ENSURING THE SECURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIETY: COUNTERING DRUG TRAFFICKING AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

The recent illegal drugs market trends are connected with the flow of new psychoactive substances also through internet resources. Consequently, the states intensified its legislative initiative in this field. In addition there is a current trend related to the use of smuggled controlled substances and new psychoactive substances, illegal cultivation of marijuana as well as the involvement our countries citizens in the trafficking of narcotic substances. The problem of drug addiction has become very topical as an ever increasing number of youth who are involved in narcotics could become a threat to each and every one of us and security of society as a whole. This case study is devoted to the study of the transformation of approaches to ensuring the safety of society and combating drug trafficking at the international level.

The aim of this study is to consider the general problem of drug trafficking as a challenge to modern international security and international economics development. The object of the study is the mechanism of combating drug trafficking at the stage of sustainable development.

The analytical method, the method of situational analysis, the comparative method, theoretical studies and specific legal research methods were used as methods in the study as methods used in the social sciences to study objective reality. The methodological approach of the study is constructivism and social constructivism. On the one hand, the analysis of the formation of a global regime of non-coercive solution to the problem of drug trafficking requires a constructive analysis. On the other hand, the problems of global governance are best developed today mainly by constructivism.

Finally, this case study testifies to the global dominance of shadow entrepreneurs in narco-states and their participation in illegal drug trafficking bypassing the participation of state institutions and confirms the assumption put forward about the lack of implementation of measures to counter this phenomenon on the part at the state level.

Keywords: security, society, sustainability, development, illegal drug trafficking.

JEL classification: F52, H56, K32

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INTRODUCTION

Any social process, is primarily, controlled by the society where it is occurring. Therefore, criminal processes are also affected by social control (Nikartas, 2014). In the opinion of the average EU citizen, “seeking to strengthen the European Union, priority should be given primarily to the fight against crime” (Analysis of Societal...2008) and in this case, counteraction to illegal drug trafficking.
The prerequisites for this study were the negative impact of the drug business on the sustainable development of global development, on the one hand, and the sustainable development of small countries in the context of national security, on the other hand. There is a certain pluralism of opinions on the evidence of this problem. The rapidly changing geopolitical processes in the world associated with changes in the multipolar world and local conflicts between entire powers create ideal conditions for the prosperity and nourishment of the drug traffickers' business. This problem is obvious and remains relevant every day.

Many international scientists at different times have considered various areas of security in their states and the secure development of society in terms of the spread of illegal drug trafficking and its impact on the sustainable development of states, in particular small countries (Bright et al., 2018; Manrique López & Pastor Armas, 2018; Richardson-Little, 2019; Rodriguez, 2020; Chomczyński & Guy, 2021; Van Uhm et al., 2021; Raisiškis, Krivins & Aleksejeva; 2023; Jukna & Grasis, 2023; Abuseridze et al., 2022).

However, to consideration of issues of combating drug trafficking and its impact on the security of society and the sustainable development of states, and in particular small countries, has been paid not enough attention. In this regard, a problematic question arises - is there sufficient countering to illegal drug trafficking in the world at the state level and whether adequate measures are taken to suppress it by the law enforcement and justice authorities?

**METHODOLOGY**

The methods of systemic, structural, and comparative legal analysis allowed us to identify gaps on combating illicit drug trafficking and to determine the directions of its improvement. To study objective reality in the work used specific methods such as studying documents (reports, conventions) to study empirical material and to identify the shortcomings of preventive measures, also applied the historical method to establish patterns of response to drug trafficking over different periods. The variety and of the methods used allowed to conduct interdisciplinary case study. Such approach to research methodology ensured the most efficient achievement of the case study goal.

The analytical method, the method of situational analysis, the comparative method, theoretical studies and specific legal research methods were used as methods in the study as methods used in the social sciences. The methodological approach of the case study is constructivism and social constructivism. On the one hand, the analysis of the formation of a global regime of non-coercive solution to the problem of drug trafficking requires a constructive analysis. On the other hand, the problems of global governance are best developed today mainly by constructivism.

**Illegal drug trafficking as a threat to national and international security**

Uncontrolled drug trafficking is an important today’s problem of national security in the modern world. The drug trade intersects with social safety threats and major national security issues such as failed states,
insurgency, terrorism, transnational organized crime, and protracted intrastate conflicts. The production and distribution of drugs can be attractive for the following reasons (Ivančiks et al., 2015):

First, drug profits can be used to pay for weapons and military equipment, train militants, corrupt government officials, and recruit sympathizers.

Secondly, illicit drugs also have qualities that distinguish them from other illicit goods. Unlike illegal trade in, for example, diamonds, copper and oil, drugs are a renewable resource that can be obtained regularly.

Thirdly, illicit drugs are also more attractive because of the ease of manufacture, transportation and concealment, which allows them to be widely distributed and constantly increase the profit margin.

Most drugs are low in weight and high in value, making them easy to transport in profitable volumes. The trade in oil, precious stones and timber requires skilled labor and sophisticated technology, while the drug trade requires low skill and limited technology.

Fourth, drugs have the added benefit that other goods do not have - they can be used by combatants for personal purposes to boost morale.

Finally, the drugs themselves can be used as a weapon against the enemy. The spread of drug addiction among the fighters of the armed forces of the enemy side is likely to reduce their combat readiness.

According to Kupatadze (2014), some states in modern world politics can be classified as “narco-states”. These states that are engaged in the production and distribution of drugs on an industrial scale and receive their main income from the drug business. Like any other term, drug-state has been criticized (Paoli et al., 2007).

Considering the popular “narco-states” cases, Shuvi (2016) emphasizes that, firstly, it cannot be argued that the entire state is involved in these cases in the drug business. As a rule, state institutions in such countries are weak, the power of the central government is far from extending to the entire territory, and even more so, these governments do not have a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Secondly, analysis of the cases of drug-states shows that only in rare cases do states receive the main income from the production and sale of drugs. As a rule, most states collect a “tax” from transit of drugs, and in any case, these revenues are not the main ones. Nevertheless, the term “narco-state” has taken root in the scientific literature and, all other things being equal, reflects the propensity of some states to the drug business. North Korea, Afghanistan, Guinea-Bissau have been involved in the distribution of illegal drugs to enrich the ruling elite. Bureau 39 of the North Korean government specializes in drug production, smuggling and distribution (Greitens, 2012). Members of the Afghan government are enriching themselves with the opium trade, confirming criticism from the Taliban, who claim that the national leaders are corrupt and do not care about ordinary citizens. Guinea-Bissau became the first drug-state in Africa under President João Bernardo Vieira, was murdered in 2009. The Syrian civil war has become the scene of widespread drug production and consumption by both pro-Assad forces and opposing rebel groups.

A Reuters agency investigation, for example, found that “Syria has seen a huge rise in amphetamine use and production as fighters on both sides of the civil war use the drugs to survive and maintain their psyche.”
Drugs also affect weak and failed states. Their production supports forces that undermine political and economic stability. Drugs undermine the legitimacy of power, because they support alternative forces. A vicious circle sets in - the more governments rely on illegal resources, the weaker they become. As a result, this may lead to the formation and expansion of areas beyond the control of the central government, where various armed groups will flourish. The erosion of state power and its subsequent loss of the ability to ensure the public and economic security of its citizens contributes to the eventual destruction of state institutions.

In countries such as Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, this dynamic has led to a situation where criminal gangs control large parts of urban spaces, gradually pushing state power to the periphery. The drug trade is also used to finance rebel and terrorist groups, which largely ensures their survival and self-dependence. Terrorist formations from the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in Colombia to the Taliban in Afghanistan, from the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) in Mali to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mauritania they sell drugs, and with the proceeds they buy weapons and pay for the loyalty of the militants. Fidous (2010) alleges that members of jihadist groups use a wide range of drugs to carry out suicide attacks. Jihadist suicide bombers have been known to use a variety of drugs from heroin, meth to Ritalin in order not to be scared at the last moment.

According to the UNODC World Drug Report 2022 (UNODC World Drug Report, 2022), of all the terrorist groups, the involvement of the Taliban in the drug trade is particularly well documented. It imposes a tax on entities involved in the illicit production, manufacture and trafficking of opiates in Afghanistan. Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) (United Nations Security Council Report, 2019) estimates that the Taliban’s total annual income is approximately $400 million, of which half likely comes from the illegal drug economy.

Santacroce R. et al. (2018) reports that in January 2018, in the port of Genoa Italian police confiscated a shipment of drugs bound for Libya. Police arrested three containers from India in which they found 37 million tramadol tablets hidden under a load of tissues. The 75 million euro seized drug is a synthetic benzoide opioid, the active ingredient in a range of pain medications for the treatment of moderate to severe pain. Despite having a lower narcotic effect than other opioids such as morphine, tramadol abuse is on the rise, particularly in North Africa and the Middle East. Tramadol used by terrorists and militants as a pain reliever and to increase endurance (Santacroce et al., 2018).

There is evidence of significant tramadol use in the Gaza Strip and among Boko Haram militants in Nigeria. In addition to tramadol, terrorists have other popular psychoactive substances. Fenetyline, sold under the brand names Captagon, Biocapton, and Fitton, is a psychostimulant that includes amphetamine and theophylline. Fenetyline is the main terrorist drug in the Middle East, and is used by ISIS and other militant groups in Syria. Captagon was most likely in the blood of terrorists during the 2015 Paris attacks (Fond & Howes, 2016). According to the United Nations World Drug Report (2021) - it is noted that so far there is no conclusive evidence of the production of Captagon in ISIS, since there are other terrorist groups operating in
the region that can produce drugs. In general, the level of violence in the illicit drug markets is extremely high, as there is no state present. The “gray zone” in which this market is located does not allow states to effectively administer it and ensure a power monopoly. If the states are present at it, they behave like drug cartels. In the drug market, violence can be used for several purposes (Felbab-Brown & Trinkunas, 2016):

– To resolve territorial, contractual, disciplinary or inheritance issues within or between drug trafficking organizations;

– To commit acts of retaliation against government law enforcement agencies or to force government officials to fail in their duty to uphold the rule of law;

– To initiate changes in legislation or policy that affect criminal activity.

In this sense, drug-related violence often affects, but is not limited to, criminals and public servants, and may involve civilians who are perceived as enemies, stranded in a conflict area or affected by repressive policies. The level of violence not only differs in countries affected by illicit drug production and trafficking, but also changes over time. The high level of violence in Colombia is due to the activities of strong drug trafficking groups, as well as the presence of an internal armed conflict. In addition, as seen in the case of Bolivia, the activities of drug traffickers are affected by pressure from civil society, in particular coca farmers, which is likely to reduce the influence of large drug trafficking organizations. Therefore, while violence is more likely to occur in coca-producing countries, the varying homicide rates suggest that this dependence is driven by socioeconomic and political factors. The level of violence associated with the illegal drug market also varies by region. For example, while Latin America and South-East Asia play a key role in the illegal production of cocaine and opium, the former region has significantly higher levels of violence than the latter (Felbab-Brown & Trinkunas, 2016).

According to the United Nations World Drug Report (2021) - drug production and distribution in the Americas is more associated with violence than in Asia, including in East and Southeast Asia. The explanation lies in the differences in the nature of the links between drug traffickers. In East and South-East Asia, opium and heroin are illicitly produced and trafficked by individuals and groups, and trafficking networks can be described as isolated and decentralized. Drug couriers tend to be from ethnic groups living on both sides of the border and come from families that have been involved in drug trafficking for generations. They are also characterized by relative independence from drug dealers and buyers who run the market. While large criminal groups have played a prominent role in drug trafficking in the past, these organizations now appear to be less hierarchical and more decentralized. By contrast, cocaine supply chains in Latin America tend to form around tight-knit hierarchical organizations. In some countries, the drug trade has contributed to the complexity and prolongation of armed conflicts, often resulting in higher death tolls. Examples from Afghanistan, Colombia, Myanmar and Peru provide clear evidence of the connection between the illegal drug trade and extremists.

According to an analysis in Afghanistan of the dependence of terrorist attacks and victims on opium production, with a 25 per cent increase in opium poppy cultivation between 1994 and 2008, terrorist attacks increased by an average of 0.15 and their victims by 1.43 per year (Piazza, 2012). Obviously, the relationship
between the dynamics of opium poppy production and the number of terrorist attacks is insignificant. Colombia provides another example of how non-state armed groups have been generating a substantial portion of their income from drug sales since the mid-1990s. It should be noted that, as a rule, terrorist groups are engaged in the production and distribution of drugs only because it brings benefits.

Terrorists and other non-state armed groups have many sources of income. If drugs cease to be profitable, these groups may engage in extortion, kidnapping for ransom, bank robbery, selling natural resources, or selling cultural property. In addition to direct financial gain, participation in the drug trade can provide other non-monetary resources that are critical to warfare, such as control of territory, military capability, and political and social legitimacy. By protecting illegal activities that provide the livelihoods of the poor, armed groups can receive support, protection and intelligence from farmers. One of the reasons the Taliban allowed the opium trade in Afghanistan was because they realized how important it was to the local economy. Indeed, support for the opium trade has been said to be one of the Taliban’s most important sources of legitimacy among the local population (Felbab-Brown, 2009). The link between drugs, armed conflict and terrorism is not inevitable and differs significantly among armed groups and countries affected by civil war. In fact, many armed groups and terrorist organizations operating in areas where they could profit from involvement in the illicit drug trade do not engage in this type of activity.

The UNODC World Drug Report 2022 notes the difficulty in finding information about the connection between terrorism and drugs. Much of the work in this area is tracking a small number of groups or is based on sources interested in exaggerating or understating certain connections (UNODC World Drug Report 2022). Most information about terrorism is collected by intelligence institutions and classified, which means that researchers have to rely on media reports and studies published by non-governmental organizations and think tanks.

An analysis of terrorist and extremist organizations registered in the terrorist database for the period 1998-2005 showed that out of 395 organizations included in the data set, only about 9 percent. (35 organizations) participated in drug trafficking. During the study, it was found that organizations are often involved in drug trafficking when they have the logistical capacity and the necessary network. Drug cartels are also challenging international and national security, especially in Latin America. Drug trafficking is the most widespread and lucrative activity for criminal gangs. According to the UNODC, the cost of the drug business is about 350 billion US dollars. For example, the production and sale of cocaine alone brings criminals about 85 billion US dollars annually (Asal et al., 2015).

Despite the fact that the groups involved in the illegal production and sale of narcotic substances differ from other criminals, they still have features that are characteristic of all transnational criminal associations: a clear hierarchy and distribution of positions (roles), as well as the presence of two partially isolated from each other friend of groups of people. The first group, the so-called “base” or “core”, includes those members who are directly involved in cultivation, transportation from one state to another and distribution; the second, smaller one, includes people whose the main task is to facilitate illegal activities, i.e. opposition to law
enforcement agencies, sometimes with the help of various corrupt tools, as well as blackmail, threats, etc. Such a core/support scheme is the same for almost all groups associated with any kind of criminal activity (America’s habit…1986). It is worth noting that in recent years the “core” of cartels has changed. If earlier it consisted mainly of relatives, friends, people connected by a common origin, now it is many times more multifaceted. At its center there is a very small association of professional criminals, and ordinary members of the group are hired to help them, who can be “recruited” both from street hooligans and even teenagers, and from groups of specialists in such fields as security, law, economics, business, etc. It is possible to single out a number of traditional regions of the world for the production of drugs. Each of them has its own “specialization”, depending on what type of narcotic raw material is cultivated there. The main ones are the Golden Triangle (where opium and heroin are produced, include Thailand, Myanmar and Laos), the Golden Crescent, South America, Morocco, China and the Netherlands. The largest producer of opium raw is Afghanistan, which actively influences the global drug situation and is included in the Golden Crescent along with Iran and Pakistan. The bulk of cocaine is traditionally produced in South America, namely in Venezuela, Colombia (the world leader in the production of cocaine), Bolivia. In the Netherlands, marijuana is grown and light synthetic drugs are synthesized. Morocco is characterized by the production of cannabis resin (hashish). The way drug traffickers operate at the transnational level, undermining the economy, is evidenced by a very recent fact that speaks of the scope of the drug business, its organization and volume: the Spanish Civil Guard reported on January 23, 2023 that the Spanish law enforcement authorities have intercepted a cargo ship en route to Riga near the Canary Islands, carrying 4.5 tons of cocaine. The market value of this cargo would be 180 million EUR. According to Marine Traffic, the freighter ‘Blume’ was on its way from Brazil and was scheduled to arrive in Riga mid-February. The ship belongs to a Greek shipping company but travelled under the flag of Togo. The Spanish investigators paid attention to the ship because, according to the documents, the ship carried only 200 tons of coffee, which is a relatively small cargo for such a large ship (Spanish authorities bust cocaine shipment headed for Riga, 2023). No doubt, control over criminal processes is under direct effect of the crime prevention quality. The more inefficient the crime prevention, the more difficult the further control of the development of criminal processes, if their conditions and reasons have not been overcome (Tumalavicius, 2017).

There is a certain order, or conditional scheme, of drug trafficking. From manufacturers growing narcotic raw materials or synthesizing psychoactive substances, illegal goods fall into the hands of wholesalers. They, in turn, use the services of drug transporters. These groups of such people are often referred to as drug couriers, and their activity is drug smuggling. Especially expensive narcotic substances are often transported in the bodies (stomachs) of smugglers, which sometimes leads to tragic consequences in case of damage to the sealed packaging in which the narcotic substances are located. From drug couriers, the drugs end up in the hands of wholesale recipients, or, more commonly known, drug dealers, who already distribute the overall bulk supply to individual drug retailers. Naturally, there are other ways to transfer drugs, but the described scheme is used most often.
The most infamous are the Mexican cartels. The existence of a 3200 km border between Mexico and the United States and a constant demand for drugs in a neighbouring country determines the constant influx of illegal migrants and drugs from Mexico into the American market, which in exchange continues to receive shipments of American firearms. The growing material and financial “feeding” of organized criminal gangs leads to attempts to merge them with local authorities, while the organizational structures of the criminal business are spreading not only on both sides of the US-Mexico border, but also moving south - to the states not yet covered by them Mexico, as well as the states of Central America.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Having examined the complex nature of the problem of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs in global level and the resulting need for a comprehensive systematic response of state institutions to it, drewed some conclusions that have theoretical and practical significance.

This situation testifies to the global dominance of shadow entrepreneurs in narco-states and their participation in illegal drug trafficking bypassing the participation of state institutions and confirms the assumption put forward about the lack of implementation of measures to counter this phenomenon on the part at the state level.

To improve the situation, researchers and state servants responsible for antidrug measures should systematically transform the forms and methods of illegal drug trafficking use prevention. The main development directions of the criminal policy regarding the counteraction to illicit drug trafficking should include changing the sentencing. In addition, state servants of law enforcement and justice agencies should to use open information published by criminals more actively.

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The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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