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MEXICO-BELGIUM DRUG TRAFFICKING ON THE RISE OF CRIMINAL: BELGIUM AS THE NEW DRUG CAPITAL OF EUROPE

Ave Sunrica Gabriel Verodova

Department of International Relations, Faculty Social and Political Science, Universitas
Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia
Email: avesunrica@student.uns.ac.id

Devi Apriani

Department of International Relations, Faculty Social and Political Science, Universitas
Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia
Email: deviaprianipy@student.uns.ac.id

Jasmine Marshanda Rully Annindya

Department of International Relations, Faculty Social and Political Science, Universitas
Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia
Email: jasminemarshandaa@student.uns.ac.id

Sabina Putri Aulia

Department of International Relations, Faculty Social and Political Science, Universitas
Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia
Email: sabinaputriaulia@student.uns.ac.id

Randhi Satria

Department of International Relations, Faculty Social and Political Science, Universitas
Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia
Email: ransatria@staff.uns.ac.id

Abstract

Belgium has recently come under international spotlight due to its reputation for drug trafficking across Europe. One of Belgium's ports, Antwerp, is home to the largest cocaine drug trafficking operation organized by drug-gang working with suppliers from other parts of Europe. In 2022, drug shipments through the Port of Antwerp recorded 110 tons of cocaine. The drug products were distributed and smuggled from Mexico. This kind of transnational organized crime harms the countries that it is aimed to distribute. Public security in Belgium is at risk due to crimes involving cartels and the distribution of illegal goods from many countries. Therefore, this research was conducted to analyze the question of how drug trafficking in Belgium affects the crime activity of Belgium societies, especially in the 2021-2022 period. This research is a qualitative study that uses descriptive methods by taking secondary data sources using library research techniques such as from journal, news, government websites, and other credible sources. The study finds that drug trafficking from Mexico has affected the rise of crime in Belgium, such as bribery of officials and corruption in port customs officials, death threats and terror to those who do not want to cooperate, killing of innocent people as a result of street shootings and house burnings, and even there are threats against high officials such as the Belgian prime minister and minister of justice at a higher level. This paper will contribute to the drug trafficking pool of study and crime related drugs in Europe, especially Belgium.

Keywords: Mexico cartel, Belgium, transnational organized crime, cocaine smuggling.

Introduction

When discussing drug smuggling, Mexico is the first country that comes to mind. This country has developed into a vital trade route for drug trafficking. This situation is supported by the condition of young people neglected by their parents. They do not get proper education, and many even decide to leave their homes and live in slum areas without jobs and income. This situation encourages drug cartels to recruit them into the cartel. Over the last fifty years, the American government has spent more than a trillion dollars fighting drugs (Farber, 2022). Mexico is already home to hundreds of cartels that ship illegal drugs to Europe. For Mexicans, getting drugs is very easy. Most of them plant, care for, buy, sell, and even use it personally for pleasure (Partlow, 2017). Illegal drugs have become a pillar of the Mexican economy and an alternative way to escape the financial crisis.

The United States was also affected by drugs imported from Mexico, which caused many fatalities. In the early days of the Trump administration, more than 42,000 Americans died of heroin, fentanyl, and opioid overdoses (Mann, 2020). Then,

in January 2019, Trump spoke about his intention to build a border wall separating the United States and Mexico to reduce drug trafficking. That day, he said (The Guardian, 2019):

“Our southern border is a pipeline for vast quantities of illegal drugs, including meth, heroin, cocaine, and fentanyl. Every week, 300 of our citizens are killed by heroin alone, 90% of which floods across from our southern border. More Americans will die from drugs this year than in the Vietnam war.”

The quote indicates that Trump had put tight regulations regarding the incursion of goods from Mexico, especially drugs. Even though the wall did not impact drug smuggling much because most drugs come from the port, it still decreased the number of sales of drugs coming from South America, especially Mexico. The extended 6-foot wall below the ground would obstruct the tunnelway for drug smuggling. The data from US Customs and Border Protection shows drugs statistics from FY2012-FY2016, which are:

Table 1. Drugs statistics from FY2012-FY2016

	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016
Cocaine	45.260	39.075	41.312	38.145	52.803
Heroin	3.780	3.990	4.314	5.530	4.223
Marijuana	522.614	469.995	437.950	602.795	515.382
Methamphetamine	14.131	20.739	23.234	29.001	37.704

*weights are in pounds (lb)

Source: Adapted from Drugs statistics from FY2012-FY2016 (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2016)

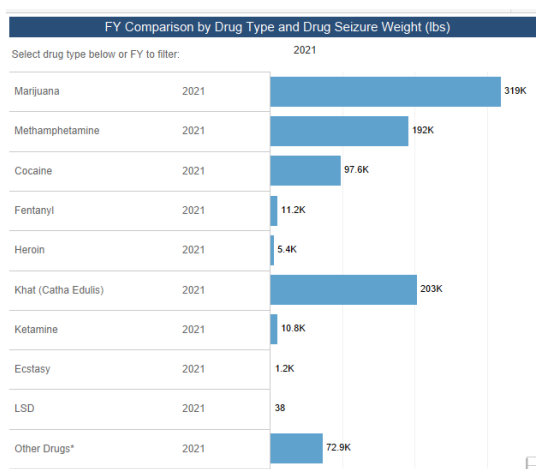
The data above shows that every year the number of drug seizures at the United States border continues to grow. Dealers usually transport the drugs using tractor-trailers and passenger vehicles with concealed compartments. In addition, dealers send the drug through various postal services or even through couriers traveling

by bus or commercial airlines, as for the cocaine hidden among the legitimate cargo.

Until the end of Trump's term of office, which is after the construction of the Trump Wall, data on drug seizures according to US Customs and Border Protection in FY2021, namely:

Figure 1. Drug seizures in FY2021 (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2023)

Compared to 2016, before Trump significantly change the number of drug



served as president and at the end of his term, the wall that Trump built did not

smugglers. Among the types of drugs, only marijuana experienced a decrease of 38

percent. Meanwhile, cocaine increased by 85 percent, heroin by 28 percent, and methamphetamine by 410 percent. The number of drug smuggling has not shown a significant change because most drugs are smuggled via ports and private vehicles. Even the drug network continues to run regardless of whether or not there is a wall that Trump built.

Seeing this opportunity, the drug gangs spread their wings to Belgium, and then Belgium circulated them to other European regions. Drug cartels smuggle drugs through Antwerp, the second largest and busiest European port after Rotterdam. Antwerp had experienced a significant increase in cocaine smuggling since 2012 when Mexican cartels began to dominate the drug market in Europe (Prothero, 2023). In 2021, 89.5 tons of cocaine were smuggled through the port of Antwerp (Brezar, 2022). The weakness of the government and Belgian law enforcement systems is why the Mexican drug cartels chose this country. The uncoordinated police force has provided an opportunity for drug cartels, both inside and outside Belgium, to continue to grow. The head of the Belgian customs service says that at least 40 percent of European cocaine imports pass through Antwerp annually (Prothero, 2023). Drugs are spreading more

and more to European areas because cocaine processing in Europe can generate more profits than usual (Brown, 2022). This previously quiet country turned overnight into a place where much violence occurred, such as street shootings and countless kidnappings. The struggle for territory between drug gangs around the port of Antwerp has resulted in an 11-year-old girl being shot dead by members of a drug gang (Rankin, 2023). This incident sparked anger among Belgians and caused concern because their environment was unsafe. Over time, Antwerp has become the most active cocaine smuggling main route in Europe.

Conceptual Framework

Concept of Drug Trafficking

Drug trafficking according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is an illicit trade that engages in transactions globally involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, and sale of substances that are included as illicit narcotics in drug prohibition laws (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011). Furthermore, according to the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, drug trafficking refers to a complex type of criminal activity, often involving more than two countries and overlapping or closely linked with other

criminal activities such as financial crime and cybercrime (European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, n.d.). Illicit drug trafficking is the most dynamic crime in the world of criminal markets according to Interpol, with evidence showing the involvement of criminal organizations in all phases of the illicit drug trade (Interpol, n.d.). This problem has become a serious concern by the global community due to the impact caused by this phenomenon affecting various regions of the country both in all the processes of crime such as source, transit, and destination areas. The problem of illicit drug trafficking is one of the major activities of organized crime in the world, whose root causes lie in the lack of interstate and international cooperation, political irregularities and the governance of global financial markets (Ameripol, 2013). For instance, cocaine trafficking from Latin America to Africa, the Caribbean, and its ultimate destination in Europe is facilitated by shortcomings in regional cooperation as well as internal political and bureaucratic inconsistencies.

The black market drug trafficking is divided into 4 types of substances, namely cocaine, opium and heroin, amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), and marijuana (Haken, 2011). According to UNODC in

2006 - 2014 through annual survey reports, it was found that the drug market experienced an increase in the number of users in the world every year. In 2020 based on the global drug demand report, it is estimated that the world's drug users are 284 million people between the ages of 15 - 64, the majority of them are male (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022). Among the total number of users worldwide, the two most common types or categories of drugs sold by long-distance sales and even outside the region are cocaine and opium (Haken, 2011). The production of these two types of drugs over the past five years has been concentrated in three small, specialized regions, including Afghanistan, Southeast Asia (mainly Myanmar), and Latin America (mainly Mexico) according to the UNODC report for 2022 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022). These three specific regions account for more than 95% of opium cultivation globally followed by Peru, Colombia, and the Plurinational State of Bolivia which accounts for the largest coca bush cultivation globally (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022). In Mexico, cross-border drug trafficking and smuggling has existed since before the 1980s. Illegal shipments of drugs, especially marijuana and heroin, from Mexico to the United States before 1984

mostly went through the Bahamas or directly from Colombia to Florida by plane. Over the next few decades, drug trafficking and shipments from and through Mexico have made their way into the EU market. Europol and the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) found that Mexican cartels have been linked to the EU drug market (Europol, 2022). This new kind of criminal collaboration indicates cooperation to traffic and expand cocaine and methamphetamine production from Latin America to the EU and among the EU members.

Concept of Transnational Organized Crime

In today's highly globalized world, there are many cross-border problems and threats that countries must face, such as terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking, animal trafficking, and other cross-border or transnational crimes. The definition of transnational organized crime is various according to experts. Therefore, there are several keywords that can be used as a reference in formulating the definition of transnational crime, including an act that is classified as a crime and occurs between countries or across countries. The term 'transnational' itself refers to crimes that transcend national borders as used in the United Nations Convention on

Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). The concept of transnational organized crime according to UNTOC, as stated in the Convention in Article 2(a), is a group of three or more non-randomly formed members, which exists for a sustained period of time, acts with the aim of engaging in at least one crime that requires four years of incarceration, and directly or indirectly for financial or material gain (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014). Moreover, according to Bassiouni in his book entitled *International Criminal Law*, the definition of transnational crime is a crime that has an impact involving more than one country, and the infrastructure and methods used can exceed the borders of a country (Bassiouni, 1986).

Transnational organized crime is a global problem that poses a serious challenge to international security and prosperity. This crime can be seen as the same as an international organization, however the crimes committed are directed at illegal matters such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, terrorism, and so on. Based on the Law Number 5 of 2009 on the Ratification of the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) has categorized the acts that are considered as transnational crimes,

including money laundering, corruption, human trafficking, smuggling, illegal immigrants, illicit trafficking in firearms, terrorism (Hamdi, 2018). In addition, the UNTOC Convention classifies illegal drug trafficking as transnational organized crime.

Illegal crimes such as drug trafficking have become prevalent in Mexico, as many cartels conduct drug transactions not only locally but also to other countries across borders. Mexico has become a vital drug trafficking route for the smuggling of cocaine from major supplying countries such as Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia to the US (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2022). Furthermore, cross-border crime organized by Mexican traffickers and cartels has brought drug products into the EU market. This includes Belgium, which is the main gateway and central port for cocaine shipments in Europe through the Port of Antwerp from Latin America, especially Mexico. This transnational crime has been a serious issue for Belgian government authorities and the European Union in recent years.

Literature Review

This research has reviewed assorted previous works of literature on drug trafficking and transnational organization.

Criminal transnational organizations that related most to illicit drug trafficking and smuggling in South America and had even reached the European market are the Mexican cartel, like Guadalajara cartel, Sinaloa cartel, Los Zetas, and Jalisco Nueva a Generación Cartel. Even though there are regulatory bases, fundamental law, political or military action to tackle the crime, the situation still can't be handled and the Mexican cartels still stand firmly ahead and enlarge their inventory. According to Del Rio (2022), the Kingpins strategy established by the US Drug Enforcement administration (DEA) that had the purpose to "weaken, dismantle and destroy drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) by targeting the management and leadership structures that enabled key activities including production, transportation, distribution and financial management," is actually a failure. The finding of the study is that the Tijuana region's murder rate surged when cartel leaders were apprehended in Mexico. The fight for the monopoly on drugs is also boosting the possibility of the emergence of new cartels or criminal groups. The potential for horizontal conflict and the likelihood of violence are both rising along with cartel/organizational competition.

Weerth (2020) has noted that the various methods and modus operandi used by

Mexican gangs to smuggle cocaine are numerous. One of them involves moving 3,800 kilograms of cocaine in submarines, which were discovered in November 2019. According to this research, improving cooperation and vigilance across the official customs and law enforcement agencies (coast guard, customs services, police, and naval forces) is an efficient way to prevent cocaine smuggling. In addition, it is crucial for Europe and Africa to employ naval troops like the coast guard in coordinated operations, as well as technologies like anti-submarine aircraft, anti-submarine naval boats, drones, and satellites.

Smuggling drugs into a nation can affect it externally and inside. Numerous studies on organized crime, including one on narcoterrorism, have been conducted in Mexico as a result of the state's inability to combat and oppose the territorial domination of cartels and TOC groups. The question of whether Mexican cartels have become politicized or to what degree they are profit-driven and apolitical remains at the center of this discussion. Some studies sidestep this debate by viewing narco-terrorism as a strategy employed by cartels to frighten public officials and members of civil society, show their dominance, and assert their control over specific regions

(Teiner, 2020) Additionally, an empirical study by Korman (2019) that looked at 32 Mexican states concluded that the country's extremely high murder rate is directly correlated with drug trafficking violence.

Countries that are destinations for drug smuggling, particularly cocaine, are expected to see a rise in crime rates in addition to Mexico. Boekhout van Solinge (2022) pointed out that, a convergence of crime can be seen in a number of locations along the two main international, illegal supply chains for cocaine, including Colombia, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Spain, Morocco, and the Netherlands. This is particularly true in locations where newly emerging cocaine smuggling routes profit from pre-existing cannabis smuggling routes. This kind of crime displacement and criminal convergence is linked to a higher danger of violence and corruption along cocaine smuggling routes as the large-scale cocaine trade expands.

Research Methods

This article is based on a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. In qualitative research, researchers make research questions which can be answered through understanding and not by hypotheses, as the essence of

qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon and not to prove it (Herdiansyah, 2011). Whereas the approach in the research focuses on descriptive research, which is referred to as research with the aim of providing a detailed description of a phenomenon or to describe what has occurred (Bailey, 1994). The data in this research was collected through library research. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), library study is research through data reviewed from qualitative documents such as books, journals, newspapers, magazines, reports, or other documents that are still related to the research. Researchers collect secondary data and then study it from various literature relevant to the research discussed, in the form of books, journal articles, news pages, and other scientific articles both printed and electronic. This secondary data covers the processes and phenomena of drug trafficking, especially from Mexico to Belgium, from 2021 to the end of 2022. All secondary data related to the event during the 2021-2022 time interval was then analyzed as part of the "text and document analysis". The selection of the study highlights starting from 2021 is based on the key time of the phenomenon being studied. Whereas, the limitation up to the end of 2022 is due to the writing period of the journal article you are currently reading

(before it is published). The data analysis technique used in this research consists of three steps, including data collection, data presentation, and data verification (Miles et al., 2014).

Discussion

Criminal Organization

The American government has been trying to battle drug cartel cartels for the last few decades. They were causing millions of people to lose their lives because of drug use. The existence of cartels causes concern among the public. Moreover, they are well-armed and even better prepared than the police. They control various areas by killing anyone who dares to enter their territory without permission. Kidnappings, killings, and torture all do to other gang members who threaten their existence. So is the Sinaloa Cartel. The cartel, based in Sinaloa, Mexico, was previously led by El Chapo Gusman, and was founded in the late 1980s (Tucker, 2018). Under El Chapo's leadership, the Sinaloa Cartel had a reputation for being exceptionally strong and undefeated. They even formed new alliances in other areas to facilitate drug trafficking. Seeing the enthusiasm of drug users, this cartel is trying to expand its business reach to other countries. They saw a more significant business opportunity in

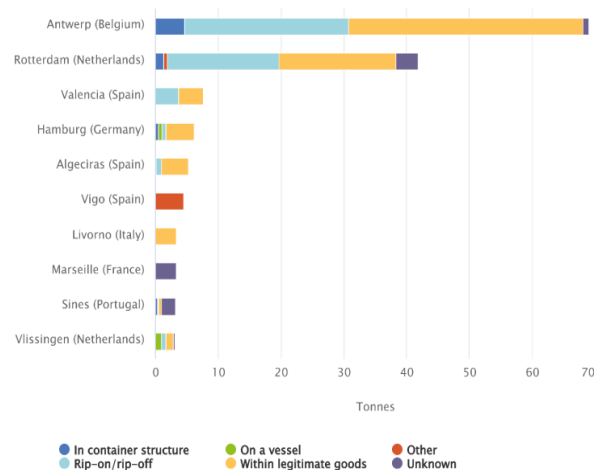
Europe. How could it not be? One kilogram of cocaine is sold for US\$60,000 in Europe, twice the price they sell in America (Brown, 2022).

According to reports published by Europol and the Drug Enforcement Administration, there is cooperation between the Mexican Cartels and criminal groups in the European Union to smuggle cocaine and methamphetamine from Latin America to Europe. The Sinaloa Cartel sends drugs to European territory via sea or air cargo. The Sinaloa Cartel works closely with the Moco Maffia Cartel in Belgium and the Netherlands. The cartel emerged as a significant drug trade actor and controlled the cocaine market in Europe. They also do not hesitate to use violence to carry out their actions and expand their reach. Every year, more than 100 people are killed in violence between the Moco Maffia group and other drug dealers in Belgium. Then why do the

drug sales by these cartels continue to run smoothly? Where did the police go? Unfortunately, they were given bribes by the mafia group. Whether it is the police, port officers, or customs officers, they give bribes of €100,000 to evade police and customs patrols (Project, 2023). Everything they do is for the sake of the continuity of their business. By giving bribes, they get access to get in and out of the port so they can control the presence of drugs hidden in containers. They also organize and ensure control over businesses that are used as cover for smuggling activities, such as renting transport vehicles or storage areas, and also to facilitate money laundering. Throughout 2020, Europol issued the following data:

Figure 2. Top 10 EU seizing ports for quantity of cocaine 2020 (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2022)

Top 10 EU seizing ports for quantity of cocaine, 2020



nearly 65 percent of the cocaine seized in the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam. The data also shows that cartels are targeting big ports and trying to control small ports, such as in Sines (Portugal) and Marseille (France). They also spread through the small port of Vlissingen in the Netherlands to compete with the drugs coming into Rotterdam. Their use of ports as a facility for trafficking drugs into the EU shows how criminal networks continue to exploit maritime routes between Latin America and Europe ((European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction). Over the years, drug gangs have been carrying out various forms of violence on the streets around Antwerp. They started by shooting guns, grenades, and fireworks bombs to intimidate port officers who occasionally disobey orders.

The weakness of the Belgian central government against drug networks causes the number of violence to increase. Likewise, a weak law enforcement system and an uncoordinated police force have allowed drug cartels inside and outside

Belgium to continue developing. Bribery between government officials and drug cartels is the main reason why cases of distribution and use of illegal drugs do not go away. In Mexico and Belgium, cartels use some of their profits to pay off judges, politicians, and officials. They force stakeholders to work together so that their business will continue running smoothly.

The Shipment of the Drug from South US to Belgium

Drugs are usually smuggled on container ships daily, with a high quantity and level of involvement of port and ship crews. This has truly created a gang feels around global container shipping. The fact that known Mexican cartels have cooperated and have connections with EU-based criminal groups to provide access to smuggle and traffic cocaine into the Port of Antwerp and then distribute it throughout the EU. The Sinaloa Cartel, which is explicitly discussed in this paper, in 2020 is

heavily involved with drug trafficking operations from the EU and distributing it to the entire EU (EUROPOL, 2022). In this operation, the cartel planned to organize a cocaine smuggling route from Colombia to an airport in southern Italy using a private jet. In the context of sea-borne shipments, once the drugs are received at EU entry points, local criminal networks working with Mexican cartels are responsible for moving the cargo of drugs to their final destination (Sorgho & Mandia, 2022).

There is a fascinating and problematic tension in the global economy. Usually, people need to think about how goods arrive. 80% of global trade is conducted by ship, and 14 trillion dollars worth of goods are moved worldwide every year (UNCTAD, 2022). The shipping industry is essentially the backbone of the global economy, where there is immense pressure on ports, shipping companies, and customs authorities to ensure smooth trade. It also prevents security services, customs officers, and others from digging up and inspecting containers as they move through the system. European ports, especially the Port of Antwerp, now the largest cocaine hub, have long been trade centers since the days of spice exploration and exploration. As a result, the infrastructure built around these ports has become increasingly efficient. As the cocaine market in the EU

grows, it makes sense for cocaine to be shipped through the port of Antwerp, which is in the north of the European continent (Bloomberg, 2022).

There are two shipment schemes for cocaine to the EU, either directly from the production country of origin or from neighboring countries of departure in South and Central America and the Caribbean. The Sinaloa Cartel has a route that takes the starting point of cocaine shipments from Colombia or Puerto Rico. The first route, from Buenaventura, Colombia, and arriving around Costa Rica and El Salvador in 24-28 hours at sea with one refueling. The second route, the ship, sails from Tumaco, Colombia, and requires 5-7 days at sea to arrive around El Salvador and Guatemala with three refuelings. The third route is where the ship sails from Puerto Rico, Ecuador, and reaches the coast of Michoacán and Guerrero, Mexico, in 8 days and, in total, refueling the ship eight times. The vessel's last recorded route sailed from Puerto Rico, Ecuador, and required 11 days at sea with a total of 8x refueling to arrive in Jalisco and Sinaloa, Mexico (Mcdermott et al., 2021).

Cocaine shipments traveling by sea to Europe frequently pass through the Caribbean and the continent of West Africa, including its neighboring islands. However,

North Africa is becoming more relevant, and although more limited, the Western Balkans might potentially experience increased activity. In 2019, 14 tons of cocaine were found in the Azores, which is where cocaine is carried by ship from the Caribbean (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2022b). With 11.1 tons recovered in 2019, cocaine seizures in West Africa, including those headed for Europe, are typically lower than those at points of departure in the Americas. Alternative sources, however, suggest that more than 16 tons were seized in the region in 2019, suggesting that seizures in West Africa may be larger than reported. With 2.9 tons discovered in The Gambia in 2021, significant seizures continued into that year (UNODC, 2021).

An important center for cocaine smuggling is rising in North Africa, with Morocco in particular, frequently using established cannabis lines. Cocaine is frequently imported directly from South America or trafficked through West Africa because of the country's strategic location between Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East. Despite having fewer seizures than West Africa, North Africa has become more significant in recent years, particularly in Morocco, where 1.5 tons of contraband were discovered in 2019

(Thibault Le Pichon et al., 2011). Contrary to Western Europe, the Western Balkans appear to have less active cocaine smuggling networks. Individual seizures in 2020 and 2021, however, point to a potential rise in smuggling through ports in Montenegro and Albania until the majority of it enters the Port of Antwerp in Belgium before being disseminated throughout the EU (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2022b). There are billions of containers coming into and leaving the port each year, but as of right now, there aren't enough facilities or equipment to scan all of them. The maximum annual base number of containers that can be scanned is 50,000. 1.5% of all incoming cargo can be scanned at the port of Antwerp (Port of Antwerp Bruges, 2022). The issue is that many more tons of cocaine will continue to enter the Belgian market even if the port formally stops one ton of bulk cocaine. In light of the fact that they may still ship more, traffickers do not worry if a few tons of their cargo are seized by port authorities. The smuggling cycle is also supported by the many cases of cocaine disguised as legitimate goods entering the European market through Belgium. Items such as fruit and jam that people use to eat their fresh bread are often where cocaine "hitchhikes" are on board.

Around 2008 and 2009, a new trend began to be noticed among police officers and customs authorities. A sizable commercial shipping company, before they entered the harbor, the crew on board would "toss over" bags full of cocaine. One of their associates/partners/parties would come on a smaller vessel, usually a fishing boat, and they would receive the bags of cocaine downstairs. This phenomenon is called "drop-off" (Mr Diaz De Mera, 2012). This modus operandi usually relies on massive corruption among the crew but also involves armed gangs boarding ships and forcing the crew to pick up cargo at gunpoint. This drop-off phenomenon usually occurs as they pass through the waters of another country, with sources reporting the Venezuelan state of Falcón as a hotspot for drop-offs. Authorities are trying to tackle this modus operandi by using the vessel's GPS device, which provides information about the vessel's speed. If a ship suddenly slows down or stops, an alarm will sound (Bloomberg, 2022).

The Impact of the Crime to Security in Belgium

Apart from leading Belgium to become the country with the largest amounts of drugs in the European Union, drug smuggling also gave rise to other

crimes inside the country. The smuggling might happen because, due to the information obtained from the former drug smuggler, the port security system is not working very well. The rise of insecurity guided by the drug war in Belgium not only happens in the vicinity of the Port of Antwerp. When the drug is planned to enter the port, bribes become the first crime that has penetrated between the workers with only providing information necessary for the criminal organizations. Bribes that occur among the port workers are only a small example of crimes that rise in recent years as a the impact of drug trafficking. As further impact of the bribes, there were threats, in a form of executing video with the gangs laughing as the backsound, addressed to the port workers that chose to not be cooperating with the criminal organizations. As the frontline and people who work directly in the field, the most vulnerable to bribery and corruption are port employees and police officers in charge of the area. Kristian Vanderwaeren, Director General of Belgian Customs, stated that the recorded value of bribes and corruption received by officers was €50,000 to €80,000 for each piece of information provided or as a gagging fee for ignoring drug-loaded containers passing through the port (Rae, 2023). So within the sphere of this port, no one can avoid the

range of criminal drug traffickers. Bribery and corruption are the result of negligence from the individuals involved, but they are also the result of pressure and threats from criminal groups.

The governor of Antwerp, Bart De Wever, stated that the money earned from the sale of drugs has gone into property development in the city and restaurants. That indicates that dirty money derived from drugs has penetrated into all aspects of Belgian society, including politics. In addition to reaching out to port employees, the criminals then approach companies that have a good image to trick them into working with them. Not only the workers of the port who are targeted to be bribed, but the politicians and the one who is supposed to be in charge to be Belgian head of narcotics. The power held by the criminal drug gangs in Belgium is getting stronger and becoming out of control. The Moccoro Moco Mafia is the name of a drug cartel who plays a crucial role in Europe's drug trade. Basically, they are the cartel who holds power over drugs tapped into Belgium. Through the Port of Antwerp, they could supply tons of drugs for their business. The authorities recorded 89.5 tonnes in total for cocaine in 2021 through Europe's second biggest port. Later in 2022, the number boosted up to 110 tonnes of cocaine. Initiating corruption of the

government officials is such a possible thing to do for the Moccoro Moco Mafia, and for that reason, they are made as the main allies of Sinaloa Cartel from Latin America.

As the cartel grew, violations caused by the Moccoro Moco Mafia also intensified due to the rivalry among the criminal networks (EMCDDA Europa EU, 2023). Drug war between them and other Belgian drug traffickers has killed over 100 citizens. One of the more advanced cases was the death of an 11 year old girl that was killed due to drug war in Antwerp. The death of an innocent girl is defined as a fatal shooting and settling scores in a rival gang's drug war in Merksem district. De Wever as the representative of the Belgium authorities stated that they are very concerned about this case due to the fact that a child and an innocent victim were killed. The terror of drug gangs is being equated as terrorism, this drug war is also called Narco Terrorism. Although they are based in Belgium, the Moccoro Moco Mafia expand their power towards the Netherlands. Another validation of how the Moccoro Moco Mafia scopes are on a higher level is when the cartels considered a threat of kidnapping possibilities towards the Prime Minister of Dutch, the Crown Princess of Dutch, and the Belgium Minister of Justice as well. The purpose of

the threats they stated were to attempt fear over the Belgium society. Furthermore, the war between narco gangs in Belgium was fought over territory and to take control of the cocaine epicenter. That is why now in Belgium, shoots in the street and explosions of grenades can be easily found since the cartels ruled the area.

Strange thing about the cocaine confiscation is that the street price has not gone through a rise in price yet, even though after the authorities have confiscated the drugs away, the price remains stable (Rankin, 2023). So the shipment can go smoothly because it turned out to be because of the cartels cooperating with the workers and officers to provide information, where they have been arrested. Bribes and corruption in Belgium drug business also led to money laundering, which ranked as the second top crime trends (Interpol, 2023).

Government & International Organization Efforts to Combat the Crime

The increase of the number of drugs coming from Mexico to Europe via Belgium and the violence they caused has not spared the attention of the government and international organizations. The government is bound to appoint a national level drug commissioner and will be

coordinating the work of different institutions with a deputy and other 10 officers. And to restrict the Port of Antwerp security, the authorities will enhance the screening personnel and agents of law enforcement as 108 customs officers, 196 maritime police agents, and 86 security guards are added to work in the port. The enhancement of the port workers is expected to make the containers-checking more possible due to the large and busy numbers of containers that pass through the port everyday, which was the reason why the Port of Antwerp became the main entry of drugs coming up to Europe. As the trafficker contacted the port officers, the authorities decided to do a background check regarding the criminal history and the financial condition of 16,000 port workers. Since the recruitment and background checking process might cause dangers and interfere if it's heard by the gangs, the state military arranges 50 troops for safety reasons (Szucs, 2023). The authorities are glad that their effort to minimize the number of drugs that came into Belgium is supported by the €70 million investments they received so that they can add five more mobile scanners and employ new workers to work in the Port of Antwerp which equals to scanning 400,000 containers (Rijken, 2023). These new tools will help the authorities to get rid of the drugs

because they could find six tonnes of drugs in just one raid. Further, the schedule to scorch the drugs is prohibited from the public due to security importance.

The authorities also made other efforts on the cyber sectors through the Sky ECC application. They tracked and encrypted software from the Canadian company that was used by the traffickers to smuggle drugs and led to 1,200 people arrested by mid 2022, more or less (Rankin, 2023). Investigation done by the authorities based on information they found in the Sky ECC made it seem as if they were inside the gangs, they had to know a hundred large-scale criminal operation plans. In 2021, Sky ECC application finally shut down. The achievement of cracking an application used by the drug traffickers was part of the EU's Drug Strategy period 2021-2025 (EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025, 2021). There are 11 strategic priorities arranged by the EU which contain the reduction of drug supply and the treatment and care services for those who have been contaminated by the drugs. The authorities also made a new regulation to tripled the fine for cocaine users up to €1,000 (or \$1,066) or offered them to do rehab provided with professional counseling (Szucs, 2023).

Conclusion

Drug trafficking and cocaine smuggling from the Mexican cartel have infiltrated many countries, especially Europe. The entrance point of cocaine shipping from South America is now concentrated in the port of Antwerp, Belgium. This trend started with the impact of the Trump Wall development in 2019, which made the organized criminal group expand their inventory to Europe. With so many people already consuming cocaine in the US, there is market saturation. Mexican cartels can double their profits by selling cocaine to Europe.

The port of Belgium is the second largest in the EU, and with enormous goods entering daily, the gap to smuggle cocaine becomes easier. The main actors of organized cocaine smuggling to the EU are the Sinaloa cartel and the Mocro Mafia. The scheme is that Sinaloa will send cocaine from South America via the sea route, and later, the Mocro Mafia, which is based in Belgium, will spread it throughout the EU. The sea routes taken by the Sinaloa cartel usually transit first, either in countries around South America or via West Africa. The cartel's modus operandi uses the "drop-off" technique and disguising cocaine powder in goods or fruit that will be imported into the EU through the Port of Antwerp.

Some of the impacts of drug smuggling into the port of Antwerp have increased the crime rate in Belgium, such as bribery of officials and corruption in port customs officials, death threats and terror to those who do not want to cooperate, and the killing of innocent people as a result of street shootings and house burnings. At a higher level, there are threats against high officials such as the Belgian prime minister and minister of justice. Related to the cases of violence that emerged, several actions by the government include:

- increasing the number of port officers;
- conducting background-checking of employees;
- adding container scanning equipment through investment; and
- deploying the military to help guard the port area.

In addition to the government, the EU, as an international organization, also took a role. The EU outlined preventive measures to reduce the supply of drugs to Belgium and provided care services and treatment for cocaine users.

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