



## **EU steps up its support to fight organised crime and drug trafficking**

Brussels, 31<sup>st</sup> May - This week in Rome, the European Union, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy and the South-Africa based Institute for Security Studies, has convened more than 180 policy makers, practitioners and leading experts to discuss the response to transnational organised crime, with representation from more than 40 countries, in order to critically evaluate its flagship “Cocaine Route Programme”. The conference also featured a keynote speech from former President Obasanjo from Nigeria, Chair of the West African Commission on Drugs, launched by former UN Secretary-General Kofi-Annan.

The conference concluded that to be successful the fight against organised crime will rely heavily on support for national, regional and trans-regional institutions and must include aspects of criminal justice cooperation and explicit efforts to tackle corruption in future programming.

In direct response, the EU announced its intention to provide an additional €10 million to help countries affected by organised crime and the drug trade to strengthen their systems of prosecution and judicial cooperation and integrity.

Through this unique programme, the first of its kind to confront organised crime on the so-called Cocaine Route from the production countries in the Andes: Bolivia, Columbia and Peru; through transit countries in Central America, the Caribbean, West, Southern and North Africa, up to Europe, the EU has committed almost €30 million over 5 years, in 36 countries. The programme provides support, technical advice and promotes coordination between the States along the entire route to strengthen local institutions' ability to seize drugs and other illicit commodities, to arrest and prosecute perpetrators and to help national governments to protect their citizens from the negative impact of organised crime.

The programme helps create teams to intercept and disrupt in more than 20 international airports and 8 seaports in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America and pursues related financial flows in 16 countries in the same regions. It has provided targeted and specialised training and equipment to more than 500 law enforcement officials, primarily in cooperation with experts from EU Member State institutions.

The environment in which the programme operates continues to evolve and presents greater challenges. Along the cocaine route, the drug trade is exacerbating extreme violence, instability and is chronically weakening state institutions.

Kristian Schmidt, Director of Human Security and Development at EuropeAid in the European Commission opened the conference with an appeal to be critical and innovative: "*The answer to*

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*organised crime is both simple and demanding. We must anticipate new challenges and seek innovative responses - we cannot respond with current strategies".*

A significant proportion of the cocaine produced globally is now destined for Europe, where consumption has doubled in less than 10 years. An estimated 4.2 million people consume more than 124 tonnes of the recreational drug per year in the EU Member States, almost the same amount that is consumed in the whole of the United States.

Drug-related gang violence contributes to instability in all countries along the route. Citizens of these countries face chronic insecurity every day, with a growing culture of criminality expanding, and the state in some places is paralysed by corruption and too weak to respond.

For a number of these countries, the problem of cocaine trafficking has reached acute levels. Given that the criminal justice budget of some West African countries is less than the wholesale value of a single ton of cocaine in Europe, the potential for criminal groups to sow corruption and support violent groups is considerable. The impact of this illicit trade on a region already experiencing armed insurgency and international terrorism is significant.

This conference presented a rare opportunity to bring government representatives and practitioners together from four continents usually treated independently, to work together to craft a new and integrated response. This is critical, as the ability to galvanise political will, create collaborative networks, and share responsibility will be key to a successful response.

The new EU funding would be financed under the Instrument for Stability to complement existing and future EU actions under national and geographical support instruments.

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