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1. Summary

The region of Central Asia lies around the so called “Northern Route” of trafficking of Afghan opiates. An estimated volume of 15-30% of this trafficking passes along the Route that brings a drug flow to a Russian market and further to Europe.

Over the recent years, the “Northern Route” hasn’t undergone radical changes as regards trafficking volumes, although some new drug patterns seem to be generated.

The most recent available data on seizures of heroin along this itinerary demonstrate growth in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Trafficking in synthetic drugs from Russia, Europe and China seems to be a new emerging threat for Central Asia. All countries of the region have registered increased seizures of synthetic substances (mostly, MDMA, “crocodile” and “spice”). The national counter-narcotics agencies are also showing a growing concern about the issue, which resulted in multiplied information and assistance requests to donor countries on the topic. Trafficking in precursors through the region remains a blank spot on a drug map, due to the lack of transparency and congruity of drug-related information, which is a major obstacle for counter-narcotics in terms of regional cooperation in the sphere, as well as for coordination of foreign assistance to the sector.

The lack of available information on drugs remains a key drawback of a regional counter-narcotics action. CARICC (Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center for Combatting Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs , Psychotropic Substances and Their Precursors) is the only regional information and analysis platform that offers adequate information service to the countries of the region and foreign donors, but this UNODC project has suffered a lack of funding, as well as an institutional crisis due to a confrontation among the project’s donors as regards the Center’s presidency rotation. The institutional crisis has been overcome, but the funding problem persists.

Another pitfall to counter-narcotics in Central Asia is a need of foresight analysis, the culture of which is still under-practised, while the law-enforcement’s action is often more tactical, than strategic, and a response to a sudden change of drug trafficking patterns mostly results in a post-factum increase in public and law-enforcement control, but not in an improved preventive analysis of future trends.

The latest issue of World Drug Report¹ highlights the decline in heroin seizures on the “Northern Route”, while evidencing a stable drug demand in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, where also the number of opioid users is increasing. At the same time, heroin seizures are growing in Eastern Europe, which suggests that traffickers are experimenting with new routes that pass through Turkmenistan towards the Caspian Sea and further through Caucasian countries to Russia and Europe. While more evidence is not available on this new itinerary, big heroin seizures in Armenia and Georgia in 2014² favour the hypothesis.

¹ https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World_Drug_Report_2015.pdf

² As reported in World Drug Report 2015

To this extent, the estimations provided by the latest Afghanistan Opium Survey³ as regards opium cultivation and production in Afghanistan are worth noting. According to this assessment, a growth in opium cultivation in Northern provinces to 154% (from 0,3% to 1% of total opium cultivation in Afghanistan) will bring to an increase in production in these provinces to 264% (which will magnify a share of the North in total opium production from 0.3% to 2%). In 2015, the volumes of opium production in five Northern provinces will rise from 20 to 72 metric tons, while the production will soar in Baghdis (+117%), Faryab (+451%) and Ghor (+249%), the closest provinces to Turkmenistan border. This condition implies a bigger pressure on Turkmenistan in terms of drug trafficking, as well as on the Northern Route, but it will also encourage the diversification of trafficking routes through Transcaspia and Black Sea areas. This trend will also affect Turkmenistan's border security, since the drug pressure may cause even more clashes between drug smugglers and border services that have become more frequent since February 2014. Moreover, the unstable situation in the North Afghanistan that is due to constant confrontation between Taliban and other gangs, often speculated to as ISIS militants, can overspill the Afghan borders and create, like it occurred before, breaches on the Turkmen border that drug couriers don't fail to take advantage of.

According to the observations of the latest World Drug Report, drug smugglers are already experimenting with new itineraries, for instance, some seizures of opiates were registered along the newly tested route Afghanistan-Pakistan-China (Xinjiang) - Central Asia.⁴

Moreover, new "opportunities" for drug trafficking were created with the formalization of the Customs Union (and a Eurasian Economic Union, subsequently) among Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Belarus. The absence of customs controls between the countries of the Union poses additional drug risks to the area. Furthermore, a growth of commercial and human flows within the single customs space is also potentially perilous in terms of narco-trafficking.

³ https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afg_Executive_summary_2015_final.pdf

⁴ https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World_Drug_Report_2015.pdf

New railways also play major role in paving of new drug routes: in December 2014, a railroad Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran was launched that is now the shortest existing track to connect Central Asia to the Persian Gulf. At the moment, the railway is not in full operation, but at its full projected capacity of 10 mln tons it can become a convenient channel for trafficking.

The counter-narcotics action in Central Asia is also handicapped by insufficient anti-money laundering activities; for the lack of capacity in financial intelligence, the work on “drugs-terrorism” nexus isn’t well developed, which results in major reliance on foreign assistance that, in its turn, contribute to the militarization of counter-narcotics sector and reinforcement of the incumbent political regimes, respectively, with overstating this nexus’s scope and allocating a fair share of fundings to the military component of counter-narcotics programmes. At the same time, financial intelligence capacity in the region remains feeble⁵, while drug treatment and drug demand reduction programmes also yield to operational counter-narcotics activities.

Latest developments related to the spread of terrorist activities across the globe and around the Central Asian borders urged the regional authorities to take up on more proactive approach towards financial intelligence, in particular, the topic appears more frequently among requests for study courses from Central Asian counter-narcotics agencies.

Mini Dublin Groups for each country enable to verify trends of counter-narcotics policies in the region, as well to analyze operational developments in the sector. Even if official statistics and available law-enforcement information is sometimes limited, UNODC, CARICC and OSCE’s documents, as well as open sources are used to facilitate the Group’s informational function.

During the last meeting of the Mini Dublin Group on Turkmenistan (Second Regular MDG Meeting on Turkmenistan in 2015), it was proposed by UNDP to create an information sharing mechanism within the Group in form of printed handouts during the meetings, either as an electronic journal, or as an online tool, which initiative is worth consideration.

⁵ It is worth noting although, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan managed to develop a relatively efficient FI capacity, so far.

2. Progress of work in the Mini-Dublin Groups

a) Place and date of the meetings of the Mini Dublin Groups

In 2015, five MDG meetings were organized:

- ***Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.*** The First Regular MDG Meeting on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 2015 was organized in Bishkek (KG) on June 5th. The Second Regular Meeting in 2015 will be held in December in Astana (KZ);
- ***Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.*** On May 6th, Tashkent (UZ) hosted the First Regular MDG Meeting on Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in 2015, while the Second Regular Meeting is planned to be organized in Tashkent (UZ) on November 10th;
- ***Turkmenistan.*** On February 26th, a Second Regular MDG Meeting on Turkmenistan 2014 was held in Ashgabat (TKM). Due to the institutional and organizational issues related to the functioning of newly-opened Embassy of Italy in Turkmenistan, the second regular meeting for 2014 was postponed to the beginning of 2015, which also caused the omission of the first regular meeting in 2015 due to MDG calendars' overlap. The Second Regular Meeting in 2015 was carried out on October 15th.

b) Overview of the regional situation regarding illicit narcotics production

Central Asia is not an opium-producing area; almost 99% of opium production is the share of Afghanistan. Though, being situated along the Northern Route, the countries of the region have often been subjected to the hypothesis on existing opium refining and heroin producing laboratory also in Central Asia.

A minor production of cannabis persists in Central Asian region with ***Kazakhstan*** as a largest producer that makes up for 97% of the total cannabis production in Central Asia. The cultivation areas in the country are mostly concentrated in the regions of Zhambyl, Eastern Kazakhstan, Western Kazakhstan, Almaty, Atyrau and the Chu Valley, and are estimated for around 72 thousand hectares.⁶

⁶ Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia, UNODC and Paris Pact Initiative, April 2008.
https://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Illicit%20Drug%20Trends_Central%20Asia-final.pdf

Wild growth and cultivation of cannabis are also registered in *Kyrgyzstan*, where, according to the OSCE estimations, the cultivation areas in Issyk-Kul, Zhalal-Abad, Talas, Chui and Osh can reach up to 6,000 hectares.⁷

Tajikistan is little affected by cannabis cultivation with only 30-odd hectares of wild-growing and only 1.24 hectares of illicit cultivation areas, the majority of which are located in Leninabad region.

Turkmenistan holds annually counter-narcotics operation “Opium” that has never reported any of illicit cultivation cases.

There is also quite a minor cannabis cultivation in *Uzbekistan*; authorities report on an average of 2 hectares of wild-growing and illicitly cultivated plants.

There are some 138,117 ha of wild-growing ephedra in Central Asia that are spread across Kazakhstan (88,299 ha), Kyrgyzstan (46,433 ha) and Tajikistan (3,484 ha)⁸. Ephedra contains ephedrine, precursor to methamphetamine. The major production is supposed to be found in Kyrgyzstan, though ephedra seizures have only been reported in Kazakhstan⁹.

Nevertheless, illicit narcotics production in Central Asia is insignificant, with major opiate production coming from Afghanistan, while the regional production of cannabis is mainly used for internal consumption.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

c) National situation regarding illicit narcotics production, consumption and trafficking in narcotics and psychotropic substances, money-laundering and precursor control

KAZAKHSTAN

Illicit narcotics production. There is no sizeable opiate production in Kazakhstan, although there has historically been high production of cannabis that is, besides occupying large areas of land with wild-growing plants, is also cultivated illicitly. The recent increase in illicit production of cannabinoids is conditioned by a growing demand in them not only in the region, but also in Russia, since the availability of opiates fell down and the prices have, respectively, increased¹⁰. The same reason lies behind the expanded trafficking of synthetic drugs in Central Asia that comes from Russia, Europe and China¹¹. Moreover, on this account, some domestic production of synthetic drugs is being observed at home-based labs.¹²

Consumption. The latest available data quotes 38,532 of registered drug users as of April 2014.¹³ According to the country's Interior Minister statistics, this number has being decreased during the last five years, from 49.7 thousand to 33-odd thousands of drug addicts.¹⁴

Trafficking. Kazakhstan is a strategic country in drug transiting through the Northern Route. There is no estimative data on drug volumes that crosses the country, but seizures year over year are stable and amount for circa 28-30 tons of drug substances with 90% being cannabis seizures (25-27 tons), followed by heroin and opium seizures (300-400 kg)¹⁵.

¹⁰ US Department of State 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2014/vol1/222913.htm>

¹¹ US Department of State 2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2015/vol1/238985.htm>

¹² US Department of State 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2014/vol1/222913.htm>

¹³ <http://press.mediaovd.kz/ru/?p=4404>

¹⁴ <http://www.nomad.su/?a=13-201506290007>

¹⁵ UNODC/Paris Pact Country Fact Sheet, February 2015 <https://www.paris-pact.net/upload/a2a694792bcd49ff243fcdcac956d0de.pdf>

Over the first 10 months of 2015, Kazakh law-enforcement seized more than 33 tons of narcotic substances, including 129 kg of heroin. Seizures of illicitly cultivated drug-containing plants amounted for 61.2 tons, while the total volume of seized precursors equaled to 14 tons¹⁶. Six drug trafficking organizations were dismantled, the number of registered drug-related crimes totaled 8,591. More than 20 controlled deliveries were carried out, 4 of which were conducted in cooperation with law-enforcement of Kyrgyzstan (2), Russia (1) and Tajikistan (1)¹⁷.

After joining the Customs Union and, successively, Eurasian Economic Union, the Kazakhstan southern borders were significantly reinforced, which resulted in better interdiction of Afghan opiates and in a subsequent six-fold rise in prices for opioids¹⁸. The major problem remains the trafficking of domestically produced cannabinoids, as well as growing traffic of synthetic drugs from Russia, China and Europe.

In January 2015, Kazakhstan introduced criminal liability for trafficking of analogues of narcotic substances in response to an increased trafficking in new psychoactive substances (NPS).

Money-laundering. Being a country with the most developed financial system in the region, Kazakhstan is particularly susceptible to money laundering and terrorism finance, which is also favoured by the presence of organized crime and a shadow economy. The main sources for money laundering are abuse of public office, tax evasion and fraudulent financial activity.¹⁹ Informal channels, such as cross-border physical transportation of cash and hawala systems, are used by migrant workers who do not necessarily have the identification documentation required by financial institutions, as well as by individuals and businesses that wish to avoid payment of taxes and high remittance fees. It is also not known whether the formal and informal remittance systems are used to launder money.²⁰

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http://mvd.gov.kz/portal/page/portal/mvd/mvd_page/min_activity/mvd_anti_narkobusiness_prof_nark/

17 <http://www.inform.kz/rus/article/2836705>

18 US Department of State 2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)
<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2015/vol1/238985.htm>

19 US Department of State 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)
<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2014/vol1/222913.htm>

20 Ibid.

The Financial Police is the only public structure authorized to investigate suspected money laundering crimes, while other responsibilities in the sphere are strictly divided among other law enforcement bodies, which, due to the lack of integration and coordination, hobbles the country's capacity to process money laundering cases related to serious crime, including drug and human trafficking.²¹

Kazakhstan has no legal framework that envisages freezing of terrorist assets in a timely manner; asset freeze orders must have court approval. Moreover, there is no mechanism for sharing the assets, seized through joint or trans-border operations with other countries.²²

Kazakhstan is a member of the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism (EAG) and of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). In order to meet the FATF requirements with regard to AML/CFT, Kazakh Government has developed a draft of a new law on fight against money laundering in July 2015. The new law supplements the list of legal entities subject to financial monitoring with pawn shops, companies that deal with digital wallets and electronic money, as well as jewelry manufacturing businesses.²³ Also, new regulations were introduced as regards transmission of data and information on suspicious financial operations to the law enforcement agencies, and, likewise, sharing and exchange of such data among national agencies and with foreign partners.²⁴

Precursor control. There is little information on precursors trafficking patterns and routes as regards Kazakhstan. It is generally presumed that the fair share of precursors is being trafficked through Chinese-Kazakh border, taking into account a vast precursors production in China.²⁵ Since Uzbekistan is the only country in Central Asia that produces precursors (the production of acetic anhydride was seized, though, after 2000) that can't represent a substantial threat for potential trafficking, it is possible that also Russia's chemical industry can be a source of precursors smuggled through Kazakhstan.²⁶

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ <http://khabar.kz/ru/news/politika/item/27923-v-rk-razrabatyvayut-zakonoproekt-po-borbe-s-otmyvaniem-deneg>

²⁴ <http://www.fbs-offshore.com/izmenilos-zakonodatelstvo-o-protivodejstvii-otmyvaniyu-deneg-kazaxstana/>

²⁵ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, UNODC

https://www.unodc.org/documents/afghanistan//Precursor_Control/PrecursorRep.pdf

²⁶ Ibid.

Precursors control in Kazakhstan is regulated under the 1998 Law on narcotic substances, psychotropic substances and precursors, as well as by the newly adopted Regulations on licensing the businesses that deal with narcotic and psychotropic substances and precursors. Also, in 2014, Kazakhstan ratified the Agreement on Regulations of Transportation of Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances and Precursors within the Customs Union.

According to the UNODC Survey on Precursors Control on Central Asia's Borders with China²⁷, the level of precursor knowledge among law-enforcement officers is low. Moreover, precursors control is not considered to be a priority. There is also no clear vision among the states of the region on possible overlap between opiate and precursor smuggling.²⁸ The lack of communication on precursors is a key obstacle to smuggling detection.²⁹

Over the nine months of 2015, more than 14 tons of precursors were seized³⁰. As regards 2014, it was reported on the seizure of 323.7 kg and 5,907.5 liters of precursors, the major part of which amounted for sulphuric acid (5,853 liters), followed by potassium permanganate and hydrochloric acid. No seizures of acetic anhydride were reported.

KYRGYZSTAN

Illicit narcotics production. No opiates or precursors production has been registered in Kyrgyzstan in the current year.

Areas of wild-growing and illicitly cultivated cannabis are estimated at 1,800 hectares.³¹ Competent authorities note a significant production of marijuana and hashish by the population of the regions of Issyk-Kul, Dzhahal-Abad, Talas, Chui and Naryn, where the areas of cannabis and ephedra plants are wide. This cannabis production is trafficked not only locally, but also across the whole region of Central Asia³².

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

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http://mvd.gov.kz/portal/page/portal/mvd/mvd_page/min_activity/mvd_anti_narkobusiness_prof_nark/

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http://www.gezitter.org/interviews/41253_kyrgyzstantsyi_ejegodno_potreblyayut_narkotik_ov_na_2_dollarov data of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Interior

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http://polis.osce.org/library/view?item_id=4158&attach_id=4120

First methamphetamine-producing laboratory was dismantled in Kyrgyzstan in 2007³³. No further information on production of synthetic drugs in Kyrgyzstan is available, but the consumption and trafficking of the latter is seemingly growing.

Consumption. There were more than 9 thousand registered drug users in Kyrgyzstan as of 2014³⁴, with the share of IDUs of 70%. Also, 66% of all drug users are opiate users.

Nevertheless, according to the UNODC survey, the number of IDUs in the country is estimated at 25,000³⁵, which makes up 0.8% of total adult population between 15-64 years of age³⁶.

As regards, the use of cannabinoids, the UNODC estimations refer to 6.2% of adult population, while the latest available data on registered cannabis users indicates ca. 8 thousands of persons to use cannabis group drugs.

Moreover, due to the presence of ephedra areas (est. 46, 433 ha), as well as growing trafficking of synthetic drugs (including new synthetic cannabinoids) from Russia and China, the number of synthetic drugs users, that amounted to 800 persons according to the latest available data³⁷, seems to grow.

Trafficking. According to the estimations of the Kyrgyz counter-narcotics agencies some 30 % of Afghan opium³⁸ passes through the country. As it was reported by the Kyrgyz State Service for Drug Control, a range from 40 to 70% of the Afghan heroin destined to Russia, is trafficked through the territory of Kyrgyzstan³⁹. Moreover, recently new trafficking channels of Afghan and Kyrgyz hashish to Russia have emerged.⁴⁰

³³ <http://www.un.org/russian/news/story.asp?NewsID=21672#.Vkr6IdLhDes>
³⁴ UNODC/Paris Pact Country Fact Sheet, Updated in February 2015.

³⁵ http://www.knews.kg/society/46008_v_kyrgyzstane_okolo_25_tyis_potrebiteley_inyektsionnyih_narkotikov/

³⁶ https://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Illicit%20Drug%20Trends_Central%20Asia-final.pdf

³⁷ https://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Illicit%20Drug%20Trends_Central%20Asia-final.pdf

³⁸ <http://kyrtag.kg/standpoint/rafik-mambetaliev-predsedatel-gskn-kr-rasprostraneniynarkotikov-v-kyrgyzstane-pomogayut-sami-sotru/>

³⁹ http://polis.osce.org/library/view?item_id=4158&attach_id=4120

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Main trafficking routes cross the country's southern borders and converge in the Osh region breaking up then into various itineraries that are used to transit drugs through the Dzhalal-Abad region to the north of the country and further to the West (through Uzbekistan). The key itineraries are Kyzyl-Art, Altyn-Mazar, Batken and Sogd.⁴¹

In the six months of 2015, Kyrgyz law-enforcement seized 13,942 kg of drugs, including 44.7 kg of heroin, 2 kg of opium, 36 kg of hashish, 316 kg of marijuana and 13,308 kg of precursors.⁴²

Money-laundering. The main sources for criminal proceeds remain drug trafficking, in which, allegedly, public authorities of various levels are engaged⁴³. Moreover, smuggling of consumer goods, fuel, trade fraud, cash manipulations feed the country's large shadow economy and organized crime linked to it.⁴⁴ The Kyrgyz AML/CFT legal framework seems to be the most adequate in the region with an independent from other agencies Financial Intelligence Service (FIS) that serves as a special investigative body for money laundering crime⁴⁵. Although there are still deficiencies as regards cooperation and data sharing among agencies, as well as enforcement and implementation of AML laws, which is also conditioned by inherent public corruption, lack of expertise and personnel, Kyrgyzstan can be considered the country that progressed most in the sphere. In 2014, Kyrgyzstan was excluded from the FATF "grey list" and from the EAG monitoring list. Moreover, in 2016 the country will become the first to undergo the joint EAG/FATF assessment of conformity of the national legislature to the FATF new standards⁴⁶.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Data provided by the Ministry of Interior,
http://www.gezitter.org/interviews/41253_kyrgyzstantsyi_ejegodno_potreblyayut_narkotikov_na_2 mln_dollarov/

⁴³ <http://kyrtag.kg/standpoint/rafik-mambetaliev-predsdatel-gskn-kr-rasprostraneniye-narkotikov-v-kyrgyzstane-pomogayut-sami-sotru/>

⁴⁴ US Department of State 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)
<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2014/supplemental/227909.htm>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ <http://kyrtag.kg/politics/kyrgyzstan-stanet-pervoy-stranoy-proshedshey-protseduru-penovym-standartam-fatf-obse>

Precursor control. There is no extensive information on precursors trafficking, while, as assessed by the UNODC survey, the level of precursor knowledge among law-enforcement officers is low and the detection of precursor trafficking is not a priority.⁴⁷ Since precursor trafficking depends on serviceable roads and railways, it is unlikely that the smuggling will occur through unofficial crossings. As Osh-Sarytash-Irkeshtam road is a critical transportation link between China and Central Asia, it is widely assumed that this route in particular is used for precursors trafficking from China⁴⁸.

Another problem is that, besides the low knowledge and priority for stopping precursor trafficking, Kyrgyz border and customs officers are not eager to inspect loads due to the weather conditions (high mountain altitude) and because of linguistic difficulty to check the Chinese customs documentation.⁴⁹

TAJIKISTAN

Illicit narcotics production. There have not been reported either illegal cultivation of opium, or production facilities.

The production of cannabis in Tajikistan is minor with about a total of 30-odd hectares of wild-growing and illicitly cultivated cannabis⁵⁰.

No production of synthetic drugs or precursors has been reported.

Consumption. There have been registered 7,279 drug abusers as of 2014, the bigger share of which (80.8%) constitute heroin users; number of cannabinoid users makes up 3.7%, while number of synthetic drug users is not available⁵¹. The percentage of IDUs is 64.7%.⁵²

⁴⁷ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, UNODC
https://www.unodc.org/documents/afghanistan//Precursor_Control/PrecursorRep.pdf

⁴⁸ https://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Illicit%20Drug%20Trends_Central%20Asia-final.pdf

⁴⁹ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, UNODC
https://www.unodc.org/documents/afghanistan//Precursor_Control/PrecursorRep.pdf

⁵⁰ https://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Illicit%20Drug%20Trends_Central%20Asia-final.pdf

⁵¹ <https://www.paris-pact.net/upload/c53d09f0be1e758ccff20d37599b265c.pdf>

⁵² Ibid.

Trafficking. An estimated of 85% of the heroin trafficked through the Northern Route transits through Tajikistan, which equals to 75-80 metric tons of heroin and 30-35 metric tons of opium annually⁵³. More than 60% of Afghan opiates enter Tajikistan on its Western borders (Khamadoni, Nizhniy Pyanzh, Shurabad, Parhar)⁵⁴. The capital of the country serves as a hub for repacking, redistribution and further trafficking to Uzbekistan (Sariosiyo), Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan (Chordzhou) routes⁵⁵. Moreover, drug smugglers frequently use the itinerary that passes through the Tajik Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) and heads towards the Kyzylart Pass on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border⁵⁶.

A bit more than 1% of this volume is seized⁵⁷. Moreover, an estimated 20-30% of the country's economy is linked to drug trafficking⁵⁸.

In the six months of 2015, the Tajik law-enforcement seized more than 2,909 kg of drug substances, including 363 kg of heroin, 787 kg of opium, 1,705 kg of hashish and 555.81 kg of cannabis⁵⁹. In comparison to the similar period of the last year, the total volume of seizures declined to 11.4%, while the seizures of opium increased to 8%, and of heroin to 48.9%, respectively⁶⁰.

At the same time, the seizures of MDMA pills are growing: in the 9 months of 2015 a total of 3686 of such pills were seized, while over the whole 2014 the number of seized pills reached 2590⁶¹. The major part of the seized synthetic drugs arrived in Tajikistan from Russia.

Tajikistan participated in 12 joint counter-narcotics operations in 2015, in which 505 kg of heroin were seized, one heroin-producing laboratory in the Afghan Badakhshan was dismantled⁶².

⁵³ 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report
<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2014/vol1/223077.htm>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ https://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Illicit%20Drug%20Trends_Central%20Asia-final.pdf

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report
<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2014/vol1/223077.htm>

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ <http://rus.pressa.tj/news/za-6-mesyacev-v-tadzhikistane-iz-nezakonnogo-oborota-izyato-bolee-2-t-narkotikov>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Information was provided by the Tajik DCA for the last MDG meeting.

⁶² <http://rus.pressa.tj/news/za-6-mesyacev-v-tadzhikistane-iz-nezakonnogo-oborota-izyato-bolee-2-t-narkotikov>

Money laundering. The Tajikistan's banking system is not developed enough to become a risk for money laundering. It is assumed that the money laundering is controlled by high-level drug trafficking networks⁶³. Moreover, government corruption facilitates drug trade and associated to it money laundering⁶⁴. At the same time, no significant investigations or prosecution cases have been recorded against the bigwigs of the Tajik narco-world.

The latest 2015 Basel AML Index ranked Tajikistan the 3rd out of 152 countries for AML/CFT risk, which defines a very high level of risk⁶⁵.

Precursor control. Since the major source of acetic anhydride for Afghanistan is Pakistan, Tajik authorities consider that the precursor trafficking from China to Tajikistan is highly unlikely, since the only functioning border check point on the border is Kulma that is open only few months a year (from May to November) due to the weather conditions⁶⁶. Traffic volumes through this BCP are also small. Moreover, no precursor test kit is available at the BCP⁶⁷.

In October, a big seizure of precursors was recorded in the Sogd region in Tajikistan where customs officers seized 7.2 tons of sulphuric acid⁶⁸.

TURKMENISTAN

Illicit narcotics production. No illicit cultivation of opium or production facilities have been recorded in Turkmenistan. The same regards wild-growing cannabis or its illicit cultivation. The lack of publicly disclosed information doesn't allow to gauge the scale of the drug problem in Turkmenistan, in general. There is no data on production of synthetic drugs in the country.

⁶³ 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report
<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2014/supplemental/228023.htm>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ https://www.baselgovernance.org/sites/collective.localhost/files/documents/basel_aml_index_2015_media_release_final.pdf

⁶⁶ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, UNODC
https://www.unodc.org/documents/afghanistan/Precursor_Control/PrecursorRep.pdf

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ <http://xn----8sbaa0ayq7aeb.xn--p1ai/383-na-severe-tadzhikistana-iz-yata.html>

Consumption. There is no available data on drug use in the country. The latest available statistics reaches back to 2007, where there was estimated about 32,000 of drug users in the country with about 26% of them to be IDUs⁶⁹. The same estimates evidence rather an insignificant share of cannabis users that equals to 0.3% of the total adult population of the country⁷⁰. No information is available on the use of synthetic drugs in the country. But due to the great exposure to opium trafficking and drastic economic conditions of the population, it can also be assumed that the problem of synthetic drug use is minor.

Nevertheless, unofficial information sources refer to a catastrophic drug use situation in the country that also becomes even more serious.

Trafficking. Turkmenistan lies on the two trafficking routes for opiates coming from Afghanistan: the Northern and the Eastern one. Through the latter, an estimated 53% of opiates is transited with opium having a much higher share than heroin⁷¹. Also, a significant amount of hashish is trafficked through this route that goes through Iran to Turkish and European markets.

The major drug entrance points are Imam-Nazar, Kelif and Serkhetabad, from which drug travels further to Mary and Russian Astrakhan or in Azerbaijan⁷².

In the first six months of 2015, in Turkmenistan 195.781 kg (+93%) of drugs were seized, including 0.115 kg (-484%) of heroin, 192.756 kg (+246%) of opium, 0.008 kg (-562%) of hashish and 2.902 kg (-774%) of marijuana⁷³. No seizures of psychotropic substances, or synthetic drugs or precursors were reported.

In February, new amendments were introduced to the law “On Drugs” and to the Turkmen Criminal Code that abolish the amnesty for drug dealers.

⁶⁹ UNODC/Paris Pact Country Fact Sheet on Turkmenistan, Updated as of February 2015

⁷⁰ https://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Illicit%20Drug%20Trends_Central%20Asia-final.pdf

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² https://www.unodc.org/documents/afghanistan//Rainbow_Strategy/Violet_paper_6_Jan._2012.pdf

⁷³ CARICC statistics, 6 months 2015

Money laundering. Turkmenistan's banking sector is of little interest as regards money-laundering activities that are mainly fed by drug trade and trafficking as well as smuggling of consumer goods⁷⁴. There is no information on cash smuggling or any other kind of illegal financial transactions. Public corruption is very high.

The FATF/EAG assessment note a positive development of Turkmenistan's AML/CFT capacity. A special Inter-Agency Coordination Working Committee for combating money laundering and terrorism financing operates under the Ministry of Finance. But no government mechanism exists on freezing of terrorist assets⁷⁵.

There is no information on any money laundering investigation or prosecution case in Turkmenistan.

Precursor control. There is no information on precursors trafficking through Turkmenistan. It can be assumed that trafficking of precursors in Turkmenistan is minimal, since the large Iran's chemical production may serve to opium transformation *in loco* without being transited to Turkmenistan.

Precursors control in the country is being regulated by the Law "On Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursors", adopted in October 2004 and amended on February 2015.

UZBEKISTAN

Illicit narcotics production. No opium production facilities are reported.

In 2014, Uzbekistan reported on eradication of 6.7 ha of drug-containing plants (both opium poppy and cannabis)⁷⁶.

No synthetic drug producing facilities are reported.

Consumption. As of 2014, there were recorded 14,692 drug users in the country, 61% of which are opium users, while 26% are cannabinoid users⁷⁷. The share of IDUs equals to 35% out of total number of drug users⁷⁸. 97% of drug users are male⁷⁹.

⁷⁴ 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report
<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2014/supplemental/228032.htm>

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/prava-cheloveka-ru/uwmBu2nCOH8>

⁷⁷ UNODC/Paris Pact Country Fact Sheet on Uzbekistan, Updated in February 2015

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

There is no information on synthetic drug users, although Uzbek authorities emphasize the growing trafficking of new synthetic cannabinoids in the country over the recent two years, which is also conditioned by an increased Uzbek migrants return from Russia.

Trafficking. The biggest drug volumes enter Uzbekistan on its eastern borders with Tajikistan. A densely populated Ferghana valley is also frequently used as drug entrance points and for trafficking in various directions, since being located in-between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Minor trafficking occurs through the Turkmen-Uzbek border, while Uzbek-Afghan border is the best equipped and protected border area, which significantly diminishes trafficking here.

Major trafficking routes lead to the capital city of Tashkent or pass through the North-Western part of the country.

In the six months of 2015, in Uzbekistan were seized 1,268 kg (-11.14%) of drugs, including 65.92 kg (-2.38%) of heroin, 565.49 kg (-18.35%) of opium, 94.64 kg (+78.56%) of hashish, 361.72 kg (+45.1%) of marijuana, 0.184 kg of psychotropic substances and 6,026 liters of precursors⁸⁰.

Also, methamphetamine trafficking from Iran to Southeast Asia through Uzbek territory was reported⁸¹.

Money laundering. Major sources of illicit proceeds are corruption, drug trafficking and goods smuggling. Cash smuggling is also highly attractive for money laundering. The black market is not funded by drug-related money, but can be used for laundering⁸².

Uzbekistan's AML/CFT system is positively assessed, but the government maintains secrecy as regards investigation or prosecution of money laundering⁸³.

⁸⁰ CARICC statistics, 6 months 2015

⁸¹ 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report
<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2015/vol1/239027.htm>

⁸² 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report
<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2014/supplemental/227889.htm>

⁸³ Ibid.

Uzbek banks can freeze a suspicious transaction for three business days, while the Financial Intelligence Unit under the Office of Prosecutor's General can extend this period by other two days, which are usually insufficient for conducting a full-fledged investigation⁸⁴.

Precursor control. Uzbekistan is the only Central Asian state that produces acetic anhydride (before 2000) and sulphuric acid. No precursor trafficking cases were recorded on the Uzbek-Afghan or Turkmen-Uzbek borders, while several big trafficking cases occurred on Uzbek-Kyrgyz border since 2008⁸⁵.

d) Summarizing the work of the Mini-Dublin Groups in the Region

The meetings' main objective is to identify prioritized needs of the host countries and to adjust donors' assistance to these.

To this extent, in order to maximally involve every host country into dialogue, two Mini Dublin Group meetings were organized afield of traditional venues. An MDG on Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was held in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) in November 2014 and a meeting on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was held in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) in June 2015. This has enabled for the direct discussion of the MDG members with national counter-narcotics agencies of all Central Asian countries.

It is worth noting that the host parties have demonstrated a positive attitude towards this practice, which manifested in more pro-active participation of the host parties in terms of vaster presence during the meetings and more information and analysis being shared with Dublin Group members.

In the last meetings, in all countries, except for Turkmenistan, an escalating problem of synthetic drugs use and trafficking was especially accentuated. Even if the scope of this threat is currently low, Central Asian agencies express a need for preventive action, with regard to which during the latest MDG sessions there have been requested specialized training courses, relevant forensic equipment for laboratories and legal assistance in the sphere.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ <http://www.rosbalt.ru/main/2008/04/02/470765.html>

e) Essential points to be followed up by the Mini-Dublin Groups

Since the new Revised guidelines for Cooperation in the Dublin Group envisage more interaction between MDG chairmanship and UNODC field offices as regards a follow-up of existing and planned counter-narcotics activities to improve the response to the expressed by the host parties needs and avoid duplication, MDG meetings organization and drafting of meeting reports, a worthwhile experience has been achieved during the latest MDG meeting on Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, held in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) on 10th November. Similar practices should be repeated and maintained in other Central Asian states. UNODC and MDG chairmanship should speak with one voice and provide a united vision of MDG action to all members of the Group.

Also, during the last MDG meeting on Turkmenistan (Ashgabat, 15th October), a UNDP delegate suggested to set a mechanism of information sharing during the meetings either in form of hand-outs, or small publications, or as online tool. The idea should be implemented within the coming MDG meetings across the region.

Moreover, greater participation of host parties in editing of meeting reports should be encouraged and facilitated.

3. Regional or sub-regional nature of problems

The core problem of fight against drug trafficking reaches back the time of formation of the new states in Central Asia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union when the new powers were established. Since the process of consolidation of power and state was tricky, political leadership of Central Asia states had to establish links with underground criminal organizations, which serves as an element of adhesion for the whole state structure also now. High public corruption and the presence of “shadow” economies nourished by drug-related money do not favour the commitment of power circles to stamp on the drug trafficking.

Taking into account the abovementioned, it appears obvious that drug-related data often lacks transparency and availability. Moreover, data sharing mechanism among the countries of the region is not well developed due to the denominated “strategic” character of any law enforcement information. CARICC remains the only efficient and valid information and analysis platform in the region.

The dialogue on drugs among the countries is insufficient due to the competition among law enforcement agencies within countries and lack of direct communications among border officers as regards sensitive information.

Moreover, geopolitical competition among the countries of the region, as well as competition for major powers' interest and favouritism, hamper effective communication and teamwork also in counter-narcotics.

4. Matters requiring treatment by the Dublin Group at the central level

Cooperation between MDG Chairmanship and UNODC field offices should be encouraged, as well as greater participation of the host parties in meetings' discussions and subsequent reports drafting.

Moreover, Dublin Group should support and promote CARICC that has finally overcome institutional crisis, while is still facing funding difficulties.

Indicated by the host parties prioritized needs should be considered by the donor countries when coordinating and planning antidrug activities.

Host parties, indeed, should constantly follow-up and update the list of respective prioritized needs in counternarcotics.

Dublin Group members should focus on a real and rational anti-drug assistance to Central Asia void of double-faced economic and political interests that are so frequent from the part of major powers. This kind of assistance is lacking, which does not contribute to a significant and profound counter-narcotics development in Central Asia. The anti-drug aid of Dublin Group countries to Central Asia should overcome the "democracy" factor and be pointed and result-oriented.

Considering the presence of European Drug Liaison Officers posted in Central Asia, under the MDG umbrella it could have been created a functional European Liaison Officers Network that would provide for direct and more practical cooperation among representatives of different European law enforcement agencies to better coordinate relevant activities in order to render the functioning of the MDG more effective and European antidrug assistance to the region more practically valuable.

5. Regional Group recommendations/conclusions with respect to:

a) Political initiatives

Recommendations for Central Asia come down to the following common:

- Improving communication among countries of the region and their donors to avoid overlapping and duplication of antidrug projects and activities;
- Providing legal support to the countries of the region in terms of drafting of antidrug policies and prevention of new emerging threats, like the recently appeared threat of new synthetic cannabinoids;
- Enhancing region's own training capacity in counter-narcotics;
- Promoting bigger commitment and support to CARICC activities, as being the only regional information and analysis platform for counter-narcotics;
- Enhance mutual trust among the countries to facilitate information sharing;
- Focus on attainability of objectives set within anti-drug projects';
- Develop antidrug projects that will also deal with improvement of economic conditions of local populations.

b) Donor community priorities in light of points 2 and 3 above

It is of high priority for the donor countries to:

- Improve and optimize coordination of donor activities;
- Ensure the effectiveness of the provided aid by developing a mechanism of mid- and long-term post-project evaluation;
- Coordinate antidrug and counter-narcotics action, especially in terms of providing for maintenance and sustainability of procured equipment;
- Do not background DDR activities due to the militarization of counter-narcotics sector by region's government and foreign assistance;

- Promote bigger commitment and support to CARICC activities, as being the only regional information and analysis platform for counter-narcotics, as well as support establishment of other data sharing mechanisms;
- Promote border and precursors control action;
- Develop more profound action against corruption;
- Sensitize public authorities towards money-laundering;
- Support countries' own initiatives with particular reference to improvement of social and economic conditions and DDR.

6. Report on the implementation of recommendations/conclusions endorsed a year before

Cooperation of host parties on prioritized needs/recommendations ratio remains insufficient, while Central Asian governments opt for bilateral cooperation (also multilateral) that corresponds to the countries' requests on specialized trainings or equipment procurement.

Lists of priorities included in MDG country reports were not updated by the host countries for over than five years that made MDG's recommendations obsolete. Last year, Italian MDG Chairmanship over Central Asia launched a priorities revision process, which resulted in better informativeness and cooperation within MDGs. At the moment, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have updated their lists of prioritized needs, while the same is expected from other Central Asian countries. This will also enable for more relevant recommendations and action by the Dublin Group members.

With regard to the expressed prioritized needs, major counter-narcotics donors to the region (US, Japan, Germany, Italy, UNODC and OSCE) implemented several initiatives in the current year. Still, the foreign assistance remains small-scale and of limited practical coverage. For this reason, foreign assistance should be supplemented by the regional efforts to enhance countries' own capacity in counter-narcotics and by a strong political will of Central Asian states to fight down the drug trafficking.