

# STUDY GUIDE



## COUNCIL OF EUROPE

### *Agenda:*

Rapid escalation of transnational organized crime in post-Soviet nations and Balkan states due to ongoing conflict and political instability, threatening institutional collapse and economic ruin.

**Chairperson: Biyas Dutta**

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# CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS

"I have nothing to declare but my genius, and this four-kilo bag of cocaine."

— Oscar Wilde

Welcome, delegates.

If you're reading this, congratulations. You are now a part of the Council of Europe, THSMUN 2026. You are here to decide how a community of 46 member states, bound by a shared commitment to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, can dismantle the structures that allow this trade to flourish.

The committee is primarily a consensus based body, but when the crisis arrives, be prepared to trust no one (no, not even your codel, not even us). Speeches are your weapon. For everything other than research purposes, let your ChatGPT sit at home for the duration of this conference (we will know).

If you have a flair for the dramatic, then great, but empty rhetoric without solutions will fetch you nothing. You must pick a mix of the two. For paperwork, get as creative or ruthless as you want with your ideation, but execution should be realistic. Cite your sources (if they're from Wikipedia, I will genuinely bawl, don't do this to me).

If you truly want to learn something and push yourself in this committee, you might want to bid adieu to your lunch breaks (fudge brownies are a hard tradeoff but you do what you gotta do). As always, do not treat this study guide as your be-all, know-all research, explore the topic in depth.

*Note: If you want an advantage over the others, you might want to look through the website very, very carefully. (go take a peek).*

Chairperson of the Council of Europe,  
Biyas Dutta

# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Hello, delegates.

This committee is going to be chaotic, fun, and will possibly exhaust the energy drink stock of your nearest convenience store.

This study guide is aimed to get you into the conversations and the debate of the committee. Newcomers and those still learning the workings of an MUN are strongly advised to go through this document carefully and note the important topics. However, the information here is not enough for anyone seeking to excel. We implore you to do better research, cite more cases and references, know more laws, and find better documents.

The only thing that you should be scared of is your own self. The true outcome we want is for the delegates to very dramatically look into their ink-stained palms (from all the communique) and then, quivering, mutter under their breaths, "...What have I become..." at 2:30 drunk on ten espressos or when sending 90 chits by lunch. (Yes, we'll have to go through all 90. Send at your own risk. Don't make us Chit Santa who carries sacks full of folded papers back home.)

Anyhow, we hope this committee will be incredibly interesting, and more importantly, a blast (though not literally. Or so we hope.)

We won't keep you reading the letter longer than the guide. Good luck, break a leg. Or break someone else's legs, with the right paperwork and sway. Just don't get caught doing it.

P.S., if you somehow missed the Chairperson's advice, we'll reiterate: go through the THSMUN'26 website very carefully. Trust us, and reap its benefits.

With a lot of love,

A touch of white powder (Just sugar from Colombia, promise),

Good luck :)

From the COE Executive Board.

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- ATS- Amphetamine-Type Stimulant
- BMK- Benzyl Methyl Ketone
- CCP- Container Control Programme
- CETS- Council of Europe Treaty Series
- CSTO- Collective Security Treaty Organization
- DLO- Departmental Liaison Officer
- FATF- Financial Action Task Force of the the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- GHB- Gamma-Hydroxybutyric Acid
- LSD- Lysergic Acid Diethylamide
- MDA 3,4-Methylenedioxyamphetamine
- MDEA 3,4-Methylenedioxy-N-ethylamphetamine
- OCTA- Organised Crime Threat Assessment
- PCCP- Passenger and Cargo Control Programme
- PDU- Problem Drug User
- SECI- South-east Europe Co-operation Initiative
- SECP- South-east European Co-operation Process
- SELEC- Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre
- THC- Tetrahydrocannabinol (primary psychoactive constituent of the cannabis plant)
- TOCTA- Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment
- VNSA- Violent Non-State Actors

# DEFINITIONS & CONCEPTS

## DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES

The terms “drugs“ and “substances“:

Covers the narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances under international control, as defined by the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961 , as amended by the 1972 Protocol , and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971. Currently, there are 118 narcotic drugs, their preparations and 115 psychotropic substances listed in the Schedules of the 1961 and 1971 Convention, respectively.

Otherwise, when used in a general pharmaceutical sense, the terms “drugs“ and “substances“ – if they stand alone and are not specifically indicated as “narcotic drugs“ and “psychotropic substances“ – are interchangeably used in the Dictionary as generic terms.

“Principal names“ of such substances:

The main denominations used in the Dictionary for the pharmaceutical substances under international control are those most commonly applied to them and are herein referred to as “principal names“. The names were designated in the scheduling decisions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and accordingly applied in the international drug control treaties.

## A NOTE ON ORGANIZED CRIME

The term ‘organised crime’ is not a strictly scientific one. First, the word ‘crime’ is relative – it is a conventional notion, a social construction. Secondly, all intentional crimes are ‘organised’ to a certain extent. Our definition of ‘organised crime’ reflects the ongoing debate in the sciences of criminology or sociology. These increasingly recognise organised crime as a form of business enterprise or as a series of ‘illicit enterprises’.

Criminal business arises, exists, and develops according to certain conditions:

- demand for illegal goods (drugs, arms, and so on) and services (e.g. prostitution)
- unsatisfied demand for legal goods and services (for example, the 'deficit' in the former Soviet Union)
- unemployment and other sources of exclusion as a basis of social deviance;— deficiencies in tax and customs policies and other government policies

A definition, if further attempted, of organised crime groups, is that they have to satisfy the following criteria:—

- They contain at least three people;
- They engage in criminal activity that is prolonged or ongoing;
- Their members are motivated by profit or power
- They commit serious criminal offences

The 1994 World Ministerial Conference may be considered the official baptism of the term 'transnational organised crime', which was bound to dominate the international debate for the following ten years. In a resolution approved by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) shortly before the conference, organised crime was equated with transnational organised crime.

Despite the efforts made by several domestic governments and international organisations to define it, organised crime is still far from meeting the normative characteristics of legal categories and its definitions usually lack both rigorousness and exhaustiveness. The definitions proposed by international bodies are so broad that they may include anything from the Italian Cosa Nostra to a gang of thieves, from Al Qaeda to Jeffrey Epstein's pedophilia ring, a drug-trafficking network to a youth clique.

*So organized crime remains a vague and ambiguous catchphrase, the application of which entails varying degrees of arbitrariness.*

## TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

According to UNODC, transnational organized crime encompasses, inter alia, illicit trafficking of firearms, drugs, protected species, cultural property, or falsified medical products and, among its most severe manifestations, human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants.

Why “*transnational*“?

It's because these criminal networks operate across borders and geographies. They illegally move people, goods, and money across borders, whether smuggling drugs from one country to another, trafficking people across continents, or laundering money through offshore accounts.

When is the offence ‘transnational’ in nature?

As specified in article 3(2) of the Organized Crime Convention, the offence is transnational in nature if:

- It is committed in more than one State;
- It is committed in one State but a substantial part of its preparation, planning, direction or control takes place in another State;
- It is committed in one State but involves an organized criminal group that engages in criminal activities in more than one State; or
- It is committed in one State but has substantial effects in another State.

## Introduction to Drug Trafficking

In recent years, global drug use has increased, making it one of the most lucrative businesses for transnational organized crime groups. The number of people suffering from drug use disorders has soared to nearly 40 million, a 45 per cent increase over ten years.

Today, illicit drug markets continue to expand their reach, fueled by the growing cocaine supply, drug sales on social media platforms, and the dangerous spread of synthetic drugs. Synthetic drugs are cheap and easy to manufacture anywhere in the world.

The digital age has revolutionized drug trafficking (No more Pablo and Bernard meeting in a dark alleyway to trade weed). Today's drug markets thrive online, operating through darknet marketplaces, social media platforms, and encrypted communication applications.

# TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2000: Creation of the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime

2003: Establishment of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption

2010: International Mass-Market Fraud Working Group Releases Threat Assessment

2010: United Nations Issues Threat Assessment on Transnational Organised Crime

2011: European Union's Anti-Trafficking Directive is Established

2018: Creation of the UNTOC Review Mechanism

2020: EU Council Sets Out 10 Priorities for Fighting Organised Crime (2022-2025)

2021: EBCGA Creates Handbook on Firearms for Border Guards and Custom Authorities

*(What are the key documents/events/actions taken related to the agenda according to your portfolio? Can be domestic or international.)*

# ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

## INTRODUCTION

The Council of Europe is an international organization, which was founded in 1949 by the Treaty of London. It is based in Strasbourg, France and it consists of 46 permanent members and 6 observer states.

The Statute of the Council of Europe has three main goals:

- First of all, it advocates the protection of Human Rights, pluralistic democracy and the principles of the Rule of Law.
- The second goal concerns the promotion of the cultural identity and diversity between the European states.
- As far as the third goal is concerned, the Council makes significant efforts in order to strengthen democratic stability by supporting political, judicial and constitutional reforms. With the aim of achieving all the above, Member States have to be united through common actions, debates and agreements.

All European states have the opportunity of the enjoyment of the Council, only if they adhere to the principles of the Rule of Law and only if they fully respect Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. This part is considered necessary to present the structure of the Council of Europe.

According to Chapter III, Article 10 of the Statute of the Council of Europe its structure includes two main organs:

- The first one is the Committee of Ministers which constitutes the statutory decision-making body and is composed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of each member state.
- The second one is the Parliamentary Assembly which is the deliberative organ of the Council of Europe and it consists of 324 members of the parliament from the 46 states.

# STRUCTURE OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

- *The Secretary General*- The head of the COE is its Secretary General, who leads and represents the organisation.
- *Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*- It acts as the legislature and also holds the power to elect various dignitaries.
- *The European Court of Human Rights*- Oversees Member States' implementation of the Council's European Convention on Human Rights.
- *Congress of Regional and Local Authorities*- The CoE's assembly for local politicians.

## THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

*(this is the one we're going to be in)*

The Committee of Ministers (CM) is made up of the foreign ministers of each of the Member States or their deputies serves as the decision-making body of the organization. It is the executive branch, supervising the execution of judgements made by the European Court of Human Rights.

The current chair of the COE is Monaco (that's us, as of 15th May, 2026 to November 10, 2026).

The role, functions and voting powers of the Committee of Ministers (CM) are described in Chapter IV of the Statute of the Council of Europe.

# MANDATE OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The Council of Europe is at liberty to discuss the protection of human rights, the rule of law, the promotion of democracy, and cultural issues. It may also discuss issues involving legal enforcement and crime. However, being a loose Parliament of European Nations, the Council may not discuss matters of international security or war.

## Relevant Conventions

- Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (CETS No. 185) (2001): Addresses computer-related crime, cross-border cooperation in digital investigations.
- Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime (Warsaw Convention, CETS No. 198) (2005): International cooperation in tracking, seizing, and confiscating criminal assets.
- Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (CETS No. 173) (1999): Measures to criminalize corrupt acts, supervised by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).
- Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197) (2005): Focuses on protecting victims and strengthening prosecution against traffickers.
- Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property (Nicosia Convention, CETS No. 221) (2017): Addresses the trafficking of cultural property, which is often used to fund organized crime.
- Medicrime Convention (CETS No. 211) (2011): Addresses counterfeit medical products and similar crimes involving threats to public health

- Agreement on Illicit Traffic by Sea (CETS No. 156): Implements Article 17 of the 1988 UN Convention, to stop drug trafficking vessels in international waters.
- Convention on the Counterfeiting of Medical Products and Similar Crimes (Medicrime Convention, CETS No. 211): Covers the forgery and illegal trafficking of medical products

# TRAFFICKING

*“My friends are saying “shut up, Jennie, just get in the car.”*

## DRUG TRAFFICKING

Narcotics trafficking refers to the illegal cultivation, manufacture, distribution, and sale of drugs that are subject to drug prohibition laws.

This global illicit trade involves substances such as opium, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and synthetic drugs, and is one of the most lucrative and dangerous black-market activities in the world.

Narcotics trafficking not only aids organized crime networks and corruption but also affects public health. The trade takes place through transnational networks and specific routes that include producers, smugglers, middlemen, and street dealers, frequently helped by corrupt officials or guarded by VNSAs (Violent Non-State Actors).

## STAGES OF THE DRUG TRADE

### *Drug Production*

Production step involves growing plants used to produce drugs like coca, opium poppy and cannabis or synthesising narcotic drugs and psychotropic materials chemically. The most important international conventions in this step are the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961, as amended in 1972) and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971).

### *Drug Manufacture*

Manufacturing includes chemical processing, refining, or synthesising a raw plant material or precursor chemical into a consumable drug (e.g. cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines, or opioids).

The United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988 Vienna Convention) goes further in the control of precursor chemicals that are essential in this stage and criminalization of illicit manufacturing operations.

### *Drug Distribution*

Distribution encompasses the illegal movement, smuggling and movement of drugs out of the production sites to transit points and finally consumer markets. Organised crime and corruption with violence are common phenomena in distribution networks, which are sometimes transnational.

In the international context this requires states to collaborate with each other in areas of interdiction, extradition, to provide mutual legal assistance and to forfeit assets in connection with drug distribution crime.

### *Sale of Drugs*

The sale phase involves illegal commercial handling of the drugs to end users at the street level, wholesale or darknet marketplaces. Sales and possession with intent to distribute are criminalised in criminal statutes.

Penalties are applied by states in accordance with the requirements of the scale of trafficking and participation in organised crime, taking into consideration the requirements of the above-mentioned drug control conventions.

## **HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

Human trafficking is a grave violation of human rights, a form of modern-day slavery. Traffickers prey on vulnerable populations, such as those living in poverty, experiencing conflict or displacement, or lacking social support networks.

Child trafficking has reached a crisis point. In the last 15 years, the proportion of children among victims has tripled. While girls are overwhelmingly subjected to sexual exploitation, boys are increasingly forced into labour.

Traffickers now operate in the digital world, using technology to entrap victims at every step. Children are particularly vulnerable, often targeted on social media platforms where they believe they are safe.

## **SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS**

The migrant smuggling trade, driven by the movement of people across international borders for financial gain, is a lucrative criminal enterprise. In 2016, it was estimated that at least 2.5 million migrants were smuggled, generating profits of up to \$5.7 billion for smugglers.

A 2018 UNODC study identified 30 major smuggling routes worldwide, highlighting the vast scope of this illicit activity. The demand for smuggling services is particularly pronounced among refugees fleeing conflict or persecution and desperate to reach safety.

The main difference between smuggling and trafficking is the consent of the victim, however sometimes smuggling can lead to human trafficking, rape, theft, kidnapping, extortion, etc.

### **ARMS TRAFFICKING**

Arms trafficking is extremely complex to track. Firearms are manufactured and traded both licitly and illicitly thus making the identification and tracing of illegally manufactured and trafficked firearms difficult. Most firearms are produced legally and then diverted into the illicit market. Notably, illicit arms are present in most forms of violent crimes and increase the power of organized criminal groups.

The Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunitions (Firearms Protocol) was developed with a view to providing measures to address the transnational nature of the phenomenon and its links to organized crime.

### **WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING**

Wildlife trafficking encompasses a wide array of activities, including the capture, trade, import, export, processing, possession, acquisition and consumption of wild flora and fauna, along with items derived from these organisms.

### **ORGAN TRAFFICKING**

It is a form of trafficking in which individuals are exploited for organs. Although victims often appear to have consented to the removal of their organs, their consent is invalid when deception, fraud or abuse of a position of vulnerability is involved. In such cases, they are considered victims of human trafficking.

# CONNECTING DRUG TRAFFICKING WITH ORGANIZED CRIME

## CORRUPTION

In order to facilitate the transportation of illicit drugs across borders and their sale on local markets, traffickers will often identify weaknesses in law enforcement. This may involve the paying of bribes or other forms of corruption. Corruption can occur at different levels, both in the public and the private sectors. A distinction is usually drawn between grand and administrative (petty) corruption, with the former referring to corrupt practices affecting legislative process and policymakers and the latter referring to dealings between individual civil servants and the public. In both of its manifestations, corruption has a devastating impact on the rule of law.

*(So in simple terms, the problem is the implementation of the current legal framework and institutional enforcement.)*

## CONNECTION BETWEEN FIREARMS AND DRUG TRAFFICKING

Cross border firearms trafficking itself can be undertaken in various ways, depending on the quantity of firearms being trafficked and the routes via which and/or region where the trafficking occurs. Generally, larger consignments of firearms are smuggled via sea and ships, and smaller quantities are smuggled using several vehicles on land, or through strategic 'ant trafficking' (*smaller amounts of firearms, not actual ants, though that is also a form of trafficking*).

The trafficking of smaller amounts of firearms is the most prominent form of firearms trafficking along cross-border land routes. This type of trafficking involves many people transporting small consignments [often only what could be considered a violation of possession regulations] to avoid potential trafficking charges, while still meeting the demand for firearms in the destination region.

*(so how do we address low volume firearm trafficking without over-criminalizing them or imposing higher penalties?)*

The crime-terror nexus regarding drugs and firearms can manifest itself in two ways:

- (1) the illicit trafficking in guns and drugs to finance terrorism; and
- (2) the use of drug crime connections to acquire firearms for terrorist purposes.

The conflict is not only a 'destination' in this complex scheme, but it can also be a 'source' since State fragility also provides opportunities for the diversion of firearms and other types of weapons into the illicit market, also allowing criminal groups to prosper.

# DRUGS

## DRUGS TODAY

Around 246 million people, or 5% of the global working population, are or have been illicit drug users, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The magnitude of the world drug problem becomes more apparent when considering that more than 10% of this total amount of users are addicts. Therefore, it is estimated that 27 million people. Almost half (12.19 million) of those problem drug users inject drugs.

This problem places a heavy burden on public health systems in terms of the prevention, treatment and care of drug use disorders and their health consequences. The annual number of drug-related deaths has remained relatively unchanged. A large number of drug users continue to lose their lives prematurely, often as a result of overdose, even though overdose-related deaths are preventable. In Europe, these drugs come from various routes, generally originating in Asia or South America.

The entry of Cocaine occurs from:

- South America, through Atlantic shipping lanes landing at ports such as Rotterdam and Antwerp
- West African transit hubs acting as intermediaries if South America's direct routes fail.
- The secondary Balkan Route

The entry of heroin and other opioids, on the other hand, originates from the Golden Crescent or the Golden Triangle, and occurs through:

- Balkan Route
- Southern Caucasus route
- Northern Route (via Central Asia and Russia)
- Maritime heroin trafficking through East Africa and the Mediterranean

*(For the purposes of this committee, we will primarily be discussing the Balkan entry route, however, discussion on other routes of drugs into Europe is within the ambit of the committee.)*

## EFFECT OF GLOBAL DISTURBANCES

The impact of other global disturbances is also being witnessed in this ever-evolving drug trade.

For example, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is being witnessed in the traditional routes of drug trafficking, but at the same time, it is also fast-tracking the production and distribution of synthetic drugs.

Another example is that of the Russia-Ukraine War, which is impacting the migration patterns and border control strategies in that region.

## THE DOMESTIC DRUG MARKET

Since 2011, almost no general population surveys have been conducted in the region with the exception of Croatia (Lack of capacity precludes a complete understanding of the health impacts of illicit drugs on the region).

Moreover, information about the type of data available is not regularly updated and statistics are often reused over several years. Some drug research is conducted in South-Eastern Europe. Of particular note is that of the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD).

This study uses targeted surveys of schoolchildren between the ages of 15 and 16 to collect comparable data on substance abuse, and is able to highlight new and evolving trends. This was the case in Bulgaria, where a 2011 ESPAD survey highlighted the relatively high level ATS use and ease of access to them for school children.

# AN INTRODUCTION TO DRUGS IN EUROPE

## THE SITUATION

Drug use appears to be relatively stable in Europe, but there are worrying indications of developments in the synthetic drugs market and, more generally, in the way drug consumers now use a wider set of substances. Polydrug use, including the combination of illicit drugs with alcohol, and sometimes, medicines and non-controlled substances, has become the dominant pattern of drug use in Europe.

## EUROPEAN DRUG POLICY

A comprehensive policy for addressing psychoactive substance use is still lacking in most Member States, and treatment services are having to adapt their practice to meet the needs of clients whose problems span multiple substances (because of the prevalence of the usage of multiple drugs at once).

Similarly, targeting and assessing the impact of measures to reduce drug supply requires consideration to be given to the overall market for psychoactive substances. Without this wider perspective, gains made in relation to one drug may result in a displacement of use to other products.

The European model of drug policy is characterised by both balancing drug supply reduction and demand reduction objectives, as well as acknowledging the importance of both human rights and community safety.

This approach permits both concerted action and cooperation in law enforcement and border control efforts to limit drug supply, e.g., current programmes targeting heroin importation routes from Afghanistan and cocaine trafficking via the Atlantic and West Africa and synthetic drug production.

It also permits innovative developments in the area of treatment and harm reduction, one example of which is heroin-assisted treatment, (this is of growing interest to a number of European countries and is the subject of a new EMCDDA review).

## THE OPIOID SITUATION

Currently, illicit synthetic opioid use in Europe appears mainly to involve the consumption of substitution drugs diverted from drug treatment. In addition, some countries in northern and central Europe are now reporting the use of fentanyl, which is likely manufactured illicitly outside the European Union.

The appearance of this drug is of particular concern and, overall, given the situation elsewhere, a good argument exists for improving our capacity to monitor trends in the misuse of psychoactive products intended to be used only for therapeutic purposes. As synthetic opioids are used illicitly mainly in place of heroin, information on their use can provide insights into the overall heroin market. Currently, an important question in this area is the extent to which supply reduction measures are now impacting on the availability of heroin on the streets of Europe.

## THE CANNIBAS DILEMMA

Cannabis remains Europe's most popular illicit drug, but it is also the one on which public attitudes are most divergent. In most European countries, cannabis use increased during the 2000s and early 2010s. Europe may now be moving into a new phase, as data from general population and school surveys point to a stabilising or even decreasing trend in cannabis use in many countries. Levels of use, nevertheless, remain high by historical standards. The last few years have also seen a growing understanding of the public health implications of the long-term and widespread use of this drug, and rising levels of treatment demand for cannabis-related problems. Therefore, what constitutes an effective response to cannabis use remains a key question in the European debate on drugs.

Cannabis can be cultivated in a wide range of environments and grows wild in many parts of the world. It has been estimated that cannabis is cultivated in 172 countries and territories.

Herbal cannabis in Europe is also imported, mostly from Africa (e.g. Ghana, South Africa, Egypt), and less often from the Americas (especially the Caribbean islands), the Middle East (Lebanon) and Asia (Thailand).

Seeing the big picture: drug use in Europe today examples of policy development here include the USA and the Netherlands. In the USA, there has been a move towards liberalising the availability of herbal cannabis for medical purposes in some states. In the Netherlands, policymakers now appear to be taking an increasingly robust stance against domestic cannabis production and the operational rules applied to 'coffee shop' sales.

## COCAINE IN EUROPE

Cocaine remains the second most commonly used illicit drug in Europe, although prevalence levels and trends differ considerably between countries. High levels of cocaine use are observed only in a small number of, mostly, western European countries, while elsewhere the use of this drug remains limited.

The conversion of coca leaves into cocaine hydrochloride is mainly carried out in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, although it may also occur in other countries. Colombia's importance in the production of cocaine is corroborated by information on laboratories dismantled and seizures of potassium permanganate, a chemical reagent used in the manufacture of cocaine hydrochloride.

*Spain, the Netherlands and Portugal, and to some extent Belgium, appear to be the main points of entry to Europe for cocaine.* Within Europe, reports frequently mention Germany, France and the United Kingdom as important transit or destination countries. The United Kingdom estimates that 25 to 30 tonnes of cocaine are imported into the country each year. Recent reports also indicate that cocaine trafficking may be expanding eastward.

## THE HERO(IN) OF THE STORY

*(please laugh)*

Two forms of imported heroin have historically been offered on the illicit drugs market in Europe: the commonly available brown heroin (its chemical base form), which comes mainly from Afghanistan; and white heroin (a salt form), which typically originates from south-east Asia, though this form is considerably less common. In some northern European countries (e.g. Estonia, Finland, Norway), fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, and its analogues are in use. In addition, some opioid drugs are produced within Europe, principally home-made poppy products (e.g. poppy straw, concentrated from crushed poppy stalks or heads) in some east European countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Poland).

Heroin consumed in Europe originates predominantly in Afghanistan, which accounts for most of the global illicit opium output. The other producing countries are Burma/ Myanmar, which mainly supplies markets in east and south-east Asia, Pakistan and Laos, followed by Mexico and Colombia, which are considered the largest suppliers of heroin to the United States.

Heroin arrives in Europe mainly by two trafficking routes. The historically important Balkan route brings heroin produced in Afghanistan through Pakistan, Iran and Turkey, and then towards other transit or destination countries, mainly in western and southern Europe. Heroin is also trafficked via the 'silk route' through central Asia and towards Russia. To a limited extent, this heroin is then smuggled through Belarus, Poland and Ukraine to other destinations such as Scandinavian countries via Lithuania.

**Heroin precursors:** The reverse Balkan route as a transit zone for trafficking is not limited to illicit drugs - it was long the transit region for acetic anhydride (AA), the main precursor chemical used in heroin processing.

The chemical was sourced in Western and Central Europe and shipped along the "reverse" Balkan route to Afghanistan through Turkey. Over the last decade, the classic modus operandi for such trafficking has involved diversion from domestic trade channels in Europe followed by transportation by road - mainly along the Romania-Bulgaria-Turkey "northern branch" (although a Serbia- Bulgaria-Turkey trajectory also seems to have been used).

There has been an almost total absence of AA seizures in South-Eastern Europe

since 2010, when Bulgaria seized some 21 tons of the substance. In 2012, the reverse Balkan route of AA appeared to be relatively dormant. Turkey, which in the past has seized anything from several hundred kilos to multi-ton shipments, saw its lowest seizures in over a decade.

This is likely due to intensive law enforcement activity, including several international operations and the arrest of the main organized criminal group involved in the traffic of AA towards Turkey (the trial of the group leadership is underway). Nevertheless, significant AA seizures in Turkey in 2013 appear to indicate that the route was still active.

### A NOTE ON AMPHETAMINES, HALLUCINOGENS, GHB AND KETAMINE IN EUROPE

Amphetamines (a generic term that includes both amphetamine and methamphetamine) and ecstasy are among the most commonly used illicit drugs in Europe. Of the two drugs, amphetamine is by far the more commonly available in Europe, whereas significant methamphetamine use has historically been restricted to the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The most widely known synthetic hallucinogenic drug in Europe is lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), consumption of which has been low and somewhat stable for a considerable time.

Amphetamine, methamphetamine and ecstasy are synthetic drugs requiring chemical precursors in the manufacturing process. Insights into the production of these substances can be gleaned from reports of seizures of controlled chemicals — diverted from licit trade — that are necessary for their manufacture.

A related phenomenon has been observed in the amphetamine market, where precursors have been chemically ‘masked’ to avoid existing border and sales control mechanisms.

International efforts to prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs are coordinated through ‘Project Prism’. The project uses a system of pre-export notifications for licit trade, and the reporting of shipments stopped and seizures made when suspicious transactions occur.

## A FOOTNOTE ON AMPHETAMINE MANUFACTURING AND TRAFFICKING

While law enforcement agencies are discovering illicit laboratories dedicated to methamphetamine manufacture in most countries along the Balkan route, four clusters have emerged:

### *Southeastern Europe (Greece and Bulgaria)*

The involvement of illicit actors in the manufacture of methamphetamine in Greece and Bulgaria has seen an uptick in recent years. Traditionally known for other illicit drug activities, criminal actors in these two countries have become increasingly involved in the manufacturing of methamphetamine. While Greece serves primarily as a transit point for methamphetamine destined for Western Europe, domestic manufacture has also emerged. In Bulgaria, rural areas are known to house clandestine laboratories, making it a more prominent manufacturing hub for methamphetamine.

### *Northern Europe*

There is large-scale illicit methamphetamine manufacturing in the Netherlands (and, to a lesser extent, in neighbouring countries). These laboratories manufacture methamphetamine using a precursor known as BMK (benzyl methyl ketone), following the same methods used by Mexican cartels. Notably, Mexican and Latin American “cooks“ have been identified in laboratories dismantled in the Netherlands, suggesting the transfer of knowledge and expertise from Latin America, and possible involvement of Latin American Cartels in the European market.

### *Central Europe*

There are a myriad of small-scale laboratories in Czechia, Slovakia, and Austria. Operations in this subregion primarily utilize ephedrine and pseudoephedrine as precursors.

The annual value of opiate and methamphetamine trafficking along the Balkan route was between US\$13.9 and US\$21.4 billion in the years 2019 to 2022.

### **A FOOTNOTE ON SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS IN EUROPE**

Lab-manufactured and highly dangerous opioids such as nitrazine and fentanyl have, as of late, gained great popularity in the various urban regions of Europe.

This new wave of such potent synthetics has quietly surpassed traditional drugs like heroin, causing record overdose deaths, while out-of-date laws and disjointed policies are unable to keep up with the rapidly changing threat.

What makes Europe particularly vulnerable to these new-age drugs is a deadly combination of factors. These factors are –

- Top-of the line and pharmaceutical facilities that can be easily exploited for secretive drug production
- The Schengen Area's open borders that allow drugs to move freely once they enter the aforementioned Schengen area
- Dark-web marketplaces and cryptocurrency systems that make large-scale anonymous trafficking simpler through enhanced transnational connectivity through unregulated digital platforms, and

The Council of Europe's emphasis on international cooperation complements the efforts of international bodies such as the EUDA and UNODC. These international bodies collectively assist member states in developing adaptable yet harmonized strategies aiming to prevent Europe from deteriorating under the wrath of ever-more-potent drugs. The Pompidou Group offers an excellent platform for the sharing of drug trafficking and drug control strategies, such as early warning systems, and cross-border investigations.

The EUDA's Early Warning System has already uncovered seven new nitazenes in 2024, the highest number of new synthetic opioids found in a single year, and at least 22 nitazene strains are now under monitoring across Europe. The effect of

these highly potent drugs can be felt most severely in the Baltic countries, where these deadly opioids have been linked many times to a large share of drug-related deaths, as they are incredibly easy to overdose on due to their high potency compared to traditional drugs such as heroin or cocaine.

These Nitrazene variants are often found as 'fake medicine' or presented as soft drug alternatives to drugs such as cannabis. In early 2026, Operation Fabryka, a year-long investigation that was coordinated by Europol with the aid of multiple European countries such as Poland, Germany, and Belgium, dismantled more than two dozen laboratories dedicated to the production of nitrazene. Europol arrested a total of 85 people and seized around 1,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals, stopping the creation of hundreds of tonnes of synthetic drugs.

### **NATIONAL DRUG STRATEGIES**

A central element of Europe's drug policy model is the adoption of national drug strategies and action plans, and these now exist in almost all of the 30 countries monitored by the EMCDDA.

A number of European countries are already using data on public expenditure as a tool for planning and evaluating the implementation of drug policies, while others, such as Portugal and Slovakia, report plans to do so. Developing a clear and complete picture of national drug-related public expenditure in Europe, however, remains a challenge. Currently, there is no consensus on how to estimate specific types of drug related expenditures. In order to improve accuracy and comparability across countries, a comprehensive mapping of the public bodies funding drug policy will be necessary, as well as the harmonisation of concepts and definitions.

# INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT ISSUES

The current drug policy environment in which the Pompidou Group finds itself is defined by a basic change in the nature, volume, and mechanisms of illicit drug markets, resulting in a crisis situation that is multifaceted and extends beyond traditional control dynamics. At the core of this problem is the proliferation and development of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances (NPS), which have significantly altered the global drug market.

Unlike traditional drugs that have been naturally produced, synthetic drugs have been produced in controlled environments with little dependency on natural resources. This has enabled their production to be dynamic and decentralized, making it difficult to control or regulate. This dynamic nature has empowered those in the illicit trade to adjust chemical compositions, effectively circumventing legal classifications and creating a dynamic gap in terms of legal adaptation to new substances.

As such, traditional enforcement mechanisms that were effective in controlling traditional drug types have become less effective. This change is further compounded by the digitalization of drug trafficking networks, particularly in relation to the development of encrypted communication systems, dark net marketplaces, and cryptocurrency-based financial systems.

The digitalization of drug trafficking networks has significantly minimized the risks associated with physical drug distribution systems, allowing drug traffickers to operate with increased anonymity and reduced risk across multiple state borders. As a result, the drug trade has become more decentralized, networked, and resilient in nature, making it increasingly difficult for individual states to monitor, intercept, and prosecute drug trafficking activities.

# INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

## The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The UNODC is the lead agency for the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its three supplementary protocols. It helps countries create and improve laws to criminalize organized crime (participation, money laundering, obstruction of justice, smuggling), offering model laws and reviews, and convenes regular meetings to oversee implementation. It provides technical assistance, e.g. training for police, prosecutors, and judges in aspects like financial investigation, witness protection, and maritime crime. UNODC also leads regional programs to strengthen cooperation (e.g., West Africa Coast Initiative), promote intelligence-sharing, joint patrols, and harmonization of law enforcement across borders.

UNODC is mandated to support the Member States in facing threats and impact of drugs and crime. A number of conventions, treaties, and international instruments guide their work, such as:

- The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)
- The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)
- Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)
- Convention against the Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988)
- The Compendium of UN standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice
- General Assembly Resolution on Technical assistance provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime related to counter-terrorism A/RES/74/175

## INTERPOL

Interpol is the world's largest international police organisation. Its mission is to promote global police cooperation and assist in the prevention and suppression of international crime. Interpol works by facilitating communication and cooperation among national police forces, and by providing a range of services and resources to support law enforcement efforts. These include the issuance of international arrest warrants, the provision of forensic expertise, and the coordination of multinational investigations.

## EUROPOL

EUROPOL coordinates EU efforts against serious transnational crimes (organized crime, trafficking, terrorism, cybercrime) via strategic threat analysis, secure intelligence exchange (SIENA platform), and support for joint investigations and operations. It provides specialized services through the European Cybercrime Centre, Counter Terrorism Centre, and asset recovery teams. Europol also facilitates legal and operational frameworks for cooperation between EU countries.

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## EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL)

The EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) plays an important role in providing police officers with the necessary expertise and skills to face the evolving challenges posed by organised crime. The European Public Prosecutor Office (EPPO) and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) both have crucial roles to investigate and prosecute crimes against the financial interest of the EU, including fraud, corruption and misuse of EU-funds. In this regard, the EPP Group encourages all Member States to participate in the EPPO.

## **International Center for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC):**

The International Center for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC) is a non-profit organisation that focuses on crime prevention research, policy development, and program implementation. The ICPC collaborates with local, national, and international partners to promote evidence-based strategies and interventions that address the root causes of crime and violence. Its areas of focus include urban safety, violence against women and children, youth and gang violence, and the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism.

## **International Narcotics Control Board (INCB):**

The International Narcotics Control Board derives its authority primarily from the 1961 Convention and functions as an independent monitoring body within the United Nations system. It is responsible for supervising the implementation of all three major drug control treaties. The INCB reviews national estimates of drug requirements, monitors actual consumption and trade, and identifies discrepancies that may indicate diversion into illicit channels. It also publishes annual and special reports assessing global compliance and highlighting emerging challenges.

# IMPORTANT CONVENTIONS

## The Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (CETS 198)

The Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism, or CETS 198, is the primary legislation enacted by the Council of Europe to break up drug trafficking.

This Convention aims to disarm the financial pillar of drug trafficking organizations. Rather than catching drug shipments or low-level drug dealers, CETS 198 focuses on stopping the flow of money that funds these ventures.

Member states are mandated to make laws for tracking, freezing, and taking away assets from serious crimes like drugs, even in the absence of a full conviction. This measure is really useful because traffickers try to stay away from the actual drugs, but their fancy cars or properties are tougher to hide. The convention also mandates fast-track mutual legal assistance between member states, meaning that a request to freeze assets in another country must be acted upon quickly.

This treaty allows Europol and other European Law Enforcement agencies to follow that money without proving every single step of the crime in advance. The Council of Europe monitors the implementation of this legislation through its Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures (MONEYVAL), which conducts peer reviews and publishes reports, showing how effective these measures are in the real world.

## The Council of Europe Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (CETS 173)

Corruption is the secret passcode which allows underground organizations to operate across numerous jurisdictions and national borders. While moving products, drug traffickers systematically bribe customs officials, police officers, judges, politicians, and border guards to ensure their shipments pass unchecked; investigations against them are stalled, and their assets remain unseized.

The Criminal Law Convention on Corruption criminalizes both active and passive bribery of public officials, including foreign officials and members of international organizations.

First, it criminalizes bribery not only of domestic public officials but also of foreign officials and members of international parliamentary assemblies.

Second, it requires states to establish corporate liability for corruption, meaning that companies and legal entities used as fronts for drug trafficking can be held criminally responsible and fined or dissolved.

Third, it mandates that states enact legislation to protect whistleblowers and witnesses who report corruption linked to organized crime, including drug trafficking. This measure aims to promote the reporting of such crimes, which is aimed at the violent threats issued by drug trafficking organizations to witnesses (*snitches get stitches?*).

Moreover, the convention also includes a protocol which extends criminalization to bribery of arbitrators and jurors, aiming to stop judicial intimidation during court cases and resolutions through Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms (ADRM).

## The UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its Protocols

The Convention criminalizes participation in an OCG, money laundering, obstruction of justice, extradition, and mutual legal assistance. It contains the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol on Human Trafficking), the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (Palermo Protocol on Migrant Smuggling), and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol)

## Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (as amended by 1972 Protocol):

Adopted in 1961 under the United Nations, this Convention created a unified global system to control narcotic drugs such as opium, heroin, and cocaine. Its central legal obligation is contained in Article 4, which requires states to strictly limit the production, manufacture, export, import, and use of narcotic drugs exclusively to medical and scientific purposes.

The Convention also introduces a system of Schedules (I-IV), categorizing substances based on their potential for abuse and therapeutic value, with stricter controls applied to more dangerous drugs.

## Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971).

The 1971 Convention was adopted to address the growing prevalence of synthetic and psychotropic substances which were not adequately covered under the 1961 framework.

# IMPORTANT REGIONAL INITIATIVES

## European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust).

The European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, also known as Eurojust, is a judicial cooperation agency of the European Union (EU). Its primary mission is to improve the effectiveness of investigations and prosecutions of serious cross-border crime by fostering cooperation among national judicial authorities. It also provides support and expertise to national authorities, including assistance with extradition, mutual legal assistance, and the coordination of joint investigation teams.

## Directive 2011/36/EU on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

On 14 April 2021, the European Commission adopted a new EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025). This plan is directly related to the EU's 2021–2025 Plan to Combat Organized Crime.

## Declaration of the Ministerial Conferences concerning Drugs

The Ministerial Conferences concerning Drugs are regular conferences held since 1980 after the Pompidou Group's joining the Council of Europe. These declarations are important as they allow for a uniform approach to dealing with drugs, considering the different approaches to solving the problem across different countries that created chaos and confusion. The Annual Activity Report on National Developments in the Area of Drugs Annual Activity Reports on National Developments in the Area of Drugs have been developed since the 1980s-1990s because of growing complexity in drug situations in various countries.

# THE BALKAN ROUTE

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, the Balkan route has been the most significant trafficking path for supplying illegal opiates, particularly heroin, from Afghanistan to Western and Central Europe. The route begins in Afghanistan and passes through Iran and Türkiye. Here, the Balkan route splits into three main branches.

- The Northern Branch

The Northern Branch crosses South-Eastern Europe through Bulgaria and Romania, continuing to Western and Central Europe.

- The Western Branch

The Western Branch passes through Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia, eventually reaching Western and Central Europe.

- The Southern Branch

The Southern Branch leads into the European Union by moving from Türkiye to Greece and then to Italy.

Another branch of the Balkan route goes through Iran, and possibly Central Asian countries such as Turkmenistan, by land or over the Caspian Sea, to the countries of the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) and then into Turkey by land or through the Black Sea. From Turkey the heroin may be transported west into the EU along one of the traditional branches of the Balkan route, or it may be shipped north on one of the ferries plying the Black Sea between Turkey and Ukraine or Moldova.

The Balkan Route, which passed largely unnoticed in the past, has suddenly garnered public attention as it has become the instrument of the unprecedented flow of refugees and migrants. While immigration is becoming a real business, and the smuggling of migrants a highly profitable activity, (which generated a revenue of 5 to 6 billion USD in 2015), Balkan criminal groups are, once again, taking advantage of gaps in legislation.

## THE BALKANS AND DRUGS

Since the entry of Bulgaria and Romania into the EU, the northern branch now crosses only one EU border, while the western branch crosses multiple borders, making it a riskier option for traffickers. However, recent border seizures indicate that, for some networks, the strength of local partners on the western branch can compensate for any risk associated with entering the EU more than once.

It remains unclear whether the integration of Bulgaria and Romania into the European Union resulted in any major transformation in the drug routes. Aside from Iran, where the consumption of both heroin and opium is widespread, Western and Central Europe are the primary destinations for the heroin produced in Afghanistan and trafficked via the Balkan route.

The region is no longer just a transit zone, but is now also a huge consumer on its own: while the consumption market reached proportions similar to the four major heroin consumers of Western Europe, the percentage of people aged between 15-64 injecting heroin is 4.6 times higher in the region than the global average as per the UN report of 2014.

South-Eastern Europe, indeed, has been identified as new entry points for cocaine coming from South America through the ports of the Adriatic and Black Sea. Among others, the Sinaloa cartel, one of the most dangerous Mexican drug cartels, found in the Western Balkans the entry point it was looking for to expand its trade towards Europe, while Colombian and Peruvian criminal groups are also allegedly showing their interests in new business in the region. It is, thus, clear how this route started, with the passing of time, to serve a twofold purpose, satisfying the demand of both the opiates and cocaine addicts of Western Europe.

## TODAY'S BALKAN ROUTE

Today the route connects Afghanistan (major heroin source) with Western Europe. When wars halted transit through Croatia and Bosnia, alternative corridors (Macedonia to Albania to Italy) opened; after the wars the pre-war route was quickly restored, often before the rule of law.

Currently, Kosovo is a major heroin hub (called “the new Colombia of Europe”). Along one branch, there may be a series of sales and re-sales that gradually move the drug towards its point of highest return. Along the way, shipments may be repackaged and cut with adulterants to increase profits. This appears to be a feature of the “southern branch“ through Greece towards Italy as well as the “western branch“ through the Western Balkans towards Western Europe.

The northern branch consists mainly of overland trafficking while the western and, in particular, the southern branch include sea trafficking at key stages. A key difference between the branches is whether or not the areas they straddle are within or outside the EU. With the entry of Bulgaria and Romania into the EU, the northern branch became a single entry point into the EU. In contrast, the western branch crosses multiple EU borders, making it a riskier option for traffickers.

While most branches of the Balkan route were once under the influence of Turkish/Kurdish criminal groups, a shift occurred in the 1990s leading to Albanian groups from the Western Balkans gaining market shares, in particular in transit or destination countries such as Italy, Greece and Switzerland.

## Problems With Data Collection along the Balkan Route

Problems with forensic data relate not only to heroin but also to other drugs. One issue is that some countries do not make a clear distinction between wholesale and retail (street) seizures. The ability to assess drug purity accurately also depends on the capacity of a country's forensic laboratories. Unfortunately, few countries in the Balkan region have the resources and capacity to regularly and properly collect price and purity data, making this level of assessment challenging. There is also a lack of detailed information about the prevalence of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) in South-Eastern Europe.

## **FIREARMS SMUGGLING IN THE BALKAN ROUTE:**

The Western Balkans is a principal departure point for firearms intended for trafficking throughout Europe. This can be attributed to the oversupply of legacy firearms dating from conflicts in the 1990s.

This route acts as a connector for global drug trafficking routes, with heroin from Afghanistan being the most common drug smuggled into the European Union via this route. Also, cocaine, trafficked from Latin America, and cannabis, which is either produced in Albania or passes through the Western Balkans from Afghanistan or Central Asia, converge onto this route.

Concurrently, firearms traffickers use the 'Balkan route' to smuggle their contraband on a regional basis and, often, simultaneously with drugs that have been smuggled from various continents.

## **THE REVERSE BALKAN ROUTE**

The Balkan route begins in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where Afghan networks send heroin over the border into the Islamic Republic of Iran, offloading their shipments to groups that will manage transportation up to the border areas of Turkey. In recent years, perhaps as a result of the strengthening of border controls between Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran, a sub route through Iraq may have emerged.

Nevertheless, most of the flow travelling from the Islamic Republic of Iran continues into Turkey. The main players organizing shipments into and through Turkey appear to be Turkish groups. Afghan groups do not appear to operate beyond their national border when it comes to heroin trafficking on the Balkan route, but Iranian groups and to lesser extent Bulgarian, Albanian and Nigerian groups are active in opiate (heroin and opium) trafficking throughout Turkey as attested by arrest statistics.

*[Bonus: If you need some humor to survive the rest of the study guide- Why is clapping not allowed in Afghanistan? Because of the Tali-ban. Yes we found that funny. And so should you.]*

# ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE BALKANS

## INTRODUCTION

The geographic position of the region, located in the middle between big empires and powers, Asia and Europe, drug producers and drug consumers fostered the creation of illegal channels of smuggling. The socialist period provided other opportunities to organized crime: strong links were established between the security sectors and criminals in all the countries, while the consumers' needs that the official economy could not satisfy started to be met through the flourishing of smuggling channels and black markets.

Fought by paramilitaries, criminals and released prisoners engaged in looting and smuggling, the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s have been addressed as another major cause of the growth of Balkan-based organized crime. The shady political and economic process of transition which followed, led to the enrichment and social advancement of criminal segments of the society, while the disappointment of the civilian population who had high hopes in the process, acted as another incentive to criminality.

Within the relevant literature, two main models explaining the structure of criminal organizations have emerged. These are:

- The Corporate Model
- The Network Model

The corporate model considers them as highly centralized and hierarchical corporate structures, while according to the network model, criminal organizations are composed of isolated networks of individuals or small groups collaborating with each other.

The latter has recently gained ground both within the literature and among police forces, to the point that the term "serious crime" is often preferred to the sometimes ambiguous "organized crime."

Modern and dynamic networks acting in a globalized world are, indeed, replacing the old image of hierarchical, rigidly structured organized groups. Organized criminal networks today operate through “fluid network structures”, which do not follow rigid and permanent patterns, but rather adapt themselves to the ever-changing political and economic environment.

Given their high capacity to adapt to changing external situations and activities and the large scale of their criminal links, Balkan-based organized criminal groups will be considered here as perfectly fitting the network model. If past theories considered criminal organizations as enterprises, ready to use violence to reach their ultimate scope of creating monopolies, today, the view according to which criminal organizations are no longer fighting each other for power, but are, instead, increasingly cooperating to reach a common objective, is gaining more ground (very relevant).

### **THE BALKAN CRIMINAL AXIS**

Although average income in the Balkans are lower than in Western Europe, and a certain income inequality persists, alongside high rates of unemployment, the Balkans are today relatively well-developed, their populations do not face grinding poverty and education levels are high. The region is, thus, not affected by many of the factors traditionally associated with rising crime. Its demographic situation, characterized by a relatively old population, and by low fertility rates in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, reduces the risk of street crimes and violence, ordinarily committed by young people. As urban areas host by nature higher crime rates than rural areas, the lesser level of urbanization in the region, compared to Western Europe, is an advantage in terms of criminality rates.

Moreover, the criminal justice system appears to be well equipped, to a certain extent thanks to the communist heritage which left behind a considerable security coverage, and a relatively efficient police system. Yet, Europol identified the “South East hub“ as the European area in which organized crime activities have most remarkably increased in recent years.

Whilst not famous worldwide in comparison to the Russian or Italian Mafia, this “Balkan axis” silently became one of the most important epicentres of organized crime and one of the main trafficking routes into the European Union (EU).

Due to increased trafficking through the Black Sea, a never-ending demand for illegal commodities in the EU and the increase in the number of illegal migrants coming from Greece, the region has recently seen a significant expansion in several criminal activities. To the old and never outdated trafficking in weapons, women, and heroin, for which the region holds a sad record, trafficking in cocaine and migrants have been added more recently. As the Balkans are the main geo-economic hub linking the EU, the Middle East, Turkey and Russia, the expansion of organized criminal activities should pose a serious concern to the whole of Europe.

# FIGHTING AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

## INTRODUCTION

Among regional cooperation initiatives, the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) has been one of the most active in the field. Its main objective was the development of a sustainable economic strategy in the region. Cooperation in the field of combating trans-border crime was an essential part of its activities aiming at regulating the normal functioning of cross-border cooperation and in 2000, a Regional Center for Combating Trans-Border Criminality was established in Bucharest.

Recognized as the main actor in the region in the fight of trans-border crime, the center closely collaborated with the most important international organizations devoted to the same cause (INTERPOL, EUROPOL, OSCE, etc.). After ten years of activity, the SECI had substantially contributed to increase the awareness of practitioners and policy-makers on the challenges to face in trans-border investigations and to strengthen the regional identity of South-Eastern Europe through the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative of 2008.

To facilitate and better organize the investigations, exchange of information and research activities, till date, eight task forces have been created by the SELEC.

The eight taskforces of the Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre are–

- Task Force Mirage on Countering Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration
- Anti-Drug Trafficking Task Force
- Financial and Computer Crime Task Force
- Anti-Fraud and Anti-Smuggling Task Force
- Anti-Terrorism Task Force
- Container Security Task Force
- Stolen Vehicles Task Force
- Environment and Nature Related Crimes Task Force

The SELEC is one of the most cost-effective investments and the best governmental response in exchanging criminal intelligence, which has been successful in speeding up investigation processes and the exchange of information among participant countries.

## THE EUROPEAN UNION

Despite numerous difficulties, the European Union has always actively fostered regional cooperation. The EU Stabilization and Association Agreement, which has been extended since 2008 to cover the entire region (with the notable exception of Kosovo), served as a fundamental step in bringing closer, and in few cases, admitting the Balkan states to the EU. The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, aiming at strengthening peace, democracy, human rights and economy in the wake of the Yugoslav wars, was replaced by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in 2008.

According to the RCC, this initiative established itself as “the central cooperation framework in SEE“, and strongly contributed to improving regional cooperation also in the fields of justice and home affairs (including fighting serious and organized crime, activities in the area of migration, asylum and refugees), security cooperation and inclusive growth (including anti-corruption strategies).

## INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

International initiatives, efforts and actors have thus far been mostly of Western origin, such as the Paris Pact Initiative (2003) or UNODC’s Regional Programme for South Eastern Europe (2009).

The threat of TOCNs and OCGs of SEE origin have been severely underestimated in the past, and the notion of solving it with unilateral solutions is impossible.

The main international instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime is the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime adopted in 2000. When ratifying this convention, States commit themselves to adopting a series of measures against transnational organized crime.

The fact that all the countries of the region (with the exception, once again, of Kosovo) have ratified this instrument between 2001 and 2005, demonstrates their recognition of the seriousness of the issue.

*The Kosovo-oh-no:* The absence of Kosovo's signature of the Convention, and its exclusion from international police organizations related to security issues such as INTERPOL, EUROPOL, SECI, and FRONTEX remain major obstacles in the

Even then, OCGs still cooperate at regional and international levels much more efficiently than the governments and international organizations which are trying to suppress them.

Thus, given the increased collaboration among OCGs, which now reach global levels, the response of law enforcement officials and policy-makers should become more and more globalized as well.

While local and regional efforts are fundamental, the need for a coordinated approach at European level and even internationally is indispensable.

# KEY ISSUES TO DEBATE

- Instead of only focusing on catching narcotics traffickers or organized crime groups after the crime occurs, countries should prevent crime from happening in the first place. This usually means stopping traffickers from recruiting people, especially vulnerable groups like poor families, refugees, or children, or early warning systems to respond to new psychotropic/psychoactive substances. It is recommended to find solutions specifically pertaining to how states can strengthen early detection systems for vulnerable populations of refugees, if governments should mandate training for border officials and local authorities to identify early signs of trafficking or what role should third party organizations, communities and campaigns play to raise awareness in high-risk regions.
- Transnational organized crime is a lot about why people are vulnerable in the first place. Issues like poverty, corruption, war, and lack of education all make people easier to exploit. How should the COE support national governments to reduce poverty, unemployment and gender inequality, which would thereby potentially reduce rates of organized crime? There may also be economic development plans that target border towns and rural areas prone to exploitation. International aid is also required to aid countries in building stronger systems and invest more in education and job creation in Eastern Europe. If countries don't address the root causes, new victims will always be at risk; even if traffickers are caught. Solving the deeper problems directly from the source leads to long-term protection.
- The European Union's open borders allow smuggled substances to move freely in the Schengen Area. Cross-border policies differ all across Europe, and domestic policies of countries also differ on criminalisation (how much punishment, etc).
- It is expected that the delegates research possible unified mechanisms or inter-agency frameworks that can be adopted to ensure perpetrators are adequately punished.

- Legal frameworks like the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime may be inadequate considering the constant updation of organised crime in cyber spaces and needs to be adapted to the digital age. Tracking darknet sales and cryptocurrency payments that bypass physical routes entirely is not adequately addressed by current protocols/frameworks. Trying to dismantle organized crime networks or trafficking by hardening borders causes slow movement in trade and hassles for ordinary citizens. On the other hand, stabilising the transit states is slower and more expensive. There is no one-way solution. Tailor each solution to your nation's priorities and m

### Things to research/understand:

- Grasp the organizational logic and typologies of trafficking networks, including their reliance on violence, corruption, and exploitation of vulnerabilities across domains such as human, drug, arms, wildlife, and cultural property trafficking;
- Examine the legal and institutional foundations provided by the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its three Palermo Protocols, alongside parallel international and regional frameworks, to understand the binding obligations and tools available to states;
- Strengthen collaborative enforcement mechanisms, including mutual legal assistance, extradition, joint investigation teams, and intelligence sharing, as essential tools for cross-border disruption of criminal enterprises;
- Formulate *best-practice models* for unified action, encompassing harmonised legislation, investment in enforcement technologies, safeguarding of witnesses, protection against corruption, and the creation of sustainable whistle-blower platforms.

# PAPERWORK

Committee Email Address: councilofeurope.thsmun@gmail.com

Please note that in this committee, the Position Paper is due on 13th June, 2026, 11:59 pm. Submission of the Position Paper is compulsory. The format of the position paper is given in the sample paperwork drive link (attached in conference handbook).

Along with this, delegates are allowed 2 pre-committee communiques, to be sent by 15th June, 2026, 11:59 pm.

This committee will be accepting the following forms of paperwork:

- Position Paper (Compulsory)
- Public Communique
- Private Communique
- Presidential Statement
- Working Paper

Final paperwork (will be explained later)

## Position Paper Writing

Your position paper must have 3 sections-

- Statement of the Problem
- Country Policy
- Solutions

### *Statement of the problem*

In your allotment's opinion, what are the main elements of the problem?

What are the roots of those elements?

### *Policy*

What are your allotment's interests/stakes in the situation?

What has your allotment done to address this/what policies are in place?

## *Solutions*

How does your allotment plan to solve the issues that you've mentioned in the first part of your position paper?

What future steps will you like to see taken to deal with the problem?

How can you improve already existing solutions to address the issue further?

While these pointers are not mandatory it is advisable delegates follow this format to give the Executive Board an idea of the delegate's stance and their understanding of the agenda at hand.

## Communiqués

A communiqué is an official document that is used to send a message or plan of action. Communiqués can be used to do virtually anything, from proposing plans of actions to carrying out operations to communicate with other portfolios or delegates. However, all communiqués must be logical and physically possible. They are subject to ratification by the Executive Board.

## Public Communiqués

Public Communiqués can be used by a delegation to declare a significant step, policy or action that has been taken by their country, pertaining to the crisis in committee, which changes the dynamics of the crisis. Public Communiqués are usually read out by the Executive Board to the committee if they are ratified. They can be submitted by a single country or multiple countries through Joint Public Communiqués.

## Private Communiqués

Private Communiqués are used by a country to take covert or secret actions through their country's agencies. These communiqués need to be realistic and outline the idea behind the action so that the Executive Board can understand the intentions of the delegation. Private Communiqués are introduced by the Executive Board to the committee in the form of updates, if they are ratified by the Executive Board. Countries usually act individually through Private Communiqués, but multiple countries can take covert actions together through Joint Private Communiqués. The more detailed you go and the more layered you make your communiqués, the more likely they are to be ratified. Always remember, quality over quantity. Get as creative as you can. Surprise us.

## Presidential Statements

These are statements made by the Head of a State of a particular country to declare a major decision or action which signifies a shift in policy of the country concerned. It can either be written by the Head of State of one country or can be jointly written by the Heads of State of several countries together in the form of Joint Presidential Statements. Note that presidential statements are always circulated to the entire committee (so if you screw up, you screw up in front of us all).

## Resolution Writing

When writing resolutions/final paperwork, remember QARMA (Questions A Resolution Must Address):

The acronym breaks down into six essential questions that a resolution should answer:

- Q – Question: What is the specific problem or question the resolution is trying to solve?
- A – Action: What actions or measures does the resolution propose?
- R – Responsibility: Who is responsible for implementing these actions?
- M – Mechanism: How will the actions be carried out?
- A – Administration: Who will oversee and coordinate the implementation?
- A – Assessment: How will progress or success be measured?

## FINAL PAPERWORK

Article 19 of the Statute of the COE-

At each session of the Consultative Assembly the Committee of Ministers shall furnish the Assembly with statements of its activities, accompanied by appropriate documentation.

The final paperwork for this committee will be an internal report of the COE titled “Statement of Activities” (this is a provisional paperwork, no document as such has been released by the COE to the public in the past). This document is of flexible nature, mostly formatted like a Working Paper, and its contents/voting procedure will be clarified to you later.

While technically this document should have no format, as ministers of the COE, we expect you to keep these basic guidelines in mind:

- Clauses are numbered sequentially with Arabic numerals, no bullets or letters, with subclauses given in lowercase Roman Numerals.
- All clauses end with a semicolon, written in plain text
- References to previous resolutions and recommendations follow the format: “Resolution Number \ ( \ Year)” and “Recommendation \ Number \ ([Year)“.
- Quotations from legal texts (like the European Convention on Human Rights) are italicised or placed in quotation marks.
- The title is short and factual
- Each subclause ends with a full stop (.)

### **Policy for Paperwork**

As diplomats of the COE, we expect all of you to maintain a certain professional work ethic in this committee. You will be highly penalized for violating these ethical codes.

### **PLAGIARISM POLICY**

All submissions are expected to be the delegate’s original work, and sources are to be cited properly in Position Papers/Communiques. Violations of such policy will result in heavy penalization.

### **AI POLICY**

Any document flagged with over 10% AI will NOT be marked. We would prefer subpar work over plagiarised work (no, that does not mean you submit subpar work).

### **SUBMISSION FORMAT:**

All submissions must be in Times New Roman, size 12 for body and size 14 for headings. All submissions should be named as follows:

AllotmentName\_TypeOfPaperwork

(Eg: Monaco\_PositionPaper)

MLA or Harvard formatting is always preferred (don’t trust citation generators, they’re as reliable as a mafia group’s right-hand man).

*Delegates must submit all paperwork in accordance with the deadlines provided by the Executive Board. Late submissions will NOT be marked.*

# FURTHER READING

Delegates are advised to go through the following reports, as well as carry out their own research (*try finding the easter egg on the website!*)

- ACPO (2010), Guidance on policing new psychoactive substances (formerly legal highs). Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, London.
- Center for Geopolitical Drug Studies (2001), 'Spain. The New Route of Colombian Traffickers', Geopolitical Drug Newsletter (July/August).
- Commission of the European Communities (2001), Towards a European strategy to prevent organised crime. Brussels: European Commission and Europol.
- Commission of the European Communities (2002), Protection of the Communities' Financial Interests and Fight against Fraud. Annual Report 2001. Brussels, Commission of the European Communities.
- Council of Europe (2005), Organised crime situation report 2005: Focus on the threat of economic crime. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Council of the European Union (2009), Manual on cross-border operations, 10505/4/09 Rev 4
- EMCDDA (2007a), Cocaine and crack cocaine: a growing public health issue. Luxembourg.
- EMCDDA (2007b), Drugs and crime: a complex relationship. Luxembourg.
- EMCDDA (2008c), Towards a better understanding of drug-related public expenditure in Europe. Luxembourg.
- EMCDDA (2010a), Annual report 2010: the state of the drugs problem in Europe. Luxembourg.
- EMCDDA (2010b), Harm reduction: evidence, impacts and challenges. Luxembourg.
- EMCDDA (2010c), Operating guidelines for risk assessment of new psychoactive substances. Luxembourg.
- European Commission (2005), Regional cooperation in the western Balkans: A policy for the European Union. European Communities.
- European Court of Human Rights (1998), Case of Teixeira de Castro v Portugal, judgment of 9 June 1998, Reports 1998-VI.

- European Union Council (1997), 'Action Plan to Combat Organised Crime', Official Journal of the European Communities, 15 August 1997, C 251: 1–16.
- Europol (2002), 2002 EU Organised Crime Report. Non-classified Version. The Hague, Europol.
- Europol (2011), OCTA 2011. EU Organised Crime Threat Assessment. The Hague.
- Europol (2015), Exploring Tomorrow's Organised Crime.
- Europol (2016), Migrant smuggling in the EU, Europol Public Information.
- Europol and Interpol (2016), MIGRANT SMUGGLING NETWORKS.
- GAO, General Accounting Office (1977), War on Organized Crime Faltering. Washington, DC, United States Government Printing Office.
- INCB (2009), Guidelines for a voluntary code of practice for the chemical industry. United Nations, New York.
- INCB (2010), Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2009. United Nations, New York.
- INCB (2011a), Precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs. United Nations, New York.
- INCB (2011b), Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2010. United Nations, New York.
- National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) (2001), United Kingdom Threat Assessment 2001. London, NCIS.
- NRM (National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings) (2002), Trafficking in Human Beings. First report of the Dutch National Rapporteur. The Hague, Bureau NRM.
- Santino, U. (1988), 'The Financial Mafia', Contemporary Crises 12: 203–43.
- SELEC (2016, May 17), Press Release. Seizure of 62 kg of heroin during a joint action between Turkish and Bulgarian authorities, <http://goo.gl/3z57Hr>.
- Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (2008), Regional Center for Combating Transborder Crime, Annual Report 2008.
- Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre (2016), Annual Report 2015.
- UN (2004), Human Trafficking and United Nations Peacekeeping, UN DPKO Policy Paper.
- UNDP (2008), A Real and Persistent Danger: Assessing Armed Violence in the Caucasus, Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe. Geneva, UNDP.

- United Nations (1994a), Background Release (17 November). World Ministerial Conference on Organised Transnational Crime, Naples, 21-23 November.
- United Nations (1994b), Background Release. Proposed Formulation of Global Convention against Organized Crime (22 November). Naples, 21-23 November.
- United Nations General Assembly (1994), Report of the World Ministerial Conference on Organized Transnational Crime. A/49/748, 2 December.
- UNODC, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2000), World Drug Report. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- UNODC, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2003), Global Illicit Drug Trends 2003. Vienna, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
- UNODC (2004), United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto. New York, UN.
- UNODC (2007), World Drug Report 2007. Vienna, UNODC.
- UNODC (2008), Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries. Vienna, UNODC.
- UNODC (2011a), Drug Situation Analysis Report South Eastern Europe. UNODC, Paris Pact Initiative.
- UNODC (2014), World Drug Report 2014. Vienna, UNODC.
- UNODC (2015), Regional Programme for South Eastern Europe (2016-2019). UNODC.
- UNODC and MCN (2010), Afghan opium survey 2010. Vienna, UNODC.
- UNODC and MCN (2015), Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015. Cultivation and Production. Vienna, UNODC.
- United States Department of State (2003), International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2002. Washington, DC, United States Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.
- United States Department of State (2002), International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2001. Washington, DC, United States Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.
- United States Department of State (2013), Trafficking in Persons Report. June 2013. United States Department of State.

*(don't hate us we had to read all of this too)*