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SUMMARY

Cultivation of opium poppy and production of heroin have continuously risen in Afghanistan in recent years. The trend is driven by the growing political instability, insufficient government control, and diminished economic incentives and opportunities for rural people, which may have exposed the rural communities to the influence of drug traders¹. A volatile security situation in the country and emergence of ISIS in the northern provinces also deteriorate the drug situation.

Recent trends have shown that opium production in Afghanistan is moving from northern and central provinces to southern areas. According to UNODC, Central and southern regions contribute for 55% of total Afghanistan's opium output. In northern parts of the country, the increase in cultivation is accounted to the growth in the number of farmers engaged in poppy cultivation. The estimated area under the cultivation increased from 127,000 ha to 328,000 ha, UNODC reported. The growth in the volume is also related to receiving of a higher opium yield per hectare.

¹ World Drug Report 2018 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.XI.9), p.8.

The rise of opium production encourages the growth in the level of precursors smuggled from Iran, India, and Pakistan logistics-wise as well as creates a precondition for a shift of trafficking towards Caucasus, Balkans, and South Asia. China's developed chemical industry considering its geographical proximity is also potentially resourceful supplier of precursors for Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Visible fall in the amount of seizures might point to the use of trafficking routes bypassing the region. Criminal groups might be using Balkan and Caucasian routes more often for smuggling heroin to Russia and Europe as recent last seizures of heroin and hashish have shown in Azerbaijan and Iran.

Corruption facilitates narcotics' smuggling. Profiting from drug trafficking becomes attractive as customs and border officials have low wages. This also exposes the problem of ethical and professional conduct which should be properly regulated. Such issues require the governments to act on political, economic, administrative, and legal dimensions.

Issues of smuggling and controlling NPS require more immediate attention in the form of changes in the legislation along with the development of new drug-countering approaches by the law enforcement. Difficulty of tracking precursors' trafficking on the map accounted to insufficient transparency and congruity of data remains as one of the most challenging aspects of NPS phenomenon.

The regional counter-narcotics action lacks coordination and informed decisions based on unified and reliable data. At the current stage, the only platform for sharing data, intelligence, and analysis, which fills an information gap on drug-related issues and shares relatively sufficient information on the region and international donors, is CARICC².

Having access to reliable, up-to-date, and complimentary data on consumption, seizures, price, purity, and other aspects of illicit narcotics from various sources which work with supply and demand reduction issues in the region is crucial for making a fair assessment of the drug situation and getting better understanding of the problems. Such data can be used for detecting the most vulnerable areas and then efficiently channel funding and resources to tackle existing problems.

² Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center for Combating Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Their Precursors

Insufficient foresight analysis is considered to be a weakness for the counter-narcotics action as it prevents law enforcement agencies from timely responding to quick changes in illegal trafficking patterns. It is important to practice preventive analysis of future trends to remedy this drawback. Furthermore, law enforcement officials can become more flexible and efficient in tackling new drug-related challenges by adopting a strategic approach to issues.

As for money-laundering of drug proceeds, Central Asian countries lack capacity in financial intelligence and therefore struggle to implement efficient anti-money laundering activities. The governments mainly rely on foreign assistance which is channeled to militarization of the counter-narcotics field and reinforcement of the political regimes. Financial intelligence capacity remains weak whereas more priority is given to operational activities in the expense of demand reduction programs.

Regional economic integration and development of road and railroad infrastructure contribute to the development of trade but at the same time creates opportunities for smuggling. Additional security risks emerge due to easing of border crossing and customs' requirements. Countries struggle to monitor containers on the border due to their growing volumes and outdated equipment.

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

1.1 Mini-Dublin Group Meetings in 2018

The following MDG meetings were organized in 2017:

- *Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.* The first regular MDG meeting on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was organized in Astana (KZ) on June 27th.
- *Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.* Tashkent (UZ) hosted the first regular MDG meeting on Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on July 5th. The second meeting will take place on 15th of November in Dushanbe (TJ).
- *Turkmenistan.* The first regular MDG Meeting on Turkmenistan was held in Ashgabat (TKM) on June 8th. The second meeting is expected on November 29th.

1.2 Overview of the regional situation regarding illicit narcotics production

Central Asia has long been considered as a transit territory for an increasing amount of Afghan opiates trafficked to the major consumer markets in Russia, Europe, and the USA. UNODC reports that cultivation of the opium and production of the heroin and other drugs in the region is on a small scale, with more than 99% of the opiates originating in Afghanistan³. Current data does not suggest evidence of production facilities for processing opium into heroin and other drugs in Central Asia.

The security and drug situation in the region is affected by instability in neighboring Afghanistan which is territorially considered as a part of South Asia. UNODC reported that a marked growth in poppy cultivation and steady increase in opium poppy yields in Afghanistan resulted in the rise of the total opium production to 9,000 tons in 2017, which constituted 87% increase from 2016⁴. Opiates are either processed on Afghanistan's territory or refined elsewhere before being transited via neighboring countries.

Although major heroin production centers are believed to be in Afghanistan, the country lacks supplies of precursors which are imported. Weak border control management and insufficient law enforcement capabilities open opportunities for smuggling of precursors⁵. Large volumes of illicit chemicals are smuggled to Afghanistan and neighboring countries where drug laboratories purify opium to obtain heroin and morphine⁶. Some sources reported the fall in the volume of seized precursors on the territory of Afghanistan, which might be caused with the possible relocation of processing laboratories to Pakistan⁷.

³ 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.

⁴ World Drug Report 2018 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.XI.9), p.8.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Ibid, p.92.

⁷ Ibid, p.73.

It is supposed that illicit narcotics are trafficked from Afghanistan mainly through three transit routes, namely the northern route passing via Central Asia and Russia, the western or Balkan route going through Iran, Turkey, and the EU, and the southern path which lies through Pakistan to Gulf countries⁸. With the decline in the volume of narcotics transited via Central Asia in recent years, noted in UNODC World Drug Report 2014, the Balkan and Caucasian passages are gaining new significance⁹. As for the Caucasian route, it passes through territories of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, and then connects to the Balkan path in Europe. The shift can be noticed looking at significantly increasing seizures of heroin in Caucasus and Iran since 2014. For instance, around 4 tons of heroin were seized in the aforementioned countries in 2016¹⁰.

According to estimates the annual amount of Afghan drugs transited via Balkan and Caucasian routes reaches about 170 metric tons (MT)¹¹. Large amounts of Afghan opium-related narcotics seized in Azerbaijan in 2016 point to the fact that the Caucasian pass has acquired a high spot on the map of heroin trafficking¹². For instance, 141 kg of heroin destined to Azerbaijan were detained by border guards on the Azerbaijani-Iranian border¹³. Opposed to Caucasus, the number of seizures in CARICC member-states (CA states, Azerbaijan, and Russia) generally decreased by 60.7% in 2017 and constituted 1,067 kg, except Tajikistan¹⁴.

⁸ 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.

⁹ World Drug Report 2014. (2014, June). UNODC, p.24.

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

¹¹ 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.

¹² V Azerbayjane peresekli vvoz 141 kg geroina. (2016, October 14). *RIA Novosti*. Retrieved September 2, 2017. <https://ria.ru/world/20160815/1474344495.html>.

¹³ 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>.

¹⁴ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.180, p.3.

More than 10.3 tons of illegal narcotics were seized in CARICC member states (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) in the first quarter of 2018, which is 9% higher or 852.5 kg more compared to the same period in 2017¹⁵. Cannabis-based drugs comprised 8 tons of the total amount whereas the opium narcotics amounted 1.05 tons¹⁶. In contrast, 7.1 tons of cannabis drugs and about 1.4 tons of opiates were seized in 2017¹⁷. In the first quarter of 2018, heroin seizures rose more than sevenfold in Azerbaijan and threefold in Tajikistan¹⁸. As for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the amount of seized opium did not exceed 1 kg¹⁹.

As for cannabis, it is widely cultivated in the region as it is easy to produce and considered as a lucrative cash crop²⁰. Cannabis is produced mostly for local markets, and a smaller amount is trafficked to Europe and Russia²¹. The largest producer of cannabis is Kazakhstan with estimated 138,000 ha of the wild plants cultivated in Zhambyl region. Such amount can be utilized for the production of 100,000 MT of marijuana or almost 3,500 MT of hashish²².

Trafficking of synthetic drugs and NPS is an emerging trend in the region. The region has a potential to become a major source of illicit substances due to vast availability of ephedra which grows in wild across the area. The plant contains ephedrine which is a precursor of methamphetamine. UNODC estimates that area of the wild ephedra amounts 138,117 ha, with 88,299 ha in Kazakhstan, 46,433 ha in Kyrgyzstan, and 3,484 ha in Tajikistan, respectively²³.

Increase of purchasing power in the countries might stimulate wider use of such drugs. Similar trend was evidenced in Russia when economic growth and emergence of the middle class spiked the demand for illegal synthetic substances. Consumption of NPS and synthetic narcotics might eventually stimulate their production in the region.

¹⁵ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, June). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No. 185, p.2.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia (2008, April), p.7.

²² 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.

²³ Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia (2008, April), p.29.

China's 'One Belt One Road' initiative focusing on regional connectivity and economic development and improving regional cooperation contribute to trade and opening of borders in the region. Central Asian countries are attracted by potential opportunities and benefits of infrastructural development but are might face border security and trafficking risks related to cross-border and trade. Growing expansion of the commercial activity and freedom of movement challenge governments' abilities to detect and intercept smuggled goods. Intensive flows of cargo and people in different directions require more investments in the development of border management capabilities and acquisition of the modern equipment. If growing needs of the border management are not met, drugs' interception efforts are less likely to be enough efficient.

To sum up, the cultivation of opium and production of illegal opioids is limited 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.

1.3 National situation regarding illicit drugs, money laundering, and precursor control

1.3.1 Kazakhstan

a. Illicit narcotics production

Kazakhstan serves as a transit hub for heroin and other opiates from Afghanistan heading to Russian and European markets. The major drug trends in the country are growing imports of synthetic drugs, internet sales of illicit narcotics, and cultivation and trafficking of cannabis from Zhambyl region located on the border with Kyrgyzstan²⁴. Growing demand has been driving cultivation of cannabis and import of synthetic narcotics. The country is threatened by the spread of synthetic drugs produced locally and originated from China, Russia, and the EU. In 2017, the amount of seized synthetic narcotics increased from 165 kg to 22 tons within seven years²⁵.

²⁴ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2018, March). Retrieved September 21, 2018, p.203.

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

The republic has large illegal production of marijuana for internal use and CIS market. Its southern regions are known for cultivation of opium poppy in small amounts and growing of ephedra²⁶. The latest statistics revealed that illegal cultivation of narcotic plants significantly increased from 97,610 bushes in 2016 to 909,128 bushes in 2017²⁷. As for the volume of seized heroin, it decreased in 2017. The street-price of heroin has increased six times since 2008²⁸.

Law enforcement of Kazakhstan seized about 20-25 tons of drugs in Zhambyl region in 2016²⁹. It is estimated that 140,000 ha of wild marijuana is grown in Shu Valley. This amount can be potentially used for yielding 100,000 MT of marijuana or almost 3,500 MT of hashish³⁰. Kyzylorda is another region with advantageous environment for the cultivation of cannabis. The province draws attention of the organized criminal groups for its favorable climate for cultivation of a certain type of marijuana³¹. Non-cannabis narcotics are mainly brought to Kazakhstan from neighboring and other countries³².

b. Consumption

The latest statistics on drug consumption recorded the reduction of officially registered drug abusers from 27,269 to 24,870 persons or by 8.8% in 2016-2017³³. The ratio of drug addicts who repeatedly sought treatment reduced from 4,504 to 4,110 people or by 8.7%³⁴. Fatal drug overdoses' number fell by 15.1% from 185 to 157 cases³⁵.

²⁶ 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>.

²⁷ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.180, p.6.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region. (2016), p.11.

³⁰ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (March 2016), p.201.

³¹ Ibid., p.12.

³² 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

³³ 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.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

c. Trafficking

Kazakhstan's location on the way of the northern route makes it significant for traffickers who use sea, air, railroad, and road communication to transit narcotics from Afghanistan to Russia and Europe. For example, a new railway crossing Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran opens possibilities for drug smuggling. Drug traffickers also use new methods like sales via bank payment systems, internet, sales, and postal services³⁶.

Recent developments point at the reduction of the trafficking levels. According to UNODC, concentration of opium production in southern Afghanistan led to the change of trafficking paths, which resulted in limited availability of heroin and six-fold increase in prices in Kazakhstan³⁷. The estimated street-price of heroin reached \$10,000-\$30,000 USD per a kilogram in Kazakhstan in 2017³⁸. The law enforcement of Kazakhstan accounted such jump in prices for the use of alternative routes passing through Southern Asia and Balkans³⁹.

In the first quarter of 2018, Kazakhstan reported 1,067 drug offences, 22.7% less than compared to the same period in 2017⁴⁰. However, the number of detained citizens who committed drug crimes grew from 1,363 to 1,449⁴¹. In the first nine months of 2018, Kazakh law enforcement authorities seized more than 707 kg of narcotics and around 2,300 MDMA and other illicit tablets, which included 395.8 kg of marijuana, around 261 kg of hashish, and 44.8 kg of heroin⁴².

³⁶ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2018, March). Retrieved September 25, 2018, p.204.

³⁷ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.201.

³⁸ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.180, p.5.

³⁹ Ibid, p.199.

⁴⁰ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, June). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.185, p.1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

Kazakhstan seized 1,902 kg of narcotics in the first quarter of 2018, which was 0.5% increase from 1,892 kg compared to the same timeframe in 2017⁴³. Seizures of heroin fell from 83.6 kg to 25 kg, of opium decreased from 8.3 kg to 0.1 kg, and of cannabis reduced from 1,678 kg to 1,609 kg⁴⁴. In contrast, the ratio of seized hashish more than doubled, from 117.8 kg to 266.2 kg in the given period of 2017-2018⁴⁵.

d. Money laundering

As a transit country Kazakhstan is at risk of laundering proceeds from illicit drugs. As for many other countries, Kazakhstan's biggest challenge is tracking money from narcotics as payments are more frequently processed through informal remittance systems⁴⁶. INCSR reports that money laundering often takes place in the form of tax evasion, abuses of public office, and fraudulent financial activities with involvement of shell companies and off-shore banking accounts abroad⁴⁷.

Kazakhstan lacks unified strategy and coordinated investigations of financial crimes⁴⁸. INCSR report suggests that smuggling of illegal goods and forged invoicing of exports and imports are widely practiced. For instance, Kazakh prosecutors processed 54 money laundering or related cases in a court in 2016⁴⁹.

⁴³ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, June). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.185, p.2.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2018, March). Retrieved September 30, 2018, p.129.

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2017, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.114.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.115.

The World Bank reports that VAT-related fraud activities are widespread in the country⁵⁰. Fraud and stealing account for roughly 50% of reported and investigated money laundering cases according to the Kazakhstan's Financial Police⁵¹. In one of the cases involving laundering of tax fraud proceeds, criminals indicated a false amount of export to obtain VAT returns and tried to transfer the fraudulent proceeds to Hong Kong⁵².

Kazakhstan's institutional capacity to detect, investigate, and prosecute laundering cases seems to be limited due to the separation of the duties between law enforcement agencies. For instance, the Financial Police as the only authority allowed to investigate money laundering incidents works just with economic and corruption crimes⁵³. As for the Ministry of Interior, it is empowered to interrogate only predicate crimes but cannot investigate money laundering cases⁵⁴. To fight money laundering, Kazakhstan established the Astana International Financial Center (AIFC). The center serves as a regional financial hub and offshore territory to be regulated by British Common Law and overseen by a future financial supervisory agency.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Todoroki, 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

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁵ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering. (2018, March). Retrieved September 29, 2018, p.129.

e. Precursor control

Precursors for production of illegal narcotics in Afghanistan and Central Asian republics can potentially be supplied from China as it has an advanced chemical industry. Information on trafficking of Chinese precursors in the region is scarce at the current stage. It is possible that a large amount of precursors pass through Kazakh-Chinese border via Dostuk, Khorgos, and Kolzhat border outposts⁵⁶. UNODC reported that the smuggling of precursors through Dostuk and Khorgos border points is feasible but high-risk⁵⁷.

The Ministry of Interior of Kazakhstan reported the seizure of 5.48 liters of substances, including hydrochloric acid, sulfuric acid, and acetone, destined for narcotics' production⁵⁸. To identify offences in this field, the government conducts 'Doping' preventive operations. Checks are conducted in educational facilities, treatment-preventive facilities, and family outpatient clinics for the correctness of accounting, storage, goods issue, and disposal narcotics, psychotropic substances, and their precursors⁵⁹.

Law enforcement professionals do not regard precursor control as a priority and question a security threat from Chinese chemicals⁶⁰. It appears that officials' level of competency and knowledge of precursors is not appropriate despite of training provided by the government, international donors, and partners⁶¹.

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, May). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.184, p.3.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ 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.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.8.

1.3.2 Kyrgyzstan

a. Illicit narcotics production

Kyrgyzstan does not have organized drug production facilities on its territory. The republic did not report any cases of illicit cultivation of opium and production of precursors in 2018. Wild cannabis and ephedra cover vast areas in Chui region and around Lake Issyk-Kul⁶². Kyrgyzstan has around 10,000 ha of raw-material base for producing cannabis-related narcotics and more than 55,000 ha of areas with ephedra which is a precursor of ephedrine used in methamphetamine⁶³. CARICC reported the cultivation of 10,353,122 bushes of marijuana in 2017⁶⁴. Officers of the State Drug Control Service of the Jalal-Abad region destroyed about 600 bales of the wild cannabis⁶⁵.

Geographical location, limited natural resources, and a fragile criminal justice system make Kyrgyzstan vulnerable to drugs' transshipment. Openness of the borders due to the membership in the Eurasian Economic Union and improvement of the road and railway infrastructure potentially increases Kyrgyzstan's insecurity to Russian-bound transit route for trafficking of drugs⁶⁶.

b. Consumption

The number of drug users decreased from 8,853 to 8,543 abusers in 2016-2017, according to CARICC⁶⁷. The ratio of drug addicts who repeatedly sought treatment reduced from 393 to 366 individuals or by 6.9% in the same period⁶⁸. Fatal drug overdoses' number was 23 cases in 2017, and no data was reported in 2016⁶⁹.

⁶² 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.

⁶³ Illegal Drugs in Kyrgyzstan.(n.d.).Facts and Details. Retrieved September 19, 2017, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Kyrgyzstan/sub8_5b/entry-4768.html.

⁶⁴ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.180, p.6.

⁶⁵ Weekly Summary of CARICC. (9-15.07.2018). №29. CARICC, p.1.

⁶⁶ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2018, March). Retrieved September 25, 2018, p.206.

⁶⁷ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.180, p.6.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

c. Trafficking

Trafficking of illicit narcotics penetrates Kyrgyzstan in the direction of Alai and Cho-Alai of Osh region, and Batken, Leilek, and Kadamjay districts of Batken region. Osh city, and also Osh, Naryn, Jalal-Abad, and Batken regions have the highest number of drug-related crimes compared to other locations⁷⁰. Osh which is often referred to as a southern capital of Kyrgyzstan serves as a transfer hub for narcotics transited to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and further to Russia, Europe, and the US⁷¹. Country's vulnerability to drug trafficking emanates from its closeness to Tajikistan and Afghanistan, activities of organized criminal groups, absence of common approach to regional security, and inefficient border management⁷².

As for the trafficking of NPS, several incidents were recorded in 2015 but considering Kyrgyzstan's regulatory deficiencies in controlling substances, the identified cases were not investigated as crimes.

Kyrgyzstan detained 1,469 kg of narcotics in the first quarter of 2018, which was twofold increase from 724.1 compared to the previous year⁷³. Seizures of heroin fell from 30.3 kg to 21.4 kg, of opium decreased from 0.6 kg to 0.1 kg, and of hashish more than halved from 331.1 kg to 123.9 kg⁷⁴. In contrast, the ratio of detained cannabis rose from 362.1 kg to 1,297.3 kg in the given period of 2017-2018⁷⁵.

Kyrgyzstan implemented a law enforcement reform by merging of the State Drug Control Service with the Ministry of Interior in July 2016, which led to the fact that experienced anti-drug officers began to leave the new service as to disagreements with the Ministry of Interior. The departure of the experienced anti-drug personnel weakened the counter-narcotics service. A similar negative trend has been observed in several instances in Russia.

⁷⁰ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region. (2016), p.17.

⁷¹ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2009, May), p.384.

⁷² 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.

⁷³ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, June). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.185, p.2.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

d. Money laundering

Corruption, activities of organized criminal groups, and large informal economy make Kyrgyzstan vulnerable to transit of drugs and laundering proceeds from drug trafficking. The US INL Bureau reported that money laundering takes place in the form of trade-based fraud, bulk cash operations, and unregulated value transfer systems⁷⁶. More than third of Kyrgyzstan's GDP is comprised of remittances from migrant workers, and a large amount of them brought to the country via informal channels.

The State Financial Intelligence Service (FIS) signed more than eight international agreements on exchange of data on money laundering and terrorism financing⁷⁷. However, relatively frail political institutes, corruption, and financial constraints hamper effectiveness of anti-money laundering activities. It is reported that FIS might not be fully acknowledged as a legitimate agency by government authorities, which results in lack of collaboration and data sharing among agencies⁷⁸. Government and private entities lack qualified staff and law enforcement capacities.

Organized crime and corruption in the criminal justice system seem to be long-term issues for the government. For instance, high-ranking officials were implicated in corruption in several instances in 2016⁷⁹. The National Service on Drug Control reported 41 drug-related corruption cases and initiated 41 criminal investigations. As a result of the investigations, 56 persons were prosecuted, and 49 of them worked in law enforcement, other government entities, and local government⁸⁰. More than 292 kg of drugs, including 70 kg of heroin, were seized from the corrupted officials⁸¹.

⁷⁶ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2018, March), p.133.

⁷⁷ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2017, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.120.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.121.

⁷⁹ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2016, March), p.208.

⁸⁰ 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>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

e. Precursor control

A legal right to traffic precursors belongs to 270 entities and individuals of the state registry. Precursors such as sulfuric acid, hydrochloric acid, acetic acid, and acetone are mainly imported to Kyrgyzstan from Kazakhstan and Russia. Occasional incidents of precursors from countries such as Austria (toluene, acetone), the Netherlands (methyl ethyl ketone, potassium permanganate) can be mentioned⁸².

China is considered as a major source of precursors for Kyrgyzstan as countries share 858-km border. Smuggling mainly occurs on Torugart and Irkeshtan border outposts⁸³. According to Kyrgyz DCA and UNODC, it is common when trucks drive across a river and mark an eastern border of Bishkek to avoid paying taxes and tariffs⁸⁴. Use of Chinese import declarations by Kyrgyz Customs in Irkeshtan and Torugart border crossings creates risks for trafficking of precursors as border officers cannot read declarations in Chinese and do not possess clear information about imported goods, especially when a driver declares liquids⁸⁵. Also, Kyrgyz law enforcement officials do not have a required level of knowledge of precursors and do not consider their trafficking as an issue.

Precursors are imported to Kyrgyzstan mainly for 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 utilized 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 added to paint as a marking material⁸⁶.

⁸² Information on Import and Export of Precursors. (2016). State Drug Control Service Under the Government of Kyrgyz Republic.

⁸³ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China.(n.d.). *UNODC ROCA CAU*.Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.16.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.15.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.16.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies seized illegal precursors totaling 2,811.8 kg in 2017 which was 1,168.6 kg more than in 2016⁸⁷. Tajikistan was a key destination for the export of precursors. During the reported period, no cases of the trade of precursors from Afghanistan were recorded.

1.3.3 Tajikistan

a. Illicit narcotics production

Tajikistan did not report any cases of narcotics' cultivation in 2018. However, production of marijuana mainly for personal use persists. The country reported 31 ha of wild growth and 1.24 ha of illicit cultivation of cannabis in 2008⁸⁸.

b. Consumption

CARICC reported that the number of drug abusers decreased from 7,067 to 6,947 in 2016-2017⁸⁹. The number of drug addicts who repeatedly sought treatment increased from 401 to 457 individuals or by 14% in the same period⁹⁰. Fatal drug overdoses' number reduced from 7 to 1 case in the reported period⁹¹.

Tajikistan adopted a five-year program in April 2016 to consolidate its efforts in drug prevention and healthy lifestyle promotion. The program targets the youth and envisages starting of educational programs for prevention of drug use and introduction of global standards which help constraining drug abuse⁹².

⁸⁷ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.180, p.6.

⁸⁸ Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia. (2008, April), p.23.

⁸⁹ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.180, p.6.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March), p.256.

The Ministry of Health provides treatment services in Dushanbe whereas the four regional centers contribute to in-house treatment and methadone maintenance. The government has 12 centers with use of methadone treatment and three of them are funded of the US. A pilot project with 13 patients on the methadone treatment was launched in 2017⁹³.

c. Trafficking

Tajikistan shares 1,343 km border with Afghanistan, the longest among all Central Asian countries, and is located on the one of the major transit corridors for Afghan opium and other illicit narcotics. Country's border areas are considered to be ruggedly remote, hard to control, and lacking essential infrastructure⁹⁴. Trafficking mainly occurs at night and involves local people who smuggle narcotics across rivers using small boats and inner tubes⁹⁵. According to UNODC estimates, 75-80 MT of Afghan heroin and 18-20 MT of opium pass through the country, but only a small fraction of those is seized by the authorities⁹⁶.

Infrastructural projects intended to contribute to economic development might create opportunities for trafficking. For instance, US-funded Nizhniy Pyanj bridge on the Tajik-Afghan border allow smugglers to move larger quantities of drugs between two countries, in addition to the improvement of the trade between two countries⁹⁷. More than half of seizures took place in Khatlon province and Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region bordered with Afghanistan⁹⁸.

⁹³ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2018, March), p.266.

⁹⁴ 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.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2018, March), p.265.

⁹⁷ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders. (2015, April). *East West Institute*, p.20.

⁹⁸ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March), p.20.

Tajikistan seized 1,376 kg of narcotics in the first quarter of 2018, which accounted for 6.3% decrease from 1,468 kg compared to the same period in 2017⁹⁹. Seizures of heroin grew from 27.8 kg to 82.5 kg and of opium rose from 399.9 kg to 453.2 kg¹⁰⁰. In contrast, the volume of detained hashish and cannabis decreased from 847.9 kg to 693.1 kg and 192.7 kg to 146.9 kg respectively in the above-mentioned period of 2017-2018¹⁰¹.

According to the US INL Bureau, Tajik DCA account the downward trend in seizures to the shift in trafficking patterns, an expanded Tajik security presence along the Tajik-Afghan border, and more attention paid by the government to drug use prevention activities¹⁰².

d. Money laundering

It is assumed that the majority of Tajikistan's laundered finances are gained from the transit of large volumes of Afghan opium drugs and other narcotics intended for Russian and Eastern European markets¹⁰³. Money launderers ring road financial institutions by physically transporting cash across countries, which allows them to transfer assets to different destinations and stay away from following currency reporting requirements¹⁰⁴.

Tajikistan's banking system is not sophisticated for fraud operations and therefore the issue of money laundering is insignificant in the country. It is assumed that a large amount of narcotics is transited via Tajikistan with involvement of some law enforcement officials as they have extremely low wages making profiting from drug trafficking attractive¹⁰⁵.

⁹⁹ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, June). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.185, p.2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2018, March), p.265.

¹⁰³ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2018, March), p.190.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2016, March), p.265.

Up-to-date data on money laundering investigations or prosecution is absent, which makes it problematic to give a precise assessment to the degree of formal banking sector's penetration by financial crimes, particularly laundering of drug trafficking proceeds, and efficiency of country's anti-money laundering system¹⁰⁶. US INL Bureau's report notes that money laundering challenges encountered by Tajikistan are likely to arise from the omnipresent culture of corruption and less likely from scarcity of strong institutions or comprehensive laws¹⁰⁷.

e. Precursor control

Tajik law enforcement officials reportedly do not have good knowledge of precursors. Some officials expressed an opinion that precursors' trafficking is not a pressing issue¹⁰⁸. Smuggling of precursors from China to Tajikistan is not a feasible option as Kulma border crossing is open only for a few months and has harsh weather conditions¹⁰⁹.

The largest seizure of precursors was recorded in Sogd region in 2015 and amounted 7,228 kg of sulfuric acid¹¹⁰. The total amount of seized precursors dramatically increased from 65.1 kg to 551.7 kg in 2016-2017¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁶ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2018, March), p.192.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China.(n.d.). *UNODC ROCA CAU*. Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.20.

¹¹⁰ Krupnayapartiyaprekursoroviz'yata v Tadjikistane // <http://rus.pressa.tj/news/krupnaya-partiya-prekursorov-izyata-v-tadjikistane>.

¹¹¹ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*.No.180, p.6.

The Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan recorded 10 seizures of sulfuric acid amounting 875.6 kg intended for refueling of accumulators in 2017¹¹². Cases of seizing chemicals for illicit drugs' production were not registered in 2017-2018. One of the significant cases of seizing precursors took place in Rudaki district in 2017, when law enforcement officers seized 724 kg of sulfuric acid¹¹³. Precursors imported to Tajikistan are hydrochloric and sulfuric acids which are mainly utilized for gold processing, oil and gas wells' exploration, leather and oil processing, laboratory tests, and some other purposes¹¹⁴. A special license has to be obtained from the Drug Control Agency for import or export of precursors.

1.3.4 Turkmenistan

a. Illicit narcotics production

Turkmenistan has never been a large producer or source of illicit narcotics or precursors. The country did not record any evidence of illicit opium and cannabis cultivation and heroin production in 2018. It is difficult to make an assessment of a situation on illicit drug production and acuteness of drug issues due to the scarcity of data on Turkmenistan. Majority of seizures occur along 804-km Turkmen-Afghan border and 1,147-km long frontier with Iran.

International donors often complain about reluctance of Turkmen authorities to participate in sustained joint training exercises with authorities of Afghanistan. UN officials note that Turkmen authorities continue to distance themselves and cancel meetings with international border management representatives without providing proper reasoning or prior warning¹¹⁵.

US INL Bureau reports that heroin, opium, and marijuana prices are among the highest in Turkmenistan compared to the prices in the region¹¹⁶. The government did not disclose information on drugs burnt during drug burning ceremonies in January and June 2017¹¹⁷.

¹¹² CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.184, p. 5.

¹¹³ Ibid., p.6.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2018, March), p.278.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2018, March), p.278.

b. Consumption

The latest available information on consumption dates back to 2007, when the total number of drug users was approximately 32,000 persons, with 26% being injecting drug users¹¹⁸. The total percentage of heroin users was 93%, whereas cannabis users made up only 3%¹¹⁹.

Local law enforcement has an authority to start drug cases and send people to rehabilitation centers like the one located in Ahal province, which can accommodate around 120 patients¹²⁰.

c. Trafficking

Turkmenistan is the main trafficking corridor going westward from Afghanistan to Iran and onwards to Europe by crossing Balkan and Caucasian routes. In contrast, the country's position is insignificant for the northern route. In most cases trafficking happens along mountainous 800-km border with Afghanistan and 1147-km border line with Iran. Commercial truck flows from Iran to Turkmenistan, and boat traffic from Turkmenistan to Caucasus and Russia creates opportunities for smuggling¹²¹.

Turkmenistan does not support or coordinate illegal production or sale of narcotics but low wages and credentials of law enforcement officials stimulate corruption and might undermine counter-narcotics efforts on the border. US INL Bureau reported that, for instance, junior level officials at border checkpoints are often bribed to allow disrupted passage of contraband goods¹²². It can be expected the use smuggled goods for concealing illicit drugs. However, there were no cases of prosecution of the government officials in relation to corruption linked to drugs¹²³.

¹¹⁸ Fact Sheet on Turkmenistan. UNODC, Paris Pact Initiative. Updated as of February 2015.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2016, March). Retrieved September 10, 2017, p.276.

¹²¹ 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.

¹²² International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.276.

¹²³ Ibid.

Turkmenistan pursues a neutral border security policy towards Afghanistan and engages with incumbents and insurgents across the border in certain instances. It is supposed that such policy might improve border management but can contribute to the growth of trafficking through Balkan and Caucasian routes via territory of Turkmenistan¹²⁴.

Turkmenistan did not report any data on seizures in 2018. The latest available statistics dates back to the first 9 months of 2017. The amount of the seized narcotics totaled at 249.3 kg in three quarters of 2017, which was 5.2% more than in the same period a year earlier. Seizure ratios of heroin and hashish declined, whereas the amount of recovered opium and marijuana rose. The total of seized heroin fell from 0.625 kg to 0.117 kg, the volume of recovered hashish plummeted from 5.4 kg to 0.032 kg in the considered period of 2016-2017¹²⁵. In contrast, the amount of opium increased from 228.3 kg to 243.7 kg and volume of marijuana grew from 617.3 kg to 742.7 kg¹²⁶.

Street-level prices of heroin, opium, and cannabis seem to be the highest in the region¹²⁷.

d. Money laundering

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.

Turkmenistan' banking and financial capabilities are weak and underdeveloped. It has only five international banks. It is supposed that money laundering can involve revenues from trafficking, sale of illicit narcotics, and related criminal activities¹²⁸.

¹²⁴ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders. (2015, April). *East West Institute*. Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.24.

¹²⁵ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.180, p.6.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2017, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.275.

¹²⁸ 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>.

e. Precursor control

Data on trafficking of precursors in Turkmenistan is unavailable. There was only one case in 2000, when two shipments of acetic anhydride amounting 40.29 tons from Singapore were detained in Turkmenistan¹²⁹.

1.3.5 Uzbekistan

a. Illicit narcotics production

The drug situation in Uzbekistan is greatly affected by its geographical position as a buffer between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, on the one side, and consumer countries, on the other.

Law enforcement of Uzbekistan registered 1,301 incidents of illicit cultivation of narcotic plants¹³⁰ and burnt 0.47 ha of wild cannabis and 0.67 ha of drug-containing plants in 2015¹³¹. The country did not report any poppy cultivation and heroin production. In 2016, Uzbek authorities uncovered 1,070 incidents of illegal cultivation and eradicated a half a hectare of cultivated land area¹³².

b. Consumption

The number of registered drug users decreased from 10,505 to 8,036 in 2016-2017¹³³. The ratio of drug addicts who repeatedly sought treatment reduced from 936 to 822 people or by 12.2%¹³⁴. Officially registered fatal drug overdoses' number was 1 case in 2016, and no case was reported in 2017¹³⁵.

¹²⁹ Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China.(n.d.). *UNODC ROCA CAU*.Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.5.

¹³⁰ Information Bulletin on Drug Related Situation in the Central Asian Region, p.39.

¹³¹ V Tashkent unichtojili 1.4 tonny narkoticheskikh sredstv // http://news.uzreport.uz/news_3_r_132658.html

¹³² International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2018, March), p.281.

¹³³ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*.No.180, p.6.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Information on abusers of synthetic drugs is unavailable despite of significant increase in trafficking of synthetic cannabinoids mainly brought to the country by its migrant workers returning from Russia.

c. Trafficking

Uzbek-Tajik border is the main concern for trafficking of opiates. In contrast, the volume of seized heroin along the Uzbek-Afghan border is lower due to its highly restrictive regime which deters drug traffickers¹³⁶.

Uzbekistan seized 173.8 kg of narcotics in the first quarter of 2018, which was 71.8% decrease from 616.1 compared to the same timeframe in 2017. Seizures of heroin dropped from 7.8 kg to 0.1 kg, of opium reduced from 411.7 kg to 62.9 kg, of hashish decreased from 29.1 kg to 20.3 kg, and of cannabis fell from 123.7 kg to 88.5 kg in the given period of 2017-2018.

Uzbekistan's drug control policy is based on the Program of Complex Measures on Countering Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking for 2016-2020. The program highlights responsibilities of the law enforcement in restricting illegal drug trafficking, reducing demand, preventing abuse, improving law enforcement legislation, and collaborating with international partners¹³⁷.

The National Center for Drug Control initiated the establishment of a working group which is composed of representatives of the official authorities of Uzbekistan to tackle issues related to new types of psychoactive substances and synthetic drugs. The working group proposes relevant amendments to the national drug control legislature related to restrictionson NPS and synthetic drugs¹³⁸.

¹³⁶ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders. East West Institute, p.23.

¹³⁷ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control. (2017, March). Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.291.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.45.

d. Money laundering

It is assumed that corruption and susceptibility of law enforcement to political influence hampers the effectiveness of the process of meeting international standards via new legislation¹³⁹.

Illicit money in Uzbekistan derives from corruption, drug trafficking, lobbying, and smuggling of goods. Some members of the political elite and businessmen expropriate revenues from state-run companies and move it abroad. For instance, an integral part of many Uzbek business deals abroad is the use of off-shores, or companies formed in various tax havens around the world, that allow true owners of a company to remain in the shadows¹⁴⁰.

Corruption investigations of mid-level government officials and former high-level politicians have been common since 2017¹⁴¹. Recent and ongoing investigations on economic crimes are connected to former government officials and influential people of Karimov's era. The major investigations were related to the former president's elder daughter, former security service officials allegedly involved in the transit of Afghan drugs via Uzbekistan, and financial crimes of a former general prosecutor.

e. Precursor control

Uzbekistan is the only country in the region with capabilities to produce acetic anhydride and sulphuric acid. However, precursors used for drugs' production for in Afghanistan predominantly smuggled from Pakistan owing to its geographic proximity to the main heroin producing provinces, namely Kandagar, Helmand, and Nangarkhar. Uzbekistan seized 3.7 kg of precursors in 2017¹⁴².

¹³⁹ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2018, March), p.209.

¹⁴⁰ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2018, March), p.209.

¹⁴¹ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. (2015, March). Retrieved September 16, 2017, p.316.

¹⁴² CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.180, p.6.

NCDC reported a seizure of 23 liters of acetone and 3.6 kg of potassium permanganate in 2017. Permissions for import and export of precursors are granted by the Ministry of Health¹⁴³.

1.4 Summary of the Mini-Dublin Group's work

MDG meetings serve as a platform for the discussion and exchange of ideas and insights on drug-related issues as well as review progress achieved by law enforcement agencies in the region and share feedback to strengthen joint activities. Stakeholders participating in the meetings exchange valuable information and develop solutions for existing problems. The main functions of the MDG framework are serving as an arena for sharing initiatives and opinions, identifying needs of Central Asian countries, and avoiding overlapping in activities. The group does not initiate or conduct operations, but only evaluates country-level and regional-level drug situations and shares information with the EU and other stakeholders. Meetings function as an informal coordination mechanism for country-specific, regional, and global issues of illegal drugs' production, trafficking, and demand reduction.

The main goal of the meetings is the identification of host countries' needs and direct donor assistance towards these needs. To fulfill its main objective and fully engage host countries into collaboration through dialogue, several MDG meetings were organized in first 9 months of 2018 in respective venues and some other meetings are expected in the fourth quarter. The meeting on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was held in June in Astana (Kazakhstan), the gathering on Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was organized in July in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) with the second meeting expected in November in Dushanbe (Tajikistan), the meeting on Turkmenistan took place in June in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) and will be followed by the second meeting in the end of October.

¹⁴³ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, March). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.184, p. 6.

The meetings gave an opportunity to participants to directly discuss drug issues and look for possible solutions along with representatives of national counter-narcotics agencies. The participants paid a special attention to exchanging ideas on the shift of drug trafficking routes, a lack of the structured data collection methods and mechanisms for investigations, and need to enhance capacities of key border outposts through appointment of Border Liaison Offices and cooperation on synthetic drugs and NPS. Parties expressed willingness to continue to participate in the future meetings, pro-actively engage in discussions, and share information and analysis with other parties.

The participants 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 changes in their national legislations to optimize control over NPS. For example, with support from UNODC K50 Project, Kyrgyzstan added 85 substances to the list of controlled psychotropic substances in 2015¹⁴⁴.

The informal platform has achieved positive results and has shown the significance of the impact made by international assistance in improving capacities of the national law enforcement agencies and aiding them to tackle drug-related issues.

The participants of MDG meetings in Central Asia proposed the following recommendations:

- Invest in the agricultural sector of Afghanistan and develop and support alternative agricultural practices stimulating replacement of poppy by crops.
- Strengthen top-down (institutional) and bottom-up (grassroots) efforts in conflict resolution, peace-building, and development.
- Strengthen collaboration among law enforcement agencies of the Central Asian countries.

¹⁴⁴ 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

- Enhance drug-prevention activities and counter-narcotics campaigns, especially with a focus on synthetic drugs.
- Further improve the scale of the technical support to drug control agencies in the region.
- Develop strategies and concrete techniques to block trafficking channels crossing the countries in the region.
- Increase the scope of constructing border outposts and technical facilities.
- Allocate more human and financial resources to professional training of border control experts.
- Organize visits of the representatives of Afghanistan's Ministry of Internal Affairs to drug control agencies in Central Asia. Foster the development of bilateral cooperation through implementation of joint counter-narcotics activities.

1.5 Essential points to be followed up by the MDGs

The Mini-Dublin Groups are advised to consider the following recommendations:

- MDG chairmanship and UNODC field offices should closely cooperate in the implementation of active and planned anti-drug activities. This will strengthen the coordination and improve the quality of reports and donors' response to host countries' needs.
- Each MDG president is advised with consent of other members to invite countries, NGOs, experts, civil society members, and other participants who are capable to contribute to the meetings. Such practice should be used in all Central Asian countries. To facilitate the process, UNODC and MDG chairmanship should join efforts and provide a mutual vision of the MDG action to all member states.
- Greater participation of host parties in contributing to meeting reports should be further encouraged and facilitated.
- MDG platform should be backed by a higher authority with a real power so the group can address issues and rely on the authority. Such status will give more leverage to presidents of the regional groups by making them more capable of implementing changes.

2. REGIONAL OR SUB-REGIONAL NATURE OF PROBLEMS

Origins of drug trafficking in the region can be traced back to the period of state-building in early 1990s. To consolidate power and increase influence over societies, political elites in post-Soviet states needed to establish connections with underground criminal groups which were influential whereas government institutions were weak. Consequently, the corruption became one of the many negative consequences of drug trafficking across Central Asia. The scale of drug profits enticed regional law enforcement, customs officials, and border guards who often closed their eyes to drug trafficking¹⁴⁵.

Data on illicit drugs is inaccurate, hard-to-access, and insufficient. Furthermore, the countries lack a unified well-functioning information sharing mechanism which is partially explained by the fact that the governments in the region regard such information as strategic. CARICC currently occupies a position of a sole, accurate, and valid source of information and analysis on anti-drug issues in Central Asia.

Geopolitical competition, regional power struggle, and unresolved issues can be considered as obstacles for the development of effective communication and collaboration. However, the recent regional rapprochement started by Uzbekistan can promote openness and closer collaboration.

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

The Dublin Group should allocate more resources to support and promote activities of CARICC which faces funding issues. The center plays an essential role of an information hub for sharing valuable data and coordinating regional counter-narcotics efforts. Information support provided by the center to member states can considerably advance multilateral cooperation and raise effectiveness of joint efforts made by national law enforcement agencies.

A stronger emphasis should be given to strengthening of the collaboration between MDG Chairmanship and UNODC field offices as well as ensuring more active participation of the host parties in discussions and drafting of subsequent reports at meetings.

¹⁴⁵ Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders. (2015, April). *East West Institute*. Retrieved September 17, 2017, p.20.

More attention should be paid by donors to the prioritization of host countries' needs during the coordination and planning of anti-narcotics activities. Assessments of needs and closer round-table discussions can help donor countries better identify of host-country priorities, implement more efficient funding campaigns and anti-drug policies. As for host parties, they should continuously communicate donors about their needs and priorities.

Members of the Group should concentrate on providing technical assistance the republics. Such approach envisages paying less attention to political factors and giving more emphasis to collaboration in providing assistance for demand reduction.

A positive impetus for improving coordination and cooperation among EU law enforcement agencies can be the creation of European liaison officers' network consisting of European drug liaison officers who serve in the region. This will allow better management of joint activities and increased efficiency of MDG in rendering anti-drug assistance.

4. REGIONAL GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Political Initiatives

The following political initiatives should be advised in Central Asia:

- Encourage and support regional cooperation among counter-narcotics' authorities in the region.
- Support the development and harmonization of national drug control legislation.
- Provide for regular and active coordination among international partners in the counter-narcotics field.
- Facilitate the exchange of information among all parties in the region, including CARICC, for creation of the counter-narcotics information platform.

4.2 Donor community priorities

The donor community proposes to focus on the following priorities:

- Improve technical capacity of competent national authorities and further support the enhancement of national capacity for counter-narcotics operations.
- Enhance professional skills of law-enforcement officers in the region by engaging counter-narcotics' institutions from MDG member state and promoting policy of preparing trainers for national partners (training of trainers).

5. PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS MADE IN 2016

Countries in the region concentrate more on capacity and institutional building instead of investing in governance and cooperation. Such policy does not help reduce the volume of illicit drugs. Moreover, unilateral action on achieving the highest seizures volumes prevails over the multilateral action in the region. Furthermore, each country focuses on bilateral cooperation targeting provision of specialized trainings and procurement of equipment instead of active multilateral engagement. As a result, 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. Improvements in information exchange and organization of joint operations are urgently needed to have a concerted and more effective response.

Sale of illegal drugs via the Internet has become a stable trend since 2016. DCSA is working on related issues and coordinating work in this direction with OSCE, UNODC, CADAP, competitive agencies, and other stakeholders to identify sources of such micro-businesses.

Host countries have not updated lists of priorities included in MDG country reports for over seven 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 regional authorities might be able to facilitate submission of more suitable recommendations and actions by the Dublin Group members.

Major donors such as the US, Japan, Germany, Italy, UNODC, and OSCE have been implementing various counter-narcotics programs in the region, but the nature of the foreign assistance remains limited and insignificant in scale. 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 and then organized several activities with UNODC in 2017.

Attachment 1. Drug-related statistics in Central Asia

Table 1. Split ratio of seized opium, heroin, and cannabis-based drugs in the first 3 months of 2017-2018 (full years for Turkmenistan)¹⁴⁶

	Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan		Turkmenistan		Uzbekistan	
	2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018	2016	2017	2017	2018
Heroin	83.6	25	30.3	21.4	27.8	82.5	0.625	0.117	7.8	0.1
Opium	8.3	0.1	0.6	0.1	399.9	453.2	228.3	243.7	411.7	62.9
Hashish	117.8	266.2	331.1	123.9	847.9	693.1	5.4	0.032	29.1	20.3
Marijuana	1,678.2	1,608.7	362.1	1,297.3	192.7	146.9	2.1	5.5	123.7	88.5

Table 2. Number of registered drug-related crimes in the first 3 months of 2017-2018¹⁴⁷

Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan		Turkmenistan		Uzbekistan	
2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018	2016	2017	2017	2018
1,380	1,067	380	379	242	277	478	419	1,346	852
-22.7%		-0.3%		14.5%		-12.3%		-36.7%	

Table 3. Number of arrested individuals in the first 3 months of 2017-2018¹⁴⁸

Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan		Turkmenistan		Uzbekistan	
2017	2018	2017	2018	2018	2017	2016	2017	2018	2017
1,363	1,449	243	639	493	1,363	504	397	1,449	243
6.3%		25.1%		29%		-21.2%		-34.7%	

¹⁴⁶ CARICC Information Bulletin (2018, June). *Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center*. No.185.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Table 4. Number of smuggling crimes in the first 3 months 2017-2018¹⁴⁹

Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan		Uzbekistan	
2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018
105	69	2	0	33	20	203	51
-34.3%		-		-39.4%		-74.9%	

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.