

# The Connections Among Drug Trafficking, Money Laundering, and Aggravated Murder – A Case Study of Montenegro

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In this paper, the authors investigated the connections among the criminal offences of the unauthorised production, possession, and distribution of narcotics, money laundering, and aggravated murder in the context of the conflict between two opposing criminal organisations in Montenegro. The study aims to determine the essential elements of these illegal behaviours and establish effective prevention and control mechanisms. The sample includes all 46 registered cases of aggravated murder committed by professional criminals in the period 2015–2020 as a result of drug smuggling and money laundering. The results of the study show that 30 of the aggravated murders (65.2%) were solved, the scene of the crime was most often a car (14 cases, or 30.4%), most murders (eight cases, or 17.3%) were committed in January, murders occur most often on Mondays (13 cases, or 28%), and the time between 17:00 and 18:00 is when most crimes are committed (nine cases, or 19.5%). The murders were most often committed by firearm discharge (30 cases, or 65.2%) and at a distance of 0–5 metres in 14 homicides (46.6%), while the means of execution was predominantly Heckler & Koch automatic rifles – used in 13 murders (28.2%) – and the victims were mostly aged 30–40 years old (18 cases, or 39.1%). During the observed period, 27.26 tons of cocaine worth several billion euros was seized, whose unauthorised production and distribution were organised by these crime groups, who altogether paid about €890,000 for the murder of rivals. The conclusions of this paper imply that an in-depth research analysis is required to find out the patterns, dynamics, and characteristics of criminal activities. The findings are a basis for a potentially more efficient reaction to these serious forms of crime.

**Keywords:** drug abuse, money laundering, murder, concurrence, Montenegro

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## 1 Introduction

This study focuses on two criminal organisations created in Montenegro that have taken on all the characteristics of transnational organised crime. These organisations originated in the beautiful coastal city of Montenegro, Kotor, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Kotor is the seat of the two strongest criminal clans, not only in Montenegro but also in the broader region. In the two settlements of this town, Škaljari and Kavač, eponymous criminal organisations were formed, which are currently considered to be by far the most dangerous and deadly criminal organisations in this part of Europe. For a long time, these two criminal clans were one organisation that was mainly engaged in the unauthorised production and sale of drugs at the international level. Kotor

is a coastal city, and the leaders of what was once one group managed to gain the services of many sailors for illegal activities as drug traffickers. The criminal organisation split in 2014 when about 300 kg of cocaine disappeared in Valencia and, since then, a bloody war has been fought between them that has claimed dozens of lives, with organised crime posing a serious threat to the rule of law and the development of modern Montenegro. Organised criminal groups became more active in the region following the calming of the security and political situation in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, with both leaders and members mostly drawn from these nations (Rakočević, 2020: 8).

The connections among criminal groups from the territory of Montenegro and those from abroad are evident in almost all cases that are prosecuted, with such cases dominated by drug offences, money laundering, and aggravated murder (Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2019). The situation regarding drug trafficking and distribution is characterised by a high level of organisation, good connections, and the high participation of Montenegrin citizens in criminal groups with an international character. The smuggling of

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narcotics is facilitated by: 1) Montenegro's geostrategic position; 2) the enormous increase in the movement of vehicles and people across the border and more liberal controls; 3) the configuration of the state borders that enable illegal crossings and the transport of drugs, as well as the insufficient number of professional staff, resources, and equipment for the work of police officers in these highly complex operational affairs; and 4) connections by the sea with all continents.

The profitability of illegal, drug-related activities, regardless of the detection and interception of smuggling channels and the neutralisation of several international criminal groups, encourages many to engage in these activities. Research indicates that organised criminal groups in Montenegro have direct links with smugglers and drug dealers in other countries, which allows them to organise the smuggling and sale of drugs, earning high profits.

The drug trade thus appears to be a major problem in the region, especially the trade in marijuana from Albania and heroin from Turkey, which is then transported onwards through the former Yugoslav states to Western Europe (Council of Europe, 2006: 92). Smuggling of cannabis products from Albania is a significant security problem for Montenegro, and while some of the smuggled drugs remain in the country, most of it is smuggled to others in the region and even further into the European Union. Despite the significant engagement and cooperation with the police of Albania and other countries in the region, the situation in this area of Montenegro, due to increased demand for cannabis on the illegal market in the EU, has not improved significantly (Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2018).

Montenegro is a territory through which the main routes of heroin smuggling from the Middle East to Western Europe pass. Processed cases, international investigations, operational findings, and information obtained through international police cooperation confirm the involvement of Montenegrin citizens in organising the smuggling of cocaine from South America to illegal markets in Europe. High profits from the smuggling and sale of cocaine are controlled by well-organised criminal groups, which significantly expand their range of criminal activities through money laundering. The Report on the Work of the Prosecutorial Council and the State Prosecutor's Office in Montenegro shows that in 2020 some 218 people were reported for committing the criminal offence of the unauthorised production, possession, and trafficking of drugs (239 people were reported in 2019 and 201 in 2018). In the period 2017–2020, 42 people were reported for aggravated murder, while in the same period 237 people were reported for money laundering (Tužilački savjet, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021).

Despite numerous problems, some progress has been made in this area in terms of legislation. Here, we primarily refer to specifying the elements of the crime of money laundering. By-laws have also been adopted to implement the Law on the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (Zakon o sprječavanju pranja novca i finansiranja terorizma, 2018). The Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code of Montenegro from 2017 significantly enhanced the prosecution of money laundering under Article 268, which clearly prescribes that to establish the existence of this, it is not necessary to have a conviction for the predicate criminal offence from which the money originated. However, the old legal framework continues to apply in proceedings conducted for criminal offences committed before 2017, except in cases where the new law is more favourable to the perpetrator. In this way, it is significantly easier to prove the occurrence of money laundering, thus enhancing the effectiveness of criminal proceedings (Krivični zakonik Crne Gore, 2017).

The subject of this paper is the analysis of the connections among drug abuse, money laundering, and aggravated murders by members of two opposing clans in Montenegro. The research aims to determine the phenomenological, etiological, and victimological dimensions of these crimes, and propose measures that can significantly contribute to the more efficient suppression and prevention of them.

## 2 Review of Previous Research

The problem of crimes committed by the powerful and the resulting responsibility (or, to use a better term, lack of responsibility) for such crimes has long been known (Kleimenov & Meško, 2019: 384). The findings show that even before World War I, some forms of criminal activity had all the signs of organised crime. Still, they were not categorised as such and were not discussed in scientific circles abroad, such as in Italy or the US (Slak, Fank, & Meško, 2015: 115).<sup>3</sup> The term

<sup>3</sup> The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines organised crime as any group with some form of the formalised structure whose primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities. These groups maintain their position in society by threats, violence, bribery of state officials, and extortion, and have a strong impact on the people in the local community, region, or country as a whole (FBI, 2010). Organised crime is crime committed by structured groups, which usually includes offering illegal goods and services. With its operations, organised crime establishes a parallel state system that undermines various state monopolies by means of coercion; organised crime's ability to levy taxes poses and presents a direct threat to the state and social structures in the places where it operates (Dobovšek, 2009: 18). Typically, organised crime is accompanied by violence, killings, terrorism, kidnapping, and other coercive means of achieving objectives and subjugating competitors (Eman & White, 2020).

“organised crime” makes one think of the mafia, i.e., large or small-scale (traditional or more recent) illegal business structures that earn their money (and gain power) by selling illicit goods or services, extorting payments in exchange for security, borrowing (and laundering) “dirty” money, robbery, and a range of other criminal activities (Kanduč, 2006: 42). A local protest movement in Montenegro has raised a series of specific criminological issues (e.g. various forms of corruption, robbery, and violence) that, in one way or another, relate to the question of power and control in society (Kanduč, 2013: 318). Significant social and economic changes, increasing globalisation and differentiation, altered relations among people, and changes in values all affect the occurrence of violence and various forms of crime (Umek, 2013: 44).

The issue of organised crime is the subject of regulation in numerous international documents, of which we emphasise the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UN General Assembly, 2000).<sup>4</sup> The Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (Council of Europe, 2005), as well as the European Union Working Group in Narcotics and Organised Crime in 1994, also dealt with this issue.<sup>5</sup> At

the national level, the Montenegrin Law on the Prevention of Drug Abuse (Zakon o sprječavanju zloupotrebe droga, 2011) also regulates drug trafficking in the relevant provisions as one of the most common forms of organised crime.<sup>6</sup>

The crimes committed by organised groups aim to acquire property, which the beneficiaries later attempt to introduce into legal channels through money laundering, which is the synthesis of criminal and legal activities. In Montenegro, particularly risky areas with regard to money laundering include gambling, privatisation, construction of buildings, and purchasing real estate, luxury, and other goods. In earlier years, money that was illegally acquired, mainly in Russia, was often invested in land, hotels, and villas on the Montenegrin coast (Rakočević, 2020: 17).

Offshore companies are also used to cover the origin of capital in Montenegro, so it is possible to return money that has been illegally acquired through privatisation or the sale of companies in the country to foreign investors. Wherever offshore companies have emerged as owners of companies, there are serious indications that money laundering has taken place through these firms (Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2016a, 2016b).

During the last few decades, the region of the former Yugoslavia has gained attention as an increasingly important route in the global drug trafficking system. Drug trafficking groups operate as loosely organised networks, interrelated through diverse transnational networks in order to successfully circumvent law enforcement efforts (Koturovic & Knepper, 2014: 316). Research in various transition countries supports the thesis that widespread corruption, associated with weak governance and state institutions, facilitates the proliferation of organised crime and reinforces the illicit activities of transnational criminal organisations (Shelley, 2002: 85). Such criminal networks often use the ‘Balkan drug route’, the main path by which narcotics, particularly heroin, are smuggled

<sup>4</sup> In order to more effectively promote cooperation in the fight against transnational organised crime, the international community has adopted the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UN General Assembly, 2000), which defines an organised crime group as: “an organised group of three or more people, existing for a certain period of time and acting by agreement for the purpose of committing one or more serious crimes or criminal offences, established in accordance with this Convention, for the purpose of obtaining, directly or indirectly, financial or other material gain.” The Convention defines a transnational criminal offence as: “an offence committed in several States or in one State, but most of the preparation, planning, management or control is carried out in another State, then if the offence is committed in one State but includes an organised crime group which deals with criminal activities in several states or is committed in one state but with significant consequences which have occurred in another state” (UN General Assembly, 2000). Article 2 of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UN General Assembly, 2000) defines “a felony” as “an act which constitutes a criminal offence punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of at least four years or a more severe punishment”

<sup>5</sup> Article 9 of the Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism contains the following elements: 1) the conversion or transfer of property, with the knowledge that the property represents the proceeds of crime, for the purpose of concealing or disguising the illegal origin of the property or assisting any person involved in the commission of a criminal offence in concurrence to avoid the legal consequences of his actions; 2) concealment or disguising of the true nature, source, location, disposition, movement, property rights or ownership of property,

knowing that such property represents the proceeds of crime; 3) the acquisition, possession or use of property, with the knowledge, at the time of receipt of that property, that it represents the proceeds of crime; 4) the participation, association or conspiracy to commit, attempts to commit and aiding, abetting facilitating and helping with advising on the commission of any act established in accordance with this article (Council of Europe, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> In accordance with the provisions of the international conventions against drug abuse, the Montenegrin Law on the Prevention of Drug Abuse defines drug abuse as: “the cultivation or processing of plants for obtaining drugs, possession of drugs, illicit or excessive drug use outside of therapeutic indications, as well as production and trafficking, contrary to the provisions of this law” (Zakon o sprječavanju zloupotrebe droga, 2011).

into Europe (Michaletos, 2007). The Balkan route, or the Pan-European Corridor X, involves several South-East European states, which play significant roles in the distribution of heroin, cocaine, cannabis, and synthetic drugs, including Albania, Southern Bulgaria, Northern Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia (European Commission, 2013). Overall, the presence of Balkan drug trafficking networks undermines democracy, inhibits the development of stable societies, and may also succeed in subverting law enforcement throughout Western Europe (Hajdinjak, 2002: 17).

The main perpetrators of violence in the Balkans are organised criminal groups from the countries of the former Yugoslavia, Albania, Turkey, and others, and they tend to be named after certain places or families. Criminals from these groups are very well connected, regardless of their nationalities, and the region is recognised as having the highest number of hired and well-paid killers in Europe. Young people from Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, and Albania, who have access to weapons and explosives, particularly stand out in this context, and this was especially evident during the conflict between the Kotor clans, with investigations showing that both had hired paid killers.

However, it should be noted that the state and trends of criminal activities in this area vary in individual countries, and an analysis of registered criminal offences shows that the total number of criminal offences in Slovenia, another nation from the former Yugoslavia, decreased in the period 2008–2017 (Japelj, 2018: 76).

In Serbia, in 2020, the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime directly initiated criminal charges against 216 people, while from the years before that criminal charges remain unresolved in relation to 203 people. The structure of reported crimes in Serbia is dominated by aggravated murders, unauthorised production and distribution of narcotics, and money laundering. According to a report by the Public Prosecutor's Office of Serbia, in 2019 criminal charges relating to organised crime were started against 293 people, while another state prosecutor's office reported criminal charges against 204 people. In 2019, the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime of Serbia had charges against 579 people (Republičko javno tužilaštvo Srbije, 2020, 2021).

The number of criminal offences against life and body that were recorded in Serbia in 2019 fell compared with the previous year. In 2019, 1,441 people were charged for crimes of violence, while in 2018, 1,640 people were arrested and charged for the same. A significant increase was registered in the criminal offence of money laundering, with 136 people charged for this in 2019, and 280 in 2019 (Republičko javno tužilaštvo Srbije, 2021).

According to data on the progress of cases in the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime of Croatia in 2020, 535 criminal charges were received for the criminal offences of organised crime and corruption, while the number was 439 in 2019, showing a rise of 96 (Državno odvjetništvo Republike Hrvatske, 2020, 2021).

In Croatia, the State Prosecutor's offices received 35,912 criminal complaints in 2019, which is 758 more than in 2018, when 35,154 people were charged, representing an increase of 2.1%. In the observed period, there was an increase of 8.6% in criminal offences in the field of drug trafficking, sale and abuse. In 2019, 34 people were charged for the criminal offence of money laundering, a figure which is almost identical to the previous year (Državno odvjetništvo Republike Hrvatske, 2020, 2021).

In 2020, 245 individuals were convicted for organised crime in Montenegro, which is 26.23% of the 934 people charged. While 47 reports from the previous period remained unresolved in the work of the Special Prosecutor's Office, there were charges brought against a total of 292 people, a rise of 19.67% compared with the 244 in 2019. In Montenegro, most of the people arrested were from Podgorica, Kotor, Bar, Nikšić, and Berane (Tužilački savjet, 2021: 187).

A significant increase in aggravated murder offences was recorded in Montenegro in 2019, up by 61.5% compared to 2018. Criminal offences in the field of drug trafficking, sale and abuse increased by 18.9%. For the criminal offence of money laundering, in 2019 prosecutors acted on charges against 97 people, in 2018 against 95 people and in 2017 against 34 (Tužilački savjet, 2020).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, 21,782 criminal charges were made against 31,329 people. If we compare this data with 2017, we see that the number of reports submitted is lower by 890 cases and 691 with regard to people. During 2018, 66 criminal charges against 600 people were received for organised crime, while in 2017, 68 criminal charges were received against 555 people (Tužilaštvo Bosne i Hercegovine, 2020).

In 2019, 29,733 criminal offences were registered in Northern Macedonia, while in 2018, 31,511 criminal offences were registered. In 2019, 897 criminal offences of unauthorised drug trafficking were reported, and in 2018, 603 such criminal offences were recorded. In 2019, 22 criminal offences of aggravated murder were registered, while in 2018, there were 43 (Jabno obvinjenje na Republika Severna Makedonija, 2020).

In Kosovo, the State Prosecutor's Office had 55,293 criminal charges pending in 2019, 10.7% less than in 2018. In 2019,

the Special Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kosovo had 2,191 criminal charges pending (Prokurori i Shetit. Republika e Kosoves, 2020). In 2019, 59,882 people were reported in Albania for committing crimes, which is 3.73% more than in 2018 (Prokurori i Shetit Shqiperise, 2020).

### 3 Organised Crime Offences in Montenegro – Case Study

From 1990 to 2015, a total of 522 aggravated murders were committed in Montenegro, whose perpetrators were unknown at the time the crimes were committed, thus presenting a significant challenge in bringing them to justice. In this period, a total of 105 (20.11%) professional murders were committed, 36 (34.28%) of which were solved, with the remaining 69 cases (65.71%) still open (Rakočević, 2016: 351).

Murder motivated by greed is the most common form of aggravated murder in Montenegro, which includes killing someone to obtain some material benefit for oneself or another, such as murder for a reward, of a creditor to avoid paying a debt, for an inheritance, and so on. The difference between this form of aggravated murder and aggravated forms of robbery and burglary is that in the former the intent is focused on taking another person's life, rather than obtaining property. However, both kinds of crimes coincide if the focus of a murder is on getting money or other valuables. In line with the principle of speciality, we qualify these murders as severe forms of robbery or burglary (Krivični zakonik Crne Gore, 2017).

Very diverse criminal networks at the regional and international levels are involved in inter-clan conflicts and the numerous illegal activities of clans. One of the essential characteristics of these adaptable types of criminal organisations is interregional and international connectivity, and a proven ability to adapt to conditions in different countries. According to available data, many of the checkpoints of these two clans are located in other countries in the region and beyond. They are thus part of a global criminal phenomenon that has long transcended national borders in search of the broadest platform for action, and uses highly sophisticated methods of committing crimes.

The transnational character of the Kavač and Škaljari clans is sufficiently illustrated by the drug seizures and murders that have taken place around the world in which members of these groups have been deeply involved. This is supported by the fact that in mid-2019, during the seizure in Philadelphia of 20 tons of cocaine on the ship MSC Guyana, owned by the Mediterranean Shipping Co, which is based in

Geneva, several members of the Škaljari clan were arrested. The final destination of the ship that was loaded with cocaine was a port in the Netherlands. The fact that sailors from Montenegro, mostly from Kotor, which has a centuries-old maritime tradition, are deeply involved in the cocaine business, was also shown by an operation in 2019 in Peru, where police searched a ship of which the entire crew consisted of Montenegrins belonging to the Škaljari clan and found 2.2 tons of cocaine. This ship, the MSC Carlotta, set sail from the Chilean port of Calao under the flag of Liberia, and the cargo's final destination was Belgium. The fact that the clans from Kotor have a well-developed business with the distribution of cocaine by ship was recently confirmed in Tivat, where a search of a training ship, the Jadran, belonging to the Montenegrin navy, turned up 60 kg of cocaine. The drugs had been brought on board by an officer on the orders of one of the Kotor clans, and the ship's destinations were Turkey and Greece (Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2020).

At the end of February 2020, about 5 tons of cocaine was seized in the waters of Venezuela from the ship Aressa, and Montenegrin citizens who were members of the Kavač clan were arrested. The Aressa had been monitored along its entire journey off South America, with special control measures on each entry and exit from the port. The Dutch navy intercepted the ship, and the drugs were found during a search, with the cocaine set to have been smuggled into Europe (Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2020).

The criminal group from Kotor was formed in 2010 after the murder of the person who had controlled most illegal activities in the city until then. After this man's death, those who worked under him continued in their drug trafficking. This criminal organisation remained in operation until 2014, when it split into the "Škaljarski" and "Kavački" clans. The reason for this was that 200 kg of cocaine, which was in a common "box", disappeared that year in Valencia. The drugs belonged to members of the current Kavački clan, who tried to sell them without the knowledge of the person who later became the leader of the Škaljarski clan. However, the drugs were found and taken away by a person close to the Škaljarski, who refused to return it to the Kavački clan, which is why he was killed. This was the first victim in a spiral of violence which continues today. A large number of people have been killed in the clan war, with the murders carried out mainly in Montenegro although also in other countries, such as Spain, Greece, Serbia, Austria, Ukraine, and Argentina. The cases processed so far have unequivocally shown that money from the sale of drugs was used to finance the murders. Given the inadequate response from the authorities, a lack of preventive activities is evident here. "The seemingly simple problem of studying criminal prevention is becoming more and more

complex and necessary for multi and interdisciplinary study” (Meško, 2000: 726). Keeping in mind that this is a problem that has been neglected for decades, it is unlikely that even the best prevention programs will help in a short period (Rakočević, 2020: 7).

#### 4 Methods and Sample

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyse the connections among drug trafficking, money laundering, and the aggravated murders of members of two

#### 5 Results

The results refer to the total number of people killed in conflicts between the two criminal organisations with regard to membership of the clans, the extent to which these crimes were solved light, the place of the murder, its time, manner, means, the age of the murder victims, and the amount of money paid for the murders.

In the period from the beginning of 2015 to 6 March 2020, 46 murders were committed (Table 1). The highest number of murders was committed in 2018, at 11 (23.9%),

**Table 1:** The number of killed clan members, accidental victims, and statistics of unsolved murder cases (source: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2021)

Year	No. of people killed	Škaljari clan	Kavač clan	Accidental victims	Solved criminal offences	Unsolved criminal offences
2015	5 (10.8%)	2 (4.3%)	2 (4.3%)	1 (2.1%)	3 (60%)	2 (40%)
2016	8 (17.3%)	2 (4.3%)	4 (8.6%)	2 (4.3%)	6 (75%)	2 (25%)
2017	9 (19.5%)	6 (13%)	2 (4.3%)	1 (2.1%)	6 (66%)	3 (33%)
2018	11 (23.9%)	4 (8.6%)	6 (13%)	1 (2.1%)	8 (72%)	3 (27%)
2019	7 (15.2%)	4 (8.6%)	3 (6.5%)	–	5 (71%)	2 (28%)
2020	6 (13%)	3 (6.5%)	3 (6.5%)	–	2 (33%)	4 (66%)
Total	46 (100%)	21 (45.6%)	20 (43.4%)	5 (10.8%)	30 (65.2%)	16 (34.7%)

opposing clans in Montenegro. Furthermore, we try to determine the phenomenological, etiological, and victimological dimensions of these three crimes in our study. The paper was conceived as a study of all cases of aggravated murder using multiple primary written and unwritten data sources. The written primary sources of data used in the research included the original police, prosecutorial, and court case materials, such as investigation reports, reports on the forensic processing of crime scenes, criminal expertise, indictments, and verdicts. The data were collected by analysing the original files of the police, state prosecutor’s office, and court cases from 1 June 2019 to 1 June 2020. The unwritten primary data sources refer to the opinions of police officers, prosecutors, and judges who acted in individual cases. Surveys and interviews were conducted in the period from 15 March to 15 June 2020. Statistical methods were used to process the collected data.

The sample includes all 46 cases of aggravated murders committed from 1 January 2015 to 6 March 2020. We point out that the study did not cover numerous cases of attempted murder since the documentation about them was incomplete.

then in 2017, with nine (19.5%). Fewer murders were committed in 2016, at eight (17.3%), while in 2019, there were seven murders (15.2%). The lowest number of murders was committed at the beginning of the clan conflict in 2015, just five (10.8%). However, in the first two months and five days of 2020 six murders were committed, or 13% of the total for the period covered, which indicates that the conflict between the clans is intensifying. The state authorities have data which indicates there are dozens of members of these criminal groups in Montenegro, but the exact number is difficult to determine since most such individuals are located in other countries (Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2020).

In the observed period, 41 members of the two opposing criminal clans were killed, and during this time there were five accidental victims. In total, there were 21 (51.2%) victims from the Škaljari clan, while there were 20 (48.7%) from the Kavač clan, with five accidental victims (10.8%). In 2015, one person was killed accidentally, in 2016 two, while in 2017 and 2018 one such person was killed each year. In one case, the killers changed their target and murdered someone else, while in four cases people died because they were near the target of the attack.

Such crimes are among the most difficult to solve, as they are committed in an organised manner, and all the perpetrators are unknown at the time of murders. Compared to previous periods, a high percentage of solved crimes was recorded in the observed period, amounting to 30 (65.2%), with 16 (34.7%) unsolved crimes, and the application of modern methods and techniques of crime detection has contributed significantly to this. We emphasise that the victims of these crimes are, in most cases, lower-level people in the two criminal organisations, soldiers rather than generals, since the leaders of these clans are under physical and technical security 24 hours a day, and it is difficult for their enemies to get close.

**Table 2:** The places where the aggravated murders were committed (source: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2021)

Site of the murder	No. of victims
Car	14 (30.4%)
Street	13 (28.2%)
Restaurant, café	7 (15.2%)
Family home	5 (10.8%)
Building entrance	2 (4.3%)
Elevator	1 (2.1%)
Car service	1 (2.1%)
Stadium	1 (2.1%)
Prison	1 (2.1%)
Garage	1 (2.1%)
Total	46 (100%)

Concerning the crime scene, the highest number of murders occurred while the victim was in a passenger motor vehicle, at 14 (30.4%). In all 14 cases, the victims were killed using an explosive device. In second place is in the street, where 13 (28.2%) murders were committed. A significant number of murders, seven (15.2%), were committed in restaurants or cafés. Five (10.8%) victims were killed in their family home or directly in front of it. Two victims were killed near the entrance to their apartment buildings, then one in a car repair shop, one in a stadium, and one each in a prison, garage, and elevator. The murder of a clan member in prison was not committed in the closed part of the prison in Podgorica (Spuž), which is surrounded by walls, but in a semi-open area that is not protected by a solid wall, and thus the killer was able to use a sniper rifle.

The majority of murders were committed with a firearm (Table 3), and 30 people (65.2%) were killed in this way. In second place is the planting and activation of an explosive device, which killed 14 people (30.4%). One murder (2.17%) was carried out by throwing the tied-up victim into water, while another killing (2.17%) was carried out by strangulation. The method of execution is often essential for solving these crimes to light, as a specific manner of execution tends to characterise the perpetrator, indicating their personality or some special knowledge, skills, and abilities that they possess.

An analysis of how the murders were committed, as shown in Table 4, shows that the highest number, 13 (28.2%), were carried out with Heckler & Koch firearms. In second place is the CZ Scorpion firearm, used to kill 11 (23.9%) people. In third place as a means of murder is the explosive trinitrotoluene (TNT), which was used to kill six (13%), followed by the explosive pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN), which was used to kill five people (10.8%), while MP 40 Schmeisser fire-

**Table 3:** The modus operandi of execution (source: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2021)

Modus operandi of execution	Firearm	Explosive device	Drowning	Strangulation
Number of murders	30 (65.2%)	14 (30.4%)	1 (2.17%)	1 (2.17%)

**Table 4:** The means of execution (source: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2021)

Means of execution	Automatic rifle Heckler & Koch	Automatic pistol CZ Scorpion	Short machine gun MP 40 Schmeisser	Pistol M21	Explosive trinitrotoluene (TNT)	Explosive pentaerythritol-tetranitrate (PETN)	Mixture of TNT and PETN
No. of victims	13 (28.2%)	11 (23.9%)	3 (6.5%)	3 (6.5%)	6 (13%)	5 (10.8%)	3 (6%)

arms were used in three murders, the same number of people killed using Zastava M21 firearms. Finally, three people were killed using a mixture of TNT and PENT explosives. Forensic examinations, i.e. ballistics of the criminal means and objects, were performed by analysing the shell casings, projectiles, and any weapons found from which the shots were fired. Highly selective and sensitive methods were used to determine the type of explosives used in the killings.

In contrast, in most cases in the period examined in the current study the victims were shot from a distance of 0–5 metres, in 14 (46.6%) murders, while eight victims (26.6%) were shot from a distance of 5–10 metres. The killings were carried out at a distance of 10–20 metres from the victim in four cases (13.3%), and 20–40 metres in two (4.34%). The perpetrator was at a distance of 40–80 metres in one case (2.17%), while in another case (2.17%) he was at a distance of more than 80 metres (Table 6).

**Table 5:** The number of bullets fired at the victim (source: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2021)

No. of bullets fired at victim	1–5	5–10	10–15	15–20	20–25	25–30	30+
No. of victims	5 (16.6%)	12 (40%)	7 (23.3%)	3 (10%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)

**Table 6:** Firing distance (source: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2021)

Firing distance (metres)	0–5 metres	5–10 metres	10–20 metres	20–40 metres	40–80 metres	80+ metres
No. of murders	14 (46.6%)	8 (26.6%)	4 (13.3%)	2 (4.34%)	1 (2.17%)	1 (2.17%)

**Table 7:** Month of execution (source: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2021)

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. of victims	8 (17.3%)	/	6 (13%)	4 (8.6%)	3 (6.5%)	6 (13%)	7 (15.2%)	3 (6.5%)	5 (5%)	/	2 (4.3%)	2 (4.3%)

In terms of the number of bullets fired, as shown in Table 5, most murders (12 cases, 40%) were committed with five to ten of these. In second place are cases in which 10 to 15 bullets were fired at victims, which happened in seven cases (23.3%). In third place are five homicides (16.6%) in which between one and five bullets were fired, followed by three cases (10%) with 15 to 20 bullets. In one case (3.3%), 20 to 25 bullets were fired. Finally, there was one case in which 25 to 30 bullets were used, and another with more than 30. Comparing the results of our study against those in other reports, we found that there is significant overlap. In particular, this study confirmed the findings from a previous study that the use of firearms is a common feature of murders, with earlier research reporting the use of firearms in about 60% of all murders (Rančić, Đurović, & Rančić, 2013). The earlier study also found many murders with multiple shots fired at the victim from automatic weapons, with the killings mostly carried out from a considerable distance and with the killers aiming at the victim's head to ensure their death.

Intriguing data were obtained regarding the month in which the murders were committed, showing that the weather conditions were not related to the commission of aggravated murders by organised criminal groups. This can be seen in the fact that the number of murders is approximately the same in the coldest month of January (eight, 17.3%) and the warmest month of July (seven, 15.2%). In June and March six murders were registered (13%), then in September five (10.8%), while in April four (8.6%) murders were recorded. Three murders were registered in May and August, and two murders were committed in November and December. During the observed period, no murders were registered in February or October (Table 7). The importance of determining the time of execution of a crime according to the year, month, day, and hour is reflected in the fact that, based on the time of commission, certain institutes of the Criminal Code are applied, and certain facts are only taken into account if they existed at the time of commission. When determining the perpetrator's age, sanity, and the moment from which the state of limitations begins

to run, the time when the criminal act is committed is taken into account. We pointed this out because of the specifics of this type of crime, i.e. professional killing, which in terms of the time of execution deviates from specific criminological theories that blood crimes are most often committed in the summer months and property crimes in the winter.

ber between 16:00 and 17:00, while one murder (2.7%) was in the period from 10:00 to 11:00. It is interesting to note that no murders were registered in the period from 23:00 to 10:00 the next day, nor in the period from 13:00 to 16:00. The time of the commission of a criminal offence may be its constitutive feature, and is especially important for checking alibis.

**Table 8:** Day of execution (source: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2021)

Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
No. of victims	13 (28.6%)	5 (10.8%)	3 (6.5%)	6 (13%)	6 (13%)	8 (17.3%)	5 (10.8%)

Regarding the day of the week in which murders were registered, it was determined that most of these crimes were committed on a Monday, at 13 (28.6%). Saturday follows, with eight (17.3%) murders, while six (13%) were committed on a Thursday and the same on a Friday, while five (10.8%) were committed on a Tuesday and the same on a Sunday. The lowest number of murders was on a Wednesday, at three (6.5%) (Table 8).

In Table 10, we can see that most of the victims, 18 (39.1%), were aged 30–40 years, followed by those aged 40–50 (13, 28.2%). There were eight victims (17.3%) aged 50–60, and seven (15.2%) aged 20–30. There were no victims younger than 20, nor older than 60.

**Table 9:** Hour of the killings (source: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2021)

Hour	10–11	11–12	12–13	16–17	17–18	18–19	19–20	20–21	21–22	22–23
No. of victims	1 (2.7%)	2 (4.3%)	8 (17.3%)	2 (4.3%)	9 (19.5%)	5 (10.8%)	6 (13%)	6 (13%)	4 (8.6%)	3 (6.5%)

Table 9 shows that most murders, nine (19.5%), were committed from 17:00 to 18:00, while eight (17.3%) were committed from 12:00 to 13:00. Six (13%) murders were committed between 19:00 and 20:00, and the same number

The activities of these criminal organisations are supported by the money gained from drug trafficking, and two models of financing the killings of clan members have been identified. The first is direct and works on the principle of “cash in

**Table 10:** The age of the murdered victims (source: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2021)

Age of victims	20–30	30–40	40–50	50–60
No. of victims	7 (15.2%)	18 (39.1%)	13 (28.2%)	8 (17.3%)

**Table 11:** The money paid for the killings (Source: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Crne Gore, 2018–2020).

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total paid killings (in EUR)	80,000	140,000	120,000	310,000	150,000	90,000

between 20:00 and 21:00. Five (10.8%) murders were committed from 18:00 to 19:00, four (8.6%) from 21:00 to 22:00, and three (6.5%) from 22:00 to 23:00. Finally, two (4.3%) murders were committed between 11:00 and 12:00, and the same num-

ber”, which is the money shown in Table 11, as found by police investigators. The second is indirect, by which illegal earnings are laundered, “legalised”, and delivered through legitimate financial flows.

## 6 Concluding Discussion

Aggravated murders, money laundering, and crime related to drug trafficking are offences that are closely related to organised crime. Organised crime refers to criminal groups (in our case clans) with a high degree of organisation, hierarchy, shared tasks, discipline, and planning with regard to illegal activities aimed at making a profit, including some connections with official structures (Elliot, 1952: 12). These connections between organised crime and official structures are reflected in the neutralising of the police and the judiciary, along with the corruption of the government, thus enabling members of organised crime groups to get away with their crimes and enter into legal activities (Schneider, 1987: 18). Organised crime thus impacts politics, public administration, the judiciary, the economy, and the media (Kaiser, 1996), and the links between state bodies and organised crime are achieved through the corruption and violence (Savone, 1995: 27). To define organised crime, it is necessary to determine precise criteria. The one-dimensional model encompasses the approach system, organisational approach, and approach activity. The organisational dimension of organised crime emphasises multidimensional concepts by detailing the four levels of complexity of this criminal phenomenon (von Lampe, 2006: 77). However, for organised crime to exist, it is not necessary for there to be a specific connection between the criminal organisation and the state.

It is indisputable that organised crime is a great challenge, risk, and threat for Montenegro. A European Commission report from 2019 states that Montenegro is only moderately prepared in its fight against such crime (European Commission, 2019), although a significant shift was noted in cooperation between different judicial bodies in the suppression of organised forms of crime. Successful collaboration between police forces was highlighted internationally through high-profile operations, drug dealers' arrests, and narcotics seizures. In the previous period, the Montenegrin police force participated in numerous activities that resulted in discovering large quantities of drugs (among which were several tons of cocaine) based on their own operational information or through joint operations with other security services. Analysis of the research results indicates that criminal organisations in Montenegro are a synthesis of a professional and adaptable type of criminal organisation. The characteristics of a professional type are reflected in the fact that both clans specialise in three types of illegal activities: organising the smuggling of narcotics, money laundering, and aggravated murder. They also contain adaptive characteristics since they are very flexible and, to a large extent, adapt to the conditions that guarantee illegal gains. These criminal clans have long since grown into transnational criminal organisations in terms of organisation, size, type of

activity, and territorial distribution. This is evidenced by their geographic spread, which has been even wider lately, while at the same time, there has been a fusion of transnational criminal organisations carrying out the same illegal activities on multiple continents. The Škaljari and Kavač clans are modern criminal organisations that are successfully mastering new technologies, which allow them to carry out their activities at an international level. The investigations and cases processed so far have shown that they are using encrypted forms of communication, successfully finding new smuggling channels, improving the existing ways of committing crimes, performing money laundering via cryptocurrencies, using offshore zones, and so on. The clans have financed, transported, and distributed large quantities of cocaine from South America to Europe. Their ability to work with local criminal groups and access cocaine at the source, combined with a significant presence in European port cities, means that they can control the supply of cocaine from its origin to its ultimate destination (Kemp, 2020: 3).

Concerning the essential elements of the criminal offence of aggravated murder, research has shown that the members of these organisations have shown a high degree of brutality, and the victims generally had no chance of survival, as seen in the many bullets fired or use of explosive substances of great destructive power. From the point of view of criminology, we can classify the members of these groups as professional lawbreakers, which is the basic determinant of contemporary crime, who commit crimes primarily out of greed or habit, as characterised by patterns of behaviour specific to these forms of crime. The fact that none of the prosecuted members of clans showed any sense of guilt or pity for their victims is worrying. Of particular concern is increased violence between clans, since even while we were finishing this work several more people were killed in the continuation of the conflict. As they say in Montenegro, they are up to their knees in blood and could not stop even if they wanted to. All this is even more reason to devote more attention to these very dangerous criminals in scientific research.

The links between money laundering and the financing and carrying out of murders in the cases that we investigated are multiple and intertwined, considering that large amounts of dirty money and other assets of value were paid or transferred to professional killers and others involved in the criminal chain to kill members of the opposing clan. This study notes that eliminating the cause is the most effective way of fighting crime. Criminals try to convert the large sums of money generated by committing crimes into legal income through money laundering. In these cases, the criminals redirected part of this money to finance the murders of opponents by changing and perfecting the techniques of commit-

ting these crimes. We believe that ending the funding of the perpetrators of aggravated murder is an essential aspect of the fight against these severe forms of crime.

In the cases that were the subject of our interest, it was established that members of these criminal organisations transferred illegally acquired money, generated mainly by the sale of cocaine procured in South America, to Montenegro through offshore companies and paid this into the accounts of companies and banks. After being put into legal channels, these funds were used to buy companies, real estate, cars, gold, diamonds, and other valuables. Many cases were registered in which murders were paid for with real estate or vehicles that originated from dirty money. Most of this money was withdrawn from accounts in cash and paid to professional killers and their accomplices. The existing legislation does not regulate all the ways in which criminal organisations obtain and direct funds. A particular challenge are the activities of an increasing number of criminal organisations that are branches of the Kavač and Škaljari clans, both in the region and beyond, with their conflicts intensifying in recent years. All this indicates the complexity that comes with tackling these forms of crime.

When it comes to money laundering and the financing of aggravated murders, the key question is how to achieve effective suppression if sophisticated money laundering methods are taken into account, including multiple financial transactions, as well as multi-country transfers. Money laundering is a process in which illegally acquired income is converted into legally obtained funds, and their original origin is concealed.

In our study, we proved that illegally acquired money and other valuables comprise an important support for financing murders. There is a wide range of activities that are financed with dirty money, including the planning, inciting, abetting, and directly committing of murders. It is indisputable that money laundering and funding murders have similarities with regard to concealing criminal activities. The problems in detecting and proving these crimes are that the perpetrators of money laundering do not keep records of their illegal activities, and the same is true for the perpetrators and financiers of murders. The international character of these crimes and the slowness of criminal law cooperation between states in this area are just some of the obstacles to effectively combating these crimes.

We compared the results obtained in this study with research from others. In a sample of 271 homicides committed over a period of 13 years observed from the victim's point of view, it was determined that the degree of the victim's role in the murder is different and varies from cases where the per-

petrator and the victim did not know each other, to cases in which the victim is considered guilty. In 60% of cases, the victim's behaviour was the immediate cause of the murder (Pečar, 1971). The perpetrators of the murders have, in most cases, manifested violent behaviour before. The victims were mostly married to the perpetrator before the murder. The author concludes that there is no significant difference between the perpetrator of the murder and the victim, and that violent behaviour was inherent to both. The killer used violence to resolve conflicts, satisfying their own needs (Pečar, 1971: 260). Contrary to Pečar (1971), the results of our research coincide significantly in terms of the perpetrator and the victim not knowing each other (a professional killer usually only has information about the physical appearance of the victim, place of residence, movements, etc.) and resolving conflict situations using violence.

One study examining homicides in several cities in the US came to the following conclusions: 1) homicides usually occur during the evening; 2) half of homicides occur in the perpetrator's or victim's home; and 3) homicides do not follow the time of year, and are not most common in the summer (Barlow, 1984: 19). Our study shows that 41% of murders were committed in the evening, partially agreeing with this earlier research. With regard to the crime scene, our study shows that 5% of murders are committed in front of the family home, which is a significant difference compared to the earlier study. This is understandable, considering that these are professional killings, and it is challenging to prepare for and carry out a murder in such conditions. There is also a similarity in the month in which the murders were committed, given that our research shows that 41% of the murders were committed in the warmer months.

Murder is a predominantly male preserve, because about 87% of murderers are male. Most murders are committed with direct intent (91%), with motives including intolerance, revenge, conflict over property, and so on, and firearms or cold weapons are most often used (Pešić, 1972: 75). The facts established in our research indisputably confirm that men dominate in the carrying out of professional murders, as paid killers trained to handle weapons and explosive devices. The motive for them doing this is exclusively greed or revenge, which also partially agrees with the cited research. There are also certain similarities in terms of the means of carrying out the murder, but there is a difference in explosive devices, which, according to the results of our study, are used for murder in 30% of cases. It is important to point out the similarity between both research works in terms of the subjective element of intent, since all professional murders are committed with direct intent, which includes awareness of the act, the will to act, and special criminal intent.

The immediate environment where murders are committed in urban settings is most commonly the street, a park, or other public areas, followed by food service establishments. In terms of the means of carrying out the murder, male killers most often use firearms. In terms of the age category, most murderers are aged 25 to 45 years (Sulejmanov, 1995: 73). The results of the cited research agree with our findings, as we found that in 28% of cases, the murders were committed on the street, which is in second place in terms of frequency in our research.

Previous research on murders in Montenegro shows that murders are most often committed in open spaces, food service establishments, or apartments (Čukić, 2000). Most murders were committed at night and in the afternoon. The killings are mostly committed on Mondays and Tuesdays, most often in the summer months. The perpetrators of murders are predominantly men. In terms of age, most victims are aged between 30 and 50 (Čukić, 2000: 124). Our study also showed that 28% of murders are committed on the street and 15% in restaurants. Concerning the time of day, most murders were committed in the period from 17:00 to 18:00 (19.5%). There is also an important match between this earlier study and our own in relation to the day of the week on which most murders were registered. In our study, this is Monday, when 28.6% of murders were committed. There is also a match in relation to the age of the murder victims. In our study, victims aged 20–40 years constituted 54.3% of the total.

In look at murders in Montenegro, the theory of a “sub-culture of violence” has been confirmed. According to this theory, a murder occurs because of the acceptance of a sub-culture of violence, its norms, patterns of behaviour, and lifestyle within which it is culturally transmitted and allows a conscious and voluntary expression of domination and hostility through the use of force in interaction with other people (Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1982: 39).

Representations of violent behaviour can be expected in any situation in which such behaviour is seen as useful, and the absence of punishment is assumed (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963: 601). It is precisely the creation of a sense of impunity that obviously contributes to the constant increase in these criminal offences, since a large number of such cases have not been solved, and the perpetrators not brought to justice.

During our work on the investigation of crimes committed by the two criminal organisations in Montenegro, we faced numerous obstacles and challenges. The limitations of this research were primarily related to the lack of complete data for some crimes since their perpetrators and evidence were abroad, while international cooperation was lacking. This was also seen in the shortage of papers on this topic.

Nevertheless, based on the available evidence, we have established that there is a link between drug trafficking, money laundering, and aggravated murder by members of criminal groups.

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## Povezave med zlorabo drog, pranjem denarja in umorom – študija primera Črne gore

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V prispevku sta avtorja raziskala povezave med kaznivimi dejanji nepooblaščne (prepovedane) proizvodnje, posesti in distribucije narkotikov, pranjem denarja in umori v kontekstu spora med dvema nasprotujočima si kriminalnima združenjema v Črni gori. Cilj raziskave je opredelitev bistvenih elementov in nezakonitih vedenj ter učinkovitih mehanizmov prevencije in zatiranja. Vzorec zajema vseh 46 registriranih primerov umorov, ki so bili profesionalno storjeni v obdobju 2015–2020 zaradi tihotapljenja mamil in pranja denarja. Rezultati študije kažejo, da: je bilo razrešenih 30 (65,2 %) umorov; je bil najpogosteje kraj zločina avtomobil (14 primerov ali 30,4 %); je bilo največ umorov (8 primerov ali 17,3 %) v mesecu januarju; se umori najpogosteje dogajajo ob ponedeljkih (13 primerov ali 28 %); in je največ kaznivih dejanj (9 primerov ali 19,5 %) storjenih med 17. in 18. uro. Največ umorov je bilo storjenih s strelnim orožjem (30 primerov ali 65,2 %). Storilec je najpogosteje streljal z razdalje 0–5 metrov (14 ali 4,6 %), kot sredstvo za izvršitev pa je bilo pretežno uporabljeno orožje Heckler & Koch – v 13 primerih (28,2 %), medtem ko so bile žrtve večinoma v starostni skupini 30–40 let (18 ali 39,1 %). V opazovanem obdobju je bilo zaseženo 27,26 tone kokaina v vrednosti več milijard evrov, katerega nedovoljeno proizvodnjo in trženje sta organizirala dva klana. Za umore tekmecev je bilo plačanih približno 890.000 EUR. Sklepne ugotovitve prispevka kažejo, da so za uspešno preventivno in represivno delo na področju odzivanja na hude oblike kaznivih dejanj potrebne poglobljene raziskave, ki razkrijejo vzorce, dinamiko in značilnosti, na osnovi katerih je možen čim bolj učinkovit odziv družbe.

**Ključne besede:** zloraba drog, pranje denarja, umor, stek kaznivih dejanj, Črna gora

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