



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

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CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
HERBERT HADAD, MEGAN GAFFNEY
HEATHER TASKER, BRIDGET KELLY
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600

MACEDONIAN LEADER OF A WORLD-WIDE ALIEN SMUGGLING
ORGANIZATION EXTRADITED TO THE UNITED STATES FROM BULGARIA

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that NAFI ELEZI, a 42-year old Macedonian citizen, arrived today in the United States, as the result of an extradition from Bulgaria, in order to face federal alien-smuggling charges. ELEZI is charged in an eight-count indictment that was returned by a grand jury in the Southern District of New York. ELEZI is charged with participating in a large-scale conspiracy to smuggle aliens into the United States from approximately January 2000 to December 2004, and with obtaining and producing fraudulent European passports as part of that smuggling ring.

The charges against ELEZI are the result of a long-term investigation by Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") that began in approximately 2001. As alleged in the Indictment and as described in previous hearings related to co-defendants, the alien smuggling organization of which ELEZI was a leader utilized a complex network of international participants to smuggle hundreds of immigrants from countries in Eastern Europe, such as Albania and Macedonia, into the United States. The aliens paid as much as \$16,000 to the smugglers in order to be brought to the United States illegally. Typically, the aliens were shuttled to Bulgaria from their originating country by individuals who worked with NAFI ELEZI. From Bulgaria, the aliens were taken via airplane by ELEZI personally, or other people who worked with him, through countries in Western Europe, to countries in South America. From South America, the aliens were taken by ELEZI or his accomplices to Mexico, where the aliens crossed into the United States through Texas. In addition, ELEZI and his accomplices provided fake passports from European countries, such as Belgium and Holland for the aliens to use for travel along the smuggling routes.

Through cooperation from Interpol and Bulgarian law

enforcement, ELEZI was apprehended at the Macedonian-Bulgarian border on July 19, 2005. ELEZI was subsequently ordered extraditable to the United States by the Bulgarian court and the Bulgarian courts denied his appeal.

ELEZI's arrest and subsequent extradition from Bulgaria out of Bulgaria were the result of close and productive cooperation between ICE; the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York; the ICE Attaché Office in Vienna, Austria; the U.S. Department of State-U.S. Embassy in Sofia, Bulgaria; the Office of the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior; the Office of the Bulgarian Ministry of Justice; the Bulgarian Supreme Cassation Prosecutor's Office; and Interpol.

ELEZI faces a maximum of 80 years' imprisonment if convicted on the charges. Mr. GARCIA praised the efforts of ICE in investigating this case and of the Bulgarian authorities in assisting with ELEZI's extradition.

Assistant United States Attorney MIRIAM E. ROCAH is in charge of the prosecution.

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