

# DRUG USE AND DRUG TRAFFICKING IN EUROPE

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Illicit drugs form an important sector of the world economy. A recent report of the United Nations' International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) stated that many estimations have been made of the total revenue of the illicit drug industry, most ranging from \$300 billion to \$500 billion (INCB 1997) According to this UN report "a growing body of evidence" suggests that the true figure lies around \$400 billion. The report further states this turnover would be equivalent to approximately eight percent of total international trade. In 1994 this figure would have been larger than the international trade in iron and steel and motor vehicles and about the same size as the total international trade in textiles. Of course, the important economic value of drugs can be largely attributed to the simple fact they are illegal.

This article aims to give an overview of some general trends in drug use and drug trafficking in Europe. This overview will not discuss all illicit drugs in detail, but will focus on two drugs, cannabis and heroin. The reasons for this are as follows. Speaking about the use of illicit substances, cannabis is by and large the one that is most used in Europe. Heroin on the other hand, is used by very few people - in drug use surveys the prevalence of heroin is usually among the lowest- but it is the drug that is most associated with marginalisation and drug addiction. This also explains why the use of this drug is more visible than the use of other drugs. The second reason for concentrating on cannabis and heroin is that the trade in these drugs is most interesting from a geopolitical point of view.

## The Demand for Drugs in Europe

Illicit drugs is a term that designates many types of mind altering substances. In this overview there is no need to present all the different types and varieties that exist, but only to present some general characteristics and trends of the drug market. To be able to do this, it is necessary to know which different drugs are used, and the different degrees of popularity they have. However, because of the illegality of drugs, both the use of and the trade in drugs are mostly hidden, which leads to a certain degree of uncertainty. Although there are indicators available, such as prevalence figures to estimate the extent of drug use, these

data also have their limitations. Not all countries are performing drug use surveys, some data only refer to very specific populations (such as people in treatment), and sometimes data are hardly reliable due to the poor methodology of data collecting. The absence of sound studies on the prevalence of drug use carried out on a regular basis in several countries, explains why one can only make but cautious statements in this regard, let alone making comparisons between countries. Although standardising reporting systems are progressing, for example by the EU's Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), there always remains a degree of uncertainty when talking about patterns and trends in drug use.

The most commonly known illicit drugs are cannabis, cocaine, and heroin. Besides these more or less 'natural drugs', made on the basis of the plants cannabis, coca, and opium, there is an increasing number of synthetic drugs on the market, the most known types being amphetamine, ecstasy (MDMA), and LSD. Roughly speaking one could say between 5% and 15% of the population of 12 years and over has ever tried drugs (WHO 1997). Cannabis, in the form of marihuana and hash, is the most used illicit drug in Europe. The available data tend to indicate that current cannabis use among the general population in European countries varies from 0.5% to 5%. When looked at younger age categories, it appears that the prevalence of cannabis use is higher; the proportion of, for example, 18 year old school students who admit ever having tried cannabis, ranges from approximately 10% to 35% (EMCDDA 1996).

Despite the methodological limitations of the available data, it is safe to say there are, today, several millions of current cannabis users in Europe. Comparative longitudinal research reveals that the degree in which cannabis is used is not as much influenced by the national drug policy applied by a country, but that international social and cultural factors seem to be playing a more big important role in this regard. In other words, drug use follows international trends, influenced by popular culture, youth culture and so forth, instead of being the result of the actual drug policy and law enforcement measures. In most western countries drug use increased in the late 1960s and early 1970s, followed by a decrease in the late 1970s and throughout the

1980s. In the 1990s drugs are experiencing a second phase of popularity; all-over the western world drug use is on the rise.

Heroin, a derivative from opium poppies, is a drug often associated with compulsive or addictive patterns of use, for which reason it is considered the main problem drug. Although the substance is also occasionally used, very few is known about this category of users. Most of the existing knowledge about heroin use is based on users from special populations, such as people in treatment. This means that even more than is the case with regard to the number of cannabis users, the figures are surrounded with a large degree of uncertainty. A very tentative estimate of the number of heroin addicts in the 15 countries of the European Union suggests that the number of heroin addicts is somewhere between 500,000 and one million (EMCDDA 1996, p. 8). Per country this would mean that the number of people that is estimated to be 'addicted' to heroin at any one time, is under 0.5% of the general population.

### **The supply side of drugs in Europe**

Even more than is the case with regard to drug use, knowledge about drug trafficking is surrounded by many uncertainties. The main indicators about the nature and the extent of this commerce, are drug seizures. However, their everlasting limitation is that one never knows whether they reflect the real trends in drug trafficking, or whether they are merely a reflection of law enforcement activities. The next question is how much of the drugs in circulation are intercepted. It is often assumed that, internationally, around 10% of the drugs in circulation are intercepted, a figure that is also applied by Interpol. However, this figure, already in use since many decades, has no scientific basis whatsoever.

Cannabis in Europe is usually available in the forms hash and marihuana. Although marihuana is gaining in popularity, hash is still predominant in Europe. A substantial part of hash on the European market originates from Morocco. Traditionally, the mountainous Rif area in northern Morocco has been a production region for cannabis, mainly destined for local consumption. Since a nearby European cannabis market become accessible, the acreage under cultivation in Northern Morocco has grown considerably. In 1993 it was estimated that between 64,000 and 74,000 hectares of cannabis were under cultivation in Northern Morocco (OGD 1994, p. 23). This would imply the acreage increased tenfold in the period of ten years. Today, Morocco is considered as the world's main cannabis exporter. The potential of Moroccan hash production is estimated to be around 2,000 metric tonnes a year. In 1993 200 tonnes of Moroccan hash were seized, of which 112 in Europe (OGD 1996, p. 192).

Besides Morocco, the European cannabis market is also supplied by other countries. Today, cannabis is cultivated on every continent of the world and the European cannabis market is supplied by different sources, such as from Asia,

where hash exported from Afghanistan and Pakistan, and marihuana from Thailand and Laos. Important American producers like Colombia, Mexico, and Jamaica, not only serve the North American market, but also export to Europe. In recent years marihuana production has increased in several African countries, especially in Western and Southern Africa, of which a part is exported to Europe. An parallel development is that an increasing part of the markets in the Western world are being supplied by local marihuana production, either indoors or outdoors. This can not only be observed in Canada and the USA, but also in Europe. The Netherlands are the European forerunner in this process; it is estimated that more than half of the total cannabis consumption is from domestic production. This international development of 'import substitution' -although it is not officially promoted as such by the authorities- has taken such proportions that in some western countries cannabis has become one of the main agricultural crops, a position that was until recently reserved to Southern producers.

Spain and the Netherlands are Europe's main countries of entry for cannabis. Since Morocco is Europe's main supplier, it comes as no surprise Spain is the main port of entry for hash. Boats, cars, and especially lorries are used to cross the Street of Gibraltar. The main means of transport by which hash is distributed throughout Europe are cars and lorries. The Diaspora of 1.5 million Moroccans living in Europe certainly facilitates the trade. The Netherlands are another important point of entry for cannabis, predominantly arriving by ships. Several reasons can be mentioned why the Netherlands -and Dutch criminal organisations- have attained an important international position in the cannabis trade. One reason can be found in the tolerant policy towards cannabis, in particular since its retailing has become permitted in the so-called coffeeshops since the 1970s, leading to a situation in which the trade in cannabis was also getting a lower law enforcement priority. A second reason can be found in a certain tradition of smuggling, going back to the butter and cattle smugglers in the South of the Netherlands during the afterwar period. A third reason has to do with the Netherlands' geographical position and their dominant role in transport and distribution.

Heroin is made on the basis of opium poppies that are mainly produced in two areas: the Golden Triangle (Burma, Laos, and Thailand) and in the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan). Two countries can be considered as world's main opium poppy growers: Myanmar (Burma) with an estimated annual 2,500 tons, and Afghanistan that produces between 1,000 and 1,500 tons of opium every year (OGD 1996). North America is mainly supplied by the Golden Triangle, especially Myanmar. The European market on the other hand is mainly supplied by the Golden Crescent. Around 70% of the heroin in Europe is made on the basis of Afghan opium (OGD 1995, p. 6). After having been transformed into morphine base, the drugs are transported to Turkish laboratories where they undergo a second transformation to become heroin.

Turkey plays a central role in the heroin trade destined for Europe. Its central geographical position, on the crossroads of Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean Sea, having both many land and sea connections, gives the country the potential to play an important role in any trade. Turkey not only has these possibilities, in practice it is really having many international contacts. Historically, going back to the Ottoman empire, Turkey has its spheres of influence in eastern directions, which is facilitated by the linguistic relationships Turkey is having with several (former) CIS republics. Due to the Turkish Diaspora in Europe, comprising 2.3 million people, there exists an international network for the distribution of heroin on the European market. An estimated 80% of the heroin on the European market is being processed in Turkish laboratories (*La Dépêche Internationale des Drogues* 1995, Nr. 48). Moreover, the heroin trade from Turkey to the European market is dominated by Turks, even though the Turkish authorities try to make it appear as if especially Kurds -the PKK in particular- are involved.

Since many years, the most common way by which heroin arrives from Turkey into Europe is by the Balkan route. Historically, the Balkan route is the main overland connection between Asia and Europe. Every year, this route is taken by around 1,5 million lorries, 250,000 coaches, and four million cars (*Inzake Opsporing*, Appendix VIII, p. 95). The most common way to transport heroin is a relatively small quantity of 20 to 50 kilos hidden in a lorry. Considering the scale of the trade on the Balkan trade, combined with the fact that it takes some hours to a whole day to search a lorry, explains why it is virtually impossible to really counteract these activities. It is estimated that 75 per cent of the heroin smuggled into Europe is transported along the Balkan route (INCB 1997, 336).

On an annual basis around 6,000 kilos of heroin are being seized in the European Union. Although this amount may look impressive, one has to wonder if this really is the case. Taking into account an estimated number of heroin addicts of 500,000 to one million, one has to conclude only a -very- small part of the heroin on the market is intercepted. This can be supported by the fact that although seizures have almost constantly risen the latest years, the street prices have nothing but declined. Even major seizures of drugs have no impact whatsoever on the market prices.

### Drug trafficking and geopolitics

Because of the extremely high economic value and profit margins of drugs, they not only have become an interesting commerce for (organised) criminals, but also for (illegal) political movements needing money to finance their activities, such as guerrilla and independent movements. This has become even more apparent since the end of the Cold War, resulting in less opportunities to receive funding from one of the world powers. A category of drug traffickers that is not mentioned often are the traffickers who are more or less connected to governments, such as the secret services

and the army, working either independently or in cooperation with political movements involved in the drug trade.

This latter observation can be illustrated by looking at the genesis of the two main opium production areas in the world, Burma and Afghanistan. One of the best books ever written about the international drug trade is *The Politics of Heroin* by Alfred McCoy, professor of Southeast Asian History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His analysis makes clear that both Burma and Afghanistan have attained this status thanks to the activities of American secret services. "The increasing opium harvests in Burma and Afghanistan (...) were largely the product of CIA covert operations. Just as CIA support for the Nationalist Chinese (KMT) troops in the Shan State had increased Burma's opium crop in the 1950s, so the agencies aid to the mujaheddin guerrillas in the 1980s expanded opium production in Afghanistan and linked Pakistan's nearby laboratories to the world market" (McCoy 1991, pp 440-441). McCoy has described how, during the 1980s, Afghanistan became Europe's main opium supplier, because CIA covert operations transformed southern Asia from a self-contained opium zone into a major supplier of heroin for the world market: "CIA intervention provided the political protection and logistic linkages that joined Afghanistan's poppy fields to heroin markets in Europe and America" (McCoy 1991, p. 441). Although the Americans have left, Afghanistan, just like Burma before it, has remained a major heroin supplier for the world market.

With regard to the hash production in Morocco, the world's largest cannabis producer, it is known that people in 'high places' are involved in both the production and trade. The smooth and organised way in which the hash trade is taking place, makes it likely this situation is not only 'tolerated', but may even be co-ordinated by the authorities (*Inzake opsporing*, appendix VIII, pp. 112-119). It is known that every year the regional services of the Moroccan ministry of Agriculture provide highly confidential statistics showing the acreage under cultivation (OGD 1994, p. 23). Although the Moroccan authorities have agreed with the EU in developing substitute crops, and hash seizures in Morocco has nothing but increased, there is every indication the total hash production has increased as well (*Inzake opsporing*, appendix VIII, pp. 117). The total revenue of the hash trade in Morocco is estimated to represent two-third of the total exports and 10% of the country's income (Ibid. p. 122).

Since it is no longer a secret that the authorities are highly involved in the trade, including the royal family, one can wonder why the European countries have a relatively lenient attitude towards Morocco and King Hassan II in this regard. On political meetings the European leaders regularly express their worries about drugs and the drug trade. One reason for these double standards can be found in the friendly diplomatic and personal relations Morocco and the King are having with some European countries and their leaders, France in particular. A more important reason why Morocco is not criticised too severely is that, un-

der the current circumstances of the civil war in Algeria and rising Muslim fundamentalism in several Arab countries, Morocco is considered an important ally of Europe and barrier against a rise in Muslim fundamentalism.

A somewhat similar situation can be observed with regard to Turkish involvement in the international heroin trade. It is been extensively documented how different Turkish Mafia organisations are having a relatively free hand in the international heroin trade (See *Inzake opsporing*, appendix VIII, pp. 95-112). Besides the more 'traditional' extended Mafia families, different political movement like the Grey Wolves, Dev Sol, and the PKK are also playing their part. Besides that, both the civil and the military secret services are involved in the heroin trade; two governmental agencies that are, in fact, competing with one another, sometimes resulting in assassinations (*La Dépêche Internationale des Drogues* 1995, Nr. 40). The involvement in, and protection by the Turkey's highest bureaucratic levels in the heroin trade were confirmed in November 1996, when a traffic accident occurred with four people sitting a the same car: an extreme right criminal on the run, a high ranked policeman, a beauty queen, and the only survivor, a parliamentarian of Prime Minister's Ciller political party.

The reason why Turkey, that is already having a customs union with the EU and is now applying for EU membership, is not criticised for their involvement in the heroin trade, are purely (geo)political. Due to its important strategic position, Turkey has been an important NATO partner since 1952. During the Gulf War, Turkey's strategic importance for military actions in the Middle East was confirmed. This also explains why, although the EU is hesitant about Turkey's membership, the USA is actually lobbying in the EU to have Turkey accepted as full EU member.

Two geopolitical developments in the 1990s have changed the face of heroin trafficking in Europe: the war in former Yugoslavia, and the falling of the iron curtain. Until the war broke out, most heroin on the Balkan route was passing through (former) Yugoslavia. The war resulted in a diversification of the trafficking routes, both in northern and in southern directions. For example, heroin was increasingly being transported from Greece to Italy, from where it could reach the markets. The Mediterranean Sea was also being used for the transport for heroin enabling to reach countries like France and Spain directly. In northern direction, new trafficking routes were also found, facilitated by the falling of the iron curtain that opened up possibilities to reach the EU on the eastern side. And, via the Black Sea heroin could be transported to Bulgaria and Romania, from where it could reach Slovakia, Poland and Germany.

Another development connected to the falling of the iron curtain is that the territory of the Russian Federation is becoming a cross-road for illicit drug trafficking. The activities of organised criminal organisations groups and the removal of customs barriers between CIS member States have made it possible for traffickers to transport illicit shipments from the Golden Crescent through central Asia, the Rus-

sian Federation and Belarus without being checked (INCB 1997).

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