
Historical cases of Mafia–Communist collaboration in Europe

Organised crime, Communist parties and state-security networks | 1960–2000

Yes. Historical evidence documents cooperation between organised criminal groups and communist officials, party members, police officers and intelligence services in several European countries.

The most substantial evidence concerns Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Poland. The relationships included drug trafficking, arms smuggling, political assassinations, corruption, protection of criminal enterprises and money laundering.

However, it is important to distinguish between **communist political parties collaborating with criminal organisations** and **individual communist officials or security agencies maintaining criminal relationships**.

1. Yugoslavia: Communist state security and organised crime (1960s–1990s)

Under Josip Broz Tito's communist government, Yugoslavia's intelligence services developed relationships with criminals operating throughout Western Europe.

The Yugoslav State Security Administration (UDBA/SDB) used criminals for operations against political opponents living abroad.

Documented practices included:

- Recruiting criminals to intimidate or assassinate political opponents.
- Providing protection to criminal associates.
- Tolerating smuggling and other illegal commercial activities.
- Exploiting criminal networks for intelligence operations.

These relationships subsequently contributed to the integration of organised crime into Serbian political and security structures during the 1990s.

Historical references

- U.S. Department of Justice, *United States Attorneys' Bulletin*, September 2003, pp. 42–49
- Magda Long, "Feral Statecraft: The Criminalized Covert Power Legacy of Yugoslavia's Security Services," *Intelligence and National Security*, 2026
- Kosta Nikolić and Vladimir Petrović, "Organized Crime in Serbian Politics During the Yugoslav Wars," *Journal of Political Power*, 2022

Assessment: This is a documented case of sustained cooperation between criminal organisations and security institutions established by a communist government, rather than proof that every level of the Communist Party participated.

2. Bulgaria: The Communist Party, Turkish criminal networks and Kintex (1960s–1989)

One particularly significant example involves Bulgaria under Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov.

The Bulgarian state-controlled foreign-trade organisation **Kintex** operated within a system connected to the communist intelligence establishment.

A declassified December 1984 CIA assessment, preserved in the U.S. State Department's historical archives, describes relationships between Bulgarian intelligence and Turkish criminal networks.

According to that assessment:

- Bulgarian intelligence offered protection and assistance to international smugglers from at least the 1960s.
- Criminal groups engaged in arms and narcotics trafficking operated through Bulgaria.
- Kintex coordinated illicit commercial operations that generated foreign currency.
- Senior Bulgarian officials were assessed as having knowledge of the networks.

The relationships extended beyond Bulgaria's borders and involved criminal operations affecting Western Europe.

Historical references

- U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981–1988, Vol. X, Document 377*
- U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Bulgarian-Turkish Narcotics Connection, congressional hearings, 1984*

The first document is especially important because it establishes that these relationships were identified in contemporaneous intelligence reporting, rather than being allegations invented after the collapse of communism.

Assessment: Evidence of institutional cooperation between a communist state's intelligence apparatus and international organised criminals. The CIA assessment is an intelligence finding, not a judicial conviction.

3. Poland: The Communist Party, police officers and the Nikoś criminal organisation (1970s–1980s)

One of the clearest examples involving identifiable Communist Party officials concerns **Nikodem Skotarczak**, known as *Nikoś*.

Skotarczak operated an organised criminal network specialising in stealing vehicles in Western Europe and selling them in communist Poland.

Historical research based on Polish security archives identifies several relevant individuals:

Individual	Position or affiliation	Documented connection
Nikodem Skotarczak	Organised crime leader	Directed an international stolen-vehicle network.
Tadeusz Jędrzejczak	Polish Citizens' Militia	Assisted in legitimising and selling stolen vehicles.
Waldemar Gruszczyński	Senior police officer, Gdańsk	Cooperated with Jędrzejczak.
Henryk Konkol	Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), Sopot	Identified among recipients of vehicles sold through the criminal network.
Mieczysław Cygan	Regional governor, Gdańsk	Also identified among recipients.
Marek Biernat	Customs officer and PZPR member	Cooperated with the criminal organisation in facilitating vehicle imports.

The participation of customs and police officials enabled the criminal organisation to operate across international borders.

Importantly, Biernat was not merely a state employee: historical records establish his membership in the ruling Polish United Workers' Party and his responsibilities within its regional apparatus.

Historical references

- Karol Nawrocki, "Autogangs: Car Smuggle to Communist Poland in the 1980s," *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*, Vol. 34 (2016), pp. 167–182 (PDF)

Assessment: Documented cooperation involving organised criminals, communist-era police and customs officers, and at least one identifiable member of the ruling Communist Party. The involvement of officials as buyers does not, by itself, establish that they knowingly participated in the criminal organisation.

4. Bulgaria: Former communist security officials and Mafia-like business networks (1989–2003)

Following the collapse of Bulgarian communism, networks connecting former intelligence officers, party officials and businesspeople became important in the country's emerging private economy.

A prominent example was **Iliya Pavlov**, founder of Multigroup.

Pavlov had close relationships with former communist security and political officials. His business network became associated with opaque commercial structures and practices that researchers describe as blurring the boundary between legitimate business and Mafia-style activity.

Research published by Cambridge University Press describes how businesses emerging from former communist-era networks acquired considerable economic and political influence.

Historical references

- *Networks and Institutions in Europe's Emerging Markets*, Cambridge University Press
- Christopher Nehring, "Files, Agents, 'Deep State,' and Russian Influence: The Legacy of the Communist State Security Service in Bulgaria," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 2022

Assessment: A documented example of organised crime becoming entangled with networks originating in communist state institutions. These relationships persisted after the regime's collapse.

5. Italy: Communist political networks and the "Mafia Capitale" scandal (2014–2020)

The Italian case is particularly relevant because it involves relationships crossing ideological boundaries.

The criminal organisation associated with **Salvatore Buzzi** and **Massimo Carminati** developed relationships with politicians from the Italian centre-left and right.

Buzzi headed a network of social cooperatives. In 2026, he stated that he had first joined the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in 1972 and had regarded the Democratic Party as his political home.

In the resulting corruption investigations:

- **Daniele Ozzimo (Democratic Party):** Received a corruption conviction, upheld on appeal in 2017.
- **Mirko Coratti (Democratic Party):** Convicted at first instance in 2017 in the wider investigation.
- **Salvatore Buzzi:** His business relationships extended across political affiliations.

A crucial legal qualification is necessary: in 2020, Italy's Court of Cassation rejected the classification of the principal criminal organisation as Mafia-type, while recognising ordinary criminal associations involving corruption. Later proceedings also produced acquittals and dismissals on limitation grounds.

Historical references

- [ANSA, "Mafia Capitale: Investigation That Changed Politics in Rome," 2017](#)
- [Italian Supreme Court ruling, 2020, discussed in *Cammino Diritto*](#)
- [ANSA, 2017, report on Daniele Ozzimo conviction](#)

Assessment: Documented political corruption involving a criminal organisation and politicians of different affiliations. It does not establish institutional cooperation between the historical PCI and the Mafia.

An important historical counterexample: Italian communists fighting the Mafia

The history would be incomplete without **Pio La Torre**, a prominent Italian Communist Party politician.

La Torre campaigned against the Sicilian Mafia and proposed legislation criminalising Mafia-type associations and facilitating confiscation of criminal assets.

He was murdered in Palermo on **30 April 1982**.

His legislative initiative contributed to the adoption of Italy's landmark anti-Mafia legislation, Law 646/1982.

Historical references

- [Italian Ministry of the Interior, profile of Pio La Torre](#)

This demonstrates why historical collaboration involving particular communist officials cannot be generalised to all communist movements.

Historical conclusion

The evidence establishes several distinct mechanisms through which organised criminals developed relationships with communist political and administrative systems.

The strongest documented examples are:

1. **Yugoslavia:** State intelligence collaboration with criminal organisations.
2. **Bulgaria:** Communist security-service cooperation with international smugglers.
3. **Poland:** Direct relationships between organised criminals, police officers and identifiable Communist Party officials.
4. **Post-communist Bulgaria:** Criminal-business networks emerging from former communist security structures.
5. **Italy:** Corruption involving criminal networks, former communist political connections and centre-left politicians, although not legally established as a Mafia-type association.

The historical evidence therefore supports a specific conclusion: **organised crime can cooperate with political actors across ideological divisions when access to public authority, institutional protection, contracts or financial resources serves their interests.**

That conclusion concerns documented historical relationships. It does not establish wrongdoing by contemporary European left-wing parties, including GUE/NGL, without separate evidence.

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