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SUMMARY

Political instability and intensely volatile security situation in Afghanistan have displaced opium production towards southern regions of the country. These regions now amount for 55% of total Afghanistan's opium output, which favors the growth of precursors trafficking from India and Pakistan, as well as causing a shift of trafficking in the direction of Caucasian, Balkan and Southern Routes. This makes the use of the new Caucasian Route, which bypasses itinerary of the Balkan Route and goes through Caucasian countries and Caspian Sea, more convenient and cost-effective for drug trafficking.

Afghanistan experiences an increase in opium cultivation with estimated 201,000 ha in 2016 and 10% growth since 2015. The largest cultivation growth in northern regions of Afghanistan is caused by the engagement of more farmers in opium poppy cultivation. In 2016, the estimated opium production potential amounted 4,800 tons, 43% increase compared to 2015. Opium producers also receive a higher opium yield per hectare. Despite growing opium production, there was the three-fold decrease in heroin seizures in Central Asia in 2016, from 1456 kg to 560 kg. The decrease in seizures might signal that drug traffickers bypass Central Asian routes. Criminal groups are using the Balkan route more often for smuggling heroin to Russia and Europe. The evidence of this can be seen in Azerbaijan where seizures increased from 80 kg to 1,186 kg in 2015-2016.

Corruption of officials is an urgent issue. Extremely low wages of government officials makes profiting from drug trafficking very attractive. This issue must be addressed by the governments on both political and economic levels.

Issues of trafficking and controlling new psychoactive substances are becoming urgent and require changes in legislation along with development of new drug-countering approaches from law enforcement agencies. One of the challenging features of this phenomenon is a difficulty to track precursors' trafficking on the map as drug-related data lacks transparency and congruity.

Geographical proximity of China to Central Asian countries can be conducive to activation of precursor trafficking. China's developed chemical industry has a great potential to supply precursors for production of illegal narcotics in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Among the major disadvantages of the regional anti-drug action is insufficient information on drugs. At the moment, CARICC (Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center for Combating Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Their Precursors) is the only data-sharing and analysis-sharing platform filling information vacuum on drug-related issues and providing relatively sufficient information to the countries in the region and international donors. Also, the center appointed a new director, Grigory Pustovitov. It is expected that the newly appointed director will reinvigorate the work and activities of the center.

One of the weaknesses of the counter-narcotics action is insufficient foresight analysis. Law enforcement agencies are usually reactive when they respond to quick changes in drug trafficking patterns. To remedy this pitfall, it is crucial to practice preventive analysis of future trends. With more strategic approach to issues, law enforcement agencies might become more flexible and efficient in responding to new drug-related challenges. Availability of reliable and up-to-date statistical data on consumption, seizures, price, and purity of illicit drugs from different agents working with supply and demand reduction issues in Central Asia is essential for getting an objective idea about a drug situation. The data can be used to identify areas most exposed to drugs and then efficiently channel funding and resources for tackling the existing problems. Such information should be complimentary.

Regional economic integration in the form of the Customs Union can contribute to intensification of drug trafficking among Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Belarus. Absence of border control and easing of customs requirements among these countries creates additional drug risks to the region. Additionally, intensification of trade and human flows in the unified customs area poses potential drug trafficking threats.

Central Asian countries lack capacity in financial intelligence which results in insufficient anti-money laundering activities. Moreover, countries' joint work on drugs and terrorism is not developed properly. This results in governments' major reliance on foreign assistance which is then channeled to militarization of the counter-narcotics sector and reinforcement of the political regimes. It is important to emphasize that financial intelligence capacity remains weak, whereas more priority is given to operational activities rather than drug demand and drug programs.

I. PROGRESS OF WORK IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN MINI-DUBLIN GROUP

1. MINI-DUBLIN GROUP MEETINGS IN 2017

The following MDG meetings were organized in 2017:

- *Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.* The First Regular MDG Meeting on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was organized in Bishkek (KG) on March 23rd. The second meeting will take place on 24th November in Astana (KZ).
- *Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.* Tashkent (UZ) hosted the First Regular MDG Meeting on Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on June 7th. The second meeting will take place on 6th December in Tashkent (KZ).
- *Turkmenistan.* The First Regular MDG Meeting on Turkmenistan was held in Ashgabat (TKM) on June 14th. The second meeting will be organized in the capital in the end of November.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE REGIONAL SITUATION REGARDING ILLICIT NARCOTICS PRODUCTION

Central Asia is not considered as a drug producing area. According to UNODC, cultivation of the opium and production of the heroin and related drugs is on a minimal level in the region, with more than 99% of the opiates originating in Afghanistan¹. The security and drug situation in the area is influenced by instability in neighboring Afghanistan which is traditionally regarded as a part of South Asia. It was estimated that Afghanistan was able to produce 4,800 tons of opium in 2016, which comprised 43% increase as to 2015². Current data does not suggest evidence of production facilities for processing opium into heroin and other drugs in Central Asia.

¹ Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia. (2008, April). UNODC ROCA. The Paris Pact Initiative. Retrieved September 14, 2017, https://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Illicit%20Drug%20Trends_Central%20Asia-final.pdf, p.6.

² Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016: Cultivation and Production. (2016, December). UNODC. Ministry of Counter Narcotics of Afghanistan. Retrieved September 11, 2017, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/press/releases/AfghanistanOpiumSurvey2016.pdf>, p.33.

The countries of the region mainly serve as transit corridors to Russia and Europe. Opiates are either processed on Afghanistan's territory or refined elsewhere before being transited via neighboring countries. Despite that the major production centers of heroin are concentrated in Afghanistan, the country lacks supply of domestic precursors which are imported. Improper border control and poor enforcement potential constrain precursors' control in Afghanistan³. The large amount of illicit chemicals is smuggled to Afghanistan and neighboring countries where drug laboratories purify opium to obtain heroin and morphine⁴. However, some Afghan officials highlighted the drop in the volume of the precursors delivered to Afghanistan by ascribing the situation to the relocation of the processing laboratories outside of Afghanistan⁵.

Central Asia has long been a transit corridor for an increasing portion of opiates coming from Afghanistan. Opiates are trafficked through five Central Asian countries to the major consumer markets in Russia, and then further to Europe and the USA. Three general routes for transiting drugs from Afghanistan are the Northern Route lying through Central Asia and going to Russia, the Western or Balkan Route passing through Iran and Turkey and reaching the EU, the Southern Route going through Pakistan to Gulf countries and further⁶. Large seizures in Caucasus in recent years suggest the existence of the Caucasian Route which represents an alternative passage for illegal drugs via territories of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, and the consequent connection to the Balkan Route in Europe. In the context of the decline in the volume of heroin trafficking via the Northern Route noted in UNODC World Drug Report 2014, the Balkan and Caucasian passages are gaining new significance in the transit of narcotics. Such trend is evidenced by large seizures of heroin in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Iran since 2014. For instance, around 4 tons of heroin were seized in the aforementioned countries in 2016⁷.

³ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March). United States Department of State. Retrieved September 2, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/268025.pdf>, p.73.

⁴ Ibid, p.92.

⁵ Ibid, p.73.

⁶ Illicit Drug Trends in Afghanistan. (2008, June). UNODC Country Office for Afghanistan. The Paris Pact Initiative. Retrieved September 9, 2017, http://www.unodc.org/documents/afghanistan/Opium_Surveys/Illicit_Drug_Trends_Report_Afg_13_June_2008.pdf, p.27.

⁷ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region. (2016). Fan va Texnologiya, p.10.

Improvement of railroad infrastructure and liberalization of trade among Central Asian countries and China contribute to growth of legal cross-border trade volumes. As the trade expands, countries struggle to detect and intercept smugglers. Large flows of containers decrease efficiency of inspections conducted by border and customs officials. For instance, recent broadening of the trade and increase in export volumes of agricultural products to Russia have affected the ratio of trafficked drugs passing through the Northern Route. Recent data shows that the volume of opium drugs' seizures decreased from 3,170 kg in 2015 to 1,411 kg in 2016. Similarly, the volume of cannabis drugs' seizures dropped from 23,439 kg to 15,084 during the same period. Official sources in the Ministry of Interior of Russia accounted this sharp decrease to shortened working hours of the anti-drug units, resulted from restructuring processes within the ministry. However, alternatively, the drop in the amount of seizures might be a direct result of relaxed control of imported agricultural goods and their rising volumes. It is plausible that traffickers have been extensively using loose trade regimes and channels for transiting drugs concealed in fruits, vegetables, and other goods. Considering such situation, the countries might face further trafficking risks as they are attracted by the benefits of developing the trade through improving the infrastructure. In this context, the major driving force of infrastructural development in the region is China with its initiative to connect Asia to Europe via roads and railroads.

The annual transit volume of Afghan opiates via the Balkan and Caucasian Routes is estimated at approximately 170 metric tons (MT)⁸. Large quantities of opium originated in Iran and seized in Azerbaijan in 2016 indicate that the Caucasian Route has gained a new significance on the map of opiates' trafficking⁹. For instance, more than 141 kg of heroin destined to Azerbaijan were seized by border control officials on the Azerbaijani-Iranian border¹⁰. In contrast, the number of illicit drugs' seizures in CARICC member-countries decreased by 20.7%, including five Central Asian states and Azerbaijan in 2016¹¹. The significant growth of 90.5% was noted in Azerbaijan and more than 41% in Uzbekistan¹².

As for cannabis, its cultivation is widespread as it is easily produced and considered as a lucrative cash crop¹³. Cannabis is mainly prepared for local markets, with lower amount trafficked to Europe and Russia¹⁴. Kazakhstan is the largest producer of cannabis in the region. It is estimated that around 138,000 ha of wild cannabis is cultivated in Zhambyl region of Kazakhstan and which can be used for production of 100,000 MT of marijuana or almost 3,500 MT of hashish¹⁵.

⁸ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2016, March). United States Department of State. Retrieved September 2, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2016/vol1/index.htm>, p.280.

⁹ V Azerbayjane peresekli vvoz 141 kg geroina. (2016, October 14). RIA Novosti. Retrieved September 2, 2017, <https://ria.ru/world/20160815/1474344495.html>.

¹⁰ Citizen of Tajikistan, who was detained in Azerbaijan with 141 kg of heroin, is a member of the IRPT. (2016, October 17). Retrieved September 4, 2017, <http://www.news.tj/en/news/citizen-tajikistan-who-was-detained-azerbaijan-141-kg-heroin-member-irpt>.

¹¹ CARICC Information Bulletin (2017, March). Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center. No.36, p.1.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Moradi, S., Moradi, H. (2013). Drug Trafficking from Northern Afghanistan and Effect of States Cooperation. Bull. Env. Pharmacol. Life Sci., 2 (12), 130-137, p.132.

¹⁴ Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia (2008, April), p.7.

¹⁵ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March). *United States Department of State*. Retrieved September 14, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/268025.pdf>, p.201.

Spread of synthetic drugs is becoming a worrisome factor affecting the drug situation in Central Asia. The trend might lead to wider use of synthetic drugs impacted by the improvement of economic conditions in the region. Similar trend was evidenced in Russia, when with the rise of the middle class the demand for illegal synthetic substances spiked. Such trend might consequently foster production of synthetic drugs in the region and turn it into a major source of illicit substances due to vast availability of ephedra which grows in wild across the area. This plant contains ephedrine which is a precursor of methamphetamine. UNODC estimates that the wild growth of ephedra totals 138,117 ha, with 88,299 ha in Kazakhstan, 46,433 ha in Kyrgyzstan, and 3,484 ha in Tajikistan, respectively¹⁶.

In general, the cultivation of opium and production of illegal opioids is confined in the region as the largest amount of the drugs comes from Afghanistan where the lack of institutional control, poverty, and corruption fuel the drug-dependent economy. In contrast, cannabis and ephedra widely grow in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and lesser in Tajikistan. Central Asia's location and exposure to corruption naturally makes it convenient for transiting illicit narcotics originated in Afghanistan.

¹⁶ Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia (2008, April), p.29.

3. NATIONAL SITUATION REGARDING ILLICIT DRUGS, MONEY LAUNDERING, AND PRECURSOR CONTROL

1. Kazakhstan

a) Illicit narcotics production

Most of the drugs are imported to Kazakhstan from neighboring and other countries¹⁷. Kazakhstan has significant illegal production of cannabis for internal use and CIS markets. It is also known for cultivation of opium poppy and ephedra in its southern regions¹⁸. The latest data revealed 154 cases of illicit cultivation of narcotic-containing drugs totaling 61 tons 251 kg in 2016¹⁹, with almost 15% increase compared to 2015²⁰. Cultivation of cannabis and import of illicit synthetic drugs have been growing with demand. It is estimated that 140,000 ha of wild-growing cannabis is mainly cultivated in Shu Valley of Zhambyl region. Such amount of the marijuana could be utilized for yielding 100,000 MT of marijuana or almost 3,500 MT of hashish²¹. It is notable that Kazakhstan's law enforcement seized about 20-25 tons of drugs in this region in 2016²². Another area with favorable climatic conditions for cannabis is Kyzylorda. The region attracts a particular attention of criminal groups thanks to its appropriate weather conditions for cultivation of a certain variety of cannabis²³. In August 2016, the law enforcement detected plantations with total of 448 cannabis plants with more than 172 kg of marijuana²⁴.

¹⁷ Assessment Report on the State of Play of Drug Policy Making in Central Asia. CADAP 6 Policy Component (C1). (2017, March). *Trimbos Institute*. Retrieved September 11, 2017, <https://assets.trimbos.nl/docs/438fe9f3-47f5-4b6e-938f-b869a47da0dd.pdf>, p.13

¹⁸ The World Factbook: Illicit Drugs. (n.d.). *Central Intelligence Agency*. Retrieved September 15, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2086.html>.

¹⁹ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region. (2016), p.7. International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2016, March), p.280.

²⁰ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region (2015). *Tashkent: Baktria Press*. Retrieved September 12, 2017, <http://ncdc.uz/upload/iblock/34b/34b9c5c9e4f5030316f5bd6d7cc0919c.pdf>, p.11.

²¹ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (March 2016), p.201.

²² Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region. (2016), p.11.

²³ Ibid., p.12.

²⁴ V MVD RK Rasskazali o Dostidzheniyah v Borbe s Narkobiznesom. (2017, September 8). *365 INFO.KZ*. Retrieved September 15, 2017, <https://365info.kz/2017/09/v-mvd-rk-rasskazali-o-dostizheniyah-v-borbe-s-narkobiznesom>.

The country faces a threat of dissemination of synthetic narcotics produced locally and coming from China, Russia, and the EU. The latest statistics show that the amount of seized synthetic narcotics rose from 165 kg to 22 tons within seven years²⁵.

b) Consumption

The latest official data on drug consumption estimates 27,269 narcotics' abusers in 2016²⁶. Their number decreased by 3,780 persons compared to 2015²⁷.

c) Trafficking

Kazakhstan occupies a strategically important position on the way of the Northern Route used for transit of opioids from Afghanistan. Illegal drugs are trafficked mainly by sea, air, railroad, and road transport. The new railroad connecting Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran potentially provides possibilities for trafficking. In the first six months of 2017 the Kazakh law enforcement authorities cleared more than 2,100 drug crimes and seized more than 16 tons of narcotics, of which 42.2 kg were heroin²⁸. Regarding seizures, the volume of seized heroin dropped slightly, whereas the amount of recovered opium, hashish, and marijuana rose significantly. The ratio of seized heroin decreased from 131.1 kg in the first six months of 2016 to 118.2 kg in the same period of 2017²⁹. However, the amount of seized opium grew from 10.7 kg to 91.3 kg, the ration of hashish doubled from 156.5 kg to 371 kg, and the volume of marijuana grew from 6 tons to more than 7.6 tons in the same timeframe³⁰.

²⁵ Assessment Report on the State of Play of Drug Policy Making in Central Asia. (2017, March), p.13

²⁶ Fact Sheet: Kazakhstan (Republic of). (2017, March). *UNODC. Paris Pact Initiative*. Retrieved September 16, 2017, <https://www.paris-pact.net/upload/2d85ee0fd051bd4c9cf01936fb4c1d6e.pdf>, p.9.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ CARICC Information Bulletin (2017, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.36, p.1.

²⁹ Infographics on Official Data for the First Six Months of 2016-2017. (n.d.). *CARICC*. Retrieved September 12, 2017, <http://caricc.org/index.php/en/authorization2-2/according-to-official-data>.

³⁰ Ibid.

UNODC reported that concentration of opium production in southern provinces of Afghanistan led to shifting of the routes away from Kazakhstan and resulting in a decrease availability of heroin and six-fold increase in prices in the country³¹. The estimated street-price of heroin reached \$18,000-\$20,000 USD per a kilogram in 2016. The law enforcement of Kazakhstan accounted such jump in prices for the use of alternative trafficking routes lying through Southern Asia and Balkans³².

d) Money laundering

Kazakhstan has the most advanced financial system in the region. However, endemic corruption, organized crime, and large shadow economy make the country vulnerable to money laundering and terrorist finance activities. Money laundering occurs in the form of tax evasion, public office abuses and fraudulent financial activities³³.

As payments are often made by using informal payment systems like hawala, electronic wallets, and other services, it is difficult to track and investigate the revenue from narcotics. The lack of common money laundering strategy and absence of coordinated financial investigations further worsen the situation³⁴. The smuggling of illegal goods and forged invoicing of exports and imports are widely practiced. For instances, Kazakh prosecutors worked with 54 money laundering or related cases in a court³⁵.

³¹ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.201.

³² Ibid, p.199.

³³ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2015, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2015/vol2/index.htm>, p.237.

³⁴ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2017, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.114.

³⁵ Ibid., p.115.

Corruption is one the main constraints to the development of open-market economy as recent surveys of the business environment and enterprise performance indicate that 34% out of all companies in Kazakhstan are expected to make unofficial payments to get work done³⁶. According to the Kazakhstan's Financial Police, fraud and stealing account for roughly 50% of reported and investigated money laundering cases³⁷. In one of the cases involving laundering of tax fraud proceeds, criminals showed false export amount to receive VAT returns and tried to transfer the fraudulent returns to Hong Kong. The World Bank report says that VAT-related fraud activities are widespread in the country³⁸.

Kazakhstan's institutional capacity to detect, investigate, and prosecute money laundering cases concerning drug trafficking is being limited by separation of the duties between law enforcement agencies. Particularly, the Financial Police being the only authority permitted to investigate money laundering cases works just with economic and corruption crimes. As for the Ministry of Interior, it is empowered to interrogate only predicate crimes, but cannot investigate money laundering incidents³⁹.

³⁶ Country Partnership Strategy: Kazakhstan 2012–2016. (n.d.). *Asia Development Bank*. Retrieved September 12, 2017, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/cps-kaz-2012-2016-psa.pdf>, p.2.

³⁷ Todorokiet, E., Celik, K., & Kholmatov, M. (2011, July). Alternative remittance systems in Kazakhstan. *The World Bank*. Retrieved September 12, 2017, [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/FINANCIALSECTOR/Resources/ARS-July2012\(English\).pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/FINANCIALSECTOR/Resources/ARS-July2012(English).pdf), p.36

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2011, May). *United States Department of State*. Retrieved September 17, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/164239.pdf>, p.189.

e) Precursor control

China has a developed chemical industry which can possibly supply precursors for production of illegal narcotics in Afghanistan and Central Asian republics. However, the information on smuggling of precursors from China is scarce. It is assumed that a relatively large amount of precursors pass through Kazakh-Chinese border, especially via Dostuk, Khorgos, and Kolzhat border-crossing points⁴⁰. UNODC report emphasizes that the smuggling of precursors through Dostuk and Khorgos border points is feasible and high-risk⁴¹.

Kazakhstan and UNODC organize training and seminars on precursors for law enforcement. Nonetheless, the level of preparation and knowledge on precursors is low among the officials⁴². Also, law enforcement professionals do not regard precursor control as a priority and do not consider any possibility of threat from chemicals smuggled from China⁴³.

2. Kyrgyzstan

a) Illicit narcotics production

There is no significant production of drugs in Kyrgyzstan. Although, wild cannabis and ephedra cover vast areas, particularly in Chui region and around Lake Issyk-Kul⁴⁴. The republic has 10,000 ha of raw-material base for producing cannabinoids and more than 55,000 ha of areas with ephedra considered as a precursor of ephedrine which is used in methamphetamine⁴⁵. As for illicit cultivation of opiates and production of precursors, Kyrgyzstan did not report any cases in 2017. However, one case of cannabis cultivation was recorded in June, when Kyrgyz law enforcement officials seized 9.5 tons of cannabis cultivated on an area of 1.1 ha in Jalal-Abad region⁴⁶.

⁴⁰ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China. (n.d.). *UNODC ROCA CAU*. Retrieved September 17, 2017, https://www.unodc.org/documents/afghanistan/Precursor_Control/PrecursorRep.pdf, p.25.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p.8.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2009, May). *United States Department of State*. Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.385.

⁴⁵ Illegal Drugs in Kyrgyzstan. (n.d.). Facts and Details. Retrieved September 19, 2017, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Kyrgyzstan/sub8_5b/entry-4768.html.

⁴⁶ SBNON MVD KR: zaderzhany podozrevaemye v nezakonom oborote narkotikov (2017, June 19). Information Portal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan. Retrieved September 15, 2017, <http://mvd.kg/index.php/rus/mass-media/all-news/item/4904-sbnon-mvd-kr-zaderzhany-podozrevaemye-v-nezakonom-oborote-narkotikov>.

b) Consumption

The number of drug users totals 8,853 people as of January 2016, according to the data of the Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan⁴⁷.

c) Trafficking

Kyrgyzstan is vulnerable to drug trafficking due to proximity to Afghanistan, international organized criminal groups' activities, absence of unified approach to regional security, and lack of efficient border control⁴⁸. Drug trafficking penetrates Kyrgyzstan in the direction of Alai and Cho-Alai of Osh region, and Batken, Leilek, and Kadamjay districts of Batken region. It is worth noting that Osh city, and also Osh, Naryn, Jalal-Abad, and Batken regions have the highest number of drug-related crimes compared to other locations⁴⁹. Osh which is often referred to as a southern capital of Kyrgyzstan serves as a transfer point for illegal narcotics transited to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and further to Russia, Europe, and the US⁵⁰.

Some incidents of selling and using new psychoactive substances took place in 2015. The main issue with such incidents is the absence of the appropriate legislation at hand in Kyrgyzstan to prosecute individuals for distribution of new drugs.

Seizure ratios of heroin and marijuana declined, whereas the amount of recovered opium and hashish grew in the first 6 months of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. The ratio of seized heroin decreased from 83.7 kg to 54.5 kg and the volume of recovered cannabis fell from 652.9 kg to 399.9 kg in the first six months of 2017 compared to the same period a year earlier⁵¹. However, the amount of seized opium grew from 5.4 kg to 21.1 kg, the ratio of hashish more than doubled from 153.8 kg to 328.6 kg in the same timeframe⁵².

⁴⁷ Baiburina, Y. (2016, July 6). Statistika: v Kyrgyzstane bolee 8 tys. chelovek narkozavisimi. KNEWS. Retrieved September 17, 2017, <http://knews.kg/2016/06/statistika-v-kyrgyzstane-bolee-8-tys-chelovek-narkozavisimiy>.

⁴⁸ Anti-Drug Program of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic (2014, January 27). Retrieved September 17, 2017, https://www.unodc.org/documents/centralasia/prodocs/Anti-drug_program_ENG.pdf.

⁴⁹ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region. (2016), p.17.

⁵⁰ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2009, May), p.384.

⁵¹ Infographics on Official Data for the First Six Months of 2016-2017. (n.d.). CARICC. Retrieved September 12, 2017, <http://caricc.org/index.php/en/authorization2-2/according-to-official-data>.

⁵² Ibid.

Two important developments can be noticed from bilateral perspective in Kyrgyzstan recently.

Firstly, the merging of the State Drug Control Service with the Ministry of Interior in July 2016 has resulted in a negative trend. For instance, experienced officers have started leaving the authority due to the disagreements with the Ministry of Interior. Such inconsistency occurs when one body comes under the other rival structure. It can be seen that the most experienced officers from the former anti-drug service authority leave the system which weakens counter-narcotics institutions. The similar negative trend can be observed in Russia.

d) Money laundering

Organized crime and corruption in the criminal justice system are ongoing problems for the government. High-ranking officials were implicated in corruption in several instances in 2016⁵³.

According to the latest statistics, the National Service on Drug Control detected 41 cases of drug-related corruption and initiated 41 criminal investigations. Total of 56 persons were prosecuted, and 49 of them worked in law enforcement authorities, other government entities, and local government authorities⁵⁴. On the whole, more than 292 kg of drugs of which 70 kg of heroin were seized from the corrupted officials⁵⁵.

The government is taking measures to control the issues. The State Financial Intelligence Service of Kyrgyzstan (FIS) signed more than eight international agreements on exchange of data related to money laundering and terrorism financing⁵⁶. However, frail political institutes, corruption, and financial constraints hamper effectiveness of anti-money laundering activities. Furthermore, government and private entities lack qualified staff and law enforcement capacity. FIS is not acknowledged as a legitimate agency by government authorities which results in lack of collaboration and data sharing among agencies⁵⁷.

⁵³ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2016, March), p.208.

⁵⁴ Baiburina, Y. (2016, July 6). Statistika: v Kyrgyzstane bolee 8 tys. chelovek narkozavisimi. KNEWS. Retrieved September 17, 2017, <http://knews.kg/2016/06/statistika-v-kyrgyzstane-bolee-8-tys-chelovek-narkozavisimy>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2017, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.120.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.121.

e) Precursor control

The major source of precursors for Kyrgyzstan as well as for other Central Asian republics is China. Kyrgyzstan has 858-km long border with China. Smuggling of precursors mainly takes place via Torugart and Irkeshtan border crossing points at the border with China⁵⁸. According to Kyrgyz DCA officials and local UNODC staff, it is common when trucks drive across the river and mark an eastern border of Bishkek to avoid paying taxes and tariffs⁵⁹.

Using of Chinese import declarations by Kyrgyz Customs in Irkeshtan and Torugart border crossings poses a risk of smuggling of precursors. As customs' officials cannot read declarations in Chinese at the border posts, they do not possess clear information about imported goods, especially if a driver declares liquids⁶⁰. Moreover, Kyrgyz law enforcement officials do not have a required level of knowledge of precursors and they do not consider fighting precursor trafficking as a priority.

A legal right to traffic precursors belongs to 270 entities of the state registry on legal trafficking of precursors, including individuals and legal entities. Precursors such as sulfuric acid, hydrochloric acid, acetic acid, and acetone are mainly imported to Kyrgyzstan from Kazakhstan and Russia. Isolated incidents of imported precursors coming from countries such as Austria (toluene, acetone), the Netherlands (methyl ethyl ketone, potassium permanganate) can be mentioned⁶¹.

Precursors are imported for the purposes of industrial use. For example, sulfuric and hydrochloric acids are used in production of soap and washing products, leather processing industry, mining industry, conducting laboratory tests; acetic acid is used in food industry, leather processing industry; potassium permanganate is used in medical practice, production of carbonated beverages; toluene and acetone are used for conducting chemical analysis, as dissolving agents for paint and varnish products; methyl ethyl ketone is used in paint as a marking material⁶².

⁵⁸ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China. (n.d.). UNODC ROCA CAU. Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.16.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.15.

Ibid., p.16.

⁶¹ Information on Import and Export of Precursors. (2016). State Drug Control Service Under the Government of Kyrgyz Republic.

⁶² Ibid.

In 2015, the law enforcement agencies arrested illegal precursors totaling 15 tons 513 kg 051 gr. In the first five months of 2016, the agencies seized 683 kg 769 gr of precursors⁶³. The main destination for the export of precursors was Tajikistan.

No cases of the trade of precursors from Afghanistan were recorded during the reported period.

3. Tajikistan

a) Illicit narcotics production

There have not been any cases of opium cultivation in 2017. As for illegal psychotropic substances, no production was reported. Production of cannabis persists in Tajikistan. Most cultivation is for personal use. In 2006, the country reported 31 ha of wild growth and 1.24 ha of illicit cultivation of cannabis⁶⁴.

b) Consumption

The Ministry of Health of Tajikistan reported 7,102 drug abusers as of June 2017 (compared to 7,185 individuals in 2016). Women made up 183 persons. The number of drug users increased by 1.2% in the first half of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016⁶⁵.

Tajikistan adopted a five-year program in April 2016 to consolidate its efforts in drug prevention and promotion of the healthy lifestyle. The target group of the initiative is youth and aims at starting educational programs for prevention of drug use and introduction of global standards constraining use⁶⁶.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia. (2008, April), p.23.

⁶⁵ AKN Podvyla Itogi Pervogo Polugoda 2017 Goda. (2017, August 4). *TJinform.com*. Retrieved September 17, 2017, <http://tjinform.com/ru/news/20170804/15763.html>.

⁶⁶ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March), p.256.

c) Trafficking

Tajikistan is located on one of the world's largest drug trafficking routes. Furthermore, it has the longest border with Afghanistan among all Central Asian countries. It is estimated that 75-80 MT of Afghan heroin and 35-40 MT of opium are transited through the country, but only a small fraction of those is seized by the law enforcement authorities⁶⁷. Tajikistan's border regions are considered to be ruggedly remote, hard to control, and lacking essential infrastructure⁶⁸. Most of the smuggling cases occur at night and involve local people smuggling drugs across the river using small boats and inner tubes⁶⁹. A relatively small amount of the trafficked drugs are seized supposing that the trafficking estimates are accurate⁷⁰.

In certain cases economic development initiatives can work for the benefit of drug trafficking. For instance, US-financed Nizhniy Pyanj bridge on the Tajik-Afghan border serves as a logistical point for traffickers allowing them to move larger quantities of drugs between two countries, in addition to its main function which is the improvement of the trade between Afghanistan and Tajikistan⁷¹.

More than half of the illegal drugs are seized in Tajikistan's Khatlon province and Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, both bordering Afghanistan⁷². Seizure ratios of heroin, hashish, and cannabis declined, whereas the amount of recovered opium rose in the first 6 months of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. The ratio of seized heroin decreased from 70 kg to 42.6 kg, the volume of recovered hashish fell from 1 ton 388.3 kg to 1 ton 327.6 kg, and the amount of cannabis dropped from 508.7 kg to 385.3 kg in the first six months of 2017 compared to the same period a year before⁷³. However, the amount of seized opium more than doubled from 284.6 kg to 609.5 kg in the same timeframe⁷⁴.

⁶⁷ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2016, March), p.264.

⁶⁸ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders. (2015, April). East West Institute. Retrieved September 17, 2017, <https://www.eastwest.ngo/sites/default/files/ideas-files/Afghanistan-Borders.pdf>, p.21.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March), p.256.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.20.

⁷² International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March), p.20.

⁷³ Infographics on Official Data for the First Six Months of 2016-2017. (n.d.). CARICC. Retrieved September 12, 2017, <http://caricc.org/index.php/en/authorization2-2/according-to-official-data>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

DCA of Tajikistan is highly concerned with rising of illicit trafficking of the new psychotropic substances (NPS). For instance, the law enforcement agencies seized 13,243 psychoactive pills in the first 10 months of 2016, which was six times higher than in 2015.

d) Money laundering

The issue of money laundering is insignificant in Tajikistan because its banking system is not sophisticated enough for fraud operations. It is supposed that large volumes of narcotics are transited through Tajikistan with support of law enforcement and government officials. It is possible to extremely low wages of government officials, which makes profiting from drug trafficking very attractive⁷⁵.

e) Precursor control

Precursor trafficking from China to Tajikistan has low probability due to operation of only Kulma border crossing which is open for a few months, with maximum opening time from May to November during the year, and because of harsh weather conditions⁷⁶.

It is reported that Tajik law enforcement officials do not have good knowledge of precursors. Some of the officials were of the opinion that precursors' trafficking is not an urgent issue for Kyrgyzstan, but is more pressing and serious one for Pakistan⁷⁷.

The largest seizure of precursors amounting 7 tons 228 kg of sulfuric acid was recorded in Sogd region in 2015⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2016, March). Retrieved September 2, 2017, p.265.

⁷⁶ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China. (n.d.). UNODC ROCA CAU. Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.20.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Krupnayapartiyaprekursoroviz'yata v Tadzhikistane // <http://rus.pressa.tj/news/krupnaya-partiya-prekursorov-izyata-v-tadzhikistane>.

4. Turkmenistan

a) Illicit narcotics production

Scarcity of publicly accessible and disclosed information on Turkmenistan does not enable making inferences regarding a situation around drug production and acuteness of drug problems in Turkmenistan.

No evidence of illicit opium cultivation and production has been recorded in Turkmenistan. This also concerns cases of illicit cultivation of cannabis and its growth in wild.

b) Consumption

Turkmenistan has not shared any data on drug abuse since 2006. Local law enforcement authorities have power of initiating drug cases and send people to a rehabilitation center. One of such centers is located in Ahal province and can accommodate around 120 patients⁷⁹.

Taking into account the lack of open-access information on drug consumption, the latest available numbers date back to 2007, when total number drug users was estimated at the level of 32,000 persons with 26% being IDUs⁸⁰. The total number of heroin users comprised 93%, whereas cannabis users made up only 3%⁸¹.

c) Trafficking

Turkmenistan is considered to be a minor player in the Northern Route, but a major crossing point for the Balkan and Caucasian Routes. Turkmenistan became a major westward trafficking corridor from Afghanistan to Iran and onwards to Europe. Majority of trafficking cases take place along mountainous 800-km long border with Afghanistan and 1147-km border line with Iran. Commercial truck flows from Iran pose a threat, and boat traffic from Turkmenistan to Caucasus and Russia provides smuggling opportunities for traffickers⁸².

⁷⁹ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2016, March). Retrieved September 10, 2017, p.276.

⁸⁰ Fact Sheet on Turkmenistan. UNODC, Paris Pact Initiative. Updated as of February 2015.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2017, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2015/vol2/index.htm>, p.275.

It is important to emphasize that Turkmenistan's border control policies are flexible and neutral to Afghanistan. It is supposed that Turkmen law enforcement officials have engaged with incumbents and insurgents across the border with Afghanistan. Albeit such approach leads to relatively more flexible and open economic border, it is conducive to the growth of trafficking through Balkan and Caucasian Routes⁸³.

International officials and providers of the border aid complain about reluctance of Turkmen authorities to participate in sustained joint training exercises with authorities of Afghanistan. UN officials have noted that Turkmen authorities continue keeping distance and cancelling meetings with international border management representatives without reason or warning⁸⁴.

Turkmenistan's government does not support or coordinate illegal production or sale of narcotics but low wages and broad powers of law enforcement workers contribute to corruption. Junior officials working at border checkpoints are often bribed to allow disrupted passage of contraband goods. However, there were no cases of prosecution of the government officials in relation to corruption linked to illicit drugs⁸⁵.

Seizure ratios of heroin, hashish, and cannabis declined, whereas the amount of recovered opium rose in the first 6 months of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. The ratio of seized heroin decreased from 70 kg to 42.6 kg, the volume of recovered cannabis fell from 508.7 kg to 385.3 and the amount of opium doubled 284.6 kg to 609.5 kg in the first six months of 2017 compared to the same period a year before⁸⁶. As for heroin, opium, and cannabis' street-level prices, they are among the highest in the region. However, such information cannot be verified⁸⁷.

⁸³ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders. (2015, April). *East West Institute*. Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.24.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.25.

⁸⁵ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.276.

⁸⁶ Infographics on Official Data for the First Six Months of 2016-2017. (n.d.). *CARICC*. Retrieved September 12, 2017, <http://caricc.org/index.php/en/authorization2-2/according-to-official-data>.

⁸⁷ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2017, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.275.

d) Money laundering

Turkmenistan does not have strong banking and financial capabilities. There are only five international banks and an underdeveloped financial sector. Money laundering can involve revenue from drug trafficking and trade of illicit narcotics⁸⁸. Data on cash smuggling or any other type of illegal financial operations is unavailable. Also, there is no information on investigation or prosecution cases involving money laundering.

Given that official information on money laundering is scarce, it can be assumed that money laundering in Turkmenistan can involve profits from trafficking and sale of illegal drugs along with those received from criminal activities⁸⁹.

e) Precursor control

Information on trafficking of precursors via Turkmenistan is unavailable. There was only one case of a seizure dating back to 2000. Two shipments of acetic anhydride amounting 40.29 tons from Singapore were arrested in Turkmenistan⁹⁰.

The main law regulating precursors in the country is the Law “On Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursors” dated 2004.

⁸⁸ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2012, March). *United States Department of State*. Retrieved September 12, 2017, <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2012/database/191294.htm>.

⁸⁹ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2017, March), p.179.

⁹⁰ Precursor Control on Central Asia’s Borders with China. (n.d.). *UNODC ROCA CAU*. Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.5.

5. Uzbekistan

a) Illicit narcotics production

The drug situation in the country is mainly conditioned by its geographical position of a buffer between the main global opiates producer, Afghanistan, and consumer countries.

In 2014 there were 1,301 cases of illicit cultivation of narcotic plants⁹¹. Authorities burnt 0.47 ha of cannabis growing in wild and 0.67 ha of drug-containing plants in 2015⁹².

No opium poppy cultivation and heroin production has been reported.

b) Consumption

The number of registered drug users totaled 13,218 persons in 2015⁹³. This indicator decreased by 1,474 compared to 2014⁹⁴. Proportion of people dependent on opium drugs comprised 60.3% or 7,977 persons⁹⁵.

Data on synthetic drug users is unavailable in spite of the fact that law enforcement authorities reiterate a significant increase in trafficking of synthetic cannabinoids mainly brought to Uzbekistan by migrant workers returning from Russia.

⁹¹ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.39.

⁹² V Tashkent unichtojili 1.4 tonnynarkoticheskikhredst // http://news.uzreport.uz/news_3_r_132658.html

⁹³ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.47

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.47.

c) Trafficking

Illegal smuggling of Afghan opiates takes place mainly along Uzbek-Tajik border. According to UNODC heroin seizure volume along this border is higher than along Uzbek-Afghan border, which has highly restrictive regime effectively deterring traffickers⁹⁶.

In 2016, law enforcement agencies detected 6,646 drug-related crimes⁹⁷. Also, the authorities seized 3 tons 542 kg of narcotic drugs, including 107.7 kg of heroin, 1 t 446.8 kg of opium, 1 t 124.3 kg of cannabis group drugs⁹⁸, 204.7 kg of kuknar and 7,184 psychotropic pills⁹⁹. There was a significant increase in seizures of opioids from 2 t 510 kg in 2015 to 3 t 542 kg in 2016¹⁰⁰. Seizures of cannabinoids also increased from 1 t 275.2 to 1 t 124.3 kg¹⁰¹.

In view of developing preventive approaches to counter new types psychoactive substances and drugs, like Spice smoking blends and synthetic cannabinoids, the Hub composed of representatives of the authorized official authorities of Uzbekistan was set up at the National Center on Drug Control. Consequently, relevant amendments envisioning restriction and circulation of new types of drugs were introduced into national legislation¹⁰².

Uzbekistan's drug control policy is detailed in the Program of Complex Measures on Countering Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking for 2011-2015 where law enforcement agencies' responsibilities are provided in respect to restricting illegal drug trafficking, reducing demand, preventing abuse, improving law enforcement legislation and collaboration with international partners¹⁰³. The country develops its border security policies unilaterally. Its strategy focuses mostly on enforcement and interdiction, while paying less attention to drug control and counter-narcotics¹⁰⁴.

⁹⁶ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders. East West Institute, p.23.

⁹⁷ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.38.

⁹⁸ CARICC Information Bulletin (2017, March). Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center. No.164, p.1.

⁹⁹ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.40.

¹⁰⁰ CARICC Information Bulletin (2017, March). Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center. No.164, p.1.

Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.45.

¹⁰³ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March). Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.291.

¹⁰⁴ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders. (2015, April). East West Institute. Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.23.

d) Money laundering

Main sources of illegal money are from corruption, drug trafficking and smuggling of goods. There are occasional reports on convictions of mid-level government officials on corruption charges¹⁰⁵

The Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) considers the anti-money laundering systems of Uzbekistan as vulnerable within international financial system because of weakening jurisdiction on anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism¹⁰⁶.

Uzbekistan's AML/CFT system is positively assessed, but the government maintains secrecy as regards investigation or prosecution of money laundering¹⁰⁷.

e) Precursor control

Uzbekistan is the only country in Central Asia which produces acetic anhydride and sulphuric acid. However, precursors for producing drugs in Afghanistan mainly come from Pakistan due to its geographic proximity to Afghanistan's largest heroin producing provinces such as Helmand, Kandagar and Nangarkhar.

There were not any recorded cases of precursor trafficking on the Uzbek-Afghan or Uzbek-Turkmen borders. However, more than 1 ton of precursors was seized on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border in 2012¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁵ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2015, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.316.

¹⁰⁶ Advisory. (2008, March 20). Advisory. Department of the Treasury. Financial Crimes Enforcement Network. Retrieved September 16, 2017,
<https://www.sec.gov/about/offices/ocie/aml/fin-2008-a004.pdf>

¹⁰⁷ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2015, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.316.

¹⁰⁸ Na iuge Kyrgyzstana iziato bolee 1 tonny prekursorov, vvezennyh kontrabandoi iz Uzbekistana. (2012, Апрель 4). Kabar. Retrieved September 16, 2017,
<http://old.kabar.kg/business/full/30813>.

4. SUMMARY OF THE MINI-DUBLIN GROUP'S WORK

MDG plays an important role in exchanging valuable information and developing recommendations to address the existing problems. One of the main functions of the meetings is being a platform for sharing initiatives and opinions, identifying needs of Central Asian countries, and avoiding overlapping. MDG does not take measures but assesses a drug situation in Central Asia, and then provides this information to the EU and other stakeholders.

MDG meetings provide a platform for exchanging ideas and discussing urgent issues in the field of counter-narcotics as well as give an opportunity to review the progress achieved by law enforcement agencies in Central Asia. The main aim of organizing the meetings is to identify needs of the host countries and direct donor assistance towards satisfaction of these needs. The gatherings also serve as a flexible and informal coordination mechanism for country-specific, regional, and global issues of illegal drugs' production, trafficking, and demand reduction.

To fulfill its main objective and fully engage host countries into collaboration through dialogue, three MDG meetings were organized in respective venues. The meeting on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was held in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) in March 2016, the conference on Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was organized in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) and the meeting on Turkmenistan took place in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) in June. The meetings gave an opportunity to the members to directly discuss drug-related issues and search for solutions along with representatives of counter-narcotics agencies from the regional respective.

Parties showed willingness to continue conducting meetings in such format by pro-active involvement with parties during discussions and sharing information and analysis with all members. The member countries paid a special attention to exchanging ideas on the shift of drug trafficking routes, lack of the structured data collection system for investigations, enhancement of key border crossing points' capacity through appointment of Border Liaison Offices, and cooperation on synthetic drugs and NPS.

It was noted that Central Asia has faced an increase in the trafficking of synthetic drugs and NPS in the last several years. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan already made legal changes in their national legislations to optimize control over NPS. For example, Kyrgyzstan added 85 substances to the list of controlled psychotropic substances in 2015 with support from UNODC K50 Project¹⁰⁹. The project has achieved good results and shown a significant impact of the international assistance on improving of the capacities of the national law enforcement agencies and help them tackle drug-related challenges. As for Uzbekistan, the law enforcement agencies revealed 43 cases of illegal trafficking of NPS and seized 579.1 grams of various psychotropic substances and synthetic drugs in 2016. To limit spreading of NPS in Uzbekistan, the National Center for Drug Control works on improving the existing anti-drug trafficking legislation. For instance, the draft law on introducing changes and amendments to some legislative acts of Uzbekistan was prepared.

In addition to the above-mentioned points, the following recommendations are considered as relevant:

- A special attention should be paid to strengthening collaboration among law enforcement agencies of the Central Asian countries.
- The agricultural sector of Afghanistan needs investments. It is important to develop and support alternative agricultural practices stimulating replacement of poppy by crops.
- One of the priorities should be strengthening drug-prevention activities and counter-narcotics campaigns, particularly, with a focus on synthetic drugs on grassroots level in the region.
- Developing strategies and concrete techniques for blocking precursors' trafficking channels crossing the regional countries.
- Increase the scope of constructing border outposts and technical facilities. Allocate more resources, both human and financial, to the professional training of border control experts.

¹⁰⁹ KGZ K 50 project was started in 2011. Its main goal is strengthening the former State Service on Drug Control which was reestablished in 2011. Two main donors are the US and Russia

- Further improve the scale of the technical support on counter-narcotics provided to drug control agencies in the region.
- Organize visits of the representatives of Afghanistan’s Ministry of Internal Affairs to regional drug control agencies. Such study visits can foster the development of bilateral cooperation through implementation of joint counter-narcotics activities.

5. ESSENTIAL POINTS TO BE FOLLOWED UP BY THE MDGS

- The groups should follow the following recommendations:
- Each MDG president should be encouraged to invite countries, experts, civil society members, and other people who can provide information and advice on agenda of a meeting with consent of other partners.
- The MDG should have someone with real power to address issues and to rely on. In its turn, such status will give more leverage to presidents of the regional groups and make them more capable of implementing changes.
- To improve proper coordination, drafting meeting reports, and donor’s response to host countries’ needs, it is crucial to ensure collaboration between MDG chairmanship and UNODC field offices as to following up active and planned anti-drug activities. The practice should be implemented in all Central Asian countries. To facilitate this, UNODC and MDG chairmanship should join efforts and provide a mutual vision of MDG action to all group members. Moreover, greater participation of host parties in contributing to meeting reports should be further encouraged and facilitated.

II. REGIONAL OR SUB-REGIONAL NATURE OF PROBLEMS

Origins of drug trafficking and border control issues in the region can be traced back to the state-building period in early 1990s. Political elites had to establish connections with underground criminal groups to stimulate consolidation of power and increase influence over the socio-political life in post-Soviet societies. Corruption became one of the many negative consequences of drug trafficking across Central Asia. The scale of drug profits entices regional law enforcement authorities, customs officials, and border guards who might be bribed to “look the other way” and conducive to drug trade¹¹⁰.

Considering the difficulty of obtaining information, data on illegal drugs is usually supposed to be inaccurate and often unavailable. Also, countries lack a unified well-functioning information sharing mechanism which is partially explained by a strategic character of such data. In this context, CARICC currently holds a position of a sole, accurate, and valid information analysis platform in Central Asia.

Other factor negatively contributing to the development of effective communication and collaboration on drug-related problems is geopolitical competition, power struggle, and unresolved border demarcation issues. However, the recent dynamics has shown reset in regional collaboration. The new leadership in Uzbekistan has launched a process of regional rapprochement by overcoming long-existed disagreements with the neighbors. Tashkent has taken significant steps towards resolution of the border disagreements by signing border demarcation and delimitation agreements with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and significantly improving relations with Tajikistan.

¹¹⁰ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan’s Borders. (2015, April). East West Institute. Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.20.

III. MATTERS REQUIRING TREATMENT BY THE DUBLIN GROUP AT THE CENTRAL LEVEL

The Dublin Group should put a stronger emphasis on enhancing collaboration between MDG Chairmanship and UNODC field offices as well as ensure more active participation of the host parties in discussions and drafting subsequent reports during meetings.

It is crucial to allocate resources for supporting and promoting CARICC which faces funding issues. The center plays an essential role of an information hub for sharing valuable data and coordinating efforts on drug-related issues among Central Asian countries. Information support provided by the center to member countries can significantly advance multilateral cooperation and increase effectiveness of joint efforts of national law enforcement agencies.

Donor countries should pay more attention to prioritization of host countries' needs when coordinating and planning anti-narcotics activities. Needs' assessments and closer round-table discussions can help donor countries better identify priorities of the host countries, tailor more efficient funding campaigns and anti-drug policies. As for host parties, they should continuously update donors about their counter-narcotics needs and priorities.

The Dublin Group members should focus more on technical assistance while providing anti-drug assistance to Central Asian republics. Such approach envisages less attention to political factors in the republics and more collaboration on the part of assistance provision towards demand reduction by capacity-building activities.

Creation of the Network of European Liaison Officers consisting of European Drug Liaison Officers serving in the countries of the region will be a positive impetus on the way of improving coordination and cooperation among various European law enforcement agencies. Such positive changes will allow for improved management of joint activities and increased efficiency of MDG in rendering anti-drug assistance to the region.

IV. REGIONAL GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. POLITICAL INITIATIVES

- Supporting development and harmonization of national drug control legislation in Central Asia.
- Encouraging and supporting regional cooperation among counter-narcotics' authorities in the region.
- Facilitating the exchange of information among all parties in the region, including involvement of CARICC, for creation of the counter-narcotics information platform.
- Providing for regular and active coordination among international partners in the counter-narcotics field.

2. DONOR COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

- Enhancing professional skills of law-enforcement officers in the region by engaging counter-narcotics' institutions from MDG member countries and promoting “training-of-trainers” policy for national partners.
- Improving technical capacity of competent national authorities and further support the enhancement of national capacity for counter-narcotics operations.

V. PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS MADE IN 2016

Host parties lack effective collaboration on multilateral level. Shortcomings are clearly evident when it comes to exchanges of operational information among the competent agencies of the region. This shows an inadequate regional response to the issue of organized drug crime by the respective national agencies. Instead of active multilateral engagement, each country focuses on bilateral cooperation targeting provision of specialized trainings and procurement of equipment. Moreover, each Central Asian government prioritizes achieving the highest results in seizures on its own territory over multilateral action. Thus, in order to have a concerted and more effective response, improvements in information exchange and organization of joint operations are urgently needed. In addition, the authorities in the region concentrate counter-narcotics efforts more on capacity and institutional building than on investing in governance and cooperation. Such emphasis results in displacement of drug flows and occurrence of new concealment methods and modus operandi, rather than reduction of overall volume of drug trafficking.

Host countries have not updated lists of priorities included in MDG country reports for over six years making the group's recommendations outdated. Only Tajikistan and Uzbekistan updated their lists of prioritized needs in these years. Other countries are also expected to renew their priority lists. In its turn, such feedback from the regional authorities will facilitate provision of more suitable recommendations and actions by the Dublin Group members.

Despite that the major donors such as the US, Japan, Germany, Italy, UNODC, and OSCE have been implementing various counter-narcotics programs in the region, the nature of the foreign assistance remains limited and insignificant in scale.

Sale of illegal drugs via the Internet became a new trend in the end of 2016. There have already been 3 cases related to NPS. DCSA is working on these issues and coordinating work in this direction with OSCE, UNODC, CADAP, competitive agencies, and other involved countries to identify sources of such micro-businesses. A special importance is given to contribution to implementation of the EU Act. During the MDG Meeting in Bishkek in March 2016, the Italian Embassy proposed initiatives to organize several meetings on these issues with member states to listen to their visions and solutions.

Attachment 1. Drug-related statistics in Central Asia

Table 1. Amount of seized illegal drugs in the first six months of 2016-2017

	Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan		Turkmenistan		Uzbekistan	
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017
Heroin	131.1	118.2	83.7	54.5	70	42.6	0.489	0.029	88.9	10.2
Opium	10.7	91.3	5.4	21.1	283.6	609.5	170.3	157.1	957.7	766.2
Hashish	156.5	371	153.8	328.6	1388.3	1327.6	0.031	0.016	196.1	60.5
Marijuana	6010	7639	652.9	399.9	508.7	385.3	1.03	1.9	282.5	252.7

Table 2. Number of registered drug-related crimes in 2015-2016

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
2015	3513	1864	965	723	6648
2016	3657	1738	856	664	6646

Table 3. Number of arrested individuals in 2015-2016

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
2015	5882	1264	1004	714	5497
2016	5660	1465	1119	730	5431