

## **Sebouh Baghdoyan**

# **DRUG TRAFFICKING IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE**

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is not a law enforcement agency. We do not manage informants, undertake surveillance or analyze criminal intelligence but we do coordinate and deliver technical assistance to countries to develop and strengthen these skills. This is our role in the war against drugs. To help us in South Eastern Europe we employ law enforcement officers in the field.

Today, I will present to you an overview of drug trafficking in South Eastern Europe – the threat – the prioritization – the response.

What do we at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime perceive as the principal threats in South Eastern Europe?

1. Heroin trafficking
2. Cocaine trafficking
3. Cannabis cultivation
4. Opium poppy diversion
5. Synthetic drug production
6. Precursor chemicals
7. Increased drug abuse
8. Organised Crime
9. Corruption

South Eastern Europe is a complex region. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime considers the following countries to fall within its project activities in this area: Albania – Bosnia and Herzegovina –

Bulgaria – Croatia – the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Romania and Serbia and Montenegro. In the past twelve years it is a region that has seen conflict and political instability. It has seen poverty, weak democratic institutions, porous borders and continues, in many countries, to see an abundance of corruption in state institutions, police, customs and the judiciary. The region has provided fertile soil for organised criminal activity of all descriptions and, importantly, drug trafficking, which brings us together here today.

South Eastern Europe has it all. There is almost no type of illicit drug that is not either trafficked, produced or consumed in the region I have described.

1. Heroin
2. Cocaine
3. Cannabis
4. Opium
5. Synthetic drugs
6. Precursor chemicals

All lead to increased local drug consumption, despite the poor buying power of the local market.

Of course, with drugs comes organised crime, local criminal groups trying to organize independent drug trafficking channels, and distribution networks leading to brutal territorial clashes, murders, gun battles and car bombings. All of this is commonplace in certain cities of South Eastern Europe.

Every organised criminal group will try to corrupt and bribe to facilitate the furtherance of its illegal activities. With greater financial resources than the true law enforcers who seek to undermine them, they will try to pay their way through any obstacles. In a region still emerging from transition under regimes where oppression was common place, “facilitation” is a way of life, where acceptance of facilitation as a means

to survive a low income turns to greed, and corruption is a debate that could cover many hours with no clear answer with solutions, in the short term even more difficult to implement.

So let us move on to look more closely at the principal drugs trafficked here in the Balkans.

Taking a look at heroin, South Eastern Europe is a bridge between the Middle Eastern and Central Asian drug producers and the lucrative Western European drug consumer market. The heroin produced in Afghanistan, generally, travels through Iran to Turkey, where it is refined, and then onwards into Bulgaria. Bulgaria is pivotal in the South Eastern European drug trafficking scene acting as a crossroads for a variety of trafficking routes.

### **Let us take a look at a few of these variations:**

#### *The Classical Route*

Prior to 1991, licit traffic and, under its camouflage, the bulk of heroin, travelled along the Sofia–Belgrade-Zagreb-Ljubljana route. The wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and later the conflict in Kosovo, as well as the bombing in Serbia, led to a breakdown of this route and the emergence of a number of further variations.

#### *The Northern Route*

This route emerged leading from Bulgaria either utilizing the Ruse-Giurgiu bridge or by ferry across the Danube into Romania. Thereafter, either through the Czech Republic and Slovakia and from there to the EU countries, or through Ukraine and Poland and thereafter into the EU.

#### *The Southern Route*

From Bulgaria through the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia into either Kosovo or Albania.

### *The Black Sea*

Sea containers, RORO, train carriages, and bulk deep-sea cargo ships, all circulate and arrive at Black Sea ports, making this an ideal alternative to the traditional TIR routings.

### *The Ferry*

There is increasing evidence that the ferry line between Istanbul and Trieste is used for the direct transfer of large quantities of heroin directly into the EU. The increased detection of heroin on the Bulgarian side of the Turkish/Bulgarian border has very quickly pushed the traffickers to considering a variety of new routings.

### *Central Asia*

The route through Central Asia and Russia, with Central Asian countries Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, is beginning to play a significant part in the trafficking of heroin along this so called 'Silk Route'.

South Eastern Europe now becomes increasingly important as a transit country for South American cocaine.

Cocaine is regularly entering the Balkan region at the airports concealed with passengers and increasingly cargo.

The Black Sea Ports of Constanta, Varna and Burgas all potentially receive illicit drugs originating from South America concealed in sea containers and aboard deep-sea banana vessels. The illicit cargo will then generally be off-loaded, where it will continue its way by lorry across the myriad of leaky border crossings that comprise what has now become known not as the Balkan Route but rather the Balkan Corridor.

The situation is no different at the Adriatic ports where it is even easier to take illicit cargo by fast boats either up the Coast, or land it directly into Italy.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has realized that good governance and clear priorities enhance credibility and attract funding.

After almost half a year of analysis and consultation, the Office is now pleased to have emerged with a new name, a new vigor and enthusiasm and a professional prioritisation. I shall briefly outline some of the key changes that I believe take our Office forward, as a quality provider of technical assistance in support of the fight against drug trafficking and organised crime.

The Office of Drug Control and Crime Prevention of the United Nations was originally set up in 1997, combining the International Centre for Crime Prevention (CICP) and the International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP). It was established by the Secretary-General to enable the Organization to focus and enhance its capacity to address interrelated issues of drug control, crime prevention and international terrorism in all its forms.

Yet, with globalization came new agendas and new challenges in these three fields, triggering the need to apply fresh policies and move with the changing environment that we seek to interdict.

In the new name and the reorganization that shall occur in the coming months you will see our own institutional divide between Drugs and Crime removed forever.

Our mandate is derived from Conventions and General Assembly Resolutions, with which many of you are surely familiar, but they are now expanded with the coming into force of the Convention against Transnational Organised Crime.

This is our armoury and these are our key themes:

1. An integrated approach
2. Sustainable development
3. Prevention and enforcement
4. Knowledge and vision
5. Best practices
6. The power of partnership

### **An integrated approach**

Drugs and crime, as well as terrorism, are most certainly intrinsically interrelated. The UNODC has now recognized that and in the period ahead it will be essential to take a more integrated approach and look into drugs issues in all their complexity.

#### *Sustainable development*

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime cannot work alone. It can enhance the civil society dimensions of globalization only if its programmes can trigger and become part of common and coordinated efforts to promote sustainable development.

#### *Prevention and enforcement*

Law enforcement alone will not succeed without parallel measures to prevent drug abuse and the treatment and rehabilitating of addicts. It is a fact that money spent on prevention and treatment will save several times that amount otherwise needed for law enforcement and interdiction.

#### *Knowledge and vision*

With more precise knowledge on the drugs phenomenon, more effective strategic decisions can be made, trends identified and timely projects

considered to permanently plug gaps as they appear. More technical assistance is needed to address these data deficiencies, which in turn undermine the effectiveness of any project whether multi- or bi-lateral.

### *Best practices*

The UNODC will aim to identify best practices, adapting them to the country concerned and applying them to institution building. Best practice is easy – adapting this to local conditions and thereafter building sustainable capacity is much harder. Here, our network of Field Offices is very much our strength.

### *The power of Partnership*

The Office desires and needs to work with others on the basis of its comparative advantage. This will become more difficult as the sharing of purpose and of instruments expands. We will promote partnerships at the earliest stages of our project development cycle – partnerships with assisted countries, partnerships with development institutions, partnerships with private sector stakeholders and, importantly, partnerships with donor institutions and Governments.

The response to the threat I have described, in line with the prioritisation that I have detailed, is very much the strength of our field-based implementation.

As mentioned in my opening words, UNODC is not an operational unit, as many of you here would understand it. UNODC is a technical assistance agency – some would believe that it just provides money to help agencies fight drugs and crime. But this is not true. UNODC in South Eastern Europe is an agency, which aims to make a difference. It is a combination of technical assistance with operational implementation.

In what follows, I am going to give you a brief overview of our current structure, our recent project successes and our plans for the future to meet the growing threat that proliferation of drug trafficking and organised crime poses to all of our countries.

Under the supervision of the UNODC HQ, day-to-day running of the Programme in South Eastern Europe is managed by a field-based Programme Coordinator, Mr. Mark Stanley, assisted by national support staff within the Field Operations Unit for South Eastern Europe, which is currently situated in Sofia. Additionally, locally engaged National Project Officers have been selected and are resident in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. These National Project Officers are also either current or ex-law enforcement officers. Together, they form a cohesive and formidable team with considerable experience within the region. We implement the Programme activities and ensure adherence to the aims and objectives of the United Nations and more specifically the Office on Drugs and Crime.

Possibilities for the future include the expansion of the network to include Project Offices in Tirana, where a border control/law enforcement project is under preparation, and Belgrade, where a priority project portfolio is also close to final authorisation.

Like all UNODC projects, they require direct donor funding and fall outside of the general UN contribution. This process can be a long one, as many donors, despite their confidence in UNODC operations, cannot offer the size of funding in one allocation. For this reason, many of our projects are divided in different financial tracks, which allow the activation of sub elements within the overall project as free-standing units. There are some potential funding sources, who prefer, for political reasons, to engage bilaterally with the beneficiary countries or through mechanisms such as twinning. Whilst some such mechanisms have succeeded, I would argue that without a dedicated and professional field operation many have shown intermittent results. Herein lies the comparative advantage of UNODC project execution in this region and one that I hope will be utilised to the full in the coming period.

In South East Europe, over 1200 staff received training by the UNODC projects in the past four years. Here is an example of front line training.



1. Land Borders
2. Sea Ports
3. International Airports
4. Intelligence Analysts
5. Informants
6. Surveillance
7. Coordination
8. Professional Networking

Does front line training work? – Yes. For example, in March 2000 at Bucharest Airport, 13.9 kilos cocaine concealed in baggage were detected through profiling by a recently trained team.

Over 200 officers have participated in Workshops and overseas study tours to consolidate their learning experiences.

Do Workshops and Study Tours work? – Yes. The September 1999 Study Tour at UK Airports permitted the seizure of 0.5 kilos of cocaine and 4.5 kilos of cannabis from passengers and 40 kilos of cannabis hidden in cargo.

Following is some of the equipment that the UNODC has provided in recent years to beneficiary agencies:

1. Comprehensive rummage tools
2. Contraband detection equipment
3. Drugs scenting dogs and kennel vehicles
4. Computer hardware for intelligence units
5. Drug test kits
6. Surveillance aids

Contraband detection equipment is used to detect relative density and thereby give an indication of potential concealment of contraband.

Does it work ? – Yes. It was beyond original expectations – UNODC Projects are flexible instruments of assistance – the figures speak for themselves – 10 kilos of heroin, concealed in a fuel tank, were detected with donated contraband detectors without previous intelligence at the Vidin Land Border. In all, 700 kilos were detected with these devices. Other smuggled substances and articles were also detected:

1. Tons of cannabis
2. Millions of cigarettes
3. Counterfeit goods
4. Gold

All that was the past – what about the future?

The UNODC Field Operations Unit for South Eastern Europe has just finalised a Strategic Programme Framework for 2003-2007. That document lays out the challenges for UNODC in the region and sets out a framework of projects aimed at plugging identified gaps where little or no technical assistance has to date been received. The framework dovetails with existing initiatives and moves forward other regional objectives – Accession – Stabilisation and Association Process, to name but two of the more significant. These are improved by enhanced capabilities and services to face new challenges. Together, they will energize the fight against crime and drug trafficking in the region. Here are some key initiatives as a conclusion:

1. Enhanced drug laboratory capacities in SEE
2. Basic surveillance training in BiH
3. Advanced surveillance and technical equipment in Bulgaria
4. Automated Donor Assistance Mechanism (ADAM)
5. Strengthening of capacities for the collection and analysis of criminal intelligence in SEE
6. Criminal Intelligence System for National and International Cooperation CISNIC
7. Fresh organisation with priorities written for the future not based in the past
8. Professional project design and field based implementation
9. Coordination with other agencies and common sense flexibility to adapt and dovetail
10. Offer effectiveness to beneficiaries and value for money to donors.

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