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TWO LEADERS OF VIOLENT ALBANIAN DRUG GANG FOUND GUILTY IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT

Defendants Convicted of Two Murders, Three Kidnappings, Racketeering and Other Offenses

Preet Bharara, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that brothers BRUNO KRASNIQI and SAIMIR KRASNIQI, leaders of a violent Albanian organized crime group, were convicted yesterday of numerous crimes, including racketeering, murder, conspiracy to murder, kidnapping, narcotics trafficking, arson, robbery, extortion, obstruction of justice, interstate transportation of stolen narcotics, and possession and use of firearms. The KRASNIQIs were found guilty after a five-week jury trial presided over by U.S. District Judge Richard J. Holwell.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara said: "Bruno and Saimir Krasniqi led one of the most brutal and violent organized crime groups in recent memory. In one six-month period, they committed two murders, two kidnappings, two drug robberies, and an arson. Today, nearly six years after the brutal murders they orchestrated, the jury's swift verdict has brought the Krasniqis' reign of terror to an end and the perpetrators of these vicious crimes to justice."

According to the trial evidence and other documents filed in the case:

BRUNO KRASNIQI and SAIMIR KRASNIQI led a racketeering enterprise (the "Krasniqi Organization") that engaged in murder, kidnapping, narcotics trafficking, extortion, robbery, arson, obstruction of justice, and interstate transportation of stolen goods. The Krasniqi Organization operated in New York, Michigan, and Connecticut, among other locations.

Among other offenses, BRUNO KRASNIQI and SAIMIR KRASNIQI were convicted of two separate homicides. On July 17, 2005, Erion Shehu, a member of a rival Albanian drug crew, was murdered outside a Queens café in a drive-by-shooting carried out by the Krasniqi Organization. On the night of the murder, SAIMIR KRASNIQI parked in front of Shehu's car, trapping him inside. BRUNO KRASNIQI and another member of the organization then shot Shehu approximately 11 times with a 9 mm semi-automatic handgun and a .22 caliber handgun equipped with a silencer. Shehu died of multiple gunshot wounds shortly thereafter.

The murder of Erion Shehu was the result of a turf battle with a rival Albanian drug gang. The Krasniqi Organization had previously robbed a member of the rival gang at gunpoint of approximately 20 pounds of marijuana. Approximately two weeks prior to the murder of Shehu, members of the Krasniqi Organization, including BRUNO KRASNIQI and SAIMIR

KRASNIQI, kidnapped another member of the rival drug gang, Neritan Kocareli, at gunpoint, pistol-whipped him, and threatened to kill him if he did not disclose the locations of other members of his narcotics crew.

On January 13, 2006, the KRASNIQIs executed Erenick Grezda, a member of their organization, because they believed he had previously set BRUNO KRASNIQI up to be kidnapped by rival drug dealers from whom BRUNO KRASNIQI had stolen \$250,000 worth of marijuana. Grezda was shot twice in the head while he was sitting in an SUV that belonged to another member of the organization. Following the murder, the KRASNIQIs and other organization members drove the SUV to New Jersey, where they set it on fire in an attempt to destroy evidence inside.

In addition to these crimes, the KRASNIQIs were convicted of participating in two other kidnappings. In 2003, members of the Krasniqi organization kidnapped a victim in Michigan at gunpoint and threatened to kill him because they believed he had disrespected one of their members. In July 2005, members of the Krasniqi Organization kidnapped and shot at a victim in Staten Island as part of a dispute with yet another Albanian drug gang.

The KRASNIQIs were also convicted of conspiring to distribute more than 100 kilograms of marijuana, conspiring to commit extortion, two counts of firearms possession and use, including possession of a firearm with a silencer, and obstruction of justice.

BRUNO KRASNIQI and SAIMIR KRASNIQI each face two mandatory minimum sentences of life in prison, as well as 60-year mandatory minimum sentences for the narcotics and firearms convictions.

Mr. Bharara praised the work of the FBI's Balkan Organized Crime Task Force, comprised of Special Agents of the FBI and Detectives of the New York City Police Department, for their work on the investigation. He also thanked the Office of International Affairs, U.S. Department of Justice Criminal Division, the U.S. State Department, and the Albanian authorities, for their assistance in the investigation and extradition of Almir Rrapo, who had been employed as the Senior Administrative Assistant to the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Albania at the time of his arrest in Albania on charges relating to his association with the Krasniqi Organization and his participation in the murder of Erion Shehu, the kidnapping of Neritan Kocareli, and narcotics trafficking. On April 11, 2011, following his extradition to the United States, Rrapo pled guilty to racketeering, murder, kidnapping, narcotics, and firearms charges pursuant to a cooperation agreement with the Government.

This case is being handled by the Office's Organized Crime Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Avi Weitzman, Natalie LaMarque, and Ian McGinley are in charge of the prosecution.