

Horánszki, Andrea Éva security policy expert*horanszki.andrea.eva@uni-nke.hu***A CRIME GEOGRAPHY ASSESSMENT OF THE COCAINE****Abstract**

The criminal geography as the word shows it, is based on analyzing of crime in a geographical frame. In this study, I would like to present the strategically important role of criminal geography in law enforcement through the cocaine trade. First, the cocaine trade is presented, concentrating on the presentation of the transport routes and the exploration of the connections. Then the strategic priorities of the European Union will be in focus. Subsequently, in the summary, I will try to show why I see the crime geography-based investigation as an important method in the law enforcement treatment of drug crime.

Keywords: cocaine, crime geography, strategy, drug, criminal geography

1. Preamble

Through the spatial characteristics of the cocaine trade, the study presents the importance of the criminal geography in the creation of a law enforcement strategy. As a result of globalization, drug crime, like any other type of criminal activity, can no longer be interpreted strictly within a national framework. Of course, it is still necessary to create a strategy at the national level, however, cross-border cooperation is now necessary. In this case, the development of a global strategy regarding the cocaine trade is extremely important, since we can talk about a series of activities consisting of several segments that are never geographically concentrated at the same point. The study is focusing on the cocaine trade, and the importance of examining territoriality.

2. Cocaine route to Europe

In Europe, after cannabis the most widely used illicit subsections is cocaine, which can be found on the market in two forms. Cannabis is considered legal in the Netherlands, the investigation of trade affecting Europe cannot necessarily be linked to criminality. For all these reasons, the study focuses on the cocaine trade. It is an inevitable fact that cocaine continues to arrive in Europe in large quantities.

First of all, it is necessary to examine which country - which continent is the country of origin of the cocaine arriving in Europe, therefore from which region the cocaine shipment starts its

journey. The majority of cocaine arrives in Europe from South America via various modes of transport, by plane, ship and via various routes. This fact is not surprising, since the coca bush requires a tropical climate, so it is the best grown in the Amazon region. Cocaine is obtained from the leaves of the coca bush. It should be noted that in terms of natural occurrence Bolivia, Colombia and Peru (Ürmösné 2018) are the countries where the coca bush growing in its natural state, without artificial planting. In my opinion, it is a very important and inescapable fact that the leaves of the coca bush play a powerful cultural role in these areas, both in a spiritual, social and health sense. So it can be said that for these countries, the coca bush does not appear as a segment of criminality, but gains social importance and has a culture-building effect. It can therefore be seen that in this case the geographical location already plays a significant role in the investigation of the countries of origin of cocaine. We cannot forget the geographical features that make it possible to grow the plant. Cocaine arrives in Europe from the countries of origin mostly from South America by ship or plane. Shipments usually start from Brazil, Venezuela and Ecuador (EMCDDA, 2016) (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Main cocaine trafficking routes to Europe

Source: https://insightcrime.org/images/2016/June-2016/16-06-01Cocaine_map.png

The attached map also shows that cocaine starts its journey from Latin America, both by ship and by plane. Brazil, Peru and Bolivia are increasingly emerging as the main transporters when looking at cocaine routes to Europe. The role of Brazil is growing, and its growing importance indicates that Bolivia and Peru are expanding their role as suppliers to the European market.

Similarly, the traffic of Colombian cocaine to Venezuela has increased. From Venezuela, criminal groups use both flights and sea routes, trying to take advantage of the high traffic surrounding the Venezuelan coast. Heavy traffic can reduce the risk of falling. Although Brazil's role is growing, it is still true that Colombia will likely remain a key source of cocaine shipments to Europe, as evidenced by increasing production figures and continued seizures. Ecuador and Argentina are also mentioned as the starting point of the drug. Brazil and Venezuela are the key entry points for cocaine bound for Europe, from where the drug is smuggled via ships, private yachts or air. It is also worth checking the transit countries. The Caribbean and West Africa are reported to be the two most common transit zones for cocaine crossing the Atlantic. Central America also appears to be an increasingly important stopover. The West African Gulf of Benin, along with Cape Verde, Madeira and the Canary Islands, form the second major transit zone for cocaine bound for Europe. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, cocaine continues its journey by sea, land or air, mainly to Western or Southern Europe, but it shows an increasingly changing trend in which country the cocaine arrives first. Nowadays, Eastern Europe and Turkey also appear as host countries. Given their geographical location, it is not surprising why these countries are the first to arrive in Europe, and the transit countries are not surprising when you look at the map (Mimi Yagoub, 2016).

The amount of cocaine in Europe is high. Based on the European drug report, 213 tons were seized in 2020. This statistic is reinforced by the fact that the purity of cocaine is getting higher, but the prices are not following this, it can be read that there is a lot of substance present on the European markets (Európai kábítószer-jelentés 2022: Tendenciák és fejlemények.).

Among the modes of transport, the most widespread is container transport by sea. It is important to point out that the finished cocaine itself does not arrive in Europe, as it is already processed within Europe (MTI, 2022. <https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/20220506/terjed-europaban-a-kokain-543381>).

Although the main delivery endpoints and the stable market, are still the Western European countries, the trade has clearly started in the eastern direction towards Russia and Asia, and the states located between these routes are also supplied. From a business point of view, cocaine smuggling to Europe can be considered much more attractive than opening to the United States market, since the prices in Europe are significantly higher, and the chances of getting caught, the risks are at a much lower level. In the US a kilogram of cocaine is worth about \$28,000 wholesale, compared to an average of \$40,000 in Europe with prices reaching \$80,000 in different parts of the country. The USA's guard is present in Latin America with a strong involvement of resources in order to suppress the drug trade, while European forces are less

present in the region. This also explains why the cocaine trade flows more towards the European markets. Cocaine is not as a deep problem for Europe as it is for the USA. Furthermore, the high level of violence in Latin America is not a problem for the US, it does not struggle with systemic corruption, which is the characteristic of many countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region. We cannot forget the fight against the coronavirus, or the economic downturn, the migration pressure on Europe, internal political tensions, and the challenges caused by the Islamic terrorism cannot be neglected either. In addition to all this, the cocaine trade is relegated to the background on the list of challenges, a fact that is exploited by the criminal groups involved in the trade. Based on these facts, it is not surprising that almost as much cocaine arrives in Europe as can compete with the amount delivered to the USA. Of course, Europe is not exempt from the challenges caused by the cocaine trade. Such challenges are for example, the distorting effects on the economy caused by the laundering of drug money, deriving from drugs across Europe. The intensification of drug-related violence and the corruption appearing in law enforcement agencies supporting the trade cannot be neglected either. What is perhaps the biggest problem for the future is the continuous strengthening of the European mafias, which the cocaine trade provides with sufficient resources further build and strengthen their organization. It can be proven for example that the cocaine trade brought the Italian mafia group called the Ndrangheta to power. All these facts appear as a serious challenge to national security across Europe. What the cocaine trade has caused in the Latin and the Caribbean regions may cause further concerns for the European states. Following the events in Venezuela, many European countries that are present in the Caribbean today have a neighbor that is seriously involved in the export of cocaine and other crimes related to it. Venezuela is currently considered a failed state and therefore also exerts migration pressure (Jeremy McDermott, 2021).

What makes trade to Europe difficult for the US is that there is no connection by a land bridge, which is why it can be transported by air or water. In the last decade, the trade route has concentrated on the sea route, mainly with container transport. As a result of the pressure between law enforcement and drug dealers, new methods of transportation are constantly appearing. The European authorities are putting more and more emphasis on the containers coming from Peru and Colombia, as a result of which the drug trade tries to choose another state in the region as a starting country. The latest technology is very dangerous, the packages of cocaine hidden in the containers are connected to legally completely clean carriers, in this case the carrier does not even know what his packages are hiding. As far as air transport is concerned, commercial flights are the most common. In Europe, the primary point of arrival is

Spain. This is not surprising, since we can talk about countries connected to Latin America in several ways, if we only think about the existence of a common language and culture. However, nowadays there is a strong control at the Spanish coasts and borders, and other European states have also appeared as arrival points (Jeremy McDermott, 2021).

In Spain the cocaine trade plays a significant role, the law enforcement agencies try to act with adequate forces to deal with the situation, and many drug laboratories have been brought down. An example of this is the case of the drug laboratory successfully busted in Madrid in 2022, where they were able to produce 102 kilograms of cocaine per a week. In this lab, the connection with the South American drug production was clearly visible, since it worked with the same method as it is used in the open air in the jungles of South America. Of course, this has historical and cultural roots. The head of the drug lab busted here was a Dominican citizen. This fact can also be fully integrated with what has been described so far, according to which the Caribbean region is also significantly affected by the arrival of cocaine in Europe (Balizs, 2022).

Based on the above, it can be said that in the case of the cocaine trade, there is a basis for geographically based analysis, and correlations can be found between the geographical location, the geographical features and the role played in the cocaine trade.

3. Europe's action against trade

In connection with the drug and cocaine trade, we can talk about several challenges, which can be dealt with at different levels. It is necessary to respond to crimes induced by the cocaine trade at both the national and global level, in which case, in my opinion, the primary task is to detect the source of the crime, since only treating the symptoms is not enough, because this does not eliminate the problem.

One of the main forces behind cocaine trade and drug trade as a whole is corruption. It can be seen that the international community, and the European Union are aware of the transport routes and methods, yet the cocaine trade continues to operate, constantly reproducing itself. One of the reasons for this is the high level of corruption. Corruption helps criminal groups, smugglers, to get into ports, hide drugs in containers, maintain the legality of companies created to cover illegal activity, smuggling activities, for example in renting transport vehicles or warehouses, and in laundering money. This kind of challenge does not only affect Europe, it appears everywhere globally, just as it is present in transit countries or producing countries. The EU appears to be becoming an increasingly important transshipment point for cocaine shipments destined for markets in the rest of Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Although there

are criminal organizations that deliver their shipments to Asia in such a way that Europe is left out, it does not even appear as a transit country. The effects of the COVID-19 epidemic can also be observed in the cocaine trade, with a greater emphasis on online purchases using post and parcel delivery services. What causes a problem is the resistance of criminal organizations involved in the cocaine trade. Here we have to realize that even if someone drops out of a particular organization, a few days later someone else will be put in his place, therefore stopping the entire criminal organization is an impossible task at this level. We can talk about criminal organizations that have a cross-border network (Ürmösné 2018), so global action and international cooperation are necessary if we want to see results against them. In the case of drug trafficking, we can now talk about networking and the creation of hubs (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2022).

In addition to the already mentioned challenges related to cocaine, there is also the possibility of gang warfare, related to violent crimes and illegal activities that have given rise to possible ad hoc situations, such as kidnapping, possession of weapons, etc. It is worth looking at what strategy the European Union intends to use. First of all, it should be emphasized that the European Union also deals with drug trafficking and the health risk caused by drug consumption during the creation of its strategy. The member states of the Union have their own drug strategies, and it is the responsibility of the EU to coordinate them. As part of the strategy, it also undertakes collaborations and is in contact with the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and the Europol as well as other international partners and civil society organizations. The organization coordinating international relations and cooperation is the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT). The keyword for drug trafficking is enhanced security. As a result, it is logical that the goal is to strengthen security-enhancing devices. The strategy focuses on the following main points: prevention, deterrence, disabling, cooperation, intelligence gathering, asset confiscation. Organized crime is closely related to drug crime, so strategic considerations related to drug crime are also part of the EU strategy (Európai Tanács, Az EU drogpolitikája).

The currently active strategy is the EU's 2021-2025 action plan for drugs, the elements of which emphasize measures to suppress drug trafficking. It can be highlighted that, due to the large-scale development of IT technology and the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic, the suppression of the online trade in drugs was not surprisingly given a special place. The strategy tries to cover all aspects of drug crime, thus also affecting the phenomenon of violence related to the drug trade. In terms of the structure of the document, it consists of seven main points, each of which is assigned separate strategic priorities with measures and names of the responsible parties. The

first point is aimed at reducing the supply of drugs. Overall, the main priorities are the disabling of criminal organizations involved in the drug trade, stronger detection of the drug trade, increasing the number of seizures, greater cooperation with the private sector, and the fight against illegal production. Measures are also associated with these goals, among which the importance of information sharing is highlighted. The measures mostly prescribe tasks for the police and customs authorities. This is where the need to curb the use of logistical and digital channels for the trade of illicit drugs can be found. The measures include the necessity for curb the online drug trade and trade via postal or express parcel delivery. Eradication of drug production, including establishment identification, monitoring and eradication, are the measures named in the strategy. The second main point emphasizes reducing the demand for drugs. Within this point, prevention - treatment - care appear as keywords. This is less related to the drug trade, but still from the point of view that if demand decreases, the trade may also slow down. The remaining strategic points already address the protection of drug users, health preservation issues, cooperation opportunities, research and development, and coordination issues. The strategic document names a total of eleven strategic priorities. Three of them fall under supply reduction, demand reduction includes two priorities (Európai Unió Tanácsa, 2021).

It can be seen that the European Union intends to take strong actions against drug crime in the period from 2021 to 2025, both locally and globally. In my opinion, it is not possible to take effective action without close international cooperation, due to the cross-border nature of drug crime.

4. Summary

The segment of drug crime and drug trafficking cannot be interpreted at the local or national level it can only be viewed globally in a large geographical area. Based on the overview of the cocaine trade, it becomes apparent that it is also necessary to analyze the trade in a geographical sense, since in order to the law enforcement agencies to be able to react effectively and act against the challenges, it is necessary to know exactly from which direction they are coming. As we have seen, the European Union tries to concentrate forces even beyond its borders, and this consideration can be greatly helped by a predefined analysis based on the geography of crime. If the exact route of the cocaine trade can be revealed, it is possible to react in a targeted way at the departure and arrival stations. In my opinion, the strategic approach based on crime and geography is particularly important in the case of drug crimes, it is not possible to act effectively against them or to set up strategic considerations. Thinking based on the geography

of crime helps to build a network of partnerships and to focus law enforcement agencies on the right location.

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