

**M.A. in International Relations, Department of Political Science
Security Studies**

Master's Dissertation

**Security and health threats posed by drug trafficking from
Afghanistan to the EU and the Russian Federation and
mechanisms of cooperation in combating it: a case-study analysis
of the current and future development of the 'Caucasus Route'**

Candidate: Romina Bulgaru (628562)

Supervisor: Carlo Magrassi

Co-supervisor: Elena Sciso

Rome 2017

**FEDERAL STATE AUTONOMOUS INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION
“MOSCOW STATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
(MGIMO-UNIVERSITY),
THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF RUSSIA”**

**M.A. in International Relations
Program “Governance and Global Affairs”**

Master’s Dissertation

**Security and health threats posed by drug trafficking from
Afghanistan to the EU and the Russian Federation and
mechanisms of cooperation in combating it: a case-study analysis
of the current and future development of the 'Caucasus Route'**

**Done by Romina Bulgaru
Supervisor: Yulia Nikitina**

Moscow 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, General Carlo Magrassi and Professor Yulia Nikitina, as well as my co-supervisor, Professor Elena Sciso, for agreeing to support me in the choice of my topic for this thesis. Additionally, I would like to thank Doctor Simone Pasquazzi for his support and valuable advice. I would like to extend a special thank you to Colonel Cesario Totaro for his enthusiastic support for my thesis topic and for putting me in contact with key experts that provided useful information and advice. Furthermore, I am indebted to the experts of the UNODC, specifically Angela Me, Tofik Murshudlu, Andrea Mancini, Ekaterina Kolykhalova and to Lieutenant Colonel Arturo Sessa, as well as Commissario Paolo Sartori and Lieutenant Colonel Marco Molinari for providing invaluable information and for agreeing to answer my many questions. Finally, it is my pleasure to thank the UNODC expert Roberto Arbitrio for sharing his first-hand experience of his field missions regarding counter-narcotics efforts, as well as for our long talks on this topic that helped me to develop interesting ideas for this thesis.

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	5
I. THREATS POSED BY DRUG TRAFFICKING FROM AFGHANISTAN TO EUROPE AND RUSSIA	12
II. THE CURRENT AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAUCASUS ROUTE	30
Possible reasons behind the development of the Caucasus route	40
1. Turkey is strengthening its South-Eastern border	40
2. Ukraine crisis offers new opportunities for organized crime activities in the country	45
3. Azerbaijan-Iran economic, political and diplomatic relations are rapidly developing	49
4. Opium production dynamics in Afghanistan influence trafficking routes	55
III. MECHANISMS OF COOPERATION IN COUNTERING DRUG TRAFFICKING FROM AFGHANISTAN	58
1. National level	59
2. Regional level	65
3. International level	70
4. Inter-regional level	75
CONCLUSION	78
BIBLIOGRAPHY	83
SUMMARY	90

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, organized crime has become a threat not only to national security, but increasingly also to regional and international security. In fact, organized crime undermines regional and international security, most of the time exasperating and fuelling already existing conflicts, and creating tensions among neighbouring countries and regions. Furthermore, organized crime activities have progressively developed into transnational ones following, misusing and exploiting the globalization process. According to Mark Galeotti,¹ "global organised crime is evolving, embracing new markets and new technologies, and moving from traditional hierarchies towards more flexible, network-based forms of organisation. To an extent, the legitimate world is a victim of its own success: globalisation of the legal economy has also globalised the underworld"². The global challenge represented by the transnational organized crime and the need for a global response to it has been officially acknowledged by the international community in December 2000 when the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and the Protocols Thereto were signed in Palermo, Italy. As the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi A. Annan, stated in his speech at the opening ceremony of the signing conference for UNTOC, "if crime crosses borders, so must law enforcement. If the rule of law is undermined not only in one country, but in many, then those who defend it cannot limit themselves to purely national means. If the enemies of progress and human rights seek to exploit the openness and opportunities of globalization for their purposes, then we must exploit those very same factors to defend human rights and defeat the forces of crime, corruption and trafficking in human beings".³ The Convention against Transnational Organized Crime is the main international legal instrument that addresses transnational organized crime. The states that ratify the Convention should adopt a series of measures against transnational organized crime in their national legislation that includes "the creation of domestic criminal offences; the adoption of new and sweeping frameworks for extradition, mutual legal assistance and law enforcement cooperation; and the promotion of training and technical assistance for building or upgrading the necessary capacity of national authorities"⁴. As of May 2017, the Convention has 187 parties, 182 of which are United Nations Member-States.

¹ Mark Galeotti is senior researcher at the Institute of International Relations Prague and coordinator of its Centre for European Security. He is also a lecturer at the Department of Security Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague. He is an expert and prolific author on transnational crime and Russian security affairs.

² Galeotti, M. (ed.) *Global Crime Today: The Changing Face of Organised Crime*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005, page 2

³ Annan, K. "Address At The Opening Of The Signing Conference For The United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime", 12 December 2000, http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/speeches/speech_2000-12-12_1.html

⁴ United Nations, "United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto", <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/treaties/CTOC/>

Having in regard the particular organized crime activity which this thesis is referring to, namely drug trafficking, there are three major drug control treaties that represent the international legal framework for addressing drug trafficking:

- Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 (as amended in 1972),
- Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971,
- United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.⁵

The above-mentioned Conventions represent the core of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) mandate. UNODC is the leading international entity in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime. Moreover, UNODC encourages the ratification and assists member-states in the implementation of the already mentioned UNTOC as well as UNCAC (United Nations Convention against Corruption) since organized crime activities and corruption always co-exist and reinforce each other.

Among the illicit activities carried out by organized crime groups, drug trafficking is the main one for most of them (though organized crime groups hardly deal solely with one criminal activity). Drug trafficking is a lucrative, complex and highly competitive activity and most importantly is transnational in its nature. No country can face alone the threat drug trafficking poses on its economy, security and citizens' health and wellbeing. Given its illicit and as a consequence secret nature, the global illicit drug market value is hard to estimate. However, a recent estimation made by the Global Financial Integrity Organization⁶ indicates that the annual turnover of the illicit drug market in the year 2014 was between \$426 billion and \$652 billion.⁷ Such an enormous value can distort and poison the economies of countries affected by drug production and trafficking. Especially source countries, which for hard drugs as cocaine and heroin are well identified and localized, are composed by developing countries with already weak or underdeveloped economies. Cocaine production is concentrated primarily in Peru and above all in Colombia (as well as other Latin and Central American countries), whereas opium, the main ingredient of heroin, is cultivated mainly in Afghanistan. Organized crime activities in general and, as far as this thesis is concerned, drug trafficking, undermines governance and rule of law, fuels corruption and distorts the economy in every country affected by this problem, but source and most of the transit countries are

⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Legal Framework for Drug Trafficking", <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/legal-framework.html>

⁶ Global Financial Integrity (GFI) is a non-profit, Washington, DC-based research and advisory organization, which produces analyses of illicit financial flows, advises developing country governments on effective policy solutions, and promotes pragmatic transparency measures in the international financial system as a means to global development and security.

⁷ May C., *Transnational Crime and the Developing World*, Global Financial Integrity, February 2011, page XI

particularly vulnerable. For example, the drug trade accounted for more than 53 per cent of the Afghan licit GDP in 2006.⁸ Though, according to recent estimations, the percentage has plummeted at around 5 per cent in 2016,⁹ (still a significant share of the Afghan GDP), entire rural communities depend on illicit opium production in order to survive (not only in Afghanistan but also in other source countries like Myanmar). Whereas an example of transit countries affected negatively by drug trafficking is the West African countries, an important transit region for cocaine heading for the European market. Having in regard their economy, according to the World Drug Report 2016 "illicit proceeds can inject large cash inflows into a country's economy and can have important macroeconomic effects, such as changes in currency values and increases in budgets and foreign exchange reserves, as in a number of West African countries, some of which have been significantly affected by cocaine trafficking".¹⁰ Effects of the heroin trafficking on transit countries will be deeply analyzed further in this thesis.

In addition to that, drug trafficking as well as other organized crime activities, fuels corruption within states. As paradoxical it may sound, traffickers often depend on the law to operate successfully and thus the corruption of law enforcement authorities, politicians, public administration employees, border security authorities etc. is crucial for drug trafficking and other organized crime activities. Not even the military forces are immune to corruption. For instance, "Beijing's concerns about the criminalisation of its military elites was one of the main reasons behind its efforts to end their involvement in commercial activities".¹¹ In countries already undermined by the corruption issue, organized crime both worsens and exploits it. Drug trafficking, weak rule of law, economic underdevelopment and corruption often create a vicious circle from which is hard to escape since all these elements feed upon and strengthen each other.

Furthermore, drug consumption is an issue not only for destination markets but also for source and transit countries. Usually, the destination markets for hard drugs like cocaine and heroin are high-income countries, where the price of these drugs increases exponentially compared to their price in the source and transit country, which typically are composed by low/medium income countries. This finds explanation in the basics of macroeconomics: cultivation and production of cocaine and heroin is confined, as already mentioned, to specific countries thus "creating a scenario in which consumers worldwide compete for a product with a concentrated supply"¹² and this in turn increases the price of the product in destination

⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Afghanistan Opium Survey", UNODC, Vienna, 2007, page 5

⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Afghanistan Opium Survey", UNODC, Vienna, 2016, page 7

¹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", United Nations, New York, 2016, page 104

¹¹ Galeotti, *Global Crime Today*, page 3

¹² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", 2016, page 77

markets making the latter much more attractive for traffickers. However, according to the World Drug Report 2016, in some cases, the "proximity to a drug-producing area or to a major drug trafficking route, for example, explains more than economic development the higher than global rates of opiate use in the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia or the higher rates of cocaine use (including "crack" cocaine) in South America and West Africa".¹³ Moreover, in some cases, drugs are used as payment among traffickers of different regions for the services provided in the drugs' transportation from source countries to destination markets thus fuelling the local demand of transit countries through increased availability and lower prices of the drugs. Additionally, increased levels of consumption in source and transit countries are often not paralleled by the increase in these countries' capacities to offer prevention and especially treatment services. Finally, if we consider that, besides being developing countries, states like Colombia and Afghanistan have severe internal security problems with some parts of their territory de facto governed by rebel and terrorist groups (the FARC and Taliban respectively), who finance their actions mainly through the cultivation, production and trafficking of illicit crops and drugs, we better understand the threat posed by organized crime activities to these countries' stability, good governance and development.

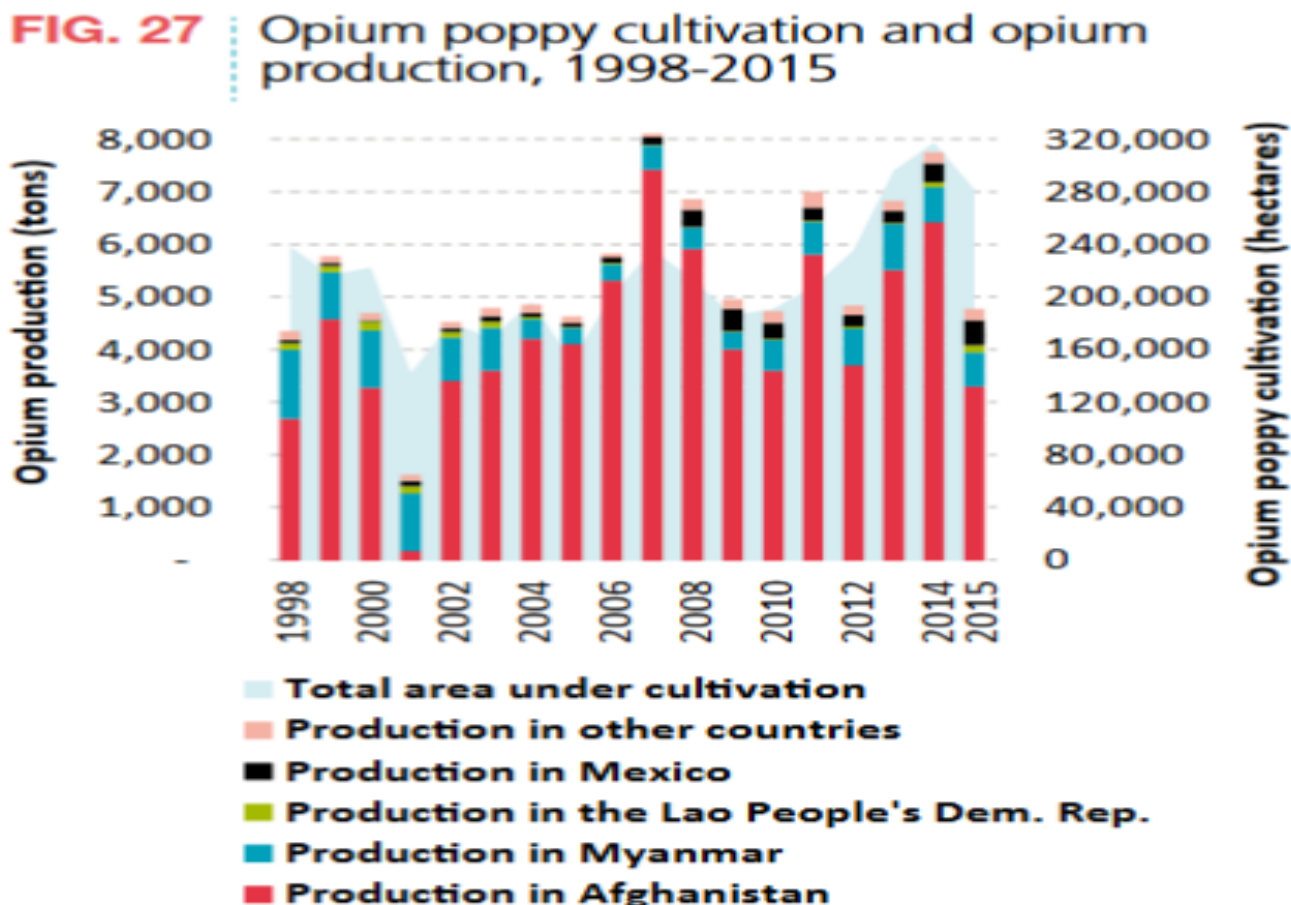
In this thesis I will first concentrate on the threats posed by drug trafficking, with a specific focus on opiates (heroin and opium) trafficking, from Afghanistan to Europe and Russia, which are the main destination markets for heroin. According to the UNODC report Global Opium Trade 2011, "Opiates originating in Afghanistan threaten the health and well-being of people in many regions of the world. Their illicit trade also adversely impacts governance, security, stability and development—in Afghanistan, in its neighbours, in the broader region and beyond".¹⁴ Even if recently, great and increasing attention is being addressed to the new psychoactive substances, hard drugs and in particular heroin, are still the most harmful ones in terms of the number of drug users worldwide, the number of overdosed deaths and of their broader health implications. Millions of people around the world suffer from opiates (opium and most of all heroin) addiction and the harm these drugs cause to individuals as well as communities and societies at large should not be underestimated. Drug abuse in general causes losses in the general well-being of a society increasing, for instance, the possibilities of car incidents and accidents in the work-place and losses in economic productivity since the majority of drug addicts are of working age and many of them die prematurely. Additionally, heroin abuse in particular causes more

¹³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", United Nations, New York, 2016, page XVIII

¹⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment", UNODC, Vienna, 2011, page 7

than that. Heroin is often associated with injection which poses the threat of spreading deadly communicable diseases like HIV or Hepatitis C.

Having in regard opiates cultivation and production, Afghanistan accounts for more than 70 per cent of opium global production¹⁵ whereas the remained share is divided mainly between Mexico, Myanmar and Lao People's Democratic Republic (see chart below).



Source: World Drug Report 2016

High instability, weak rule of law, insurgency, corruption, underdevelopment and poverty are all elements that contributed to transform Afghanistan in the leading nation worldwide for opium poppy cultivation and heroin production. Drug trafficking proceeds have been used by the Taliban for years to finance their insurgency and to maintain control over some parts of the Afghan territory thus putting in place the instability-weak rule of law-corruption-economic underdevelopment mechanism from which Afghanistan struggles to come out. Nevertheless, drug cultivation and production in Afghanistan does not limit its effects solely to the Afghan state. In fact, drug trafficking routes originating from there, poses a direct threat to its neighbouring countries as well. According to the UNODC's Global Afghan Opium Trade of 2011 "Afghan opium now presents significant public health and internal security challenges for the

¹⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", United Nations, New York, 2016, page 27

population of Afghanistan and its immediate neighbours."¹⁶ Finally, the same can be said for the other transit countries not directly bordering Afghanistan but closely involved in heroin trafficking originating from it. Drug trafficking in these countries, the majority of which are low/medium income countries, undermines stability, security, health, economy and fuels corruption.

Because of all these spill-over effects (in the security, health, development areas) of drug trafficking and opiates trafficking from Afghanistan in particular, that I have chosen this topic for my master thesis. Moreover, being a Double Degree student graduating in International Relations both at LUISS University in Rome and at MGIMO University in Moscow, I chose a topic which affects both the Russian and the European societies and that possibly can be an area in which Russian-European Union cooperation could expand in the future. In fact, also according to the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2016) "there is potential for Russia and the EU to step up combined efforts to counter terrorism, uncontrolled and illegal migration, as well as organized crime, including human trafficking, illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors, arms and explosives, and cybercrime".¹⁷

In the second part of my thesis, I will conduct an in-depth analysis of the so-called Caucasus Route, which recently has attracted much attention because of important drug seizures in the region, which according to the World Drug Report of 2015 "were in stark contrast to the very low levels of seizures made in those countries over the past 15 years. This suggests that drug trafficking networks may be experimenting with new trajectories".¹⁸ The reason why I have chosen to analyse this particular route is because I believe it will develop further in the near future because of several interweaved reasons which I will discuss in detail in the thesis, and because strategic analysis and information is vital when dealing with drug trafficking. The importance of strategic information and stronger research, both to increase operational effectiveness and to be flexible in the face of changing and emerging trends of organized crime activities must be acknowledged and further stressed. According to the Paris Pact Initiative¹⁹ Report 2015-2016, one of the gaps in the fight against opiates trafficking from Afghanistan is in the research field where there is a "lack of knowledge on dynamics along trafficking routes, quantities of

¹⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment", UNODC, Vienna, 2011, page 12

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", November 30 2016, para. 64

¹⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", United Nations, New York, 2015, page 65

¹⁹ Paris Pact Initiative (PPI) is a partnership to combat illicit traffic in opiates originating in Afghanistan.

drugs trafficked, trafficking networks and links with other illicit trades."²⁰ Traffickers are very fast in adapting to changing situations, both in their favour and not. Frequently, by the time that national, regional and international counter-narcotics authorities get to understand better a certain route, traffickers have already switched to some other route or found convenient diversions in case of successful law enforcement operations along a certain route. Because of this the above-mentioned authorities would definitely benefit of a more strategic and future-oriented analysis of the existing trends.

Finally, given the transnational nature of this particular crime, another crucial element in succeeding against drug trafficking as well as other organized crime activities, besides strategic analysis, is regional, inter-regional and international cooperation. The process of globalization had not only “globalized the underworld”, as mentioned above but, at the same time, has pushed the world society to act united as a community of risk²¹. This has contributed to the increase of international cooperation on these matters, which in turn led to the growing of the global interception rates of drugs. Because of this, the last part of my thesis will be dedicated to the analysis of the existing regional and international cooperation mechanisms concerning drug trafficking along the routes originating in Afghanistan and what more can be done especially in terms of inter-regional cooperation in fighting opiates trafficking. Furthermore, in this last part, I will focus in particular on the Caucasus region, where the difficult political relations among the countries of the region and the existence of separatist regions not internationally recognized, makes it difficult to jointly implement anti-narcotics and anti-organized crime initiatives. I will, as well, explore some possible spaces for improving the already existing regional and international cooperation initiatives and for creating new ones.

²⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Paris Pact Initiative Report 2015-2016”, UNODC, Vienna, 2016, page 68

²¹ Outhwaite, W. Habermas: A Critical Introduction, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1994, page 152

I. THREATS POSED BY DRUG TRAFFICKING FROM AFGHANISTAN TO EUROPE AND RUSSIA

According to the UNODC's report *Global Afghan Opium Trade, A threat Assessment*, “heroin is the most dangerous drug worldwide”.²² Heroin is one of the more commonly known and abused among the opioid-drugs category. Opioids²³ are responsible for the majority of the deaths caused by drug abuse worldwide. According to the "discussion paper on Opioids overdose: preventing and reducing opioid overdose mortality" jointly prepared by the UNODC and the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2013, “an estimated 70,000-100,000 people die from opioid overdose each year. Opioid overdose was the main cause of the estimated 99,000- 253,000 deaths worldwide related to illicit drug use in 2010”²⁴. With a particular reference to heroin, “opioid overdose accounts for nearly half of all deaths among heroin injectors, exceeding HIV and other disease-related deaths”²⁵. Additionally, the fact that heroin users mostly inject it, leads to the risk of the spread of communicable diseases among them, thus posing a threat to the health and wellbeing of societies at large, as happened for example in India, Myanmar and Ukraine where HIV epidemics linked to injecting drug use have extended to the general population, essentially through sexual contact.²⁶ According to the *World Drug Report 2016*, around 12 million people inject drugs, with 1.6 million of them living with HIV and 6 million with Hepatitis C.²⁷

The overall impact of heroin use in terms of health consequences continues to be devastating, not only in terms of communicable diseases but also in terms of its share of premature deaths caused by overdose. Recent analysis highlighted that the percentage of overdose deaths caused by opioids, and heroin in particular, is on a rise. In the USA from 2002 to 2015 there was a 6.2-fold increase in the total number of deaths related to heroin overdose (see the chart below).

²² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment”, UNODC, Vienna, 2011, page 7

²³ Opioids include all the psychoactive substances that produces morphine-like effects that directly derive from the opium plant or are chemically synthesized. Commonly, there is a distinction between opioids, which are considered to be those **chemically synthesized** substances that act on the brain’s opioid receptors and opiates, which are substances that have the same effects but derive from the **opium poppy plant**. The opiates usually include opium, morphine and heroin.

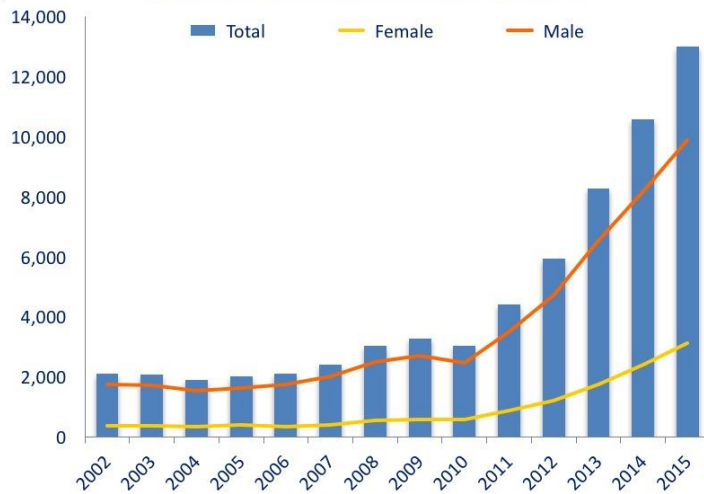
²⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Opioids overdose: preventing and reducing opioid overdose mortality”, Discussion Paper UNODC/WHO, United Nations, New York, 2016, page 1

²⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Opioids overdose: preventing and reducing opioid overdose mortality”, Discussion Paper UNODC/WHO, United Nations, New York, 2016, page 2

²⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “World Drug Report”, United Nations, New York, 2016, page 66

²⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “World Drug Report”, United Nations, New York, 2016, page X

National Overdose Deaths Number of Deaths from Heroin



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, CDC Wonder

In the European Union, opioids are found in 82 per cent of fatal overdoses²⁸ and “heroin features prominently in data on fatal overdoses and is also the most common illicit drug reported in new European city-level data on hospital emergency presentations”.²⁹ Taking into consideration specific European regions, we can observe from the graph below,³⁰ that not only heroin is responsible for the majority of deaths related to drug abuse in England and Wales, but also that there has been a significant increase in deaths caused by heroin overdose from 2012 to 2015.

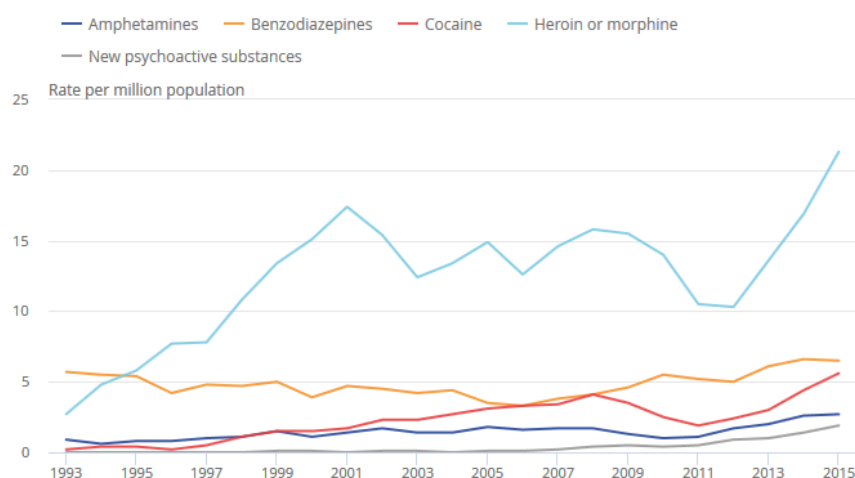
²⁸ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, “The European Drug Report: Trends and Developments”, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016, page 15

²⁹ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, “The European Drug Report: Trends and Developments”, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016, page 16

³⁰ Office for National Statistics, “Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales: 2015 registrations”, 9 September 2016, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsrelatedtodrugpoisoninginenglandandwales/2015registrations>

Figure 4: Age-standardised mortality rates for selected substances, deaths registered in 1993 to 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

In fact, deaths involving heroin and/or morphine doubled between 2012 and 2015 from 579 to 1,201 (see the table below).

Table 1: Number of drug-related deaths where selected substances that are commonly abused were mentioned on the death certificate, deaths registered in England and Wales between 2011 to 2015

England and Wales					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
All drug poisoning deaths	2,652	2,597	2,955	3,346	3,674
Any opioid ⁴	1,439	1,290	1,592	1,786	1,989
Heroin and/or morphine	596	579	765	952	1,201
Methadone	486	414	429	394	434
Tramadol	154	175	220	240	208
Codeine	88	73	130	136	128
Dihydrocodeine	109	103	102	86	94
Other specified opioid	90	80	93	129	113
Unspecified opioid	131	92	145	169	196

Furthermore, particularly alarming is the increase of heroin consumption among 15-year old students in Italy. Heroin consumption among 15-year-old students has doubled to 2 per cent from 2014 to 2015.³¹ Finally, as with any other drug, heroin use "can also have an impact on public health by increasing the

³¹ Corriere Della Sera, "Droga a scuola: cresce il consumo di eroina tra i 15 enni", 8 April 2016, http://www.corriere.it/cronache/16_aprile_08/droga-scuola-cresce-consumo-eroina-15enni-6aeb6b0c-fdb1-11e5-820b-500d9d51558a.shtml?refresh_ce-cp

risk of road traffic accidents (driving while under the influence of drugs) and accidents in the workplace".³²

UNODC, in its annual World Drug Report 2016, has estimated the global number of opioid users in 33 million people, 17.4 million of which are considered to be opiates users. The most commonly known and widespread illicit opiate is heroin, though in Afghanistan and above all Iran, the consumption of opium is significantly high. Out of the 4,770 tons of opium produced in 2015, 3,410 tons have been processed into heroin, whereas the remaining 1,360 tons were consumed as opium³³. Opium consumption is localized mainly in Afghanistan itself, Iran and in certain regions of Pakistan. Besides the historical and ancient tradition of smoking opium (in Iran, "references to opium use can be found in literature dating back several thousand years"³⁴), in these countries opium addiction together with heroin addiction has become a huge concern. In Afghanistan for example, "in the absence of access to adequate health-care facilities in rural areas", opium is used, still nowadays, as "a remedy for the most common ailments among children, such as coughs, colic, aches and pains, restlessness and diarrhoea" and as "self-medication for the treatment of ailments among adults, such as aches and pains, sleeplessness and chest pains, which are probably due to respiratory illnesses".³⁵ In addition to that, prevention and treatment services are still very weak in Afghanistan thus making it almost impossible to cure opiate addiction. In Iran, where "opiates remain the main drugs consumed by problem drug users"³⁶ and where drug production and trafficking is punishable by death, narcotics coming from Afghanistan are a grave threat to its population. According to the US National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) "Iran is suffering from the 2nd most severe addiction to opioids in the world".³⁷ Smoking opium has been part of these countries' culture for centuries and there is a widespread positive attitude toward this drug. Thus, the already existing predisposition in the use of opium, coupled with the enormous availability of heroin and other social factors, led to a rapid increase of heroin consumption as well. Afghan opium is not only consumed in Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, Iran and Pakistan. Important raw opium seizures have always

³² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", United Nations, New York, 2016, page 66

³³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", United Nations, New York, 2016, page 26

³⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Responding to drug use and HIV in Iran", 19 November 2008, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/responding-to-drug-use-and-hiv-in-iran.html>

³⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", United Nations, New York, 2016, page 24

³⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", United Nations, New York, 2016, page 7

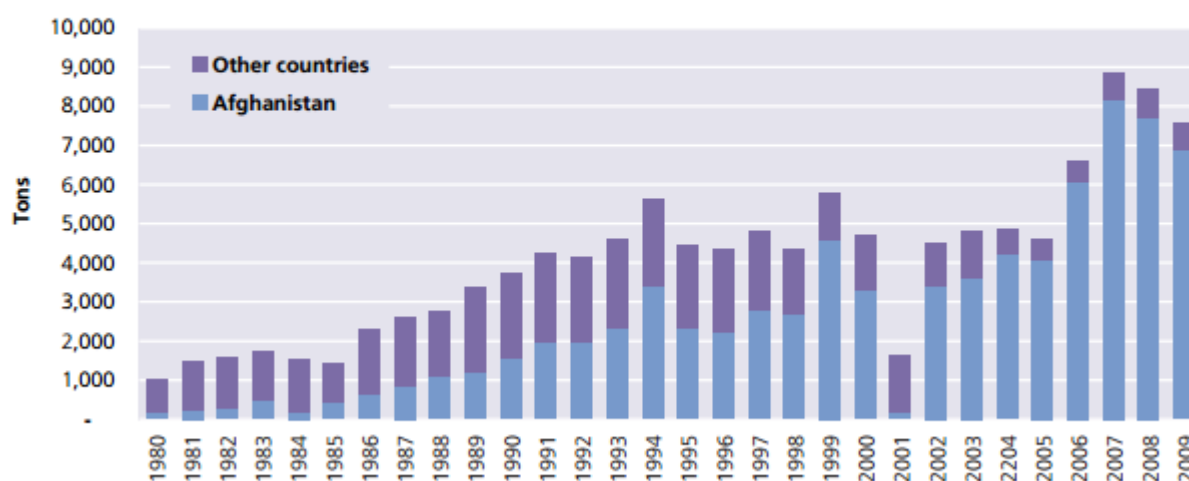
³⁷ Zarghami, M. "Iranian Common Attitude Toward Opium Consumption", in Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences, vol. 9, no. 2, 23 June 2015, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4539585/>

characterized Central Asian countries. This can mean mainly two things: either the raw opium is used to synthesize heroin or it is consumed as smoking opium. Considering that, according to the World Drug Report 2015, 77 per cent of global heroin production takes place in Afghanistan³⁸ and that "historically, Afghanistan has been the main country reporting seizures of opiate laboratories, indicating that large quantities of opium are processed into heroin in Afghanistan",³⁹ it is plausible to assume that the majority of the raw opium seized in Central Asian countries are destined to be consumed as smoking opium.

Afghanistan has maintained its leading role as the main opium producer for almost 30 years in a row, starting to increase its share of opium production worldwide in the early nineties (see the chart below). Except for the year 2001, when the Taliban government in power at that time banned opium cultivation throughout all regions of the country, Afghanistan has been and it continues to be the greatest opium producer worldwide.

Fig. 5: Global potential opium production, 1980-2009

Source: UNODC World Drug Report (figure for 2009 based on 2009 Survey results for Afghanistan and 2008 data for the rest of the world)



Source: World Drug Report 2010

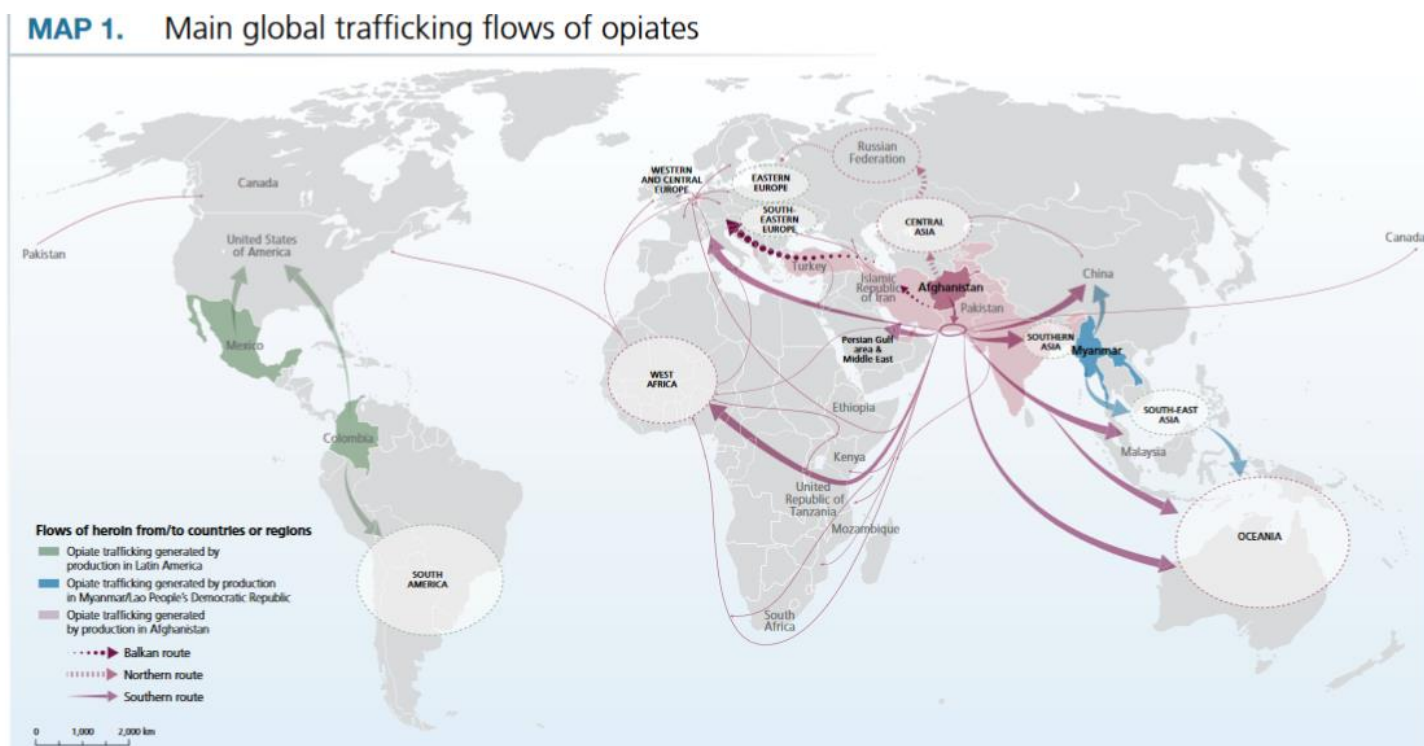
As highlighted in the introduction, Afghanistan's share in worldwide opium production accounts for 70 per cent. Several factors have contributed to make Afghanistan the leading opium producer worldwide throughout the years: favourable cultivation conditions made Afghan yields to be constantly higher than in other opium-producing countries; compared to other producing countries Afghan opium contains higher quantity of morphine thus making the transformation process from opium to heroin cheaper (e.g.

³⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", United Nations, New York, 2015, page 42

³⁹ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction "EU Drug Markets Report: In-Depth Analysis", EMCDDA–Europol Joint Publications, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016, page 81

in Southeast Asia, about 10 kg of opium is needed to produce one kg of heroin, whereas in Afghanistan, on average only 6 to 7 kg of opium are needed to produce one kg of heroin⁴⁰); high levels of rural poverty which pushes farmers to turn to opium cultivation given the lack of alternative sustainable livelihoods; poor infrastructure like the shortage of proper irrigation system (needed, for instance, for cultivations like wheat) and of good roads and stocking facilities make opium cultivation much more convenient for Afghan farmers than other crops; finally the insecurity, weak state control over large parts of the Afghan territory and corruption facilitated the development of the drug trade.

As a consequence of this long-lasting record, important trafficking routes, connecting Afghanistan to Europe and Russia, the main destination markets, were established. As it can be noticed from the map below, there are three main trafficking routes for opiates originating from Afghanistan: the Northern Route, through Central Asian countries (traditional supplier of the Russian market); the Balkan Route, through Iran, Turkey and the Balkans (traditional supplier of the Western and Central Europe); the Southern Route, through Iran and Pakistan, Africa or India (which emerged several years ago⁴¹, although suspected for decades, as a viable corridor to traffic opiates toward different regions of the world).



Source: *World Drug Report 2015*

As one of the consequences of the establishment of these routes, it has been observed that drug consumption has increased in the countries along these drug trafficking corridors. The traditional division

⁴⁰ Buddenberg, D. and Byrd, W. (eds.) "Afghanistan's Drug Industry: Structure, Functioning, Dynamics and Implications for Counter-Narcotics Efforts", UNODC, Vienna, page 26

⁴¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", United Nations, New York, 2015, page 67

among source transit and destination countries as regards drug consumption has increasingly blurred. An example of this is the South-Eastern Europe which, as stated in the report *The Illicit Drug Trade Through South-Eastern Europe* by UNODC, "is not only a transit region, but also faces drug consumption challenges in its own right".⁴² Furthermore, also the international community acknowledged this trend in the Outcome Document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS). In fact, among the recommendations there is the promotion of "cooperation with and technical assistance to the States most affected by the transit of drugs in developing and implementing comprehensive and integrated policies to address, where appropriate, the impact of illicit drug trafficking on increasing drug use in such States, including by reinforcing national programmes aimed at prevention, early intervention, treatment, care, rehabilitation and social reintegration."⁴³ Part of the drugs transported through the transit countries remains there, either for personal use of the traffickers, to sell it on, as a way of payment for the transportation services among traffickers or as a way of controlling the others (for instance, in the prostitution market, drugs are used to better control the prostitutes which often suffer from drug addiction).

Besides health threats posed by drug trafficking from Afghanistan pointed out above, in terms of overdose deaths, spread of communicable diseases, increased levels of drug consumption, the drug trade originating from Afghanistan has also broad national, regional and international security implications. Starting from the security implications of the drug business in Afghanistan itself, the Taliban involvement in drug cultivation, production and trafficking has long been acknowledged by the international community, included both states and international organizations and entities dealing with transnational organized crime and drug trafficking. Taliban represent an anti-state element that, through their activities, undermine stability and security and that finance their actions through the drug trade. As it is well known, Taliban control parts of the Afghan territory and in these territories they either engage directly in opium cultivation and heroin production or they tax traffickers that are involved in drug production and trafficking. One of the provinces in which the Taliban presence is stronger is the Helmand province (South of Afghanistan, on the border with Pakistan). The security situation in this province, as in the rest of the Southern Afghanistan, has always been precarious since 2001 but in 2014 it reached a new level. In fact, according to a report of the Institute for the War Study "in the 2014 fighting season, the Taliban carried out multiple, large-scale assaults on several districts primarily focused within Helmand

⁴² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Illicit Drug Trade Through South-Eastern Europe", UNODC, Vienna, 2014, page 8

⁴³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Outcome Document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem New York, 19-21 April 2016", United Nations, New York, 2016, page 7 para. (n)

province"⁴⁴, thus worsening the already deteriorated security situation. It is not surprising therefore that according to the latest Opium Survey in Afghanistan prepared by UNODC in collaboration with the Afghan government, the Helmand province, notwithstanding a decrease in opium production by 7 per cent in 2016 compared to 2015, has remained by far the leading opium-growing province. In fact, in 2016 it accounted for 40 per cent of the total opium grown in Afghanistan (see the table below).

Table 2: Main opium-poppy-cultivating provinces in Afghanistan, 2010-2016 (Hectares)

Province	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Change 2015-2016	2016(ha) as ⁵ % of total
Helmand	65,045	63,307	75,176	100,693	103,240	86,443	80,273	-7%	40%
Badghis	2,958	1,990	2,363	3,596	5,721	12,391	35,234	+184%	18%
Kandahar	25,835	27,213	24,341	28,335	33,713	21,020	20,475	-3%	10%
Uruzgan	7,337	10,620	10,508	9,880	9,277	11,277	15,503	+37%	8%
Nangarhar	719	2,700	3,151	15,719	18,227	10,016	14,344	+43%	7%
Farah	14,552	17,499	27,733	24,492	27,513	21,106	9,101	-57%	5%
Badakhshan	1,100	1,705	1,927	2,374	4,204	4,056	6,298	+55%	3%
Nimroz	2,039	2,493	3,808	16,252	14,584	8,805	5,303	-40%	3%
Rest of the country	2,930	3,538	5,475	8,121	7,858	7,453	14,779	+98%	7%
Rounded Total	123,000	131,000	154,000	209,000	224,000	183,000	201,000	+10%	100%

Source: Afghanistan, Opium Survey 2016

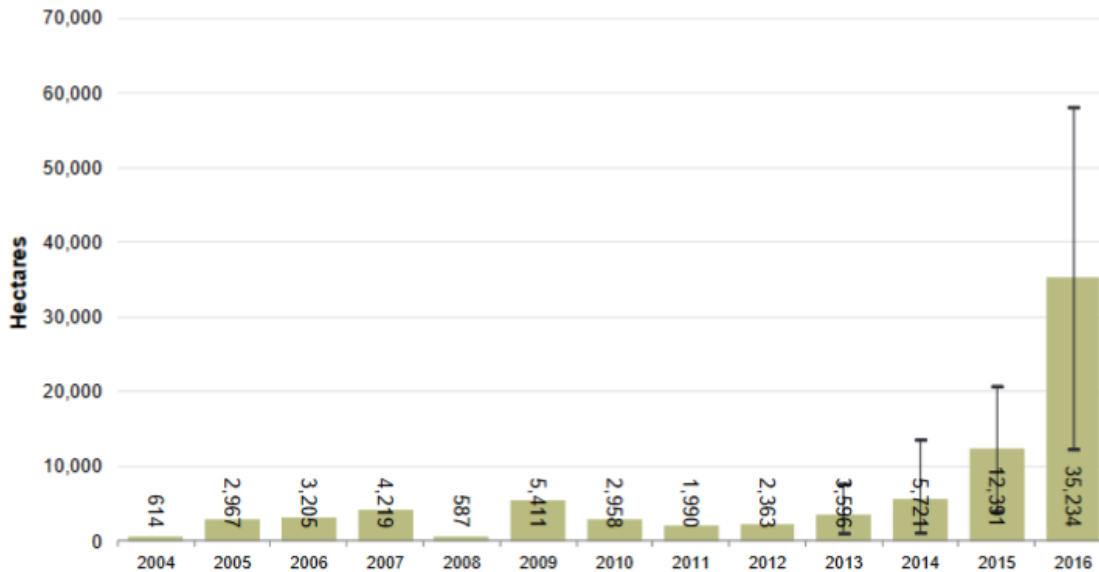
Moreover, it is believed that "most processing takes place in small, mobile laboratories in the Afghan-Pakistan border areas",⁴⁵ of which the border areas in Helmand occupy a prominent role.

Additionally, if we take another look at the table above, we can notice that the second main opium-poppy-cultivating province in Afghanistan in 2016 was Badghis, in the West part of the country, on the border with Turkmenistan. As it can be observed, opium cultivation in the Badghis province has grown by a striking 184 per cent in 2016 compared to 2015. As well, compared to the small oscillations in opium cultivation in this specific province during the previous years (see the chart below), the growth of opium cultivation in 2016 is even more remarkable.

⁴⁴ McNally, L. and Bugala, P. "The Taliban Resurgent: Threats to Afghanistan's Security", Institute for the Study of War, Washington, 2015, page 13

⁴⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Country Profile: Pakistan", <https://www.unodc.org/pakistan/en/country-profile.html>

Figure 11: Opium poppy cultivation in Badghis province, 2004-2016 (Hectares)



Source: Opium Survey, Afghanistan 2016

This strong increase in opium cultivation is believed to have happened because of the deteriorating of the security situation in the province⁴⁶, where a "MP from Badghis province [...] said that the Taliban militants have intensified their activities in Muqur, Abkamari, and Balamurghab districts of the province. He warned that the districts may fall to the Taliban control, unless the government takes immediate action"⁴⁷. This demonstrates that the Taliban do not have to actually control a territory in order to see the effects in terms of increasing drug cultivation and production. Their actions destabilize and weaken the rule of law thus permitting the spread of illicit cultivations, even without them fully controlling the territory.

Though opium cultivation in Afghanistan is not solely due to the Taliban presence, (as highlighted above opium cultivation in this country is due to several reasons besides the Taliban destabilizing actions), the latter is with no doubt a necessary factor for explaining Afghanistan's prominent role in opiates production. Without being able to retain control over its territory, no government can guarantee the security and the continuity of its social and economic policies, needed to interrupt the organized crime activities-underdevelopment-corruption vicious circle. In fact, if we compare the maps below, we can see that four out of five leading opium-growing provinces (Helmand, Badghis, Kandahar, Uruzgan in red) in Afghanistan are also among the ones with a strong Taliban presence on the territory, being it directly Taliban-controlled or a contested area.

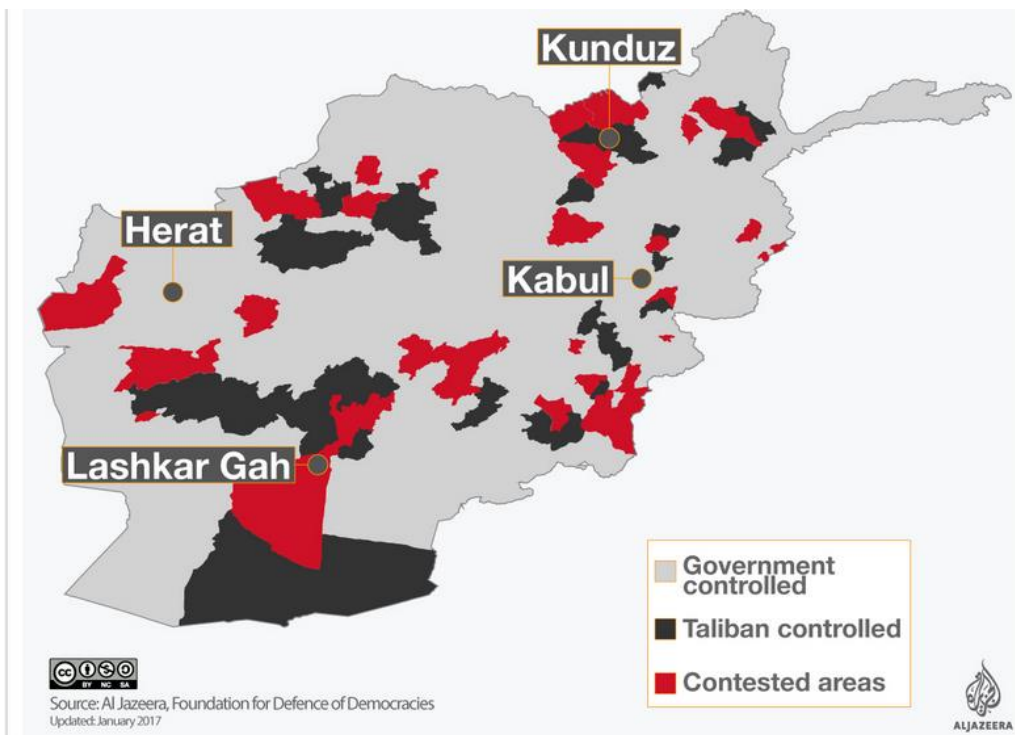
⁴⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Afghanistan Opium Survey", UNODC, Vienna, 2016, page 6

⁴⁷ Afghanistan Times, "Mounting insecurity in Badghis: Protesters demand dismissal of governor, security chief", 11 May 2015, <http://afghanistantimes.af/mounting-insecurity-in-badghis-protesters-demand-dismissal-of-governor-security-chief/>

Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan (by province), 2016



Source: *Opium survey, Afghanistan 2016*



Outside of Afghanistan, drug trafficking originating from it has also a costly and grave impact on transit countries in terms of security matters, besides the health implications stressed out at the beginning of this chapter. Iran for example, according to a 2015 report by the East-West Institute, "spends nearly one

billion dollars annually on counternarcotics efforts, and 3,000 troops of Iran's conscript army are deployed to assist border guards in counter-trafficking work along the frontier with Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition to that, Iran has constructed along the 936-kilometer-long Afghanistan-Iran border, 400 kilometres of embankments, 800 kilometres of deep canals, 39 kilometres of concrete walls and barriers and 140 kilometres of barbed wire fencing".⁴⁸ In addition to this enormous deployment of resources, the impact of drug trafficking on the violence level in the regions bordering Afghanistan should be given proper attention. In fact, shootings among Iranian border guards and military forces and the "well-armed drug convoys that tear across the border into Iran"⁴⁹ are not rare events. In particular the zone between Iran and the Afghan province of Farah "is one area of the border where Iranian drug control agents have suffered heavy losses".⁵⁰ UNODC has estimated that over the past three decades of Iranian counter-narcotics operations "more than 3,700 national law enforcement officials have been killed and over 12,000 have been maimed".⁵¹

High levels of violence related to drug trafficking can be found, besides Iran, also in Central Asia and more specifically in a region of Central Asia called Fergana Valley. This region, that now is divided among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (see the map below), is the most densely populated area in Central Asia (up to 250hab/km² to be compared with the average of 14 hab/km² in Central Asia⁵²) and among the most fertile and productive zones due to numerous water flows that cross it and that are subject of controversy among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

⁴⁸ East West Institute, "Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders", April 2015, page 16

⁴⁹ East West Institute, "Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders", April 2015, page 12

⁵⁰ East West Institute, "Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders", April 2015, page 31

⁵¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Drug Trafficking And Border Control Situation Analysis", <https://www.unodc.org/islamicrepublicofiran/drug-trafficking-and-border-control.html>

⁵² Baker, N. "The Ferghana Valley: A Soviet Legacy faced with Climate Change", *Inventory of Conflict and Environment*, no. 252, December 2011, <http://mandalaprospects.com/ice/ice-cases/ferghana.htm>



Source: <http://mandalaprojects.com/ice/ice-cases/ferghana.htm>

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Fergana Valley has been one of the most unstable regions because of several factors, such as "diverse and interspersed populations, complex borders, dwindling resources and religious extremism".⁵³ Before the Soviet Union incorporated this region, Fergana Valley knew no borders, as well as the majority of the territories in Central Asia. Borders were imposed by the Soviets mainly for administrative purposes. The majority of the Central Asian peoples were nomadic and the divisions among them were not according to specific nationalities but were based on clan, religion or region. The complexity and instability of the Fergana Valley today, derives not only from the disputes over its resources (mainly water and energy), but also from the consequences on the population of these artificial borders created during the Soviet period. As already pointed out, Fergana Valley is the most densely populated area in Central Asia. Currently, around 10 million people live in the region and "the Fergana Valley holds a very significant portion of three countries' overall population: 27% of Uzbekistan, 31% of Tajikistan and 51% of the Kyrgyz Republic".⁵⁴ According to a Stratfor assessment on the Fergana Valley, "each of the three countries in the Fergana Valley contains significant minorities of the other two ethnic groups. Further complicating this are several ethnic exclaves in the Fergana Valley", including Uzbek exclaves in Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz exclave in Uzbekistan and Tajik exclave in Kyrgyzstan.

⁵³ Strategic Forecasting Inc., "Central Asia: The Complexities of the Fergana Valley", <https://www.stratfor.com/article/central-asia-complexities-ferghana-valley>

⁵⁴ Baker, N. "The Ferghana Valley: A Soviet Legacy faced with Climate Change", *Inventory of Conflict and Environment*, no. 252, December 2011, <http://mandalaprojects.com/ice/ice-cases/ferghana.htm>

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE FERGANA VALLEY



Source: Stratfor article: "Central Asia: The Complexities of the Fergana Valley"

Besides ethnic, border and resources disputes, Fergana Valley's instability is also due to drug trafficking and the related criminalization of the societies living there. The region is at the crossroads of important trafficking routes originating from Afghanistan and heading mostly for the Russian market, which together form the so-called Northern Route, of which Uzbekistan and in particular Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are main transit countries. A large portion of the 10 million people living in the Fergana Valley are youths. Particularly, in the Kyrgyz portion of the Valley, young people are the 40 per cent of the population.⁵⁵ In particular, as it can be observed in the table below, Osh city, in the Kyrgyz part of the Fergana Valley, together with Bishkek (the Kyrgyz capital) have the highest number of recorded crimes per 100.000 population aged 14 and over.

Number of recorded crimes per 100 000 population aged 14 years of age and over, by territory

Table 2.2:

(cases)



The largest number of crimes has been recorded in Bishkek and Osh cities, as well as Chui (due to high population density) and Issyk-Kul oblasts.

Source: Netstatcom of the Kyrgyz Republic.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Kyrgyz Republic	907	774	723	671	658
Batken oblast	228	230	232	249	257
Djalal-Abad oblast	550	386	372	336	343
Issyk-Kul oblast	889	814	753	702	686
Naryn oblast	383	401	338	310	307
Osh oblast	477	281	269	286	278
Teles oblast	586	547	505	486	474
Chui oblast	983	1014	915	853	867
Bishkek city	1759	1804	1783	1520	1399
Osh city	2633	1227	1225	1122	1277

Source: Crime and Public Order in the Kyrgyz Republic, Statistical publication

⁵⁵ Maitra, R. "Drug-Infested Ferghana Valley: Target of the Axis of Three Devils", International Executive Intelligence Review, 23 July 2010, page 1

This, together with dense population, poverty, high levels of corruption, high unemployment rates and proximity to the main opiates producer worldwide, results in a high level of engagement in the drug business which consequently led to notified high levels of HIV, recorded drug users, and drug related crime. Again, especially Osh city is known as the Southern capital of Kyrgyzstan, but it is also known as one of the drug capitals in Central Asia. According to UNODC's report *Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia*, "Osh city is thought to [...] serving as a jumping off point for drugs trafficked through Tajikistan to transit westward to Uzbekistan and, via Bishkek, northward to Kazakhstan".⁵⁶ A concrete example of this is given in the CARICC⁵⁷ weekly summary (05/29/2017-06/04/2017) of drug seizures in its member-states. According to this weekly summary, on 31 May 2017, a 30-year old Kyrgyz national has been stopped at the Kyrgyz-Kazak border and, in his car, border security authorities found 15,4 kg of heroin. The courier tried to transport the drugs from Osh City to Moscow.⁵⁸

The poor control the Kyrgyz central government has on Osh city and other border areas with Uzbekistan surrounding the Fergana Valley is another issue that causes tensions between the two countries, in addition to the ones mentioned above and it also enables criminal activities to flourish. In fact, according to the statistical publication *Crime and Public Order in the Kyrgyz Republic 2015*, Osh city remains among the regions with the highest incidence of crime.⁵⁹ Taking into consideration drug-related crimes, in the same publication is mentioned that "In 2014, in most regions of the country, except for Osh city, Batken and Osh oblasts, the largest proportion of crimes related to drugs were committed without intent to sell these drugs".⁶⁰ From this statement we can infer that in these regions (Osh city, Osh oblasts and Batken, another region next to the Fergana Valley) crimes related to drugs involved the selling of drugs, thus drug trafficking, since its core is the distribution of the drugs either by selling them on the local market or to other traffickers that will continue to transport the drugs toward the destination markets.

⁵⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia", UNODC, Vienna, 2008, page 13

⁵⁷ CARICC - Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for Combating Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors. Member-States: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

⁵⁸ CARICC Weekly Summary (05/29/2017-06/04/2017) of drug seizures.

⁵⁹ The National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, "Crime and Public Order in the Kyrgyz Republic", Statistical Publication. Bishkek, 2015, page 7

⁶⁰ The National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, "Crime and Public Order in the Kyrgyz Republic", Statistical Publication. Bishkek, 2015, page 42

The violence that derives from the rivalry of different criminal clans competing for drug trade shares in the region, couples with several extremist and non-state groups that exploit drug trafficking to fund their activities. The most active and well known of such groups in the region is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Originally formed in 1998 in the Fergana Valley to overthrow the Uzbek president Islam Karimov's government, it developed into an al-Qaeda and Taliban ally. Furthermore, in 2015, "the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan terrorist group has reportedly sworn allegiance to the Islamic State. In a video posted by the IMU-controlled Furqon TV on July 31, a figure identified as the group's spiritual leader, Sheikh Muhammad Ali, stands in front of the black flag of IS and pledges loyalty to the organization".⁶¹ According to the UNODC report *An Assessment of Transnational Organized Crime in Central Asia*, "The IMU and drug barons, with their mutual interest in border crossings, established a symbiotic relationship developing joint routes for their activities".⁶² In particular the links between drug trafficking and arms trafficking is significantly developed in this part of the world. According to the UNODC's above-mentioned report "in particular, in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the activities of the IMU together with a process of political and social radicalization in the Fergana Valley has helped to underscore the seriousness of the dangers posed by trafficking in firearms"⁶³ which previously has not been given proper attention in the region, notwithstanding strong evidence pointing out the links between drug trafficking and arms trafficking. An example of this is given in the same report regarding Tajikistan, where "drug trafficking has been used for funding, with opposition militants buying drugs from Afghanistan, selling them in the Russian Federation and then returning to Afghanistan to purchase weapons".⁶⁴

Another example of the threat posed by the opiates trafficking originating from Afghanistan can be found in Turkey. If Iran is the first country as regards opiates seizures along the Balkan Route, Turkey is the second one (see the chart below).

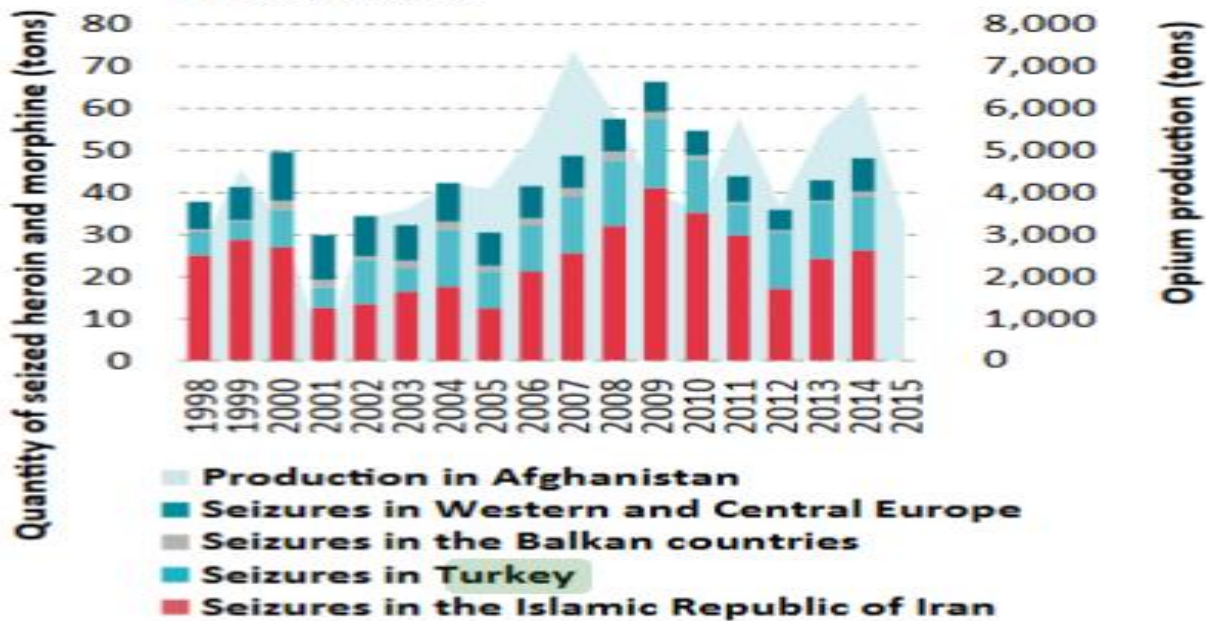
⁶¹ Lemon, E. "IMU Pledges Allegiance to Islamic State", [eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org/node/74471), 1 August 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/74471>

⁶² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "An Assessment of Transnational Organized Crime in Central Asia", United Nations, New York, 2006, page 34

⁶³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "An Assessment of Transnational Organized Crime in Central Asia", United Nations, New York, 2006, page 36-37

⁶⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "An Assessment of Transnational Organized Crime in Central Asia", United Nations, New York, 2006, page 36

FIG. 33 : Opium production in Afghanistan and heroin and morphine seizures in key countries along the Balkan route, 1998-2015



Source: UNODC Afghanistan opium survey, 2015 and previous years; and responses to the annual report questionnaire.

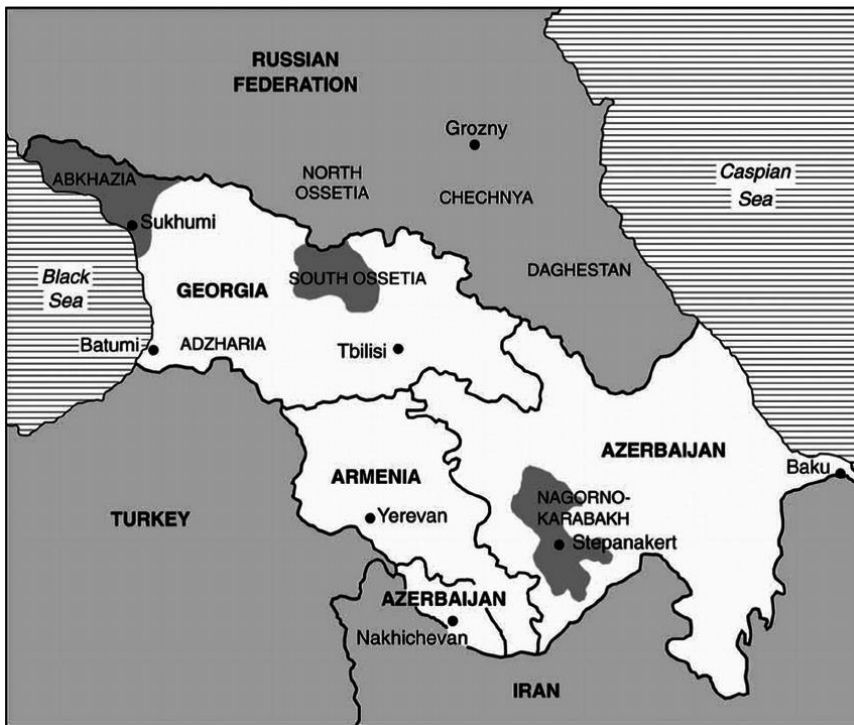
Source: *World Drug Report 2016*

As I will explain in more details further in this thesis, an important part of the drug trafficking from Afghanistan through Turkey, is managed by Turkish Kurds, many of whom are PKK members or have links to it. The PKK is either directly involved in heroin trafficking or taxes heroin traffickers in the territories under their control. As it is well known, PKK is a non-state actor, considered by Turkey and others to be a terrorist group, that has threatened Turkey's territorial integrity since the instauration of the Republic. During the years, the share of illegal activities in the funding of PKK activities has proportionally increased as state sponsorship has decreased. Today, it is believed that drug trafficking is the main source of income of the PKK (further in this thesis I will highlight the level of PKK involvement in drug trafficking from Afghanistan).

As it is shown by this analysis, Afghan opiates trafficking poses serious threats to the health, development, security, stability and integrity of the countries and regions affected by this crime. Not only it poisons societies' health, well-being, fuels corruption and undermines sustainable development, it also increases violence levels within states and across regions, it worsens already existing tensions among countries and last but not least, it is used to finance other organized crime activities and the actions of non-state actors that menace the national and regional stability and territorial integrity of the countries. The regions that I have analyzed above belong either to the Northern Route (Fergana Valley) or to the Balkan Route (Iran and Turkey). But, taking into consideration that, though well-consolidated, these

routes can deviate to other countries and regions according to new opportunities or obstacles, drug trafficking can create the same effects highlighted above also elsewhere, especially in already vulnerable countries/regions. The next part of my thesis will be dedicated to the analysis of the re-emerging route through the Caucasus and to its possible future development. The Caucasus is already a very complex and unstable region and tensions between the countries in the area developed around disputed and occupied territories such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijani territories occupied by Armenian military forces (see the maps below).

Disputed territories in the Caucasus



Nagorno-Karabakh conflict



The dispute over these territories has led also to direct confrontations such as the Georgian-Russian war in 2008 or the periodic clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region after the full-scale war ended in 1994. The last and one of the worst fight between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region since the end of the war was in 2016, when 30 soldiers (18 Armenian and 12 Azeri) died and there was also civilian casualties⁶⁵. Increased drug trafficking through the region will definitely exacerbate this already difficult situation, whereas cooperation among these countries to counter drug trafficking is unlikely to happen due to almost non-existent political and diplomatic relations. Moreover, Azerbaijani authorities constantly declare that they can not guarantee proper control and the respect of the rule of law in the Armenian-occupied territories in Azerbaijan. As a matter of fact, when Azerbaijan signed the United Nation Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, it reserved itself the right to declare that "The Republic of Azerbaijan [...] is unable to guarantee the application of the provisions of the Convention in the territories occupied by the Republic of Armenia until these territories are liberated from that occupation."⁶⁶ This situation makes the Caucasus countries very vulnerable to organized crime activities and drug trafficking in particular for reasons that I will stress in the next part. In this second part of the thesis I will also reveal the recent development in drug trafficking in the Caucasus region and I will underline the reasons why I think this particular route will further develop in the short-medium term.

⁶⁵ British Broadcasting Corporation, "Nagorno-Karabakh fighting: Azerbaijan 'calls truce'", BBC, 3 April 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35953916>

⁶⁶ United Nations Treaty Collection, "12. United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime", 15 November 2000, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12&chapter=18&clang=_en#EndDec

II. THE CURRENT AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAUCASUS ROUTE

The Balkan Route into Europe and the Northern Route into the Russian Federation remain the main conduits to traffic heroin from Afghanistan to its destination markets. However, according to the EU Drugs Market Report of 2016 "the so-called 'trafficking routes' are very flexible and fluid, as are the methods of transportation and concealment used. An example of this is the emergence of a new Southern Caucasus route".⁶⁷ This route can potentially supply both the European and the Russian market. The recent trend in drug seizures shows that this route is emerging as a viable corridor for drug trafficking to Europe and Russia. In fact, according to the United States Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, "while the Balkan Route into Western Europe remains heavily used, evidence suggests that traffickers also use a more northerly route through Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, and the Ukraine."⁶⁸ In addition to that, according to the Federal Drug Control Service of Russia, in recent years, the role of the Northern branch of the Balkan Route, which begins in Iran, bypasses Turkey by going through the Caucasus region and the waters of the Caspian and Black sea toward Russia and through Ukraine toward West Europe, is growing.⁶⁹

The so-called "Caucasus Route" is not new and it has been used for heroin trafficking since the beginning of the new millennium but it is poorly known for several reasons: geopolitical tensions in the Caucasus between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, as well as the Georgian war and the frozen conflict over the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, did and do not allow a clear analysis of the drug trafficking situation in the region. Furthermore, the latter facts are a huge obstacle for regional and international cooperation initiatives while, at the same time, increase the favourable opportunities for organized crime activities by creating legislative and law enforcement vacuums in particular in the disputed territories. Moreover, the majority of heroin trafficked through this region comes from Iran, which is one of the major transit countries together with Turkey on the Balkan Route. But as already pointed out in the first chapter of this thesis, Iran has directed its strategic and operational action against drug trafficking along the borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan, where there are massive interventions and investments both in infrastructure for border control and police and military forces.

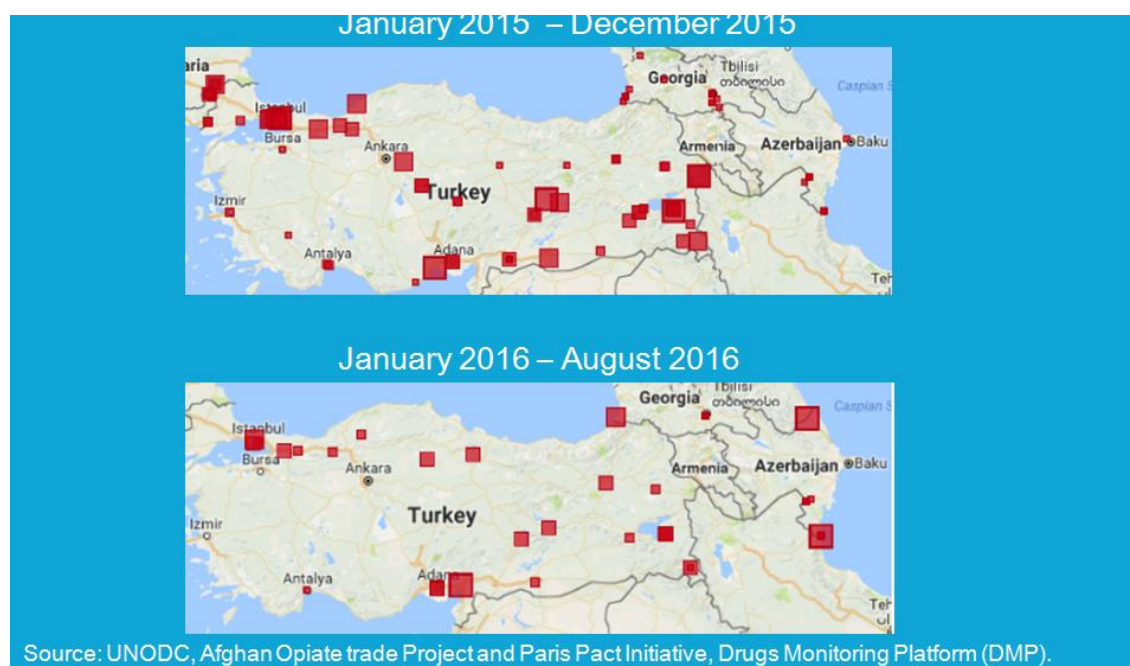
⁶⁷ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction "EU Drug Markets Report: In-Depth Analysis", EMCDDA–Europol Joint Publications, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016, page 90

⁶⁸ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I - Drug and Chemical Control", United States Department of State, 2016, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/253655.pdf> , page 288

⁶⁹ Lenta, "Russia on the needle: How to get rid of drugs", 6 January 2015, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2015/01/05/drugs/>

Other borders, including the ones with Azerbaijan and Armenia, are considered to be of a lower priority for the Iranian national security, thus drug trafficking through this border lacks proper attention.

Notwithstanding all these elements, along the Caucasus region there has been observed an important increase in drug seizures together with a diminishing trend in seizures in Turkey, which suggests that there might be a growing shift from Turkey to the Caucasus region of part of the heroin produced in Afghanistan. The image below shows the heroin seizures in Turkey from January 2015 to December 2015 versus the heroin seizures from January 2016 to August 2016. As it can be observed, there has been an important decrease in heroin seizures in Turkey, which, as already said, is one of the major transit countries along the Balkan route.



The decrease in heroin seizures in Turkey does not, alone, suffice to support the hypothesis of a shift toward the Caucasus because the smaller number of heroin seizures can be due, not only to the changing of the route, but to other factors as well. New and better methods of concealment, lower efficiency of the law enforcement agencies, focus on more pressing issues (for example terrorism and illegal migration) etc. can all be elements explaining the lower heroin seizures in Turkey. However, together with the decrease in heroin seizures in Turkey there has been an increase in the Caucasus region. If we take a look at the map below, we can see that quite big seizures (the biggest red squares) were made on the Iranian-Armenian border and Iranian-Azerbaijani border (main input points of the Caucasus) and on the Russian-Azerbaijani border and on the Georgian coast on the Black Sea (output points of the Caucasus) reinforcing the hypothesis of the development of the Caucasus Route.

Heroin seizures in the Caucasus region, 2010-July 2016



Source: UNODC, Afghan Opiate trade Project and Paris Pact Initiative, Drugs Monitoring Platform (DMP).

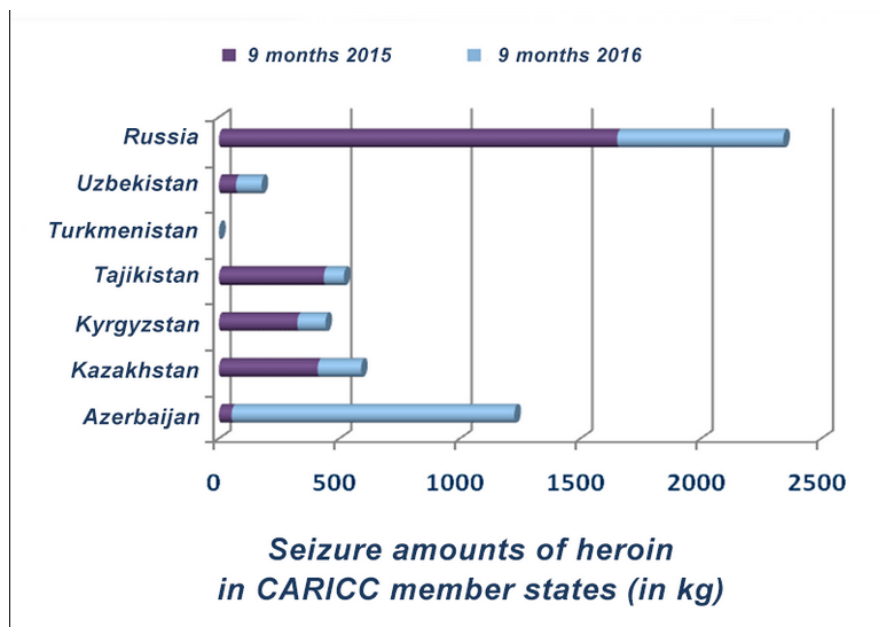
Looking more into details of the single Caucasus countries, we can observe (see table below) that there has been a significant increase in opiates seizures in Azerbaijan during the first six months of 2016 compared to the first six months of 2015. In particular, heroin seizures skyrocketed from around 38 kg in the first six months of 2015 to around 1,024 kg in the first six months of 2016, which means that Azerbaijani law enforcement seized 26.7 times more heroin in the first semester of 2016 than in that of 2015.

Total amount of seized narcotic substances (in kg) for the first 6 months of 2015 and 2016.

	Azerbaijan	
	2015	2016
Total drugs seized	657.365	1,629.62
+/- (in %)	147.9	
Opioids	147.457	1,200
+/- (in %)	8.1 times more	
Heroin	38.328	1,024.6
+/- (in %)	26.7 times more	
Raw opium	109.129	175.3
+/- (in %)	60.7	
Cannabinoids	506.534	413.24
+/- (in %)	-18.4	
Hashish	41.203	17.486
+/- (in %)	-57.6	
Marijuana	465.332	395.76
+/- (in %)	-15	
Cannabis		

Source: Council of the European Union, the Dublin Group

The growing trend in heroin seizures is confirmed also by the data of the Central Asian Region Information and Coordination Centre for combating illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors (CARICC). If we look at the chart below we can see that the same trend highlighted by the table above for the first 6 months of 2016 can be observed as well for the longer period of 9 months.



Source: CARICC web site

Azerbaijan is a perfect transit country given its closeness to Iran on the "supply" side and Russia and Europe on the "demand" side. "Azerbaijan's Ministry of Internal Affairs estimated in 2014 that between 5.8 and seven metric tons (MT) of illegal drugs transit Azerbaijan annually, much of it through the country's southern border with Iran"⁷⁰. As an example of the fact that drugs are being trafficked through the Azerbaijani-Iranian border, in August 2016, Azerbaijani border guards seized 141 kg of heroin on the above mentioned border. The truck where the drugs have been founded was heading toward Georgia, a proof of the existence and active use of the so-called Caucasus Route.⁷¹ Another case was that of a Belarus national arrested in Azerbaijan for trying to traffic 500 kg of heroin, coming from Iran and headed for Belgium.⁷² Besides this, the Armenian military occupation of the Azerbaijani territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh does not allow a clear analysis of the drug trafficking through that region.

⁷⁰ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I - Drug and Chemical Control", United States Department of State, 2016, p. 107

⁷¹ Russia Today, "Azerbaijan stopped the import of 141 kg of heroin", 15 August 2016, <https://ria.ru/world/20160815/1474344495.html>

⁷² Onliner, "Azerbaijani customs officers found 500 kg of heroin in Belarus car. The man tried to hide the drug in a sweet", 18 April 2016, <https://people.onliner.by/2016/04/18/azerbajdzhan>

However, Azerbaijani authorities have always denounced that the territories occupied by the Armenian military forces and Nagorno-Karabakh itself have turned into a regional hub for drug production and trafficking.⁷³ Though this statement can be criticized for a lack of objectivity, I believe that in the light of the recent developments in drug seizures across the whole Caucasus region highlighted above and of the fact that these territories also border Iran, this statement gains new plausibility.

As regards Georgia, it "has emerged as a viable trafficking corridor for transnational criminal organizations to smuggle increasingly large shipments of cocaine, marijuana, heroin, amphetamine, and synthetic drugs to markets in Western Europe, Russia and Turkey"⁷⁴. In particular, Georgian authorities seized a record 2.8 tons of liquid heroin in July 2014⁷⁵. Another 178 kg of heroin has been seized by the Georgian authorities in June 2016. The heroin, coming from Iran, was headed for the Netherlands using as transit countries Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine.⁷⁶ Additionally, in the 2015 Annual Report of the Direzione Centrale Servizi Antidroga (the Italian anti-drug law enforcement authority), it is observed that among the emerging criminal groups, there is a significant increase of Georgian nationals (especially in Istanbul). Georgian criminals are described as characterized by a particular predisposition to integrate with the local organised crime and as having a effective criminal "know-how", good logistics skills and a good knowledge of the territories outside Turkey thanks to the Georgian diasporas in Greece and in some areas of the Balkans and Europe. Finally, the same Georgian criminals are indicated to be the ones interested and involved in drug trafficking through the Black Sea,⁷⁷ which is part of the Caucasus Route.

The last Caucasus country potentially involved in drug trafficking along the Caucasus Route is Armenia. Being landlocked and having the two longest of its four borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan closed, results in limited transport options, thus making the country less attractive for drug trafficking. Notwithstanding this situation, the Armenian-Iranian border seems to be used quite actively by

⁷³ Azernews, "Baku, UNICEF talk about drug trafficking in occupied territories", 26 November 2013, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/61961.html>

⁷⁴ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I - Drug and Chemical Control", United States Department of State, 2016, page 165

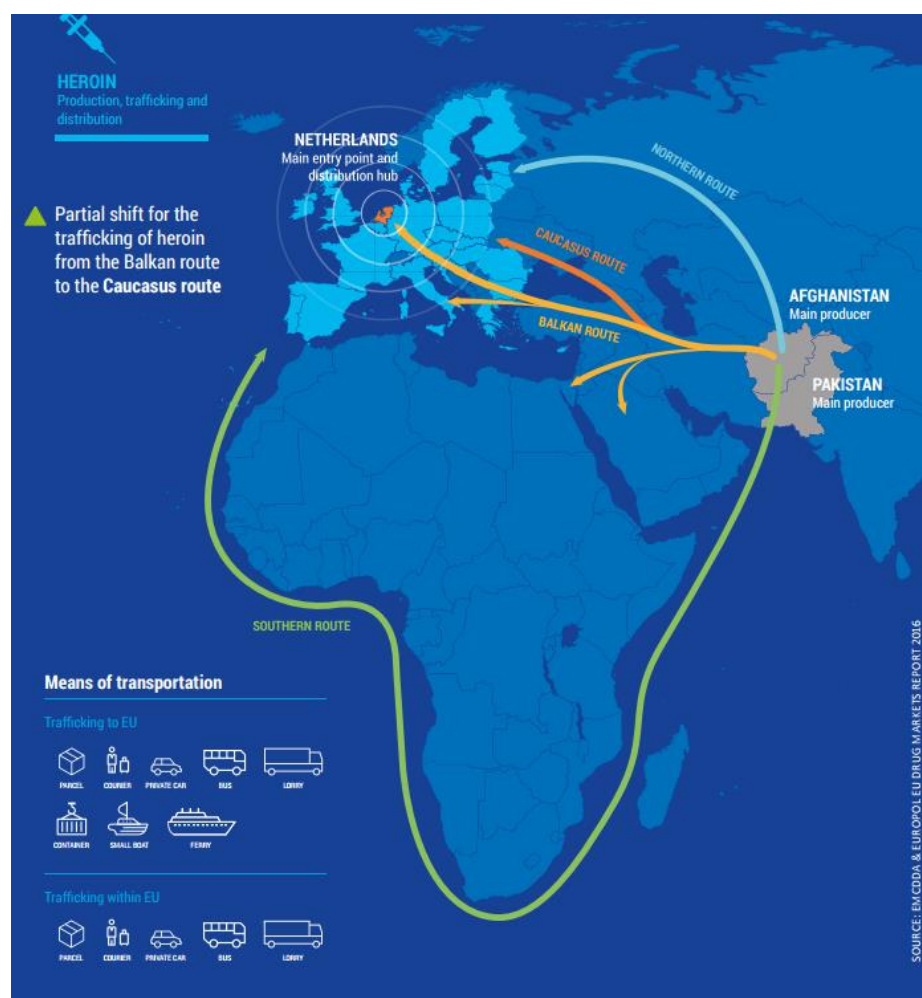
⁷⁵ Meydan, "Georgian Police Seized 2.8 Tons Of Heroine Coming From Azerbaijan", 12 July 2014, <https://www.meydan.tv/en/site/society/2237/>

⁷⁶ Meydan, "'It's time to investigate the smuggling of heroin from Azerbaijan to the EU" - Arif Mammadov", 13 June 2016, <https://www.meydan.tv/ru/site/politics/15218/>

⁷⁷ Direzione Centrale per i Servizi Antidroga, "Relazione Annuale", 2015, page 14

traffickers. In January 2014, 927.6 kg of heroin have been seized at the above-mentioned border. The heroin was headed for Georgia and it remains the largest heroin seizure in the history of Armenia.⁷⁸

Again, as for the decreased number of heroin seizures in Turkey, the reasons for the growth of their number in the Caucasus might be multiple: changing of the route, higher efficiency of law enforcement agencies, more attention attributed to the drug issue etc. Nevertheless, despite these different and multiple reasons, it is hard to believe that the Caucasus countries have experienced, for example, improvements in the efficiency of the law enforcements agencies or have attributed much more attention to the drug issue all together and at the same time as in Turkey was happening the exact opposite. It seems more plausible that some kind of deviation from the classical Balkan route can be observed. According to the EUROPOL report Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment, there has been a partial shift of heroin from the Balkan Route to the Caucasus Route (as highlighted in the image below), as far as the European heroin market is concerned.



Source: *Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment, EUROPOL*

⁷⁸ Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, “Armenia: Authorities Report Largest Drug Seizure in Country’s History”, 20 January 2014, <https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/2291-armenia-authorities-report-largest-drug-seizure-in-countrys-history-76733398>

Apparently, part of the heroin transiting through the Caucasus region, for example the above - mentioned 2.8 tons of liquid heroin seized in Georgia, is destined to Turkey via the Black Sea from the Georgian coastlines, after entering the Caucasus through Armenia and mostly Azerbaijan. Heroin passing through the Caucasus might not even go through Turkey but directly to Southern Europe, particularly to Bulgaria and Romania. As it can be seen from the table below, in 2014 Bulgaria reported that drugs seized on its territory came only from Turkey. In 2015, Georgia and Iraq appeared as new departure countries of the drugs seized in Bulgaria. Experts call this route the Northern Balkan route because, after deviating northerly toward the Caucasus countries, it goes back to Turkey, Bulgaria or Romania, destined mostly for major markets in Western Europe, such as Great Britain, Italy, France and Germany, following the path of the traditional Balkan route.

Trafficking along the Balkan route in 2015 (or latest year available) based on UNODC, ARQ

	Trafficking	Origin	Departure	Transit
Bulgaria (2015)	100% road	Iran	Georgia, Iraq, Turkey	Turkey
(2014)	100% road	Turkey	Turkey	Turkey

But there is also another option for the heroin trafficked through the Caucasus. It seems quite likely that part of the drugs are headed toward Ukraine via the Black Sea or the Northern Caucasus in the Russian territory. Ukraine has always been used as a transit country for several types of drugs, destined both for the European market and the Russian one (see map below).



Considering the recent drug seizures trend in the Caucasus, the fact that Ukraine can be easily reached from Georgia and its long border with Russia, it is very plausible that its importance as a transit country for drug trafficking, in particular Afghan heroin, will increase. If we take a look at the table below, we can observe that 71 per cent of the heroin seized in Romania in 2014 has been transiting through Bulgaria. Only one year later there has been a total change in that, with 93 per cent of the drugs seized in Romania having transited through Ukraine and only 7 per cent through Bulgaria.

Trafficking along the Balkan route in 2015 (or latest year available) based on UNODC, ARQ

	Trafficking	Origin	Departure	Transit
Romania (2015)	97% road	Ukraine (93%), Turkey (2%)	Ukraine (93%)	Ukraine (93%), Bulgaria (7%)
(2014)		Turkey (43%), Bulgaria (29%)	Bulgaria, Turkey, Ukraine	Bulgaria (71%)

If we take into consideration that between the Bulgarian-Romanian border there are no controls since they both are EU members, whereas there are borders controls between Ukraine and any other EU country, some kind of very favourable condition (which I will analyze in detail further in this thesis) is pushing traffickers to take the risk of one extra border control and use Ukraine as a transit country instead of opting for the easiest option of Bulgaria. The June 2015 seizure of 500kg of heroin heading toward Poland and coming from Iran is additional proof of the importance of Ukraine as a transit country for the Afghan heroin.⁷⁹

Although poorly known, this route should be monitored more closely because it offers several important advantages to traffickers. As already mentioned above, the confused and non-cooperative atmosphere in the region is a big advantage for criminals, whose cooperation is not affected by the difficult political relations among governments of the region. Azerbaijan has more than once complained about the fact that it can not guarantee the control of and security along its internationally recognized borders because of the Armenian-military occupation of part of its territory surrounding the separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijani authorities are claiming that "Armenian armed forces create conditions for the expansion of drug trafficking and international terrorism on the occupied territories"⁸⁰. Though this claim, as already highlighted, is coming from one of the sides involved in the dispute and might be biased, it is a matter of fact that the situation in which Nagorno-Karabakh and other territories in the region find themselves in, is not favourable for a clear analysis of the drug issue. Moreover, the fact that internationally recognized borders do not match with the reality on the ground creates vacuums from the international law perspective, since at the international level a state is deemed responsible for controlling and monitoring a territory even though it is not, de facto, under its control.

In addition to the above, the Caucasus Route offers the opportunity to reach both the European Union market by directly crossing the Black Sea toward Bulgaria and Romania or through Ukraine as well as the Russian Federation, which has direct borders with Azerbaijan and Georgia. In this regard, in the 2015

⁷⁹ World Customs Organization, "Large heroin seizure in Ukraine", 22 June 2015,

<http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2015/june/large-heroin-seizure-in-ukraine.aspx>

⁸⁰ Azerbaijan State Commission for Combating Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking, "National Annual Report on Drug Control", 2015, page 10

Annual Report of the Direzione Centrale Servizi Antidroga is mentioned that the Caucasus could potentially be the conjunction point between the flows of drugs coming from the Northern Route and those coming from the Balkan Route. Based on the data of the previous year when the biggest drug seizures were made in the Caucasus countries, the authors of the 2015 Annual Report state that there is a potential risk in the medium/long term for the European market coming from the intersection of the two routes. The risk derives from the fact that the Caucasus region might be used to transport drugs into Europe coming also from the Northern Route and transiting through the Russian territory.⁸¹

I have already highlighted how the Caucasus countries are involved in drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Europe. Focusing on Russia, I will show how the development of Caucasus Route poses a threat also to it. Along the Northern Route, through which most of the heroin on the Russian market is being brought and which is composed by Central Asian countries, there has been a general trend toward decreasing opiates seizures and a lower availability of heroin on these countries' illegal markets. Overall, heroin and opium seizures in Central Asian countries have diminished by 52 per cent (from 6,5 tons to 3,2 tons) in the period from 2005 to 2015.⁸² In particular, in two of the major transit countries along the Northern route, namely Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, there has been a downward trend in opiate seizures. In Tajikistan there has been a decrease in opiates seizures from 2,666.9 kg in the first half of 2015 to 2,251.7 kg in the same period of 2016. In Kyrgyzstan the decrease has been even more significant, from 24,840.5 kg in the first half of 2015 to 12,917.9 kg in the same period of 2016. Whereas in Kazakhstan, the lower availability of heroin on the illegal market caused a six-fold increase in heroin price in 2016.⁸³ All these facts point in the direction that less heroin is being trafficked through these countries. But to this decrease it does not correspond a lower consumption on the Russian market. Russian Federation still remains the leading consumer of heroin worldwide. According to Mark Galeotti "almost 6 percent of the total population, or some 8.5 million people, are drug addicts or regular users. Some 90 percent use heroin at least part of the time, making Russia the world's leading heroin-using nation per capita".⁸⁴

This means that a decline in heroin trafficked through the Northern Route must correspond to an increase of it along some other routes. It seems plausible that part of the heroin is being trafficked through

⁸¹ Direzione Centrale per i Servizi Antidroga, "Relazione Annuale", 2015, page 14

⁸² Mansurov, A. "Theses to the Sessional Meetings of the Special Segment Within the Framework of the 59th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, on the Preparation for the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the Problem of Drugs (14-16 March, 2016, Geneva)", 13 April 2016, <http://www.ncdc.uz/ru/press-tsentr/vystupleniya-doklady/2016/04/404/>

⁸³ Regional Report on Central Asia, Council of the European Union, page 1

⁸⁴ Galeotti, M. "Narcotics and Nationalism: Russian Drug Policies and Futures", Foreign Policy at Brookings, page 2

Turkmenistan, another Central Asian country where traffickers are able to exploit poorly guarded borders with Afghanistan, long land border with Iran and Uzbekistan and sea connections to Azerbaijan and Russia through the Caspian Sea. Furthermore, as already mentioned above, the Badghis province in Afghanistan, which borders Turkmenistan, has become the second opium-growing province in 2016. This can lead to a shift of the Afghan heroin trafficked out of the country toward Turkmenistan, which can then become an alternative point of departure for both the Northern and the Caucasus Routes. According to the latest data, this could already be happening. In fact, Turkmenistan actually experienced a significant growth in drug seizures in the first half of 2016 with the latter increasing by 323.7 per cent compared to the first half of 2015.⁸⁵ It seems likely that the decrease in heroin seizures in Central Asian countries more closely involved in the Northern Route trafficking, is not due to an actual decrease of the heroin trafficked out of Afghanistan, but to a shift of part of the heroin destined to Russia toward Turkmenistan and then to the Caucasus region, either directly, for instance through Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan or indirectly through Turkmenistan-Iran-Azerbaijan. Given that Azerbaijani authorities has stated that the majority of heroin seized on its territory comes from Iran, it seems that the indirect path is more used than the direct one. This hypothesis is supported also by the National Information-Analytical Centre on Drug Control under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which clearly stated that, according to them, the overall diminishing of opiates seizures in Central Asian countries are directly linked to the activation of the Caucasian route, which they call also the Northern Black Sea route, and the Southern route⁸⁶ through Pakistan, Iran and East-Africa.

Another reason why we should keep an eye on the drug trafficking in this region, is the confirmed trend in the blurring of the traditional division between origin-transit-destination countries as regards drug consumption. According to the World Drug Report 2016, the Caucasus region is already among the regions with higher prevalence of injecting drug use: “Eastern and South-Eastern Europe is the subregion with by far the highest prevalence of injecting drug use: 1.27 per cent of the population aged 15-64 [...] In Central Asia and Transcaucasia⁸⁷ and in North America, the prevalence of injecting drug use is also high: 0.72 per cent of the population aged 15-64 in Central Asia and Transcaucasia; and 0.65 per cent in North America”.⁸⁸ This trend can not but increase with the growing of drug trafficking through the Caucasus countries. Drug consumption is not limited to the destination countries anymore. It has been observed that

⁸⁵ Council of the European Union, “Regional Report on Central Asia”, 2016, page26

⁸⁶ Mansurov, A. “Theses to the Sessional Meetings of the Special Segment Within the Framework of the 59th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, on the Preparation for the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the Problem of Drugs (14-16 March, 2016, Geneva)”, 13 April 2016, <http://www.ncdc.uz/ru/press-tsentr/vystupleniya-doklady/2016/04/404/>

⁸⁷ Transcaucasia is a synonymous for South Caucasus which include Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

⁸⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “World Drug Report”, United Nations, New York, 2016, page 14

there is a correlation between being involved in drug trafficking regardless if the country is at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the chain, and consumption levels. Nowadays, for example, as already mentioned, the major consumers of opium are Afghanistan (producer country) and Iran and Pakistan (major transit countries). We can observe the same phenomenon in other transit countries as well, which all have experienced increasing levels of consumption, like the Balkan countries. Of course, the increase is not solely due to this correlation. Other factors, such as high unemployment rate, can push people either to drug consumption or to involvement in drug trafficking. But being a producer or a transit country, means that there is more drug available at a lower cost, which often leads to higher consumption.

Possible reasons behind the development of the Caucasus route

The development of the Caucasian route, as described above, is quite recent. Because of this, it still needs to be observed and studied to better understand its evolution and the reasons behind this trend. This trend has only been mentioned in the 2016 World Drug Report as a new, experimental route amongst the Balkan route networks for Afghan heroin trafficking⁸⁹. Based on data from 2015, which is the period when this route has begun to re-emerge, the report does not go into detail in analysing this route or the possible causes behind the renewed activity along it. But, since then, drug seizures data in the region has confirmed the existence of this trend.

As far as this thesis is concerned, I explored four possible reasons for which this route has, recently, gained new attention and possibly will continue to develop. I will analyze every reason in detail and separately but this does not mean that they are not interlinked or that one is enough for explaining the phenomenon under observation. In fact, I believe that these four reasons all play crucial roles in explaining the recent development of the Caucasus Route and its possible future development.

1. Turkey is strengthening its South-Eastern border

Since the civil war in Syria broke out, the whole regional stability around it has been disrupted. The war in Syria has had and it still has enormous consequences on the regional and international equilibrium and relations. For the purposes of this thesis, I will explore only the direct effects it is having on one of its neighbours, namely Turkey, and how this situation has possibly affected drug trafficking in the region.

Since the Syrian war broke out, Turkey has been one of the main actors involved for several reasons: refugee flows, tensions with Russia, the Kurdish issue, numerous terrorist attacks on its territory etc. As a

⁸⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “World Drug Report”, United Nations, New York, 2016, page 15

direct effect of the Syrian war and because of the Kurdish issue, related mostly to the PKK activities, Turkey has focused its national security strategy on the regions bordering Syria, Iraq and Iran (South-East areas). In particular, the reinforcement of the border between Iran and Turkey, which is a crucial point in Afghan heroin trafficking heading toward Europe along the Balkan route, could explain the re-orientation of part of the drug trafficking toward other regions, in this particular case toward the Caucasus region. As it can be read in the already mentioned 2015 Annual Report of the Direzione Centrale Servizi Antidroga, the Turkish-Iranian border is a fundamental crossroad for the drugs' transit and a privileged logistics base for international traffickers that transport opiates destined to the European market. The entry points into Turkey are located on its Oriental side. In particular, the border crossing of Gurbulak, on the frontier with Iran, is the main transit point for all the commercial flows between Turkey and the rest of the countries in that geographical area.⁹⁰

Turkey has started to strengthen its South-Eastern borders for obvious reasons after the Syrian war commenced. Uncontrolled flows of refugees directly from Syria and Iraq or through Iran and the ISIS threat, caused massive concentration of national security authorities efforts in these areas. In addition to that, as one of the consequences of the Syrian conflict and of Turkish internal dynamics, the Kurdish issue has entered a new phase. At 19 per cent of the population⁹¹, the Kurdish community makes up the largest minority group in Turkey and it has been, since the instauration of the republic, a threat to Turkish territorial integrity. Tensions between the Turkish central government and Kurdish counterparts have often led to accusations on behalf of the Turkish government of human rights violations against the Kurds and to terroristic attacks claimed by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) against Turkey.

Analysing more in detail the PKK, it is considered to be a terrorist organization by USA, European Union and NATO among the others. But most importantly it is considered to be a terrorist organization by Turkey. When the peace process between the Turkish government and the PKK, which started in the early 2000s, did not bring any tangible changes for the situation of the Kurdish population in Turkey and after the developments of the Syrian war, the tension between the parties involved grew more intense again in July 2015. In the wake of Turkey's failed coup in July, the Turkish government declared its "war on terrorism" having among its objectives the clearing of ISIS terrorist militia fighters from its border and the elimination of Kurdish PKK militants in the country's southeast as well as northern Iraq and their main source of income, namely illicit activities. According to the Anadolu News Agency, the "Turkish army began its air-and-ground operations against PKK terrorist organization inside Turkey and northern

⁹⁰ Direzione Centrale per i Servizi Antidroga, "Relazione Annuale", 2015, page 13

⁹¹ Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>

Iraq in late July, as the PKK renewed its armed campaign against the Turkish state following a two-and-a-half year cease-fire".⁹²

By now, it is commonly known that one of the main sources of income for the PKK is drug production and trafficking. For instance, according to an UNODC report "The PKK is well known for its direct and indirect involvement in the heroin trade. According to the Turkish Trafficking and Organized Crime Police, the PKK is involved in heroin trafficking from the Turkey-Islamic Republic of Iran border to Western and Central Europe, either directly or indirectly by taxing traffickers".⁹³ As regards drug production, PKK is thought to have the biggest share in illegal cultivation of cannabis in Turkey. "Approximately two-thirds of all illegal cannabis cultivated in Turkey are believed to be grown in Diyarbakır. This area remains as one of the last places where the PKK terror organization has partial control over the rural territory inside Turkish borders"⁹⁴. Besides cultivation and trafficking of cannabis, PKK is also involved in heroin trafficking going from Afghanistan to Europe. In June 2016, the Anadolu News agency reported that drug trafficking has become the main source of income for PKK activities: "According to a recent report by Turkey's Interior Ministry, the PKK earns around \$170 million a year through cannabis production and a further \$1.5 billion annually through smuggling other drugs, primarily heroin".⁹⁵

Additionally, according to the US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs "Many major drug traffickers in Turkey are ethnic Kurds or Iranians".⁹⁶ And as can be seen from the map below, Kurds in Turkey, are mainly concentrated in the South-Eastern regions and all the Turkish regions bordering Iran are majority-Kurdish areas.

⁹² Anadolu Agency, Turkey: '31 PKK terrorists' killed in Hakkari operation, 5 November 2015, <http://aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-31-pkk-terrorists-killed-in-hakkari-operation/467906>

⁹³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment", UNODC, Vienna, 2011, page 45, 59

⁹⁴ Daily Sabah, Fresh operations in s.eastern Turkey to destroy PKK's cannabis fields, group's largest source of income, 21 June 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/06/21/fresh-operations-in-seastern-turkey-to-destroy-pkks-cannabis-fields-groups-largest-source-of-income>

⁹⁵ Anadolu Agency, Anti-drug drive against PKK ends in southeast Turkey, 4 July 2016, <http://aa.com.tr/en/turkey/anti-drug-drive-against-pkk-ends-in-southeast-turkey/602710>

⁹⁶ Bureau of international narcotics and law enforcement affairs, USA, 2016, <https://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2016/vol11/253316.htm>



This geographical position facilitates the involvement in Afghan heroin trafficking for several reasons: first of all, the proximity of Turkey to both the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan) and Europe makes it a favourable transit country for opiates trafficking; in addition to that, Kurdish-majority regions are mostly mountainous, which makes it more difficult for security forces to control the area; finally, good and secular cross-border relations among the inhabitants of the Turkish and Iranian frontier zones make the trade in both licit and illicit goods much easier. Furthermore to the aforementioned facts, Turkish diasporas in Europe linked to the PKK creates connections with the destination markets which facilitates the whole trade process. According to TR Defense "In Europe, nobody can sell drugs without the PKK's permission. They are the ones who bring buyers and sellers together".⁹⁷

Right after the failure of the negotiations between Turkish central government and Kurdish counterparts in July 2015 and after the PKK resumed its 30-year armed campaign against the Turkish state, the president of Turkey, Erdogan, has launched massive security operations against the PKK in the South-Eastern regions, saying that it won't stop until "the terrorists lay down their arms and the organization is dissolved".⁹⁸ Since July 2015, news of PKK members being killed or arrested in the South-Eastern regions of Turkey and their drugs being seized are quite regular. For example, in December 2015, 110 PKK members were killed⁹⁹ whereas in November 2016 more than 60 PKK members were neutralized in one week and "in addition, security officers carried out operations to prevent the financing of the terrorist organization through the drug and smuggling networks. Large quantities of drugs were seized and 1,064

⁹⁷ Söylemez H., PKK finances terrorism through drug trafficking, TR Defence Turkish Military News, Strategy & Geopolitics Portal, 13 November 2011, <http://www.trdefence.com/pkk-finances-terrorism-through-drug-trafficking/>

⁹⁸ Anadolu Agency, Anti-PKK operations to continue without break: Erdogan, 4 November 2015, <http://aa.com.tr/en/turkey/anti-pkk-operations-to-continue-without-break-erdogan/467522>

⁹⁹ Cakan, S., Turkish military offensive kills 110 Kurdish militants in six days: security sources, 20 December 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-kurds-idUSKBN0U30G720151220>

people involved in drug trafficking were arrested".¹⁰⁰ In 2017, these security operations are still going on with PKK members arrested or being killed, like in March 2017 when 7 PKK members were killed in the South-Eastern Sirnak province¹⁰¹ and other 4 in eastern Diyarbakır and Bingöl provinces.¹⁰² In April 2017, seven senior PKK members were killed in an anti-terror operation in south-eastern Turkey's Mardin, one of whom was reportedly an Iranian national.¹⁰³

In almost all these anti-terror operations, Turkish authorities also seized huge amounts of drug proving once again the PKK's involvement in the drug trade and, given this fact, the large-scale military operations can not but affect PKK's business in drugs. This could be the explanation for the above-mentioned decreased number in drug seizures in Turkey during the first half of 2016. Drug seizures have decreased possibly because less drugs are being trafficked through the usual entry point of Turkey, namely the Turkish-Iranian border, due to the ongoing security operations in the area. Of course a well established route, such as the Balkan route, of which the Turkish-Iranian border is a crucial component, can not be disrupted too easily. The majority of the drugs from Afghanistan going to Europe are still being trafficked along this route. However, if we correlate these security operations against the PKK in the South-Eastern regions of Turkey and the uncontrolled refugee flows/ with the lower drug seizures in Turkey and the higher drug seizures in the neighbouring Caucasus, it results in a possible new trend. Traffickers have started to look for new possibilities and routes to exploit in order to be able to continue their lucrative trade in drugs toward Europe. The Caucasus region, for all the reasons already highlighted, is a perfect candidate that can help by-passing the Turkish-Iranian border and the South-Eastern regions of Turkey, which are now given too much attention since the anti-terrorist operations have started and the refugees crisis broke out. Given the fluidity of the trafficking routes and the availability in the region of other suitable options, it is likely that the tendency of traffickers to avoid the Turkish-Iranian border will increase, resulting in a more decisive shift toward the Caucasus.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.actualite-news.com/en/international/europe/222-actualite-turquie-en/3363-more-than-60-pkk-terrorists-neutralized-across-turkey-in-one-week>

¹⁰¹ APA Holding, Seven PKK terrorists killed in SE Turkey, 10 March 2017, <http://en.apa.az/world-news/asia-news/seven-pkk-terrorists-killed-in-se-turkey.html>

¹⁰² Daily Sabah, 4 PKK terrorists killed in counter-terror operations in eastern Turkey, 7 March 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/03/07/4-pkk-terrorists-killed-in-counter-terror-operations-in-eastern-turkey>

¹⁰³ Daily Sabah, Senior PKK terrorists killed in operations last week, 10 April 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/04/11/senior-pkk-terrorists-killed-in-operations-last-week>

2. Ukraine crisis offers new opportunities for organized crime activities in the country

Ukrainian territory has always been used to smuggle drugs both into Europe and into Russia. Ukraine has all the necessary infrastructures of a modern state such as seaports, roads, railways etc. that can facilitate drug trafficking of any kind but at the same time it has not enough capacities to secure and properly control them. In addition to that, its geographical position between Europe and Russia and its ports on the Black Sea that connects it to the Caucasus, Turkey and South-Eastern Europe, makes it a viable corridor for drug trafficking. Furthermore, criminals look to Ukraine as a perfect transit country not only because of its modern infrastructure and geographical position but also because of its enormous corruption problem, its under-regulated financial system that facilitates the money laundering process of the proceeds from illegal activities and its political instability throughout the years.

Ukraine is a 26 year-old country that has passed through a dramatic change in its political, economic and social structure when the Soviet Union collapsed. As Mark Galeotti sustains "The collapse of the USSR was a seismic event which unleashed a new and fast-moving form of organised crime onto the world,"¹⁰⁴ that indeed affected also Ukraine. The country "experienced a massive upsurge in organized crime in the 1990s, when new political and economic systems were being created at a time of catastrophically weak state control".¹⁰⁵ For years Ukraine has been a huge hub for cocaine trafficked from South America into Europe. Cocaine trafficking through Ukraine has had ups and downs during the years but, in the EU Drug Market report, A strategic Analysis (2013), the Black Sea is again mentioned as the entry point of cocaine heading toward Europe. Among the countries that share the Black Sea coastlines, Ukraine emerged, at that time, as the one of the main actors involved into cocaine trafficking. For instance, Ukrainian authorities seized a total of approximately 775 kg of cocaine in two operations in the port of Odessa (South - West Ukraine) from ships arriving from Chile and Venezuela.¹⁰⁶ Since synthetic drugs have begun to spread, Ukraine became a preferred transit point also for these drugs, produced mostly in Europe and heading for the Russian, Middle Eastern and Central Asian markets. Cannabis is another drug that is heavily trafficked through the Ukrainian territory destined to be transported in every direction. Moreover, "Ukraine has emerged as an apparently large producer of cannabis in recent years."¹⁰⁷ Finally, Ukraine has always been used also for heroin trafficking, though in a smaller proportion in comparison with the

¹⁰⁴ Galeotti, M. (ed.) *Global Crime Today: The Changing Face of Organised Crime*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005, page 5

¹⁰⁵ Galeotti, M., Ukraine's mob war, *Foreign Policy*, 1 May 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/05/01/ukraines-mob-war/>

¹⁰⁶ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, *EU Drug Markets Report, A strategic analysis*, 2013, page 48

¹⁰⁷ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction "EU Drug Markets Report: In-Depth Analysis", EMCDDA–Europol Joint Publications, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016, page 63

other drugs, especially cocaine. Even if the share of heroin has traditionally been smaller compared to other drugs trafficked through the Ukrainian territory, that doesn't mean that the amount of heroin passing through Ukraine isn't notable in terms of quantity. For example, in April 2014 the Polish authorities seized, on the border with Ukraine, 150 kg of heroin, worth 10 million dollars on the European illicit market.¹⁰⁸

As highlighted in the "Caucasus Route" paragraph, the situation of Afghan heroin trafficked through Ukraine has changed. The country is experiencing an increase in heroin seizures (the already mentioned record seizure of 500 kg of heroin is obviously leading the race), which, as for the Caucasus region, I believe is due more to an actual rise in the quantity of the drugs being trafficked rather than to other factors. This mainly for two reasons: the first one, as already mentioned above, has to do with the developments of drug trafficking in the Caucasus region. Ukraine is, because of its geographical position, common borders with the Russian Federation and the European Union and ports on the Black Sea, a perfect puzzle piece of the Caucasus Route. According to the 2016 EU Drug Markets Report "The Caucasus is now being used to smuggle large amounts of opiates from Iran to northern Europe. The ferries that cross the Black Sea from Georgia to Ukraine and Moldova are likely to be used to that end. From Ukraine or Moldova it is possible to reach both lucrative western European markets and the large Russian market by a variety of overland routes";¹⁰⁹ the second reason is linked to today's situation in Ukraine which makes it even more attractive for organized crime activities in general and, as far as this thesis is concerned, to drug trafficking in particular.

Since the Ukrainian crisis broke out in 2014, the destabilization of the political arena, the social upheaval, the economic crisis and, most of all, the civil war between Ukraine and the self-declared independent republics of Donesk and Lugansk have created bigger vacuums that the underworld is filling. As Professor Mark Galeotti has written already in November 2014, "it has become clear that the conflict in Ukraine is having an impact on not just the regional but the global underworld. As one Interpol analyst told me, "What's happening in Ukraine now matters to criminals from Bogotá to Beijing."¹¹⁰ All the reasons that criminals had to use Ukraine as a transit country for drug trafficking of any kind, have not only deepened but new reasons emerged. In particular, following the events in Crimea and in East Ukraine, the political

¹⁰⁸ The voice of Russia, Poland seizes \$10 mln worth of heroin smuggled from Ukraine, 4 April 2014, https://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/news/2014_04_04/Poland-seizes-10-mln-worth-of-heroin-smuggled-from-Ukraine-3471/

¹⁰⁹ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction "EU Drug Markets Report: In-Depth Analysis", EMCDDA–Europool Joint Publications, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016, page 90

¹¹⁰ Galeotti, M., How the Invasion of Ukraine Is Shaking Up the Global Crime Scene, 6 November 2014, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/how-the-invasion-of-ukraine-is-shaking-up-the-global-crime-scene-1106

crisis that divided the country, also brought chaos into the police forces with those supporting the old regime facing charges and dismissals. In addition to this, Ukrainian national security authorities are now understandably focused on the ongoing conflict in the Eastern regions, with anti-drug trafficking activities suffering from a lack of proper attention. Moreover, the corruption issue, despite efforts of the government, has not changed significantly. In 2016, transparency international ranked Ukraine 131 out of 176 countries in its Corruption Perceptions Index. Furthermore, the profound economic crisis that Ukraine is experiencing, deepens its corruption issue, might push people to turn to illegal activities (given the high level of unemployment) and Ukrainian economy may turn to liquidity coming from illicit activities, given the slow economic recovery in 2016 after its GDP collapsed by a cumulative 16 per cent in 2014 and 2015.¹¹¹

Prior the events of 2014, Ukraine was already being used as a transit country for drug trafficking and organized crime had strong roots. Said in Professor Galeotti's words "Ukraine headed into the crisis already undermined and interpenetrated by criminal structures closely linked to cabals of corrupt officials and business oligarchs".¹¹² It is undoubtful that the Ukrainian crisis has strengthen these trends and that it will have severe consequences on the country's future development. As far as the conflict in the Eastern regions is concerned, it is very likely that it will remain a frozen conflict, putting the Eastern regions of Ukraine in the same situation as Transnistria for instance. This de facto independent state within the internationally recognized borders of Moldova, has notoriously turned into the black hole of Europe where any kind of illicit activities are carried out. Moreover, after the events in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, Ukrainian gangsters and Russian organized crime are tightening their cooperation even if and in spite of the fact that their countries are virtually at war. As in the Caucasus region, the fact that diplomatic and political relations among official governments are difficult if nonexistent, does not hinder organized crime cooperation. Such cooperation has indeed been always present if we consider the strong historical ties, economic relations and Russian as a common language, which facilitates and simplifies all kind of economic transactions, being it licit or illicit. But with the Ukrainian crisis this collaboration has been given new opportunities to exploit. "Russian law enforcement officers have confirmed to me that on the Ukrainian mainland, the Moscow-based Solntsevo network, Russia's largest and most powerful mob, has a long-standing relationship with the "Donetsk clan," an infamous political-criminal circle in the eastern Ukrainian industrial city of the same name" wrote Professor Galeotti in an article for the Foreign Policy magazine. He goes on saying that "gangs of the rest of Ukraine, though, also have ties to Russia. The Black Sea port of Odessa is an infamous smugglers' haven, not least moving Europe-bound Afghan

¹¹¹ The World Bank, Ukraine Economic Update – April 2017,

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ukraine/publication/economic-update-spring-2017>

¹¹² Galeotti, M., Ukraine's mob war, Foreign Policy, 1 May 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/05/01/ukraines-mob-war/>

heroin arriving from the Caucasus".¹¹³ Another example of the intertwined relation between Ukraine and Russia as regards their "underworld", is the arrest, in February 2017, of 47 Ukraine nationals on the Russian territory for drug trafficking. The 47 arrested criminals were part of a criminal network composed of 67 members operating in Russia.¹¹⁴ In addition to that, economic struggles, endemic corruption, underdevelopment and organized crime often end up in a vicious cycle feeding up on each other. In present-day Ukraine all these elements are present and are reinforcing each other posing a serious threat to the country's future development.

If we take into consideration the Ukrainian factors favouring drug trafficking through its territory prior 2014 (geographical position, corruption etc), the conflict in Eastern Ukraine with the instability, the rise of organized crime activities it produces throughout the country and the opportunities it opens for cooperation between Ukrainian and Russian criminals, we can conclude that together with the strengthening of the Turkish-Iranian borders, these factors can both explain the current and future development of the Caucasus Route, in which Ukraine could play a crucial role given its proximity to the Caucasus region and its favourable environment for organized crime activities.

3. Azerbaijan-Iran economic, political and diplomatic relations are rapidly developing

At the beginning of 2013 Europol Director Rob Wainwright explained: "International drug trafficking remains the principal activity of most organised crime groups. They are adapting to new criminal opportunities and changing smuggling methods and routes to evade law enforcement, and we have noticed an increase in the exploitation of legitimate commercial transportation options, such as containers, aircraft, couriers and postal services. This allows drugs to be moved through multiple transit points making them harder to intercept".¹¹⁵ Taking into consideration the last part of his statement about the exploitation of the legitimate trade for drug trafficking, this trend has continued to increase in the years after 2013. In fact, this trend has been recognized also by the United Nations Member-States during the 2016 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the World Drug Problem. In the outcome document, the Member-States recommend to "monitor current trends and drug trafficking routes and share experiences, best practices and lessons learned, in order to prevent and counter the misuse of

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Gordonua.com, The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia announced the arrest of 47 Ukrainians part of an international drug syndicate, 10 February 2017, <http://gordonua.com/news/worldnews/v-mvd-rossii-zayavili-o-zaderzhanii-47-ukraincev-po-delu-o-mezhdunarodnom-narkosindikate-173362.html>

¹¹⁵ European Commission Press Release, Illicit drugs: EU report unveils new worrying trends in smuggling and consumption, 31 January 2013, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-73_en.htm

international trade for illicit drug-related activities".¹¹⁶ Also the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has long recognized this trend in drug trafficking as it is reflected by several of its programmes like the Global Container Control Programme that started in 2003 and which seeks to assist law enforcement agencies in developing countries to identify and inspect the high-risk containers. Other examples are the TARCET Initiative (that included Operations TARCET I, II and III) and its successor, the Regional Intelligence Working Groups on Precursors, that aims at enhancing intelligence sharing and cooperation at the operational level in order to prevent the trafficking into Afghanistan of acetic anhydride, a crucial chemical component in the production of heroin that often is diverged from its licit trade and use in industrial and chemical factories.

Being aware of the exploitation of legal trade for illicit purposes is vital when states want to enhance their economic relations and integration. Deeper economic relations and integration between states bring with them several potential negative outcomes if the above-mentioned misuse of legal trade is not taken into consideration. Along with the enhanced trade relations, countries should increase also cooperation regarding security issues related to organized crime activities, intelligence sharing and law enforcement agencies collaboration. All these are particularly relevant for states heavily affected by drug trafficking, which is transnational in its nature. In fact, it must be taken into consideration that "trade agreements can inadvertently facilitate drug trafficking due to exploitation of the free movement of goods, vehicles, and passengers".¹¹⁷ A clear example of that is given by the Turkey - Iran case. From the beginning of the new millennium these two countries saw a dramatic improvement in their economic relations, which culminated in the signing of the memorandum of understanding on the transfer of Iranian and Turkmen natural gas to Europe via Turkey in 2007 and of the treaty for cooperation in air, land, and sea transportation in 2009. These agreements greatly fostered the economic relations between the two countries. For instance, Professor Nader Habibi¹¹⁸, in 2012, has stated that "bilateral economic relations between Turkey and Iran have grown at a rapid pace during the past decade, and both economies now depend heavily on these relations" and that "Iran's strong economic relations with Turkey have helped partially offset the pressure of unilateral Western sanctions".¹¹⁹ Even now that diplomatic relations

¹¹⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Outcome Document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem New York, 19-21 April 2016", United Nations, New York, 2016, page 11

¹¹⁷ Ekici B. and Unlu A., Increased Drug Trafficking from Iran, Ankara's Challenges, Middle East Quarterly, 2013, <http://www.meforum.org/3659/iran-turkey-drug-trafficking>

¹¹⁸ Professor of the Economics of the Middle East, in the Crown Centre, and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Economics at the Brandeis International Business School

¹¹⁹ Prof. Nader Habibi, Turkey and Iran: Growing Economic Relations Despite Western Sanctions, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University, May 2012, page 1

between Iran and Turkey have been seriously compromised by their different interests in the Syrian war, experts still believe that "regional politics may cause tensions between the two countries, but in the light of their strong economic ties, I don't believe the recent escalation in diplomatic tensions is going to lead to a serious confrontation".¹²⁰

Having in mind that Iran and Turkey are major transit countries for Afghan heroin, these deeper economic relations have indeed influenced also drug trafficking across their borders. "While Iranians were long considered the principal ethnic group in Turkey engaged in drug-related crimes, their activity has significantly widened as a result of the 2007 memorandum of understanding with Iranian transnational syndicates stepping more aggressively into the fray and the overall volume of drug seizures from Iranians rising sharply".¹²¹ In particular, it was noticed that in the period after the signature of the memorandum of understanding, "the volume of the trafficked drugs and the transportation methods used," displayed "the growing capabilities of drug-trafficking networks".¹²² In that period the volume of drugs in each seizure grew and the availability of more vehicles and people crossing the borders between Iran and Turkey offered traffickers increased possibilities of transporting drugs, mainly heroin and opium, from Iran to Turkey. At the same time, Turkish-Iranian security cooperation remained limited in that period and nonexistent nowadays due to the difficult diplomatic relations between the two parties. Drug enforcement agencies don't share actionable intelligence and no joint operations are carried out.

Having in mind the trend in the misusing of licit trade to traffic drugs and the correlation between trade openness among countries and the danger of increased drug trafficking between those countries, as highlighted by the Turkish-Iranian case, another explanation for the development of the Caucasus Route could be found in the recent evolution of the diplomatic, political and economic relations between Iran and Azerbaijan. Iran and Azerbaijan relations have always been problematic since Azerbaijan gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Several reasons have prevented the two countries to develop good relations of neighbourhood. First of all, the dispute over the Caspian Sea and several incidents, like the Iranian ships and planes violating Azerbaijani borders and entering into Azerbaijani territorial waters and air space, have worsened their relations. Additionally, issues about the big Azeri minority living in Iran, have also provided reasons for friction in Azeri-Iranian relations. Moreover, Iran have always been suspicious of the pro-Western policies of Azerbaijan, its engagement with NATO and

¹²⁰ Bora, B., What is behind the hostility between Iran and Turkey?, Aljazeera, 26 February 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/02/hostility-iran-turkey-170225184418231.html>

¹²¹ Ekici B. and Unlu A., Increased Drug Trafficking from Iran, Ankara's Challenges, Middle East Quarterly, 2013, <http://www.meforum.org/3659/iran-turkey-drug-trafficking>

¹²² *Ibid.*

the U.S. military and the involvement of Western oil companies in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea. Finally, Azerbaijani military and economic cooperation with Israel was another issue that hinder the instauration of good political and diplomatic ties between the two.

Things started to improve after the election of the Iranian president Rouhani and particularly after the progress on the nuclear talks between Iran and the Western states and the subsequent lift of the sanctions. "President Rouhani, eager to attract investments into Iran, has visibly changed the Iranian government policies towards Azerbaijan, and the two nations have been deepening economic and political ties for the past two years".¹²³ Since President Rouhani's first official visit to Baku in 2015 there have been numerous official meetings both in Baku and in Tehran and many discussions on tightening political, cultural and economic relations between the two countries. Both countries are interested in developing their non-oil sectors since they both suffered from low oil prices lately and, in addition to that, they have plenty of possibilities to improve their economic relations given their similar economic structure (both are major exporters of oil and have analogous opportunities for investments), their common land and sea borders and their cultural and ethnical communalities (Azerbaijanis are the largest minority group in Iran).¹²⁴

In one of the recent (January 2017) official visit of an Iranian delegation to Azerbaijan the President Aliyev "paused the development of bilateral cooperation between the two countries in recent years" and expressed his confidence that the visit of the Iranian delegation "will contribute to further strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries".¹²⁵ In particular, the parties noted vast possibilities for expansion of cooperation in the fields of agriculture, energy, scientific and academic fields as well as the banking sector, transit (with a particular focus on the International North-South Transport Corridor, which I will analyze later on), infrastructure, customs and tourism. In addition to that, during the meeting, a special emphasis was put on the cooperation between Iran and the Azerbaijani border regions. While these and future positive developments between Azerbaijan and Iran relations are welcomed and beneficial for both countries, we can not ignore the potential threat deriving by these progresses in terms of drug trafficking in the Caucasus region. Especially sensitive in this matter is the tightening of the relations in the banking sector, customs, transit and infrastructure fields and between border regions.

¹²³2016, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13330-a-breakthrough-in-iran-azerbaijan-relations?.html>

¹²⁴ Center Intelligence Agency, The World FactBook, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121119021206/https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

¹²⁵Nazarli A., Azerbaijan, Iran work closely to boost economic cooperation, Azer news, 27 January 2017, <http://www.pressreader.com/azerbaijan/azer-news/20170127/281500750971099>

Closer cooperation in these areas should come with enhanced cooperation in the security domain to prevent the increase in drug trafficking and money laundering that will be given new opportunities by the boost of the economic relations between the two countries. Iran and Azerbaijan seem to acknowledge the threats in terms of security deriving from their closer ties in other fields. In fact, in March 2016, “commander of Iran's Border Police and Azerbaijan's Interior Minister have discussed expansion of bilateral ties [...] particularly in combating drug smuggling”.¹²⁶ In addition to that, in the same period, “Azerbaijan, Iran and Russia have discussed prospects of cooperation for ensuring border security, as well as steps aimed at combating any illegal activities in the Caspian Sea”.¹²⁷ In particular, they pointed out at the importance of enhancing security cooperation “aimed at resolving the issues arising from implementation of North-South international transport corridor project”.¹²⁸ However, after these meetings in 2016 there were not many noticeable developments along this line. Cooperation in the security area is much more complicated than the economic cooperation, given the sensitivity of the data and information that should be shared.

Stronger economic ties between countries usually include the construction of new and/or the development of the existing transit and infrastructure facilities. However, these facilities can easily be exploited by traffickers if not properly controlled. An example of this is the U.S.-funded bridge at Nizhniy Pyanj on the Afghan-Tajik border that “has expanded trade links between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, but it has also become a vehicle for traffickers to move larger quantities of drugs”.¹²⁹ Drug trafficking in that area is quite primitive with smugglers throwing “sacks of heroin over the Panj River, wading across when the water is low, setting up flotillas of car tires and using small ferries or footbridges”.¹³⁰ The construction of the bridge has not only facilitated the legal trade, but it has also simplified the above-described process allowing traffickers to move larger quantities of drugs from Afghanistan to Tajikistan.

An example in the Caucasus region of an infrastructure that could potentially be exploited by traffickers is the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). As already said, INSTC is one of the key points in the discussion between Iran and Azerbaijan. This project, was first conceived “at the turn of the

¹²⁶ Daneshvar F., Azerbaijan, Iran mull security cooperation along borders, Trend News Agency, 10 March 2016, <http://en.trend.az/iran/politics/2505554.html>

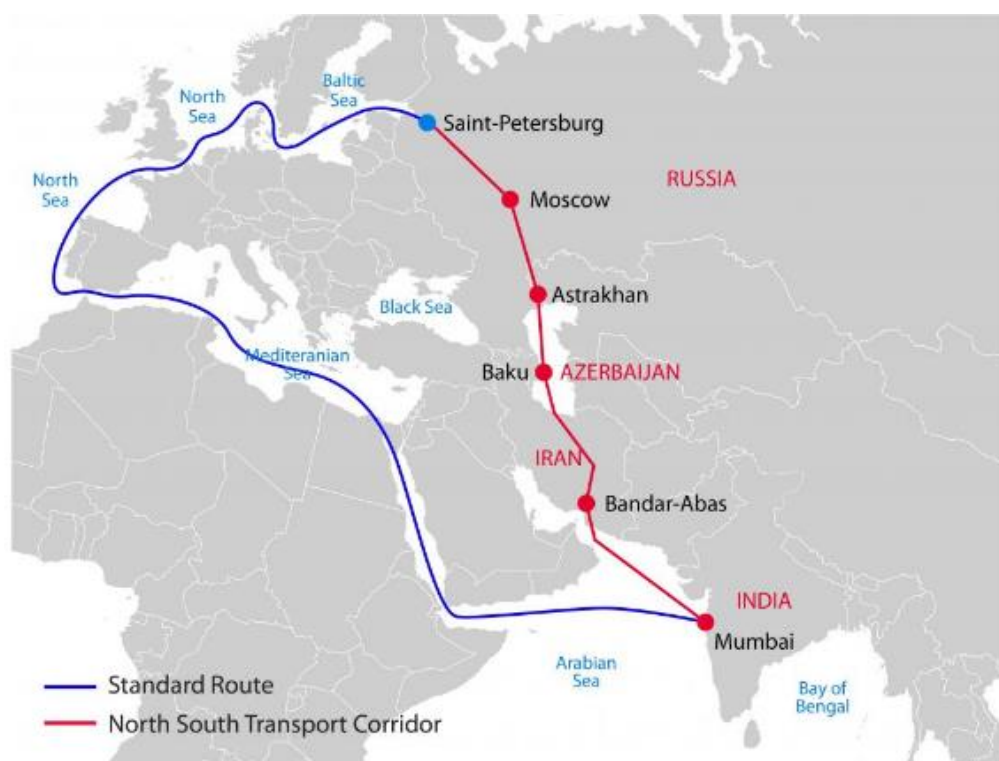
¹²⁷ Gadimova N., Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia discuss co-op on ensuring border security, Azer News Agency, 14 March 2016, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/93991.html>

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ East West Institute, “Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders”, April 2015, page 20

¹³⁰ Lasseter T., U.S.-built bridge is windfall — for illegal Afghan drug trade, McClatchy Newspapers, 28 June 2009, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24543589.html>

millennium, when Russia, India and Iran proposed a revival of the ancient transport route”.¹³¹ During the years, other countries joined the project, among which Azerbaijan. The project has met several obstacles in its implementation along the years but the political will to implement it is still strong, especially in the context of the Western sanctions against Russia and its need to develop new trading partnerships. In fact, in December 2016, Moscow hosted an international conference on the North-South International Transport Corridor, organized by the Indian Embassy in Russia, along with the Russian Ministry of Transport and the embassies of Azerbaijan and Iran. The project, as it is conceived now, aims at establishing a transport corridor between Russia and India, passing through Iran and Azerbaijan (see the map below).



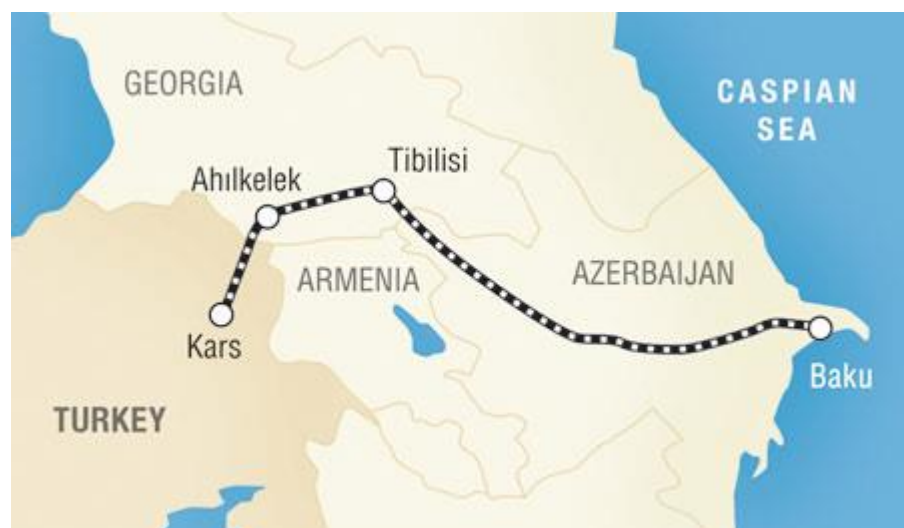
Through the implementation of this project, governments and businessmen in the countries involved are looking to enhance and facilitate their trade relations. At the same time, criminal networks, in particular drug traffickers, are looking at it as a good and an alternative opportunity to transport drugs. Already in 2002, one of the main concern of several Russian politicians was that the INSTC could “be abused for illicit drug and weapons trafficking, following existing routes from Afghanistan”.¹³² The development and implementation of this project could potentially lead to increase of the drugs trafficked through the Caucasus region and to a shift from the Northern Route, which traditionally has supplied the Russian

¹³¹ Volkhonsky B., North-South Transport Corridor begins functioning, Russia & India Report, 12 December 2016, https://in.rbth.com/blogs/the_outsiders_insight/2016/12/12/long-awaited-north-south-corridor-close-to-launch_655489

¹³² Spector R., The North-South Transport Corridor, Brookings, July 2002, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-north-south-transport-corridor/>

market, toward this region either following the Afghanistan-Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Russia path or the Afghanistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Azerbaijan-Russia path.

Additionally, the INSTC (and the broader development of the Azeri-Iranian relations) is not a potential threat only for the Caucasus and Russia but for Europe as well. In fact, parallel to the discussions with Iran, Azerbaijan is developing closer ties with both Georgia and Turkey. An example of this is the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (a city in the North-East of Turkey) railway (see the image below).



“The work on the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project [...] is nearing its completion and set to be put into service in June. The railway project will have major importance for countries that will trade through Turkey, which is expected to double its railroad capacity with the project”.¹³³ This railway could potentially become another infrastructure to be exploited for drug trafficking by traffickers interested in circumvent the Turkish-Iranian border and transporting the drugs toward Europe.

From this analysis it appears that Azerbaijan is heading toward becoming a key actor in the region from the economic point of view, developing closer ties with Iran, Russia, Turkey and Georgia. All this must be looked at also from the organized crime perspective. Azerbaijan is already an important transit country for Afghan heroin in the region but, having in mind the above-analysed trends in its foreign policy, it must be noticed that the country could be transformed by criminal networks into a major hub for heroin coming mostly from Iran and going both to Russia (directly from Azerbaijan) and to Europe (through Azerbaijan-Georgia-Ukraine or Turkey).

¹³³ Daily Sabah, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway to boost commercial connectivity between Europe, Asia by June, 6 March 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2017/03/07/baku-tbilisi-kars-railway-to-boost-commercial-connectivity-between-europe-asia-by-june>

4. Opium production dynamics in Afghanistan influence trafficking routes

The main opium poppy-growing provinces in Afghanistan have been traditionally the Southern ones (Helmand in particular) where the Taliban insurgency is stronger. Even if, during the years the Northern provinces have seen the biggest relative growth in opium cultivation, the production of opium is still highly dominated by the Southern provinces. Notwithstanding this concentration of opium cultivation in the Southern provinces, traditionally around 25 per cent of the Afghan opiates has been trafficked out of the country from its Northern provinces. During the years, the amount of opium and heroin necessary to supply the northern regions, from where traditionally the Northern Route begins, was being transported, internally, from the main opium poppy-growing regions. In addition to that, as already mentioned, the Western province of Badghis, that borders Turkmenistan, has seen an increase in opium production by 184 per cent in 2016 compared to 2015 due to the deteriorating security environment in the province, making it the second main opium poppy-growing province of Afghanistan in 2016.

Recently, the following elements related to the drug business originating from Afghanistan can be observed: lower drug seizures in Central Asian countries, the development of the Southern Route and the Caucasus Route, significant increase in opium cultivation in the Badghis province and the upholding of the leading status in opium cultivation of the Southern provinces of Afghanistan. All these elements and their influence on and meaning for the overall picture of drug trafficking from Afghanistan have already been discussed and underlined. However, the development of the so-called Southern Route through Pakistan and Iran and the production of opium dynamics must be given proper attention. In fact these two elements together have led to an increasing concentration of drugs being trafficked out of Afghanistan from the regions bordering Pakistan and Iran. It is estimated that, each year, more than 70 per cent of the Afghan drugs are trafficked out of the country through the Afghan-Iranian and Afghan-Pakistani borders.¹³⁴ Two of the three main trafficking routes from Afghanistan, namely the Southern Route and the Balkan Route, start from the Southern borders of Afghanistan.

Particularly, what these routes, plus the above-analyzed Caucasus Route, have in common is Iran. This country, as already underlined several times throughout the thesis, has always played a crucial role for Afghan opiates trafficking, being one the major transit countries. Additionally, the increasing development of the Southern Route, coupled with the already enormous quantities transiting the Iranian territory along the Balkan Route and the big Iranian internal market for opium and heroin, has led to

¹³⁴ United nations assistance mission in Afghanistan, UNODC head welcomes joint anti-drug trafficking efforts of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, 18 December 2012, <https://unama.unmissions.org/unodc-head-welcomes-joint-anti-drug-trafficking-efforts-afghanistan-iran-and-pakistan>

growing quantities of drugs being trafficked out of Afghanistan through Iran, either directly or from Pakistan and/or Turkmenistan. Taking into consideration the latter and the fact the second opium poppy-growing province in 2016 has been the Badghis province, which borders Turkmenistan, it is likely that the quantities of opiates transiting Iran and coming from Turkmenistan will increase. As concerns opiates trafficking from Pakistan to Iran, the two countries launched in 2013, under the framework of the Triangular Initiative (of which Iran and Pakistan are members together with Afghanistan), the Maritime Regional Security Initiative (MARES). The initiative aims at strengthening of maritime cooperation and of container control at the sea ports of Karachi (Pakistan) and Bandar Abbas (Iran) and developing coordination mechanisms. The need for such an initiative derives from the fact that growing quantities of opiates are trafficked from Pakistan to Iran via sea transportation, along the Southern Route.

Such big quantities of opiates concentrated in Iran, for all the reasons highlighted above, make it easier for traffickers to exploit the Caucasus Route linked to this country. In particular, this could be the reason for the decreasing opiates seizures in Central Asian countries along the Northern Route. Part of the Russian demand for heroin is likely being supplied through the Caucasus Route given that this big concentration of opiates in Iran make it more convenient for traffickers to move further the drugs through the Caucasus Route rather than the Northern Route. Thus the traditional (Southern provinces) and recent (the Western Badghis province) internal dynamics of opium cultivation and production in Afghanistan coupled with the development of the Southern Route, could be another explanation, that together with the three explanations analyzed above, can help in better understanding the current and future development of the Caucasus Route.

III. MECHANISMS OF COOPERATION IN COUNTERING DRUG TRAFFICKING FROM AFGHANISTAN

As underlined in the introduction, another vital element in fighting organized crime activities, and in this particular case drug trafficking from Afghanistan, besides strategic and future-oriented analysis, is the mechanisms of cooperation, within and among countries, at different levels: national, regional, inter-regional and international. Cooperation between countries and their law enforcement authorities should be given proper attention and should be developed further. The need for further cooperation between the countries has been stressed also in the Outcome Document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS). In fact, in the document reference is made to the commitment of Member-States in enhancing and strengthening cooperation at all levels based on the principle of common and shared responsibility. Furthermore, the Member-States recommend, among other measures for supply reduction, to "Promote and strengthen the exchange of information and, as appropriate, drug-related criminal intelligence among law enforcement and border control agencies, including through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime multilateral portals and regional information centres and networks, and promote joint investigations and coordinate operations, in conformity with national legislation, and training programmes at all levels, in order to identify, disrupt and dismantle organized criminal groups operating transnationally that are involved in any activities related to the illicit production of and trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and the diversion of their precursors and related money-laundering."¹³⁵

As already mentioned, the cooperation between criminal groups follows and exploits the globalization process, given that their collaboration is facilitated by the fact that, though illicit, their exchanges can be fully included into the category of economic transactions. As such, even when their respective national countries have difficult or non-existent political and diplomatic relations, criminal groups will still collaborate for the common goal of the profit. Not only criminal groups will continue their cooperation, they sometimes further exacerbate and take advantage of the non-collaborative relations between countries, as clearly shown by the Caucasus region case. In this chapter of the thesis I will analyze the different forms and levels of collaboration between the countries and regions affected by trafficking of the Afghan drugs, with a special focus on the Caucasus region, where cooperation among the countries of the area is strongly needed and, at the same time, is completely absent. Transit countries and regions need to face specific and multifaceted threats deriving by drug trafficking, as acknowledged by the UNGASS 2016: "We recognize that transit States continue to face multifaceted challenges, and reaffirm the

¹³⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Outcome Document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem New York, 19-21 April 2016", United Nations, New York, 2016, page 11 para. (f)

continuing need for cooperation and support, including the provision of technical assistance to, inter alia, enhance their capacities to effectively address and counter the world drug problem, in conformity with the 1988 Convention."¹³⁶

1. National level

The basis of all other levels of cooperation is the strengthening of national abilities as a precondition for the creation of efficient regional, inter-regional and international entities. Crucial in this regard is, first of all, the collaboration between national authorities, especially between law enforcement agencies among them and with judicial institutions at the national level. The need for such collaboration has been acknowledged again in the UNGASS 2016 Outcome Document: "We recognize that successfully addressing and countering the world drug problem requires close cooperation and coordination among domestic authorities at all levels."¹³⁷ What sometimes happens in some transit countries is, for example, that border control and security authorities inadequately collaborate and exchange information with police or anti-drugs agencies and, accordingly, coordination between them suffers. On the contrary their cooperation is critical in understanding the amount of drug trafficking through the country, the different actors involved in this activity, the gaps in the law enforcement system and it is essential also in gathering useful information and data avoiding the risk of "double counting" the statistical data on drug seizures and drug-related crimes and in having a single and strong voice on the international arena regarding drug trafficking. For instance, in two countries involved in the Caucasus Route as described above, namely Georgia and Ukraine, there is room for enhancing this internal collaboration. In Georgia, although counter-narcotics efforts are unified and primarily driven by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), which also controls police and border forces, there is still possibility to increase the efficiency of anti-drugs efforts. In fact, according to the Compendium of Drug-Related Statistics concerning GUAM¹³⁸ "all drug-and crime-related information gathered by the police is shared with the National Statistics Agency and the principal law-enforcement agencies. The Customs authorities, however, only pass on part of the drug-and crime-related information that they assimilate".¹³⁹ Thus, increasing efficiency in countering drug trafficking in Georgia would come with more cooperation and information sharing between customs authorities and other national law enforcement agencies.

¹³⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Outcome Document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem New York, 19-21 April 2016", United Nations, New York, 2016, page 3

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ GUAM: Organization for democracy and economic development in Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova.

¹³⁹ Compendium of drug-related statistics concerning GUAM, March 2014, page 11

In Ukraine the situation is much more complicated. First of all, counter-narcotics efforts are divided among several national actors and second of all, as in the Georgian case, they do not always and successfully coordinate. Again according to the above-mentioned GUAM report, in Ukraine there is "the State Drug Control Service [...] which defines national drug policy and controls the export, import, production and procurement of legal drugs and precursors. The Department on Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking of MIA; the Principal Department on Combating Organized Crime of SSU¹⁴⁰; the Administration of the Border Guard Service; and the Department of Customs Affairs of MinRD¹⁴¹ contribute to the operational and investigational work in countering illegal drug smuggling and trafficking in Ukraine".¹⁴² In addition to these numerous agencies dealing with drug trafficking in Ukraine, which per se complicates anti-narcotics efforts, every agency runs its own data registry "for more specific information, which is subsequently partially integrated into national statistics". This more specific information is about "dismantled illegal plantations, clandestine laboratories, or more detailed information about seized drugs and offenders, offences committed by drug addicts etc."¹⁴³ These registries are run in spite of the existence of a unified electronic register in which "all authorized agencies [...] contribute by inserting the data about all statements from the crimes and initiated criminal cases". This fragmentation of both the responsibilities in countering drug trafficking and the information gathering process coupled with high levels of corruption in the country surely does not help in effectively combating drug trafficking through the Ukrainian territory.

In addition to the coordination and cooperation among national law enforcement authorities, another element is necessary in order to successfully counter organized crime activities and drug trafficking in particular. Counter-narcotics efforts should not stop at the interdiction and seizure of drugs. After the seizure, there should be a follow-up in the criminal justice system. In this context, the cooperation between law enforcement agencies and judicial institutions is essential. Effective actions against organized crime require a continuum between law enforcement activities at the operational level on the one hand and prosecution on the other hand. Improving the judicial and prosecutorial system, so that to have the certainty of a legal punishment for drug trafficking charges would increase the risk in engaging into this activity. The lower the risk the more likely that a particular crime will develop and will easily induce people to participate in it, especially in already vulnerable contexts characterized for example by high levels of poverty, unemployment, corruption and other socio/economic factors and weak rule of law.

¹⁴⁰ Security Service of Ukraine

¹⁴¹ Ministry of Revenue and Duties

¹⁴² Compendium of drug-related statistics concerning GUAM, March 2014, page 18

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

Particularly, this cooperation and continuum between law enforcement operations and prosecution is strongly needed where the rule of law is weak and corruption levels are high.

Having in regard the corruption issue, among the countries that compose the Caucasus Route, I have already pointed out how serious this matter is in Afghanistan and Ukraine.¹⁴⁴ But the other countries of the Caucasus Route have severe corruption issues as well. According to Transparency International Corruption Index 2016, Iran ranks 131st, Turkmenistan 154th, Armenia 113rd and Azerbaijan 123rd. Only Georgia is an outsider in this list since it ranks 44th.¹⁴⁵ Therefore addressing drug trafficking in these countries must be paralleled by addressing the corruption issue as well, especially in the public domain, including law enforcement agencies and judicial institutions. In this context, the involvement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) could help in tackling corruption and ensuring the integrity of state institutions. The participation of CSOs in fighting organized crime and the issues related to it has been strongly advocated by the new Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres. Making reference to the philosopher Habermas's contribution to the contemporary world, Guterres has stated, during the Munich Security Conference in February 2017, that "one of the key elements of a modern democracy is the permanent interflow of communication between political societies and civil societies and the fact that that flow of communication has an impact on the political decisions and an impact on the change of that action that might be necessary in political decisions, independently of the electoral moment of the electoral period".¹⁴⁶ Partnership with CSOs, on issues related to organized crime, can help strengthening the rule of law by promoting a culture of lawfulness and can help assess and advance integrity conditions relating to the delivery of law enforcement and judicial institutions. In this regard, UNODC for example has already extensive cooperation with CSOs in the implementation of its programmes and initiatives. A recent example of this is the CRIMJUST initiative, a project financed by the European Union and implemented by UNODC, INTERPOL and Transparency International. The project is an example of inter-regional cooperation along the Cocaine route from South America to Europe and it involves countries from Latin America, the Caribbean and West Africa. The initiative aims at contributing in fighting organized crime, and drug trafficking in particular, along the Cocaine route through three pillars: capacity building, inter-regional cooperation and institutional integrity. In this initiative CSOs collaborate with INTERPOL and UNODC through Transparency International specifically on the third pillar (institutional integrity). The latter is primarily about the fight against

¹⁴⁴ According to the Transparency International Corruption Index 2016, Ukraine ranks 131 and Afghanistan 169.

¹⁴⁵ Transparency International. Corruption Perceptions Index 2016,

https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016

¹⁴⁶ United Nations Secretary-General, Secretary-General's remarks to Munich Security Conference, 18 February 2017, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-02-18/secretary-general%E2%80%99s-remarks-munich-security-conference>

corruption in law enforcement agencies and judicial institutions in order to guarantee a more efficient and potentially free from infiltrations criminal justice system. In this picture CSOs serve as an external assessment instrument of the levels of corruption throughout and as a tool in controlling sensitive changes in the criminal justice system. This model could be "exported" and applied also along the heroin routes coming out of Afghanistan in general and, as far as this thesis is concerned, along the Caucasus Route in particular. Given the high levels of corruption of these countries, an external assessment made by the CSOs is a useful tool that can help tackling this issue.

Another national aspect that is worth mentioning regarding efficient efforts in countering drug trafficking is the capacity building process within countries. In this specific context, capacity building refers to improvement and development of a country's ability to counter organized crime and drug trafficking in particular by enhancing the technical aspects of counter-narcotics efforts. One area of improvement concerning drug trafficking is the so-called integrated border management (IBM). "Underpinning the idea of IBM is that individual border agencies are generally more effective when cooperation is in place. That means cooperation within the agency itself (intra-agency); between the various agencies involved in border management in the same country (inter-agency); and cooperation with the border agencies of neighbouring countries (international)".¹⁴⁷ The intra-agency and inter-agency part of the integrated border management is included in the concept put forward above on the broader need for coordination among national law enforcement agencies dealing with drug trafficking. The integrated border management is just a more specific branch of it since it is referred only to customs and border police patrolling and controlling the land border crossing points, harbours and airports within one country. As far as the Caucasus Route countries are taken into consideration, within the current EU Eastern Partnership (EaP), there is a EU-funded project on IBM that include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine (besides Belarus and Moldova). The project, to be carried out from 2014-2017, has been focusing "on capacity building and enhancing the training capacities of the national agencies in each EaP country that are involved in border management, such as border police and customs. [...] The overall objective of the project, therefore, is to facilitate the movement of persons and goods across borders in the six EaP countries, while at the same time maintaining secure borders through the enhancement of cooperation at national, cross-border and international levels".¹⁴⁸ This type of initiatives can help the countries along the Caucasus Route to enhance their capacities in countering the threat posed by increased drug trafficking

¹⁴⁷ Eastern Partnership, Integrated Border Management Capacity Building Project, <http://www.eap-ibm-capacitybuilding.eu/en/about/ibm>

¹⁴⁸ Eastern Partnership, Integrated Border Management Capacity Building Project, <http://www.eap-ibm-capacitybuilding.eu/en/about/project>

through the region by decreasing corruption levels at the border, enhancing professionalism of border, customs and law-enforcement personnel, improving security at borders in the countries involved in the project (at the national level) and by exchanging information, ideas and best practices, developing trust and good relations among border agencies, conducting joint operations (at the regional, inter-regional and international level).¹⁴⁹

Another area of improvement at the national level in combating drug trafficking is the trafficking of chemical precursors needed to synthesize opium into heroin, the most important chemical precursor for this process being acetic anhydride. The importance of stopping the misuse of chemical precursors for drug production is acknowledged also in the UNGASS 2016 Outcome Document that recommends to "Take appropriate measures to address the diversion and illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in as well as misuse of precursors under international control and to tackle the misuse of pre-precursors and substitute or alternative precursors for illicit drug manufacturing."¹⁵⁰ Often the routes used to traffic opiates out of Afghanistan are used backwards to traffic acetic anhydride inside Afghanistan, since, as already said, the majority of heroin is processed in Afghanistan itself. Therefore, transit countries have to face not only drug trafficking alone but also precursor trafficking, which consequently will favour the continuation of drug trafficking throughout their territories. Whereas border security forces of transit countries are quite familiar with opium and heroin, huge gaps have been noticed when it comes to knowledge about chemical precursors, especially in Central Asian countries. For example, according to the UNODC report Precursor Control on Central Asia's borders with China, "The level of precursor knowledge is low amongst Kyrgyz law enforcement officials. Even in Kyrgyzstan's DCA, which is the lead national agency in precursor control, senior officers report that precursor knowledge is not yet adequate".¹⁵¹ The same can be said also about the Tajik law enforcement officials.¹⁵²

In addition to the lack of proper knowledge about the chemical precursors, law enforcement authorities in the Central Asia region does not seem to give it the proper importance and does not seem to acknowledge the necessity of improving the efforts on this matter. According to the UNODC report Precursor Control

¹⁴⁹ Eastern Partnership, Integrated Border Management Capacity Building Project, <http://www.eap-ibm-capacitybuilding.eu/en/about/project-results>

¹⁵⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Outcome Document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem New York, 19-21 April 2016", United Nations, New York, 2016, page 20 para. (m)

¹⁵¹ United Nations Office on Crime and Drugs, Regional Office for Central Asia, Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, page 15

¹⁵² United Nations Office on Crime and Drugs, Regional Office for Central Asia, Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, page 19

on Central Asia's borders with China, "As in Kazakhstan, detecting and stopping precursor trafficking is not a priority for Kyrgyz officials [...].For example, the Chief of the Counter-Narcotics section of the Osh City Police did not believe that its officers had any desire or ability to investigate precursor trafficking. This essentially means that law enforcement personnel are not able (or willing?) to enforce laws they have been ordered to".¹⁵³ As already mentioned in this thesis, chemical precursors, such as acetic anhydride, have an extensive legal use in industrial factories and often are diverged from the legal trade toward its illicit use in converting opium into heroin. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are three Central Asian countries (and important transit countries for opiates trafficking) that have long porous border with China (1,533 km, 858 km, 414 km respectively, see the map below) which has huge and well developed industrial and chemical factories.

Figure 3: Central Asia's borders with China



Source: Precursor Control on Central Asia's borders with China

¹⁵³ United Nations Office on Crime and Drugs, Regional Office for Central Asia, Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, page 16

Long porous borders with an industrial power such as China definitely poses a threat in terms of diversion and smuggling of precursors heading for Afghanistan's drug industry, though the above-mentioned Central Asian countries point to the fact that the majority of precursors trafficked into Afghanistan comes from its South: India and Pakistan. Even if enormous quantities of precursors are actually smuggled into Afghanistan from India and Pakistan, Central Asian countries would certainly benefit from enhanced technical assistance and knowledge in detecting and stopping the trafficking of chemical precursors from China. As well, in the framework of the development of the Caucasus Route for heroin trafficking, we should be aware of the fact that this route could be used as a corridor also for precursors trafficking. Thus, in the overall picture of developing national capacities of the countries along the Caucasus Route, proper space and attention should also be given to potential precursor trafficking through the region. This can help in having comprehensive counter-narcotics efforts in these countries at the national level. Enhancing at best national capacities in fighting drug trafficking is important in all countries affected by opiates trafficking from Afghanistan, but in the Caucasus region is particularly needed given the difficult relations at the regional level and the consequent low level of cooperation in all domains and particularly in the organized crime/drug trafficking area. Accordingly, training of law enforcement officials on and efforts in countering the trafficking of chemical precursors (together with the other national initiatives underlined above) should be encouraged at least at the national level in the countries of the Caucasus region.

2. Regional level

Improvements at the national level should not come in isolation and as an end in itself. Progress at the national level in countering organized crime and drug trafficking is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to successfully and efficiently fighting organized crime activities. There must be a follow-up at the regional level given the transnational nature of most of the organized crime activities and of drug trafficking in particular. Regional cooperation though, is not always simple, especially on matters that touches upon security issues of a country. Cooperation among states on transnational crime imply the necessity to first overcome political and diplomatic issues and then the sharing of sensitive information and the need for a significant amount of personal trust between law enforcement officials. These elements are not easy to find also among countries with good neighbourly relations, let alone between countries that have economic, political, ethnic, territorial etc. disputes. A good example of how challenging this type of cooperation might be is the European Police Office (EUROPOL). EUROPOL is the European agency that fights crime in the EU countries and it is composed by unites of law enforcement officials of the 28 countries of the EU, which are the link between EUROPOL and the respective law enforcement agencies of each EU country. EUROPOL as it is now has had a slow evolution, starting from the first proposal to have an European Police in 1991. At that time the Maastricht Treaty was being discussed and

EUROPOL has been included in the treaty though with a very modest role in coordinating the sharing of information between EU countries. After the Maastricht Treaty officially came into force, the slow process of ratifying the EUROPOL Convention began and led to EUROPOL formally taking up its duties only in 1999. In 2010 EUROPOL has been reformed as a full EU agency which increased its powers to collect criminal data and information. The brief EUROPOL history described above is an indicator of how difficult collaboration on criminal-related matters is even among states that collaborate extensively in other domains, as it is the case of EU countries. It took decades for the European countries to only arrive at the proposal of building such an institution and then almost two decades to transform it into a full EU agency. In spite of the difficulties met along its creation and evolution process, EUROPOL still remains, nowadays, as the most structured and complete form of regional cooperation on criminal matters, having a Executive Director appointed by the Council of the European Union (in this particular case by the Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs of the EU countries) and it is divided into three departments: operations, governance and capabilities department. EUROPOL's budget, which is part of the overall EU budget, is approved by both the Council and the European Parliament. In addition to that, EUROPOL is the result of direct negotiations between the Member- States, without a third party playing the role of a neutral mediator between the countries. That has been possible because of the particular relationship that links the EU Member-States.

Another example of successful regional cooperation is the Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre (SELEC). This organization is composed by twelve member states in South-Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Turkey) that collaborate "in combating trans-border organized crime, terrorism and trafficking in human beings and goods".¹⁵⁴ SELEC has been in place since 2011 and it is the successor of the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) Centre that has been functional for twelve years before being transformed into SELEC.¹⁵⁵ As EUROPOL, SELEC is an example of a very structured regional organization on criminal matters, though with a different level of integration and with less sovranational elements compared to EUROPOL. SELEC is composed by the Council, which is the highest decision-making body, consisting of high-level representatives of the Member-States; the Secretariat, composed by the Director General, the Directors and the SELEC staff; the National Units, composed of Liaison Officers and National Focal Points; and the Task Forces, composed by SELEC Member States law enforcement representatives. Both the Director General and the Directors are elected by the Council for 4 and 3 years respectively. The SELEC budget is established on an annual basis and

¹⁵⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, <http://www.mfa.gov.rs/en/foreign-policy/eu/regional-initiatives/selec>

¹⁵⁵ Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre, <http://www.selec.org/m106/About+SELEC>

financed mainly through contributions from Member-States. SECI Centre first and as a consequence SELEC are the result of agreement between the Member-States with the decisive mediation of the United States government through its special envoy of the Department of State for the region of South-East Europe (SEE), Richard Schifter, who first proposed, in 1996, and then strongly advocated for the creation of the SECI Centre which finally has been established in 1999. The mediation has been necessary given the high levels of ethnic tensions among the countries of the Balkan region in the nineties. Notwithstanding the ethnic tensions, the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the subsequent Yugoslav wars, thanks to the US mediation and the strong support of other actors such as the European Union, SECI Centre became operative in combating trans-border crimes and in helping with the stabilization of the SEE region, demonstrating that cooperation, even under such circumstances, is not only possible but it can help overcome distrust and be a first step in the normalization of the relations among Member-States. This initiative has been developing throughout the years into one of the most successful initiatives in the region, resisting to geopolitical changes (particularly to the Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence and to the entrance of some of the SELEC countries into the European Union) and to the never-completely-settled ethnic tensions in the region. SELEC has become a reference point in the region for data, statistics and information on trans-border crimes in the SEE region, as it is highlighted by the collaboration with UNODC. This collaboration has been already quite productive and has led to some useful results in terms of research, collection and validation of data and the publication of important reports regarding organized crime activities in South-Eastern Europe, such as the 2015 Report on "Drug Money: the illicit proceeds of opiates trafficked on the Balkan route".

Important regional initiatives have been carried out also in the geographical areas situated more closely to Afghanistan, namely Central Asia and the Golden Crescent. One of them is the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for Combating Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors (CARICC). It was formed in 2009 between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and it is a law enforcement/intelligence coordination body. The purpose of this organization is to provide the legal framework and mechanism for information sharing, cooperation on operational activities and analysis. CARICC's structure is similar to that of SELEC, though not equally complex and with even less sovranational elements. There is the Council of National Coordinators of CARICC composed by the heads of the competent coordination body of each state and the Director of the Centre and it is the governing body; the Director which is appointed every two years on a rotational basis with the approval of the Heads of the member states based on recommendations of the Council; the deputy/deputies of the Director follow the same procedure of appointment and can not be a citizen of the same country as the Director; the Liaison Officers of the states parties which are the link between CARICC and the respective national law enforcement authorities.

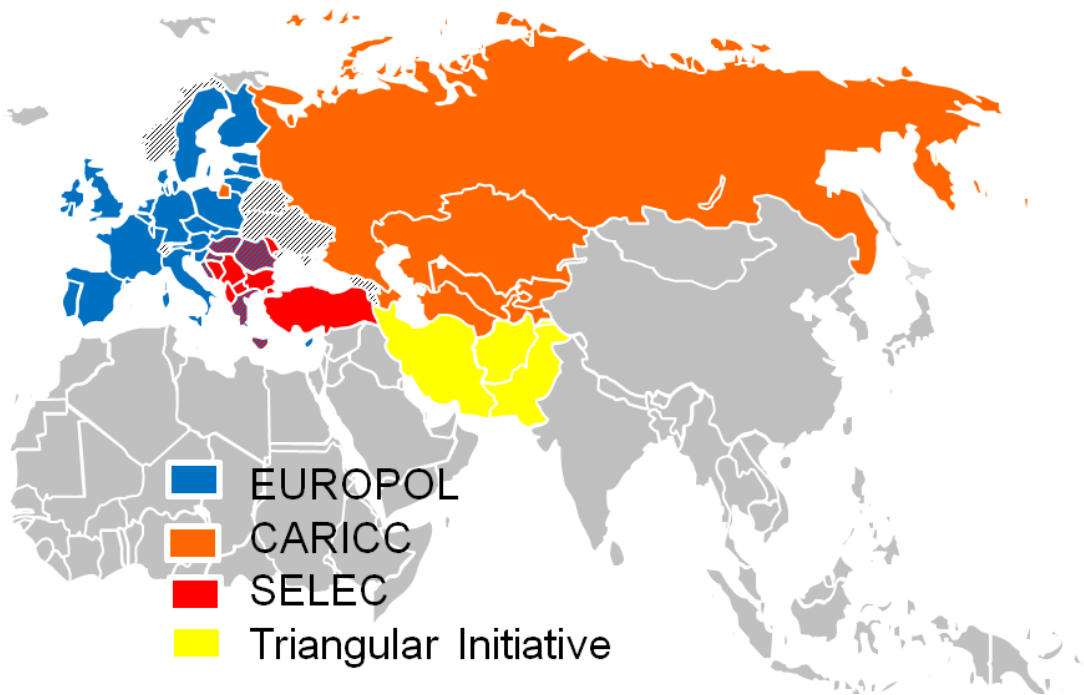
CARICC's budget is composed by donations of several EU countries (among which Italy), Canada, USA, Japan, Kazakhstan, Turkey. As for SELEC, CARICC has been established thanks to the initiative and strong support of a third party which played the role of the mediator between the countries, namely UNODC. UNODC's mediation has been crucial given the mistrust some Central Asian countries have toward multilateralism and regional cooperation. Uzbekistan for example is well known for its preference of the bilateral rather than the multilateral approach in foreign policy and as a consequence it did not always follow coherently its decisions on regional and international cooperation. For instance, in 1999 Uzbekistan joined the GUAM organization, which became the GUUAM until Uzbekistan withdrew in 2005. The same happened with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), an intergovernmental military alliance between Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. The CSTO is the successor of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) signed in 1992 between Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (after a year Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus joined). In 2002 the treaty was renewed under the current name by all members expect for Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan. While Azerbaijan and Georgia never joined the alliance again for obvious reasons, Uzbekistan joined it again in 2006 but withdrew from it in 2012. Having this in regard and adding all the other sources of disputes among Central Asian countries, the establishment and functioning of CARICC can be considered an important success from the regional cooperation point of view.

As it can be understood from the analysis of these three types of regional cooperation initiatives, mainly three elements must be taken into consideration for their successful initiation and functioning: the time factor, the political will of potential member-states to put in place such initiatives and, in most of the cases, the need for a third party perceived as neutral that mediates between the countries. Out of these three, the political will of countries is the most difficult element to have. As already said, the most common reason for not cooperating is some kind of dispute, being it territorial, ethnic, economic etc. among the parties. Sometimes though, cooperation is hindered also by the lack of knowledge on how regional cooperation can be put in place and how it can work or by the inadequate understanding of the transnational nature of organized crime activities and drug trafficking. In this domain, international actors such as UNODC play a crucial role. UNODC is the perfect third neutral actor that can help countries setting up regional initiatives for cooperation on organized crime activities. Not only UNODC's extensive expertise and longstanding engagement in facilitating regional and inter-regional cooperation have already proven crucial in the building up of regional entities and in helping countries filling in their knowledge gaps on transnational organized crime, UNODC is also in the right position to expose countries to already existing cooperation platforms, offering the states different "packages" and options of regional mechanisms for cooperation, from the EUROPOL model to the SELEC or CARICC model.

Even though, regional cooperation is possible also in scenarios characterized but some elements of friction, as highlighted by the examples above, some countries might still not want to have a structured organization dealing with such sensitive and security-related issues. In these cases, another type of regional cooperation, less structured and more specific, is possible. An example of this type of initiative is the so-called Triangular Initiative (TI) between Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan (the Golden Crescent) also coordinated by UNODC. The TI was launched in 2007 and it has been implemented through the creation of a law enforcement/intelligence coordination body on drug trafficking operations, in Tehran, called Joint Planning Cell (JPC) and several Border Liaison Offices (BLOs). It does not contemplate a secretariat, a governing body or a director (another example of such an initiative is the AKT Initiative between Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan¹⁵⁶). It is simply a coordination platform for law enforcement officials of the countries involved and for specific joint operations and data sharing. Even though this mechanism is not functioning at its maximum potential given difficult relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan especially on the Taliban issue, it is still remarkable that such an initiative has been possible to set up between countries that previously would not even seat at the same table. In my opinion, the Triangular Initiative is a good model that potentially could be replicated in the Caucasus region, of course with the strong support by international actors such as UNODC and the European Union. Russia also should eventually support such an initiative given its common borders with Georgia and Azerbaijan, its close ties with and interest in the Caucasus region, especially with Armenia which is linked to Russia through various regional initiatives such a CSTO and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), the threat posed by the growing drug trafficking trend through the region in terms of destabilization of the region that can spread to the North Caucasus and increased supply of the Russian heroin market.

If we visualize all these regional initiatives related to countering drug trafficking from Afghanistan on a map, we can clearly see the gaps that should be filled in (see map below).

¹⁵⁶ The AKT Initiative is part of the UNODC Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries and was launched in 2012 with the purpose of strengthening cross-border cooperation in law enforcement and legal matters and promoting joint operations as well as information sharing between Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan at the starting point of the Northern Route.



As it can be observed on the map, important transit countries (Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia) for drug trafficking are left out of every relevant regional initiatives analysed above. In particular, along the Caucasus Route, countries like Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia are not included in regional platforms for cooperation in countering drug trafficking from Afghanistan and given their growing importance in this activity, I think that this fact will further facilitate drug trafficking through these countries. In addition to that, as already mentioned and as it can be seen from the map, no regional cooperation mechanism is in place among the Caucasus countries. In the region, only Azerbaijan is cooperating with Central Asian countries and Russia through the CARICC platform.

3. International level

The lack of participation of these countries in regional initiatives against drug trafficking is partially offset by their participation at the international level. Armenia and Belarus for instance are Member-States of the already-mentioned CSTO. The aim of this military alliance is the “strengthening of peace, international and regional security and stability, protection of independence on a collective basis, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Member States”.¹⁵⁷ However, given that the CSTO Member-States view drug trafficking as one of the primary national threats to their security and to regional stability, article 8 of the CSTO treaty states that “The Member States shall co-ordinate and unite their efforts at struggle with international terrorism and extremism, illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances, weapon, organized transnational crime, illegal migration and other menaces to safety of the

¹⁵⁷ Article 3 of the CSTO treaty.

Member States”. In particular, the Russian Federation considers drug trafficking from Afghanistan as one of the major strategic threats to its security.¹⁵⁸

As a consequence, CSTO contribution to anti-narcotics efforts in the Member-States has been remarkable. In 2003, the member-states decided to initiate an anti-narcotics operation called “Channel” within the CSTO framework. The coordinated efforts of the Member-States through operation Channel has led to the seizure of 10 tons and 702.2 kg of narcotic drugs, psychotropic and strong substances in 2004, 11 tons and 251.7 kg in 2005, 23 tons and 993.5 kg in 2006 (plus 540 tons of chemical precursors), 27 tons and 815,2 kg in 2007,¹⁵⁹ almost 16 tons in 2011.¹⁶⁰ CSTO Member-States efforts in countering drug trafficking through their territories is continuing. In 2014 “the summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), attended by the Presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan, adopted the CSTO anti-drug strategy for the period 2015-2020” and in 2015 “the heads of the drug law enforcement agencies of CSTO member countries discussed the situation in Afghanistan and decided to continue their cooperation in tackling the manufacture and distribution of new psychoactive substances and to prepare a plan of action for the period 2016-2017”.¹⁶¹ In addition to that, other concrete anti-narcotics operations has led to more drug seizures in the countries involved. For instance, according to the International Narcotics Control Board Report of 2015 “Large-scale international counter-narcotics operations were carried out in 2014 by the member States of CSTO and Afghanistan, in cooperation with the Federal Drug Control Service of the Russian Federation. As a result of those operations, 16.5 tons of narcotic drugs were seized”.¹⁶² Additionally, “the counter-narcotics operation “Channel Patrol”, conducted on 18-22 May 2015, resulted in the seizure of more than 12 tons of narcotics, including over 7 tons of opium, approximately 3 tons of hashish, more than 1 ton of heroin and 126 kg of cannabis herb”.¹⁶³

As regards Ukraine and Georgia, though regionally not integrated into any initiative and are not part of the CSTO, they do participate in some relevant UNODC global programmes and initiatives addressing organized crime and drug trafficking. Particular relevance in this area has the already mentioned

¹⁵⁸ Шапиро Н. И. (N. I. Shapiro) , Конфликты и проблемы безопасности (Conflicts and security issues), page 42

¹⁵⁹ Collective Security Treaty Organization, Press Release, <http://www.odkb.gov.ru/e/azkk.htm>

¹⁶⁰ Andreev A., In the framework of the CSTO ‘Channel’ operation, 16 tons of narcotics were seized in one week, RIA Novosti, 13 December 2011, https://ria.ru/beznarko_danger/20111213/515787278.html

¹⁶¹ International Narcotics Control Board, Report 2015, page 80

¹⁶² International Narcotics Control Board, Report 2015, page 86

¹⁶³ International Narcotics Control Board, Report 2015, page 82

Container Control Programme (CCP), implemented by UNODC in partnership with the World Custom Organization (WCO). The project was launched in 2003 and aims at assisting the governments to create sustainable enforcement structures in selected sea ports in order to minimize the risk of shipping containers being exploited for illicit activities through the creation of port control units (PCUs) and training activities. Georgia (as well as Azerbaijan and Iran along the Caucasus Route) is a full member of this programme and the only country on the Black Sea to have operational PCUs: "one at Poti with seven team members which was established in 2012 and increased its presence at Batumi Sea Port, focusing on transit and export shipments and ferry traffic to the European Union and Ukraine; the other at Tbilisi where the PCU was established formally in April 2015 and has a team of ten, consisting of officers from the Georgia Revenue Service, Patrol Police and Criminal Police".¹⁶⁴ Ukraine is not yet fully participating into this programme, since it has not any operational PCUs on its territory. But trained personnel in Ukraine as well as Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova "have access to ContainerCOMM¹⁶⁵ with the operational units in Georgia using it regularly". In addition to that, CCP provided, in 2015, theoretical training to 19 Ukrainian participants and "efforts to implement the CCP in Ukraine continued through constructive discussions with the country's CCP Steering Committee".¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, besides the CCP, Ukraine's cooperation with UNODC is extensive through its Office in the country. UNODC continues its operational activities on HIV/AIDS, collaborates on exchange of information and best practices and helps in the drafting of legislation and design of policies related to combat drug trafficking, drug prevention and rehabilitation of drug users. For instance, "in June 2013, UNODC Office in Ukraine signed a MoU with the Inter-agency Scientific-Research Centre on the Problems of Combating Organized Crime under the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine [...] with the aim of facilitating collaboration on key areas of interest related to UNODC mandate, promoting regular dialogue and the exchange of information, data collection and the dissemination of best practices and tools".¹⁶⁷ In the drafting of legislation and design of policies areas, UNODC has helped Ukraine in preparing, in 2013, a new Strategy of the national policy on drugs for the period until 2020 and has submitted, in 2015 a set of

¹⁶⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime-World Customs Organization Container Control Programme , Report 2015, page 22

¹⁶⁵ ContainerCOMM, the WCO's real-time communication tool for information exchange and cooperation that facilitates container targeting between the PCUs. The system also facilitates the global communication between Customs container targeting officers and risk profilers in a host of countries that are not part of the CCP.

¹⁶⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime-World Customs Organization Container Control Programme , Report 2015, page 22

¹⁶⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Eleventh Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Europe 2015, page 11

proposals to be comprised in the Ukrainian Presidential decree called "National Comprehensive Plan of effective measures to combat drug trafficking, drug prevention, social rehabilitation of drug users".¹⁶⁸

Besides these specific countries, international cooperation in countering drug trafficking from Afghanistan includes several other relevant initiatives. The most comprehensive initiative in this regard as concerning the number of participants is the Paris Pact Initiative (PPI), a partnership to combat illicit trafficking in opiates originating in Afghanistan. The PPI is made up of 58 partner countries (see the image below), among which all the countries on the Caucasus Route included the major destination countries for heroin and 23 organizations, among which the CARICC, CSTO, EU, EUROPOL, SELEC, UNODC etc.



The PPI serves as a consensus building and coordination platform in combating opiates trafficking from Afghanistan, opiates consumption and related issues in the countries touched by this matter. In UNODC's words, "the Paris Pact functions as an essential bridge between political commitment at the highest

¹⁶⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Eleventh Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Europe 2015, page 11

international levels and the prioritization of technical assistance interventions on the ground".¹⁶⁹ In 2012 the Vienna Declaration, which is the outcome document of the Third Ministerial Conference of the Paris Pact Partners, has been adopted. The document represents the guide for the countries participating in the PPI with its four pillar on strengthening and implementing regional initiatives; detecting and blocking financial flows linked to illicit traffic in opiates; preventing the diversion of precursor chemicals used in illicit opiates manufacturing in Afghanistan; and reducing drug abuse and dependence through a comprehensive approach. The consensus building process takes place during the Ministerial Conferences, whereas the coordination mechanism is given by the UNODC global programme called GLOY09 and which is currently in its IV Phase of implementation of the four Vienna Declaration pillars. The importance of this initiative is given by the recognition of the states of a shared responsibility in combating this crime and by the acknowledgement of the common threat represented by the Afghan opiates to each Paris Pact partner. The PPI can be considered the framework within which all the other initiatives on countering drug trafficking from Afghanistan take place, from research to intelligence sharing and multilateral operations and from capacity development to inter-regional cooperation.

Taking into consideration the capacity building and development process in particular, I placed it within the national level analysis. However, the national efforts in improving capacities in countering drug trafficking does not exclude international cooperation and intervention on this matter. On the contrary, many countries along the opiate routes do not have the resources, both financial and in terms of technical knowledge, needed to properly develop their capacities on this issue. One relevant initiative in this regard is the Domodedovo Project, named after the academy where the initiative takes place (the Domodedovo Training Centre, Moscow). This project is provided under the UNODC Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries by UNODC itself in partnership with Russia and Japan. The project aims at giving specialized trainings to Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. "The training sessions [...] are delivered by leading experts from the Domodedovo Training Centre, the Russian Ministry of the Interior, the Russian Federal Drug Control Service, the Russian Federal Customs Service, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, with the participation of senior experts from the Narcotics Control Department and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan".¹⁷⁰ Currently the project has been focusing on the Afghan law enforcement authorities, given the low drug-seizure capacity of Afghanistan. However, during the second phase of the project, the training sessions have expanded to include also the five Central Asian countries. Another international project

¹⁶⁹United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Paris Pact Initiative, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/paris-pact-initiative.html>

¹⁷⁰United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC, Japan and Russia welcome new phase in partnership for Afghanistan and Central Asia, 11 December 2015, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2015/December/unodc--japan-and-russia-welcome-new-phase-in-partnership-for-afghanistan-and-central-asia.html>

helping countries to developing national capacities to fight organized crime activities and drug trafficking is the already mentioned EU-funded project on Integrated Border Management within the European Eastern Partnership.

4. Inter-regional level

Another element of the Paris Pact Initiative is the emphasis put on inter-regional cooperation. National, regional and international cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking from Afghanistan analyzed throughout this chapter of the thesis should be in place for different reasons, though with the aim of achieving the same result: stopping opiates trafficking. The national level is necessary in order to empower the source and each transit country against this organized crime activity as a precondition to develop strong cooperation at the other levels; the regional level is needed because as criminal networks cross borders to traffic drugs so must do the counter-narcotics efforts; the international level is required since stopping drug trafficking is a shared responsibility and it affects all countries worldwide and because, as highlighted in the previous paragraph, in some cases the "national level" needs support from the "international one".

What is missing in this picture is the inter-regional level. The latter is essential because regional networks, once created, can develop their maximum potential only through connecting and coordinating with other regional networks, thus making anti-drugs efforts truly global. This connection between regional platforms can help tackling not only drug trafficking but other organized crime activities as well and in particular can help tracking the Illicit Financial Flows (IFF) and stopping the money laundering process of the proceeds deriving from illegal activities. Drug trafficking and the IFF are transnational in their nature. They transit countries, cross borders and go from region to region. Thus, promoting a horizontal cooperation between regional entities and law enforcement authorities can help in catching up with the criminal groups, who are already cooperating at the inter-regional level, and, accordingly, in addressing more effectively organized crime activities.

I have already mentioned the inter-regional project CRIMJUST concerning the cocaine route. An additional project worth referring to in this context is the UNODC global programme Building Effective Networks Against Transnational Organized Crime (BENATOC). Based on the concept of inter-regional cooperation in order to achieve a truly global response to organized crime activities and drug trafficking in particular, UNODC launched it in 2015. The programme "aims to improve intelligence-sharing and enhance capacities to collect and analyze data; promote a network of law enforcement training and educational institutions; strengthen capacities to target illicit financial flows; and enhance maritime

cooperation"¹⁷¹ and its primary focus will be on the Networking the Networks (NtN) initiative. This initiative was first launched in 2013 in Istanbul and it "aims to establish a criminal intelligence network in an innovative approach to confronting illicit drugs and crime across regions".¹⁷² At the second meeting organized under the UNODC's NtN Initiative and co-hosted by the Gulf Cooperation Council's Criminal Intelligence Centre to Combat Drugs (GCICCD)¹⁷³ in Doha in 2014, experts from Central and Southeast Asia, Eastern Africa, Europe, as well as countries of the Triangular Initiative (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan), the Gulf States and international agencies such as INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization met and discussed possibilities of cooperation. Furthermore, the NtN Initiative has already brought together regional and international entities such as CARICC, Joint Planning Cell, GCICCD, as well as Europol, INTERPOL, the WCO, ASEANAPOL, the Egmont Group, the OSCE, and others. The NtN Initiative serves as a platform for putting together experts from different countries and organizations, for sharing of information and good practices and, importantly, for the building of mutual and personal trust among the participants. In particular, within the broader NtN Initiative, in 2015, Azerbaijan hosted the initial meeting of the Network of the Law Enforcement Training Institutions (LE TrainNet), whereas India hosted financial intelligence bodies to create a network designed to combat illicit financial flows. In line with these meetings, the networking of networks should not only happen at geographic level, but also in terms of functions and themes. In fact, in the framework of the NtN Initiative, all actors and entities involved in countering organized crime activities (police, judges, prosecutors, border security authorities etc.) should be included. Moreover, the NtN can be a useful platform where to exchange best practices and investigation methods on new and emerging trends in organized crime activities and drug trafficking. For instance, according to the World Drug Report 2016, "Drug supply via the Internet, including via the anonymous online marketplace, the "dark net", may have increased in recent years. This raises concerns in terms of the potential of the "dark net" to attract new populations of users by facilitating access to drugs in both developed and developing countries".¹⁷⁴ Many countries are unprepared to face such a new trend as regards both financial resources and methods of investigation. The NtN, by bringing together experts and law enforcement officials from different countries that can exchange information, best practices and methods of investigation, can help with this matter. The misuse of Internet for drug-related

¹⁷¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, New UNODC programme builds greater connectivity among global partners to fight drugs and crime, 16 December 2015, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2015/December/new-unodc-programme-builds-greater-connectivity-among-global-partners-to-fight-drugs-and-crime.html>

¹⁷² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Networking the Networks to fight opiate trafficking, 14 October 2014, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2014/October/networking-the-networks-to-fight-opiate-trafficking.html>

¹⁷³ Gulf Cooperation Council's Criminal Intelligence Centre to Combat Drugs (GCICCD) was launched, with the help of UNODC, in 2007 among the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait. The GCICCD is another regional coordination centre for anti-drug trafficking operations among Gulf countries whose future is uncertain given the recent negative developments in political and diplomatic relations among the Gulf states.

¹⁷⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "World Drug Report", United Nations, New York, 2016, page XII

activities has been recognized also by the international community as it can be inferred from the paragraph (p) page 20 of the UNGASS 2016 Outcome Document that recommends to "Support research, data collection, analysis of evidence and sharing of information and strengthen law enforcement, criminal justice and legal responses, as well as international cooperation, to prevent and counter drug-related criminal activities using the Internet, consistent with relevant and applicable law."

However, one big challenge in setting up inter-regional initiatives, especially the ones like NtN which can be considered a form of South-South cooperation, is to raise adequate and sustainable funding. In fact, while NtN and BENATOC have received the political support of several Member-States, identifying sustainable funding resources is proving elusive. Considering the fact that donors are usually more eager to fund projects focused on specific geographical areas or themes, a possible solution to this would be to present a clearer strategic vision to donors and to focus on the partnership with organizations with a global reach. Overcoming the obstacle of the funding would mean setting up something innovative and needed for efficient and effective counter-narcotics efforts. Additionally, there is another potential positive spill-over effect from participation in inter-regional initiatives such as the NtN. For some countries this could be a first step in considering the possibility of a regional cooperation. NtN is serving as a platform for trust building among law enforcement agencies and if fully implemented could serve as a showcase for promoting cooperation among states.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have tried to highlight how opiates trafficking from Afghanistan is having severe consequences worldwide, that notwithstanding increasing attention addressed toward the spread of the new psychotropic substances, should remain a priority on the international agenda. In this context, I have explored mainly three topics within the general topic of opiates trafficking from Afghanistan: the threats posed by this criminal activity primarily in terms of its health and security implications, the case-study analysis of the current and future development of the Caucasus Route and the mechanisms of cooperation at different levels in countering opiates trafficking from Afghanistan, with a special focus on the countries along the Caucasus Route.

Through the first topic (Threats posed by drug trafficking from Afghanistan toward Europe and Russia) I wanted to underline the grave implications, in terms of health, of opium and most of all heroin abuse and of the danger to the national, regional and international security. The overall impact of heroin use in terms of health consequences continues to be devastating, in terms of overall losses in the general well-being of the societies, the potential spread of communicable diseases associated with the injection of heroin and of its share in premature deaths caused by overdose. As concerns the security implications, I wanted to draw attention to all the cases in which opiates trafficking from Afghanistan contributes to increase the violence levels and to criminalize already vulnerable societies and to finance non-state actors among which terrorist and rebel groups.

The first topic serves as a showcase of the severe impact and implications of opiates trafficking and consumption in source, transit and destinations countries and regions long affected by this organized crime activity in order to better understand the potential repercussions on new countries and regions that emerge as prominent transit areas for opiates trafficking. In this context, I have chosen to analyze the current and future development of the Caucasus Route, which is the second chapter of this thesis. This relatively new route has emerged in 2014 when important heroin seizures were made in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, as a viable corridor for opiates trafficking from Afghanistan and it has concrete possibilities to further develop. The choice to analyze this particular route has been dictated, first of all, by the believe that strategic and future-oriented analysis and research are decisive elements in countering organized crime activities and drug trafficking in particular. Second of all, the potential of this route to develop and supply both the Russian and the European markets represents a common threat for both of them and at the same time, a possible ground for collaboration. I have demonstrated, through graphs, charts and tables that, since 2014, the trend in drug seizures in the Caucasus region has confirmed the emergence of this route.

Furthermore, I have also analyzed four possible reasons behind this development which I believe all played a role in allowing the surfacing of the Caucasus Route. First of all, the effects of the Syrian war in particular on Turkey has undermined the opiates trafficking in the region. Turkey has concentrated its security efforts on its South-Eastern borders due to uncontrolled refugee flows and military operations against the PKK. Given that the South-Eastern border of Turkey is a crucial point in the transiting of opiates from Afghanistan and that the PKK is notoriously partly financing its activities through opiates trafficking, the increasing attention given to this particular geographic area has possibly caused traffickers to seek for new transit points to by-pass the Iranian-Turkish border. The Caucasus region, given its proximity and favourable environment for organized crime activities, is a perfect candidate in "helping" traffickers to circumvent the Iranian-Turkish border.

A second reason which can explain both the emergence of the Caucasus Route and its possible future development is the Ukrainian crisis. Ukraine, prior to the events of 2014, was already used by criminal networks for drug trafficking of any kind. Factors like its geographical position between Europe and Russia, high levels of corruption, political instability, under-regulated financial system which facilitates the money laundering process of illegal proceeds, availability of modern infrastructures but weak capacities to properly control them, have contributed to the flourishing of organized crime activities and drug trafficking in Ukraine. The conflict in Eastern Ukraine with the instability, the rise of organized crime activities it produces throughout the country, the opportunities it opens for deeper cooperation between Ukrainian and Russian criminals, the creation of separatist areas not internationally recognized within the official Ukrainian borders, have deepen existing and added new reasons for traffickers to exploit the Ukrainian territory. In the context of the development of the Caucasus Route, Ukraine is, because of its geographical position (common borders with the Russian Federation and the European Union and ports on the Black Sea that connects it to the Caucasus, Turkey and South-Eastern Europe), a perfect puzzle piece of this emerging route.

The third reason that I have identified is related to the recent developments in the Azeri-Iranian political, diplomatic and economic relations. In the past 2 years these two countries have started to expand their relations in various fields, among which the banking sector, customs, transit, infrastructure and between border regions of the two countries. As I have demonstrated through the example of the development of economic relations between Iran and Turkey, enhanced economic collaboration between countries highly affected by drug trafficking, can result in growing drug trafficking between the countries as traffickers will exploit the new opportunities given by improved economic relations. In particular, cooperation in the above-mentioned fields between Iran and Azerbaijan is especially sensitive for drug trafficking. While these and future positive developments between Azerbaijan and Iran relations are welcomed and

beneficial for both countries, the potential threat deriving by these progresses in terms of drug trafficking in the Caucasus region can not be ignored. Enhanced cooperation in these areas should be paralleled by collaboration in the organized crime/drug trafficking field or broadly speaking, in the security domain. However, such collaboration, despite some meetings on this regard, is still not in place while talks on the economic cooperation are proceeding.

The fourth factor that I believe has influenced and will influence the development of the Caucasus Route is linked to the internal dynamics of opium production in Afghanistan coupled with the increasing development of the Southern Route, which starts in Iran and/or Pakistan. Traditionally the Southern regions of Afghanistan, on the border with Iran and Pakistan, were the first in terms of opium cultivation and production. According to the latest opium survey in Afghanistan (2016) this fact hasn't changed. In addition to that, in 2016 the Badghis province, on the border with Turkmenistan (which in turn borders Iran), has become the second opium poppy-growing province in Afghanistan. Thus the traditional (Southern provinces) and recent (the Western Badghis province) internal dynamics of opium cultivation and production in Afghanistan coupled with the development of the Southern Route, led to the concentration of enormous quantities of opiates in Iran. Especially, as concerns the supply of the Russian market, this concentration of opiates in Iran makes it more convenient for traffickers to move the drugs further on the Caucasus Route rather than on the Northern Route.

Finally, the last part of the thesis has been dedicated to the analysis of the national, regional, international and inter-regional mechanisms of cooperation in countering drug trafficking originating from Afghanistan. The promotion of new and the enhancement of the already-existing mechanisms of cooperation are essential in successfully and effectively addressing drug trafficking. I have first focus on the national level, since I believe that strengthening national capacities in fighting drug trafficking is the pre-condition to have functional and effective cooperation at the other levels. From the national point of view I have identified several areas of improvement which can include the participation and involvement of international actors as well: upgrading the cooperation and coordination between national law enforcement authorities and between them and judicial institutions and involving CSOs in anti-corruption initiatives; investing in the capacity building process of national technical abilities in countering drug trafficking by, for instance, applying the Integrated Border Management concept; enhancing the knowledge on the trafficking of chemical precursors needed to proceed opium into heroin and highlighting the importance of stopping such trafficking as a necessary and essential part of anti-narcotics efforts.

To successfully combat organized crime activities and drug trafficking, improvements at the national level are a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Given the transnational nature of most of the organized crime activities and of drug trafficking in particular, there must be a follow-up at the regional level. In this thesis I have analysed several types of regional initiatives dealing with drug trafficking (EUROPOL, SELEC, CARICC, Triangular Initiative), comparing their different structure and highlighting the lack of regional cooperation among the Caucasus countries and the non-inclusion of Ukraine, which is a crucial transit country for heroin trafficking, in any regional initiative analysed. I have also pointed out how the lack of regional cooperation between countries along the Caucasus Route is an advantage for traffickers and I have as well hypothesize that the potentially best type of regional cooperation between the Caucasus countries is the one similar to the Triangular Initiative format, with no director, no secretariat and no governing body. It is simply a coordination platform for law enforcement officials of the countries involved and for specific joint operations and data sharing.

The lack of participation in regional initiatives against drug trafficking of some of the crucial countries along the Caucasus Route is partially offset by their participation at the international level. Armenia, for instance, is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) which through the years has greatly contributed to anti-narcotics efforts of its Member-States. As concerns Ukraine and Georgia, though regionally not integrated into any initiative and are not part of the CSTO, they do participate in some relevant UNODC global programmes and initiatives addressing organized crime and drug trafficking. Georgia for example is a full member of the UNODC Container Control Programme (CCP) which seeks to enhance countries' capacities in preventing the exploitation of commercial containers for illicit purposes and in detecting those containers carrying illegal products in seaports. Additionally, continuous efforts are made to implement the CCP also Ukrainian seaports on the Black Sea. Furthermore, Ukraine-UNODC cooperation is quite extensive ranging from operational activities on HIV/AIDS and collaboration on exchange of information and best practices to provision of technical help in the drafting of legislation and design of policies related to combat drug trafficking, drug prevention and rehabilitation of drug users. Besides these specific countries, there is the Paris Pact Initiative (PPI) which is a platform for consensus building and coordination in fighting opiates trafficking from Afghanistan, opiates consumption and related issues. This initiative is comprises 58 countries (among which all the countries along the Caucasus Route) and 23 organizations (among which all the regional and international organizations mentioned in this thesis). Finally, international cooperation can be intertwined to and participate in the national capacity building process. An example of this is the Domodedovo Project, which is a project that aims at giving specialized trainings to Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. It is implemented under the UNODC Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries in partnership with Russia and Japan.

The last level of cooperation analysed in this thesis is the inter-regional one. Inter-regional cooperation is a crucial element in successfully combating transnational crimes. The regional level is necessary though still not sufficient given that drug trafficking is not only trans-border but also trans-region. Regional networks, once created, can develop their maximum potential only through connecting and coordinating with other regional networks, thus making anti-narcotics efforts truly global. In this context, UNODC has launched, in 2015, an innovative programme called Building Effective Networks Against Transnational Organized Crime, known as BENATOC. The programme's objective is to promote inter-regional cooperation in the fields of intelligence-sharing, collection and analysis of data, law enforcement training and education institutions collaboration, illicit financial flows and maritime cooperation. Its main focus will be on the Networking the Networks (NtN) Initiative. This initiative was launched in 2013 in Istanbul and aims at establishing a criminal intelligence network to combat organized across the regions. The NtN initiative has already managed to bring together regional and international entities such as CARICC, Joint Planning Cell, GCICCD, as well as Europol, INTERPOL, the WCO, ASEANAPOL, the Egmont Group, the OSCE, and others. However, the main problem with the NtN initiative and BENATOC is to raise adequate and sustainable funding because states are usually more eager to fund projects focused on specific geographical areas or themes. In order to overcome this obstacle, a clearer strategic vision should be presented to donors regarding the activities of BENATOC and the NtN Initiative.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Afghanistan Times, “Mounting insecurity in Badghis: Protesters demand dismissal of governor, security chief”, 11 May 2015, <http://afghanistantimes.af/mounting-insecurity-in-badghis-protesters-demand-dismissal-of-governor-security-chief/>

Anadolu Agency, Anti-drug drive against PKK ends in southeast Turkey, 4 July 2016, <http://aa.com.tr/en/turkey/anti-drug-drive-against-pkk-ends-in-southeast-turkey/602710>

Anadolu Agency, Anti-PKK operations to continue without break: Erdogan, 4 November 2015, <http://aa.com.tr/en/turkey/anti-pkk-operations-to-continue-without-break-erdogan/467522>

Anadolu Agency, Turkey: '31 PKK terrorists' killed in Hakkari operation, 5 November 2015, <http://aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-31-pkk-terrorists-killed-in-hakkari-operation/467906>

Andreev A., In the framework of the CSTO ‘Channel’ operation, 16 tons of narcotics were seized in one week, RIA Novosti, 13 December 2011, https://ria.ru/beznarko_danger/20111213/515787278.html

Annan, K. “Address At The Opening Of The Signing Conference For The United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime”, 12 December 2000, [unodc/treaties/CTOC/http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/speeches/speech_2000-12-12_1.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/speeches/speech_2000-12-12_1.html)

APA Holding, Seven PKK terrorists killed in SE Turkey, 10 March 2017, <http://en.apa.az/world-news/asia-news/seven-pkk-terrorists-killed-in-se-turkey.html>

Azerbaijan State Commission for Combating Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking, “National Annual Report on Drug Control”, 2015

Azernews, “Baku, UNICEF talk about drug trafficking in occupied territories”, 26 November 2013, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/61961.html>

Baker, N. “The Ferghana Valley: A Soviet Legacy faced with Climate Change”, Inventory of Conflict and Environment, no. 252, December 2011, <http://mandalaprojects.com/ice/ice-cases/ferghana.htm>

Bora, B., What is behind the hostility between Iran and Turkey?, Aljazeera, 26 February 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/02/hostility-iran-turkey-170225184418231.html>

British Broadcasting Corporation, “Nagorno-Karabakh fighting: Azerbaijan 'calls truce’”, BBC, 3 April 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35953916>

Buddenberg, D. and Byrd, W. (eds.) “Afghanistan's Drug Industry: Structure, Functioning, Dynamics and Implications for Counter-Narcotics Efforts”, UNODC, Vienna, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Afgh_drugindustry_Nov06.pdf

Bureau of international narcotics and law enforcement affairs, USA, 2016, <https://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2016/vol1/253316.htm>

Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I - Drug and Chemical Control”, United States Department of State, 2016, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/253655.pdf>

Cakan, S., Turkish military offensive kills 110 Kurdish militants in six days: security sources, 20 December 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-kurds-idUSKBN0U30G720151220>

Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre, “Weekly Summary on Drug Seizures: 29 May 2017- 4 June 2017”, CARICC, 2017

Center Intelligence Agency, The World FactBook, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121119021206/https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>

Collective Security Treaty Organization, Press Release, <http://www.odkb.gov.ru/e/azkk.htm>

Collective Security Treaty Organization treaty, http://www.odkb-csto.org/documents/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=1896

Compendium of drug-related statistics concerning GUAM, March 2014, <http://www.guam-organization.org/attach/comp1.pdf>

Corriere Della Sera, “Droga a scuola: cresce il consumo di eroina tra i 15 enni”, 8 April 2016, http://www.corriere.it/cronache/16_aprile_08/droga-scuola-cresce-consumo-eroina-15enni-6aeb6b0c-fdb1-11e5-820b-500d9d51558a.shtml?refresh_ce-cp

Council of the European Union, “Regional Report on Central Asia”, 2016.

Daily Sabah, Fresh operations in s.eastern Turkey to destroy PKK’s cannabis fields, group’s largest source of income, 21 June 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2016/06/21/fresh-operations-in-seastern-turkey-to-destroy-pkks-cannabis-fields-groups-largest-source-of-income>

Daily Sabah, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway to boost commercial connectivity between Europe, Asia by June, 6 March 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2017/03/07/baku-tbilisi-kars-railway-to-boost-commercial-connectivity-between-europe-asia-by-june>

Daily Sabah, 4 PKK terrorists killed in counter-terror operations in eastern Turkey, 7 March 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/03/07/4-pkk-terrorists-killed-in-counter-terror-operations-in-eastern-turkey>

Daily Sabah, Senior PKK terrorists killed in operations last week, 10 April 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/04/11/senior-pkk-terrorists-killed-in-operations-last-week>

Daneshvar F., Azerbaijan, Iran mull security cooperation along borders, Trend News Agency, 10 March 2016, <http://en.trend.az/iran/politics/2505554.html>

Direzione Centrale per i Servizi Antidroga, “Relazione Annuale”, 2015, <http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/relazione-annuale-2015.pdf>

East West Institute, “Afghan Narcotrafficking: The State of Afghanistan's Borders”, April 2015, <https://www.eastwest.ngo/sites/default/files/ideas-files/Afghanistan-Borders.pdf>

Eastern Partnership, Integrated Border Management Capacity Building Project, <http://www.eap-ibm-capacitybuilding.eu/en/home>

Ekici B. and Unlu A., Increased Drug Trafficking from Iran, Ankara's Challenges, Middle East Quarterly, 2013, <http://www.meforum.org/3659/iran-turkey-drug-trafficking>

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, EU Drug Markets Report, A strategic analysis, 2013, http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/741/TD3112366ENC_406102.pdf

European Commission Press Release, Illicit drugs: EU report unveils new worrying trends in smuggling and consumption, 31 January 2013, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-73_en.htm

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, “The European Drug Report: Trends and Developments”, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016.

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction “EU Drug Markets Report: In-Depth Analysis”, EMCDDA–Europol Joint Publications, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016.

Gadimova N., Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia discuss co-op on ensuring border security, Azer News Agency, 14 March 2016, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/93991.html>

Galeotti, M. (ed.) *Global Crime Today: The Changing Face of Organised Crime*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005.

Galeotti, M. “Narcotics and Nationalism: Russian Drug Policies and Futures”, Foreign Policy at Brookings, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Galeotti-Russia-final.pdf>

Galeotti, M., Ukraine’s mob war, Foreign Policy, 1 May 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/05/01/ukraines-mob-war/>

Galeotti, M., How the Invasion of Ukraine Is Shaking Up the Global Crime Scene, 6 November 2014, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/how-the-invasion-of-ukraine-is-shaking-up-the-global-crime-scene-1106

Gordonua.com, The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia announced the arrest of 47 Ukrainians part of an international drug syndicate, 10 February 2017, <http://gordonua.com/news/worldnews/v-mvd-rossii-zayavili-o-zaderzhanii-47-ukraincev-po-delu-o-mezhdunarodnom-narkosindikate-173362.html>

International Narcotics Control Board, Report 2015, https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2015/English/AR_2015_E.pdf

Ismailzade F., A breakthrough in Iran-Azerbaijan relations?, The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, 19 February 2016, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13330-a-breakthrough-in-iran-azerbaijan-relations?.html>

Lasseter T., U.S.-built bridge is windfall — for illegal Afghan drug trade, McClatchy Newspapers, 28 June 2009, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24543589.html>

Lemon, E. “IMU Pledges Allegiance to Islamic State”, eurasianet.org, 1 August 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/74471>

Lenta, "Russia on the needle: How to get rid of drugs", 6 January 2015, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2015/01/05/drugs/>

Maitra, R. "Drug-Infested Ferghana Valley: Target of the Axis of Three Devils", *International Executive Intelligence Review*, 23 July 2010.

Mansurov, A. "Theses to the Sessional Meetings of the Special Segment Within the Framework of the 59th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, on the Preparation for the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the Problem of Drugs (14-16 March, 2016, Geneva)", 13 April 2016, <http://www.ncdc.uz/ru/press-tsentr/vystupleniya-doklady/2016/04/404/>

May, C. "Transnational Crime and the Developing World", *Global Financial Integrity*, March 2017, http://www.gfintegrity.org/storage/gfip/documents/reports/transcrime/gfi_transnational_crime_web.pdf

McNally, L. and Bugala, P. "The Taliban Resurgent: Threats to Afghanistan's Security", Institute for the Study of War, Washington, 2015.

Meydan, "'It's time to investigate the smuggling of heroin from Azerbaijan to the EU" - Arif Mammadov", 13 June 2016, <https://www.meydan.tv/ru/site/politics/15218/>

Meydan, "Georgian Police Seized 2.8 Tons Of Heroin Coming From Azerbaijan", 12 July 2014, <https://www.meydan.tv/en/site/society/2237/>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", November 30 2016, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, <http://www.mfa.gov.rs/en/foreign-policy/eu/regional-initiatives/selec>

Nazarli A., Azerbaijan, Iran work closely to boost economic cooperation, *Azer news*, 27 January 2017, <http://www.pressreader.com/azerbaijan/azer-news/20170127/281500750971099>

Office for National Statistics, "Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales: 2015 registrations", 9 September 2016, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/death-related-to-drug-poisoning-in-england-and-wales/2015-registrations>.

Onliner, "Azerbaijani customs officers found 500 kg of heroin in Belarus car. The man tried to hide the drug in a sweet", 18 April 2016, <https://people.onliner.by/2016/04/18/azerbajdzhan>

Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, "Armenia: Authorities Report Largest Drug Seizure in Country's History", 20 January 2014, <https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/2291-armenia-authorities-report-largest-drug-seizure-in-countrys-history-76733398>

Outhwaite, W. *Habermas: A Critical Introduction*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1994.

Prof. Nader Habibi, Turkey and Iran: Growing Economic Relations Despite Western Sanctions, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University, May 2012, <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB62.pdf>

Russia Today, “Azerbaijan stopped the import of 141 kg of heroin”, 15 August 2016, <https://ria.ru/world/20160815/1474344495.html>.

Шапиро Н. И. (N. I. Shapiro) , Конфликты и проблемы безопасности (Conflicts and security issues), http://www.imemo.ru/files/File/magazines/rossia_i_novay/2015_02/ODKB_Chapiro.pdf

Spector R., The North-South Transport Corridor, Brookings, July 2002, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-north-south-transport-corridor/>

Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre, <http://www.selec.org/m106/About+SELEC>

Söylemez H., PKK finances terrorism through drug trafficking, TR Defence Turkish Military News, Strategy & Geopolitics Portal, 13 November 2011, <http://www.trdefence.com/pkk-finances-terrorism-through-drug-trafficking/>

Strategic Forecasting Inc., “Central Asia: The Complexities of the Fergana Valley”, <https://www.stratfor.com/article/central-asia-complexities-fergana-valley>

The National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, “Crime and Public Order in the Kyrgyz Republic”, Statistical Publication. Bishkek, 2015.

The voice of Russia, Poland seizes \$10 mln worth of heroin smuggled from Ukraine, 4 April 2014, https://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/news/2014_04_04/Poland-seizes-10-mln-worth-of-heroin-smuggled-from-Ukraine-3471/

The World Bank, Ukraine Economic Update – April 2017, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ukraine/publication/economic-update-spring-2017>

Transparency International. Corruption Perceptions Index 2016, https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016

United Nations, “United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto”, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/treaties/CTOC/>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Legal Framework for Drug Trafficking”, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/legal-framework.html>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Afghanistan Opium Survey”, UNODC, Vienna, 2007.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Afghanistan Opium Survey”, UNODC, Vienna, 2016.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “World Drug Report”, United Nations, New York, 2016.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “World Drug Report”, United Nations, New York, 2015.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment”, UNODC, Vienna, 2011.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Paris Pact Initiative Report 2015-2016”, UNODC, Vienna, 2016.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Opioids overdose: preventing and reducing opioid overdose mortality”, Discussion Paper UNODC/WHO, United Nations, New York, 2016.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Responding to drug use and HIV in Iran”, 19 November 2008, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/responding-to-drug-use-and-hiv-in-iran.html>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “The Illicit Drug Trade Through South-Eastern Europe”, UNODC, Vienna, 2014.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Outcome Document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem New York, 19-21 April 2016”, United Nations, New York, 2016.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Country Profile: Pakistan”, <https://www.unodc.org/pakistan/en/country-profile.html>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Drug Trafficking And Border Control Situation Analysis”, <https://www.unodc.org/islamicrepublicofiran/drug-trafficking-and-border-control.html>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia”, UNODC, Vienna, 2008.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “An Assessment of Transnational Organized Crime in Central Asia”, United Nations, New York, 2006.

United Nations Treaty Collection, “12. United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime”, 15 November 2000, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12&chapter=18&clang=_en#EndDec

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Networking the Networks to fight opiate trafficking, 14 October 2014, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2014/October/networking-the-networks-to-fight-opiate-trafficking.html>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, New UNODC programme builds greater connectivity among global partners to fight drugs and crime, 16 December 2015, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2015/December/new-unodc-programme-builds-greater-connectivity-among-global-partners-to-fight-drugs-and-crime.html>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC, Japan and Russia welcome new phase in partnership for Afghanistan and Central Asia, 11 December 2015, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2015/December/unodc--japan-and-russia-welcome-new-phase-in-partnership-for-afghanistan-and-central-asia.html>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime-World Customs Organization Container Control Programme , Report 2015, https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/containerprogramme/CCP_Annual_Report_2015_final_February.pdf

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Eleventh Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Europe 2015,

http://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/HONLEAs/HONEURO/HONEURO_11_3_e_V1502782.pdf

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Paris Pact Initiative, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/paris-pact-initiative.html>

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNODC head welcomes joint anti-drug trafficking efforts of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, 18 December 2012, <https://unama.unmissions.org/unodc-head-welcomes-joint-anti-drug-trafficking-efforts-afghanistan-iran-and-pakistan>

United Nations Secretary-General, Secretary-General's remarks to Munich Security Conference, 18 February 2017, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-02-18/secretary-general%E2%80%99s-remarks-munich-security-conference>

United Nations Office on Crime and Drugs, Regional Office for Central Asia, Precursor Control on Central Asia's Borders with China, https://www.unodc.org/documents/afghanistan/Precursor_Control/PrecursorRep.pdf

Volkhonsky B., North-South Transport Corridor begins functioning, Russia & India Report, 12 December 2016, https://in.rbth.com/blogs/the_outsiders_insight/2016/12/12/long-awaited-north-south-corridor-close-to-launch_655489

World Customs Organization, "Large heroin seizure in Ukraine", 22 June 2015, <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2015/june/large-heroin-seizure-in-ukraine.aspx>

Zarghami, M. "Iranian Common Attitude Toward Opium Consumption", in *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences*, vol. 9, no. 2, 23 June 2015, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4539585/>

SUMMARY

Since the end of the Cold War, organized crime has become a threat not only to national security, but increasingly also to regional and international security. In fact, organized crime undermines regional and international security, most of the time exasperating and fuelling already existing conflicts, and creating tensions among neighbouring countries and regions. Furthermore, organized crime activities have progressively developed into transnational ones following, misusing and exploiting the globalization process. According to Mark Galeotti, "global organised crime is evolving, embracing new markets and new technologies, and moving from traditional hierarchies towards more flexible, network-based forms of organisation. To an extent, the legitimate world is a victim of its own success: globalisation of the legal economy has also globalised the underworld". The global challenge represented by the transnational organized crime and the need for a global response to it has been officially acknowledged by the international community in December 2000 when the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and the Protocols Thereto were signed in Palermo, Italy. As the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi A. Annan, stated in his speech at the opening ceremony of the signing conference for UNTOC, "if crime crosses borders, so must law enforcement. If the rule of law is undermined not only in one country, but in many, then those who defend it cannot limit themselves to purely national means. If the enemies of progress and human rights seek to exploit the openness and opportunities of globalization for their purposes, then we must exploit those very same factors to defend human rights and defeat the forces of crime, corruption and trafficking in human beings". The Convention against Transnational Organized Crime is the main international legal instrument that addresses transnational organized crime. The states that ratify the Convention should adopt a series of measures against transnational organized crime in their national legislation that includes "the creation of domestic criminal offences; the adoption of new and sweeping frameworks for extradition, mutual legal assistance and law enforcement cooperation; and the promotion of training and technical assistance for building or upgrading the necessary capacity of national authorities". As of May 2017, the Convention has 187 parties, 182 of which are United Nations Member-States.

Having in regard the particular organized crime activity which this thesis is referring to, namely drug trafficking, there are three major drug control treaties that represent the international legal framework for addressing drug trafficking:

- Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 (as amended in 1972),
- Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971,
- United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.

The above-mentioned Conventions are the core of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) mandate. UNODC is the leading international entity in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime. Moreover, UNODC encourages the ratification and assists member-states in the implementation of the already mentioned UNTOC as well as UNCAC (United Nations Convention against Corruption) since organized crime activities and corruption always co-exist and reinforce each other. The ideas and concepts put forward in this thesis are largely based on my personal experience as an intern at the UNODC, on information and data gathered from UNDOC experts and on numerous UNODC reports and publications.

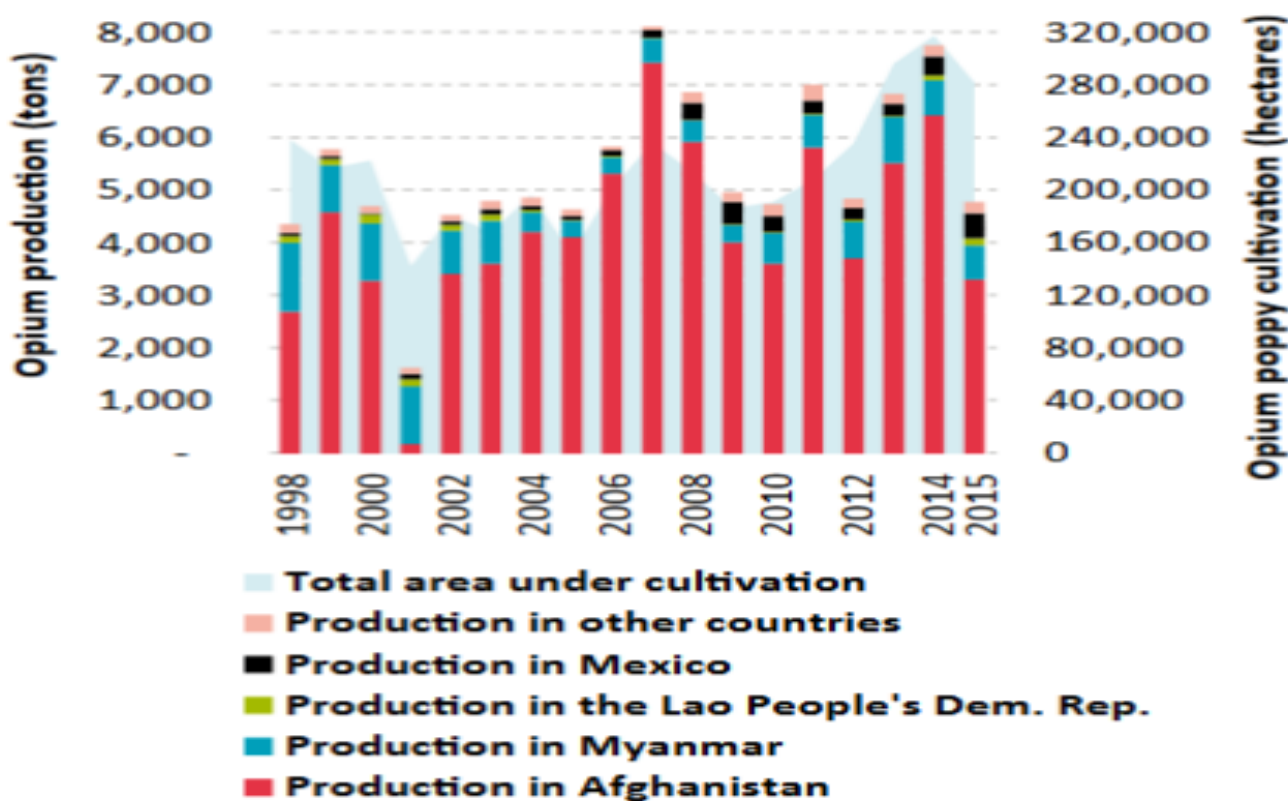
Among the illicit activities carried out by organized crime groups, drug trafficking is the main one for most of them (though organized crime groups hardly deal solely with one criminal activity). Drug trafficking is a lucrative, complex and highly competitive activity and most importantly is transnational in its nature. No country can face alone the threat drug trafficking poses on its economy, security and citizens' health and wellbeing. Given its illicit and as a consequence secret nature, the global illicit drug market value is hard to estimate. However, a recent estimation made by the Global Financial Integrity Organization indicates that the annual turnover of the illicit drug market in the year 2014 was between \$426 billion and \$652 billion. Such an enormous value can distort and poison the economies of countries affected by drug production and trafficking. Especially source countries, which for hard drugs as cocaine and heroin are well identified and localized, are composed by developing countries with already weak or underdeveloped economies. Cocaine production is concentrated primarily in Peru and above all in Colombia (as well as other Latin and Central American countries), whereas opium, the main ingredient of heroin, is cultivated mainly in Afghanistan. Organized crime activities in general and, as far as this thesis is concerned, drug trafficking, undermines governance and rule of law, fuels corruption and distorts the economy in every country affected by this problem, but source and most of the transit countries are particularly vulnerable. For example, the drug trade accounted for more than 53 per cent of the Afghan licit GDP in 2006. Though, according to recent estimations, the percentage has plummeted at around 5 per cent in 2016, (still a significant share of the Afghan GDP), entire rural communities depend on illicit opium production in order to survive (not only in Afghanistan but also in other source countries like Myanmar). Whereas an example of transit countries affected negatively by drug trafficking is the West African countries, an important transit region for cocaine heading for the European market. Having in regard their economy, according to the World Drug Report 2016 "illicit proceeds can inject large cash inflows into a country's economy and can have important macroeconomic effects, such as changes in currency values and increases in budgets and foreign exchange reserves, as in a number of West African countries, some of which have been significantly affected by cocaine trafficking".

In addition to that, drug trafficking as well as other organized crime activities, fuels corruption within states. As paradoxical it may sound, traffickers often depend on the law to operate successfully and thus the corruption of law enforcement authorities, politicians, public administration employees, border security authorities etc. is crucial for drug trafficking and other organized crime activities. Not even the military forces are immune to corruption. For instance, "Beijing's concerns about the criminalisation of its military elites was one of the main reasons behind its efforts to end their involvement in commercial activities". In countries already undermined by the corruption issue, organized crime both worsens and exploits it. Drug trafficking, weak rule of law, economic underdevelopment and corruption often create a vicious circle from which is hard to escape since all these elements feed upon and strengthen each other.

Furthermore, drug consumption is an issue not only for destination markets but also for source and transit countries. Usually, the destination markets for hard drugs like cocaine and heroin are high-income countries, where the price of these drugs increases exponentially compared to their price in the source and transit country, which typically are composed by low/medium income countries. This finds explanation in the basics of macroeconomics: cultivation and production of cocaine and heroin is confined, as already mentioned, to specific countries thus "creating a scenario in which consumers worldwide compete for a product with a concentrated supply" and this in turn increases the price of the product in destination markets making the latter much more attractive for traffickers. However, according to the World Drug Report 2016, in some cases, the "proximity to a drug-producing area or to a major drug trafficking route, for example, explains more than economic development the higher than global rates of opiate use in the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia or the higher rates of cocaine use (including "crack" cocaine) in South America and West Africa". Moreover, in some cases, drugs are used as payment among traffickers of different regions for the services provided in the drugs' transportation from source countries to destination markets thus fuelling the local demand of transit countries through increased availability and lower prices of the drugs. Additionally, increased levels of consumption in source and transit countries are often not paralleled by the increase in these countries' capacities to offer prevention and especially treatment services. Finally, if we consider that, besides being developing countries, states like Colombia and Afghanistan have severe internal security problems with some parts of their territory de facto governed by rebel and terrorist groups (the FARC and Taliban respectively), who finance their actions mainly through the cultivation, production and trafficking of illicit crops and drugs, we better understand the threat posed by organized crime activities to these countries' stability, good governance and development.

Having in regard opiates cultivation and production, Afghanistan accounts for more than 70 per cent of opium global production whereas the remained share is divided mainly between Mexico, Myanmar and Lao People's Democratic Republic (see chart below).

FIG. 27 : Opium poppy cultivation and opium production, 1998-2015



Source: World Drug Report 2016

High instability, weak rule of law, insurgency, corruption, underdevelopment and poverty are all elements that contributed to transform Afghanistan in the leading nation worldwide for opium poppy cultivation and heroin production. Drug trafficking proceeds have been used by the Taliban for years to finance their insurgency and to maintain control over some parts of the Afghan territory, thus putting in place the instability-weak rule of law-corruption-economic underdevelopment mechanism from which Afghanistan struggles to come out. Nevertheless, drug cultivation and production in Afghanistan does not limit its effects solely to the Afghan state. In fact, drug trafficking routes originating from there, poses a direct threat to its neighbouring countries as well. According to the UNODC's Global Afghan Opium Trade of 2011 "Afghan opium now presents significant public health and internal security challenges for the population of Afghanistan and its immediate neighbours." Finally, the same can be said for the other transit countries not directly bordering Afghanistan but closely involved in heroin trafficking originating from it. Drug trafficking in these countries, the majority of which are low/medium income countries, undermines stability, security, health, economy and fuels corruption.

Because of all these spill-over effects (in the security, health, development areas) of drug trafficking and opiates trafficking from Afghanistan in particular, that I have chosen this topic for my master thesis. Moreover, being a Double Degree student graduating in International Relations both at LUISS University in Rome and at MGIMO University in Moscow, I chose a topic which affects both the Russian and the European societies and that can possibly be an area in which Russian-European Union cooperation could expand in the future. In fact, also according to the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2016) “there is potential for Russia and the EU to step up combined efforts to counter terrorism, uncontrolled and illegal migration, as well as organized crime, including human trafficking, illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors, arms and explosives, and cybercrime”.

In this thesis I have tried to highlight how opiates trafficking from Afghanistan is having severe consequences worldwide, that notwithstanding increasing attention addressed toward the spread of the new psychotropic substances, should remain a priority on the international agenda. In this context, I have explored mainly three topics within the general topic of opiates trafficking from Afghanistan: the threats posed by this criminal activity primarily in terms of its health and security implications, the case-study analysis of the current and future development of the Caucasus Route and the mechanisms of cooperation at different levels in countering opiates trafficking from Afghanistan, with a special focus on the countries along the Caucasus Route.

Through the first topic (Threats posed by drug trafficking from Afghanistan toward Europe and Russia) I wanted to underline the grave implications, in terms of health, of opium and most of all heroin abuse and of the danger to the national, regional and international security. According to the UNODC report Global Opium Trade 2011, “Opiates originating in Afghanistan threaten the health and well-being of people in many regions of the world. Their illicit trade also adversely impacts governance, security, stability and development—in Afghanistan, in its neighbours, in the broader region and beyond”. The overall impact of heroin use in terms of health consequences continues to be devastating, if we consider the overall losses in the general well-being of the societies, the potential spread of communicable diseases associated with the injection of heroin and of its share in premature deaths caused by overdose. Millions of people around the world suffer from opiates (opium and most of all heroin) addiction and the harm these drugs cause to individuals as well as communities and societies at large should not be underestimated. As concerns the security implications, I wanted to draw attention to all the cases in which opiates trafficking from Afghanistan contributes to increase the violence levels and to criminalize already vulnerable societies and to finance non-state actors among which terrorist and rebel groups.

The first topic analysed in the thesis, serves as a showcase of the severe impact and implications of opiates trafficking and consumption in source, transit and destinations countries and regions long affected by this organized crime activity in order to better understand the potential repercussions on new countries and regions that emerge as prominent transit areas for opiates trafficking. In this context, I have chosen to analyse the current and future development of the Caucasus Route, which is the second chapter of this thesis. This relatively new route has emerged in 2014 when important heroin seizures were made in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, as a viable corridor for opiates trafficking from Afghanistan and it has concrete possibilities to further develop. The choice to analyse this particular route has been dictated, first of all, by the believe that strategic and future-oriented analysis and research are decisive elements in countering organized crime activities and drug trafficking in particular. Second of all, the potential of this route to develop and supply both the Russian and the European markets represents a common threat for both of them and at the same time, a possible ground for collaboration. I have demonstrated, through graphs, charts and tables that, since 2014, the trend in drug seizures in the Caucasus region has confirmed the emergence of this route.

Furthermore, I have also analysed four possible reasons behind this development which I believe all played a role in allowing the surfacing of the Caucasus Route. First of all, the effects of the Syrian war in particular on Turkey has undermined the opiates trafficking in the region. Turkey has concentrated its security efforts on its South-Eastern borders due to uncontrolled refugee flows and military operations against the PKK. Given that the South-Eastern border of Turkey is crucial point in the transiting of opiates from Afghanistan and that the PKK is notoriously partly financing its activities through opiates trafficking, the increasing attention given to this particular geographic area has possibly caused traffickers to seek for new transit points to by-pass the Iranian-Turkish border. The Caucasus region, given its proximity and favourable environment for organized crime activities, is a perfect candidate in "helping" traffickers to circumvent the Iranian-Turkish border.

A second reason which can explain both the emergence of the Caucasus Route and its possible future development is the Ukrainian crisis. Ukraine, prior to the events of 2014, was already used by criminal networks for drug trafficking of any kind. Factors like its geographical position between Europe and Russia, high levels of corruption, political instability, under-regulated financial system which facilitates the money laundering process of illegal proceeds, availability of modern infrastructures but weak capacities to properly control them, have contributed to the flourishing of organized crime activities and drug trafficking in Ukraine. The conflict in Eastern Ukraine with the instability, the rise of organized crime activities it produces throughout the country, the opportunities it opens for deeper cooperation between Ukrainian and Russian criminals, the creation of separatist areas not internationally recognized

within the official Ukrainian borders, have deepened existing and added new reasons for traffickers to exploit the Ukrainian territory. In the context of the development of the Caucasus Route, Ukraine is, because of its geographical position (common borders with the Russian Federation and the European Union and ports on the Black Sea that connects it to the Caucasus, Turkey and South-Eastern Europe), a perfect puzzle piece of this emerging route.

The third reason that I have identified is related to the recent developments in the Azeri-Iranian political, diplomatic and economic relations. In the past 2 years these two countries have started to expand their relations in various fields, among which the banking sector, customs, transit, infrastructure and between border regions of the two countries. As I have demonstrated through the example of the development of economic relations between Iran and Turkey, enhanced economic collaboration between countries highly affected by drug trafficking, can result in growing drug trafficking between the countries as traffickers will exploit the new opportunities given by improved economic relations. In particular, cooperation in the above-mentioned fields between Iran and Azerbaijan is especially sensitive for drug trafficking. While these and future positive developments between Azerbaijan and Iran relations are welcomed and beneficial for both countries, the potential threat deriving by these progresses in terms of drug trafficking in the Caucasus region can not be ignored. Enhanced cooperation in these areas should be paralleled by collaboration in the organized crime/drug trafficking field or broadly speaking, in the security domain. However, such collaboration, despite some meetings on this regard, is still not in place while talks on the economic cooperation are proceeding.

The fourth factor that I believe has influenced and will influence the development of the Caucasus Route is linked to the internal dynamics of opium production in Afghanistan, coupled with the increasing development of the Southern Route, which starts in Iran and/or Pakistan. Traditionally the Southern regions of Afghanistan, on the border with Iran and Pakistan, were the first in terms of opium cultivation and production. According to the latest opium survey in Afghanistan (2016) this fact hasn't changed. In addition to that, in 2016 the Badghis province, on the border with Turkmenistan (which in turn borders Iran), has become the second opium poppy-growing province in Afghanistan. Thus the traditional (Southern provinces) and recent (the Western Badghis province) internal dynamics of opium cultivation and production in Afghanistan coupled with the development of the Southern Route, led to the concentration of enormous quantities of opiates in Iran. Especially, as concerns the supply of the Russian market, this concentration of opiates in Iran makes it more convenient for traffickers to move the drugs further on the Caucasus Route rather than on the Northern Route.

Finally, the last part of the thesis has been dedicated to the analysis of the national, regional, international and inter-regional mechanisms of cooperation in countering drug trafficking originating from Afghanistan. Given the transnational nature of this particular crime, another crucial element in succeeding against drug trafficking as well as other organized crime activities, besides strategic analysis, is regional, inter-regional and international cooperation. The process of globalization had not only “globalized the underworld”, as mentioned above but, at the same time, has pushed the world society to act united as a community of risk. The promotion of new and the enhancement of the already-existing mechanisms of cooperation are essential in successfully and effectively addressing drug trafficking. In this context, I have first focus on the national level, since I believe that strengthening national capacities in fighting drug trafficking is the pre-condition to have functional and effective cooperation at the other levels. From the national point of view I have identified several areas of improvement which can include the participation and involvement of international actors as well: upgrading the cooperation and coordination between national law enforcement authorities and between them and judicial institutions and involving CSOs in anti-corruption initiatives; investing in the capacity building process of national technical abilities in countering drug trafficking by, for instance, applying the Integrated Border Management concept; enhancing the knowledge on the trafficking of chemical precursors needed to proceed opium into heroin and highlighting the importance of stopping such trafficking as a necessary and essential part of anti-narcotics efforts.

To successfully combat organized crime activities and drug trafficking, improvements at the national level are a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Given the transnational nature of most of the organized crime activities and of drug trafficking in particular, there must be a follow-up at the regional level. In this thesis I have analysed several types of regional initiatives dealing with drug trafficking (EUROPOL, SELEC, CARICC, Triangular Initiative), comparing their different structure and highlighting the lack of regional cooperation among the Caucasus countries and the non-inclusion of Ukraine, which is a crucial transit country for heroin trafficking, in any regional initiative analysed. I have also pointed out how the lack of regional cooperation between countries along the Caucasus Route is an advantage for traffickers and I have as well hypothesize that the potentially best type of regional cooperation between the Caucasus countries is the one similar to the Triangular Initiative format, with no director, no secretariat and no governing body. It is simply a coordination platform for law enforcement officials of the countries involved and for specific joint operations and data sharing.

The lack of participation in regional initiatives against drug trafficking of some of the crucial countries along the Caucasus Route is partially offset by their participation at the international level. Armenia, for instance, is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) which through the years has

greatly contributed to anti-narcotics efforts of its Member-States. As concerns Ukraine and Georgia, though regionally not integrated into any initiative and are not part of the CSTO, they do participate in some relevant UNODC global programmes and initiatives addressing organized crime and drug trafficking. Georgia for example is a full member of the UNODC Container Control Programme (CCP) which seeks to enhance countries' capacities in preventing the exploitation of commercial containers for illicit purposes and in detecting those containers carrying illegal products in seaports. Additionally, continuous efforts are made to implement the CCP also Ukrainian seaports on the Black Sea. Furthermore, Ukraine-UNODC cooperation is quite extensive ranging from operational activities on HIV/AIDS and collaboration on exchange of information and best practices to provision of technical help in the drafting of legislation and design of policies related to combat drug trafficking, drug prevention and rehabilitation of drug users.

Besides these specific countries, there is the Paris Pact Initiative (PPI) which is a platform for consensus building and coordination in fighting opiates trafficking from Afghanistan, opiates consumption and related issues. This initiative is comprised of 58 countries (among which all the countries along the Caucasus Route) and 23 organizations (among which all the regional and international organizations mentioned in this thesis). Finally, international cooperation can be intertwined to and participate in the national capacity building process. An example of this is the Domodedovo Project, which is a project that aims at giving specialized trainings to Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. It is implemented under the UNODC Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries in partnership with Russia and Japan.

The last level of cooperation analysed in this thesis is the inter-regional one. Inter-regional cooperation is a crucial element in successfully combating transnational crimes. The regional level is necessary though still not sufficient given that drug trafficking is not only trans-border but also trans-region. Regional networks, once created, can develop their maximum potential only through connecting and coordinating with other regional networks, thus making anti-narcotics efforts truly global. In this context, UNODC has launched, in 2015, an innovative programme called Building Effective Networks Against Transnational Organized Crime, known as BENATOC. The programme's objective is to promote inter-regional cooperation in the fields of intelligence-sharing, collection and analysis of data, law enforcement training and education institutions collaboration, illicit financial flows and maritime cooperation. Its main focus will be on the Networking the Networks (NtN) Initiative. This initiative was launched in 2013 in Istanbul and aims at establishing a criminal intelligence network to combat organized crime across the regions. The NtN initiative has already managed to bring together regional and international entities such as CARICC, Joint Planning Cell, GCICCD, as well as Europol, INTERPOL, the WCO, ASEANAPOL, the Egmont Group,

the OSCE, and others. However, the main problem with the NtN initiative and BENATOC is to raise adequate and sustainable funding because states are usually more eager to fund projects focused on specific geographical areas or themes. In order to overcome this obstacle, a clearer strategic vision should be presented to donors regarding the activities of BENATOC and the NtN Initiative.