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An overview of recent changes in cocaine trafficking routes into Europe

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Executive Summary

Spain and Portugal in the south, and ports in the Netherlands and Belgium in the north, are the most important entry points for South American cocaine reaching the European market. Cocaine is shipped from Latin America mainly in boats departing from Brazil and Venezuela. Venezuela has become more important in recent years as trafficking organisations move Colombian cocaine overland across a porous border and take advantage of the busy maritime traffic between the coast and the islands of the Caribbean, where the Dominican Republic and Jamaica are considered the main hubs, although operations elsewhere appear to have pushed some trafficking through the Eastern Caribbean. West Africa, while no doubt a trafficking route and storage location, has decreased in importance in recent years following a marked rise in seizures between 2004 and 2007.

The nature of international commercial maritime traffic means a vast number of routes can and will be used. Smaller, private boats are able bring in large quantities of cocaine in single shipments. Air transport of cocaine, which involves individual couriers aboard commercial flights as well as private flights, is also used, and aside from direct flights from Latin America, recognised stop-off points are in the Caribbean, Cabo Verde, the Canary Islands, and West Africa. However, compared to maritime shipments the quantity transported by air is marginal.

In the past few years, seizure data has suggested growing use of South Eastern Europe as an entry point, spurring talk of an emerging Balkan route for cocaine overlapping an established heroin route, and seizures in Baltic countries have also led to discussion of another possible passage for cocaine. Available data suggests a) these 'routes' are used sporadically; and b) they remain of negligible importance compared to established primary routes.

Introduction: Objectives and Methods

The French criminologist Xavier Raufer makes an important point when he writes: "tracing a cocaine route is impossible because the ink never dries on the page, channels change." Over the past 40 years, he observes, "transport of cocaine from Latin America to Europe has never been interrupted" (AMERIPOL, 2013). The UN has estimated that "at least 75% of international drug shipments would need to be intercepted to substantially reduce the profitability of drug trafficking" (Associated Press, 1997). It is worth keeping these comments in mind during any discussion of drug trafficking routes. However, despite the fluid, flexible nature of routes, seizure data can provide some indications of primary departure, transit, and entry points for South American cocaine destined for the European market.

Methodological problems should be acknowledged from the outset. At the point of seizure the local authorities make an assessment of the country of provenance, and while in some cases this may be obvious, in many cases it is not and gaps therefore occur in the data and consequently interpretation. There are also distorting issues like "double counting" in which the involvement of more than one country in a seizure operation can result in both countries using the haul in their respective data. Moreover, because many countries do not provide such information at all, knowledge of routes is invariably incomplete. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the primary repository of such statistics, warns that their own rankings of provenance for cocaine seized in Europe "should be interpreted with caution" (UNODC, 2013).

In assessing routes, intelligence agencies and concerned international bodies tend to look for discrepancies between the amount seized within a country and the available data on the prevalence of cocaine use, and interpret gaps as suggesting transit to other countries is taking place. Again, while this appears logical, there are problems. Prevalence rates are at best rough estimates and interpretations of seizure rates can obviously be distorted by discrepancies in capabilities and priorities among countries, as well as heightened interdiction operations or the adoption of new and better tactics and technologies. As such, and considering the natural delays in collating illicit drug-related data, any interpretation of statistics should look for long-term trends. Attempts to determine a route's relative importance 'at present' - e.g. this year as opposed to last year, or perhaps even two or three years ago - are likely to be misleading. In assessing an illicit market, we are largely in the realm of estimations and best guesses.

Mindful of these facts this report will discuss the most recent and most reliable information on trafficking

routes, derived via the imperfect means mentioned earlier, and will place emphasis on contextualising these figures within the appropriate historical information. Greater weight will be given to longer-term trends and to studies that draw conclusions based on long-term data sets. When making statements about a route's use and importance a number of sources taking in a sufficient time period will be cited. With previous caveats accepted, where there are indications of route changes or emerging routes, official, non-governmental, and media sources will be collated to try and determine relative importance.

Findings

i) Departure Points

Included in the UNODC's 2013 World Drug Report was a list of the countries of provenance most frequently mentioned during cocaine seizures made in Europe over the period 2001-2012. The results, stopped here at number 7, were as follows: 1. Brazil; 2. Colombia; 3. Argentina; 4. Dominican Republic; 5. Venezuela; 6. Peru; 7. Jamaica (UNODC 2013). The list, while it relies on instances the country of provenance was mentioned and not on the quantity of total seizures, provides a useful indication of the established departure points in the region. It reflects the known primary transit routes within the Caribbean and it also, corroborating other sources, demonstrates the rise in prominence of Brazil as a departure point over the past few years. For example, a 2008 study summarised the UNODC's findings as follows:

"Based on individual drug seizures reported to UNODC, most of the cocaine intercepted in Europe could be traced back to Venezuela in 2006 (36% of seizures, in weight terms, for which the origin was known), followed by Colombia (17%), the Dominican Republic (5%), Brazil (3%), Ecuador (3%), Argentina (3%) and Peru (3%). The ranking for 2007 started again with Venezuela (44%), followed by Panama (11%), Colombia (5%), the Dominican Republic (4%), Peru (4%), Brazil (2%), Argentina (2%), Bolivia (1%), Mexico (1%) and Costa Rica (1%)." (UNODC, 2008)

According to data from 2009, in terms of quantity seized in Europe, Venezuela was far in the lead, with Brazil having moved into second place, followed by the Dominican Republic (UNODC, 2011). The figures also demonstrate the decrease in relative importance of Colombia as a direct departure point for cocaine heading to Europe; a fact no doubt linked to the decrease in provenance of cocaine originating in Colombia. However, the evidence, particularly seizure data from local police operating in the port cities, still suggests the Colombian coast is an important departure point for cocaine heading to the United States and Europe.¹ Large seizures have continued to be made on the Atlantic coast over the past few years: in total, the local authorities seized around 166 tonnes in 2014, including a 7 tonne shipment in the port city of Cartagena destined for the Netherlands (Rodriguez, R. 2014; Reuters, 2015).² As well as the shift to Venezuela and Brazil, the drop in seizures in Europe of cocaine that has departed from Colombia could be explained by the large seizures made by the Colombian police on the coast, or by more sophisticated means of hiding the cocaine used by Colombian groups. "The sending of narcotics from the ports continues to be one of the principal exit doors for Colombian cocaine," the country's largest newspaper *El Tiempo* reported in 2014, observing also that seizures had grown relative to the previous year (*El Tiempo*, 2014). Colombia has traditionally dominated as the source of the cocaine sold in Europe, although in recent years Bolivia and Peru have been taking up increasing proportions of supply. To give a national example: in 2002 "the UK authorities reported that 90% of the cocaine seized originated in Colombia, but by 2008, the figure fell to 65%" (UNODC 2010). Bolivia and Peru are far more commonly mentioned in seizure cases in Europe than they are in the United States, and in some European countries they are considered more important sources than Colombia; the increasing use of Brazil as a departure point also implies a greater share of supply is originating in Bolivia and Peru, which, as of 2012/2013, is considered to have overtaken Colombia as the

¹ As focus switches to Venezuela, there seems to be a tendency to regard Colombia as unimportant as a departure point. Certain statistics ostensibly reinforce this view. For example, a UNODC report noted in 2010 that "According to the new Maritime Analysis Operation Centre (MAOC-N), more than half (51%) of all intercepted shipments in the Atlantic started their journey in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Direct shipments from Colombia, in contrast, accounted for just 5%." These figures should be treated with caution. While it does appear clear that Venezuela has risen in importance as a departure point for cocaine headed to Europe relative to Colombia, the size of the gap in seizures could be misleading. The MAOC-N primarily intercepts fishing and sailing vessels. The large discrepancy could signify simply a difference in preference for types of transport used. The MAOC-N figures also say nothing about commercial (cargo and container ship) maritime shipments and therefore cannot be considered conclusive enough to determine relative importance. (UNODC, 2010)

² For further examples see: Rondon, 2014, 2014a; Guerrero Barriga, 2014; *El Heraldo*, 2013, 2014.

world's largest cultivator of coca, although the latter remains the largest producer of cocaine (UNODC, 2010; UNODC 2013a)

As well as using Colombian ports, traffickers appear to be increasingly moving cocaine overland to the Venezuela. To give a further example to the statistics already cited in regard to this trend: a study between 2003 and 2008 of the seizures made in France found “34% of the cocaine seized by the French authorities left South America via the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 14% via Brazil, 5% came directly from Colombia, 6% via other South American countries, 14% left the Americas via the Caribbean and 1% via Central America.” (UNODC, 2010). The Venezuelan route grew from around 2006 and is now an important departure point for maritime routes to the Caribbean (increasingly the Eastern Caribbean, constituting Antigua, Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines), West Africa, and Europe (Coto, D. McFadden, D. 2013; UNODC, 2008a; UNODC, 2010). Andean cocaine is transported through Colombia and across the border before reaching ports or airstrips in Venezuela, and the onward movement of cocaine from the coast to the Caribbean region is facilitated by the extensive maritime traffic between the ports and the islands. Direct from Colombian and Venezuelan ports cargo and container ships transport cocaine to Europe, and when transiting in the Caribbean cocaine is moved in commercial, go-fast, and fishing boats, as well as small in private vessels and on some private flights (OAS, 2013).

The inclusion of Argentina in third place in the UNODC list is likely misleading as an indicator of that country's relative importance as a departure point. Although the use of the Southern Cone route for Bolivian cocaine appears to have risen around 2006 (UNODC, 2008) and seizures inside Argentina have been rising - as have interdiction operations, particularly around the port city of Rosario - the data suggests that seizures in Europe of cocaine considered to have departed from Argentinean ports are generally of small quantities (UNODC, 2011). In their 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report the US State Department did not include Argentina in their list of major transit countries (nor any Southern Cone countries for that matter). In Latin America and the Caribbean, the countries mentioned were: The Bahamas, Belize, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela (The Central American countries and Ecuador, while used to transit cocaine to Europe, are mainly transit points for the US market (United States Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, 2014)). In terms of individual mentions as a provenance country, Argentina was marginal in 2007 and significant in 2009, but the total *quantity* seized in Europe and suspected to have transited in Argentina actually fell over the 2005-2009 period; Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic were all more important departure/transit points in terms of the quantity being moved to Europe (UNODC, 2011; UNODC, 2008a).³ Another issue to be considered is that while prevalence of cocaine use in Argentina is not, according to official statistics, high for the region, Argentina has a population of around 40 million and a growing middle class, so it may well be that much of the cocaine seized inside the country is destined to meet internal demand. According to the latest government figures, seizures of cocaine in Argentina in 2013 were 11,137 kg, higher than previous years but, for perspective, half the amount seized in Costa Rica and a third of that seized in Ecuador (INCB, 2013).

ii) Transit Points: The Caribbean and West Africa

It was estimated in 2007 that around 40% of Andean cocaine destined for Europe transited through the Caribbean. (INCB, 2007) Current data suggests the region has been gaining in importance in recent years: according to the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) almost double the amount of cocaine was seized in the region in 2012 as compared to 2011; in Jamaica, the second most important transit point after the Dominican Republic, seizures of cocaine doubled between 2012 and 2013 (Coto, D. McFadden, D. 2013; Primera, M. 2014; Wigglesworth, R. 2013). The government of the Dominican Republic has reported that most seizures are made via land routes into the country, which may mean the majority of cocaine is entering through Haiti (UNODC, 2008a). The indications of increasing use of the Caribbean route in recent years would make sense following the crackdowns in Mexico and Central America; although there are no indications the region is resuming the level of importance it once held. Linguistic connections with European countries remain important in determining routes: the Dominican Republic is an important transit

³ Why this would be the case is a question of interpretation. The explanation for the small quantities, at least, could be related to the nature of the local drug trafficking gangs operating in Argentina, which are not sophisticated operations with logistical capacities akin to the Mexican or Colombian groups. For some discussion see (Eventon, 2013).

point before cocaine reaches Spain; the Netherlands has traditionally recorded high seizures of cocaine transiting in the Dutch Antilles; and Jamaica is connected with the United Kingdom, as are Martinique and Guadeloupe with France.⁴

The other established passage is known as the Central route: cocaine departs directly from South America, notably Brazil, headed for Europe, sometimes with stop-offs (mainly when trafficking via air) in the Canary Islands, Cabo Verde, Madeira, the Azores, or, via air and sea, in West Africa. As with the Caribbean, linguistic and cultural ties appear to matter: Brazil is mentioned more often as a country of provenance when seizures are made in Portugal than in Spain; and based on arrest data Colombian traffickers play a larger role in Spain than Portugal (UNODC, 2013; UNODC, 2010). The West African route rose in prominence in the early 2000s but by 2008 diminishing seizures were observed and the route is considered to have fallen considerably in relative importance. In 2012, less than 3 tonnes of cocaine was seized in West and Central Africa, with 2.2 tonnes seized in Cabo Verde alone (UNODC, 2013; UNODC, 2014). Reports a UNODC research paper: “In 2008, only four large (over 100 kg) seizures were made, and in 2009, only one. According to IDEAS, an air courier database, in the second quarter of 2007, 59% of cocaine couriers detected were from West Africa. In the third quarter of 2009, none were” (UNODC, 2011a). Cocaine reaches the West African coast – via fishing vessels, freight ships and smaller boats that pick up cocaine dropped off by the 'mother' ship - and airports before it is moved on towards Europe by air, land and sea. There have been occasional cases of 'narco flights' from South America bringing cocaine into Africa. Drug trafficking gangs are considered to use the region for storage and repackaging of cocaine. When the use of the West Africa route began to grow, the most frequently mentioned departure country in Latin America, according to seizure data, was Brazil, followed by Venezuela, and the main entry points in Europe after transit in West Africa were Spain and Portugal (UNODC, 2008a). Based on seizures made at European ports and airports, Guinea Bissau and Guinea, and the area known as the Bight of Benin - from Ghana to Nigeria – were highlighted as transit points (UNODC, 2010). Authorities also identified Senegal and Guinea Bissau in particular as notable transit points for air 'couriers'. Algeria, Libya and Morocco in the North emerged as onward transit points. Traditionally a source of cannabis resin, Morocco recorded a spike in cocaine seizures - 4kg in 2004 to 843kg in 2005 - as the West Africa route grew and traffickers considered to be part of Latin American organisations took advantage of the pre-existing cannabis routes (UNODC, 2007). Of the 248kg of cocaine seized by the Moroccan government in 2007, 93kg was captured at the international airport in Casablanca (United States Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, 2008). Seizures of cocaine in Morocco dropped off following the decrease in the use of the West Africa route, but occasional large seizures are made, e.g. 226kg found aboard a lorry in 2014 (AFP, 2014). It is likely that routes through the region are fluid and transient (Algeria recorded a sudden spike in seizures in 2012, for example) (AMERIPOL, 2013). West Africa is certainly a transit point for cocaine, and its use, while having reduced recently, could rise again, particularly if pressure on other routes increases; observes the UN: “...interdiction efforts can push cocaine trafficking routes into areas even more vulnerable to disruption than the original transit zone. This is the story of West Africa between 2004 and 2008” (UNODC, 2010). Rising rates of local use could also lead to increasing supplies reaching the region. But, in terms of quantities of cocaine entering Europe, West Africa is of only marginal importance compared to more established routes; the UNODC observed the rise over the past half decade in their 2006 World Report, and added, “Despite this increase, African seizures still account for less than 1 per cent of global cocaine seizures but there are indications that only a very small proportion of cocaine transiting the African continent is actually seized” (UNODC, 2006).

iii) Entry Points

The majority of the cocaine reaching Europe is entering through ports in Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Belgium, arriving in commercial vessels departing primarily from Brazil and Venezuela. Between 2009 and 2012 the following quantities of cocaine (kg) were seized: Spain, 87,954; Netherlands, approximately 40,000; Belgium, 38,626; France 25,773; Portugal 13,639.⁵ Seizure data for cocaine suggests Spain's share has been decreasing relative to other countries since a spike in supply in 2006, and France, Belgium, Italy,

4 Air trafficking through the Dutch Antilles to the Netherlands was once important but reduced in mid-2000s, it appears in response to enforcement efforts directed at air 'couriers' – the so-called '100% control' policy enacted in the Antilles and at Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam. The coastguards still reported high seizures, however, and local analysts criticise the focus on air traffic when such large quantities enter through the ports (UNODC 2008a). A major seizure was made in April this year by French authorities off the coast of Martinique – see (Worland, 2015).

5 Belgium experienced a spike in 2012 that somewhat distorts the apparent relative importance. Data taken from EMCDDA Data and Statistics. Available from: <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/data/2014>

the UK and Germany in particular have begun absorbing a larger share (UNODC 2013).⁶

Maritime is overwhelmingly the most important method of transporting cocaine. The nature of international maritime traffic means drug trafficking organisations can make use of a vast range of routes. For example, in December 2014 a seizure was made in Rotterdam port of 3,500kg of cocaine which was found aboard a commercial vessel transporting cassava root from Costa Rica; in Italy large shipments of cocaine have been found in commercial container ships arriving in Calabrian ports and originating in California and Mexico (Cluskey, 2014; ANSA, 2015). A recognised trend in recent years, based on seizures, has been the preference among traffickers to ship cocaine inside containers on commercial vessels, making detection more difficult. The UN reported in 2012 that while overall seizures in Europe had been dropping, supply seemed to have remained stable. In a multi-country study, they found container seizures had been rising while seizures aboard vessels, but not in containers, had decreased, “implying that traffickers are increasingly making use of containers on the European route by taking advantage of the large volume of container shipments between South America and Europe” (UNODC 2012). Smaller pleasure boats, sometimes carrying large quantities of cocaine, can enter Europe at many points; in 2014, for example, a private yacht carrying a tonne of high-quality cocaine, which had been picked up in Venezuela, was intercepted off the coast of Ireland (Roche, 2015).

Although seizures at airports make up a large proportion of the total seizures, the actual quantities encountered are relatively small. According to the UNODC data on seizures of all illicit drugs between 1997 and 2011 only 11% were maritime seizures, but this translated to 41% of total quantity. Air seizures represented a significant number of total seizures (37%), but represented only 5% of total quantity; just over half of all seizures are made on roads and trains, and these constitute around the same percentage of total quantity (UNODC, 2013). The Canary Islands and Cabo Verde are important transit stops for cocaine being flown on private planes from South America on the way to Europe. Although occasional large individual seizures aboard aircraft stopping in these islands, while appearing spectacular, should be considered relative to the importance of maritime traffic to other areas.⁷

From the Iberian Peninsula cocaine is redistributed throughout Europe, obviously with important overland transit links through France. The Netherlands and Belgium represent the other primary redistribution 'hub' in Europe; the largest seaports in Europe are in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (the second busiest shipping port in the world) and Antwerp, Belgium. After around 10,000kg of cocaine were seized in Rotterdam over the course of 2013, Dutch police claimed between 25% and 50% of cocaine reaching Europe now enters via the port, which handles around 11 million containers a year, only 50,000 of which are scanned (DutchNews, 2014). The reality may be that the two ports are used interchangeably by traffickers or, as would be expected with such large amounts of traffic, seizures can only provide a vague guide to relative importance; the year before Antwerp had recorded far higher seizures - 18,000kgs compared to 3,600kgs in Rotterdam. Cocaine reaching this northern 'hub' is generally moved alongside legal products aboard commercial container ships. It is considered rare for packages to be dropped off by larger ships to be transported via smaller craft to the shore, as occurs around the Iberian Peninsula (UNODC, 2010).

A recent observed discrepancy between the availability of cocaine and estimated cocaine use rates has led to speculations that Europe may be growing in prominence as a transit stop on route, it has been assumed, to markets in Russia, China, the Middle East, and perhaps also the Oceania region. The Netherlands, Germany and the UK have been identified, based on seizures in Australia, as primary transit points in Europe (UNODC 2014). Time and relevant data will add better understanding and suggest whether in fact the speculations are accurate. Around the mid-2000s rising seizures of cocaine in Southern Europe led to talk of growing use of a

6 Although very high numbers of seizures are recorded in the UK, the quantities are generally small compared with Spain, Portugal, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. See, EMCDDA Data and Statistics. Available from: <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/data/2014>

7 Argues a 2013 AMERIPOL study: “Special attention should be paid to the Canary Islands. In mid-2012, more than 2,500 of cocaine were seized inside an aeroplane coming from Venezuela and headed for Mali. This seizure, together with other seizures which have been intensified in the Canary Archipelago and that have led to severe blows against criminal organisations, confirms that the Canary Islands are one of the main entry points for cocaine from South American countries.” However, given what is known about the relative importance of maritime compared to air transport and the quantities arriving in Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and Belgium, it is perhaps too strong to describe the area as a 'main' entry point requiring special attention. The preference may come from the fact that airport interdictions are far simpler matters than maritime seizures, particularly on commercial boats (AMERIPOL, 2013).

Balkan route, with cocaine traffickers suspected of piggy-backing on the established heroin trafficking route (UNODC, 2014a). Romania, Greece and Bulgaria are considered primary entry points; seizures are mainly made at the ports, with Thessaloniki, Constanza and Varna the most important (UNODC 2013; UNODC, 2014a).⁸ Albania has also recorded occasional large seizures, and processing labs have been discovered; local police raided a lab this year that the government claimed was the largest and most modern ever encountered in the Balkan region (IBNA, 2015). Local gangs move cocaine overland to Western Europe, but there is evidence they could also be serving growing markets in the Middle East; for example, a proportion of a large seizure made in Greece last year was considered by local police to be destined for the Middle East, and according to Israel's Anti-Drug Authority prevalence of cocaine use in the country doubled between 2005 and 2009 (Tzagari, 2014; Kubovich, 2013). Seizures have been rising across the region, law enforcement agencies report growing involvement in the cocaine trade among nationals, and there is little doubt that the South Eastern European countries are being used as entry points to a greater extent than before. But it should be recognised that seizures are generally of small quantities, with occasional spikes in number or size, suggesting the use of the route is intermittent. The amount of cocaine moved through the region remains relatively small - 365kg of cocaine were seized in South-Eastern Europe in 2012, "equal to just 1 per cent of all the seizures made in Western and Central Europe that year" and "even in 2009, when cocaine seizures peaked in South-Eastern Europe, the amounts seized represented only 4 per cent of the 53 tons seized overall in Western and Central Europe" (UNODC, 2014a). As in the case of West Africa, it is likely pressure elsewhere or rising local or regional use of cocaine could lead to increasing adoption of the route.

There have been indications and speculations of other minor routes emerging. According to law enforcement authorities, some other passages for cocaine are: Brazil-Turkey via the Suez Canal; South America-South Africa-Romania; South America-Turkey-Romania-Bulgaria-Italy (AMERIPOL, 2013). In 2013, the UNODC noted, "Limited but non-negligible amounts of cocaine have also been seized in the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and, notably, Israel, which registered an increase in 2011" (UNODC 2013). Moreover, in 2010, noted spikes were recorded in Estonia, Latvia and also Lithuania. This could imply rising domestic use, as well as a possible rise in traffic through the Baltic region, where seizure data suggests cocaine is arriving mainly by sea and is moved to Eastern Europe and maybe also Scandinavia (UNODC 2013). As with the case of the Balkans, it should be remembered that traffickers can rely on a vast number of ports and air routes to bring cocaine to Europe and can likely switch routes with relative ease. Available data still suggests these routes are only marginal in relation to the primary well-established routes and that they are used intermittently. Regardless, occasional large seizures tend to lead to exaggerated talk of new 'hubs'; the countries on the Adriatic coast (Montenegro, Croatia and Slovenia), which consistently record low seizure quantities of cocaine, are such an example (UNODC, 2014a).

Conclusion

Cocaine continues to find its way to Europe via the well-established entry points: the Iberian coastline and the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp. Commercial maritime vessels carry the majority of cocaine shipments, and traffickers appear to increasingly prefer hiding cocaine within containers aboard commercial vessels. Indications are that Spain has been decreasing slightly in relative importance in the past few years, with the slack picked up by France, Belgium, Italy, the UK, and Germany. In Latin America, Brazil, Venezuela and Colombia are key departure points for maritime shipments. Brazil has risen in importance in recent years, as has Venezuela, and while there are indications the Colombian coastline is not as frequently used as it once was, local seizure data demonstrate that it is still a departure point for large quantities of cocaine destined for Europe. Cocaine is also moved from the Andean region through the Southern Cone of Latin America, although Argentina's role may have been overstated. The main transit points in the Caribbean are the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, and the region has recorded rising seizures in recent years, suggesting operations in Central America and Mexico are spurring the return to a route used prominently during the 1980s. There is some evidence to suggest traffickers are shifting to the periphery and moving cocaine through the Eastern Caribbean.

⁸ The UNODC observed in 2013: "Reports on the provenance of cocaine in 2010 and 2011 from Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine, taken together, point to the possible emergence of cocaine trafficking routes overlapping to some extent with the established Balkan route for heroin trafficking and being used to convey limited quantities of cocaine to Central and Eastern Europe." And quoting a 2014 report: "Greece seems to be a particular hotspot for the entry of cocaine into South-Eastern Europe. Of all the countries in South-Eastern Europe, Greece has consistently reported some of the largest seizures, particularly at ports." (UNODC 2013; UNODC, 2014a)

Regarding secondary routes, transit through West Africa has declined from a peak around 2008, while in South Eastern Europe there have been indications that traffickers are sporadically using new routes, particularly through the ports in Romania, Greece and Bulgaria. Likewise, seizures in the Baltic region suggest another entry point has opened up. Quantities seized remain relatively small. It is likely, as the data infers, that Europe is a transit point for cocaine being moved on to Russia, the Middle East and Oceania. There are some indications of the routes being used, although more time and data will be needed in order to build a clearer picture. In any case, the constantly demonstrated elasticity and transience of routes, notably their cyclical nature in Latin America, is a reminder that changes are made relatively easily, that the enormous profit margins involved in the trade mean rising transport costs are not an inhibiting factor, and that the constant chasing of new 'routes' and 'hubs' carry serious risks. It is likely that, as occurred in West Africa, pressure on certain areas coupled with growing local demand in new regions could lead to greater adoption of currently quiet routes, with all the damaging implications this will undoubtedly entail. Acknowledging these facts is not a declaration of defeat, but simply an affirmation of what has long been understood: interdiction operations are an extremely cost inefficient means of confronting illicit drug consumption, particularly when compared with the more efficient methods such as improved demand reduction programmes in consumer countries.⁹

9 For discussion and evidence see: Reuter et al (1988); Rydell, Everingham (1994); and Reuter (2004).

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