

# Joint Master in Global Economic Governance and Public Affairs

## *Transnational Organized Crime and Security Governance in Europe: Strategies for Addressing Emerging Threats*

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2024

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Ambassador Ugi Zvekic, for his guidance and expertise throughout this research journey. His insights have been crucial in shaping this work.

I am also very grateful for my amazing friends that I have made this year and that have truly been a support during this time and made the writing of this thesis a lot more fun than expected.

My deepest appreciation to the teachers and staff of CIFE and LUISS for their great support and dedication. The supportive and engaging atmosphere created by the dedicated faculty and staff was invaluable in making this journey both productive and enjoyable.

Finalement, merci infiniment à ma famille, pour leur amour et leur soutien inconditionnel dans tous mes projets dans tout ce que je décide d'entreprendre.

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the evolving nature of transnational organized crime and its impact on security governance in Europe. The primary research objective is to identify effective strategies to combat TOC, focusing on drug trafficking, human trafficking, and cybercrime. The research is contextualized within the framework of the European Union's security governance, emphasizing the significance of law enforcement collaboration and policy adaptation to emerging threats.

The findings reveal that TOC networks exploit legal and operational disparities among EU member states, necessitating enhanced intelligence sharing and coordinated policies. Case studies on cocaine trafficking through Spain and migration dynamics influencing organized crime highlight the complex interplay between drug trafficking, migration, and organized crime. These cases underscore the importance of adaptive strategies and international cooperation.

This research contributes to the understanding of TOC's impact on EU security and offers practical recommendations for strengthening security governance frameworks. The findings aim to support policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and international organizations in developing more resilient and cohesive strategies to combat TOC in Europe.

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# I. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Rationale

Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) represent a significant and growing threat to Europe's security and governance. The EU's open borders have made it easier for organized crime groups (OCGs) to move illicit goods, services, and people across countries (Europol, 2021). Globalization, technological advancements, and changing migration patterns have further complicated the situation, making these criminal networks more sophisticated and adaptable (UNODC, 2021).

Various forms of TOC, such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering, and cybercrime, impact the EU. For example, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2023) reports that the EU remains a major market and transit point for drugs from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Large quantities of cocaine, cannabis, and methamphetamine are seized annually. Additionally, human trafficking networks take advantage of migrants and refugees, showing flaws in how the EU manages its borders (European Commission, 2020).

Despite substantial efforts and resources dedicated to combating TOC, the problem persists and evolves, posing ongoing challenges to the EU's security governance. The adaptability of TOC networks to new opportunities and their exploitation of legal and operational disparities among EU member states create constant enforcement challenges. This adaptability necessitates enhanced law enforcement collaboration, intelligence sharing, and coordinated policies to effectively combat these threats (Europol, 2021). However, differences in legal and operational approaches across member states can lead to fragmented efforts and enforcement gaps, necessitating a more cohesive strategy (European Commission, 2021).

TOC groups also exploit international networks and differences in national laws to hide their operations. This global dimension requires a cooperative international response. Initiatives like the European Arrest Warrant (EAW) and agencies such as Europol and Interpol are crucial for fostering cross-border cooperation and strengthening the EU's ability to tackle TOC. (European Parliament, 2022).

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

The primary objective of this study is to identify and evaluate effective strategies for combating the evolving nature of TOC in Europe. The leading question guiding this research is: What are the most effective strategies for combating the evolving nature of TOC in Europe, and how can current security governance frameworks be adapted to mitigate these emerging threats more efficiently? To address this leading question, the study will explore several subordinate questions. First, it will look at how historical events and recent developments, including migration trends and border security measures, have shaped the current landscape of organized crime in Europe. Second, it will identify the predominant forms of TOC in Europe and examine how they have evolved due to technological advancements and globalization. Third, the study will assess which models of security governance have shown the greatest efficacy in combating organized crime in Europe and what factors contribute to their success. Fourth, it will explore how international cooperation and joint initiatives, such as those involving EU agencies, international treaties, and organizations like INTERPOL, contribute to combating TOC and what challenges exist in enhancing this cooperation. Finally, the study will identify emerging trends and challenges in TOC that pose the greatest future threats to European security governance and propose how policy frameworks can be adapted to effectively address these evolving threats.

## 1.3 Significance of the Study and Research Gap

This study aims to provide a comprehensive view of the evolving nature of TOC in Europe by exploring how historical and recent events have shaped its current state and identifying the predominant forms and their evolution. A key focus is evaluating the effectiveness of existing security governance models to enhance current strategies.

By assessing how European security governance frameworks can adapt to the evolving challenges posed by TOC, the research aims to offer practical recommendations for strengthening these frameworks. The goal is to identify best practices and areas for improvement to ensure a more coordinated and resilient approach to combating TOC.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to offer a detailed and up-to-date analysis of the strategies used to combat TOC in Europe. By providing insights into how



these strategies can be refined and adapted in response to emerging threats, the study aims to contribute valuable knowledge to policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and international organizations. This research supports the ongoing improvement of security governance strategies, making them more resilient and adaptable to the dynamic threats posed by TOC.

#### 1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The literature review begins by examining the historical concepts of TOC to understand its origins and evolution. This foundational knowledge sets the stage for analyzing current manifestations and challenges of TOC. The review then addresses security governance in Europe, drawing on reports and frameworks from key EU bodies and agencies. It assesses the effectiveness and limitations of these frameworks, identifying gaps in current research and practice, and highlighting the main issues the EU faces in combating TOC.

The case studies explore the changing landscape of TOC in the EU. The first case study focuses on cocaine trafficking and migration dynamics, highlighting Spain's role in the European cocaine market and the connection between migration and organized crime. It investigates how OCGs adapt to law enforcement actions and exploit migration trends for criminal purposes. Additionally, it examines the significance of countries like Ecuador as major transit points and the involvement of Balkan traffickers, particularly the Albanian mafia.

The second case study evaluates the EU's response mechanisms, focusing on Europol and the EAW. It provides an overview of Europol's operations, highlighting major initiatives that demonstrate its role in disrupting TOC networks. The study also examines how the EAW streamlines the extradition process among EU countries, enhancing the EU's ability to pursue and apprehend suspects across borders. Furthermore, it explores various forms of cross-border cooperation and assesses their contributions to a unified strategy against organized crime.

The analysis and findings chapter synthesizes insights from the case studies and evaluates current strategies against TOC. This chapter identifies the strengths and weaknesses of existing security governance frameworks and provides an integrated

analysis of different approaches. It discusses how these strategies can be improved to better respond to the evolving nature of TOC.

The conclusions and recommendations chapter summarizes the key findings and suggests policy recommendations to improve the effectiveness of security governance strategies in combating TOC.

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1 Transnational Organized Crime: Concepts and Historical Context

#### Definition of Transnational Organized Crime

TOC involves illicit activities conducted by highly organized and coordinated groups that operate across national borders. These criminal organizations engage in various illegal enterprises, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering, cybercrime, and migrant smuggling (UNODC, 2021). TOC groups exploit global networks and legal loopholes to conduct and hide their operations, characterized by their international reach, structured organization, and ability to manipulate differences in national laws (UN, 2023; Europol, 2021).

TOC groups now often function as sophisticated networks instead of traditional hierarchies. They use advanced technologies and global trade and communication systems to manage and grow their operations. For example, drug trafficking networks create complex supply chains across multiple continents. They exploit weak regulatory environments and corrupt officials to transport illegal substances (UNODC, 2020).

Human trafficking, another critical aspect of TOC, involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploitation. This crime affects millions of victims worldwide and is driven by factors such as poverty, lack of education, and political instability (UNODC, 2020).

Arms smuggling plays a major role in TOC, adding to global violence and conflict. These networks enable the illegal trade of weapons across borders. They often supply arms to terrorist groups and insurgents, which increases geopolitical instability (UN, 2023).

Money laundering is a key part of TOC as it allows criminals to conceal the origins of their illegal profits. This process involves transferring money through a complex series of banking transfers or commercial transactions to make it appear legitimate. Initially, illegal funds are introduced into the financial system, then moved through multiple layers of transactions to obscure their source, and finally integrated back into the economy as clean, legal money (FATF, 2021).

Cybercrime, a rapidly growing frontier of TOC, includes activities like identity theft, financial fraud, ransomware attacks, and cyber-espionage. Criminal organizations exploit the internet's anonymity, reach, and speed to commit these crimes, targeting individuals, businesses, and governments. This allows them to steal huge amounts of money and sensitive data, disrupt critical infrastructure, and perpetrate fraud globally (Europol, 2021; Interpol, 2023).

Migrant smuggling involves the illegal transportation of individuals across borders, often under dangerous conditions and for substantial profit. Criminals exploit people seeking better opportunities or fleeing conflict and persecution. This activity puts migrants at great risk, subjecting them to overcrowded vehicles, harsh environments, and neglect. The profits from smuggling fuel other criminal enterprises, worsening global human rights violations and security issues (UNODC, 2020).

Ultimately, TOC undermines national and international security, destabilizes economies, and erodes public trust in institutions. The interconnected nature of these crimes necessitates a concerted and cooperative international response to effectively combat and dismantle these criminal networks (UNODC, 2021; Europol, 2021).

#### Economic and Social Impact

TOC profoundly impacts economies and societies worldwide. Economically, TOC drains billions of dollars from the global economy through drug trafficking and money laundering. These illegal operations distort markets, reduce tax revenues, and increase public spending on law enforcement and health services (UNODC, 2021; Europol, 2021). For instance, drug trafficking alone generates hundreds of billions of dollars annually, often funding further criminal activities and corruption (UNODC, 2020).

Socially, TOC exacerbates violence and insecurity. In regions that suffer from drug cartels or human trafficking networks, local populations endure higher crime rates, violence, and social disintegration. Criminal organizations infiltrate and corrupt local governments and institutions, destabilizing communities (Europol, 2021). Victims of human trafficking suffer severe physical and psychological trauma, leading to long-term social issues like poverty and health problems (UN, 2023).

TOC also erodes public trust in institutions. When criminal organizations infiltrate political systems, they can influence policy decisions, undermine the rule of law, and perpetuate corruption and inefficiency. This erosion of trust makes it harder for governments to implement policies and maintain social order (FATF, 2021).

The negative effects of TOC, such as corruption and violence, highlight the need for robust international cooperation and comprehensive strategies to combat these criminal networks. Effective responses must address both the economic and social dimensions of TOC, ensuring that efforts to dismantle these organizations are supported by measures to restore social order and economic stability (UNODC, 2021; Europol, 2021).

## Historical Context of Transnational Organized Crime

This chapter aims to provide a thorough overview of TOC, focusing on its concepts and historical context. It will explore the definition and scope of TOC, the structure of criminal networks, and the various types of illegal activities involved. Additionally, the chapter will trace the historical evolution of TOC from its early 20th-century origins to the present day, highlighting key developments and trends. By understanding the foundations and evolution of TOC, this chapter will offer insights into its impact on EU security and the importance of ongoing efforts to combat these criminal networks.

### *A. Early 20th Century Origins*

TOC emerged in the early 20th century, notably with the emergence of the Italian Mafia during the Prohibition era in the United States. From 1920 to 1933, the prohibition of alcohol created a lucrative black market. Criminal organizations like the Mafia seized this opportunity by smuggling and distributing illegal alcohol. This venture proved immensely profitable, allowing these groups to expand their influence and operations significantly. The success of these coordinated illegal enterprises beyond borders demonstrated the potential for organized crime and laid the foundation for future TOC networks (UNODC, 2021).

During this period, the Mafia's operations showed how criminal organizations could thrive by exploiting legal prohibitions and gaps. Their ability to operate across national frontiers and coordinate complex smuggling operations highlighted the

profitability and sustainability of such illicit activities. This era marked the beginning of a more organized and structured approach to crime, influencing the development of TOC groups globally (Europol, 2021; Interpol, 2021).

#### *B. Post-World War II Era*

The end of World War II significantly expanded TOC activities. Increased global trade and travel provided new opportunities for criminal organizations. Smuggling operations grew more sophisticated as these groups exploited the economic boom and relaxed travel restrictions. The rapid growth of international commerce also opened new avenues for money laundering and other financial crimes, embedding TOC further into the global economy (Europol, 2021).

Post-war, TOC groups capitalized on the surge in global trade to smuggle contraband efficiently. Air travel and shipping routes facilitated illicit goods movement between countries. The economic recovery provided more financial transactions, which these groups exploited for money laundering, integrating illicit profits into legitimate businesses (UNODC, 2021; Interpol, 2021).

This era saw TOC groups become more structured and adaptable, using advanced technologies, and expanding into legitimate industries, setting the stage for today's sophisticated TOC networks (Europol, 2021).

#### *C. Cold War Period*

During the Cold War, TOC activities became more pronounced, particularly with the emergence of Latin American drug cartels. Cartels in Colombia and Mexico exploited the growing global demand for narcotics, significantly expanding their drug trafficking routes and increasing their power and influence. Geopolitical tensions during the Cold War further fueled TOC, as various factions sought funding through illicit means. These cartels often bribed with or corrupted state officials to facilitate their operations, embedding themselves deeply in local and international politics and economies. This era saw drug cartels evolve into very powerful entities, using their substantial resources to influence both political landscapes and economic activities (UN, 2023; Europol, 2021).

#### *D. Late 20th Century to Present*

The period following the Cold War saw significant developments in TOC. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent political and economic instability in Eastern Europe created fertile ground for organized crime. Criminal networks took advantage of weakened state structures and engaged in various illegal activities, including arms smuggling and human trafficking (Europol, 2021). For example, Russian Mafia expanded its operations globally, becoming involved in activities ranging from drug trafficking to cybercrime (UNODC, 2021).

In the late 20th century, the rise of the internet and advancements in technology introduced new dimensions to TOC. Cybercrime emerged as a major threat, with criminals exploiting digital platforms for identity theft, financial fraud, and other illegal activities. These advancements allowed TOC groups to operate more anonymously and reach a global audience, complicating efforts to combat their activities (UNODC, 2021). For instance, the WannaCry ransomware attack in 2017 affected over 200,000 computers across 150 countries, demonstrating the global reach and impact of cybercrime (UNODC, 2021).

Overall, the history of TOC highlights its evolution and great capacity to adapt to ever-changing environment. From its origins in the Prohibition era to today's current manifestation in cybercrime, TOC has continuously evolved, exploiting new opportunities, and adapting to changing global conditions (UNODC, 2021; Europol, 2021).

## 2.2 Security Governance in Europe

### Introduction to EU Security Governance

Effective security governance within the EU requires a cohesive approach that involves coordinated efforts across member states and the development of robust legal and policy frameworks. This chapter will examine the structure of EU security governance, highlighting the strategies and mechanisms in place to combat TOC and ensure the safety and stability of the region (Europol, 2021).

TOC has a major impact on the EU, costing between €218 billion and €282 billion annually and affecting both victims and economic stability (European Commission,

2020). These crimes drain financial resources and worsen social issues, highlighting the need for strong countermeasures.

The EU's security strategy framework uses a coordinated and multi-layered approach. It involves entities at local, national, and international levels to ensure safety and stability across all member states. This framework brings together the efforts of police, judicial authorities, and intelligence agencies to effectively handle transnational crimes. A key part of this model is intelligence and information sharing, which enables member states to respond quickly to security threats. Tools like the Schengen Information System (SIS) and agencies like Europol facilitate this crucial exchange. Additionally, the EAW helps prevent criminals from escaping justice by crossing borders.

The EU also has a strong legal and regulatory framework that standardizes laws across member states, preventing criminals from exploiting weaker systems. The EU invests in building the operational capacities of its members by providing training, funding, and logistical support to enhance national capabilities in crime prevention and law enforcement. These frameworks are essential as they directly impact the economy and the safety of citizens. By encouraging collaboration and information sharing, the EU aims to build a resilient and adaptable security governance system capable of countering the evolving nature of TOC.

#### Key tools and Mechanisms

To effectively combat TOC, the EU relies on several key tools and mechanisms that facilitate cooperation and streamline enforcement. Notably, these include Europol, the EAW and the SIS. These are among the most important tools, representing the core of the EU's security strategy and enhancing its capacity to tackle TOC across member states.

For a comprehensive overview, it is important to also mention other important instruments, even if they cannot be explored in detail due to the length constraints of this study. These include the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS) for the exchange of information on criminal convictions, the Passenger Name Record (PNR) system for tracking airline passengers, the Prüm framework for sharing DNA, fingerprint, and vehicle registration data, Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) for collaborative cross-border investigations, and the European Investigation Order (EIO) for simplifying the



process of obtaining evidence across EU countries. While these tools also play a role in the EU's strategy against TOC, they will not be discussed further in this chapter to maintain focus on the primary mechanisms.

### *Europol*

Europol serves as the central hub for law enforcement cooperation across the EU, playing a significant role in facilitating intelligence sharing and coordinating anti-crime efforts. This agency's operational capabilities significantly enhance the EU's ability to tackle TOC.

For instance, during Operation Trojan Shield, Europol collaborated with international partners, including the FBI and the Dutch National Police, to dismantle OCGs. Europol provided critical intelligence analysis, operational support, and coordination. This operation, one of the largest in law enforcement history against encrypted criminal activities, resulted in over 800 arrests across several countries, including EU member states. Europol's involvement included analyzing millions of encrypted messages, coordinating international law enforcement actions, and supporting the operational logistics necessary to carry out the arrests (Europol, 2021a).

Similarly, in Operation Pollino, Europol played a key role in dismantling a major 'Ndrangheta network operating in multiple European countries, including Italy, Belgium, and Germany. Europol's contribution included intelligence sharing, real-time operational support, and coordination among national law enforcement agencies. This operation highlighted Europol's crucial role in combating TOC, demonstrating its ability to disrupt sophisticated criminal networks and facilitate international cooperation (Europol, 2021b).

Europol coordinates operations using its extensive network and advanced analytical tools, allowing member states to share vital intelligence swiftly and securely. These efforts underscore Europol's diverse contribution to enhancing security cooperation within the EU and beyond.

### *European Arrest Warrant (EAW)*

The EAW simplifies and accelerates the extradition process within the European Union. It allows judicial authorities in one EU country to request the arrest and transfer of a criminal suspect or sentenced individual from another EU country, reducing the chance for criminals to escape justice by exploiting national borders. Introduced in 2004, the

EAW fosters cooperation and trust between EU countries, ensuring that justice is served efficiently worldwide (European Commission, 2023).

The EAW offers large benefits, particularly in terms of speed and efficiency. In 2021 alone, the 27 EU member states issued a total of 14,789 EAWs, showing its widespread use and importance in enhancing EU-wide security and justice (European Commission, 2023). The speed of the EAW process is a major advantage, significantly reducing the time required to transfer suspects between countries compared to traditional extradition methods.

A clear example of the EAW's success is the arrest of Robert Dawes, a notorious British drug lord. In November 2015, authorities in the UK, France, and Spain coordinated to arrest him at his villa in Spain. Dawes was behind a large-scale cocaine smuggling operation, including the shipment of 1.3 tonnes of cocaine seized at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport in 2013. After his arrest, Dawes was quickly extradited to France, where he was sentenced to 22 years in prison. This case shows how effective the EAW is in bringing high-profile criminals to justice (Eurojust, 2023; Evening Standard, 2018).

The EAW has greatly improved judicial cooperation across the EU, enabling faster and more effective legal processes. The ability to swiftly bring suspects to justice enhances the overall security and trust among EU member states.

#### *Schengen Information System (SIS)*

The SIS plays a vital role in maintaining security within the EU. This large-scale system supports external border control and law enforcement cooperation across Schengen States. Police and border guards use SIS to enter and check alerts on wanted or missing persons and objects. It enables the swift exchange of information between national border control, customs, and police authorities, helping to catch criminals, find missing persons, and recover stolen property. The system processes millions of records, significantly improving security cooperation among member states (European Commission, 2020).

For example, when Ireland connected to SIS II in March 2021, it greatly boosted the Irish police's ability to tackle cross-border crime. Between March and September 2021, Ireland made 74 arrests based on SIS data for crimes like drug trafficking, robbery, and sexual assault. Additionally, there were 52 arrests on EAWs during this period,

almost doubling the number of arrests compared to the previous two years. This integration means law enforcement across participating countries can instantly recognize flagged individuals or objects, enhancing collaborative security efforts (Gov.ie, 2021a; Gov.ie, 2021b).

SIS benefits all member states by enabling seamless information sharing and cooperation. Alerts about missing persons or wanted criminals are shared rapidly, leading to swift, coordinated responses. The system's ability to process millions of records and provide instant access to crucial information makes it a cornerstone of the EU's efforts to combat transnational crime and ensure public safety.

These tools, along with others mentioned briefly, form the backbone of the EU's strategy to combat TOC.

#### EU Security Union Strategy 2020-2025

The EU Security Union Strategy 2020-2025 is a comprehensive plan designed to tackle the evolving security challenges facing the EU. This strategy emphasizes building robust capabilities to ensure a resilient security environment, addressing both digital and physical threats.

The strategy focuses on four main areas. First, it aims to protect and improve critical infrastructure, such as energy, transport, and healthcare, to prevent disruptions from spreading into other sectors. This involves enhancing the resilience of these infrastructures against both physical and cyber threats. Second, the strategy addresses evolving threats by enhancing cybersecurity measures and improving cross-border cooperation. This includes initiatives to boost the detection, prevention, and response to cyber-attacks, as well as the creation of a Joint Cyber Unit to provide coordinated responses to large-scale incidents. Third, it strengthens measures against terrorism, radicalization, and organized crime by improving information sharing and collaboration among law enforcement agencies. Reinforcing Europol's role in cross-border investigations and intelligence sharing is a key aspect of this effort, aimed at effectively disrupting TOC networks.

Moreover, the strategy builds a strong security network by fostering cooperation between public and private sectors and enhancing the capabilities of EU agencies. It

emphasizes the need for continuous adaptation and the strengthening of existing tools while developing new ones to counter emerging threats. The policy highlights that fragmentation in implementing security measures across member states can severely undermine the EU's collective response to TOC, underscoring the necessity for a unified and coherent approach.

By focusing on these priorities, the EU Security Strategy aims to create a secure and resilient environment for all its citizens. It underscores the importance of maintaining a comprehensive security framework capable of responding effectively to both current and future challenges, ensuring that the Union is well-prepared to protect its people and uphold its values in an increasingly complex global security landscape. The strategy's comprehensive approach ensures that it addresses not only immediate threats but also long-term security challenges, fostering a safer and more stable Europe for all its citizens.

## Conclusion

The EU's security governance framework effectively integrates various tools and mechanisms to combat TOC. Utilizing key instruments such as Europol, the EAW and the SIS, the EU significantly enhances cooperation and coordination among member states. This approach ensures swift and efficient responses to criminal activities. These tools, along with mechanisms like ECRIS, PNR, Prüm, JITs, and EIO, form the core of the EU's strategy against TOC.

However, despite these strengths, the framework faces several limitations. Challenges in data sharing and coordination among member states can hinder the effectiveness of Europol (Europol, 2021). Legal and procedural inconsistencies across member states sometimes delay the execution of the EAW (European Commission, 2023). Additionally, the SIS faces technical and operational challenges, including data privacy concerns and the need for real-time updates (European Commission, 2020).

Looking ahead, continually adapting, and strengthening these instruments will be vital in maintaining and improving the EU's ability to counter the evolving challenges posed by organized crime. Addressing these limitations through enhanced cooperation, improved legal harmonization, and advanced technological solutions will ensure the EU remains resilient against the threats of TOC.

## 2.3 Challenges and Responses to Organized Crime in the EU

### Overview of Organized Crime Challenges in the EU

Because of its unique structure characterized by open borders, the EU is particularly vulnerable to various criminal activities. Nonetheless, the EU has developed comprehensive strategies to combat TOC and enhance security governance. In this chapter, the study explores the challenges, responses, and future strategies of the EU's approach to TOC, focusing on the effectiveness of current frameworks and identifying areas for improvement.

#### *TOC challenges in the EU*

Drug trafficking is one of the major concerns, with the EU acting as a major market and transit point for drugs from Latin America, Africa, and Asia (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2023). In 2021, authorities across the EU seized over 303 tonnes of cocaine, along with substantial amounts of other drugs, including 1,500 tonnes of cannabis and 21 tonnes of methamphetamine (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2023). Ports in countries like Spain, Belgium, and the Netherlands are key transit hubs for drug trafficking, helping to bring drugs into and distribute them across Europe. The port of Antwerp in Belgium and the port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands are major entry points for cocaine, showing their strategic importance for traffickers (Europol, 2021). The EU's synthetic drug production, especially in the Netherlands and Belgium, also underscores the region's role not just as a consumer but as a producer in the global drug trade (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2023).

Despite these sizable seizures, enforcement encounters many obstacles. For example, the coordination between port authorities and national law enforcement agencies often experiences delay due to bureaucratic processes. In the port of Antwerp, the large volume of cargo makes thorough inspections challenging, leading to potential delays in identifying and seizing drug shipments. Furthermore, traffickers exploit legal loopholes and logistical complexities in major ports. Traffickers use legal cargo shipments to conceal cocaine, making detection difficult for customs officers (Europol, 2021). Addressing these issues requires streamlining procedures and increasing the use of technology like advanced scanning systems to enhance the efficiency of inspections.

Additionally, the fragmentation of information sharing across EU member states complicates efforts to track and dismantle drug trafficking networks. For example, inconsistent reporting standards and data formats hinder effective intelligence sharing between countries. Increasing the integration of data systems and standardizing reporting protocols can improve cross-border cooperation (Europol, 2021).

Human trafficking involves complex networks that exploit people for labor and sexual exploitation, highlighting a serious human rights issue within and beyond the EU (EU Strategy to Tackle Organised Crime, 2021). Between 2017 and 2018, the EU registered over 14,000 victims of human trafficking, with sexual exploitation accounting for 60% of cases (European Commission, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic made the situation worse, leaving vulnerable people even more susceptible to exploitation (Frontex, 2021). Resource limitations hinder operations against human trafficking, as many countries lack sufficient funding and personnel to support victims and pursue traffickers. Shelters for trafficking victims often lack funds, leading to inadequate care and support services (European Commission, 2020). Legal hurdles complicate enforcement. Differences in legal definitions and penalties for trafficking-related offenses across EU member states create inconsistencies in prosecuting traffickers. In some countries, traffickers exploit lenient laws to avoid severe penalties. Lengthy judicial processes can delay justice and allow traffickers to continue their operations (Frontex, 2021).

Cybercrime has evolved with advancements in technology, creating new challenges for security and law enforcement agencies (EU Parliament on Organized Crime in Europe - Trends, 2022). The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) reported that ransomware attacks have increased significantly, affecting businesses, government institutions, and critical infrastructure (European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, 2022). The complexity and scale of these cyber threats require coordinated responses, emphasizing the interconnected nature of TOC in the EU. Keeping up with these technological advancements is difficult. Criminals use encryption and anonymization tools like end-to-end encryption in messaging apps, which hinders authorities from intercepting communications (Europol, 2021). Specific challenges include the rise in ransomware attacks, such as the 2021 Colonial Pipeline incident, which prompted EU member states to strengthen their defenses (ENISA, 2022). Phishing attacks

have also become more sophisticated, targeting individuals and organizations to steal sensitive information.

To address these issues, the EU invests in advanced cyber capabilities and specialized training for law enforcement. Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) collaborates with member states to enhance digital forensic capabilities and develop proactive measures against cyber threats. The EU Cybersecurity Act strengthens ENISA's role, improving coordination of responses to cyber incidents across member states (ENISA, 2023).

### *Barriers to Enforcement*

One of the main barriers to effective law enforcement against TOC within the EU is the diversity of legal and judicial systems across member states. While the EU provides a framework for cooperation, the main issue often lies in implementing this framework due to differences in national laws, capacities, and priorities. This fragmentation can slow down and complicate the sharing of information and resources needed to tackle organized crime effectively (EU Strategy to Tackle Organised Crime, 2021).

For example, extradition cases have faced delays or denials due to legal inconsistencies between EU member states. In one notable case, the Spanish and German courts faced challenges during the extradition proceedings of a Catalan politician due to differing legal interpretations of the charges (European Parliament, 2022). Similarly, in 2019, a Belgian court denied the extradition of a suspect wanted in connection with organized crime charges in Italy, citing concerns over prison conditions (European Parliament, 2022).

Additionally, issues like language barriers, cultural differences, and varying levels of technical expertise further complicate coordinated responses and joint operations (Europol Organized Crime Threat Assessment, 2021). The EU has attempted to address these issues through initiatives like the EAW, but challenges remain in ensuring consistent application across all member states. Furthermore, varying national priorities can hinder collective action, as some countries might prioritize other issues over TOC, creating gaps in enforcement efforts (EU Parliament, 2022).

### *Emerging Threats*

Digital technologies and cryptocurrencies are increasingly shaping emerging threats in TOC. Cybercriminals use digital platforms to carry out illegal activities, including selling drugs, weapons, and distributing child exploitation material. Cryptocurrencies enable anonymous financial transactions, making it harder for law enforcement to trace money linked to criminal activities (EU Parliament on Organized Crime in Europe - Trends, 2022).

### *Cryptocurrency and Money Laundering*

Approximately 2-5% of global cryptocurrency transactions, worth about \$76 billion each year, involve criminal activity (European Parliament, 2022). In one case, Finnish custom seized over 1,800 bitcoins from a suspected drug trafficker, showing how criminals use cryptocurrencies for money laundering or to fund illegal activities. Authorities had trouble managing and disposing of the seized assets because of the unpredictable nature of cryptocurrency markets (European Parliament, 2022).

### *Dark Web Marketplaces*

Dark web marketplaces have become major platforms for illegal trade. EU law enforcement has targeted major marketplaces like *DarkMarket* and Wall Street Market, which were among the largest platforms for selling illegal goods. In 2021, authorities dismantled *DarkMarket* in a coordinated international operation, seizing 20 servers in Moldova and Ukraine (Europol, 2021). *DarkMarket* had nearly 500,000 users. On these platforms, criminals primarily trade drugs, followed by counterfeit documents, malware, and weapons (European Parliament, 2022).

Furthermore, technological advancements allow cybercriminals to enhance their security and expand their operations. They now operate across multiple jurisdictions without being physically present, challenging traditional law enforcement methods (Europol, 2021). The use of encrypted communication tools and anonymizing software like *Tor* enables criminals to conduct illegal activities with a high degree of secrecy.



## Assessment of the EU's Legislative Frameworks

### *Directive on Combating Terrorism (2017/541/EU)*

The Directive on Combating Terrorism, adopted in 2017, plays a crucial role in the EU's fight against terrorism, which often intersects with organized crime. The directive criminalizes preparatory acts such as travel for terrorism, training, and financing, enhancing the EU's capabilities. For example, in 2018, French authorities used this directive to prosecute a group of individuals planning a terrorist attack, resulting in successful convictions (European Parliament, 2017). The directive also emphasizes the rights of victims, which is vital for comprehensive counter-terrorism efforts (European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 2017).

### *Anti-Money Laundering Directives*

The EU's Anti-Money Laundering Directives form, particularly the Fifth (AMLD5) and Sixth (AMLD6), significantly enhance measures to combat money laundering and terrorism financing. In 2020, Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) across EU member states received approximately 1.1 million suspicious transaction reports, leading to the seizure of significant assets (European Parliament, 2018). AMLD5 increases transparency around the ownership of companies and trusts, while AMLD6 introduces harsher penalties and broadens the scope of money laundering predicates, ensuring legal entities are held accountable for facilitating such crimes (European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 2018). For example, in a high-profile case in 2021, German authorities used these directives to seize over \$60 million in cryptocurrency assets from a criminal organization.

### *New Directive on Combating Corruption*

The new Directive on Combating Corruption, enacted by the European Union in 2024, significantly strengthens the EU's framework against corruption. Specifically targeting sectors prone to corruption, such as public procurement and political office, the directive introduces stringent oversight and transparency requirements. It aims to harmonize anti-corruption efforts across member states by establishing uniform standards for identifying, reporting, and prosecuting corrupt activities. These standards apply to both public officials and private entities, facilitating a more integrated approach to preventing corruption. By aligning this directive with existing financial regulations like the Anti-

Money Laundering Directives, the EU ensures a cohesive and robust defense against corruption, reflecting its commitment to maintaining integrity and legal compliance across its institutions and member states (European Commission, 2024).

#### Evaluation of Operational Tools and Agencies

This chapter assesses the various operational tools and agencies the European Union uses to fight TOC. It also examines how the Council of Europe supports these efforts with additional mechanisms and frameworks. The chapter analyzes the activities and collaborative effects of different EU bodies, like Frontex and Eurojust, along with the Council of Europe's contributions. Europol will not be covered here as it was already discussed in the previous section. This discussion showcases Europe's complex strategy for tackling the widespread issues of organized crime.

#### *Frontex*

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, manages the EU's external borders and combats cross-border crime such as human trafficking and drug smuggling. For instance, in 2021, Frontex intercepted several attempts to smuggle drugs into the EU through maritime and land frontiers, as highlighted in their annual risk analysis report (Frontex, 2021). In one case, Frontex assisted Spanish authorities in seizing over 2,000 kilograms of hashish in a joint operation off the coast of Spain, demonstrating their effectiveness in combating drug smuggling.

#### *Eurojust*

Eurojust enhances judicial cooperation across the EU, tackling serious crimes like drug trafficking and cybercrime. Established in 2002, it streamlines legal processes across borders, facilitating extradition and mutual legal assistance. A notable demonstration of this is its coordination of Operation Pollino in December 2018. This extensive operation targeted the 'Ndrangheta OCG and resulted in the arrest of 90 individuals across multiple countries. Eurojust's support was crucial for the success of this multinational enforcement action, demonstrating its ability to handle the complex legal and jurisdictional issues typical of transnational crime (Eurojust, 2018).

### *Council of Europe's Contribution*

The Council of Europe, established in 1949 and distinct from the European Union, plays a crucial role in supporting the EU's efforts against organized crime. It promotes human rights, democracy, and the rule of law across its 47 member states, contributing significantly to combating TOC.

The Council offers frameworks and standards that bolster EU initiatives. It has developed key conventions like the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and the Warsaw Convention on money laundering, which set benchmarks for national legislation and facilitate international cooperation.

The Council's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) monitors the implementation of anti-trafficking measures, directly supporting the EU's efforts. Additionally, by promoting judicial cooperation and providing training, the Council ensures that anti-TOC measures respect human rights. This collaboration enhances the EU's capacity to tackle organized crime effectively.

### *GRECO (Group of States Against Corruption)*

GRECO was established to enhance the capacity of its member states to fight corruption by setting high standards for transparency and accountability. Corruption is often a facilitator of organized crime, and GRECO's evaluations and recommendations help EU countries to strengthen their anti-corruption measures, which in turn support the EU's overall strategy against organized crime (GRECO, 2021). For instance, GRECO's periodic reviews provide critical insights and foster the implementation of effective anti-corruption policies across Europe.

### *GRETA (Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings)*

This convention, overseen by the GRETA, provides a comprehensive framework to combat human trafficking. It emphasizes the protection of victims, prevention of trafficking, and prosecution of traffickers. By aligning with EU policies, this convention helps ensure a coordinated and effective approach to combating human trafficking across member states (Council of Europe, 2020). The convention's standards and GRETA's monitoring have been pivotal in enhancing national legislations and operational responses to trafficking in human beings.

#### *OLAF (European Anti-Fraud Office)*

Since 1999, OLAF has played an important role in protecting the European Union's financial interests by investigating fraud, corruption, and misconduct involving EU funds. In February 2024, OLAF worked with Polish Customs to successfully intercept the illicit import of 20,000 e-bikes. This operation prevented significant losses in customs duties and taxes, essential for the EU budget. This example underscores OLAF's active role in enforcing EU customs regulations and fighting import fraud. ("OLAF and Polish Customs Intercept Illicit Imports of 20,000 E-bikes," 2024; "OLAF - European Anti-Fraud Office").

#### *EMCDDA (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Addiction)*

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) monitors drug trends across Europe, collecting data essential for shaping policies and responses to drug-related organized crime. The EMCDDA's annual European Drug Report has influenced EU drug policy and led to initiatives like the EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025, which focuses on reducing drug demand and supply. In response to the EMCDDA's data on the increasing prevalence of synthetic drugs, the EU introduced measures to enhance early warning systems and control precursors, highlighting the impact of the Centre's work on combating drug-related organized crime.

#### *EPPO (European Public Prosecutor's Office)*

The EPPO is an independent EU body responsible for investigating and prosecuting financial crimes, including fraud, corruption, and money laundering (European Commission, 2021). Since its establishment, the agency has conducted over 1,000 investigations and secured several high-profile convictions. In one case, the EPPO prosecuted a corruption scandal involving EU funds, resulting in sizable fines and imprisonment for the offenders. It enhances legal cooperation and addresses complex cross-border financial crimes, showcasing its effectiveness in combating TOC.

#### *AMLA (EU Anti-Money Laundering Authority)*

The AMLA is a proposed EU agency that will oversee anti-money laundering efforts across member states (European Commission, 2021). Scheduled to begin operations in mid-2025, the AMLA will supervise financial institutions, coordinate with national

authorities, and strengthen the EU's ability to combat financial crime. The European Commission anticipates that the AMLA will significantly reduce money laundering and terrorist financing activities, improving the EU's resilience against such threats.

Responses and emerging strategies

### *Technological Innovations*

#### 5.1.1 Biometrics

The EU uses biometric systems to enhance border security and track criminals. The European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) employs biometric screening to manage border crossings more effectively (European Commission, 2021). For example, authorities have used facial recognition technology at borders to identify wanted criminals.

#### 5.1.2 Advanced Encryption and Cybersecurity

The EU is strengthening cybersecurity using advanced encryption technologies to protect sensitive data and combat cybercrime. The EU Cybersecurity Act boosts the role of the ENISA in handling cyber threats (ENISA, 2023). In recent high-profile cybercrimes, such as the attack on the European Medicines Agency, advanced encryption technologies were crucial in mitigating the threats.

#### 5.1.3 Predictive Policing and Artificial Intelligence

The EU employs predictive policing tools that incorporate artificial intelligence to identify potential crime hotspots and prevent organized crime. In Operation Trojan Shield, AI-assisted surveillance helped in apprehending criminals (Europol, 2021). Predictive policing has shown to be effective in reducing crime rates and improving arrest rates in several EU member states.

#### 5.1.4 Blockchain Technology

The EU is exploring blockchain technology to secure supply chains and combat money laundering. The EU's Horizon 2020 research program funds blockchain-related projects to combat fraud (European Commission, 2021). In one case, authorities used blockchain

technology to trace the origins of counterfeit goods, disrupting an organized crime operation.

#### 5.1.5 Data Analytics

The EU uses advanced data analytics to detect hidden patterns in criminal activities. The EMCDDA utilizes data analytics to monitor drug trends and identify emerging threats (EMCDDA, 2023). Data-driven investigations have been effective in disrupting organized crime networks and solving complex cases, highlighting the importance of data analytics in combating TOC.

### 5.2 Policy Initiatives and Reforms

#### 5.2.1 Directive on Asset Recovery and Confiscation (2023)

The Directive on Asset Recovery and Confiscation enhances the ability of EU member states to seize, manage, and dispose of assets from criminal activities (European Commission, 2023). For example, Italian authorities used this directive to confiscate assets worth €150 million from a criminal organization, significantly disrupting its operations. The directive ensures a consistent approach to asset recovery, resulting in more uniform enforcement across the EU. The European Commission reported that member states seized assets worth billions of euros under this directive, showing its impact.

#### 5.2.2 EU Strategy to Tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025

The EU's Strategy to Tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025 outlines a comprehensive approach to addressing organized crime, focusing on dismantling criminal networks, improving law enforcement cooperation, and cutting off criminal finances (European Commission, 2021). The strategy led to successful operations like the joint EU-UK operation against a major drug trafficking ring, which resulted in 59 arrests and the seizure of 10 tonnes of drugs. The European Commission noted that these initiatives have dismantled dozens of criminal networks and intercepted large volumes of illegal goods.

### 5.2.3 EL PAcCTO 2.0 Program

The EL PAcCTO program is a collaborative initiative between the EU, Latin America, and the Caribbean, aiming to bolster the fight against TOC (European External Action Service, 2023). The program has a substantial budget of €58.8 million and focuses on enhancing judicial and security cooperation across regions. EL PAcCTO facilitated successful joint operations, such as a cross-border investigation into a human trafficking ring, leading to multiple arrests and rescuing victims. The program fosters specialized cooperation and strengthens the rule of law, impacting various forms of organized crime.

### International Cooperation

International cooperation is vital for the European Union's efforts to tackle TOC. The EU collaborates closely with several key international partners and engages in regional and bilateral agreements to address complex criminal networks.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) plays a crucial role in this effort. UNODC works to combat drugs, crime, terrorism, and corruption worldwide. One of its key tools is the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which provides a legal framework for international cooperation. In 2020, the EU contributed €24 million to various UNODC programs targeting drug trafficking, human trafficking, and cybercrime (UNODC, 2021). Together, the EU and UNODC run joint training programs to enhance the skills of law enforcement officials, ensuring they can effectively tackle organized crime.

Interpol, the International Criminal Police Organization, is another essential partner. Interpol facilitates international police cooperation and crime control. Through operations like Operation Pangea, the EU and Interpol have shown the power of collaboration. In 2022, Operation Pangea led to the seizure of over €10 million worth of counterfeit medicines (Interpol, 2023; Government of the Netherlands, 2023). The EU and Interpol also conduct joint training programs focusing on cybercrime and counterfeiting, improving coordination among international law enforcement agencies (Interpol, 2023).

The EU engages in regional cooperation agreements, such as the EU-Latin America Cooperation Agreement on Drugs, which emphasizes judicial collaboration and

intelligence sharing. This agreement has led to significant drug seizures and the dismantling of criminal networks (European Commission, 2023). Similarly, the EU-Central America Association Agreement focuses on security cooperation, targeting issues like human trafficking and drug smuggling (European Commission, 2021).

Bilateral agreements with North African and Balkan countries further highlight the EU's commitment to combating TOC through international collaboration. These agreements facilitate targeted operations against smuggling, terrorism, and organized crime networks (UNODC, 2021). By working closely with international partners, the EU demonstrates the importance of global cooperation in addressing the pervasive threat of organized crime.

#### International Harmonization of EU Legislation

A vital aspect of the EU's international cooperation efforts is the harmonization of its legislative framework with key international conventions. The EU has been progressively aligning its laws with the UNTOC and the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Recent developments indicate significant steps towards combating corruption and organized crime. In November 2023, the UNTOC conducted a comprehensive review assessing the EU's implementation of UNCAC provisions on criminalization, law enforcement, and international cooperation (European Commission, 2023a). Additionally, in May 2023, the European Commission proposed modernizing anti-corruption measures by harmonizing the definitions of corruption offenses, setting minimum penalties, and extending statutes of limitations across member states (European Commission, 2023b). These efforts demonstrate the EU's commitment to standardizing legal frameworks to enhance cross-border cooperation and improve the effectiveness of its anti-corruption and anti-organized crime strategies. Moreover, the proposed Cybercrime Convention, currently being negotiated by the United Nations, aims to address the growing threats posed by cybercrime, which has become a multi-trillion-dollar industry (UN News, 2024). This convention seeks to criminalize key cybercrimes such as hacking and network security breaches, emphasizing the importance of international cooperation and strong human rights safeguards (UNODC, 2024). By aligning its legislation with these international frameworks, the EU not only strengthens its internal mechanisms but also promotes more effective collaboration with global



partners. This harmonization is crucial for maintaining a unified and robust approach to combating organized crime and corruption on a global scale.

#### *5.4 Resource Allocation and Limitations*

Resource allocation and limitations remains a considerable challenge to the EU's efforts against TOC. Agencies like EMCDDA rely on adequate funding to monitor drug trends and support policymaking (EMCDDA, 2023). However, budget constraints often limit the capabilities of key agencies such as Europol and Frontex, affecting their effectiveness in combating organized crime. Moreover, the varying resource allocations across EU member states create disparities in enforcement capacities. Some countries have well-funded law enforcement agencies, while others struggle with limited budgets, affecting their ability to effectively combat TOC (European Commission, 2021). These disparities highlight the need for a more unified approach to resource allocation to enhance the EU's overall effectiveness in tackling organized crime.

In conclusion, many issues and challenges remain in the effort of the EU to combat TOC, particularly in terms of enforcement and cooperation, as well as resource allocation and limitations. However, the EU has developed robust strategies to address these challenges and is exploring innovative solutions to tackle future threats. By enhancing international cooperation, improving technological capabilities, and allocating resources more effectively, the EU can strengthen its ability to combat organized crime and improve security governance across the region.

### III. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design to investigate the effectiveness of current strategies in combating TOC in Europe. By focusing on case studies of cocaine trafficking and migration dynamics, the research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the challenges and responses in the EU's security governance framework. Additionally, the study evaluates the role of Europol and the EAW in addressing these issues, assessing their impact on TOC and security governance in the EU.

#### 3.2 Data Collection Methods

The primary data for this research comes from multiple sources. Document analysis involves examining reports, policy documents, and strategic frameworks from key EU bodies such as Europol, the European Commission, and the EMCDDA. These documents provide valuable insights into the policies, operational strategies, and effectiveness of various anti-TOC measures. By analyzing these documents, the study gains a comprehensive view of the formal approaches taken to combat TOC.

The study focuses on two detailed case studies. The first explores Spain's critical role in the European cocaine trade and examines the profound impact of migration on the dynamics of organized crime. The second case study evaluates the EU's response mechanisms, focusing on Europol and the EAW. Both case studies draw on existing literature, official reports, and statistical data to offer a comprehensive view of the issues.

Quantitative data from Europol, the EMCDDA, and other relevant agencies will support the findings from document analysis and case studies. This data includes statistics on drug seizures, arrests, and the effectiveness of cross-border operations. The integration of quantitative data helps in validating the qualitative insights and offers a more robust analysis.

The data collected will be analyzed by systematically reviewing the documents and statistical data to identify key themes and patterns related to the research questions. The initial step involves familiarization with all collected documents and statistical data to gain an overall understanding of the context and content. This is followed by extracting relevant information that addresses the objectives of the study.

Thematic analysis will be employed to group the extracted information into broader themes to understand the main issues, challenges, and successes in combating TOC. This process helps synthesize findings from different sources, providing a coherent narrative. The case study synthesis will integrate findings from the two case studies to draw broader conclusions about the effectiveness of the EU's strategies against TOC. Comparisons will be made to highlight common challenges and successful practices.

Validation involves cross-referencing findings from different data sources to ensure validity and reliability. By comparing and contrasting information from documents and statistical data, the study ensures a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how current security governance frameworks can be adapted to combat the evolving threats of TOC more effectively in Europe.

### 3.3 Selection of Case Studies

The chosen case studies are strategically selected due to their significant relevance and impact on understanding TOC in Europe. Spain's role in cocaine trafficking is critical because of its geographical position as a primary entry point for cocaine from Latin America into Europe. By examining Spain, the study can explore how these factors facilitate TOC and how organized crime groups exploit these routes.

Ecuador's emergence as a significant transit point for cocaine highlights the international dimension of TOC. Ecuador's strategic location, combined with vulnerabilities within its criminal justice system and political instability, make it an essential link in the cocaine supply chain to Europe. By examining Ecuador's role, the study can provide insights into how external factors and international dynamics influence TOC within Europe.

The involvement of Balkan traffickers, particularly the Albanian mafia, underscores the complexity and reach of TOC networks within Europe. The Albanian mafia's sophisticated logistics and distribution networks illustrate the strategic alliances between Latin American cartels and European criminal groups. Studying their operations provides insights into the methods and strategies used to expand the cocaine market in Europe.

Migration dynamics are also a critical focus because they directly impact organized crime within the EU. The exploitation of migration routes for human

smuggling and trafficking complicates the EU's efforts to manage migration and maintain security. By examining the relationship between migration and organized crime, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how these dynamics influence the structure and strategies of criminal networks.

These case studies were chosen not only for their relevance and impact but also because they represent diverse aspects of TOC that challenge EU security governance. They offer a diverse view of the issues, allowing for a thorough evaluation of the EU's response strategies.

### 3.4 Limitations

Despite the strengths of the chosen methodology, several limitations should be acknowledged. One potential limitation is the reliance on document analysis, which may introduce biases based on the availability and selection of documents. The data obtained from reports and policy documents might reflect the perspectives of the issuing organizations, potentially leading to partial views of the issues. Additionally, the use of secondary data from agencies like Europol and the EMCDDA might be limited by the completeness and accuracy of the data provided.

Another limitation is the challenge of accessing certain data, particularly sensitive or classified information related to law enforcement operations. This could limit the depth of analysis in some areas. Furthermore, while the case studies offer a comprehensive view of specific aspects of TOC, they may not fully capture the diversity and complexity of all TOC activities in Europe.

Addressing these limitations involves careful selection and cross-referencing of multiple sources to ensure a balanced perspective. Triangulating data from various documents and statistical reports can help mitigate potential biases and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issues. By acknowledging these limitations, the study aims to maintain rigor and transparency in its findings.

## IV. Case Studies: Navigating the Evolving Landscape of TOC in the EU

### 4.1 Case Study 1: Cocaine Trafficking and Migration Dynamics

#### Introduction

This first case study examines how Spain acts as a primary gateway for cocaine entering Europe and explores the complex relationship between organized crime and migration dynamics. Criminal groups use these routes not only for drug trafficking but also for illegal activities like human smuggling, further complicating the EU's security landscape. The study aims to assess the effectiveness of EU counterstrategies in addressing these intertwined threats and to propose recommendations for improving security measures.

#### Spain and the Cocaine Market

##### *Geographical and Political Factors*

With its extensive coastlines along the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, including the Strait of Gibraltar and the Canary Islands, Spain serves as a key gateway for maritime traffic from South America and North Africa. Ports in Galicia and Algeciras are central hubs for cocaine transshipment, facilitating its distribution across Europe. This advantageous position allows traffickers to effectively exploit maritime routes, solidifying Spain's role as a primary entry point for cocaine into Europe (EMCDDA, 2023; Global Initiative, 2023).

Spain's strong political and economic ties with Latin American countries, rooted in shared language and cultural connections, make the communication and collaboration between traffickers easier. The stable political environment and robust law enforcement capabilities make Spain an attractive route for traffickers seeking efficient access to European markets. However, high youth unemployment rates and economic challenges create vulnerabilities that traffickers can exploit, potentially leading to corruption within law enforcement and customs agencies. These factors facilitate the movement of cocaine through Spain's ports and borders (EMCDDA, 2024; Europol, 2021; El País, 2023).

Transatlantic trafficking routes involving sailing, merchant and fishing vessels, 2022

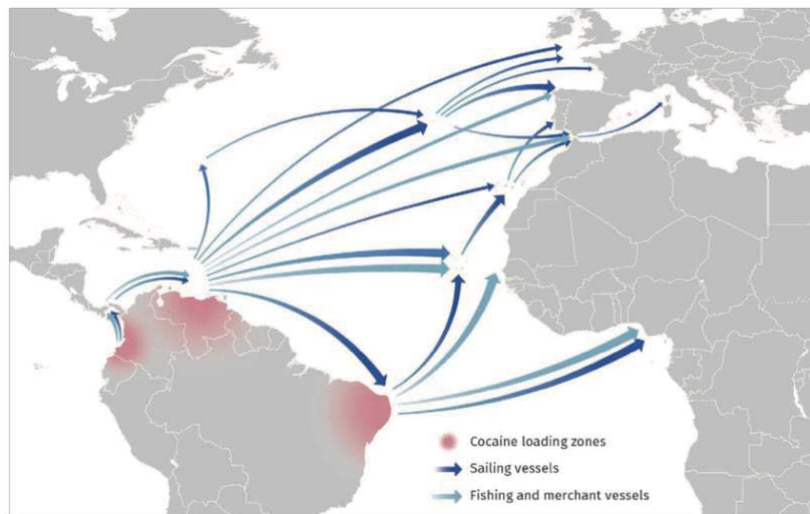


Figure 1: Transatlantic trafficking routes involving sailing, merchant and fishing vessels, 2022 (Source: UNODC, *Global Report on Cocaine 2023*)

#### *Historical Context and Trends*

Since the 1980s and 1990s, increased law enforcement pressure in the United States and other parts of Europe has made traffickers turn to Spain as a key entry point. Spanish and Latin American criminal organizations use fishing vessels, yachts, and commercial cargo to transport cocaine from Colombia and other major production areas (EMCDDA, 2023; Global Initiative, 2023).

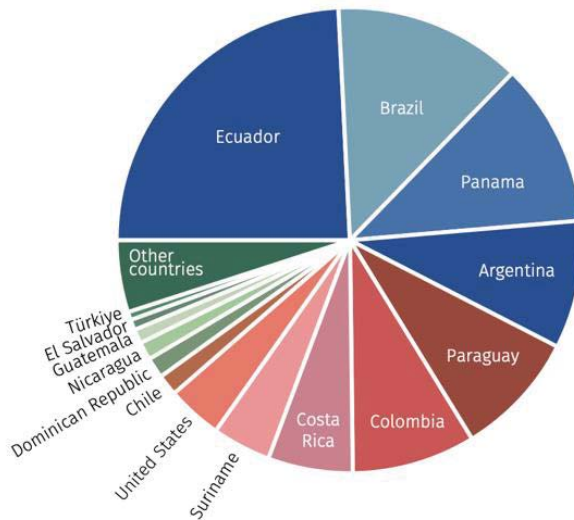
Recently, cocaine trafficking through Spain has evolved significantly. The purity and availability of cocaine have increased, reflecting changes in supply chains and market demands. In 2021, Spanish authorities seized about 49 tonnes of cocaine, ranking Spain among the top three European countries for cocaine seizures, along with Belgium and the Netherlands (InSight Crime, 2023). This high volume of seizures underscores Spain's central role in the European cocaine market and indicates a shift toward local processing, as shown by the discovery of numerous cocaine processing labs in the country (InSight Crime, 2023). These developments highlight the complex and evolving nature of cocaine trafficking in Spain, involving various criminal networks that exploit Spain's strategic location and infrastructure (EMCDDA, 2023; Global Initiative, 2023).

### *Ecuador as a Transit Hub*

Ecuador’s location along the Pacific coast makes it a key transit hub for cocaine destined for Europe, with ports in cities like Guayaquil playing a crucial role. Proximity to cocaine-producing regions in Colombia and Peru bolsters its position in the global trafficking network (UNODC, 2023). In 2023, competition among drug trafficking groups led to Ecuador's most violent year on record. Authorities seized record amounts of cocaine, surpassing Bolivia and Peru combined, underscoring Ecuador’s critical role in the cocaine trade (InSight Crime, 2023). Traffickers in Ecuador use advanced methods to smuggle cocaine. They hide drugs within legitimate cargo like bananas, seafood, and other goods exported from Ecuador’s ports. They use special packaging to avoid detection, including vacuum-sealing the drugs and embedding them in products. Chemical processes mask the smell, making it hard for drug-sniffing dogs to detect the cocaine (UNODC, 2023).

Traffickers also use “narco-submarines,” which are small, semi-submersible vessels that carry large quantities of cocaine across the Pacific Ocean to Central America, from where it is sent to Europe and North America. These vessels are built in remote jungle areas and are hard to detect because they sit low in the water. Fast boats and container ships are also used, blending in with regular maritime traffic to avoid detection (InSight Crime, 2023).

**Breakdown of cocaine seizures by customs authorities in Western and Central Europe, by country of departure of the consignment, 2021**



*Figure 2: Breakdown of cocaine seizures by customs authorities in Western and Central Europe, by country of departure of the consignment, 2021 (Source: World Customs Organization, Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Western Europe)*

Ecuador’s criminal justice system, hampered by corruption and limited resources, facilitates large-scale cocaine trafficking. Corrupt officials often assist drug shipments through important ports, while weaknesses in customs and border control are exploited by traffickers (UNODC, 2023). Bribery of port officials and law enforcement undermines border security efforts, with the high volume of cargo making thorough inspections challenging (UNODC, 2023).

Ecuador’s political landscape, marked by frequent government changes and internal conflicts, diverts resources and attention from combating organized crime. Traffickers exploit this instability to enhance their operations, solidifying Ecuador’s role as a key link in the cocaine supply chain to Europe. Political instability and high violence levels make it harder for law enforcement to tackle entrenched trafficking networks. Internal conflicts and frequent political shifts create an environment where organized



crime can thrive without consistent pressure from a unified government approach (UNODC, 2023; InSight Crime, 2023).

*Figure 3: Drug Trafficking and Routes in Ecuador (Source: Ecuador project and Organized Crime Observatory field work)*



Drug trafficking has a severe impact on local communities in Ecuador. Increased violence from competition among trafficking groups leads to higher homicide rates and general insecurity. The influx of drug money fuels corruption and undermines public trust in institutions. Communities near trafficking routes and production sites suffer from increased crime and social disruption (InSight Crime, 2023).

In conclusion, Ecuador remains a crucial part of the global cocaine trafficking network. Addressing its internal challenges is essential. Strengthening law enforcement, improving judicial oversight, and tackling corruption are key steps to reduce its role in the drug trade.

**As authorities seize more cocaine flowing through Ecuador, homicides have similarly increased**

Metric tons of cocaine seized and the homicide rate per 100,000 people, 2016–2023

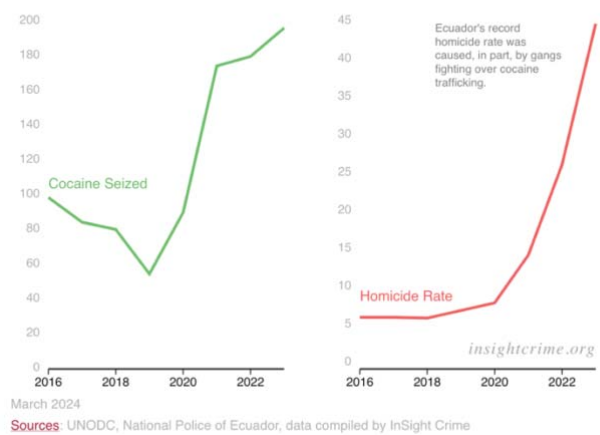


Figure 4: Metric tons of cocaine seized and the homicide rate per 100,000 people, 2016-2023. (Source: UNODC, National Polic of Ecuador, data complied by InSight Crime)

*Presence of Balkan Traffickers*

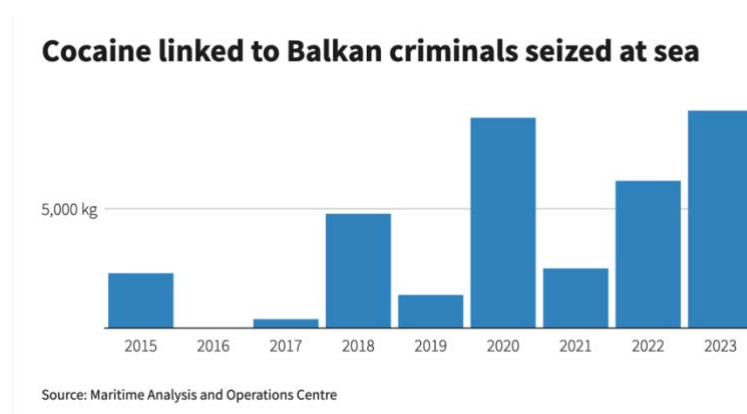
The Albanian mafia has become a significant force in the European cocaine market by using Spain as a key distribution hub. Known for their efficiency and violence, these OCGs control large portions of the cocaine trade. They form strategic alliances with Latin American cartels to ensure a steady supply of cocaine, which they distribute across Europe (Global Initiative, 2023).

Their prominence in the cocaine trade is largely due to their sophisticated logistics and distribution networks. Balkan traffickers use advanced smuggling methods, such as concealed compartments in vehicles, maritime routes, and air transport. Their operations involve multiple layers of coordination, allowing them to effectively evade law enforcement. This efficiency highlights their capability in managing extensive cocaine distribution from strategic positions in Spain (EMCDDA, 2024; Global Initiative, 2023).

The rise of Balkan traffickers in South America can be traced back to the turmoil and conflicts in the Balkans during the 1990s. Wars and economic crises created conditions that pushed many Balkan criminals to seek new opportunities abroad. Latin America, with its turbulent political climate and booming cocaine production, became an attractive destination. Once established, Balkan OCGs coordinated large-scale cocaine shipments to Europe, leveraging advanced logistics and communication technologies to manage their operations and evade detection (Global Initiative, 2020).

In 2020, Europol coordinated *Operation Familia*, targeting a major Balkan criminal network involved in large-scale cocaine trafficking from South America to Europe using private planes. This operation led to the arrest of 16 individuals and the seizure of over a tonne of cocaine and €2 million in cash. It revealed that Balkan traffickers were operating in Europe, South America, and Asia, coordinating maritime trafficking of multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine (Europol, 2023).

In another major operation in 2023, Montenegro, supported by Europol, dismantled a large Balkan criminal network trafficking cocaine from Central America to



Europe. This operation disrupted a major smuggling route, highlighting the critical role Balkan traffickers play in the trans-Atlantic cocaine trade (Europol, 2023).

*Figure 5: Cocaine linked to Balkan criminals seized at sea. (Source: Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre)*

#### *Global Initiatives to Combat Cocaine Trafficking*

The UNODC's 2023 Global Report on Cocaine highlights how drug traffickers are diversifying their routes and creating new hubs, urging stronger international cooperation (UNODC, 2023). In response, the EU has launched the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan, focusing on better coordination, intelligence sharing, and joint operations (EMCDDA, 2024). These collaborations, along with advanced surveillance and targeted

law enforcement, show a strong global effort to combat drug networks (Global Initiative, 2023).

In 2023, European authorities made significant seizures, including a 10-ton haul in Hamburg, Germany (InSight Crime, 2023). However, challenges remain. Only about 2% of global shipping containers are inspected, allowing much cocaine to slip through (CSIS, 2023). Corruption among port and customs officials worsens this issue, especially in South America and the Caribbean (El País, 2023).

Despite technological advancements in surveillance, inconsistent adoption hinders thorough inspections (CSIS, 2023). Many countries, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, face resource constraints that limit effective drug interdiction (UNODC, 2023). Additionally, OGCs continually adapt their methods, making it hard for global initiatives to stay ahead (InSight Crime, 2023).

Efforts to eradicate coca cultivation need to balance with providing alternative livelihoods for farmers to prevent social unrest (UNODC, 2023). Political instability in key cocaine-producing countries also hampers consistent anti-narcotics strategies (InSight Crime, 2023). Effective counter-trafficking requires seamless coordination between multiple agencies, but bureaucratic hurdles and differing priorities often obstruct these efforts (UNODC, 2023). While there have been successes, tackling corruption and political instability is crucial for sustainable results.

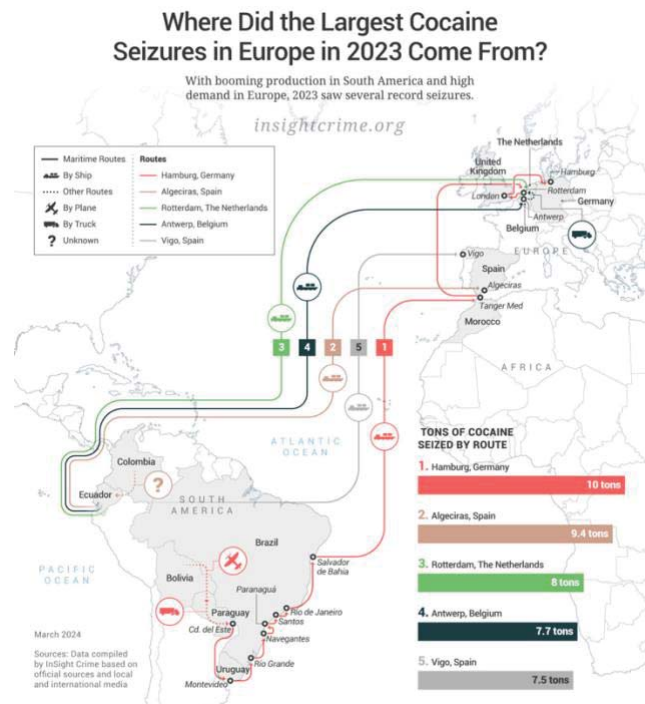


Figure 6: Where Did the Largest Cocaine Seizures in Europe in 2023 Come From ?. Source: Data Compiled by InSight Crime based on official sources and local and international media)

## Migration Dynamics

### *Migration Trends in Europe*

In recent years, migration flows in Europe have surged. According to the International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix, arrivals increased by 55% in 2023, reaching a total of 292,985 individuals (IOM, 2024). This rise is driven by ongoing geopolitical instability and economic hardships in the countries of origin, prompting people to seek refuge and better opportunities in Europe. Migration peaks mainly occur in the warmer months, with the third quarter consistently seeing the highest numbers as milder weather conditions make travel safer (IOM, 2024).

The main migration routes into Europe are through the Mediterranean and the Western African Atlantic paths. The Central Mediterranean route, leading primarily to Italy, is the most heavily trafficked. Italy receives the highest number of arrivals due to its direct access to the European mainland, making it a crucial entry point for migrants from North Africa and the Middle East (IOM, 2024). Additionally, the Western African Atlantic route, leading to the Canary Islands, has seen a sharp rise in activity as smugglers increasingly use this route to avoid intensified patrols in the Mediterranean. The Eastern Mediterranean route, passing through Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus, remains active but is less busy than the central route. This route serves as a significant passage for migrants from Turkey and Syria, emphasizing the roles of Spain and Italy as key entry points in European migration dynamics (IOM, 2024).

### *Exploitation of Migration by Organized Crime*

OCGs in Europe heavily exploit migration routes to smuggle both humans and drugs, taking advantage of the vulnerabilities of migrant populations. The International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix reveals that Mediterranean routes into Europe are actively used by sophisticated smuggling networks. These networks expose migrants to extreme risks and abuses, often coercing them into labor or sexual exploitation under the guise of facilitating their journey to safety.

Drug trafficking is closely linked with human smuggling along these routes. The European Drug Report (EMCDDA, 2023) highlights that major drug seizures, particularly of cocaine, often occur in maritime ports that are also key for migration flows,

such as those in Spain and Italy. Traffickers use the high volume of human movement as cover to smuggle drugs, exploiting the chaotic conditions at these entry points.

Migrant populations are especially vulnerable due to their often irregular or undocumented status, lack of local language skills, and limited access to legal protections. According to the Frontex report on drug trafficking and human smuggling, migrants are frequently coerced into participating in criminal activities, sometimes as a means to pay for their passage. Additionally, inadequate reception and integration measures push many migrants to the margins of society, making them more susceptible to exploitation by criminal networks.

In summary, OCGs exploit migration routes for both human smuggling and drug trafficking, leveraging the vulnerabilities of migrant populations. This exploitation endangers migrants and complicates the management of migration flows and border security in Europe.

#### *Impact on EU Security and Governance*

The link between migration and organized crime creates major issues for EU security and governance, affecting migration policies and border stability. Europe's border agencies face enormous difficulties in distinguishing between migrants fleeing persecution and those trafficked by smugglers, complicating rescue, and reception operations. The International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM, 2023) highlights these problems. OCGs exploit migration routes to smuggle people, drugs, and weapons, requiring coordinated responses from multiple EU agencies.

Criminal networks align their operations with migration patterns, especially along the Central Mediterranean route through Spain and Italy. The European Drug Report (EMCDDA, 2023) indicates that these activities exploit chaotic border situations and limited law enforcement resources, straining EU security and allowing organized crime to penetrate further into EU territories.

Several cases show the direct links between migration and TOC within the EU. Investigations have uncovered human smuggling rings operating along the Central Mediterranean route that smuggle migrants and engage in drug trafficking and other criminal activities (IOM, 2023). The Frontex report details how Eastern European criminal networks use migrant flows to smuggle women into the EU for sexual

exploitation, highlighting the complex challenges EU security forces face in separating humanitarian migration from criminal exploitation (Frontex, 2023).

In summary, the connection between migration and organized crime creates significant problems for EU security and governance. Addressing these issues requires coordinated strategies that integrate enhanced law enforcement cooperation, improved data sharing, and robust legal frameworks to protect migrants' rights and secure EU borders.

#### *Analysis of Law Enforcement Adaptations*

Spain has embraced advanced technologies to strengthen surveillance and interdiction at key points like the major ports of Algeciras and Valencia, as well as coastal areas such as the Strait of Gibraltar. AI-driven container scanning systems have revolutionized inspections by using machine learning algorithms to analyze X-ray images and detect hidden drug cargoes. This technology played a crucial role in the 2023 record seizure of 11 tonnes of cocaine in Valencia (InSight Crime, 2023). Additionally, drones and satellite monitoring are now integral in patrolling maritime routes, providing real-time data and high-resolution imagery to help the Spanish Navy and Coast Guard detect and intercept drug smuggling vessels before they reach the mainland (El País, 2023).

Specialized units like the Anti-Drug Criminal Intelligence Centre (CICA) have greatly improved operational outcomes. These units integrate various branches of law enforcement and focus on intelligence-led operations using informants, undercover agents, and electronic surveillance to dismantle trafficking networks. For instance, one notable operation led to the arrest of 17 individuals involved in extensive drug trafficking and money laundering activities (EMCDDA, 2024).

Spain's strategy heavily relies on collaboration with international bodies like Europol and Frontex to enhance cross-border operations and intelligence sharing. Joint Investigation Teams (JITs), coordinated by Europol, facilitate synchronized raids and arrests across multiple jurisdictions, playing a critical role in disrupting sophisticated trafficking networks operating across Europe. A joint operation in December 2023 with Frontex resulted in the seizure of over 850 kg of drugs and the arrest of 46 suspects across 61 airports. Moreover, working with law enforcement agencies in Latin America has been pivotal, with Spanish liaison officers in countries like Colombia and Ecuador enhancing the capacity to intercept drug shipments at their source (UNODC, 2023; CSIS, 2023).

Spanish authorities measure the success of counter-trafficking operations through several key metrics. They look at the quantity of drugs intercepted, such as the 11 tonnes of cocaine seized in Valencia in 2023 (InSight Crime, 2023). They also track the number of arrests and successful prosecutions of traffickers, like the 17 individuals arrested in a major operation (EMCDDA, 2024). Disruption of drug trafficking networks and the effective use of advanced technologies, including AI-driven scanners and drones, are also critical measures of success (UNODC, 2023; El País, 2023).

Despite these advancements, Spanish law enforcement faces several challenges and limitations in combating trafficking. Corruption among port and customs officials remains a significant obstacle, allowing traffickers to exploit vulnerabilities. Stronger oversight and accountability measures are needed to address corruption (El País, 2023). Limited resources, particularly in terms of funding and personnel, hinder comprehensive interdiction efforts. Increasing investment in law enforcement infrastructure and training is essential (UNODC, 2023). Inconsistent adoption of technology across all ports limits overall effectiveness. Standardizing the deployment of advanced scanning and monitoring equipment would improve inspection rates (CSIS, 2023). Additionally, traffickers continually adapt their methods to evade detection, requiring law enforcement to stay ahead with innovative strategies. Enhanced intelligence sharing and rapid adaptation of tactics are crucial (InSight Crime, 2023).

Implementing stricter oversight and anti-corruption measures at ports to ensure integrity among officials is crucial (El País, 2023). Securing more funding for law enforcement agencies to improve infrastructure, technology, and training is essential (UNODC, 2023). Standardizing the deployment of advanced surveillance and scanning technologies across all major ports will improve inspection rates (CSIS, 2023). Developing adaptive strategies and improving intelligence sharing to counter the evolving tactics of traffickers are necessary steps (InSight Crime, 2023). Through robust technological enhancements and international collaborations, Spain has made considerable strides in disrupting the cocaine trade and reducing the influence of organized crime within its borders. Continuous adaptation and enhanced cooperation are essential to effectively counter the evolving tactics of traffickers.

## 4.2 Case Study 2: Evaluating the EU's Response

### Introduction

The European Union confronts the persistent challenge of TOC. To combat these threats, the EU relies on essential tools such as Europol and the EAW. This case study evaluates the EU's strategies against TOC, focusing on the effectiveness and adaptability of Europol and the EAW. It aims to identify best practices, highlight shortcomings, and provide recommendations to strengthen the EU's overall approach to fighting TOC.

### Europol's Role

#### *Mandate and Operations*

Europol, established in 1999, is the EU's agency for law enforcement cooperation. The Europol Regulation (EU) 2016/794 outlines its mandate, which includes supporting and strengthening national law enforcement authorities in preventing and combating serious international crime and terrorism (Europol Regulation, 2016). Europol operates as a central hub for intelligence sharing and coordination of cross-border criminal investigations, enabling member states to respond swiftly and effectively to criminal threats (Europol, 2021).

Europol's operations include deploying mobile offices and forensic experts to support national authorities during critical interventions. The agency utilizes advanced data analysis tools such as the Europol Analysis System (EAS) to identify crime patterns and trends, crucial for anticipating future criminal activities and developing strategic responses. Additionally, Europol offers training programs to enhance the skills and capabilities of law enforcement officers across the EU, promoting a culture of continuous learning (Europol, 2021).

#### *Major Operations*

Operation Trojan Shield represents one of Europol's most notable achievements in combating organized crime. Launched in coordination with the FBI and the Dutch National Police, this operation targeted criminal networks using encrypted communication platforms. Criminals believed these platforms were secure, but law enforcement agencies had secretly developed and managed them. This allowed Europol



and its partners to monitor criminal communications in real-time. The outcomes of Operation Trojan Shield were substantial, with over 800 individuals arrested and significant quantities of drugs, weapons, and cash seized (Europol, 2021; DW, 2021). Specifically, the operation led to the seizure of over six tons of cocaine, five tons of marijuana, two tons of methamphetamine, and \$148 million in various currencies (Europol, 2021; Justice.gov, 2021). Additionally, over 27 million messages were intercepted and reviewed, providing critical intelligence that facilitated numerous arrests and ongoing investigations (ComputerBase, 2021).

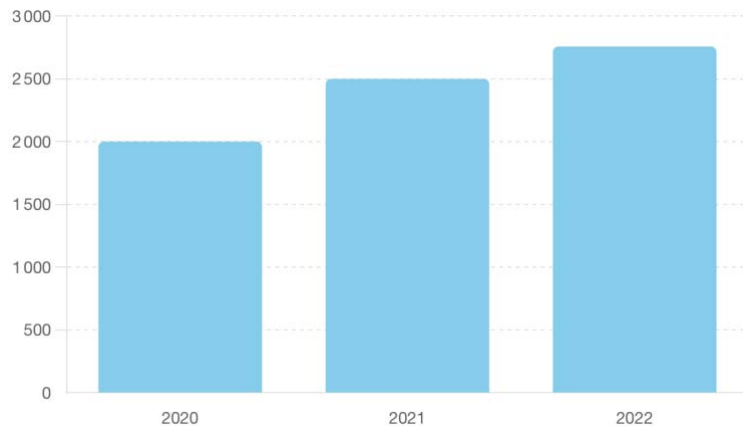
Operation Pollino targeted the 'Ndrangheta mafia, one of the world's most powerful and secretive criminal organizations. Coordinated by Europol, this operation involved law enforcement agencies from Italy, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The operation aimed to dismantle the mafia's extensive network involved in drug trafficking and money laundering (Europol, 2018). The primary challenge was the mafia's sophisticated structure and deep-rooted connections across various countries. By pooling resources and information, the participating countries conducted simultaneous raids and arrests. The results were significant, with 90 arrests and the seizure of millions of euros in assets, including luxury cars, properties, and cash. This operation highlighted the importance of cross-border collaboration in tackling organized crime (Europol, 2018).

Operation Opson is an ongoing initiative focused on combating the trade in counterfeit and substandard food and beverages. Conducted annually in collaboration with Interpol and national food safety authorities, Europol's role involves coordinating efforts, providing analytical support, and facilitating information exchange (Europol, 2020). The detection and tracing of counterfeit goods, often involving intricate distribution networks, pose significant challenges. Europol employs advanced data analysis and intelligence sharing to identify suspicious patterns and trace the origins of counterfeit products. In one year alone, authorities seized over 12,000 tonnes of illegal products, ranging from counterfeit alcohol to substandard meat and dairy products. These seizures protect public health and prevent significant economic losses for legitimate businesses (Europol, 2020).

### Impact and Adaptability

Europol has demonstrated considerable effectiveness in combating TOC through its comprehensive approach to intelligence sharing, operational support, and international cooperation. The agency's ability to coordinate complex operations underscores its critical role in disrupting sophisticated criminal networks (Europol, 2021; Europol, 2018). By leveraging advanced analytical tools and fostering robust partnerships with law enforcement agencies across the EU, Europol enhances the collective capability to tackle TOC effectively.

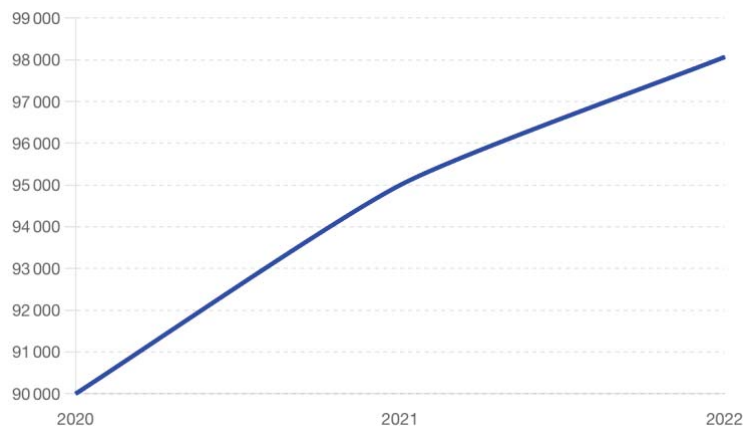
In 2022, Europol accepted 98,068 operational contributions and supported 2,758 operations. The number of operations supported by Europol has steadily increased from 2020 to 2022, reflecting its



expanding operational role (figure 7: Number of Operations Supported by Year. Source: ChatGPT generated).

The agency organized or supported 394 action days and established 18 Operational Task Forces (OTFs).

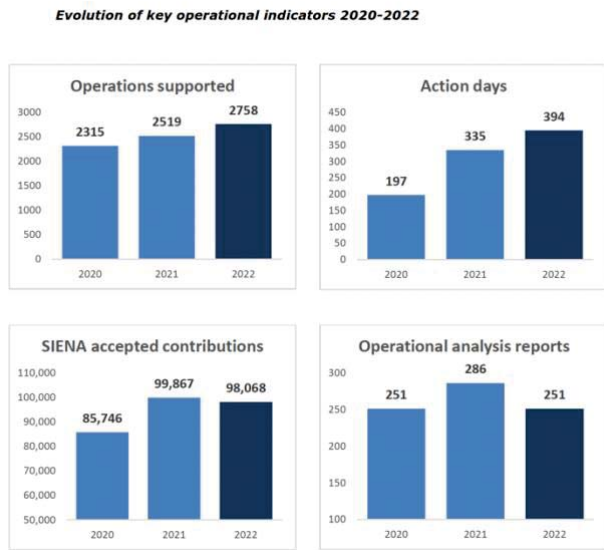
The volume of operational contribution accepted by Europol has shown an upward trend, indicating the growing demand for Europol's support and intelligence services (Figure 8:



Operational Contributions by Year. Source: ChatGPT generated).

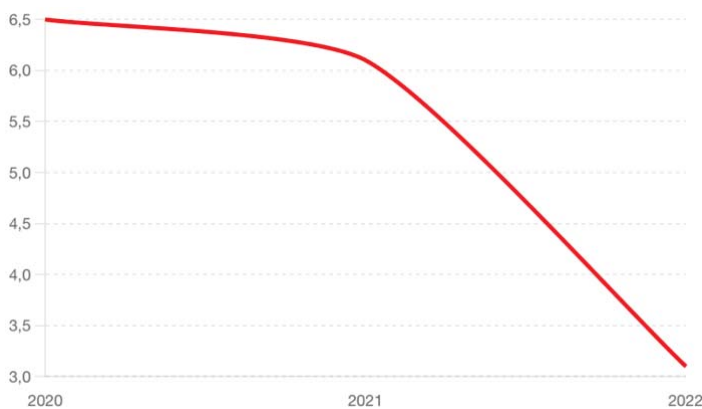
Satisfaction with operational support, as measured via the User Survey, reached an impressive 9.6 out of 10, reflecting the high regard in which Europol's support is held by member states (Europol, 2023).

The evolution of key operational indicators from 2020 to 2022 highlights the increasing scale and scope of Europol's activities (Figure 9: Evolution of Key Operational Indicators 2020-2022. Source: CAAR Europol 2022).



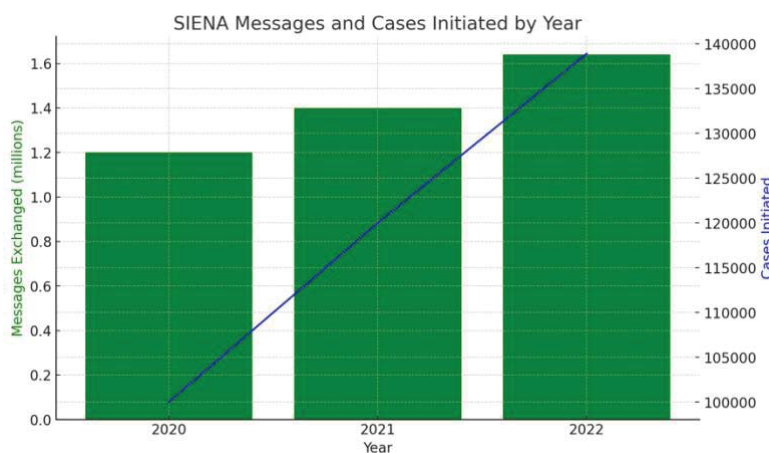
Europol's adaptability to evolving criminal landscapes is evident in its proactive strategies and technological advancements.

The agency continuously updates its methods to address new threats, such as cybercrime and the use of encrypted communication by criminals. For instance, Operation Trojan Shield demonstrated Europol's innovative approach by exploiting criminal reliance on encrypted platforms to monitor and intercept illicit activities in real-time (Europol, 2021). Similarly, initiatives like the EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) showcase Europol's agility in addressing online radicalization and terrorism (Europol Regulation, 2016).



Technological advancements play a significant role in Europol's operations. In 2022, Europol introduced a new analysis tool and a data analysis portal, enhancing its capability to process and analyze large

volumes of data. Additionally, the deployment of a new Visualization & Analysis Toolbox has improved the efficiency of data interpretation and operational planning. The speed of first-line response to SIENA requests also improved significantly, averaging 3.1 days compared to 6.1 days in 2021 (Figure 10: Average Response Times for SIENA Requests. Source: ChatGPT generated) (Europol, 2023).



The number of SIENA messages and cases initiated has also been on the rise demonstrating Europol's increasing activity in facilitating cross-border law enforcement cooperation (Figure 11: SIENA

*Messages and Cases Initiated by Year. Source: ChatGPT generated).*

However, many difficulties remain. Coordinating actions across different jurisdictions with varying legal frameworks can complicate joint operations. Additionally, the sheer volume of data requiring analysis presents a major hurdle. To overcome these challenges, Europol has invested in advanced data analysis technologies and increased its focus on fostering seamless cooperation among member states (Europol, 2020). Regular training programs and workshops help align the practices and capabilities of national law enforcement agencies, ensuring a unified and efficient response to TOC.

## European Arrest Warrant (EAW)

### *Mandate and Operations*

The EAW was established to streamline the extradition process within the European Union, aiming to enhance judicial cooperation and ensure swift justice. Introduced by the Council Framework Decision 2002/584/JHA, the EAW allows judicial authorities in one EU country to request the arrest and transfer of a criminal suspect or convicted individual from another EU country (European Commission, 2021). This legal framework represents an important step forward in creating a unified judicial area in Europe.

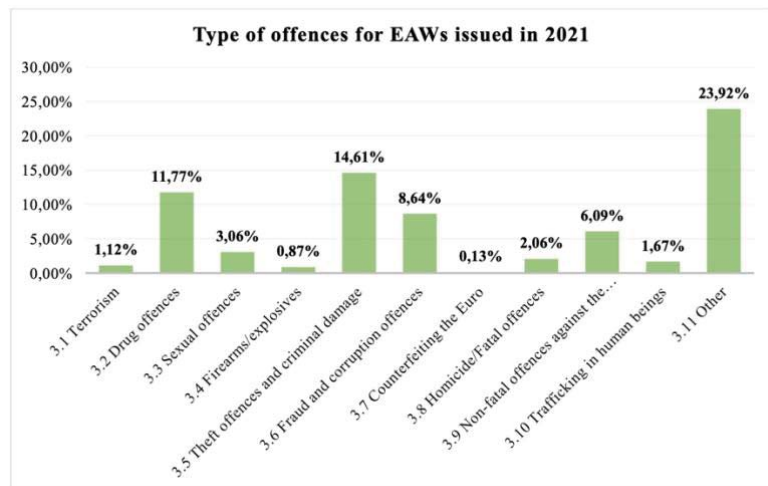
The EAW is characterized by its speed, efficiency, and the principle of mutual recognition of judicial decisions among EU member states. These features are crucial in facilitating the rapid apprehension and transfer of suspects, thereby preventing criminals from evading justice by crossing borders. The EAW process is streamlined to minimize bureaucratic delays, ensuring that extraditions are carried out promptly, typically within

a 60-day timeframe (Council Framework Decision, 2002). This efficiency is vital for maintaining the integrity of the EU’s judicial system and ensuring that justice is served swiftly.

In 2021, a total of 14,789 EAWs were issued by the judicial authorities of the 27 EU member states. This marks a slight decrease from 15,938 in 2020 and a significant drop from 20,226 in 2019 (European Commission, 2023). The decrease may indicate a stabilization in the number of EAWs issued post-pandemic or improved efficiency in handling cases domestically, reducing the need for cross-border extraditions.

### Categories of Offences

The types of offences for which EAWs were issued highlight the focus areas of EU law enforcement. Theft offences and criminal damage accounted for 2,162 EAWs, representing 14.63% of the total issued. Drug offences

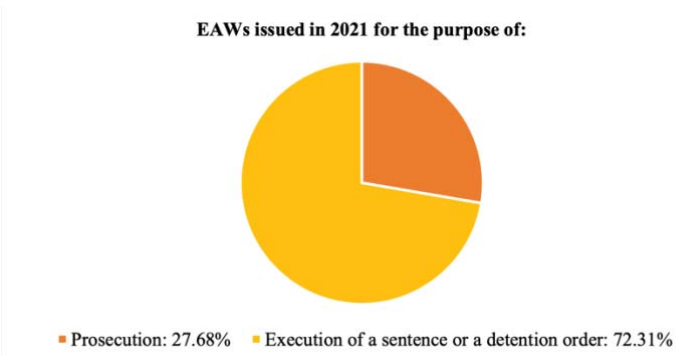


Disclaimer: not all Member States provided detailed information on the type of offences.

were the reason for 1,741 EAWs, making up 11.77% of the total. Fraud and corruption prompted the issuance of 1,278 EAWs, or 8.64%. Trafficking in human beings was the cause for 248 EAWs, which is 1.67%. Terrorism led to 167 EAWs, making up 1.12%. The prevalence of theft and drug offences suggests these remain primary concerns for EU authorities. The relatively lower numbers for trafficking in human beings and terrorism may reflect either effective domestic measures or the inherent complexity and lower frequency of such crimes.

(Figure 12: Type of offences for EAWs issued in 2021. Source: European Commission, 2023).

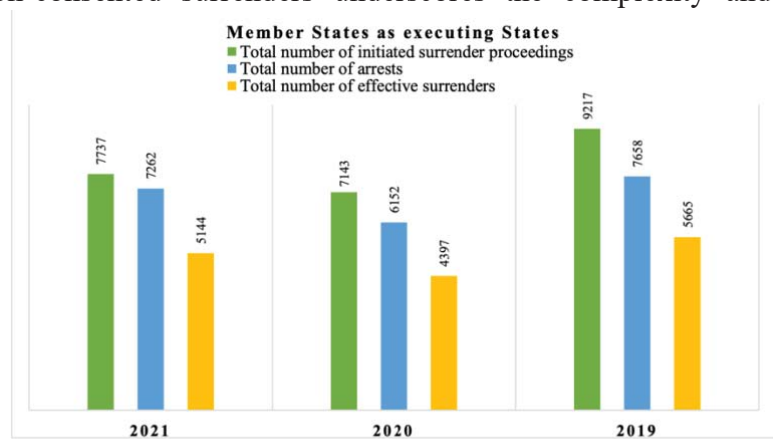
## Effective Surrenders



Out of the total issued EAWs, 5,144 resulted in effective surrenders, representing 34.8% of all warrants issued. This ratio indicates a strong implementation mechanism but also highlights areas where

execution rates can be improved. Regarding consent, 49.48% of the surrenders were with the consent of the individuals, while 50.52% were without consent. This near-equal split between consented and non-consented surrenders underscores the complexity and variability of cases handled

under the EAW framework. The consent of the requested person significantly speeds up the process, with the average time to surrender being 20.14 days compared to 53.72 days without



*Disclaimer: the Member States that provided figures for each year are not identical.*

consent. This stark difference illustrates the critical role of individual cooperation in expediting judicial processes.

*(Figure 13: EAWs issued for the purpose of: prosecution and execution of a sentence or a detention order. Source: European Commission, 2023).*

*(Figure 14: Member States as executing States. Source: European Commission, 2023).*

## Challenges and Limitations

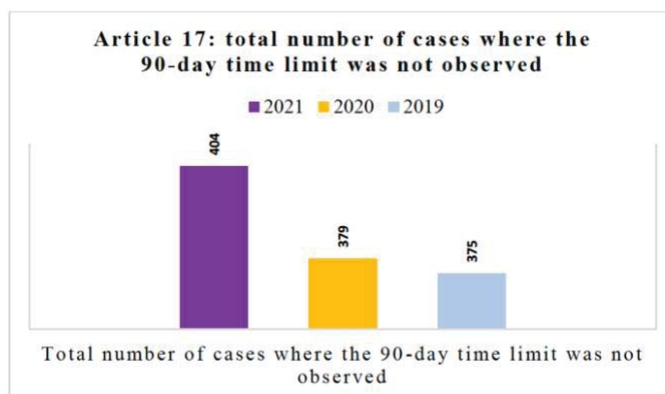
One of the main challenges facing the EAW is the legal and procedural variations among EU member states. These differences can lead to inconsistencies in how the EAW is executed, impacting its overall effectiveness. For instance, variations in the definitions of criminal offenses and differences in judicial procedures can cause delays and complications in the extradition process (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2024). To address these issues, the EU has been working on harmonizing legal

standards and enhancing judicial cooperation through training programs and legislative reforms aimed at creating a more cohesive legal framework across member states (Council Framework Decision, 2002).

The EAW system has faced criticism over potential human rights concerns, particularly regarding fair trial standards and prison conditions in some member states. These issues can result in judicial authorities hesitating to execute EAWs, fearing that extradited individuals may face inhumane treatment or unfair trials (European Commission, 2021). To mitigate these concerns, the EU has implemented measures to ensure that EAW procedures respect fundamental rights. The European Court of Justice has also played a key role in ensuring that extraditions under the EAW comply with human rights standards, thereby reinforcing the trust among member states (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2024).

Political and judicial resistance within some member states poses another challenge to the EAW's effectiveness. Issues such as concerns over national sovereignty and distrust between judicial systems can lead to reluctance in fully implementing or cooperating with the EAW framework. This resistance impacts the overall efficiency and cooperation needed for the EAW to function effectively (European Commission, 2021). Addressing this requires building greater mutual trust through dialogue, enhancing judicial cooperation, and ensuring that all member states adhere to agreed-upon standards and practices (Council Framework Decision, 2002). Regular forums and meetings facilitated by the European Judicial Network (EJN) can help bridge these gaps and foster a more collaborative environment.

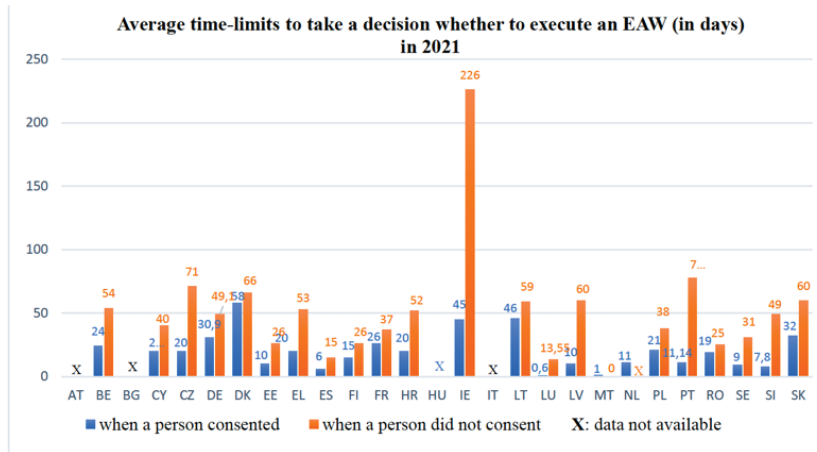
Non-compliance with the prescribed time limits remains a concern, with 404 cases exceeding the 90-day limit for decision-making on EAW execution. This is slightly



*Disclaimer: the Member States that provided figures for each year are not identical.*

higher than the 397 cases in 2020. The most significant delays were reported by Germany, the Netherlands, and Ireland. Informing Eurojust in 88 cases of delays represents

an improvement in transparency but indicates the need for better adherence to timelines. (Figure 15: article 17: total number of cases where the 90-day time limit was not observed. Source: European Commission, 2023).



(Figure 16: Average time-limits to take a decision whether to execute an EAW (in days) in 2021. Source: European Commission, 2023).

#### Recommendations for Improvement

To enhance the effectiveness of the EAW, achieving legal harmonization across EU member states is crucial. This involves standardizing the definitions of criminal offenses and aligning judicial procedures to ensure a more consistent and efficient execution of the EAW. By reducing legal discrepancies, the EU can streamline the extradition process and minimize delays. Strengthening human rights protections is another essential step. Ensuring that all extradited individuals receive fair trials and humane treatment will address concerns that currently hinder the EAW's full implementation. This can be achieved by reinforcing the role of the European Court of Justice in overseeing compliance with human rights standards and by implementing additional safeguards within the EAW framework. Enhancing cooperation and trust among judicial authorities is also vital. Regular training programs, joint workshops, and continuous dialogue can foster a better understanding and mutual respect among member states. Initiatives like the European Judicial Network (EJN) can facilitate this process by providing platforms for collaboration and exchange of best practices. Building stronger relationships between judicial authorities will ensure more seamless cooperation and bolster the overall effectiveness of the EAW.



## Conclusion

The EU's strategy against TOC, supported by Europol and the EAW, has significantly enhanced cross-border law enforcement and judicial cooperation. Europol has proven crucial in intelligence sharing and coordinating cross-border investigations, with notable operations like Trojan Shield, Pollino, and Opson disrupting sophisticated criminal networks. Europol's advanced data analysis tools and on-the-ground support have strengthened the EU's capacity to address criminal threats swiftly and effectively.

The EAW has revolutionized the extradition process within the EU, ensuring that criminals cannot evade justice by crossing borders. Its streamlined process, characterized by speed and mutual recognition of judicial decisions, facilitates rapid apprehension and transfer of suspects. Despite its successes, the EAW faces challenges, including legal and procedural variations among member states and human rights concerns.

Ongoing improvements in legal harmonization, robust human rights protection, and enhanced judicial cooperation will ensure a resilient and effective approach to combating TOC. Harmonizing criminal offense definitions and aligning judicial procedures can streamline extradition processes and reduce delays. Reinforcing human rights protections within the EAW framework will build trust and ensure compliance with fundamental rights, preventing judicial hesitance.

Enhancing cooperation among judicial authorities through training programs, joint workshops, and continuous dialogue is vital for the EAW's success. Initiatives like the European Judicial Network can facilitate collaboration and the exchange of best practices, fostering stronger relationships and seamless cooperation between member states.

In summary, the EU's comprehensive strategy against TOC, anchored by Europol and the EAW, has made significant strides in enhancing cross-border law enforcement and judicial cooperation. Continuous improvements in these areas are essential to adapting to future challenges and ensuring a resilient and effective response to TOC, thereby securing justice and stability across member states, and upholding the rule of law.

## V. Discussion and Analysis

### 5.1 Evaluation of EU Strategies

The EU's strategies against TOC have achieved notable successes but also face significant challenges. Europol has played a key role in intelligence sharing and coordinating cross-border operations, as demonstrated by operations like Trojan Shield and Pollino. These operations underscore the importance of international cooperation and advanced data analysis in combating TOC.

However, the case studies also highlight limitations. The reliance on traditional law enforcement methods without sufficient adaptation to evolving criminal tactics limits the EU's effectiveness. Sophisticated groups like the Albanian mafia, with their advanced logistics and alliances with Latin American cartels, indicate the need for more innovative and flexible approaches.

The EAW has improved extradition efficiency within the EU, ensuring criminals cannot evade justice by crossing borders. Its streamlined process and mutual recognition of judicial decisions have facilitated rapid apprehension and transfer of suspects. Nonetheless, the EAW faces challenges such as legal and procedural variations among member states, human rights concerns, and political resistance, necessitating further harmonization and enhanced judicial cooperation.

### 5.2 Challenges and Limitations

Several challenges hinder the EU's efforts to combat TOC effectively. Disparities in legal frameworks and operational practices across member states complicate coordination and information sharing. Variations in criminal offense definitions and judicial procedures lead to inconsistencies and delays.

Corruption within law enforcement and customs agencies, particularly in key transit countries like Spain and Ecuador, undermines anti-TOC efforts. The case studies highlight instances where corrupt officials facilitate the movement of drugs and other contraband. Addressing corruption requires robust oversight and stronger accountability measures.

Criminal groups exploiting migration routes for human smuggling and drug trafficking add another layer of complexity. The vulnerabilities of migrant populations are exploited, complicating migration flow management and border security. Integrated and comprehensive strategies are needed to address these dual threats.

### 5.3 Policy Implications

The findings from the case studies have significant implications for EU security governance. To improve its strategies against TOC, the EU must adopt a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of organized crime and strengthens international cooperation.

Coordinating EU legislation with international conventions like the UNTOC and UNCAC is crucial. Aligning policies with these conventions will create consistent legal standards, streamline law enforcement processes, and enhance cross-border cooperation. The European Commission's recent directive proposal aims to harmonize corruption offenses and introduce preventive measures (European Commission, 2023b).

The forthcoming Cybercrime Convention offers an opportunity for the EU to update its cybercrime laws to address emerging digital threats (UN News, 2024). This treaty aims to criminalize core cybercrimes, enhance international cooperation, and include strong human rights safeguards. Despite challenges in balancing security and human rights protections, the EU's efforts reflect its commitment to a cohesive legal framework.

Enhancing technological capabilities and investing in advanced data analysis tools are critical to staying ahead of evolving criminal tactics. Europol's success in operations like Trojan Shield underscores the importance of innovation in law enforcement.

Legal harmonization across EU member states is essential to streamline extradition processes and improve the EAW's effectiveness. Standardizing criminal offense definitions and aligning judicial procedures will reduce discrepancies and delays. Ensuring fair trials and humane treatment for extradited individuals will address human rights concerns and build greater mutual trust among member states.

#### 5.4 Future Research Directions

Future research should focus on exploring new and emerging threats posed by TOC, including cybercrime and the use of cryptocurrencies for money laundering. Additionally, studies on the effectiveness of alternative approaches to traditional law enforcement, such as community-based interventions and preventive measures, would provide valuable insights.

Research should also examine the impact of political and economic instability in source and transit countries on the dynamics of TOC. Understanding these factors can inform more targeted and effective international cooperation strategies.

By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to the development of more adaptive and resilient strategies for combating TOC, ensuring the security and stability of the EU in the face of evolving criminal threats.

The EU's current strategies against TOC, supported by Europol and the EAW, have made significant strides in enhancing cross-border law enforcement and judicial cooperation. However, continuous improvements are necessary to adapt to evolving threats to ensure a resilient and effective approach to combating TOC, securing justice and stability across member states. The insights gained from this study provide a foundation for developing more comprehensive and integrated strategies to address the complex challenges posed by TOC in Europe.

## VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

TOC remains a major and evolving threat to Europe's security and governance. Despite considerable efforts, the persistence of these criminal networks calls for ongoing enhancement of the EU's strategies. The ability of TOC groups to exploit legal and operational disparities among EU member states underscores the need for a more unified and integrated approach.

Strengthening international cooperation is crucial. By building stronger partnerships with global organizations like the UNODC and Interpol, and expanding bilateral and regional agreements, the EU can improve intelligence sharing and joint operations. Harmonizing legal definitions and penalties for TOC-related offenses across member states will ensure consistent enforcement and judicial action, closing the gaps that criminals currently exploit.

Investing in advanced technologies is essential. Deploying tools such as AI, data analytics, and blockchain will enhance the detection, monitoring, and interdiction of criminal activities. Improving cyber capabilities is particularly important to address the rising threat of cybercrime, ensuring that the EU stays ahead of the technological advancements used by criminals.

Adequate funding and resources for key agencies such as Europol, Frontex, and the EMCDDA are critical. These bodies must have the capacity to operate effectively across all member states, creating a unified and robust response to TOC. Addressing resource disparities and implementing strong oversight and anti-corruption measures will further fortify the EU's security framework.

To combat TOC more effectively, the EU should strengthen specialized task forces within Europol that focus on high-priority areas such as cybercrime, human trafficking, and drug trafficking. These units need advanced technological tools and experts in these fields, along with regular training and updates on emerging threats to maintain their effectiveness.

Increasing funding for technology initiatives will support the development and deployment of advanced solutions, such as AI for predictive policing, expanded data analytics infrastructure, and blockchain for secure transaction tracking. Investing in

cybersecurity measures to protect critical infrastructure from cyberattacks is also essential.

Fostering collaboration between public sector agencies and private companies will leverage diverse expertise and resources. Tech companies can assist in developing sophisticated surveillance and data analysis tools, while financial institutions can help monitor and prevent money laundering activities. A framework for regular dialogue and cooperation will enhance overall capabilities.

Standardizing legal definitions and penalties for TOC-related offenses across EU member states will ensure uniformity in prosecution and sentencing. Establishing a centralized legal advisory body can help navigate the complexities of harmonization and provide guidance to member states.

Investing in capacity-building programs for law enforcement and judicial personnel will ensure they are equipped with the latest techniques in crime detection, investigation, and prosecution. International training exchanges and joint exercises can promote best practices and improve operational coordination among member states.

Implementing advanced surveillance systems and biometric technologies at key border points will improve the detection of illegal activities. Strengthening Frontex's mandate and resources will enable better monitoring and control of the EU's external borders, reducing entry points for TOC.

Developing community engagement and prevention programs will help prevent the recruitment of individuals into organized crime. These programs should involve community outreach, education, and providing economic opportunities in high-risk areas. Collaborating with local organizations can enhance the effectiveness of these programs and build community resilience against TOC.

Improving existing platforms for intelligence sharing and creating new ones will facilitate real-time information exchange. Ensuring that all member states have access to up-to-date intelligence can significantly enhance coordinated responses to TOC.

In conclusion, the EU must develop a cohesive and resilient security governance strategy to combat TOC effectively. By building on existing frameworks, addressing identified gaps, and implementing targeted recommendations, the EU can significantly bolster its ability to protect its citizens. Continuous adaptation and collaboration at national, regional, and international levels are vital to mitigating the evolving threats

posed by TOC. This comprehensive and proactive approach will ensure a safer and more stable Europe for all its inhabitants.

## VII. List of Acronyms

- AMLA** – Anti-Money-laundering authority
- AMLD** – Anti-Money Laundering Directives
- CICA** – Anti-Drug Criminal Intelligence Centre
- EAS** – European Analysis System
- EAW** – European Arrest Warrant
- EC3** – European Cybercrime Centre
- ECRIS** – European Criminal Records Information System
- EIO** – European Investigation Order
- EJN** – European Judicial Network
- EMCDDA** – European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Addiction
- ENISA** – European Union Agency for Cybersecurity
- EPPO** – European Public Prosecutor’s Office
- EU** – European Union
- EU IRU** – EU Internet Referral Unit
- EUROPOL** – European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
- ETIAS** – European Travel Information and Authorisation System
- FATF** – Financial Action Task Force
- Frontex** – European Border and Coast Guard Agency
- GRECO** – Group of States Against Corruption
- GRETA** – Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in human Beings
- IOM** – International Organization for Migration
- INTERPOL** – International Criminal Police Organization
- JITs** – Joint Investigation Teams
- OCG** – Organized Crime Groups
- OLAF** – European Anti-Fraud Office
- OTF** – Operational Task-forces
- PAcCTO** – Europe Latin America Programme of Assistance against Transnational Organised Crime
- PNR** – Passenger Name Record
- SIS** – Schengen Information System



**SIENA** – Secure Information Exchange Network Application

**TOC** - Transnational Organized Crime

**UN** – United Nations

**UNCAC** – United Nations Convention against Corruption

**UNODC** – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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