

United States Department of Justice

**For Immediate Release**

June 8, 2010 **United States Attorney's Office**  
**Southern District of New York**

**Sixteen Members of International Organized Crime Group Charged with Kidnapping, Narcotics, Robbery and Firearms Crimes**

NEW YORK—Sixteen defendants were charged today with various counts of kidnapping in aid of a racketeering enterprise, narcotics trafficking, robbery and firearms possession, announced Preet Bharara, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, George Venizelos, the Acting Assistant Director-in-Charge of the New York Office of the FBI, and Raymond W. Kelly, the Police Commissioner of the City of New York.

Bruno Krasniqi, Saimir Krasniqi, Elton Sejdaris, Erkliant Sula, Skender Cakoni, aka “Neri,” Gjovalin Berisha, aka “Cuz,” Nazih Nasser, aka “Naz,” Plaurant Cela, and Gentian Nikolli, aka “Genti,” were arrested this morning at their respective homes in New York by members of the Joint Organized Crime Task Force, which includes agents of the FBI and detectives of the New York City Police Department (NYPD). Shkelzen Balidemaj was arrested this morning in his home in Branford, Conn. Gentian Cara, Marjan Tamali and Joanna Pakulski, each residents of Canada, were arrested this morning by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police based on requests for their provisional arrest in connection with the Indictments. Three defendants remain at large.

The defendants arrested in New York and Connecticut are expected to appear in federal court in Manhattan this afternoon.

As alleged in the indictments unsealed today in Manhattan federal court:

Bruno Krasniqi, Saimir Krasniqi, Elton Sejdaris and others participated in a racketeering enterprise (hereinafter, the Krasniqi Organization) that was engaged in kidnapping, narcotics trafficking, extortion, robbery, and the interstate transportation of stolen goods. The Krasniqi Organization was led by brothers Bruno Krasniqi and Saimir Krasniqi, and operated in New York, Michigan, and Connecticut, among other locations. The Krasniqi Organization sought to enrich its members through various criminal schemes, including the trafficking of marijuana and used firearms and threats of violence to protect its power and territory, as well as to instill fear among rival drug dealers and victims.

In total, the Krasniqi Organization and their co-conspirators—specifically, Bruno Krasniqi, Saimir Krasniqi, Erkliant Sula, Skender Cakoni, Gjovalin Berisha, Nazih Nasser, Gentian Nikolli, Shkelzen Balidemaj, Plaurant Cela, Gentian Cara, Marjan Tamali, and Joanna Pakulski—are charged with having trafficked and distributed more than 100 kilograms of marijuana from 2003 through 2007.

In addition to narcotics trafficking, members of the Krasniqi Organization engaged in robberies and kidnappings. Specifically, on or about June 2005, after obtaining a multi-kilogram load of

marijuana from one of the Krasniqi Organization's marijuana suppliers (CC-1) and Plaurant Cela, Bruno Krasniqi, Saimir Krasniqi, Elton Sejdaris, and other members of the Krasniqi Organization used guns and threats of violence to rob CC-1 and Cela of the marijuana and the marijuana proceeds. Subsequently, Bruno Krasniqi, Saimir Krasniqi, and Elton Sejdaris, along with other co-conspirators, kidnapped another rival drug dealer at gunpoint.

In addition to these charges, other members of the narcotics conspiracy—including Plaurant Cela and Skender Cakoni—are charged with firearms offenses. Specifically, after members of the Krasniqi Organization robbed CC-1 and Cela of marijuana and the proceeds of marijuana trafficking, Cela, Cakoni, and others obtained firearms to protect their narcotics business and attempted to violently retaliate for the robbery of narcotics by members of the Krasniqi Organization.

The below table summarizes the charges and potential penalties in the indictments.

The case is assigned to U.S. District Judge Richard J. Holwell. The initial conference before Judge Holwell is scheduled for June 15, 2010, at 12:00 P.M. EDT.

U.S. Attorney Bharara praised the outstanding work of the FBI and NYPD in the Joint Organized Crime Task Force in the investigation. He added that the investigation is continuing. In addition, Mr. Bharara expressed his gratitude to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for their cooperation in the investigation.

U.S. Attorney Bharara said: "Led by brothers Bruno and Saimir Krasniqi, this international organized crime group allegedly engaged in kidnapping, robbery, narcotics trafficking and acts violence to fund and protect its operations. This investigation, which has spanned multiple states and two neighboring countries, demonstrates the ongoing commitment of the Southern District of New York and the Joint Organized Crime Task Force to pursue the ever-present threat posed by international organized crime operating within our borders and on our streets."

FBI Acting Assistant Director-in-Charge George Venizelos said: "The alleged charges from today's arrests include robbery, firearms possession, narcotics trafficking, and kidnapping. These indictments highlight problems that not only impact the citizens of New York City. The crimes committed have a major effect on criminal organizations and public safety worldwide. As witnessed today, cooperation between dedicated groups of law enforcement partners is, and will continue to be, a critical factor for successfully defending threats that endanger our societies and citizens, both at home and abroad."

New York City Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly said: "The nexus between violence and marijuana trafficking was never clearer than in this case, where rivals reverted to kidnapping and intimidation to control the market."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Avi Weitzman is in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the indictments are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

**Defendant**

**Age Residence**

Bruno Krasniqi	26	Staten Island, N.Y.
Saimir Krasniqi	29	Staten Island, N.Y.
Elton Sejdaris	26	Staten Island, N.Y.
Erkliant Sula	25	Staten Island, N.Y.
Skender Cakoni	44	Queens, N.Y.
Gjovalin Berisha	30	Bronx, N.Y.
Nazih Nasser	35	Queens, N.Y.
Gentian Nikolli	33	Queens, N.Y.
Shkelzen Balidemaj	39	Branford, C.T.
Plaurant Cela	29	Brooklyn, N.Y.
Gentian Cara	37	Toronto, Canada
Marjan Tamali	35	Toronto, Canada
Joanna Pakulski	36	Toronto, Canada

**Ct Charge Defendant Maximum Penalty 1 Kidnapping in Aid of a Racketeering Enterprise**

Bruno Krasniqi

Saimir Krasniqi

Elton Sejdaris Life imprisonment; five years' supervised release; \$250,000 or twice the amount of criminal proceeds 2 Use and Carrying of a Firearm Bruno Krasniqi

Saimir Krasniqi

Elton Sejdaris

Life imprisonment with seven years to run consecutively with any other imprisonment; five years' supervised release; \$250,000 or twice the amount of criminal proceeds 3 Narcotics

Conspiracy Bruno Krasniqi

Saimir Krasniqi

Erkliant Sula

Shkelzen Balidemaj

Plaurant Cela

Skender Cakoni

Gentian Cara

Marjan Tamali

Gjovalin Berisha

Nazih Nasser

Gentian Nikolli

Joanna Pakulski Forty years' imprisonment with a mandatory minimum term of five years; \$2,000,000 fine or twice gross gain/loss from the offense; mandatory minimum four years' supervised release with a maximum term of life supervised release 4 Use and Carrying of a

Firearm Bruno Krasniqi

Saimir Krasniqi

Elton Sejdaris Life imprisonment with seven years to run consecutively with any other

imprisonment, or 25 years to run consecutively if it is a second firearms conviction; five years' supervised release; \$250,000 or twice the amount of criminal proceeds 5 Hobbs Act Robbery Conspiracy Bruno Krasniqi

Saimir Krasniqi

Elton Sejdaris Twenty years in prison; three years' supervised release; \$250,000 fine or twice the gain or loss from the offense 6 Use and Carrying of a Firearm Plarent Cela

Skender Cakoni Life imprisonment with five years to run consecutively with any other imprisonment; five years' supervised release; \$250,000 fine