

**Latin American Cocaine Increasingly Enters EU through Bulgaria**2010-05-30 14:33:24

An increasing amount of cocaine from Latin America is reaching Western Europe through the southeastern part of the continent, according to the EMCDDA data.

Even though the major amount of the Latin American cocaine still goes directly to Western Europe, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are emerging as a convenient new transit route, according to Laurent Laniel from the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction, as cited by BGNES.

The cocaine traffickers are said to be using more and more the Balkans where there is already a thick network of channels for all kinds of trafficking – human, drug, or arms.

According to Laniel, a rising number of cocaine shipments of several hundred kilograms from Latin America are arriving in the countries bordering the Black Sea or the Eastern Mediterranean such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece, either directly, or via the Caribbean or West Africa.

EMCDDA experts believe this process is facilitated by the liberalization of trade in the Balkans, the proximity to the rest of the EU, and the presence on the spot of established organized crime networks.

Europol data shows that several large-scale cocaine shipments have already been intercepted in the area in 2009 – 1.2 t of cocaine in a timber shipment from Brazil to Constanta, Romania, and 1 020 bottles with a mixture of wine and cocaine from Bolivia to Bulgaria's Varna.

Experts believe that much of this cocaine is retained in laboratories around Central and Eastern Europe for storage and additional processing, especially in countries such as Albania and Moldova.

Laniel has pointed out that the criminal organizations controlling the cocaine trafficking are made up of an array of criminals from across the globe, and that purely national networks are very rare.

While the drug market in Eastern and Central Europe is traditionally dominated by amphetamines as the cocaine goes to the West, a recent report by the EMCDDA and Europol has expressed concern over the likelihood that the consumption of cocaine in Central and Eastern Europe may grow substantially.

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