

News story: Channel Tunnel people smuggling gang jailed

The Birmingham-based crime gang's activities began to unravel on 12 March 2015, when a car was stopped by Border Force officers at the UK Control Zone in Coquelles, France. The driver was Lee Anderson, 46, and his passenger was Jason Cowley, 44. When the car was searched by Border Force officers, they found 2 adults and a child, all Albanian nationals, hidden in the boot. Anderson and Cowley were both arrested at the scene.

Later, on 2 August 2015, a car driven by Gillian Barker, 47, was stopped at the same controls. Officers found 2 Albanian men hidden in the boot and Barker was arrested. On both occasions, the Albanians found in the cars were handed to the French authorities.

The cases were passed to Immigration Enforcement's Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) team who, following investigations, linked both smuggling attempts to 3 further individuals. On 13 October 2015, officers searched the homes of Ilir Hani, 44, Eduart Karaj, 39, and Vullnet Karaj, 41.

Travel and telephone records linked the three gang members to the 2 smuggling detections. Investigations also showed that Eduart Karaj and Vullnet Karaj were following Anderson and Cowley in a separate car at the first detection to make sure it got through safely. The car used by Barker had also previously been driven by Karaj and Karaj on 12 March 2015 when in convoy with Anderson and Cowley and was previously owned by Vullnet Karaj.

Hani, Karaj and Karaj, all Albanian nationals, were all arrested on suspicion of conspiring to facilitate illegal immigration.

Eduart Karaj, Jason Cowley, Lee Anderson and Gillian Barker all entered guilty pleas at the beginning of their trial last month. Ilir Hani and Vullnet Karaj pleaded not guilty but were convicted.

They were all charged with conspiring to facilitate the commission of a breach of the UK immigration law by a non EU person and sentenced as follows:

Ilir Hani – 5 and a half years Vullnet Karaj – 5 years Eduart Karaj – 4 years Jason Cowley – 30 months Lee Anderson – 30 months Gillian Barker – 20 months

Assistant Director, David Fairclough, from CFI, said:

This was an organised crime group, motivated by money, that has been dismantled thanks to the dedication and expertise of Immigration Enforcement and Border Force officers.

The border detections were only the start of our investigations. As time passed Eduart Karaj, Vullnet Karaj and Hani may have believed that their offences had gone undetected, but my officers were

digging deeper, gathering the evidence that would ultimately ensure that they too were held to account for their offences.

This case sends a clear message. We are patient people and never stop looking for those involved in immigration crime.

Paul Morgan, Director Border Force South East and Europe, said:

The Border Force detections were the crucial first step in bringing these offenders to justice. Border Force officers are on the frontline keeping our borders safe and secure. We will continue to work with law enforcement colleagues to ensure that people smugglers and traffickers face the consequences of their crimes.

Anyone with information about suspected immigration abuse can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously or visit www.crimestoppers-uk.org.