# Entertainment executive arrested with £150,000 drugs haul claims he was unwitting courier



# Unwitting Courier or Organised Criminal? The Case of Mariyan Tsvyatkov

An entertainment executive's arrest at Belfast Port has sparked intense scrutiny and debate within the legal sphere, as Mariyan Tsvyatkov, a 37-year-old Bulgarian national, faces serious allegations of involvement in a sophisticated drug smuggling operation. Tsvyatkov was stopped upon returning from England, where he claims to have organised a corporate event, only for police to discover £150,000 worth of herbal cannabis concealed within his vehicle.

According to court proceedings, Tsvyatkov insists that he had no knowledge of the drugs hidden inside his Volkswagen Jetta. He was apprehended on November 22 last year after returning on a ferry from Cairnryan. The police search revealed a consignment of 11 kilos of cannabis expertly concealed within a compartment in the vehicle’s rear seat and boot area. Despite his claims of innocence, the prosecution has argued that Tsvyatkov is part of a well-organised crime network, asserting that while he may not be a ringleader, he plays a crucial role as a low-level courier.

Prosecution counsel has voiced concerns over Tsvyatkov's strong links to Bulgaria, which raises the potential risk of him fleeing from charges that carry severe implications. The prosecution described the operation as "very organised" and indicated that individuals like Tsvyatkov often serve as the "stooges," carrying out the risky final leg of drug smuggling, while the masterminds remain insulated from arrest. This perspective aligns with a worrying trend in Northern Ireland, where increasing amounts of drugs are being seized at ports, underscoring the ongoing battle against organised crime.

Just weeks before Tsvyatkov's arrest, law enforcement had already ramped up operations at Belfast Harbour. A notable operation led to the seizure of over £500,000 worth of herbal cannabis hidden within a heavy goods vehicle, highlighting the scale of the issue and the collaborative efforts of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Harbour Police. This is part of a wider effort to dismantle criminal networks that thrive on drug trafficking, which often leads to extensive social harm within communities.

Moreover, the illicit trade extends beyond drugs. Just a few months prior, HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) reported the seizure of over 10 million illegal cigarettes at Belfast Port, which represented around £5.3 million in unpaid taxes. Officials have stressed that such tobacco fraud frequently funds larger crime operations, creating further issues that adversely affect local communities.

During the court hearings, Tsvyatkov’s defence lawyer cited the executive’s history in the entertainment industry and the nature of his travels, which involved meetings for event coordination and planning for corporate engagements. The lawyer argued that Tsvyatkov’s role, if the prosecution's assertions are accurate, positions him as an unwitting participant—a mere operator in a larger, more sinister operation.

Mr Justice Shaw, presiding over the case, ultimately denied bail, citing a prima facie case that suggested Tsvyatkov was connected to individuals intent on bringing harmful substances into Northern Ireland. This decision underscores the mounting legal perspective that even low-level players in drug trafficking can significantly impact public safety.

As the case continues to unfold, it raises broader questions about the intersection of organised crime and the everyday lives of those unintentionally caught up in these dangerous webs. The stark reality is that Tsvyatkov's future hangs in the balance, while the judicial system grapples with the challenges posed by increasingly sophisticated drug smuggling operations infiltrating communities across Northern Ireland.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/entertainment-executive-found-with-150k-drugs-claims-he-knew-nothing-about-the-haul-discovered-hidden-inside-his-car-JQEGDOPVQZH2NOYFAIEVDFS2HE/), [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/entertainment-executive-found-with-150k-drugs-claims-he-knew-nothing-about-the-haul-discovered-hidden-inside-his-car-JQEGDOPVQZH2NOYFAIEVDFS2HE/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/entertainment-executive-found-with-150k-drugs-claims-he-knew-nothing-about-the-haul-discovered-hidden-inside-his-car-JQEGDOPVQZH2NOYFAIEVDFS2HE/), [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/entertainment-executive-found-with-150k-drugs-claims-he-knew-nothing-about-the-haul-discovered-hidden-inside-his-car-JQEGDOPVQZH2NOYFAIEVDFS2HE/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/entertainment-executive-found-with-150k-drugs-claims-he-knew-nothing-about-the-haul-discovered-hidden-inside-his-car-JQEGDOPVQZH2NOYFAIEVDFS2HE/), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2023-08-10/drugs-worth-more-than-500000-seized-in-belfast-harbour)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/06/26/news/more_than_10_million_illegal_cigarettes_seized_at_belfast_port-3382652/), [[5]](https://www.irishtimes.com/crime-law/2023/05/27/6-million-worth-of-drugs-seized-in-northern-ireland/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.rte.ie/news/ulster/2023/0526/1385903-drugs-northern-ireland/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/entertainment-executive-found-with-150k-drugs-claims-he-knew-nothing-about-the-haul-discovered-hidden-inside-his-car-JQEGDOPVQZH2NOYFAIEVDFS2HE/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/entertainment-executive-found-with-150k-drugs-claims-he-knew-nothing-about-the-haul-discovered-hidden-inside-his-car-JQEGDOPVQZH2NOYFAIEVDFS2HE/), [[7]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-68765503)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/entertainment-executive-found-with-150k-drugs-claims-he-knew-nothing-about-the-haul-discovered-hidden-inside-his-car-JQEGDOPVQZH2NOYFAIEVDFS2HE/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/entertainment-executive-found-with-150k-drugs-claims-he-knew-nothing-about-the-haul-discovered-hidden-inside-his-car-JQEGDOPVQZH2NOYFAIEVDFS2HE/> - An entertainment executive, Mariyan Tsvyatkov, was arrested at Belfast Port after £150,000 worth of herbal cannabis was found hidden in his car. Tsvyatkov, a 37-year-old Bulgarian national, denies charges of possessing and being concerned in the supply of Class B drugs. He claims to have been returning from organizing a corporate event in England and was unaware of the drugs concealed in his vehicle. The prosecution argues that he is part of a sophisticated smuggling operation, while the defense suggests he was a low-level courier. Bail was denied due to the risk of further offending.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2023-08-10/drugs-worth-more-than-500000-seized-in-belfast-harbour> - A 42-year-old man was arrested after a joint operation between the PSNI and the Harbour Police led to the seizure of over £500,000 worth of herbal cannabis at Belfast Harbour. The drugs were concealed within a heavy goods vehicle. Detective Inspector Conor Sweeney highlighted the importance of partnership working to tackle organized criminality and appealed for public assistance in identifying suspects or providing information about suspected drug dealing in the area.
4. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/06/26/news/more_than_10_million_illegal_cigarettes_seized_at_belfast_port-3382652/> - HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) seized over 10 million illegal cigarettes at Belfast Port, representing around £5.3 million in unpaid taxes. The cigarettes were found inside a container scanned by Border Force. Lucie Irving, assistant director of the fraud investigation service at HMRC, emphasized that tobacco fraud often funds organized crime and other illegal activities that harm communities. Darren Brabon, assistant director of Border Force Northern Ireland Command, noted that illicit cigarettes are dangerous and harmful, targeting young people and exposing them to crime.
5. <https://www.irishtimes.com/crime-law/2023/05/27/6-million-worth-of-drugs-seized-in-northern-ireland/> - A 45-year-old lorry driver from Portadown was arrested after over 300 kilograms of cannabis, valued at £6 million, were seized at Belfast Port. The drugs were hidden in a lorry transporting soft drinks. David Cunningham, NCA branch commander, stated that the seizure would be a significant blow to the organized crime group behind the importation and emphasized the ongoing efforts to prevent illegal drugs from reaching communities.
6. <https://www.rte.ie/news/ulster/2023/0526/1385903-drugs-northern-ireland/> - A 45-year-old lorry driver from Portadown was arrested after over 300 kilograms of cannabis, valued at £6 million, were seized at Belfast Port. The drugs were concealed within a lorry transporting soft drinks. NCA branch commander David Cunningham described the seizure as a massive haul that would have ended up on the streets of Northern Ireland, highlighting the ongoing efforts to prevent illegal drugs from reaching communities.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-68765503> - A 41-year-old man from County Donegal was charged after more than £1 million worth of cannabis was discovered hidden among boxes of paint in the back of a van at Belfast Port. The van, belonging to an Armagh-based furniture company, was stopped as it disembarked the ferry from Liverpool. The man was charged with possessing Class B drugs with intent to supply. Police emphasized the involvement of organized crime groups in such drug importations and the importance of public assistance in tackling this issue.