

Eleven Arrested in Pukanić Killing

Police make several arrests of men suspected of involvement in the bombing deaths of Croatian journalist Ivo Pukanić and his marketing manager, Niko Franjić.

By OCCRP | October 31, 2008

Eleven men, some armed and all described as extremely dangerous members of the underworld, have been arrested, ten by Croatian police special forces and one by Bosnian police as suspects in connection with the assassinations of Ivo Pukanić, owner and an editor of *Nacional*, and his marketing manager, Niko Franjić last week.

According to Krunoslav Borovec, head of the police chief's office, three of the men resisted and police used force to subdue them; two suspects and two officers were hurt in the struggle. Four were arrested near the Serbian border and the others in the Zagreb area.

Although police declined to identify the men, Zoran Pilipović, lawyer for Luka Matanić, 23, Amir Mafalani and S. Đurović, confirmed that the three, along with Robert Matanić, Luka's cousin, were arrested and suspected in the Pukanić assassination. Matanić was reporter to want to cooperate



Weapons seized by police in raids against the properties of suspected crime figures involved in the recent murders. Photo: Jutarnji List.

with police to clear his name and Pilopović said he disagreed with that strategy and would not represent Robert Matanić.

The Matanić cousins were described as hitmen from Croatia.

The cousins were arrested about 100 kilometers from the Serbian border as they were trying to flee. Press reports said that police had been monitoring the suspects and their phone conversations and moved in when some of the men headed to Serbia

Several Tied to Sreten Jocić

Two of the others arrested were Serbians and were being questioned about who ordered the murder of Ivana Hodak on Oct. 6 and the bombing of Pukanić and Franjić.

They were described by the Serbian daily *Blic* as members of the criminal clan of Sreten Jocić, 46, aka Joca Amsterdam, a drug lord and hit man thought to be responsible for murders in Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Croatia, Serbia, Germany and Bosnia. One of

the two, Boba Đurović from Bar in Montenegro, was described as Jocić's lieutenant and the man who ran his finances. The other was Milenko Kuzmanović from Belgrade.

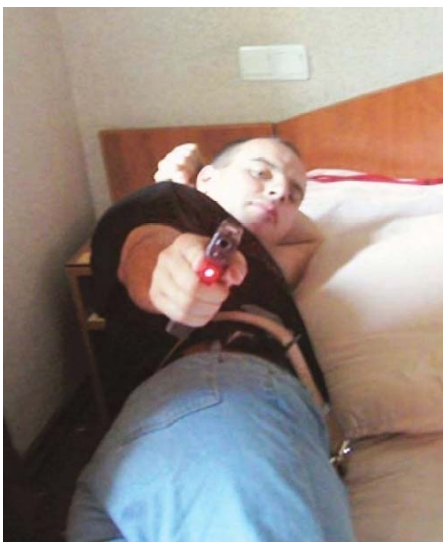
The Matanić cousins were suspected as part of a group of hitmen that liquidated Bulgarian drug lords when Jocić, was moving into the drug scene in Bulgaria in the mid 1990s.

On Thursday, police arrested Elvis Hadžić, 35, of Velika Kladuša, for questioning in the bombing. Croatian media said police said he also was connected with the Matanić group.

Croatian police were raiding apartments, houses and weekend houses and seven cars as the investigation continued.

Jocić Part of Nacional Story

Jocić, and more specifically his friend, were figures in a story that *Nacional* had published and was working on. Before the Pukanić assassination, *Nacional* had raised the possibility that Jocić was connected with the murder of Ivana Hodak, who



Robert Matanić.

Photo: 24 Hours, Sofia.



was gunned down Oct. 6 at her apartment in downtown Zagreb.

Recently, according to Jutarnji List, Jocić contacted former members of the Surčin clan and they started using drug money to gain the privatization of a number of Serbian companies. The paper said Jocić recently got into buying Croatian shopping centers.

Nacional's stories said that Jocić's close friend, Uglješa Aranitović, was trying to work with Igor Vucelić to buy property from Vladimir Zagorec, a former Croatian general who is in prison on war crimes charges. Zagorec was represented by Ivana Hodak's father, Zvonimir.

Nacional speculated that because Ivana Hodak broke off her relationship with Vucelić and began a relationship with Ljubo Pavasović it cost the two men the deal. Pavasović was a lawyer for a rival Croatian general, Hrvoje Petrač, and that that may have caused the deal to fall through.

Aranitović was killed in Belgrade on August 19. Ivana Hodak was killed October 6.

The week after the story ran, on October 23, a bomb exploded in front of Nacional's offices in downtown Zagreb, killing Pukančić and Franjić.

Jocić History: Murders, Connections

According to various published reports and to sources, Jocić's history goes back to the mid-1980s, when he worked in Amsterdam for Ljubinko "Duja" Bećirović and was suspected of killing a man in Amsterdam in 1990, on Bećirović's orders.

In October of that year, Bećirović died after he was wounded in an attack ordered by Klaas Bruinsma. Jocić subsequently became boss.

Bruinsma did not live long; he was killed in a hit in June 1991, a murder by Jocić's friend, gang member and former police officer Martin Hoogland.

Then, on November 22 of that year, an attempt by police to arrest Jocić degenerated into a shootout and left several police and Jocić's bodyguards wounded. Jocić was sent to prison on the Amsterdam murder charge but released in 1992 and went to Bulgaria, a year before he was convicted in



Sreten Jocić at Extradition Hearing in Sofia court, 2002. Photo: Prefectura Naval Argentina.

absentia of wounding a policeman in that shootout. At that time, Bulgaria was a transshipment point for stolen cars to former Soviet republics and to the Middle East, from where oil was shipped back. But drugs were becoming the major item trafficked.

Gangs Join Forces

Jocić and his crew became part of that scene, joining forces with other gang leaders such as Milorad Luković, aka Legija of the Zemun clan, and Pantyo "Poli" Pantev and Ilcho Bonev, aka Bay Mile, to control narcotics routes.

The gangs ruthlessly killed off competition, committing more than 60 murders in the mid-90s. For example, a group of Kosovo Albanians tried to move into the narcotics market in Bulgaria through connections with a security and insurance firm named VIS that according to police was a front for a criminal group involved in extortion and fuel and car smuggling.

In 1995, VIS's founder Vasil Iliev, was shot in his car while driving in Sofia. According to Bulgarian police sources, Jocić and Bonev allegedly ordered Iliev's murder.

But Jocić's own business partners were not immune. Pantev, the owner of another security and insurance firm named SIK was shot four times as he entered an elevator at the Hotel Sonesta in Aruba, allegedly on the order of Jocić, according to newspaper and police sources.

In 2002, Jocić was arrested in Bulgaria and extradited to the Netherlands.

He had been betrayed, according to various accounts, by Bonev or Legija. From prison, he arranged the killing of Bonev in a spectacularly orchestrated ruse in which men in police uniforms appeared at the sports complex Slavija, which Bonev used as his headquarters, and shot him down with Kalashnikovs.

In 2004, when police broke up the Zemun clan, Legija surrendered, reportedly saying he would be safer in prison.

In the Netherlands, Jocić served time for his 1993 in absentia conviction for the murder of an Amsterdam police officer. He was released, with the court taking into account time served in pre-trial custody, in March 2004.

Jocić was soon charged on suspicion of heroin smuggling. He was in prison again until March 2006, when he was extradited to Serbia. He was also suspected of plotting the assassination of a Dutch prosecutor, but Netherlands prosecutors said they had no irrefutable evidence.

Jocić was suspected in Serbia of ordering the murders of Goran Marjanović, aka Goksi the Bomber, and another man. He was detained, but released May 26, 2006, on €300,000, supposedly because a witness changed his testimony. Another indictment was filed and he was scheduled to go on trial in June.

The trial was postponed and is rescheduled for December 2.

He reportedly has been seen recently in Serbia. ■

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Murder Tied to Tobacco Case

An Italian prosecutor rues the gangland murder of a second witness in his case against Montenegrin tobacco smugglers tied to Prime Minister Milo Đukanović.

By OCCRP | October 31, 2008

An Italian prosecutor admitted yesterday that Croatian editor Ivo Pukanić was an important witness in his case against 12 tobacco smugglers, including a number of people close to Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Đukanović.

“We are disturbed because the Croatian reporter was one of the most important witnesses in our investigation on the Balkan mafia,” Bari prosecutor Giuseppe Scelsi told *Il Piccolo* newspaper.

Scelsi said Pukanić is the second journalist witness killed in the case. Duško Jovanović, the editor at Podgorica-based *Dan* magazine, was killed in an ambush on May 27, 2004.

Đukanović was indicted in the case, but since he has diplomatic immunity, prosecutors have suspended the case until that status changes.

The revelation is the latest twist in the murder of the controversial Croatian editor.

Zagreb police’s main suspect appears to be Belgrade drug trafficker Sretan Jocić, aka Joca Amsterdam. Pukanić had published and was working on a series of stories discussing among other things a failed



The damaged car of Nacional editor Ivo Pukanić after he was killed along with his marketing manager by an explosive device in front of his magazines office.

Photo: Jutarnji List.

business deal between Jocić and a former Croatian general. The failed deal may have also led to the murder of Ivana Hodak, the daughter of a prominent attorney, who was shot gangland style on October 6.

Police have so far arrested 10 people, including members of Jocić’s gang.

Jocić himself says the Bari case is important. In a courier delivered message this week allegedly from Jocić to Press newspaper in Belgrade, Jocić says he is being framed for Pukanić’s murder and the real murderer can be found from examining Pukanić’s Bari testimony.

There is no shortage of theories on who killed Pukanić, an editor who as many in the region liberally used his magazine as a tool for private feuds and business dealings, which often involved both politicians and questionable figures.

His magazine broke the story of Đukanović’s alleged involvement in cigarette smuggling. Over one period Pukanić wrote dozens of negative

stories about Đukanović, at least one in each issue.

There is also another link between the case in Bari and Jocić’s gang. One of those indicted in Bari is Andrija Drašković who is known to have worked with Jocić and is often mentioned in regional media as working with Jocić.

Witness testimony in the Bari case showed that Montenegro became a major transit point for cigarette smuggling from 1994 to 2000. This trade was controlled by the government, which Bari prosecutors described as a mafia-like organization.



Ivo Pukanić Photo: Nacional.



Duško Jovanović

Photo: Dan.

Montenegro imported huge amounts of cigarettes from major manufacturers – on average about 100,000 cases or 50,000,000 packs of cigarettes per month. This was far more than the country’s 600,000 residents could ever smoke.

The trade was controlled by the government through four tobacco export licenses.

Witnesses said that Đukanović himself sat in on negotiations for those four licenses.

In their indictment, prosecutors said Đukanović was a “directly interested party” in the trade.

The final agreement gave control of the trade though members of the Italian Cosa Nostra, including the Camorra crime network.

Most of the cigarettes were then smuggled across the Adriatic into Italy using high speed boats.

Đukanović’s government, according to witness testimony, allowed the licenses to be controlled by Franco Della Torre, who “with the collaboration from the Authorities of (Montenegro) maintained mafia-like control over the illicit trade with the coastline of Regiona Puglia and, in particular, with the coastal area belonging to the Bari Appeals Court.”

Della Torre was a Swiss financier who was a defendant in the famous “Pizza Connection” trial, which revolved around an Italian mafia plot to launder money from heroin sales through a series of independently owned pizza parlors. Della Torre was sentenced to two years in jail in the case.

According to the testimony of participants, smugglers paid \$30 per case of cigarettes in “transit tax” to Zeta Trans, a Montenegrin warehouse company. An extra \$30 per case was collected by Della Torre from the smugglers and illegally transferred into private Swiss accounts and then forwarded to accounts in Monaco, Cyprus and other locales, presumably for Montenegrin officials, the case states.

“Milo Đukanović was acting in his own interest and for the interests of a cabal of associates, at the expense of Italian state and the European Union,” the case says.

According to the case, Andrija Drašković insured the protection of the Italian criminals, many of whom were



Prime Minister Milo Đukanović has denied any role in tobacco smuggling. Photo: Government of Montenegro.

living in Montenegro during the time of the smuggling. In exchange, they cooperated on the trafficking of heroin and cocaine into Italy. Drašković is known to be close to Đukanović and may have represented the president during negotiations with organized crime.

Đukanović’s brother Aco also was involved. The speedboats of the smugglers were forced to refuel in a gas station owned by Aco Đukanović in Herceg Novi, and had to pay twice the local price for fuel there, the case says.

Pukanić is believed to have met with Scelsi and testified on a number of issues, although exactly what he told Italian prosecutors is still not clear. ■

Andrija Drašković Released from Italian Jail



Andrija Drašković. Photo: Euro Blic.

Controversial Serbian businessman Andrija Drašković, a suspect in cigarette smuggling and drug trafficking investigations, was released from Italian prison on August 13th due to a lack of evidence, his attorney Veljko Delibašić stated.

Italian prosecution suspected that Drašković was aiding an Italian mafia organization in Montenegro by arranging for their accommodation, providing protection from local criminal groups and cooperating with them in drug trafficking and cigarette smuggling.

Drašković was arrested in March

2007 in Frankfurt, Germany based on an Interpol warrant, and was later extradited to Italy where he was interviewed by prosecutors in Bari.

The release due “to a lack of evidence” came suddenly.

So far neither the Italian Prosecution nor Drašković had any comment on media reports that he had agreed to testify on behalf of the prosecution.

Andrija Drašković was a chief suspect in 2000 assassination of Željko Ražnjatović Arkan in the Intercontinental Hotel in Belgrade and has been indirectly tied to many other crimes.