



Brussels, 8 May 2017
(OR. en)

8667/17

CORDROGUE 54
ASIE 12

NOTE

From:	Italian regional Chair for the Dublin Group
To:	Dublin Group
No. prev. doc.:	13561/16
Subject:	Regional Report on Central Asia

SUMMARY

Political turmoil and instability 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. The Caucasian Route hypothesis is being sustained by large drug seizures in Armenia, Georgia, Iran and Azerbaijan, where four tons of heroin were seized in 2015, while heroin seizures in Turkey over the same period equaled to one ton only.

The most recent opiates' production trends in Afghanistan saw 48% decline in opium cultivation. This still results in an average potential production of 150 tons of heroin and other 1.360 tons of unprocessed opium remaining, 25% of which are apparently trafficked along the Northern Route through Central Asian republics. A general trend is towards a decrease of opioids' seizures. Availability of heroin falls in the Central Asian black markets resulting in an increase of the heroin cost. For instance, there was a six-fold growth in heroin price in Kazakhstan in 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-countermeasures from law enforcement agencies. One of the challenging features of this phenomenon is a difficulty to track precursor's trafficking on the map. This is mainly because 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.

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.

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.

The volume of narcotic drugs' seizures increased in 2016 compared to 2015 in Azerbaijan by 90.8%, Kazakhstan by 2.1%, Turkmenistan by 23.6% and Uzbekistan 41.1%. At the same time, the amount of the narcotics' seizures of the opium group as a whole increased by 79.9%, from 5 t 483.1 kg in 2015 to 9 t 865.8 kg in 2016. In contrast, amount of cannabis group seizures decreased by 20.6%. The proportion of marijuana seizures fell by 3.6 in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. As for marijuana, the number of seizures decreased by 32.2% in Tajikistan but rose by 29.5% in Turkmenistan (see **Table 1**. Total amount of seized illegal drugs in 2015 and 2016 in the **Attachment 1**. Drug-related statistics in 2015-2016).

The latest regional report was issued in October 2016.

1. PROGRESS WORK IN THE MINI-DUBLIN GROUPS

a. *Place and date of the meetings of the Mini Dublin Group*

Total of three Mini-Dublin Group (MDG) meetings have been organized since October 2016. They included the following:

- ***Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.*** The First Regular MDG Meeting on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was organized in Bishkek (KGZ) on March 23 of 2017.
- ***Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.*** The second meeting was organized in Dushanbe on November 22.
- ***Turkmenistan.*** The Second Regular MDG Meetings on Turkmenistan was held in Ashgabat on December 5.

b. *Overview of the regional situation regarding illicit narcotics production*

The major heroin-producing country is Afghanistan which is traditionally regarded as a part of South Asia. Nevertheless, Afghanistan seriously affects the security situation in Central Asia which is not traditionally regarded as a drug-producing region. Production and cultivation of the opium in the region is minimal with more than 99% of the opiates originating in Afghanistan¹.

There has not been any evidence of production facilities processing opium into heroin in Central Asia. Therefore, the transited opiates are either processed on Afghanistan's territory or processed elsewhere before being transited via Central Asia. While the main production of heroin is concentrated in Afghanistan, the country lacks supply of domestic precursors which are imported. This means that Central Asia can serve as a channel for illicit precursors entering Afghanistan for further utilization in opium processing.

¹ Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia. UNODC, The Paris Pact Initiative, April 2008, p.6.

According to UNODC classification, there are three general routes used for trafficking drugs out of Afghanistan. These routes are the Northern Route via Central Asian countries to Russia, the Western or Balkan Route through Iran and Turkey to the EU, the Southern Route passing through Pakistan to Gulf countries and further². Recent seizures in Caucasus indicate existence of the Caucasian Route, an alternative corridor for smuggling drugs through Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, and connecting to the Balkan Route in Europe.

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. Though, UNODC World Drug Report 2014 points at a decrease in heroin trafficking via the Northern Route. In this context, the Balkan and Caucasian Routes have gained new significance in trafficking. This trend is evidenced by large seizures of heroin in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Iran. For instance, around 4 tons for heroin were seized in the above-stated countries³.

The annual transit volume of Afghan opiates via the Balkan and Caucasian Routes is estimated at approximately 170 metric tons (MT)⁴. Large quantities of opium originated in Iran and seized in Azerbaijan in 2016 indicate that the Caucasian Route is gaining a new significance in opiates' trafficking⁵. For instance, 141 kg 156 gr of heroin destined to Azerbaijan were seized by border control officials on the Azerbaijani-Iranian border⁶.

² UNODC Country Office for Afghanistan, *Illicit Drug Trends in Afghanistan*, the Paris pact initiative a partnership to counter traffic in and consumption of Afghan opiates, June 2008, p.27.

³ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region. Fan va Texnologiya, 2016, p.10.

⁴ International Narcotics Control Strategy (INCS), Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, US Department of State, March 2016, p.280.

⁵ V Azerbayjane pereseqli vvoz 141 kg geroina, RIA Novosti // <https://ria.ru/world/20160815/1474344495.html>, last accessed on 14.10.2016.

⁶ Citizen of Tajikistan, who was detained in Azerbaijan with 141 kg of heroin, is a member of the IRPT // <http://www.news.tj/en/news/citizen-tajikistan-who-was-detained-azerbaijan-141-kg-heroin-member-irpt>, last accessed 17.10.2016.

There was 20.7% decrease in seizure of illicit drugs in CARICC member-countries, including five Central Asian states and Azerbaijan in 2016, the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center (CARICC) reported⁷. The significant growth of 90.5% was noted in Azerbaijan and more than 41%⁸ in Uzbekistan.

As for cannabis, its cultivation is widespread due to the fact that it is easily produced and considered as a lucrative cash crop⁹. Kazakhstan is 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 3500 MT of hashish¹⁰.

Spread of synthetic drugs is becoming a worrisome factor affecting the drug situation in Central Asia. This trend might cause wider use of synthetic drugs with improvement of economic conditions in the region. Similar trend was noticed in Russia, when with the rise of the middle class the demand for illegal synthetic substances spiked. This trend might consequently foster production of synthetic drugs in Central Asia and turn it into a major source of synthetic drugs due to vast availability of Ephedra growing in wild across the region. 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 in Kazakhstan, 46,433 in Kyrgyzstan and 3,484 ha in Tajikistan, respectively¹¹.

Despite of the above-mentioned cases of cultivation, production of illegal narcotics is very limited in Central Asia. The largest amount of illegal drugs comes from the neighboring Afghanistan where lack of institutional control, poverty and corruption fuels the drug-dependent economy.

⁷ CARICC Information Bulletin #164, March 2017, p.1.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Salar Moradi, Heydar Moradi. Drug Trafficking from Northern Afghanistan and Effect of States Cooperation. Bull. Env. Pharmacol. Life Sci., Vol 2 (12) November 2013: 130-137, p.132.

¹⁰ INCS, Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control, March 2016, p.201.

¹¹ Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia, p.29.

c. National situation regarding illicit drugs, money laundering and precursor control

KAZAKHSTAN

(1) *Illicit narcotics production*

Kazakhstan has significant illegal production of cannabis, mainly for CIS markets. It is also known for cultivation of opium poppy and ephedra in its southern regions¹². This is evidenced by the fact that 154 cases of illicit cultivation of narcotic-containing drugs totaling 61 tons 251 kg were recorded in 2016¹³. This shows almost 15% increase compared to 2015¹⁴.

Cultivation of cannabis and import of illicit synthetic drugs has been growing with respective increase of demand. Estimated amount of 140,000 ha of wild-growing cannabis is mainly cultivated in Shu Valley of Zhambyl region, which could be utilized for yielding 100,000 MT of marijuana or almost 3,500 MT of hashish¹⁵. Kazakhstan's authorities seized about 20-25 tons of drugs in this province in 2016¹⁶. Another place with favorable climatic conditions is Kyzylorda region, where authorities detected and eradicated 32 plantations of Indian hemp with total area of over 50 ha¹⁷. Kyzylorda attracts a particular interest of criminal groups for its favorable climatic conditions for cultivation of a certain variety of cannabis¹⁸.

(2) *Consumption*

The latest official statistics on drug consumption estimates 31,049 drug-dependent persons in 2015¹⁹. Their number decreased by 3,172 persons compared to 2014, when there were 34,221 drug users.

¹² Illicit Drugs: Kazakhstan, CIA World Factbook //

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2086.html>

¹³ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.7.

International Narcotics Control Strategy (INCS), Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, US Department of State, March 2016, p.280.

¹⁴ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region. Baktria Press, Tashkent, 2015, p.11.

¹⁵ INCS, March 2016, p.201.

¹⁶ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.11.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁸ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.12.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.10.

(3) Trafficking

Kazakhstan occupies a strategically important position on the way of the Northern Route for transit of opioids from Afghanistan. Illegal drugs are trafficked mainly by sea, air, railroad and road transport. Kazakh law enforcement authorities seized 36 t 689.3 kg of drugs in 2016²⁰.

There was an increase of 2.1% in seizures of all types of illegal drugs. As for the volume of cannabinoids' seizures, it fell by 47.7% in the first ten months of 2016 compared to the same period in 2015. The amount of hashish seizures, in fact, rose 32.4%, according to CARICC data in 2016²¹. UNODC reported that concentration of opium production in southern provinces of Afghanistan led to shifting routes away from Kazakhstan and resulting in a decrease availability of heroin and six-fold increase in prices in the country²².

Law enforcement officials arrested 196.6 kg of heroin, 2.3 kg of opium, 431.7 kg of hashish and 29 t 315.7 kg of marijuana in 2016²³. Amount of the seized drugs increased compared to 2015. There was a decrease in seizures of opium drugs from 468.5 kg in 2015 to 198.9 kg 2016²⁴. Similarly, seizures of cannabinoids decreased from 34,628 kg to 29,747.4²⁵.

As for drug offences, there was 4.1% increase in Kazakhstan. The law enforcement recorded 3657 drug-related crimes. This led to 5660 arrests.

The new Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railroad might provide additional opportunities for drug trafficking.

(4) 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 happens in the form of tax evasion, public office abuses and fraudulent financial activities²⁶.

²⁰ CARICC Information Bulletin #164, p.1.
²¹ CARICC Information Bulletin #164, p.2.
²² INCS, March 2016, p.201.
²³ CARICC Information Bulletin #164, p.3.
²⁴ CARICC Information Bulletin #164, p.1.
²⁵ Ibid.
²⁶ INCSR 2015 Volume II Country Database, p.237.

Corruption is one the main constraints to the development of open-market economy. 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 done²⁷. According to the Kazakhstan's Financial Police, fraud and stealing account for roughly 50% of reported and investigated money laundering cases²⁸. 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 country²⁹.

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 cases³⁰.

(5) Precursor control

China has a large and developed chemical industry and can possibly supply precursors for production of illegal narcotics in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Despite of the fact that information on trafficking of precursors is scarce, it is assumed that a relatively large amount of precursors pass through Kazakh-Chinese border, especially via Dostuk, Khorgos and Kolzhat border crossings³¹. In UNODC report on precursors, it is noted that the smuggling of precursors through Dostuk and Khorgos border points is feasible and high-risk³².

²⁷ Country Partnership Strategy: Kazakhstan 2012–2016, p.2 //

<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/cps-kaz-2012-2016-psa.pdf>

²⁸ Emiko Todoroki et. al., Alternative remittance systems in Kazakhstan, The World Bank, 2011, p.36 // [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/FINANCIALSECTOR/Resources/ARS-July2012\(English\).pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/FINANCIALSECTOR/Resources/ARS-July2012(English).pdf)

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ INCSR, 2011, Volume II, p.189.

³¹ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China. UNODC ROCA CAU, p.25. // https://www.unodc.org/documents/afghanistan/Precursor_Control/PrecursorRep.pdf

³² Ibid., p.25.

Kazakhstan and UNODC provide precursor training seminars to law enforcement officials, but, nonetheless, the level of preparation and knowledge on precursors is low among the officials³³. Also, law enforcement professionals do not regard precursor control as a priority, and do not consider any possibility of threat from precursors smuggled from China³⁴.

KYRGYZSTAN

(1) *Illicit narcotics production*

There is no significant production of drugs in Kyrgyzstan. Although, there is no commercial production of narcotics, wild cannabis and ephedra grow in vast areas, particularly in Chui region and around Lake Issyk-Kul³⁵. The republic has 10,000 ha of raw-material base for producing cannabinoid drugs and more than 55,000 ha of areas of ephedra, which can be a precursor for producing ephedrine used in methamphetamine³⁶.

As for illicit cultivation of opiates and production of precursors, Kyrgyzstan did not report any cases in 2016.

(2) *Consumption*

The number of drug users totals 8,853 people as of January 2016, according to the data of the Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan³⁷.

³³ Ibid., p.8.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ INSCR, 2009, p.385.

³⁶ Natsionalniy otchet o narkosituatsii v Kyrgyzskoi Respublike, 2011. CADAP 5, p.5 // www.uiphp.org.ua/media/1482

³⁷ Statistika: V Kyrgyzstane bole 8 tys. chelovek narkozavisimi // <http://knews.kg/219078/statistika-v-kyrgyzstane-bolee-8-tys-chelovek-narkozavisimy/>, last accessed 16.10.2016.

(3) *Trafficking*

Kyrgyzstan is vulnerable to drug trafficking due to factors such as proximity to Afghanistan, international drug criminal groups' activities in Central Asia, absence of unified approach to regional security and lack of efficient border control³⁸. 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 Osh, Naryn, Jalal-Abad, and Batken regions have the highest number of drug-related crimes compared to other regions³⁹. Osh, often referred to as a southern capital of Kyrgyzstan, serves as a transfer point for illegal drugs transited to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and, then, on to Russia, Europe and the US⁴⁰.

Some incidents of selling and using new psychoactive substances took place in 2015. The main issue with such incidents is that Kyrgyz authorities do not have right legislation at hand to prosecute individuals for distributing the new drugs.

In 2016, all law enforcement agencies of Kyrgyz Republic seized 18 tons 162 kg of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors, which is 44.9% less than in 2015⁴¹. There was a fall in seizures of opioids from 445.4 kg to 191.7 kg⁴². In contrast, seizures of cannabinoids grew from 2848.6 kg to 2934 kg⁴³. The number of drug-related offences decreased by 6.7% compared to 2015. Bishkek city and Osh region saw increasing number of the drug-related crimes.

Recently, two important developments can be noticed from bilateral perspective in Kyrgyzstan. Firstly, restructuring of the State Drug Control Service and opening it under the Ministry of Interior results in a negative trend when experienced officers start leaving the structure because of the rivalry from Ministry of Interior. This often happens when one body comes under the other rival structure. It can be seen that the most experienced officers from the former anti-drug service leave the system after reorganization. Therefore the anti-drug bodies are weaker now. The similar negative trend can be seen in Russia.

³⁸ Anti-Drug Program of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014 // https://www.unodc.org/documents/centralasia/prodocs/Anti-drug_program_ENG.pdf

³⁹ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.17.

⁴⁰ INSCR, 2009, p.384.

⁴¹ CARICC Information Bulletin #164, p.1.

⁴² Ibid., p.1.

⁴³ Ibid.

(4) Money laundering

Organized crime and corruption in the criminal justice system are ongoing problems for the government. There were instances of implicating high-ranking officials in corruption cases⁴⁴. National Service on Drug Control detected 41 cases of drug-related corruption and initiated 41 criminal cases. In total, 56 persons were prosecuted, and 49 of them worked in law enforcement authorities, other government entities and local government authorities⁴⁵. On the whole, more than 292 kg of drugs of which 70 kg of heroin were seized from these people⁴⁶.

(5) Precursor control

The major source or precursors for Kyrgyzstan, as well as for other republics, is China. Kyrgyzstan has 858 km long border with China. Smuggling of precursors mainly takes place via Torugart and Irkeshtan border crossings at the border with China⁴⁷. According to Kyrgyz DCA officials and local UNODC staff, it is common when trucks drive across the river marking an eastern border of Bishkek to avoid paying taxes and tariffs⁴⁸.

Using of Chinese import declarations by Kyrgyz Customs in Irkeshtan and Torugart border crossings poses a risk of smuggling precursors. Customs' officials cannot read declarations in Chinese at the border posts and, therefore, do not have clear information about imported goods, especially, if the driver declares liquids⁴⁹. Moreover, knowledge of precursors among Kyrgyz law enforcement officials is not at the required level. Also, the officials do not consider fighting precursor trafficking as a priority.

According to the law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On drug control authority of the Kyrgyz Republic", the State Service on Control of Drugs under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic is a specialized law enforcement authority conducting a unified policy in the sphere of trafficking drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors, and countering trafficking of drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors.

⁴⁴ INSCR, 2016, Volume I, p.208.

⁴⁵ Statistika: V Kyrgyzstane bole 8 tys. chelovek narkozavisimi // <http://knews.kg/219078/statistika-v-kyrgyzstane-bolee-8-tys-chelovek-narkozavisimy/>, last accessed 16.10.2016.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, p.16.

⁴⁸ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, p.15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.16.

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 can be mentioned coming from countries such as Austria (toluene, acetone), the Netherlands (methyl ethyl ketone, potassium permanganate)⁵⁰.

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 material⁵¹.

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 precursors⁵². The main destination for export of precursors has been Tajikistan.

Cases of precursors' trade from Afghanistan have not been recorded.

TAJIKISTAN

(1) *Illicit narcotics production*

There have not been any cases of opium cultivation in 2016.

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 cannabis⁵³.

⁵⁰ Information on import and export of precursors. State drug control service under the Government of Kyrgyz Republic. 2016.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Information on import and export of precursors.

⁵³ Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia, p.23.

(2) Consumption

The latest data on the number of registered drug users from the Ministry of Health of Tajikistan showed that 7,324 persons were drug users as of April 2015. Women make up 203 persons. The number of drug users increased by 1.5% in comparison with the same period of 2015⁵⁴.

(3) Trafficking

Tajikistan has the longest border with Afghanistan among all Central Asian countries. Thus, the entire volume of opiates and cannabinoids is smuggled from Afghanistan. Estimated 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 authorities⁵⁵. Also, Tajikistan's border regions are considered to be ruggedly remote, hard to control and lacking essential infrastructure⁵⁶. Most of the smuggling cases happen at night and involve local people smuggling drugs across the river using small boats and inner tubes⁵⁷.

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, in addition to improving trade between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, also serves as a logistical point for traffickers allowing them to move larger quantities of drugs between two countries⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ Kontrol za oborotom narkotikov i profilaktika narkomanii // http://rus.akn.tj/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1571:-2015-&catid=48:statistika&Itemid=48

⁵⁵ INCSR, 2016, Volume I, p.264.

⁵⁶ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders. East West Institute, p.21.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.20.

More than half of the illegal drugs are seized in Tajikistan's Khatlon province and Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, both bordering Afghanistan⁵⁹. Tajikistan's law enforcement agencies seized 3.42 t of illicit drugs, including 700.3 kg of opium group drugs, and 2 t 726 kg of cannabis products in 2016⁶⁰. If we compare this seizure with the same period in 2015, it is less 31%⁶¹. There was a decrease in seizures of opioids from 1 t 578 kg to 700.3 kg in 2016⁶². Similarly, seizures of cannabinoids dropped from 3 t 98 kg to 2 t 726 kg⁶³.

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 which exceeded 2015 figure by six times in the first 10 months of 2016.

(4) Money laundering

The issue of money laundering in Tajikistan is not pressing because its banking system is not sophisticated enough to be used for fraud operations.

It is assumed that large amounts of narcotics go through Tajikistan with support of law enforcement and government officials. This hypothesis is inferred from the fact that extremely low wages of government officials makes profiting from drug trafficking very attractive⁶⁴.

(5) 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 conditions⁶⁵.

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 more pressing and serious one for Pakistan⁶⁶.

⁵⁹

Ibid.

⁶⁰

CARICC Information Bulletin #164, p.1.

⁶¹

CARICC Information Bulletin #164.

⁶²

Ibid., p.1.

⁶³

Ibid.

⁶⁴

INCSR, 2016, Volume I, p.265.

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Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, p.20.

⁶⁶

Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, p.20.

The largest seizure of precursors amounting 7 tons 228 kg of sulfuric acid was recorded in Sogd region in 2015⁶⁷.

TURKMENISTAN

(1) *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.

(2) *Consumption*

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 IDUs⁶⁸. The total number of heroin users comprised 93%, whereas cannabis users made up only 3%⁶⁹.

As for synthetic drugs' consumption, there is no data available. Taking into account difficult economic conditions and low purchasing power, it can be assumed that the issue of synthetic drugs is insignificant compared to opioids and cannabinoids transited from Afghanistan.

(3) *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.

⁶⁷ Krupnaya partiya prekursorov iz'yata v Tadjikistane // <http://rus.pressa.tj/news/krupnaya-partiya-prekursorov-izyata-v-tadjikistane>.

⁶⁸ Fact Sheet on Turkmenistan. UNODC, Paris Pact Initiative. Updated as of February 2015.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

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 Routes⁷⁰.

International officials and border aid sponsors complain about reluctance of Turkmen authorities to participate in sustained joint training exercises with authorities of Afghanistan. UN officials have noted that Turkmen officials continue keeping distance and cancelling meetings with international border management representatives without reason or warning⁷¹.

There was a growth of 23.6% in seizures of all types of narcotics opioids in 2016. Seizures of drugs from opium group increased from 243.9 kg to 295.3 kg⁷². Seizures of cannabinoids also showed upward trend increasing from 15.3 kg to 25.2 kg⁷³.

(4) 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 narcotics⁷⁴.

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.

(5) Precursor control

Information on trafficking of precursors via Turkmenistan is unavailable. There was only one case of precursor's seizure dating back to 2000. Two shipments of acetic anhydride amounting 40.29 tons from Singapore were arrested in Turkmenistan⁷⁵.

⁷⁰ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders. East West Institute, p.24.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.25.

⁷² CARICC Information Bulletin #164, p.1.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ INSCR, 2012, Volume II // <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2012/database/191294.htm>, last accessed 17.10.2016.

⁷⁵ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, p.5.

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

UZBEKISTAN

(1) *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 plants⁷⁶. Authorities burnt 0.47 ha of cannabis growing in wild and 0.67 ha of drug-containing plants in 2015⁷⁷.

No opium poppy cultivation and heroin production has been reported.

(2) *Consumption*

The number of registered drug users totaled 13,218 persons in 2015⁷⁸. This indicator decreased by 1,474 compared to 2014⁷⁹. Proportion of people dependent on opium drugs comprised 60.3% or 7,977 persons⁸⁰.

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.

(3) *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 traffickers⁸¹.

⁷⁶ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.39.

⁷⁷ V Tashkent unichtojili 1.4 tonny narkoticheskikh sredst // http://news.uzreport.uz/news_3_r_132658.html

⁷⁸ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.47

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.47.

⁸¹ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan’s Borders. East West Institute, p.23.

In 2016, law enforcement agencies detected 6,646 drug-related crimes⁸². 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 drugs⁸³, 204.7 kg of kuknar and 7,184 psychotropic pills⁸⁴. There was a significant increase in seizures of opioids from 2 t 510 kg in 2015 to 3 t 542 kg in 2016⁸⁵. Seizures of cannabinoids also increased from 1 t 275.2 to 1 t 124.3 kg⁸⁶.

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 legislation⁸⁷.

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 partners⁸⁸. 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-narcotics⁸⁹.

(4) 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 charges⁹⁰

⁸² Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.38.

⁸³ CARICC Information Bulletin #164, p.1.

⁸⁴ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.40.

⁸⁵ CARICC Information Bulletin #164, p.1.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.45.

⁸⁸ INCSR, 2016, Volume I, p.291.

⁸⁹ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders. East West Institute, p.23.

⁹⁰ INCSR, 2015, Volume II, p.316.

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 terrorism⁹¹.

Uzbekistan's AML/CFT system is positively assessed, but the government maintains secrecy as regards investigation or prosecution of money laundering⁹².

(5) 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, 2 tons for precursors were seized on Kyrgyz-Uzbek border in 2006⁹³.

d. Summary of the Mini-Dublin Group's Work

The main objective of organizing MDG meetings is identifying needs of the host countries and directing donor assistance to satisfy these needs. MDG meetings also serve as a flexible, informal coordination and coordination mechanism for country-specific, regional and global issues of illicit drugs production, trafficking and demand reduction.

To fulfill its main objective and fully engage host countries into collaboration through dialogue, five MDG meetings were organized in respective venues. The meeting on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was organized in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) in March 2016, the meeting on Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was held in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) in November and the meeting on Turkmenistan was held in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) in December. These meetings gave an opportunity to MDG members to directly discuss drug-related issues and search for their solutions with counter-narcotics agencies' representatives from respective Central Asian countries.

⁹¹ Guidance to Financial Institutions on the Money Laundering... Department of the Treasury. 2008 // <https://www.sec.gov/about/offices/ocie/aml/fin-2008-a004.pdf>

⁹² INSCR, 2015, Volume II, p.316..

⁹³ <http://www.kabar.kg/business/full/30813>, last accessed on 17.10.2016.

Parties showed willingness to continue conducting meetings in this format by pro-active involvement during the discussions with parties, and by sharing information and analysis with all MDG members. The members paid a special attention to discussion of shifting trafficking routes from Northern Route to Southern Route, lack of the structured data collection system that could be used in investigations, enhancing the capacity of key border crossing points through establishment of Border Liaison Offices and cooperation on synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances.

It was noted that Central Asia has faced an increase in synthetic drugs' trafficking in the last several years. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan already made legal changes in national legislations to control NPS. For example, Kyrgyzstan added 85 substances to the list of controlled psychotropic substances in 2015 with support from UNODC K50 Project⁹⁴. The project has achieved good results and shown that international assistance can have significant impact on improving capacities of national law enforcement agencies and help them tackle drug-related challenges.

⁹⁴ 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

In addition to the above-mentioned points, the following recommendations from the MDG Meeting in Dushanbe are considered as relevant:

1. a special attention should be paid to strengthening collaboration among law enforcement agencies of the Central Asian countries.
2. the agricultural sector of Afghanistan needs investments. It is important to develop and support alternative agricultural practices stimulating replacement of poppy by crops.
3. 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.
4. developing strategies and concrete techniques for blocking precursors' trafficking channels crossing Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
5. increase the scope of constructing border outposts and technical facilities. Allocate more resources, both human and financial, to the professional training of border specialists.
6. further improve the scale of the technical support on counter-narcotics provided to the DCA.
7. visits of the representatives of Afghanistan's Ministry of Internal Affairs to regional DCAs can foster the development of bilateral cooperation through implementation of joint counter-narcotics operations.

e. Essential points to be followed up by the MDGs

The Dublin Group is an informal platform where representatives of various countries can directly meet in person or group to discuss and share information provided by partners. They can identify priorities and, then, submit them to key stakeholders who can implement these priorities.

Each president of the MDG 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, this gives power to presidents of the MDGs making them more capable to implement changes.

To avoid duplication in organization of meetings, drafting meeting reports, and improve response of donors to needs of host countries, it is crucial to ensure collaboration between MDG chairmanship and UNODC field offices when it comes to following up active and planned anti-drug activities. This practice should be implemented in all Central Asian countries. In order 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 encouraged and facilitated.

2. REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL NATURE OF PROBLEMS

Roots of drug trafficking and border control issues can be traced back to the state-building period in Central Asia in the beginning of 1990s. Political elites had to establish connections with underground criminal groups in order 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 Central Asian law enforcement, customs officials and border guards who might be bribed to “look the other way” and therefore enabling and protecting the drug trade⁹⁵.

Considering the difficulty of obtaining information due to above-mentioned reasons, it can be inferred that data related to illegal drugs is usually biased and unavailable. Add to this, countries lack a unified well-functioning information sharing mechanism which is partially explained by a strategic character of such information. Currently, CARICC holds a position of the only precise and valid information analysis platform in Central Asia.

Other factor negatively contributing to development of effective communication and collaboration on drug-related problems is geopolitical competition, power struggle and unresolved border demarcation issues.

⁹⁵ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan’s Borders. East West Institute, p.20.

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

The Dublin Group should pay a high attention to enhancing collaboration between MDG Chairmanship and UNODC field offices, as well as more active participation of the host parties at discussions and subsequent reports' drafting during meetings.

It is crucial to allocate resources for supporting and promoting CARICC facing funding issues. CARICC 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 CARICC to member countries can significantly improve multilateral cooperation and increase effectiveness of joint efforts of national law enforcement agencies.

Donor countries should put more emphasis on prioritizing needs of the host countries when coordinating and planning anti-narcotics activities. Needs assessments and closer round-table discussions can help donor countries to better identify priorities of the host countries and 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 economic side rather than political one and put less emphasis on "liberal democracy" factor while providing anti-drug assistance to Central Asian republics. This approach envisages less attention to internal politics of the republics and more collaboration on the part of provision of assistance towards demand reduction capacity-building activities.

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

4. REGIONAL GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

a. Political Initiatives

- Supporting development and harmonization of national drug control legislation in Central Asian region.
- Encouraging and supporting regional cooperation among counter-narcotics agencies/authorities in the region.
- Facilitating the information exchange 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 counter-narcotics area.

b. Donor community priorities

- Enhancing professional skills of law-enforcement officers in the region by engaging counter-narcotics institutions from Mini-Dublin Group 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.

5. PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS MADE IN 2015

Host parties lack effective collaboration on multilateral level. Shortcomings are clearly evident when it concerns exchanges of operational information among the competent counter-narcotics agencies of the region. This shows an inadequate response to the regional organized drug crime problem by the national agencies in the respective countries. 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 to it, the authorities in the region concentrate counter-narcotics efforts more on capacity and institutional building, than on investing in governance and cooperation. This results in displacement of drug flows and appearance 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 MDG's recommendations outdated. Only Tajikistan and Uzbekistan updated their lists of prioritized needs so far. Other Central Asian countries are also expected to update their priority lists. In its turn, this will facilitate provision of more relevant recommendations and actions by the Dublin Group members.

Despite of the fact 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 of the member states and other involved countries to identify sources of such microbusinesses.

A special importance is given to contributing to implementation of the EU Act. During the MDG Meeting in Bishkek on 23rd of March, the Italian Embassy proposed initiatives to use the table as a platform exchanging ideas and improving cooperation on EU initiatives (CADAP and EU Act) and NPS.

Attachment 1. Drug-related statistics in 2015-2016

Table 1. Total amount of seized illegal drugs in 2015 and 2016.

	Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan		Turkmenistan		Uzbekistan	
	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
Heroin	464.4	196.6	344.45	166.81	498.95	88.79	0.711	0.952	147.92	107.76
Opium	4.1	2.3	46.339	24.915	1079.286	611.537	243.276	293.416	882.250	1446.820
Hashish	311.3	431.7	511.619	794.770	2188.029	2108.739	0.008	5.381	250.210	241.150
Marijuana	34 316.7	29 315.7	2 337.05	2 139.05	910.09	617.3	15.324	19.850	1 025.05	883.230

Table 2. Number of registered drug-related crimes

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

Table 3. Number of arrested individuals

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