Clones of Duka Trade Mark," *Rilindja Demokratike*, March 19, 2005, sec. Commentary p.1.

107 Abrahams, *Modern Albania: From Dictatorship to Democracy in Europe*, 283.

108 Abrahams, 282.

109 Abrahams, 293.

110 ATA, "Berisha: I Accept Election Outcome, Declare My Resignation From All PD Functions," Transcript (Tirana, Albania: ATA (Albanian Telegraphic Agency), June 26, 2013), http://en.ata.gov.al.

The economy was slow, unemployment was high, and Albania was fourth on Transparency International's ranking of the most corrupt countries in Europe.[111] Furthermore, Rama had allied himself with former Albanian Prime Minister Ilir Meta to help defeat the DP. Meta had a reputation for corruption. His reputation was justified in the minds of many Albanians when he resigned as Prime Minister in 2011 after an Albanian television station broadcast video of him attempting to influence the decision of a government power plant contract.[112] Nevertheless, under Rama, the EU granted Albania candidate status in 2014 after determining that Albania had finally fulfilled a stabilization and association agreement (SAA) that had been in place since 2009.[113]

Albania has moved in positive directions since the 2013 elections, but the wild exaggerations and harsh political accusations along partisan lines still routinely surface in the media today, and they show little sign of diminishing. In May 2018, DP opposition parties scheduled a rally to protest against Rama, claiming that government corruption under him is threatening the country's prospects for EU membership. In a statement to the Associated Press, the head of the DP, Lulzim Basha, claimed that "hundreds of thousands" of citizens attended the rally to speak out against the government's ties to organized crime[114] (a claim which is extremely unlikely to be well-founded when one takes into account the fact that the population of Tirana is less than 500,000).[115] The party newspapers continue their biased reporting, and there are also unaffiliated partisan newspapers which further saturate the public with non-objective information. In early August 2018, the right leaning *Gazeta 55* published commentary claiming that Rama has criminal ties, uses cannabis, and rose to power thanks to support from George Soros.[116]

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111 Abrahams, *Modern Albania: From Dictatorship to Democracy in Europe*, 294.

112 "Albanian Crisis Deepens After Three Protesters Die," *Irish News*, January 24, 2011.

113 European Commission, *Albanian 2016 Report*.

114 Shamil Shams, "Albania Protesters Demand Prime Minister Edi Rama's Resignation," *Made for Minds*, May 26, 2018, http://www.dw.com/en/albania-protesters-demand-prime-minister-edi-ramas-resignation/a-43941193.

115 "Tirana Population," Population.City, accessed August 28, 2018, http://population.city/albania/tirana/.

116 Fahri Balliu, "Rama's International Isolation Has Begun," *Gazeta 55*, August 2, 2018.

The continuance of partisan battles hinders Albania's potential to overcome corruption and crime. Albania receives poor rankings by external institutions with respect to corruption, but more damaging are the internal perceptions of corruption. A 2016 report by Transparency International found a lack of confidence among Albanian citizens in their politicians and governmental institutions, including the judicial system, and it cited high levels of "civic apathy."[117] In other words, Albanians see the government as a broken institution with little possibility of repair. Worse yet, their apathy extends beyond their feelings toward the state to their feelings about society as a whole. There is little desire to work for a greater good. Therefore, the citizens are concerned with themselves and those closest to them, but invest little in the larger community. This attitude makes it easy for people to justify evading and avoiding taxes, dealing in unregulated economic markets, and engaging in criminal behavior. In this environment, it is no surprise that cannabis became such a large part of Albania's gray economy.

2. Gray Economy

Economically, the cannabis market adds to what Arsovska refers to as a "gray economy."[118] For the most part, Arsovska's use of this term describes an economy built on illicit goods and services. The illicit aspect of a gray economy means that it operates outside the regulation of a state, but this does not mean that it is necessarily unregulated. A gray economy may be loosely regulated by social structures, including shared norms and values, or directly regulated by criminal organizations. Arsovska maintains that gray economies can actually benefit citizens in poor countries by providing a form of income in areas where little opportunity exists, but her view overlooks the inevitable pitfalls of such an economy on both a microeconomic and macroeconomic scale. Gray economies create a cycle in which crime and corruption cause slow economic growth, which further encourages crime and corruption. In the event the state pursues an end to the gray economy,

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[117] Adela Halo and Megi Llubani, *National Integrity System Assessment: Albania 2016* (Berlin, Germany: Transparency International, June, 2016), https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/national_integrity_system_assessment_albania_2016, 7.

[118] Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 233.

it is the poor citizens that are most likely to suffer. Both shortcomings of a gray economy have been demonstrated in the case of southern Albania.

Until 2014, much of the cannabis cultivation in Albania took place in the south in underdeveloped villages like Lazarat. These villages had little governance and access to public services, and this explains why local residents began to rely on a product that was easy to produce and profitable. The cannabis market established a gray economy that provided residents with crops to grow and receive money for**.** Cannabis obviously must be sold to make money. For the cannabis production to be profitable, it must be distributed in large quantities. Consequently, those producing the cannabis had to engage with organized criminal groups capable of smuggling the product in bulk, and by the late 1990s, criminal organizations had taken over the market.[119]

The outdoor cultivation and trafficking of cannabis from Lazarat would not have flourished without the assistance of corrupt officials. It is not a coincidence that Lazarat was the primary location of outdoor cannabis cultivation until 2014. The town citizens were faithful supporters of the DP during their time in power from 2005 to 2013.[120] Unfortunately for the poor residents of Lazarat, the gray economy may have provided income, but they likely received fewer benefits than their criminal counterparts and corrupt officials. One reason for this is that corruption has its greatest negative impact on the poor. According to the World Bank,

> Corruption has a disproportionate impact on the poor and most vulnerable, increasing costs and reducing access to services, including health, education and justice…Empirical studies have shown that the poor pay the highest percentage of their income in bribes.[121]

Therefore, it is fair to assume the individuals that profited most from the cannabis trade in Lazarat were the professional criminals and corrupt politicians.

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119 Tom Kington, "How Albania Turned into Cannabistan," *Times (London)*, January 6, 2018, 1 edition, sec. News, 36.

120 Elvis Nabolli, "An Albanian War on Drugs," *Balkan Insight*, November 11, 2016, http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/an-albanian-war-on-drugs-11-15-2016.

121 "Combating Corruption," The World Bank, October 4, 2018, http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/governance/brief/anti-corruption.

Another reason the gray economy was not of great benefit to the residents of Lazarat is that they ultimately suffered legally and economically after Rama and the SP took power in 2013. Tirana was under international pressure over its flourishing cannabis market so the state reacted with force against Lazarat. The raids in Lazarat in 2014 were championed by Rama and Albanian officials as a great success, but in reality, they simply forced the criminal traffickers to move their operations elsewhere. A 2016 *Balkan Insight* article by Elvis Nabolli addressed how criminals adapted to the raids by spreading cannabis plantations throughout the country.[122] Additionally, Nabolli points out that officials had made only low-level arrests from 2014 to 2016. The failure to contain the cannabis market and bring down high-level criminals led to the firing of the national police chief in early 2018.[123] Drug traffickers were able to shift their trade to other areas to avoid legal punishment and continue to earn profits. However, the residents of Lazarat were forced to either continue cultivating cannabis under a heightened risk of arrest, or try to make ends meet through less profitable means.

The gray economy created by the Albanian cannabis market has had negative macroeconomic impacts on the country as well. One issue is that the income generated is unregulated by the state, so the state institutions receive no revenue. This is a problem in Albania where 18 percent of the GDP comes from the agriculture sector.[124] With an enormous amount of land being used to cultivate cannabis, rather than legal taxable crops, the state government is deprived of significant funds.

This may not appear to be a problem to the average Albanian citizen—who is not always enthusiastic about contributing taxes to the state. However, the development of Albania as a whole is hindered when large sums of money are withheld from official channels. One example of this can be seen in an analysis of the remittances that make up a significant income source for Albanian citizens. In a 2018 report by the Bank of Albania,

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122 Elvis Nabolli, "An Albanian War on Drugs," *Balkan Insight*, November 11, 2016.

123 Benet Koleka, "Albania Sacks Police Chief, Vows Boost Fight against Cannabis Trade," *Reuters*, January 8, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-albania-police/albania-sacks-police-chief-vows-boost-fight-against-cannabis-trade-idUSKBN1EX21N.

124 "Albania GDP from Agriculture," Trading Economics, accessed March 22, 2018, https://tradingeconomics.com/albania/gdp-from-agriculture.

the authors explain the drawbacks of keeping money out of the banking system.[125] At the individual level, moving cash through informal channels comes with higher transaction costs, and individuals forego opportunities to invest or earn interest on their money. Therefore, the individuals are left with less money in both the short-term and long-term.

At the societal level, less money in the banking system equates to less supply, which increases the cost of money in the form of higher interest rates. High interest rates slow the economy by acting as a barrier for individuals and businesses looking to purchase homes, buildings, or other assets. Although remittances are perfectly legal, the insistence of many Albanian citizens to deal in cash rather than through the banking system directly hinders potential economic growth that remittances could stimulate. This choice may be somewhat based on a preference for cash, but it is primarily based on a lack of trust. A survey conducted by the Bank of Albania found that over half of the respondents do not have a bank account.[126] If trust in Albanian financial institutions was stronger, more Albanians would establish and maintain bank accounts.

Another example of how Albanian economic development is stunted by the gray economy is demonstrated by the cycle of corruption produced from illegal funds being invested in the legal economy. Money acquired through illegal activity, like the cannabis trade, will catch the attention of authorities if it is simply deposited in a bank. To avoid this, the proceeds generated by the cannabis market are often laundered into real estate or businesses like the construction industry.[127] These reinvestments require illegal market practices to merge with legal practices, and this merger can only be accomplished through corruption. Albanian citizens witness this corruption, further eroding their trust in state institutions. This leads to their reluctance to invest their legally earned money in banks or other financial institutions. With little investment in the economy, economic growth is stunted; and citizens turn to the gray market for income, furthering the cycle of corruption.

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[125] Frashëri et al., *Remittances: A Support for Development*.

[126] Frashëri et al. 27.

[127] Hysi, "Organised Crime in Albania: The Ugly Side of Capitalism and Democracy," 553.

E. CHAPTER SUMMARY

The rise of Albanian organized crime coincided with a difficult transition from communism to a democracy. While much of the country was figuring out a way forward and adapting old laws to a new societal structure, criminal activity went mostly ignored. Cannabis was allowed to spread rapidly through ungoverned areas in southern Albania, and soon its product was being trafficked throughout Europe. As Europe began to react negatively to the development, political rivalries in Albania focused primarily on their power struggles seeking control of the government by any means possible. Cooperating with criminal organizations became a normal activity if it helped one's party attain seats in parliament. As international pressure increased further, Prime Minister Edi Rama began to take forceful measures to combat the cannabis market. Tirana's efforts became highlights for the new government to show EU governments and institutions its commitment to fighting crime and corruption, but Albanian citizens view these efforts with a critical eye. For multiple decades, Albanian citizens have had to deal with corrupt state institutions and informal criminal economies. Tirana has made significant progress against the cannabis market, but the destabilizing effects it has produced will likely linger for many years to come.

III. ALBANIAN TRANSNATIONAL CRIME AND INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS

This chapter argues that the Albanian transnational illicit cannabis market damages Albania's global reputation, impedes Albania's quest for EU membership, and causes concern for NATO allies. It begins by providing an overview of the concerns voiced across the globe about the threat posed by transnational organized crime in general. Next, this chapter discusses the complicated problem that cannabis creates for policy makers because of the global confusion generated by the cannabis debate by reviewing challenges that have occurred with decriminalization in the United States. The next two sections look at how damage to Albania's global reputation has hurt Albanian citizens and diaspora, degraded policy and law enforcement efforts, and hampered Albania's quest for EU membership. Lastly, the chapter briefly covers regional security concerns for NATO with respect to the cannabis market.

A. CANNABIS FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

1. Global Concerns about TOC

Unlike the debated definition of TOC, the belief that TOC is a global threat produces little contest. The reaction is not a surprise considering that estimates for various transnational crimes often express the enormity of the problem. 2010 estimates for trafficking in persons show that 70,000 victims are trafficked annually for a value of $3 billion; and counterfeiting of products results in the production of 2 billion articles per year worth $8.2 billion.[128] These are just two examples of numerous crimes associated with TOC which have caught the attention of lawmakers, international institutions, and world leaders. However, the seriousness of the threat is often different throughout the world.

TOC takes on unique forms in various locations affecting countries in different ways. In the case of human smuggling, the United States primarily struggles against the

[128] Felia Allum, "Introduction," in *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, F. Allum and S. Gilmour (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3–5.

smuggling of migrants into its territory from Mexico and South America.[129] European countries deal with a slightly more complex problem in having to combat the smuggling of migrants from Africa and the Middle East. With respect to human trafficking, Eastern European women have been heavily targeted by traffickers in the sex trade compared to those in Central or Western Europe. 2005 to 2006 data show that 32 percent of human trafficking victims detected in Europe came from the Balkans and 19 percent were from former Soviet Union countries, yet only 7 percent came from Central Europe, and no significant percentage was given for Western Europe.[130]

In its multiple forms, TOC has the ability to threaten a state's stability, global security, or both. Stephen Ellis provides a good example of how TOC threatens state stability in his book chapter, "Nigerian Organized Crime." Ellis describes Nigeria as a kleptocracy and notes that it has been a source of many transnational crimes, including drug trafficking, international fraud, and illegal oil trafficking.[131] Ellis argues that the coordination of these transnational crimes often traces back to state officials. This implies that TOC is intertwined with the normal functions of the state, which hinders its effectiveness and stability.

TOC can also threaten global stability when it provides support to violent extremist organizations (VEO). According to the UNODC, "it is well established that there are terrorists and non-State armed groups profiting from the drug trade."[132] In this case, terrorists are using revenue from drug trafficking to fund operations and purchase weapons. Weapons are available because of the transnational crime of trafficking firearms. While there is little indication that Albanian TOC is funding terrorism—a point that will be covered thoroughly in the final chapter of this thesis—that does not stop countries from

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[129] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, No. E.10.IV.6 (New York: United Nations, 2010), http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/TOCTA_Report_2010_low_res.pdf, 4.

[130] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 3.

[131] Stephen Ellis, "Nigerian Organized Crime," in *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. F. Allum and S. Gilmour (New York: Routledge, 2011), 127–42.

[132] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Drug Problem and Organized Crime, Illicit Financial Flows, Corruption and Terrorism," 4.

having concerns about terrorism whenever large-scale drug trafficking operations are discovered.

Of the numerous types of transnational crimes, drug trafficking is considered to be one of the largest markets. In 2005, the UNODC reported the illicit drug market was estimated to be worth $322 billion globally.[133] In 2012, the UNODC estimated that drug trafficking amounted to almost half of all TOC profits,[134] but their estimate fell to "between one fifth to one third" by 2014.[135] In the same year Peter Reuter wrote that "the markets for illegal drugs, mostly cocaine, heroin, and cannabis, probably generate, globally, more revenues than any other illegal market,"[136] although he admitted the data available are not sufficient to conclusively prove this claim. Most recently, the UNODC has taken the stance that among TOCs, drug trafficking profits are second only to counterfeiting goods.[137] It must be recalled that criminals seek to avoid detection, making their activities difficult to measure. Therefore, estimates of the size of any illicit market must be viewed with some skepticism. That being said, the large annual amount of drug shipment seizures, drug-related hospitalizations, and drug-related deaths provide evidence that the size of the global drug market is by no means trivial.

2. Global Debate about Cannabis

Cannabis is a difficult problem for policy makers around the globe. It naturally attracts the attention of policy makers and global citizens because it is estimated to be the most widely consumed illicit drug on the globe. It is true that estimates will naturally have inaccuracies, but given that the estimate cited by the UNODC for cannabis use is five and

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133 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2005*, No. E.05.XI.10 (New York: United Nations, 2005), http://www.unodc.org/pdf/WDR_2005/volume_1_web.pdf, 128.

134 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2012*, No. E.12.XI.1 (New York: United Nations, 2012), http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2012/WDR_2012_web_small.pdf, 84.

135 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Drug Problem and Organized Crime, Illicit Financial Flows, Corruption and Terrorism," 9.

136 Peter Reuter, "Drug Markets and Organized Crime," in *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime*, ed. Letizia Paoli (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 359–80.359.

137 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Drug Problem and Organized Crime, Illicit Financial Flows, Corruption and Terrorism," 22.

a half times that of the next closest competing drug,[138] the estimate of cannabis use is not something that can be ignored. While it is an unavoidable truth that cannabis use is prolific throughout the globe, the level of use is not troubling for those who believe cannabis is a harmless drug.

The level of actual physical harm that cannabis causes is heavily debated. Unlike heroin or cocaine, cannabis is not typically associated with serious addiction and death. The perceived harmlessness of the drug sometimes leads to inconsistent enforcement. The UNODC observed that "The global community is confused about cannabis" because international laws against the drug are firm but enforcement is typically much more lenient than that affecting other illicit drugs.[139]

The difficulty in determining the harmfulness of cannabis lies in its history as an illegal drug, emotional public reactions to decriminalization, and the development of new and more potent cannabis strains. The United States can provide insight to how each of these factors can complicate the determination.

Cannabis has been illegal in the United States for decades, complicating research into its effects. The U.S. federal government has five schedules that classify controlled substances which trace their roots back to the *Controlled Substances Act* (CSA) of 1970.[140] These schedules determine the severity of the substances and are currently laid out in the United States Code, Title 21, Chapter 13, Subchapter 1, which is still referenced as the CSA.[141] The CSA lists "marihuana" and "Tetrahydrocannabinols" (THC) as schedule 1 substances, which indicates:

> (A) the drug or other substance has a high potential for abuse, (B) the drug or other substance has no currently accepted medical use in treatment in the

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138 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Analysis of Drug Markets Opiates, Cocaine, Cannabis, Synthetic Drugs," in *World Drug Report 2018*, No. E.18.XI.9 (New York: United Nations, 2018), https://www.unodc.org/wdr2018.

139 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2006*, 155–157.

140 "Controlled Substances Act," Pub. L. No. 91–513, 84 Statute (1970), www.gpo.gov.

141 "United States Code, 2006 Edition, Supplement 5, Title 21 - FOOD AND DRUGS," Y 1.2/5 United States Code § 801–971 (2012), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2011-title21/pdf/USCODE-2011-title21.pdf.

> United States, (C) there is a lack of accepted safety for use of the drug or other substance under medical supervision.[142]

This classification of the cannabis plant and its active chemical THC have made it historically difficult to study. This is beginning to change now that over half of the states within the United States have legalized cannabis for medical use with some now allowing both medical and recreational use.[143] Although cannabis is not legal at the federal level, research studies have proceeded—albeit with some bureaucratic red tape. This scenario has played out in a similar manner globally as the UN laws on cannabis are similar to those of the U.S. federal government.

Some experts hold that public reaction to the decriminalization of cannabis has been emotional rather than rational, which has also added to the difficulty in determining the harmfulness of the drug. According to a *Time* article, starting around 1973, multiple U.S. states began to decriminalize cannabis owing to a belief that the drug was not harmful.[144] Although there was not significant scientific research into the effects of cannabis, the move toward decriminalization was initially well received. Along with decriminalization came stores selling cannabis paraphernalia, advertisements toward youth, and speculative reports that childhood use of the drug was rising. By the 1980s, vigorous parental backlash against these unforeseen consequences of decriminalization began to force a rollback of the 1970s legalization movement before any serious studies on cannabis could be done.

Similar movements are present in U.S. states that have legalized cannabis in recent, years, adding confusion to public knowledge about cannabis. In Colorado, for example, which permits medical and recreational use of cannabis, advocacy groups such as *Smart Colorado* have been fighting the legalization since 2012 on the grounds that it endangers

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142 The CSA defines the term "marihuana" as "all parts of the cannabis sativa L whether growing or not; the seeds thereof; the resin extracted from any part of such plant; and every com- pound, manufacture, salt, derivative, mixture, or preparation of such plant, its seeds or resin." THC is the active chemical in cannabis. United States Code, 2006 Edition, Supplement 5, Title 21 - FOOD AND DRUGS, 509–23.

143 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *The Health Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids: The Current State of Evidence and Recommendations for Research* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academic Press, 2017), www.nap.edu, 1.

144 Emily Dufton, "U.S. States Tried Decriminalizing Pot Before. Here's Why It Didn't Work," *Time*, December 7, 2017, http://time.com/5054194/legal-pot-experiment-history/.

youth.[145] Meanwhile, pro-cannabis groups continue to argue that cannabis use poses few or no health risks. Like the movements of the late 1970s, arguments in this fight have often been emotional ones based on pre-determined beliefs, and they have relied on non-peer reviewed studies and questionable citing of those studies to support their arguments. This is part of the reason why, until recently, there have been few, if any, truly comprehensive and objective studies on the effects of cannabis for both short-term and long-term health risks.

In fact, a recent book published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in 2017 may be the first of its type. It covers a wide range of health topics and reviews the evidence of how cannabis may or may not affect them. The book was the product of a nationwide sixteen-member committee of professionals, with a support staff of eleven professional study staff members and six consultants from various scientific and medical backgrounds.[146] Furthermore, it was reviewed nationally by fifteen professionals from institutions such as the Yale School of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University, and the UCLA School of Medicine to ensure its objectivity. It appears that both the pro and anti-cannabis advocacy groups have reacted to the report emotionally, quickly citing the results within the report that support their agenda, while disregarding the results that may hinder their narrative. This is telling, in that long-standing individual beliefs about the safety or danger of cannabis are emotionally based and difficult to change even with scientific data. This is true throughout the globe and not merely unique to the United States.

To further complicate determining the harmfulness of cannabis, forms of the drug and even its genetic composition have changed substantially. According to the National Academies of Sciences, in the United States alone, cannabis-derived products come in various forms which are either smoked, ingested, vaporized, or absorbed through the skin via creams and patches.[147] Consuming cannabis products in each of the various ways can produce different effects, and the potency of THC among the different forms of cannabis

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145 "Smart Colorado: About," SmartCO, accessed October 8, 2018, smartcolorado.org.

146 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *The Health Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids: The Current State of Evidence and Recommendations for Research*. v-viii.

147 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 50–1.

varies as well. For researchers attempting to provide policy makers with objective facts on the potential health risks this becomes problematic. In the case of chewable foods that contain cannabis, a directed study may show that adults can safely consume the food in certain quantities without any significant health risk. However, this does not satisfy concerns over how the chewable food may affect children if accidentally ingested, nor does it provide any insight to how likely accidental child ingestion may be because of the existence of such food.

The various potency of cannabis products adds yet another complication to understanding the health risks of cannabis. From 2010 to 2016, cannabis cultivation was reported by 145 countries.[148] Not only does cannabis grow in numerous outdoor global climates, it can also be produced indoors in grow houses. The astonishing number of places around the globe which cultivate cannabis have, as with any agricultural crop, inevitably led to producers learning ways to increase yields and quality through genetic modification. In the case of cannabis quality, higher potency (i.e., its THC content) is synonymous with higher quality. This means that dried cannabis flowers, commonly referred to as "buds," from one source may have a significantly higher THC content than those from another source, making scientific study difficult. Some growers have developed techniques to grow plants from clones rather than from seeds; and this has increased the average potency of cannabis in the United States from 4 percent in 1995 to 12 percent in 2014.[149] As a result, studies of the health effects of cannabis can quickly become outdated as the forms of cannabis and its potencies evolve throughout the globe.

The history of cannabis legality, the emotion surrounding the debate on decriminalization, and the constant evolution of the forms and potencies of cannabis have fragmented the United States in a way few other topics can rival. As mentioned previously just over half of U.S. states now permit the medical use of cannabis, with about one in five allowing recreational use. This has occurred despite the substance being illegal and unsafe

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[148] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Analysis of Drug Markets Opiates, Cocaine, Cannabis, Synthetic Drugs."

[149] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *The Health Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids: The Current State of Evidence and Recommendations for Research*.

per U.S. federal law. In an odd twist, the District of Columbia, which is home to all three branches of the U.S. federal government, has legalized cannabis for both medical and recreational use.[150] While the cannabis question in the United States may look like a fiasco to onlookers, the situation is by no means unique to the United States. The same issues are globally applicable and for these reasons both the EU and NATO cannot simply ignore the cannabis market in Albania.

3. Global Effects of Albanian Cannabis Trafficking

A major consequence of the Albanian cannabis market is its ability to damage Albanians' and the state's global reputation. This can lead to negative consequences for ethnic Albanians living abroad, and can also lead to ineffective policy and law enforcement efforts in cannabis consuming-countries.

The cannabis market damages Albania's global reputation in numerous ways. Although this is not an exhaustive list, cannabis damages Albania's global reputation in three major ways: through corruption, a reputation of lawlessness, and transnational organized crime.

Corruption damages Albania's global reputation because it degrades the credibility of officials in Albania and raises questions as to their dedication to combatting the problem. For example, it would be difficult for state officials in Berlin to trust that officials in Tirana are serious about combatting cannabis if they suspect that those same officials in Tirana are aiding in or profiting from the trafficking of cannabis. As a consequence, Berlin officials may be reluctant or unwilling to work with counterparts in Tirana, which undermines the benefits that are attainable through joint intervention. In response, the lack of trust can insult those in Tirana who are truly committed to the effort—further degrading cooperation.

This erosion of trust at the state official level can also be assumed at the law enforcement level, but at this level, cooperation is arguably more important. While distrust at the political level may result in poorly established policy, policy itself, whether good or

[150] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 1.

bad, matters little if it is not effectively enforced. If intelligence gathering and operations against cannabis trafficking are compromised by corrupt authorities, there exists little chance of success in stopping the problem.

The cannabis market damages ethnic Albanians' reputations because it creates a perception of lawlessness and violence within the Albanian state that gets projected on all Albanians. As far back as 1993, news reports began to surface about increasing levels of cannabis cultivation within Albania.[151] By the late 1990s, reports became more sensational with journalists referencing violent criminal organizations that were flourishing in southern Albania in reaction to the "cannabis boom."[152] Articles in January 2018 referred to Albania as "Cannabistan"[153] and reinforced the global belief that Albania is an unruly land rife with crime and violence.

This perception of Albanian lawlessness and violence creates two second-order effects that tend to reinforce one another. The first effect is that, over time, the line between fact and fiction becomes blurred. For example, Albania was extremely violent following the collapse of the pyramid schemes in 1997. According to the figures provided by Arsovska, in 1997 alone over 1,500 people were murdered out of a population of around 3 million.[154] To put that in perspective, that equates to a rate of around 50 people for every 100,000 in the population. However, the murder rate was cut by over half within one year and was down to under 3 people for every 100,000 by 2008.[155] While it is fair to argue that there is significant criminal activity in Albania, it would be incorrect to categorize contemporary Albania as a particularly violent country. However, many reports on Albania make little effort to separate crime and violence, which effectively blurs the truth.

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151 "Albanian Farmers to Be Tried for Growing Cannabis," *United Press International*, October 24, 1993, sec. International.

152 James Pettifer, "Cannabis Boom Brings Gang Warfare to Albanian Hills," *Times (London)*, December 2, 1998, sec. Overseas news.

153 Kington, "How Albania Turned into Cannabistan."

154 Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 38.

155 Arsovska, 38.

The second effect is that Albania's perceived lawlessness and violence can foster a sense of xenophobia toward ethnic Albanians living abroad. Albania is a very homogenous society, which can lead people to incorrectly assume that the commonly reported-on activity of a small portion of citizens within Albania is likely synonymous with the activity of ethnic Albanians as a whole. This is particularly significant because, as cited in Chapter II, over 1 million ethnic Albanians—about one quarter of all ethnic Albanians—live outside the borders of Albania. These irrational fears can be reinforced by myths and partial truths, while myths and partial truths can be a reinforced by irrational fears. As the second order effects of xenophobia and blurred truths build on one another, Albania minority populations living abroad can become victims of unjust stereotypes and other prejudices.

The TOC that is created by the cannabis market damages the state's global reputation because it makes Albanian institutions appear lacking in capability. Foreign states view the cannabis market as a problem that should be contained within the borders of Albania because it is cultivated in this country. Therefore, onlookers see the Albanian authorities as ultimately responsible for stopping the TOC related to cannabis. For institutions like the EU, the continued existence of TOC is evidence of a breakdown in cooperation between Albanian police officers and judicial prosecutors.[156] The United States Ambassador to Albania, Donald Lu, was more critical in his assessment last year, declaring that, "if America and EU countries are going to devote our resources and our credibility to this war against organized crime, we expect results."[157]

Corruption, a perception of lawlessness, and transnational organized crime can work together in a complicated fashion to negatively influence policy and enforcement efforts in countries abroad. For example, in May 2018, accusations surfaced that Albanian criminals were taking over the United Kingdom's (UK) cocaine market, and Prime Minister Rama was criticized during a BBC interview regarding Albania's lack of control

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156 European Commission, *Albanian 2016 Report*, 4–5.

157 Will Nicoll and Vincent Triest, "The Opiate Epidemic Isn't Just America's Problem: How One Small European Country Got Hooked on Cocaine," *Newsweek*, November 19, 2017, https://www.newsweek.com/opiate-epidemic-isnt-just-americas-problem-cocaine-albania-716205, 7.

over the situation.[158] This specific criticism was in reference to cocaine rather than cannabis, but the roots of the criticism lie in Albania's damaged reputation. Implying that ethnic Albanian criminals in the UK are linked to criminals in Albania is largely based on a stereotype likely encouraged by xenophobic views of Albanians. It implies that Albanian criminals only work with Albanians. This is obviously a false assumption, but even if it were true, it overlooks the enormity of the Albania diaspora population which could participate in trafficking, as opposed to individuals within Albania. It also implies that corruption within the Albanian government, or a lack of capabilities in Albanian law enforcement, or both, should be blamed for the criminal activity taking place within the UK. This is a misguided criticism. Criminal activity by ethnic Albanians within the borders of the UK is not the responsibility of Albania, just as an ethnic Japanese person committing a crime in the United States is not the responsibility of Japan. While it would be reasonable for UK officials to encourage Tirana to combat the trafficking of cocaine from its territory, it would be foolish to expect that criminal activity within the UK should be handled by Albania simply because the criminals are ethnically Albanian. Such views are highly counterproductive because they waste resources assigning blame rather than defining solutions, ultimately compromising policy and enforcement efforts.

B. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ALBANIA

The Albanian cannabis market presents the EU with multiple problems. First, it is difficult to combat because the product's perceived harmlessness to individuals can overshadow the negative impacts it can have with respect to criminal trafficking and corruption. Second, while it would be ideal if the market was eliminated before Albania joins the EU, its swift removal could have damaging consequences for Albania's growing, yet vulnerable economy. Lastly, delays in membership due to concerns about the cannabis market could lead Albania to seek economic support from EU competitors or strain relations between EU member states and Tirana.

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158 Andrew Byrne, "PM on Front Line Against Albania's Cocaine Kingpins; With an Eye to Joining the EU, Edi Rama Is Battling to Crack Down on the Crime Networks That Dominate the British Drug Trade," *Sunday Times (London)*, May 13, 2018, 2 edition, sec. News, 18.

The Albanian cannabis market is likely concerning for the EU because the confusion about cannabis makes it uniquely suitable for transnational crime. In the case of a "hard" drug like heroin, punishments are severe for traffickers, dealers, and even consumers in most countries. Additionally, the punishments are consistently enforced in states with a strong rule of law. In the case of cannabis, punishments typically decrease as the product gets closer to the consumer. Some countries have decriminalized possession and recreational use of cannabis altogether. Decreasing punishment equates to decreasing risk as the product gets closer to the consumer, making the product attractive for criminals. Furthermore, the commonly perceived harmlessness of the product means that authorities may be more likely to accept bribes, or possibly just charge less for bribes, as the product moves across borders. This provides another incentive for traffickers to pick the cannabis market rather than the "hard" drug market, where willing accomplices are fewer and/or more expensive.

As a candidate for EU membership, Albania's efforts to reduce organized crime constitute a focal point that is examined annually by the European Commission.[159] Among these examinations are reviews of the efforts put forward by the Albanian government to combat its cannabis market. The EU's concern is warranted. Most government and law enforcement agencies agree that unregulated proceeds from illicit markets can have serious consequences. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) warns that "the vast sums of money involved [with TOC] can compromise legitimate economies and have a direct impact on governments through the corruption of public officials."[160] EU members recognize that membership for Albania will only make the trafficking of cannabis easier. Therefore, the EU's desire to see Albania contain the cannabis market prior to attaining membership is reasonable.

That being said, the EU must also consider economic impacts should Albanian membership be further delayed. As noted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

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159 "European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations."

160 "Transnational Organized Crime," Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/organized-crime.

mission in March 2018, the Albanian economy is one of the fastest growing in the region, but its rate of growth is predicted to slow as infrastructure projects funded by foreign direct investment (FDI) conclude.[161] Albania is ranked as a high-middle income country by the World Bank, but it sits just above the cutoff for low-middle income.[162] So much so, that as little as a $424 decrease in GNI per capita would drop Albania to low-middle income by World Bank standards.[163] FDI has helped the economy, but it has been focused on industry and resource extraction, which does not necessarily benefit the large part of the Albanian workforce (over 40 percent) that is in agriculture.[164] Additionally, public debt sits at over 70 percent and non-performing loans (NPL) made up 13.2 percent of loans in 2017.[165] In short, the economy is delicate at the moment, and the impacts the cannabis market has on the stability of the economy need to be factored into Albania's future.

With the current vulnerabilities in the Albanian economy, the elimination of the cannabis market could lead to problems without processes put in place to offer alternative opportunities for those who rely on it to sustain themselves. Law enforcement institutions are concerned with the criminal element and governmental corruption associated with cannabis, but, as mentioned in chapter II, there is a significant gray economy that exists because of the market, and there are Albanians who rely on that economy for their livelihoods who are not necessarily hardened criminals. This leaves the member states of the EU with a tough decision. Will they accept Albania in the EU with its ongoing fight against the cannabis market or continue to delay until Albania proves it has fully dealt with it?

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161 "Albania: Staff Concluding Statement of the First Post-Program Monitoring Mission," International Monetary Fund, March 20, 2018, https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2018/03/20/ms032018-albania-staff-concluding-statement-of-the-first-post-program-monitoring-mission.

162 "World Bank Country and Lending Groups," The World Bank, accessed June 4, 2018, https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups.

163 "GNI per Capita, Atlas Method," The World Bank, accessed June 4, 2018, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD?locations=AL.

164 Merita Meçe, "THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON ALBANIA," *CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN REVIEW* 10, no. 1 (2016), https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/caeer/10/1/article-p41.xml, 56.

165 "Albania: Staff Concluding Statement of the First Post-Program Monitoring Mission."

If they choose the former option, there is a risk that Tirana may take pressure off its fight against cannabis once it attains membership, or alternatively look to the EU to help manage the cannabis market, costing the EU resources. In either scenario, the EU would add a member with a highly undesirable crime and corruption problem.

If the EU chooses the latter option, there is a risk that public support for EU membership within Albania may begin to recede. Albania applied for EU membership in 2009 and has been a candidate since 2014.[166] In 2015, Albanian citizens still overwhelmingly supported EU membership, but these citizens have a long history of receiving unkept promises by politicians. With membership talks now delayed by another year until mid-2019,[167] patience may begin to wear thin for Albanians. The danger of waning public support is that it may force Albanian officials to expedite efforts to destroy the cannabis market in hopes of avoiding further membership delays. This rush would likely come at the expense of firmly establishing an economic backup plan for those who will be most affected by the termination of the cannabis gray economy.

Another danger of waning public support is that it could lead to Tirana looking for supporting states outside the EU. In 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron referred to the speculation that Russia or Turkey might attempt to spread its influence in Albania should EU membership not be granted soon. He noted the difficult decision the EU faces because admitting Albania too soon may have stability risks for the EU, but delay may lead Tirana to seek assistance from EU competitors.[168]

Albanian Prime Minister Rama knows that Albania's reputation as a major producer of European cannabis is damaging to Albania's quest for EU accession. In order to overcome this obstacle Rama has also been vocal about the strides his country has made in eliminating cannabis from its territory. As mentioned in chapter II, Rama has posted pictures on his Facebook page with comments about how successful the police raids on

166 "European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations."

167 "EU Begins Screening Macedonia, Albania for Mid-2019 Accession Talks," *Reuters*, July 17, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-balkans-enlargement/eu-begins-screening-macedonia-albania-for-mid-2019-accession-talks-idUSKBN1K7217.

168 "Splits Apparent in EU Over Enlargement," *IntelliNews - Albania This Week*, April 17, 2018.

cannabis plantations had been compared to years past. Moreover, he announced that cannabis would be eradicated from Albania by the end of 2017, and he commended Italy's report supporting Albania's claims of success against the illicit cannabis market.

Rama's strong desire to demonstrate the strides Albania has made against cannabis may actually be doing the country more harm than good. Many of Tirana's successes have been overshadowed by aforementioned reports and news articles indicating that cannabis is still originating from Albania. The perceptions that have been created by Tirana's continuous lofty claims of success followed by journalist reports to the contrary include lack of capacity, lack of will, or—possibly—lack of honesty. These perceptions have caused concern among some EU member states, notably the Dutch, who have become critics of Rama. In May 2018, Tirana received an official visit by Dutch MPs who, after reviewing the government's reform progress, concluded that Albania had yet to demonstrate the will to fight crime and corruption at high levels.[169] Rama and the SP were noticeably upset by the setback. Rama responded with harsh words toward the Dutch visitors, and the speaker for the Albanian Parliament, Gramoz Ruçi, retaliated against the Dutch criticism of cannabis activities in Albania by saying, "the seeds come from the Netherlands, technology comes from the Netherlands, and the market from the Netherlands."[170]

Depending on how one views the situation, Tirana's frustration with the Dutch may have been justified but it was certainly not constructive with reference to Albania's candidacy for EU membership. If Albania and the EU desire a successful future together, antagonistic rhetoric will not be the path to success. As previously mentioned, Albania's efforts to reduce organized crime have been a focal point for the European Commission. The European Commission has also noted Albania's efforts to combat the cannabis market, but it has not provided clarifications on exactly what must be accomplished. Must cannabis

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169 "Dutch MPs: Albania Is Not Ready for Opening Negotiations," *Exit Explaining Albania*, May 7, 2018, https://exit.al/en/2018/05/07/dutch-mps-albania-is-not-ready-for-opening-negotiations/.

170 Quote was translated using google translate from an Albanian article. Orginal text can be found at, "Rama e Ruçi i përgjigjen Holandës. Kryeparlamentari: Shqiptarët e gjetën hashashin atje," *Time.al*, May 9, 2018, http://time.ikub.al/18-05-12-Zyrtaret-holandeze-kane-nje-pergjigje-per-Ramen673983/Rama-e-Ruci-i-pergjigjen-Holandes-Kryeparlamentari-Shqiptaret-e-gjeten-hashashin-atje.aspx.

cease to exist in Albania prior to membership, or is there a specific metric that must be attained? For a successful future to exist for both parties, the EU and Albania must explicitly address the cannabis market and all associated complications, and agree on exactly what milestones must be accomplished prior to membership and the expectations that will exist after membership.

C. NATO AND ALBANIA

Police launched operations into Lazarat in 2012 and 2014 to eliminate cannabis production. They met resistance in both operations, thwarting police efforts in 2012, and nearly again in 2014, when police were attacked by nearly 30 armed men.[171] Lazarat, like many other villages that are centers for cannabis farming, had been taken over by organized crime. From an outside perspective, it may appear that the villagers were hostages to criminal organizations, but Arsovska contends that the issue is not that simple. She sees the issue as a more complicated social problem, arguing that many villagers, like those of Lazarat, potentially view underdevelopment and underemployment as greater threats than organized crime.[172]

Albania is a member of NATO, so its domestic stability is important to the alliance, but NATO's primary focus with reference to Albania must be on how the cannabis market can threaten regional stability. As discussed throughout this thesis, the Albanian cannabis market threatens domestic stability both economically and socially. For a military alliance focused on collective defense, these domestic threats to stability are outside NATO's control. Although opinions such as Arsovska's—that certain social conditions within Albania's borders have turned parts of the population to organized crime—are bound to raise concerns for NATO, they are not a reason for panic. Albania is a pro-West, pro-NATO country, and much of the civilian distrust toward government institutions is focused domestically and not internationally. Therefore, NATO's focus on the Albanian cannabis market does not need to be on the domestic effects. Additionally, Albania's extremely pro-

171 Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*.

172 Arsovska, 233.

West population and other factors suggest that the local cannabis market is unlikely to cause a global security threat by funding anti-Western terrorist groups—a point that will be thoroughly discussed in chapter IV. Lastly, as previously covered, the transnational organized crime associated with Albania's cannabis market does cause stability issues for states which are consumers of the product, but those issues become domestic in nature and are again outside the purview of NATO. From NATO's vantage point, the most likely threat from the cannabis market is its potential to inject funds into a regional conflict should one arise.

The direct conflict in the Balkans has long since passed, but tension in the region has not diminished. According to Christopher Bennett, strong rhetoric from Serb authoritarian elites, often supported by Russia, has increased regional tensions.[173] This is problematic for NATO as well as the EU. There are 4,300 NATO soldiers currently in Kosovo and 600 European Union Force (EUFOR) soldiers in Bosnia.[174] Both institutions would like to see the region stabilize and be able to withdraw their forces, but if past is prologue, a return to conflict in the region would also witness a return of various non-state armed groups, similar to the KLA of the 1990s, complicating NATO's and the EU's missions.

During the Kosovo conflict, the KLA fought a guerrilla campaign with a goal of an independent Kosovo state. The organization was considered a liberation army by some and viewed as a terrorist organization by others. In either case, they were armed and many of the arms used by the KLA were looted from Albania during the 1997 economic collapse.[175] It has also been claimed that the KLA funded its campaign through donations from other ethnic Albanians and drug-related operations.[176] There is ample evidence to support the

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[173] Christopher Bennett, "Backsliding in the Western Balkans," *NATO Review*, February 2, 2017, https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2017/Also-in-2017/backsliding-western-balkans-kosovo-servia-bosnia/EN/index.htm.

[174] Bennett.

[175] Andreas Heinemann-Grüder and Wolf-Christian Paes, *Wag the Dog: The Mobilization and Demobilization of the Kosovo Liberation Army* (Skopje: Bonn International Centre for Conversion (BICC), 2001), https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/16177/Brief_20.pdf, 13.

[176] Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 45.

former claim. According to Arsovska, most of the donations came from the Kosovo Albanian diaspora in Western Europe and the United States.[177] As to the latter claim, it is based on rational thought more than actual evidence. One detailed brief about the KLA states that the source of some of its financing was "probably from drug lords" and that "it would be naive to assume that no 'drug money' was spent on the Kosovo war."[178] The KLA was peacefully demobilized and disarmed by NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) following the cessation of hostilities in the Kosovo conflict, but the KFOR troops continued to find KLA weapons caches in subsequent years.[179]

For NATO, the previous conflict in the Balkans and the various armed groups that took part in the struggle provide a cautionary tale. In the case of Kosovo, although the KLA was willing to demobilize, weapons were secretly kept by both Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs who felt insecure about their future safety.[180] This is an example of the strong ethnic divisions that exist in Kosovo and the rest of the Balkans despite the presence of NATO forces. If drug operations were a source of funding to armed groups in the Balkans previously, the Albanian cannabis market poses a risk of doing the same in a future conflict. Therefore, it is in NATO's best interest to maintain awareness about Albania's cannabis market for the sake of regional stability.

D. CHAPTER SUMMARY

The illicit transnational cannabis market is a complex problem for Albania and other countries. States are fearful of TOC, and evidence of the damage it can cause is well documented, but cannabis is often viewed as a harmless substance. This complicates the efforts of law enforcement authorities, and for this reason, it becomes a product useful to criminals because it can provide high profits at a relatively lower risk than other "hard" drugs. Albania's cannabis market has been particularly damaging because it, along with

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177 Arsovska, 44–47.

178 Andreas Heinemann-Grüder and Wolf-Christian Paes, *Wag the Dog: The Mobilization and Demobilization of the Kosovo Liberation Army*, 13.

179 Heinemann-Grüder and Paes, 19–21.

180 Heinemann-Grüder and Paes, 20.

other TOC activities, has undercut global confidence in Tirana's will and ability to combat it. This has had a ripple effect within the EU, which continues to delay membership talks as certain member states, including France and the Netherlands, resist expansion. For NATO, many of the problems the cannabis market creates within Albania are sources of concern, but outside the alliance's purview. What it can focus on are the continuing efforts at maintaining regional stability in the Balkans and ensuring that the TOC created by the Albanian cannabis market does not interfere with that stability.

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IV. THE UNLIKELY LINK BETWEEN TERRORISM AND ALBANIAN CANNABIS

This chapter investigates potential links between the Albanian cannabis market and terrorist organizations, and it concludes that direct ties between Albanian cannabis and terrorism are possible but not probable. Many international institutions have voiced concerns about narcotics being used as a funding source for terrorist groups.[181] Given the sheer enormity of the revenues produced from the illicit Albanian cannabis market, it is logical for these entities to suspect that part of the profits could have ties to terrorist organizations as well.

In order to clarify why links between Albanian cannabis and terrorism are doubtful, this chapter examines historical accounts of where narcotics markets and terrorist activities have co-existed. In each case study, the primary condition that facilitated the development of links between narcotics and terrorism will be discussed. In the final sections of this chapter, those conditions will be compared to those in modern day Albania. This comparison will show that many of the enablers which have led to the intersection of narcotics and terrorism in other countries do not exist in Albania and will probably not do so for the foreseeable future.

A. TERRORISM, TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS, AND NARCO-TERRORISM

Examining links between narcotics and terrorist organizations is not a simple undertaking. Ideally, an investigation would start with a general consensus on what constitutes a terrorist organization, which first requires defining terrorism. This task can be daunting, because defining terrorism can be as complex as defining transnational organized crime (TOC). Andrew Silke and others have argued that "there is still no wide agreement

181 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Drug Problem and Organized Crime, Illicit Financial Flows, Corruption and Terrorism," 4; European Commission, *Communication from the Commision to the European Parliament and the Council* (Brussels: European Union, 2017), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/organized-crime-and-human-trafficking/drug-control/eu-response-to-drugs/20170315_evaluation_communication_en.pdf. 8–11.

within academic circles on what exactly is meant by 'terrorism."[182] John Horgan has reminded readers of the cliché, "one man's terrorist is another man's patriot," which succinctly points out how individual perceptions can add complexity to defining terrorism.[183] In short, the waters of terrorism are muddied, and any attempt at providing a clear-cut definition of terrorism is likely to encounter some criticism. In order to avoid a tangential literature review, this chapter does not attempt to define terrorism specifically. Instead, it focuses on case studies that have been widely discussed with regard to links between narcotics and terrorism. This chapter accepts Conor Gearty's view that the definition of terrorism "is moulded by government, the media and in popular usage, not by academic departments."[184]

This approach to defining terrorism—or not defining it, technically speaking—may appear sloppy but, in reality, it is a rational way to approach the subject at hand; that is, the link between the Albanian cannabis market and terrorist organizations. It is rational because, like definitions of terrorism, narratives on how narcotics fund terrorism are also often "moulded by government, the media and in popular usage."[185]

An example of this can be found in the Taliban case, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. Except for a relatively brief period in 1998 discussed in the next section, the Taliban provoked little interest among U.S. citizens until 9/11. After 9/11, the Taliban were considered a terrorist organization by many American citizens and media outlets, and their link to the opium market in Afghanistan became prevalent in public discourse. Academically speaking, the accuracy of viewing the Taliban's taxation of the opium market as "drug funded terrorism" can be challenged from a number of angles but that precision matters little to this chapter. That is because in the case of the Taliban, as in all other historical cases yet to be discussed, the factors that fostered the co-existence of

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[182] Andrew Silke, "Contemporary Terrorism Studies: Issues in Research," in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, R. Jackson, M.B. Smyth, and J. Gunning (New York: Routledge, 2009), 34.

[183] John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 14.

[184] Conor Gearty, *Terror* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 6.

[185] Gearty, 6.

the narcotics market with activities labeled as terrorism do not exist in Albania and are not likely to arise.

In a similar fashion to terrorism, the term narco-terrorism can also stir up debate. Again, the perfect accuracy of this term is not critical to this discussion. In the 1990s, author Rachel Ehrenfeld used narco-terrorism to reference scenarios of governments using drug trafficking to fund terrorism with the goal of undermining the United States.[186] While links to drug trafficking and state-sponsored terrorism may fall in the realm of narco-terrorism, this chapter will focus on non-state actors. Admittedly, the Taliban fall into a gray area as they were essentially the governing body of Afghanistan for five years, but they were never represented at the United Nations. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this chapter, narco-terrorism will be used as a generic shorthand way to describe the "drug-terror nexus"[187] that exists when drug production, drug trafficking, or drug profits interact with non-state groups or activities labeled as terrorist organizations or terrorism respectively.

Narco-terrorism occurs in two primary situations: when terrorists and drug traffickers co-exist, or when terrorists are also drug traffickers. The former situation will be discussed in the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The latter situation will be split into two discussions. The first discussion—on Ireland—will show how a terrorist organization can become involved in illicit narcotics. The second discussion—on Colombia—gives an example of drug traffickers becoming terrorists.

B. THE TALIBAN

It can be argued that narco-terrorism in Afghanistan began in 1997 when opium production was sanctioned by the Taliban.[188] This allowed them to tax its production as a form of revenue. Simultaneously, the Taliban were providing terrorist groups safe haven

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[186] Rachel Ehrenfeld, *Narco-Terrorism: How Governments Around the World Used the Drug Trade to Finance and Further Terrorist Activities* (United States: Basic Books, 1990).

[187] Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Narcoterrorism and the Long Reach of U.S. Law Enforcement, Brookings," October 12, 2011, https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/narcoterrorism-and-the-long-reach-of-u-s-law-enforcement/.

[188] Angela Gendron, "Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism," in *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, F. Allum and S. Gilmour (New York: Routledge, 2011), 412.

within their borders, including the terrorist Osama bin Laden, who had lived there since 1996.[189] It is not clear how strong the relationship was between the Taliban and bin Laden by this point, but *Time* magazine reported that, upon his return to Afghanistan in 1996, bin Laden solidified his relationship with the Taliban by arranging the marriage of his daughter and the Taliban leader Mullah Omar.[190] In any event, Afghanistan came under sanctions when the Taliban refused to turn over bin Laden following the 1998 bombings of two American embassies in Africa.[191] This refusal to give up bin Laden, while simultaneously profiting from the illicit opium market, pushed the Taliban over the narco-terrorism line, according to some authors.[192]

However, narco-terrorism in Afghanistan did not become prominent in the public eye until after 9/11. Even after the 1998 embassy bombings, there were few, if any, global expressions of concern regarding the threat of narco-terrorism from Afghanistan. That began to change a month after the 9/11 attacks when the British government released a report stating that al-Qaeda was heavily funded through the drug trade in Afghanistan.[193] The accuracy of this report is questionable considering that the Taliban had issued a statewide ban on opium production in July 2000 which, with the assistance of a drought, had succeeded in eradicating most poppy crops from the country.[194] Nevertheless, the narrative took hold and, in an ironic twist, was further fueled by the actions of the Taliban when they turned back to the opium market after being deposed.[195] In 2004, Integrated

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189 Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London - New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 5.

190 Tony Karon, "The Taliban and Afghanistan," *Time*, September 18, 2001, http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,175372,00.html.

191 Barbara Crossette, "Taliban's Ban on Poppy a Success, U.S. Aides Say," *New York Times*, May 20, 2001, https://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/20/world/taliban-s-ban-on-poppy-a-success-us-aides-say.html.

192 Roderic Broadhurst, Sandy Gordon, and John McFarlane, "Transnational Organized Crime in the Indo-Asia Pacific," in *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. F. Allum and S. Gilmour (New York: Routledge, 2011), 145–6.

193 Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, 16.

194 United Nations Drug Control Monitoring, *Afghanistan: Annual Poppy Survey* (Islamabad, Pakistan: United Nations, 2001), https://www.unodc.org/pdf/publications/report_2001-10-16_1.pdf. ii.

195 Broadhurst, Gordon, and McFarlane, "Transnational Organized Crime in the Indo-Asia Pacific," 146.

Regional Information Networks (IRIN)—the UN humanitarian news agency of the time—reported on the Taliban using Afghanistan's illicit opium market as a source of revenue.[196] The subject continued to gain momentum in the public sphere, and it has arguably become the premier poster-child for 21st-century narco-terrorism.

The Taliban case provides an example of how illicit narcotics markets and terrorist organizations can co-exist. The Taliban were, at a minimum, supportive of bin Laden until 9/11, as indicated by their refusal to extradite him in 1998. If that support qualifies the Taliban as a terrorist organization, Afghanistan provides an example of how a terrorist organization can co-exist with an illicit narcotics market. Both groups benefit from the arrangement because the terrorists tax the market to obtain revenue, while the drug entrepreneurs are allowed to operate without concerns of legal punishment. If the Taliban are not considered a terrorist organization, Afghanistan is still an example of co-existence because, within the Taliban territory, the opium market and terrorist organizations are both allowed to operate.

In either narrative on Afghanistan, common ideology was the key factor that enabled narco-terrorism to exist. From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban allowed multiple Arab Jihadist groups to train within their territory.[197] The Taliban were a strict Salafi-fundamentalist group[198] so, ideologically speaking, it is safe to assume that they shared common ground with the terrorist groups. That being said, narcotics production or consumption is prohibited by the Qur'an. This fact might have been a point of contention for all parties involved, but the rule was circumvented on the basis that the narcotics produced were for Western kaffirs (unbelievers).[199] Thus, the drug-terror nexus was fully justifiable because it either provided necessary funds for terrorist supporters (i.e., the Taliban are harboring terrorists), or it directly provided funds to terrorists (i.e., the Taliban

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196 IRIN, UN Officer for the Cooperation of Humanitarian Affairs, "Bitter-Sweet Harvest: Afghanistan's New War," *Payvand News*, August 20, 2004, http://www.payvand.com/news/04/aug/1196.html.

197 Craig Whiteside, "The Islamic State and the Return of Revolutionary Warfare," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 27, no. 5 (October 2016): 747.

198 Gendron, "Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism," 412.

199 Gendron, 412–3.

are terrorists), while simultaneously acting as a weapon against the perceived enemy of fundamentalist Islam (i.e., the West).

C. THE LOYALIST PARAMILITARIES

The protestant paramilitaries in Northern Ireland, referred to as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defense Association (UDA), began terrorist campaigns that would eventually transition into organized crime. The UVF dates back to the early 20th century. Protestant unionists formed an army to contest the British government's approval of Irish self-government in 1912, and their rebellion resulted in the partition of Ireland in 1920.[200] The purpose of the UVF at the time was clear, but the purposes of its resurrection in 1966, and the formation of its follow-on counterpart, the UDA, are less apparent. The loyalists themselves claimed to be defending Protestants and Ulster from the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Jonathan Tonge challenges this claim on the basis that the IRA was almost non-existent from the mid-1960s to 1970.[201] Tonge asserts that the loyalist violence may have caused the British to fear an outbreak of civil war should they allow Northern Ireland to leave the UK. Assuming this is accurate, it could have been a motivating force for the UVF and UDA. While the true motivation behind the loyalist violence is debatable, the reality that terrorism was their primary tactic is not. In *Northern Ireland's Troubles*, the authors provide data showing that the loyalists were responsible for the deaths of 983 people from 1969 to 1998. Among the victims, only 26 were members of the rival republican paramilitaries. An overwhelming 858 victims were civilians.[202]

The UVF's and UDA's reliance on criminal activity was initially out of necessity. Unlike the IRA and Provisional IRA (PIRA), who had received weapons and funding from Irish-Americans,[203] loyalist paramilitaries did not receive donations from abroad. They also did not have, nor seek, local support**,** although Tonge points out that the unionist public

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200 Jonathan Tonge, *Northern Ireland* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2006), 147.

201 Tonge, 153–166.

202 Marie-Therese Fay, Mike Morrissey, and Marie Smyth, *Northern Ireland's Troubles: The Human Costs* (London - Sterling, Virgina: Pluto Press, 1999), 169–170.

203 Tonge, *Northern Ireland*, 46.

did not exactly condemn their actions either.[204] While the republican paramilitaries were funded through donations, taxes, some large robberies and money laundering, the loyalists had to rely on drugs, extortion and prostitution.[205]

The loyalist transition point from being mainly terrorists to becoming drug traffickers came in the wake of the ceasefire in 1994. However, as early as the 1980s, signs that the necessary evils used to fund "the cause" were beginning to overtake "the cause" began to surface. The UDA's chief fundraiser was killed by an Ulster freedom fighter in 1989 following years of taking what were considered to be excessive amounts from the loyalist fundraising efforts.[206] After the ceasefire in 1994, profiting from drug trafficking and other crimes was unnecessary because there was no longer a threat for loyalists to arm against. Nevertheless, according to Tamara Makarenko, the loyalists continued their criminal activities as their focus shifted from the original goals of defensive violence to maintaining financial sources.[207] As a result, violence erupted between loyalist paramilitary groups, and within their ranks, as they struggled to control drug rackets and turf.[208] The loyalists had ceased to be defenders of Protestants and had become drug traffickers.

Ideology was the key factor that enabled narco-terrorism in Afghanistan, but in Northern Ireland, the enabling factor was the perception of an internal political threat along sectarian lines. Tonge presents convincing evidence that the UVF reemergence in 1966 had little to do with defending against an almost non-existent IRA. He explores multiple explanations for the whole Northern Ireland conflict, but in regard to why loyalists became terrorists, it is apparent that it was in reaction to the Catholics in the 1960s seeking greater

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[204] Tonge, 154.

[205] Tonge, 198.

[206] Tonge, 159

[207] Tamara Makarenko, "Foundations and Evolution of the Crime-Terror Nexus," in *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. F. Allum and S. Gilmour (New York: Routledge, 2011), 244.

[208] Tonge, *Northern Ireland*, 163–164.

civil rights in Northern Ireland.[209] In essence, what the loyalists were defending was the Protestant position in society. The necessity for an end state of a subdued Catholic minority justified the violent means required to achieve it, and the means to fund the violence through drug trafficking (i.e., narco-terrorism), among other crimes, were also justified by the end state.

D. THE MEDELLIN DRUG CARTEL

Narco-terrorism in Colombia produced two versions of the drug-terror nexus. The first version consisted of terrorists becoming drug traffickers, similar to the loyalists of Northern Ireland. The second version emerged when drug traffickers became terrorists. The Colombia Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) constitute one of the most commonly referenced organizations among discussions of the former situation. The latter situation is best exemplified by the Medellin drug cartel, which will be the focus of this section.

It should be noted that when referring to economic markets, the term cartel describes independent businesses that cooperate to fix prices and outputs.[210] Some may contend that this does not accurately describe the operations of the Medellin drug cartel. Additionally, it can be argued that the word cartel does not accurately describe many drug trafficking networks commonly referenced in modern day public discourse. As with terrorism and narco-terrorism, the use of the word cartel, with respect to organized crime, has been shaped by society. This chapter uses the term only for ease of communication to describe one prominent drug trafficking organization that existed in Colombia from the late 1970s to the early 1990s.

Two major cartels, the Cali cartel and the Medellin cartel, began their rise to power in the 1970s, but the latter is best known for its terror campaign against the state. The cartel's main source of income, cocaine trafficking, dates back to the 1930s in Colombia,

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209 Tonge, 37.

210 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "cartel," accessed May 15, 2018, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/132457?redirectedFrom=organized+crime#eid33332775.

but it received little U.S. attention until the 1960s.[211] The most notorious member of the Medellin cartel, Pablo Escobar, entered into the business as a small time enforcer, but he moved his way up to establish a partnership with Fabio Ochoa and his sons in the late 1970s**,** creating what became known as the Medellin cartel.[212] Facing increasing anti-drug pressure from the Colombian government, Escobar turned to a combination of politics and political violence to protect his trade. Escobar funded a housing project entitled "Medellin without Slums," which gained him strong local support and was instrumental in his election to the Colombian Congress in 1982.[213] Behind the scenes, he enlisted armed groups both for protection and enforcement. According to Ehrenfeld, from 1982 to 1990, "Colombian drug cartels have killed over 1,000 public officials, 12 Supreme Court judges, more than 500 judges, over 170 other judicial employees, dozens of journalists, a narcotics police chief, an attorney general, a major newspaper publisher, and 3 presidential candidates."[214] It is unknown how many of those deaths can be attributed to Escobar. That being said, it is commonly accepted that between the two main cartels of the period, the Cali and Medellin cartels, the former was politically active primarily through non-violent means like bribery, while the latter engaged in a political terror campaign largely credited to Escobar.[215]

The Medellin cartel example of narco-terrorism is associated with political violence, such as the loyalist paramilitary case, but with an opposite cause-effect relationship. In Northern Ireland, the loyalists saw the need to subdue a rising political threat as a justification for funding through illicit markets. Alternatively, in Colombia, the financial gains of the illicit market were the goal and terrorism was merely a political tool

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211 Michael Kenney, "The Evolution of the International Drug Trade: The Case of Columbia, 1930–2000," in *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, F. Allum and S. Gilmour (New York: Routledge, 2011), 201–16.

212 Kenney, 208–9.

213 Ehrenfeld, *Narco-Terrorism: How Governments Around the World Used the Drug Trade to Finance and Further Terrorist Activities*, 88.

214 Ehrenfeld, 86–7.

215 Francisco E. Thoumi, "Organized Crime in Columbia: The Actors Running the Illegal Drug Industry," in *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime*, Letizia Paoli (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 177–95; Michael Kenney, "The Evolution of the International Drug Trade: The Case of Columbia, 1930–2000," 210.

to protect it. Thus, the three cases discussed demonstrate three different enablers of narco-terrorism: ideology, politics motivated by sectarianism, and politics motivated by financial interests. Each enabler will be considered to examine the potential for narco-terrorism in Albania in the following section.

E. IDEOLOGICAL NARCO-TERRORISM IN ALBANIA

Among the three enablers of narco-terrorism previously discussed, ideology is the least applicable to Albania, yet it is of greatest concern to Western societies. With a few Internet searches, one can find reports about the violent Albanian mafia which is structured through Islam and utilizes violent tools like "honor killings"[216] (likely a reference to the Albanian Kanun laws which have no basis in Islam[217]). Other articles have surfaced reporting that the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) infiltrated the mountainous village of Lazarat, in Southern Albania, and took control of the cannabis market while simultaneously recruiting and radicalizing local residents.[218] Arguably, the credibility of these sources can be challenged. However, in 2016, the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) reported that the Balkan countries are Europe's top exporters of fighters to radical Islamic organizations, like ISIS, with Kosovo ranking first, Bosnia and Herzegovina ranking second, and Albania ranking fourth behind the non-Balkan state of Belgium.[219]

These reports of ideological motivations may appear plausible upon first glance, but are quickly dispelled when Albania is carefully examined. Albania is a small state of 2.8 million people. It is predominantly Muslim with some sources estimating the

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216 Alexander Shah, "Gruesome Albanian Mafia Replaces Italian Mafia — Thanks to Islam," Geller Report, July 31, 2017, https://gellerreport.com/2017/07/albanian-mafia-islam.html/.

217 Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 63–66.

218 Allan Hall and Dan Warburton, "ISIS Seizes £4bn Drug Ring From the Mafia to Fund Its Brutal Terror Campaign," Mirror, January 17, 2016, https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/isis-seizes-4bn-drug-ring-7191800.

219 Predrag Petrović, *Islamic Radicalism in the Balkans*, Report No. 24 (Paris, France: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2016), http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/dsee/dv/10_balkan_radicalism/10_balkan_radicalismen.pdf.

percentage to be as high as 80 percent.[220] This large majority is unique in Europe. This may explain why concerns over Islamic radicalization exist despite the research which shows the concerns are unsubstantiated. For example, Jana Arsovska, an expert on Albanian organized crime, provided detailed accounts of the rather insignificant influence of Islam on the daily lives of Albanian citizens.[221] Her view of "Albanianism"—the idea that Albanians identify themselves first as being ethnically Albanian before identifying themselves with any religious faith—has been shared by other authors, such as those from the Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED) who released a 2016 report about the decline in "Albanianism" in Kosovo.[222] Although the report indicated concerns about ethnic Albanians in Kosovo becoming less secular, it did not make any assertion that the same trend was evident inside Albania. To further the point, a Washington think tank, the American Foreign Policy Council (AFPC), rates the level of Islamist activity in Albania as low.[223]

Concerns about large numbers of Albanians joining the ranks of ISIS are also misguided when carefully examined. According to the EUISS, Albania's contribution of 110 fighters to ISIS as of 2016 placed it just behind Belgium in fighters per capita. The report implies, or more accurately asserts, that Balkan countries are susceptible to radicalization because of their large Muslim populations. The statistics cited raise concern until one examines the demographics of each state. As previously mentioned, Albania's population of 2.8 million is predominantly Muslim. In comparison, Belgium's population of 11.3 million[224] is estimated to be only 7.6 percent Muslim. If one believes the argument that Albania's predominantly Muslim population makes its citizens susceptible to

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220 The American Foreign Policy Council, *Albania* (Washington, D.C.: AFPC, 2017), http://almanac.afpc.org/Albania.

221 Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*, 59–63.

222 Agon Demjaha and Lulzim Peci, *What Happened to Kosovo Albanians: The Impact of Religion on the Ethnic Identity in the State Building-Reriod* (Prishtina, Kosovo: Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2016), http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/What_happened_to_Kosovo_Albanians_740443.pdf.

223 The American Foreign Policy Council, *Albania*.

224 "Population Total," The World Bank, accessed June 10, 2018, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=BE.

radicalization, then it stands to reason that its fighters per capita should greatly exceed those of Belgium. It is true that any European citizen volunteering to join the ranks of ISIS is of grave concern. However, the fact that Albania produces fewer fighters per capita than a state with a substantially smaller Muslim population percentage refutes the notion that Albanians located within Albania are especially susceptible to radicalization because of their religious demographics.

It is unlikely that the ideological narco-terrorism that occurred in Afghanistan will occur in Albania. It would be difficult to find a modern democracy completely void of radicals, but Albania as a whole is relatively secure from such a radical ideology. The Taliban governed most of Afghanistan while in power. They permitted the illicit opium market on the grounds that it only hurt non-Muslims while simultaneously engaging in terrorism, or supporting terrorists, depending on one's perspective. Evidence that the common anti-West ideology that prevailed among the governing Taliban and the jihadist groups within their territory exists, or may develop, in Albania is lacking. To the contrary, it can be argued that Albania is one of the most pro-Western Muslim countries in the world both governmentally and among its citizens. Therefore, ideological narco-terrorism is not a significant concern in Albania's foreseeable future.

F. SECTARIAN NARCO-TERRORISM IN ALBANIA

Like ideological narco-terrorism, the political narco-terrorism witnessed in Northern Ireland has little in common with current circumstances in Albania. The violence in Northern Ireland stemmed from a perception that a minority of the population was threatening the political status quo. Additionally, the division between the majority and minority had sectarian origins. In Albania, the population is very homogeneous with over 80 percent being ethnically Albanian,[225] but dialects divide Albanians between two main groups, the majority being Tosks and the minority being Ghegs.[226] After the fall of communism, there were complaints that President Sali Berisha, a Gheg, was replacing

[225] The American Foreign Policy Council, *Albania*.

[226] Arsovska, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime: Culture, Politics, and Globalization*.

many Tosks with fellow Ghegs.[227] Additionally, Arsovska has also found evidence of Albanian organized crime groups in Western Europe aligning along Gheg and Tosk lines.[228] Albania is known to be tribal and clan-based in some respects, but politically there does not appear to be evidence of a continuous sectarian divide that had briefly appeared in the early 1990s.

Hypothetically, if the Albanian Tosks were to see the Ghegs as a political threat, the environment in Albania might resemble that in Northern Ireland. Most southern Albanians are Tosks, and southern Albania is where the majority of cannabis cultivation initially took place. In this counterfactual scenario, a Tosk paramilitary group would require funding for its terror campaign, and a logical source would be the large cannabis market run by their fellow Tosks.

This is where the hypothetical vignette diverges from the circumstances in Northern Ireland and why it is not probable. In Northern Ireland, the loyalists mobilized first and then began illicit markets to fund their activities. In Albania, the cannabis market is already established with annual revenues estimated to be as much as $6 billion.[229] Thus, the Tosks involved in the cannabis market would probably prefer to avoid anything that could disrupt their trade. Angela Gendron's book chapter, "Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism," acknowledges that the crime-terror nexus faces multiple barriers.[230] In this theoretical case, the dominant barrier would be the criminal organization's desire to maintain the status quo. A terrorist campaign along sectarian lines funded by drug trafficking would certainly attract global attention and not be good for business.

G. FINANCIAL NARCO-TERRORISM IN ALBANIA

Perhaps the case that most closely relates to the current environment in Albania is that of the Colombian Medellin cartel of the 1970s-1990s. In both the Colombian case and

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227 Arsovska, 58.

228 Arsovska, 134–137.

229 Arsovska, 41.

230 Gendron, "Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism," 406.

in Albania today, one can see powerful drug trafficking organizations located within states that suffer from law enforcement deficiencies and high levels of corruption. Another parallel is that the government of Albania, in its quest to join the EU, receives mounting pressure to crackdown on its illicit cannabis market—evident by the annual reviews of its potential membership.[231] This is similar to the intensifying pressure Colombia received from the United States to rein in its cocaine market. The Colombian government's reaction to the pressure from the United States (i.e., attacking the source of cocaine) was similar to the Albanian government's current efforts to eradicate cannabis from the country's southern regions.[232] These parallels can lead one to conclude that the current state of affairs in Albania may result, in some circumstances, in a financially motivated political terror campaign against the state, if the cannabis traffickers find themselves without better options.

Nevertheless, there are factors that lessen the probability of financial narco-terrorism erupting in Albania**,** despite the correlation between the current state of Albanian affairs and the past events in Colombia. The primary differences are in the geography and societal structures of the two countries. Geography is the most obvious difference. Colombia is roughly 39 times the size of Albania. Both countries are mountainous, but Columbian terrain is significantly harsher and inhospitable. The Andes Mountains in Colombia divide into separate chains and consist of multiple mountain peaks exceeding 18,000 feet.[233] In comparison, Albania's mountains are generally over 1,000 feet with the tallest mountain in Eastern Albania reaching 9,000 feet.[234] The extreme size and dramatic topography of Colombia create a country with widely isolated areas. Albania has isolated areas as well, but not to the same extreme as Colombia. As Francisco Thoumi explains,

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231 "European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations."

232 Austrian Regional Chair of the Dublin Group, *Regional Report on Western Balkans*.

233 "Topography," Nations Encyclopedia, accessed June 10, 2018, http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com.

234 "Topography."

Colombia's geography made territorial law enforcement very difficult, as it "was formed as a collection of regions with little communication and trade exchanges among them."[235]

Societal structure also reduces the potential for financial narco-terrorism in Albania. As mentioned before, Albania is largely a homogeneous society, and the differences between the Ghegs and Tosks do not create political friction. The same cannot be said of Colombia. The country has had a long history of violence, often instigated by significant regional heterogeneity.[236] Both countries suffer from corrupt governments**,** which lead to a lack of trust among the population; but, unlike Albania, where Albanianism creates a national identity among the population, the diversity in Colombia has created barriers to the establishment of a national Colombian identity. Lastly, the desire of an overwhelming majority of Albanians to integrate with Western nations and attain membership in the EU indicates that they do not suffer from the natural resistance to government that was seen in Colombia.

H. CHAPTER SUMMARY

Narco-terrorism is a phenomenon that is largely feared but not well understood. Statements such as "it is well established that there are terrorists and non-State armed groups profiting from the drug trade"[237] from reputable institutions, like the UNODC, produce little doubt among the public that it is something to be taken seriously. However, these definitive statements become less convincing when other organizations, such as the European Union**,** report on the need to document "potential connections between drug trafficking and the financing of terrorist groups and activities" because there is a "lack of solid evidence."[238] These reports give the impression that the causes of crimes are being determined before there is evidence of a crime.

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235 Thoumi, "Organized Crime in Columbia: The Actors Running the Illegal Drug Industry," 178.

236 Thoumi, 178–180.

237 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Drug Problem and Organized Crime, Illicit Financial Flows, Corruption and Terrorism." 4.

238 European Commission, *Communication from the Commision to the European Parliament and the Council*. 11.

Such may be the case in Albania, where there is an undeniable co-existence of a Muslim majority and a hugely profitable drug trade. If it is assumed that Muslims are susceptible to radicalization and that large-scale illicit drug operations fund terrorism, narco-terrorism appears inevitable in Albania. All that remains is finding the evidence of the crime.

The danger of these assumptions is that law enforcement officials may end up jumping to conclusions and chasing the wrong evidence. In response, governments may end up pursuing the wrong reforms. As discussed, of the three motivating factors for narco-terrorism, ideology is the least relevant to Albania. If anything, the focus should be on avoiding a scenario like the one that transpired in Colombia from the 1970s to the 1990s, as that scenario has the most parallels to the Albanian situation. This starts by building trust in the national government by stamping out corruption. Next, Albania must continue to promote the strong national identity that is shared by the majority of the population. Lastly, in the government's quest to eradicate cannabis cultivation, it cannot be overlooked that alternative sources of revenue must be available. The predominantly agricultural villages of the south rely on cannabis as the primary source of income. The most likely enabler of a narco-terrorism scenario erupting in Albania would result from ignoring this reality.

V. CONCLUSION

Transnational organized crime (TOC) can be difficult to define and challenging to combat. However, no matter how it is defined, TOC is a global threat. Some states will suffer greater effects than others, but no state is guaranteed to be immune. Less developed states are particularly vulnerable to TOC due to economic challenges and weak state institutions. Such is the case in Albania, where TOC has persisted since its entrance into the democratic world in the early 1990s.

Albanian cannabis production and trafficking have been able to spread thanks to a difficult transition to democracy orchestrated by politicians that have prioritized consolidating power over pursuing the democratic rule of law. As a result, the illicit market has contributed to a wide range of harmful effects. Internally, it has disturbed the social structure of villages and promoted corruption, which in turn has eroded state institutions. Moreover, it has fostered informal economies that have promoted further crime while taking away from the regulated market economy. Tirana has made great strides to eradicate cannabis plantations, but even if the crop is totally eliminated, it will have lingering effects on Albanian stability.

Externally, the cannabis market is a branch of TOC that is problematic for outside countries and of particular concern to the EU. Cannabis is a profitable industry, and trafficking it comes with less risk than that of "hard" drugs. This creates easier access into consumer countries where governments have decriminalized its use and whose citizens may see the substance as less harmful than alternative drugs. However, the perceived harmlessness of cannabis at the individual level does not negate the harmful effects it has at the state level. The reputation of Albania and its people has suffered from the negative effects, including the publicity the cannabis market and other organized crime activities have produced. This has likely caused some bias among outside governments and law enforcement authorities which is counterproductive to cooperation. In order for countries to establish the best policies with respect to the Albanian cannabis market, they must ensure that they look past pre-existing biases and work with Albanian authorities toward a common end-state.

Under pressure from the EU, Albanian officials have increased enforcement against the cannabis market, but TOC groups have adapted. As early as 2010, well before the 2012 and 2014 operations in Lazarat, the UNODC was reporting on "an increasing trend of indoor cannabis cultivation."[239] This development was prophetic as cutting off cannabis at the source has become increasingly difficult in recent years even as outdoor cultivation in Albania has been significantly reduced. Such developments have raised questions among EU member states about Tirana's commitment to combatting the cannabis market and have reinforced assumptions of corruption. There is little doubt that the cannabis market is a contributing factor in the EU's recent decision to delay Albania's membership talks by yet another year.

Any transnational drug trafficking will create global concerns because drug trafficking is considered to be a potential funding source for non-state armed groups and terrorist organizations. This may cause trepidation for NATO. Albania is a NATO ally, which makes its stability a point of importance for the alliance. While it behooves the allies to stay abreast of the internal developments within Albania, their focus as a defensive alliance must be on stability in the Balkans as a whole. The Albanian cannabis market creates a wrinkle in this plan. Although it is unlikely to become a funding source for radical terrorist organizations, the potential for the cannabis market to be used as a funding source for armed groups in the Balkans, should old conflicts resurface, is genuine.

In the end, the Albanian cannabis market will survive as long as the Albanian population allows it to. It will most likely never be eliminated completely, but if the will is there, it can be reduced to insignificant levels. The question is whether it will continue to factor into the EU's decision about Albanian candidacy for membership. Moreover, how long will the citizens of Albania be willing to wait for acceptance into the EU? Apprehension by some EU member states regarding expansion is understandable, but there are risks associated with delaying too long. The most logical way for the EU and other countries to determine how to move forward with Albania is to look back at its past. For

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[239] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2010*, E.10.XI.13 (New York: United Nations, 2010), http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2010/World_Drug_Report_2010_lo-res.pdf. 183–184.

nearly three decades, the small state has progressed, despite bitter partisan politics, economic collapse, large waves of emigration, widespread corruption, and organized crime. Its military has been raised to NATO standards, and its economy has transitioned from being the poorest state in Europe to becoming one of the fastest growing economies. Albania has proven itself to be persistent. Considering those factors and the fact that the population is extremely pro-West, the benefits Western countries stand to gain by engaging with Albania likely outweigh the risks posed by its cannabis market.

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