

Organization Attributes Sheet – Darko Saric Group

Author: McKenzie O'Brien

Review: Phil Williams

A. When the organization was formed + brief history
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saric's group appears to have risen to its current position of power in 2005, after prominent members of the America Group (Serbia-Montenegro) were arrested and unable to continue to function as smuggling associates of a powerful unnamed Montenegrin mafia boss; Saric filled this gap, and when Sreten Jovic (Joca Amsterdam) was arrested in 2009, Saric became the Montenegrin boss's sole close associate.¹• In 2008, the police forces and judiciaries of Serbia, Montenegro, several Latin America countries including Argentina and Uruguay, the United States and a few European states, through Operation Balkan Warrior, discovered the Saric group attempting to transport from Uruguay 2.7 tons of cocaine.²
B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,
a. In general
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As pertains to Central America and the Caribbean: Drug Trafficking (cocaine)• Globally: Drug Trafficking (cocaine and heroin), Money Laundering• Money Laundering: Saric engages in extensive money laundering, but mostly in the Balkans. On 6 August 2010, the Special Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime in Serbia issued an indictment against Darko Saric and eight other persons, among whom is Saric's close associate Zoran Copic, for laundering money in the amount exceeding 20 million euros.³
b. <i>Specific detail: types of illicit trafficking activities engaged in</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drug Trafficking: The Saric Group is responsible for transporting large shipments (i.e., tons) of cocaine from Latin America to Europe via the Balkans.⁴ According to Serbian police, Saric was organizing two shipments of cocaine a year. The shipments were more or less the same in size as the one seized in Uruguay, which is between 2 and 3 tons.⁵ The group allegedly has access to its own cocaine plantations in South America, which for a few years have been under the control of a powerful unnamed Montenegrin mafia boss who may also currently be protecting the wanted Saric.⁶ Although Saric is wanted by Interpol, the coca plantations in South America have, according to a close associate of Saric, not stopped functioning "even for a moment."⁷ Additionally, Saric is reported to control/supervise several sophisticated factories in Europe for the manufacture and processing of cocaine.⁸
C. Scope and Size
a. Estimated size of network and membership
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Although information on the actual size of Saric's network is unavailable in open sources, it would appear that the group is relatively small and/or elite and its excellent capacity is derived mainly from massive financial power and strong criminal and legitimate international connections.
b. Countries / regions group is known to have operated in. (i.e. the group's operating area)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As pertains to Central America and the Caribbean: Colombia, Peru, Bolivia,⁹ Uruguay,¹⁰ Argentina,¹¹ "South America" most often mentioned in general• Globally: Serbia, Montenegro, Balkans, Spain, Europe; as of 2010, Saric's people were operating in the cocaine markets in Greece, Italy, and Spain and were planning to extend activities to Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany.¹²

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

D. Leader Characteristics

a. Who is/are the leader(s)

- **Darko Saric** – Montenegrin-born individual. Despite being wanted by Interpol, he allegedly continues to smuggle cocaine from South America and manages his transactions from Montenegro.¹³
- **Luka Bojovic** – “long one of Saric’s main associates,” he may have taken over running much of the group’s day-to-day operations, especially in Europe, after an Interpol warrant was issued for Saric’s arrest in January 2010.¹⁴ Although arrested in 2007 and charged with the illegal possession of firearms and forged documents, he has apparently never served his sentence of 15 months.¹⁵

b. Leadership timeline

- **Saric appears to have risen to his current position of power in 2005**, after prominent members of the America Group (Serbia-Montenegro) were arrested and unable to continue to function as smuggling associates of a powerful unnamed Montenegrin mafia boss; Saric filled this gap, and when Sreten Jovic was arrested in 2009, Saric became the Montenegrin boss’s sole close associate.¹⁶
- Prior to this, Saric may have been part of the America Group, playing an important role in legalizing money and cocaine transfers.¹⁷

c. Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)

- Autocratic to an extent, as Saric likes to have a hand in all aspects of the group’s operations, but he also allows a more diffuse, flexible network structure, with several prominent nodes existing below him. In the last few years, it is claimed, Saric developed a complex network: from directly contracting the cocaine purchase and effecting the payment, to shipping the haul (which was done by oceangoing ships) and managing his dealer network.¹⁸

E. Organizational Structure

a. Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)

- Both hierarchical and network – Saric appears to try to adhere to a hierarchical, centralized structure, but he also makes use of a flexible network structure, with several prominent nodes existing below him (see “Leadership Style” above).

b. Membership – is there formal or informal membership in the organization or network? What role do informal or nonmembers play in trafficking and other criminal activities?

- Prominent members of Saric’s group include:
 - **Drasko Vukovic**¹⁹ - evaded an arrest attempt in Berane (Montenegro) after being tipped off only minutes before the raid occurred.²⁰
 - **Boris Laban**²¹ - arrested in raid executed simultaneously with one that was intended to apprehend Vukovic.
 - **Goran Sokovic** - owned the second largest package of shares in the Podgorica daily *Pobjeda*, the main state newspaper
 - **Nebojsa Joksovic (aka Joksa)** – Saric’s “right-hand man” until his arrest and transition to informant for the prosecution against Saric
 - **Zeljko Vujanovic** – Saric’s cousin²²
 - **Zoran Copic (aka Cop)** – close associate who helped Saric launder millions of KM (convertible marks) through Copic’s businesses in Serbia.²³ Copic reportedly sits on the managing boards of seven companies owned by Saric.²⁴
 - **Drazen Golemovic** – Croatian businessman closely associated with Saric²⁵

c. Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.
All research conducted according to the project manual.

- Despite running what appears to be a flexible network, with decentralized nodes for operational purposes, Saric has traditionally appeared to follow a very active and centralized control structure (see “Leadership Style” and “Topology,” above).

F. Resources

a. Financial

- **Significant financial resources.** Saric is also a very successful legitimate businessman, owning real estate, hotels, restaurants, discotheques,²⁶ and a soccer club.²⁷ He was apparently always in the possession of huge amounts of cash.²⁸ **He has been able to pay Colombian criminal organizations in cash for several tons of cocaine.**²⁹ Up until now it has been established that Saric has various property on 17 locations in Novi Sad and Belgrade, as well as several accounts in Swiss banks. **The value of his property is estimated at several scores of millions of Euros.**³⁰ As of 2010, Saric was reportedly still the largest “investor” in Montenegrin businesses and businessmen.³¹ **Serbian police estimate that Saric made about 4.5 billion Euros from narcotics trafficking.**³²

b. Human

- **Public Support Network.** Saric’s extensive investments into Balkan, particularly Montenegrin, businesses and businesspeople provide him with an even wider support network than initially believed. The services he has provided to his various locales have made him a very respected figure to some, so much so that in his hometown of Pljevlja, petitions and Facebook pages of support were launched.³³

c. Logistical

i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.

- Information not found.

ii. Key routes

- Information not found.

d. Transportation

i. Land

- Information not found.

ii. Sea

- Saric utilizes sea routes to transport cocaine from South America to the Balkans and Europe. He might also recruit sailors to carry and deliver the drug to ports in Italy, Greece, the Netherlands, and Belgium.³⁴

iii. Air

- Saric reportedly has his own helicopter, as well as access to private aircraft, which he often uses, through a friend’s company.³⁵

iv. Intermodal container

- Information not found.

G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities

a. Corruption

- Saric appears to make extensive use of corruption, particularly within Balkan state, security, and financial structures (*see Relationships, below*).

b. Concealment

- Saric’s people in Italy were reportedly using a new system to avoid detection – they chemically turned cocaine into a plastic-like substance to cheat customs inspectors.³⁶

c. Deception

- Information not found.

d. Circumvention (avoiding border entry points)

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.
All research conducted according to the project manual.

- Information not found.

H. Prior / Existing Relationships

a. Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)

- **Colombian criminal organizations** (exact organizations unknown) - Allegedly Saric maintained direct contacts with the top of the Colombian cartel through "liaison officer" Rodoljub Radulovic, a reportedly very powerful person, with contacts in the top of the Serbian-Montenegrin underground, as well as with politicians in those two countries. Radulovic has since emigrated to the U.S., and it is claimed that Saric contracted cocaine purchases in direct communication with the barons of Colombian drug cartels, purchasing tons of narcotics from them and paying with cash.³⁷
- **Russian and Italian criminal organizations** (exact organizations unknown) – According to some sources, Saric is not “the brains” of the cocaine smuggling from South America. Rather, he is believed to be only a “service provider” below the Russians. In this vein, in cocaine smuggling operations both Serbian and Montenegrin mafiosi are second or third down the line and work for bigger drug cartels. To smuggle cocaine in oceangoing vessels one requires a big system, which Saric did not have himself, but accessed by working for larger Russian and Italian organizations.³⁸ The notion of Saric working for Russians and/or Italians is perhaps supported by rumors that a) the Russian and Italian mafias are offering a reward to whoever turns Saric over to them, or b) the Russians or Italians are actually protecting Saric.³⁹
- **Montenegrin “Mafia Boss” /Criminal Organization** – (name listed as unknown in many open source documents) both the **America group** and **Sreten Jovic** were key associates of (or workers for, it remains somewhat unclear) this individual/group for a lengthy period of time. With arrests of America group leaders for a time, and the recent incarceration of Jovic, Saric appears to be the Montenegrin boss’s new partner.⁴⁰
- **America Group** (Serbia-Montenegro) – According to former Saric group associate, Joksovic, Saric’s group operated in 2008 with members of an Italian criminal organization(s) and with the America Group. It was some of the bosses of "America," whose links with drug cartels in South America date back decades, who had offered guarantees for Saric.⁴¹
- **Balkan criminal connections** - Argentine police and the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) identified at the end of 2009 a connection between Darko Saric and Stanko Cane Zabac Subotic, formerly "the boss of the Balkan tobacco mafia." Saric may have laundered or continues to launder money through Subotic’s financial channels. Finally, it is interesting to note that Subotic, like Saric, is also a personal friend of Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic.⁴²

b. Corrupt politicians, law enforcement , political parties and other state entities, etc.

- **Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic** – Saric is reportedly very close to current Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic.⁴³
- **Montenegrin Prva Bank** – There is suspicion that a Montenegrin bank, in order to strengthen its liquidity, financed the smuggling of the 2 tons of narcotics that were intended for Montenegro. According to certain calculations, around 250 million euros would have entered Montenegro from the sale of the Latin American narcotics shipment should it have arrived and been distributed as planned.⁴⁴ More specifically, the deputy head of the European Commission delegation, Clive Rumbold, has requested data from the Prva Bank which is owned by Aco Djukanovic (the Montenegrin prime minister's brother) and whose minority shareholder is

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

[Montenegrin Prime Minister] Milo Djukanovic, regarding the loan granted to the MAT company which is connected to Darko Saric.⁴⁵

- **Serbian and Montenegrin political and security structures (Corruption and Penetration)** – Reportedly, Saric “had his men in all structures. He used the drug money to finance politicians, various political parties, [and] people in the police.”⁴⁶
- **Pljevlja (Montenegro) Mayor Filip Vukovic** – enjoyed good relations with Saric. Opposition party Movement for Change (PZP) leader Nebojsa Medojevic has on several occasions accused Vukovic of being linked to the Sarics and being on good terms with them, going so far as to say that as far back as 2006 “the true mayor was Darko Saric” who used his influence to guarantee Vukovic and his party elections.⁴⁷

c. *Specific detail: Any alliances / past dealings with terrorist groups.*

- No indications in open source of past or present dealings with known terrorist groups.

I. Ideological / Ethnic / Familial Orientation (if any)

- Ethnicities of the former Yugoslavia (particularly Serbia and Montenegro)

J. Technical Sophistication

- Information not found.

K. Penchant for Innovation

- Information not found.

L. Activities in United States

- a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities
 - Information not found.
- b. *Specific detail: trafficking activities ; logistical activities*
 - Information not found.
- c. Linkages with US groups
 - i. Market/transaction links
 - Information not found.
 - ii. Stable supplier
 - Information not found.
 - iii. Franchise arrangement
 - Information not found.
 - iv. HQ and Branch office
 - Information not found.

M. Evaluations

- a. Strengths
 - **The strength of Saric's group lies in its massive financial power and prominent connections** to Balkan businesses and political structures, as well as to powerful international criminal organizations such as those of the Russians and Italians.
- b. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities
 - Given that there are Serbian and Interpol warrants currently out for Saric’s arrest, and that a number of his assets and financial accounts have been seized, it is much **more difficult for Saric to move around and operate**, if indeed he is not already dead.
- c. Additional insights
 -

Other Notes

- **Darko Saric has both Serbian and Slovak citizenship**, the latter of which, obtained in 2006, allows him to easily move around the EU/Schengen Area via the Schengen Agreement.⁴⁸ He might also have Swiss and Croatian passports.⁴⁹

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.
All research conducted according to the project manual.

-
- ¹ “Serbia: Source Says 'Drug Baron' Saric Has Own Coca Plantations in South America,” *Belgrade Blic*, February 15, 2010, OSC: EUP20100217047004.
- ² “Italian police requested arrest of Montenegrin drug smuggling suspects – daily,” *Podgorica Dan*, November 16, 2010, OSC: EUP20101118950023.; and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), “Montenegrin daily says alleged Serbian drug baron is in Switzerland,” *BBC Worldwide Monitoring, LexisNexis Academic*, February 27, 2010.
- ³ Moraca, Nikola. “Police Carry Out Action Entitled, The Machine, in Banja Luka and Bijeljina - Property of Saric's Partner Raided,” *Nezavisne novine*, April 27, 2011.
- ⁴ “Italian police requested arrest of Montenegrin drug smuggling suspects – daily,” OSC: EUP20101118950023; and “Source: Rising Mob Boss Bojovic Planned Killing of Two Serbian Police Officials,” *Belgrade Blic*, June 17, 2010, OSC: EUP20100620012001.
- ⁵ BBC, “Serbian police put Saric gang's cocaine trade turnover at 4.5bn euros,” *BBC Worldwide Monitoring, LexisNexis Academic*, February 2, 2010.
- ⁶ “Serbia: Source Says 'Drug Baron' Saric Has Own Coca Plantations in South America,” OSC: EUP20100217047004.
- ⁷ “Drug Boss Saric's Associate Joksovic Discloses Information on Cocaine Smuggling,” *Podgorica Revija D*, February 16-23, 2011, OSC: EUP20110225023001.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ “Serbia: Source Says 'Drug Baron' Saric Has Own Coca Plantations in South America,” OSC: EUP20100217047004.
- ¹⁰ “B-H Report Analyzes Serbian Police Crackdown on Drug Trafficking, Links With B-H,” *Sarajevo Slobodna Bosna*, November 5, 2009, OSC: EUP20091111223005.; and “Italian police requested arrest of Montenegrin drug smuggling suspects – daily,” OSC: EUP20101118950023.
- ¹¹ “Italian police requested arrest of Montenegrin drug smuggling suspects – daily,” OSC: EUP20101118950023.
- ¹² BBC, “Serbian police put Saric gang's cocaine trade turnover at 4.5bn euros.”
- ¹³ “Source: Rising Mob Boss Bojovic Planned Killing of Two Serbian Police Officials,” OSC: EUP20100620012001.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ “Serbia: Source Says 'Drug Baron' Saric Has Own Coca Plantations in South America,” OSC: EUP20100217047004.
- ¹⁷ “Drug Boss Saric's Associate Joksovic Discloses Information on Cocaine Smuggling,” OSC: EUP20110225023001.
- ¹⁸ “Montenegro: Report Details Darko Saric Ties with Criminals, Tycoons, Politicians,” OSC: EUP20100228023004.
- ¹⁹ “Serbian, Montenegrin Officials Quoted on Need for Cooperation in Crime Fighting,” *Belgrade RTS Television First*, February 12, 2010, OSC: EUP20100212047014.
- ²⁰ BBC, “Montenegrin fugitive avoids arrest due to tip-off – minister,” *BBC Worldwide Monitoring, LexisNexis Academic*, November 8, 2010.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² “Montenegro: Report Details Darko Saric Ties with Criminals, Tycoons, Politicians,” *Podgorica Monitor*, January 29, 2010, OSC: EUP20100228023004.
- ²³ Moraca.
- ²⁴ BBC, “Fugitive Croatian businessman questioned by Bosnian Serb police,” *BBC Worldwide Monitoring, LexisNexis Academic*, June 22, 2010.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*; and Moraca.
- ²⁶ “B-H Report Analyzes Serbian Police Crackdown on Drug Trafficking, Links With B-H,” OSC: EUP20091111223005.
- ²⁷ “Montenegro: Report Details Darko Saric Ties with Criminals, Tycoons, Politicians,” OSC: EUP20100228023004.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² BBC, “Serbian police put Saric gang's cocaine trade turnover at 4.5bn euros.”
- ³³ BBC, “Petition supporting Montenegrin drug smuggling suspect launched in his hometown,” *BBC Worldwide Monitoring, LexisNexis Academic*, February 2, 2010.
- ³⁴ “Montenegro: Report Details Darko Saric Ties with Criminals, Tycoons, Politicians,” OSC: EUP20100228023004.
- ³⁵ BBC, “Alleged drug baron quit Montenegro in private aircraft – daily,” *BBC Worldwide Monitoring, LexisNexis Academic*, March 1, 2010.

-
- ³⁶ BBC, "Serbian police put Saric gang's cocaine trade turnover at 4.5bn euros."
- ³⁷ "Montenegro: Report Details Darko Saric Ties with Criminals, Tycoons, Politicians," OSC: EUP20100228023004.
- ³⁸ "Crime Expert Nicovic Claims Russian Mafia Runs Drug Smuggling from South America," Podgorica *Analitika*, November 18, 2010, OSC: EUP20101129023003.; and "Drug Boss Saric's Associate Joksovic Discloses Information on Cocaine Smuggling," OSC: EUP20110225023001.
- ³⁹ "Crime Experts Say Saric Possibly Under DEA Protection," Podgorica *Revija D*, December 15, 2010, OSC: EUP20101222023001.; and "Drug Boss Saric's Associate Joksovic Discloses Information on Cocaine Smuggling," OSC: EUP20110225023001.
- ⁴⁰ "Serbia: Source Says 'Drug Baron' Saric Has Own Coca Plantations in South America," OSC: EUP20100217047004.
- ⁴¹ "Drug Boss Saric's Associate Joksovic Discloses Information on Cocaine Smuggling," OSC: EUP20110225023001.
- ⁴² "Montenegro: Report Details Darko Saric Ties with Criminals, Tycoons, Politicians," OSC: EUP20100228023004.
- ⁴³ "B-H Report Analyzes Serbian Police Crackdown on Drug Trafficking, Links With B-H," OSC: EUP20091111223005.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ BBC, "EU officials inquire about Montenegrin bank's loan to alleged drug baron," BBC Worldwide Monitoring, *LexisNexis Academic*, March 16, 2010.
- ⁴⁶ "Crime Expert Nicovic Claims Russian Mafia Runs Drug Smuggling from South America," OSC: EUP20101129023003.; and BBC, "Official says Serbian drug lord 'enlisted help from state'," BBC Worldwide Monitoring, *LexisNexis Academic*, August 22, 2010.
- ⁴⁷ BBC, "Montenegrin mayor says he would never reveal location of alleged drug baron," BBC Worldwide Monitoring, *LexisNexis Academic*, May 12, 2010.
- ⁴⁸ "Crime Experts Say Saric Possibly Under DEA Protection," OSC: EUP20101222023001.; and BBC, "Wanted mafia boss had long-term stay in Slovakia – press," BBC Worldwide Monitoring, *LexisNexis Academic*, February 17, 2010.
- ⁴⁹ "Montenegro: Report Details Darko Saric Ties with Criminals, Tycoons, Politicians," OSC: EUP20100228023004.