

9. The use of South-Eastern Europe for cocaine trafficking is likely to continue to increase as the region is another entry point for cocaine destined primarily for European markets. Based on seizures, cocaine appears to be increasingly trafficked through Türkiye to South-Eastern and Eastern Europe via air (couriers) and sea routes. The points of departure for cocaine trafficked to Türkiye remain in South America.⁶

10. Turkish authorities have highlighted that the increasing use of Türkiye as a transit country for cocaine might potentially affect other South-Eastern and Eastern European countries, as well as Greece. Criminal groups involved in the trafficking of heroin along the Balkan route may exploit their connections to also expand into the potentially emerging cocaine markets of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East.⁷

11. Cocaine trafficked from Türkiye to European countries likely transits north through the Black Sea and the Balkans, which have been traditionally associated with trafficking of opiates and smuggling of cigarettes, but have recently become more prominent as transit subregions for cocaine trafficking. Container shipments of fresh fruit from South America, especially Ecuador, have been a typical method of concealment for cocaine that arrives at Balkan seaports. In addition, according to Italian authorities, since 2020, Italian ports have been increasingly used as a trans-shipment point for cocaine directed eastward to the Balkan ports on the Aegean Sea and on the Black Sea. At these ports, large shipments of cocaine from South America are received by Balkan criminal groups, in particular those of Albanian and Serbian-Montenegrin nationals, who ensure its wholesale distribution and transportation to markets and stockpiling areas in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Ukraine.⁸

12. As conflicts may disrupt and shift drug trafficking routes, it is likely that some trafficking flows through Ukraine might eventually be diverted to other ports on the Black Sea, such as those in Bulgaria and Romania. Moreover, the growing supply of cocaine transiting Türkiye adds another stream through the Balkans. With Balkan criminal actors more active in the European cocaine market than ever, the Balkan route is likely to continue growing in importance.⁹

13. Preventing a further increase in the cocaine being supplied to Europe requires the boosting of international cooperation between the Americas and Europe and the transfer of best law enforcement practices in terms of targeting loose criminal networks and new communication tools. Such cooperation needs to include not only law enforcement agencies but also prosecutors and should also involve the promotion of joint investigation teams through the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust) and the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol).¹⁰

B. Organized crime and illicit drug trafficking

Organized crime

14. In Albania, organized criminal groups generally comprise 10 to 15 members and are well organized.¹¹ In terms of networks, criminal groups in Albania have begun to cooperate with criminal groups in other countries and regions, such as North Macedonia, Türkiye and Latin American, as well as with Albanian-speaking criminal groups in Kosovo.¹² The most common crimes are the cultivation of and trafficking

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *World Drug Report 2021*, booklet 1.

¹¹ Albanian State Police, National Service for Combating Narcotics.

¹² All references to Kosovo in the present document shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).