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**EUROPOL**

# **Project COLA**

## **European Union Cocaine Situation Report 2007**

The Hague, 5 September 2007

**This report is a product of the Europol Drugs Unit**

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# European Union Cocaine Situation Report 2007

## 1. Introduction

The European Union is a major consumer market for all sorts of illicit drugs. The principle trafficking routes have been in existence for decades. Whilst these routes remain prominent, there is a growing diversification of trafficking patterns: a two-way use of the Balkan Route with increased trafficking, in addition to precursor chemicals, of ecstasy and cocaine from Western Europe into Central and Southern Europe and Turkey; a further development of maritime cocaine trafficking from South America via Western Africa into Europe and an increasing role of Albania as a producer country of cannabis and a storage country for heroin and cocaine.

Production and trafficking of drugs remain amongst the primary activities of organised crime. Many criminal groups no longer limit their activities to one type of drug as reflected in the increasing number of 'poly-drug' seizures.

## 2. Cocaine

### 2.1. Source countries

The Andean region is the major cocaine producing area in the world, with an estimated output in 2006, based on the area under coca bush cultivation (159,600 hectares), of 910 tons of cocaine. Colombia accounts for 70% of global cocaine production (640 tons), Peru for 20% (180 tons) and Bolivia for 10% (90 tons). The UNODC <sup>(1)</sup> estimates that 68,600 households are involved in coca bush cultivation in Colombia, some 50,000 in Peru and another 40,000 in Bolivia.

Cocaine production is under the control of Colombian, Peruvian and Bolivian criminal groups. In addition, paramilitary and insurgent groups such as the FARC in Colombia are involved in this process. The latter are said to control some 40% of the area in Colombia where cocaine cultivation takes place.

<sup>(1)</sup> United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime.

Colombian criminal groups co-operate in temporary joint ventures as and when required. They make use of specialists in all sectors of their criminal activities. In cocaine processing chemists are used; for the transportation of cocaine use is made of skippers, pilots, high-tech specialists, trained couriers and specialists on concealment methods and for the laundering of their criminal proceeds financial experts are employed. Furthermore, links have been established with transport, fishing and fruits companies and shipping agents.

### 2.2. The route to Europe

Huge amounts of cocaine are transported from South America to the European Union across the Atlantic Ocean ostensibly via maritime routes. Multi-ton maritime shipments take place from Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina and Suriname into the coastal areas of Spain and Portugal and into major seaports in Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy.

Significant amounts of cocaine are smuggled from South America to the Caribbean for onward transportation to Europe. This in part can be explained by the region's geographical position, close to the cocaine producing areas, but also by historic links between the Caribbean and some Member States, for example between Curaçao and the Netherlands



and between Jamaica and the United Kingdom. The French overseas territories of Martinique and Guadeloupe are becoming increasingly important as transit areas for cocaine trafficking towards the European Union. Fast boats, cargo freighters and container ships remain the most common conveyances for moving the drug through the region but traffickers also use aircrafts for droppings in international waters.

Three main sea routes to Europe have been identified: the Northern route, leading from the Caribbean via the Azores to Portugal and Spain; the Central route from South America via Cape Verde or Madeira and the Canary Islands to Europe and, more recently, the African route from South America to Western Africa and from there to Spain and Portugal.

### 2.3. Introducing new routes

Western Africa is an increasingly prominent region for the transit and storage of cocaine from South America to Europe. The drugs are collected from mother ships in the Atlantic by fishing boats which carry the flag of African countries. Crews are Africans with Spanish or South American controllers. The drugs are offloaded in West African ports, awaiting repacking and further transportation into Europe by sea, by air, via parcel post or overland. Transportation of cocaine by sea from warehouses in West African countries into Europe takes place by fishing boats with African crews and South American and European controllers. The drugs are unloaded at the northern coast of Portugal or in Galicia in Spain.

Significant seizures have occurred in the region in 2006, including one of 1.9 tons in a warehouse at a coastal town in Ghana in May. Until 2004, the average annual amount of cocaine seized in Ghana was less than 10 kg. In 2004, 617 kg of cocaine were seized in the country; in 2005 661 kg and in 2006 1,980 kg. Seizures in 2007 include one of 500 kg in Cape Verde, in March, in a container destined for Portugal, one of 635 kg in Guinea-Bissau in April and seizures of 1,200 and 1,250 kg in Senegal in June. These and other events confirm the increased importance of the region, particularly of Cape Verde, Ghana, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Togo.

Meanwhile, Latin American groups have based themselves in the West African region and have set up a variety of businesses to cover their illicit activities and justify their presence. They closely cooperate with West African criminal groups and fully exploit the instable social, political and economic situation in the region, the high level of corruption, the lack of control in seaports, the porous and uncontrolled borders between West African countries and the vast, merely unpatrolled, coastline. Their criminal activities are furthermore facilitated by understaffed, inexperienced and poorly equipped law enforcement agencies, by inadequate and outdated legislation and by a lack of national and international law enforcement co-operation.

Recent information confirms the existence of overland cocaine smuggling routes from Western to Northern Africa to link up with traditional cannabis smuggling routes into the European Union, benefiting of the logistics and know-how of well-established cannabis trafficking groups.

Cocaine is also transported by air from West African countries to European airports. In order to avoid controls, couriers frequently use indirect flights, e.g. via Morocco. Member States report an increase in the arrests of cocaine couriers from West Africa. Equally, the number of cocaine couriers arrested at Western African airports is growing.



## 2.4. The European Union

The European Union remains, after the United States, the second largest and still growing cocaine consumer market in the world. Countries with the highest prevalence rate for cocaine use are Spain and the United Kingdom. An estimated 250 tons of cocaine enter the Union annually via maritime shipments, air freight and couriers. In 2006, almost 100 tons of cocaine was seized in the Member States. This is in line with the trend identified in the 2007 World Drug Report of UNODC, according to which globally more than 45% of produced cocaine is intercepted.

Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy continue to be principle countries for entry of maritime cocaine shipments into the European Union. In 2006, Spanish law enforcement agencies seized 49,650 kg of cocaine, 66% of which was seized in the high seas and another 11% in containers. Spanish navy and law enforcement boarded 27 vessels in the Atlantic. In 18 cases cocaine was found.

In 2006, Portuguese and Spanish authorities dismantled several cocaine laboratories owned by criminal groups made up of Spanish, Colombian, Venezuelan and Ecuadorian nationals. In these facilities cocaine base was transformed into cocaine hydrochloride or extracted from clothes or liquids. Chemicals were seized and chemists arrested.

Considerable amounts of cocaine are trafficked from depots in Spain to other Member States, with France being an important transit country. The Netherlands constitutes another focal point from where cocaine is distributed to Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Although large amounts of cocaine are smuggled to Europe in sea freight, the role of couriers and air freight is also important. Each year, about 30 tons of cocaine is transported by couriers from South America and the Caribbean to airports in the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, France and Germany.

In recent years, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands have been confronted with large numbers of couriers departing from the Caribbean. This has led them to making significant efforts in combat-



ing cocaine trafficking from Jamaica to the United Kingdom and from the Dutch Antilles and Surinam to the Netherlands.

Colombian criminal groups still dominate large scale importation of cocaine into the European Union. Spanish and Portuguese criminal groups remain their main partners. They closely co-operate with groups from France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, members of which permanently reside in Spain or Portugal. However, criminal groups involved in international cocaine trafficking are more and more heterogeneous, with criminals from various countries working together.

## 3. Law Enforcement Initiatives

Large scale production of, and trafficking in, illicit drugs are core businesses of organised crime. Its activities fuel drug abuse, drug-related crime and public nuisance and are major sources for illegal profits. For those reasons, the combating of drug-related organised crime has been, and remains, a priority for law enforcement agencies in the European Union.

It is obvious that this problem of an international, if not global, dimension cannot be addressed by Member States in isolation. International co-operation is a must. This is why the matter is high on the political agenda; this is why there is the European Union Drugs Strategy and its Action Plans on Drugs; this is why Member States have created Europol, Eurojust and the Police Chiefs Task Force, the European

Joint Unit on Precursors, Joint Investigation Teams and the Maritime Analysis and Operational Centre on Narcotics (MAOC-N). This Centre was created by seven Member States (France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom) and is based in Lisbon. Its objectives are to collect and analyse operational information relating to the movement of non commercial vessels and aircraft suspected of trafficking large drug shipments from South America across the Atlantic towards the European Union; to assist in determining best interdiction outcomes and to facilitate interdiction operations. The Centre, through its Member States, will closely co-operate with Europol.

With a view to making law enforcement more effective and efficient, Member States are developing the model of intelligence-led law enforcement. Intelligence-led law enforcement is meant to make the exchange of information more efficient and effective by allowing the selection of the most appropriate targets based on the assessment of their roles, their impact on society and the environment in which they operate. The concept also allows for a more efficient use of human and financial resources.



In practical terms this means that law enforcement moves from ad-hoc actions based for instance on the arrest of a courier or a seizure of drugs, towards combating those criminal organisations that

pose the most serious threat. In other words, intelligence-led law enforcement moves away from the crime to the criminal organisation; from reacting to incidents towards a pro-active, target-oriented approach; from un-co-ordinated interventions to strategic planning and from local to national and European Union-wide law enforcement priorities.

When combating organised crime this requires a good understanding of current and future threats posed by criminal organisations, followed by priority-setting by the Justice and Home Affairs Council, the identification of data requirements and operational actions.

A main tool to implement the concept of Intelligence-led law enforcement is the European Criminal Intelligence Model (ECIM), a cyclical process which starts with the Organised Crime Threat Assessment (OCTA), produced by Europol in close co-operation with the Member States. The OCTA is designed to identify current and future trends, knowledge gaps and intelligence requirements for data collection programmes in Member States and at European Union-level. This is to lead to the development of intelligence products, which are the basis for the targeting of top criminal organisations in the Member States, where appropriate with the support of Europol and Eurojust and by making use, where feasible, of Joint Investigation Teams.

This concept is supported at the highest level by the Police Chiefs Task Force its COSPOL Projects <sup>(2)</sup>. The objectives of COSPOL projects are to facilitate best use of information, to identify opportunities for operational projects and to solve constraints in day-to-day co-operation, by making use of existing tools, in particular Europol's analysis capacities. One of these projects relates to the combating of large-scale cocaine trafficking.

Law enforcement and international co-operation have their limitations in the availability of human and financial resources, priorities etc. Intelligence-led law enforcement should improve knowledge of the criminal threat and optimise the use of law enforcement capacities and capabilities.

<sup>(2)</sup> Comprehensive Operational Strategic Planning for the Police.



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