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# Human Smuggling and Trafficking From/Via Eastern Europe

The Former 'Intelligence' and the Intermediary Structures.  
An analysis of 50 Belgian case studies covering the period 1995-2003

Johan Leman and Stef Janssens

**Johan Leman** is professor at IMMRC, and **Stef Janssens** is free researcher at IMMRC, department of social and cultural anthropology, K.U. Leuven (Catholic university of Leuven, Belgium), e-mail address: [johan.leman@ant.kuleuven.be](mailto:johan.leman@ant.kuleuven.be)

## Introduction

Many authors suggest that there is no single, well-developed theory of migration (Goss & Linqvist 1995; Hirshman, Kasinitz & DeWind 1999; Portes 1999; Massey 1999; Arango 2004). The assumption of this article is that neither is there a single, well-developed theory on migrant smuggling of human beings, not only as regards volume and direction, but also as regards its structural-organisational nature. It seems, therefore, appropriate to attempt to clarify this matter without presuppositions by means of concrete analyses.

From the literature and from an analysis of Belgian case studies on human smuggling and trafficking from and through Eastern Europe, we observe that often ‘strongly structured flexible networks’ are at work in human smuggling. This indicates a different profile than, for example, presented by irregular transit migrations through Turkey (Içduygu and Toktas 2002). The effective structure is clear, in the Eastern European case, from two very demonstrable characteristics. In at least one third of the 50 case studies, verified with judicially registered cases which we could study (Belgium, 1995 to June 2003), *mala fide* travel agencies were used for organising human smuggling and were sometimes even set up on an *ad hoc* basis. Furthermore, in 13 cases, there are clear indications of involvement from former intelligence circles. It is this second attribute we will discuss in this article.

Van Amersfoort has pointed to the importance of three aspects in the analysis of contemporary migrations (1998:15):

*The first characteristic, transport links, constitutes at present no longer a hindrance. The second concerns the resources needed to make use of these connections, such as money or contacts (social capital)... A third characteristic... are the rules for passports and visas (Van Liempt 2004: 6, translated from Dutch).*

Criticising the network theories, Krissman rightly suggests that network theories in and of themselves often are insufficient to explain migratory movements because they are ‘both ahistorical and *post factum*’. All the actors and actions should be considered (2005: 5).

We argue in favour of further dividing ‘the resources needed to make use of these connections, such as money or contacts’ into more possibilities. Resources can apply

only to the first or the third characteristic, but there can also be resources that constitute a second field efficiently connecting the two other aspects (transport links and rules for passports and visas) and that develop a specialisation on this level. Which intermediary structures can both provide good transport facilities and easily acquire the appropriate official documents? Travel agencies can take on this role. Another aspect that undoubtedly deserves more attention must be the organisation of a chain of safe houses and transit hotels. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated, the (former) 'intelligence' of some Eastern European countries can also occupy this intermediary field quite effectively.

It is repeatedly asserted in the literature that, during and after the implosion of communism, parts of the (former) security services were recycled by criminal organisations in some Eastern European countries with a view to greater efficiency. It is also true that several security employees had lost their jobs. Several sources mention the close alliances between former communist security services like the KGB and its satellites and organised crime (Gould 1997; Knight 1996; Handelman 1997; Varese 2001; McCauley 2001; Shelley 1997; Sterling 1995; Waller 1994). Because of this cooperation and the know-how and international contacts of the security services, the criminal organisations were able to professionalize (McCauley 2001; Shelley 1997).

In a number of files of organised human smuggling, we note that former 'intelligence' personnel, on the level of intermediary structures, were able to provide know-how and contacts to, for example, travel agencies. In a number of cases, they were even able to develop into entrepreneurs in the human smuggling and trafficking business. An important consequence of this is that it has the potential of involving official bodies.

In a broader literature study, we focus on Bulgaria and Albania because the empirical data from our research (in 13 of 50 cases) is situated mainly in that area. By way of conclusion, we will consider three cases more closely: one Albanian and two Bulgarian. They are cases about which we were able to obtain very detailed information through interviews with policemen, lawyers and embassy staff. Our research into these cases covers the period between 1999 and June 2003.

One final remark is appropriate to conclude this introduction. This article specifically focuses on the typically 'large-scale' smuggling networks that smuggle and traffic people from and/or via Eastern Europe. The smuggling practices from Eastern Europe that are 'smaller in scale' but no doubt also exist will not be discussed. This indicates a bias in our account. It is not the purpose to convince the reader that human smug-

gling is only a matter of large-scale networks. We observe only that, in a significant number of 'Eastern European' cases, the large-scale approach with the character of a business, albeit with very flexible networking, is indeed a fact. In, for example, a large Albanian case, 14.000 people were smuggled to England in just two years. This article will, in particular, demonstrate that in a fourth of the large-scale 'flexible networks', former staff from 'intelligence' very demonstrably played a central part.

We will first discuss the literature and subsequently enter into the case studies.

### **Former and present Eastern European 'intelligence' and organised crime**

The Eastern European criminal organisations, some of which have good connections with former and present members of the security services, are today actively involved in drugs and weapons trafficking and in prostitution (Finckenauer 1998). Some Eurasian criminal organisations are attempting to build a 'network of networks' and, with this in mind, according to Waller (1995), among others, enter into strategic alliances with traffickers in Africa, America, the Middle East, and elsewhere. It is because of this cooperation with members of the former security services that the Russian mafia, for example, was able to deliver weapons from Eastern European depots to the Italian mafia (Fondazione Roselli 1999).

According to the anthropologists Kurtsikidze and Chikovani (2002), who carried out research in Georgia, the local Communist nomenklatura, the police, and the KGB were working closely with criminal organisations. Some sources claim that even at the highest level, several years before the collapse of the Soviet empire, the KGB was making deals with the Russian mafia. Several people in the KGB sensed that the implosion of the Soviet regime was imminent. In the mid 1980s, some claim as early as during Yuri Andropov's leadership, the Soviet security services already knew that the system, with no drastic reform, was doomed to collapse. People in various KGB departments ceased their efforts against the black market or against the criminals. They lost their faith in socialist law and order. Some started to strike deals with the Russian underworld (CSIS 1997).

Moreover, during the transition from communism to the free-market economy, many staff members from the security services were dismissed. They lost their privileges and their protected position (CSD 2003).

After the fall of communism, security agents were in great demand with the organised-crime organisations because of their specific skills and contacts (Institute for National Strategic Studies 1999; Pelley 2001; Rollins 1998).

*Being a KGB officer was always a lucrative and liberating proposition. Access to Western goods, travel to exotic destinations, making new (and influential) friends, mastering foreign languages, and doing some business on the side (often with one's official "enemies" and unsupervised slush funds) – were all standard perks even in the 1970's and 1980's. Thus, when communism was replaced by criminal anarchy, KGB personnel (as well as mobsters) were the best suited to act as entrepreneurs in the new environment. They were well travelled, well connected, well capitalized, polyglot, possessed of management skills, disciplined, armed to the teeth, and ruthless. Far from being side-tracked, the security services rode the gravy train. But never more so than now (Vaknin 2004).*

From the analysis of our case studies and our conversations with the informants, we find that several parts of the old spy networks from the world of 'intelligence' are still being used today and can provide the components for transnational networks for human smuggling and trafficking. Companies that in the past were typically used as a cover for communist intelligence operations now surface, for example, in files of human trafficking and smuggling through visa fraud or through their recycling of previous lobbying contacts in order to infiltrate the government machinery.

Former spies can use their former foreign financial funds in the future for money laundering purposes (Institute for National Strategic Studies 1999) or their knowledge and expertise to offer protection to (Varese 2001; Chambliss 1999) and to forge documents for organised crime organisations (Chambliss 1999). Other services include implementing counter-strategies (Xhudo 1996) or sophisticated elimination techniques (Volkov 2002; Williams and Picarelli 2002; Yun 2003; Zalisko 2003). Some transnational Russian criminal organisations have even built a parallel intelligence network (Friedman 2000).

In December 1996, former DCI R. and head of American intelligence James Woolsey warned that current and former members of the Russian SVR, successor to the foreign KGB directorate, as well as officials in the departments of foreign affairs and defence, are cooperating with Russian criminal organisations (CSIS, 1997):

*(1) through the use of intelligence tradecraft for criminal purposes; (2) by their ability to protect Russian organized crime activity from inside the government itself; and (3) through their contacts in overseas networks and business ventures that date back to KGB operations as the Soviet Union was breaking up in the late 1980s (CSIS, 1997).*

There are sufficient indications in the literature to indicate that, without generalising, a collaboration has effectively been established between former and sometimes still present staff of some security services and people from organised crime and that ‘intelligence’ has made know-how available.

### **Former and present Eastern European security services and smuggling networks**

Some Eastern European intelligence services, not least the overseas business activities of the KGB, have created a network of companies and banks abroad. They have activated contacts and have established cooperation with sectors of organised crime that have an enormous source of revenue at their disposal (McCauley 2001; CSIS 1997). A Russian parliamentary committee reported in 1995 that the politburo passed several secret decrees on the ‘direct concealment of state revenue and property in commercial structures’ (Novitskaia & Prest 2004). Knight (1994) points out that the SVR passes on significant amounts of economic data collected by the ‘intelligence’ to Russian crime-controlled private business. Meanwhile it has been demonstrated on the basis of concrete evidence that these firms were already acting on KGB orders in drug dealing, nuclear smuggling, and a wide variety of money laundering operations (Jensen 1999). In Bulgaria, during the Cold War, there was even an entire spy and smuggling network built up around the firm Kintex (CSD 2004).

Some smuggling networks were at first set up by security services and were later taken over by organised-crime organisations (CSD 2004). The war in the Balkans strongly stimulated. Initially, mainly drugs and weapons were smuggled but eventually the criminal organisations also targeted human smuggling and trafficking, for which the same routes and partners were used (CSD 2004; Hajdinjak 2002). Border and visa checks in some Eastern European countries fell within the corrupting field of activity of criminal organisations, which, for this purpose, sometimes collaborated closely with former security agents (CSD 2003).

This collaboration between certain security services and certain criminal organisations emerged in the organisation of some significant cases of human smuggling and trafficking. The means provided by present and former security agents were: connections with contacts in Western embassies (which was important for obtaining visas) and access to hotels or other temporary accommodation for travellers (Hajdinjak 2002). Often, this went hand in hand with cooperating with or establishing new travel agencies in some Eastern European capital cities. In this way, a business with an enormous turnover could be established.

*Estimates, based on the recorded cases (40.000 immigrants) only in Austria and only for the year 1999, amount to \$100 million. The overall estimates for the EU are \$3 billion in 1999. In 2002 the world-wide illegal immigrants "business" is worth between \$12 billion (IOM estimate) and \$30 billion (US sources). On average, the EU-bound immigrants pay between \$2.000 and \$2.500 for their transfer from Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union, between \$9.000 and \$14.000 for the transfer from Central and South Asia, and up to \$24.000 for the trip from China. (Hajdinjak, 2002)*

According to estimates 500.000 women are brought into the EU annually in the context of prostitution. Of them, 200.000 are from Central and Eastern Europe and Russia (Limanowska 2002).

### **Bulgaria, irregular migrations and 'intelligence' in the literature**

Together with Romania, Bulgaria, because of its location, is one of the principal entry points for irregular migrants to Europe (CSD 2002). Between 1992 and 2002, an estimated 80.000 migrants tried to cross the Bulgarian border irregularly into Western Europe. In 1999 alone, more than 22.733 irregular migrants were stopped by the border police, 4.500 more than the year before. Some estimates indicate that 50.000 to 89.000 Bulgarians are living outside Bulgaria illegally (Hajdinjak 2002). An estimated 10.000 Bulgarian girls have ended up in prostitution abroad (Limanowska 2002).

Bulgarian experts estimate that approximately USD 30 to 50 million in forged and/or authentic visas and transport tickets are circulating illegally on the market. The illegal transit from the Middle East via Turkey and Bulgaria to Western Europe costs USD 7.500, the migrants paying for each phase of the journey separately (Hajdinjak 2002).

Originally, the smuggling networks were established by the Bulgarian security service. This took place in the 1970s as part of an entire network of companies in Western countries around the state firm Kintex, the Bulgarian weapons company that was responsible for smuggling weapons to other countries (CSD 2004). But, in addition to weapons smuggling, those channels were also used for the illegal transport of people (e.g. terrorists) and trafficking goods with an historical value (Hajdinjak 2002). According to a Belgian confidential police report from the 1980s (Bihay 1985), Kintex was officially registered as an import/export firm but was also involved in weapon and drug smuggling and was protecting terrorists while it also maintained contacts with the Italian *Cosa Nostra*. Kintex was divided into seven directorates, each of which had a KGB advisor (Bihay 1985).

In 1989, a large number of the Bulgarian 'intelligence' officers were involved in dozens of firms known for their 'transborder criminal activities' (such as smuggling goods). In 1991, Bulgaria owned more than 250 firms spread over Germany, Italy, France, Austria, the United Kingdom, India, and elsewhere (Hajdinjak 2002). Officially, they were mainly import and export firms (Nikolov 1997).

During the transition phase to the free-market economy and while firms were being privatised, the distinction between the 'intelligence' and the criminal organisations faded further (CSD 2004). Via former and present members of the security services, several state firms ended up in private ownership and in the hands of criminal organisations irregularly (CSD 2004).

In this transition period, a 'dirty business' developed in the grey zone of smuggling, prostitution, gambling, and drugs (CSD 2004; Nikolov 1997). Protection firms were established that were actually criminal firms offering their services to hotel chains on the coast, for example, that lived from prostitution and gambling (Nikolov 1997). Hotel chains are also an important link in the intermediary structures of the trafficking networks involved in human trafficking (Hajdinjak 2002). In the process of privatisation, members of the security services had the opportunity to participate in companies and to make use of their expertise, information, contacts, and agent networks for quasi-criminal corporations (CSD 2004). Many security agents were employed in protection firms that were later transformed into insurance companies such as the VIS but were in fact covers for criminal organisations (Nikolov 1997).

According to a UN study on transnational organised-crime organisations, the VIS has many contacts with other criminal organisations and its core business consists mostly of protection services, illegal gambling, and cigarette smuggling. Also, although officially an insurance company, the VIS's activities include smuggling irregular migrants and women and children in the context of sexual exploitation. The VIS makes use of

corruption, has much influence in the local political world, and has deeply infiltrated the economic system (UN 2002). The VIS maintains strong contact with other criminal organisations because it must ensure the security on the routes used for trafficking weapons, drugs, and people (UN 2002).

The smuggling networks from the world of 'intelligence' were soon used to transport migrants to Greece and Italy immediately following the downfall of the communist regime (Hajdinjak 2002). The collaboration between members of the 'intelligence' and of criminal organisations was thereby strengthened (CSD 2004). Until 1997, the border control tasks, such as passport control, were under the authority of the 'intelligence'. Reports revealed the ties between several security officers and criminal organisations. The reports showed the involvement of these services in smuggling people and stolen cars (CSD 2004). For example, two members of 'intelligence' were consequently fired because of their connections with a criminal organisation involved in prostitution and human trafficking (Caparini & Marenin 2005).

### **Albania, irregular migrations and 'intelligence' in the literature**

Albania takes up an important position in the human smuggling and trafficking routes. Trafficking irregular migrants and women destined for prostitution from Albania via Italy by the Albanian criminal organisations and in cooperation with Italian mafia organisations plays an important role on the international criminal market (Hajdinjak 2002). Originally, most of the people transported illegally to Italy were Albanians. Very soon after they were joined by Kurds, Chinese, Iranians, Pakistanis, Bosnian Muslims, Macedonians, and other nationalities.

Official EU estimates have it that Italian and Albanian traffickers had earned between three and four billion US dollars in this illegal business by 1998 (Hajdinjak 2002; Cillufo & Salmoiraghi 1999). According to the Italian authorities, between 500.000 and 1.000.000 illegal migrants were smuggled from Albania to Italy in the 1990s. Among them were about 100.000 Albanian women (Limanowska 2002) of which 30.000 would have ended up in prostitution (US Department of State 1999).

Most smuggling networks were set up by Sigurimi, the communist security service. In 1991, upon the collapse of communism, Sigurimi was discontinued and replaced by the security service SHIK (CSD 2002). About a third of the Sigurimi, among which were most of the officers, were recycled to form the new security service SHIK (CSD 2004).

After the fall of communism, the Sigurimi agents who had been dismissed offered their services to the highest bidding criminal organisations (Xhudo 1996). Some of their specialties were circumventing state control and organising a comfortable life in the West (Xhudo 1996).

The former Sigurimi agents started cooperating with the Italian (Pugliese) mafia *Sacra Corona Unita*, which had a strong presence in Albania, at first mainly in the smuggling sector for weapons, drugs, and cigarettes (CSD 2002; Cillufo 1999). The Sigurimi agents knew how to get to the weapon depots in Albania and delivered these weapons to the Italian mafia organisations (CSD 2004). The cooperation quickly expanded and focus turned to the lucrative market of human smuggling and trafficking (CSD 2002; CSD 2004; Cilluffo 1999). At the same time, some of the former Sigurimi agents left for the West as irregular immigrants. A large number of these irregular immigrants ended up in organised-crime organisations there (CSD 2004). The military style in which Albanian criminal organisations work in the West gives reason to believe that former Sigurimi agents are giving training sessions (CSD 2004).

An immigration report from the Belgian Immigration Liaison Officer, giving a strategic analysis of irregular migration and human trafficking from Albania, described the situation as follows:

*The Hoxha regime with its powerful secret service has thoroughly formed the spirits of the Albanians: not only has the regime produced many skilful agents who after the implosion of the regime have turned themselves into powerful mafia bosses, but it also has taught the people to communicate secretly and to be distrustful (Belgian ILO 2001).*

It subsequently appeared that organised-crime organisations were recruiting not only dismissed Sigurimi agents but also agents from the new security services. When the corrupt Berisha regime collapsed in 1997, it appeared that the government apparatus was maintaining close ties with the Albanian criminal organisations (CSD 2002; CSD 2004). According to a recent country report from the British Home Office, the security services in Albania are still very prone to corruption (Vickers 2004).

At the end of the '90s (the end of the Balkan War), the Albanian KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) also served as an important partner in the smuggling networks as it be-

gan to operate in the same sector, for example, by smuggling women to be exploited in prostitution (Hajdinjakj 2002).

The question now is: what can be learned from the 50 cases (Belgium, 1995 to 2003) that we have examined and of which 13 contain references to the (former) ‘intelligence’?

### **Analysis of 13 case studies from Belgium: general analysis**

The 50 case studies can be divided among the following nationalities. Seventeen files deal mainly with Albanian traffickers. Some of these Albanian files are connected to two Chinese files and one Indian file. There are also 21 Bulgarian, three Russian, two Hungarian and two Romanian cases. Finally, there is one case from Lithuania and one from Ukraine. Of the 50 cases, 20 concern trafficking in human beings exclusively, 10 are exclusively smuggling files, and 20 involve with both smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

The 13 cases in which there are indications of the involvement of members or former members of security services can, in turn, be divided ‘ethnically’ into three clusters. The first cluster consists of five Albanian cases that are interconnected with one Indian and two Chinese cases. Then there is a cluster of four Bulgarian cases of which one is connected to a Turkish file. Finally, there is one Russian case. The former members of the ‘intelligence’, appearing in the Albanian core cases that involve large-scale organised human smuggling, already turned up earlier in a prostitution file. In fact, the five ‘Albanian’ cases appear to form one large Albanian network. A few persons and contacts surface in several cases, although not always the same, and together they comprise five cases. When two Albanian suspects managed to escape, the police spontaneously went to the family members of convicts that appear in another Albanian smuggling file to look for the escapees.

The related Chinese cases and the Indian case function as a supply channel of smuggled migrants for this Albanian network. It must be pointed out that, in practice, these smuggling channels transported women intended for prostitution as well as people who wanted to be sent through to England. For example, from a telephone tap in the Indian case, it appeared that a Bulgarian accomplice went to Sofia to collect women who were then dumped into prostitution in Brussels. Because no prostitution victims could be found, and several illegal transit migrants were found, the case, from a legal

perspective, was treated as a case of human smuggling (and not of human trafficking). The legal arrangement around a case sometimes depends purely on a few coincidences while the reality is much more complex.

According to legal sources, this global Albanian network owns the transport market from Brussels to England and has single-handedly smuggled many thousands of people (in fact, so far at least 14.000) into England in two years' time.

A second cluster consists of four Bulgarian cases of human trafficking and smuggling from the 1990s with the involvement of the former Bulgarian national security. These cases, in which travel agencies and a transport firm functioned as the intermediary structure, are connected to a file of visa fraud involving the Belgian embassy in Sofia and others in the 1990s. These cases involved companies that were associated with the former Bulgarian national security as is described in the literature on Bulgarian practices in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Hajdinjak 2002; Nikolov 1997; see also: McCauley 2002; CSIS 1997).

Finally, amongst the 13 cases there is a Russian case of visa fraud and corruption from the 1990s. A Belgian civil servant employed in the protocol service of the Belgian ministry of Foreign Affairs arranged the distribution of diplomatic passports. This civil servant admitted to have sold at least 300 residence permits to people associated with the Russian mafia and people known for espionage activities. The essence of the case probably lies with financial laundering operations but there are also traces of human smuggling and trafficking.

### **Three case studies**

The following principles were used in the selection of the case studies. The cases were selected from the two countries in which our samples showed the clearest indication of the involvement of 'intelligence' in organised human smuggling. There is no reason these practices should be considered to be restricted to Belgium. The Case A. (see further) is partially also a Dutch case. Three remarks are appropriate here: presumably we could have chosen other countries and, of course, we do not at all intend to stigmatise the people from these countries as such. The subjects or characteristics discussed are not related to communities but to phenomena that can essentially be reduced to broad political, economic, and social shifts. Finally, it is in no way our intention to criminalize the migrants themselves. The cases show how, over the years, former

members of 'intelligence' were gradually entering the picture of human smuggling and trafficking from some Eastern European countries. They possessed the skills, know-how, and contacts to occupy, very professionally and efficiently, a niche driven by the desire of thousands of people to migrate to the West at a time when the West wished to impede access.

The choice of cases is intended to help the understanding of the way such a set-up is organised and how the organisations structure themselves.

### *Case Study 1 – Albania: the Case of G.*

In several criminal acts of human smuggling and trafficking and of prostitution recorded, from 2002 to 2003, in several Belgian cities and judicial districts, a single Albanian network emerged. At a certain moment, a Chinese network also came into play. Generally, human smuggling was involved, but some members of the Albanian network appear to have been convicted of prostitution in the past. The Albanian network has a multi-ethnic composition: there were also Indian and Turkish participants and even one Serb. The non-Albanian members, however, played only minor roles. They were the chauffeurs or procured customers, for example, from Asia. The network's leadership was Albanian.

When the case appeared in court in Brussels, one of the leaders proved to be a former security agent who had already been convicted in another judicial district (Dendermonde) for human smuggling. He had simply continued his activities from prison where he was visited by, among others, an Albanian heavyweight who controlled a large part of the prostitution in Brussels and Liège and who himself now had become the object of a major prostitution case.

To illustrate the size and the importance of the Albanian network: in the Dendermonde Albanian file alone, there is mention of 13.000 victims having been smuggled into England over a two-year period. In the Brussels-Albanian file of the federal public prosecutor's office, approximately 1.000 victims were traced in a matter of months. In the Albanian file that is linked with the Chinese network, one can see how, at a certain moment, some 150 Chinese victims were 'accommodated' in safe houses waiting for their transport.

In the meantime, related cases came to court in other cities (namely Leuven, Bruges, and Antwerp) dealing with supply activities managed by Indians and Chinese for the same Albanian network. Incidentally, one of the male clients of the Albanian network in the Dendermonde smuggling file was a KLA fighter from Kosovo.

In this network, we see an example of multiple entrepreneurships. The objective of the human smuggling was irregular mass migration to the United Kingdom. The Belgian link was specialised in the transport between Brussels and the United Kingdom. The police departments discovered that there was a kind of agreement by which the several ethnic networks placed their clients under the control of the Albanian network in Brussels, which then handled the final stage of the smuggling route from Brussels to England. There were price agreements between the different networks.

According to their statements, two leaders of the Albanian network had been working for the 'intelligence' in Berisha's time until 1997. Bank transfers in their names were found to his political organisation in Albania. The visas were obtained through a person who had excellent contacts with the Greek embassy in Albania. The boss who had been able to continue giving his instructions from the Dendermonde prison had held a diplomatic passport in the past.

From the police reports, it further appears that the Albanian network had achieved an advanced level of professionalism. Some members turned out to be trained to carry out contra-observations. Normally, these techniques are taught by people who work for 'intelligence'. At the same time, a travel agency and several transport firms showed up in this case.

This is a clear example of how an intermediary terrain (using the terminology of Van Amersfoort 1998) is brought under the control of the main entrepreneur through multiple entrepreneurships and can develop into an effective business.

### *Case Study 2 – Bulgaria in the 1990s: the Case of T.*

In several cases from Bulgaria and Belgium from 1995 to 2000, we observe a cluster of activities arising from former members of the Bulgarian national security, originally espionage and smuggling networks and various other criminal activities that, at a certain moment, started focusing on the market of human smuggling and trafficking.

In one case, we see a *mala fide* Belgian-Bulgarian travel agency owned by the family of a former senior official of the Bulgarian ‘intelligence’. In the mid-‘90s, there were excellent contacts between this travel agency and the Belgian embassy in Sofia. Until July 1996, official tourist visas were very easily delivered *en masse* to the Belgian-Bulgarian travel agency. This only changed in mid-1996 when the visas were refused.

One of the people who had received such a visa was then refused one in mid-1996 and appeared to be convicted of pimping in Ghent at the end of 1996. Another person is cited in an international legal case on the Kurdish PKK concerning child soldiers and weapons. Also in the latter case, it is discovered how 70 people were illegally transported to Western Europe. Yet another person, in the meantime, was implied in a case of illegal international trafficking of stolen cars at the end of the ‘90s.

What can be seen happening here corresponds perfectly with the outline described by Nikolov (1997) and Hajdinjak (2002) regarding the firms created by Bulgarian ‘intelligence’ at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. The Belgian-Bulgarian travel agency involved did indeed belong to the family of a senior official of Bulgarian ‘intelligence’ of that period. In 1997, the firm suddenly changed its name, and in 2000 it was declared bankrupt by a Belgian court. In 1997, the manager of the company was able to acquire Belgian nationality.

In connection with this case is a case of a transport firm that was investing in bringing ‘invited guests’ to Belgium in that same period. The manager of the firm is described in a note from the Belgian national security as ‘active person in charge of a company connected to the Bulgarian branch of the mafia that is known for its violence and the delivery of forged documents, visas, and work permits’. According to the same note, the manager was also active in the Albanian and Turkish prostitution rings. For a few years now, the manager has established himself in Belgian business life where he is head of a management agency with contacts in the world of shipping and transport.

This is a good example of flexible management moving into new market niches. Financial laundering operations diversify and gradually change into a seemingly legal exploitation of many people’s desire to emigrate to the West and into a lucrative human trafficking business for prostitution. At the same time, criminals from the inner circle are also brought over. The extent to which organised human smuggling took place via this channel and the extent to which this can be attributed to the easy acquisition of visas are shown from the listings from the Belgian embassy in Sofia, ac-

ording to which at least 250 people were able to leave for Western Europe through travel agencies and bus companies.

*Case Study 3 – Bulgaria 2000 to 2003,....: the Case of A.*

In the literature, one can learn about the insurance company VIS, which maintained close ties with former security agents (Nikolov 1997). A UN study confirms that the VIS is an international Bulgarian criminal organisation and has infiltrated social and economic life. Originally, it was one of those typical protection firms that arose in the transition period and that were recruiting security agents (Nikolov 1997). The firms that were protected by the VIS were even provided with a special VIS sticker (Nikolov 1997).

The Case of A. is a good example of the protection mechanisms of the new mafia organisations that arose when communism collapsed and after these criminal protection firms recruited the many security agents. The meaning of protection can be derived from a case such as A.. A witness revealed in 2002 that she had been paying a protection fee to VIS for her bus company since 1995. First, there was a monthly fee of USD 1,500. This was later increased to USD 3,000 and in 1997 it was again increased to USD 5,000. When she refused to pay the fee in 1997, the bus of her firm came under machine-gun fire and a bomb was placed near her office. In addition, a clothing shop she owned went up in flames and her pub was smashed to pieces.

Also in this case, girls were brought to Belgium and the Netherlands for prostitution through a travel agency. In the Netherlands, this Albanian cluster is known by the police as being at the head of the prostitution world. They are those that control contacts with important pimps from Russian, Albanian, Romanian, and Macedonian groups. The head of the network in Bulgaria is a well-known mafia figure who owns a chain of restaurants, pubs, a pawn broker's shop and a taxi company. He maintains good contacts with at least 10 criminal organisations in Bulgaria, amongst them the insurance companies VIS and SIC. From a witness in this case, it appears that a meeting was organised of 10 mafia organisations at which time a number of criminal activities, such as prostitution in the Netherlands and Belgium and activities in economic sectors such as transport, hotel and catering, travel agencies, and car dealerships were divided among them. In the analysis of this case, one notes that people from government circles, from both the Bulgarian government and Western embassy personnel, have had contact with people from these groups.

Since this file was considered by the court as a case of human trafficking and not of human smuggling, the quantitative aspect (typical of human smuggling) was left out of consideration and extreme cases of exploitation remained the main focus.

### Final considerations

#### *Albania*

In the Albanian cluster, we observe that the involvement of the 'intelligence' mainly involves recycled ex-members of the security services who make their know-how available to criminal networks. Furthermore, family relationships in which the *fares* are central are important, that is, the family clan within which the principles of brotherhood, honour, loyalty and secrecy are key (CSD 2004), somewhat comparable to that which can be found in the Sicilian mafia, albeit here it concerns a symbolic family (Paoli 2003).

What is also remarkable is the willingness to cooperate with other ethnic groups. For example, a Serbian who also belonged to the network complained to the police about the racism in the organisation. Without making generalisations about the entire organised human smuggling ring, it is noticeable how in this specific cluster there is excellent coordination. Accordingly, there was telephone communication with a contact in China who was passing information about the departure of Chinese migrants to be brought into contact with the Albanian cluster to bridge a part of the Brussels – England route. One may also note that the point of coordination in China had contacts with other groups in the Netherlands and that it is still operational (at the moment this article is written, August 2005). Some thousands of smuggled migrants could pass through Belgium in that way.

#### *Bulgaria*

In the Bulgarian cluster from the 1990s, we see how a criminal organisation simply assumed significant parts of the structures and the contacts of the security services as well as typical government duties like providing protection. According to authors such as Gambetta (1993) and Varese (2001), the offering of protection by criminal organisations in cooperation with members of security services in Russia was a typical characteristic in the rise of the Russian mafia organisations. What is interesting to see is

that these structures are being recycled as smuggling networks for human smuggling and trafficking and for prostitution.

Based on T.'s listings alone, it is known that an estimated 250 people acquired a visa for Belgium in 1996. Before 1996, the Belgian embassy issued 229 visa listings of which more than 10 were for T.. However, one visa listing can contain several sometimes dozens of names. The importance of the Bulgarian cases rests mainly on the qualitative level of the analysis of the profound infiltration of the government structures and the involvement of former Eastern European security personnel.

### **Human smuggling, a large-scale business or not?**

It is undoubtedly entirely incorrect to conclude from this study that human smuggling is only a matter of coordinated business. The study does show, however, that it is equally incorrect to dismiss this aspect of well-structured business as a marginal phenomenon. Where coordinated business occurs (verifiable in a large number of Eastern European cases), one has the impression that a diversification of the business is taking place in which human trafficking is gaining importance (in the sense of a more long-term exploitation of migrants).

Of course, this does not mean that the individual migrants themselves therefore intend to set up an organised business to arrange their own migration let alone arrange for their continuous exploitation. From our data, it appears that it is very likely that people, initially and for the first part of the route, appeal to a multitude of individual middlemen. However, at a certain moment, and even against their will, they will find themselves within a strictly organised setting for a specific part of their route. One has the impression that, the further people are away from home and the more unfamiliar they are with their new environment, the more likely it is that very well organised networks will at some point assume control.

### **The intermediary structures (e.g. the 'intelligence') in the migration study**

In the last few decades, studies on migratory movements have verified the ties that existed between the countries of origin and the countries of destination, as well as the ties between migration and family structures and strategies (Bretell 2000: 98). The social networks that linked both countries were studied (Boyd 1989; Gurak & Cases 1992; Kritz, Lim & Zlotnik 1992; Boyle, Halfacree & Robinson 1998; Bauer, Epstein

& Gang 2002). Attention was given to transit countries like Mexico and Turkey and countries in Eastern Europe, such as Ukraine (Uehling 2004), the former Yugoslavia (Wieschhoff 2001), and other Central and Eastern European countries (Okolski 2000; Iwinski 2000; Wallace, Chmouliar & Sidorenko 1996). The anthropological research, in turn, focused more on the modernisation theory and on the bipolar framework of region of origin versus region of destination (Bretell 2000: 102). This approach was later followed by an approach from the context of globalisation in which the attention shifted 'from the individual to the macro-level processes' (Bretell 2000: 103). Human smuggling is, justifiably, approached from the same paradigms and the wish to migrate is still considered key.

Nonetheless, what should not be overlooked is that the intermediary level itself between the region of origin and the country of destination can be considered from very different perspectives. The study of this 'in-between' area, in its diversity, promises to show a multitude of versions ranging from multiple, diversifying large-scale business (sometimes criminal in nature) to religious networking (Foner 2003; Levitt 2003; see also the doctoral research of Akçapar 2004) to fragmented, independent initiatives in which the agency remains fully in the hands of the migrant. This article has examined more closely a reality that points more to large-scale business. Speaking of business also mean speaking of specific, mutually complementary skills and know-how. 'Intelligence' can obtain a not-to-be-underestimated role in this.

The efficiency of an organisation that seeks to develop as a business depends, among other things, on the best possible control over the intermediary structures. As far as Eastern Europe is concerned, members of the former 'intelligence' are offered a chance to cash in on their know-how and contacts. This can take on the form of entrepreneurship but also of a calculated provision of know-how and contacts. The business mentality in which this occurs does not exclude the possibility of a specific ethno-cultural effectuation of a network, that, in the case of a more diversified large-scale clustering (as is, for example, the case in the Albanian network described in this article with its contacts with a Chinese supplier) can lead to an ethno-cultural mosaic where local tradition and rational agreements go hand in hand. Anyone who has worked for 'intelligence' can also prove to be of great utility in such ethno-cultural matters.

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