



## **Drug Trafficking and Russian Security** by **Serghei V. Golunov**<sup>1</sup>

Drug-trafficking is one of the most serious and socially dangerous challenges to the national security of Russia and its neighbors. According to official figures, the number of drug addicts in Russia is about 400,000, but by expert estimations, the figure could be as high as 3-4 million. Two thirds are young people not older than 30. During the last ten years the number of drug addicts in Russia has increased ninefold while the annual income of the narcomafia is estimated at between 8 to 18 billions of US dollars.

The strategic response to this challenge is only in the initial stage. It is determined by the combination of factors such as the perception of the problem by decision-makers, the interests of the Russian political elites and external actors such as the EU. The current policy emphasis on military and police measures is manifested in increasing expenditures for border control and the tightening of migration policy. At the same time, efforts to reduce demand through narcological programs (including regional programs carrying out in border regions) often receive insufficient financial support. There is a common tendency to call for extraordinary measures and additional funding at the expense of education, health protection etc. In addition, violations of human rights and maltreatment of ethnic groups are justified by the necessity to struggle with narcomafia. Critics of such policies are routinely portrayed as "accomplices of the mob".

Taking into account these considerations, there is a strong need for well-reasoned critical evaluation of anti drug trafficking policy including measures for responding to transboundary trafficking.

This policy research project will focus on addressing the following questions are: a) How effective are military and police measures to counter narcotraffic through Russian borders? b) In which cases is the policy successful and why? c) To what extent are demand reduction measures effective? d) In which circumstances will the re-distribution of funds from "force measures" to demand reduction be useful? e) Taking into account that citizens of CIS states and "ethnic criminal groupings" often appear to play key roles in transboundary drug-trafficking, how can security measures be combined with observation of human rights and the maintenance of close relations between Russia and other post-Soviet countries?

This research will carry out a structural-functional analysis of transboundary narcotraffic in Russia, analyse drug related statistics concerning the main trafficking routes and in border regions, draw on expert estimations, and event analysis of cases of traffickers' arrests.

The structure of drug-trafficking through Russian borders is determined by many factors not least demand, the geography of drug producing sites, pre-existing smuggling routes, and the reactions of the narcodealers to state and international agencies efforts. Drugs are brought to Russia through several main directions. With its weak landscape-based border and its well-developed network of transboundary communications, the Russia-Kazakhstan border is the main drug route. Lower volumes are smuggled through Russia's borders with the Transcaucasian states, China, Ukraine, Byelorussia, and the Baltic countries. The main routes of drug-trafficking originate in Afghanistan (heroin and opium) and Tshu (Chu) valley area at Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan borderland (cannabis), lesser routes are from Ukraine (poppy straw), and the EU countries (synthetic drugs and cocaine). After crossing Russian border the most intensive flows of heroin, opium and cannabis are directed to Central (Moscow) and Northern-Western (St. Petersburg) Russia and partially further westwards to EU states, to the Volga and the Ural regions, Caucasian resorts (Krasnodar and Stavropol regions), gas-and-oil producing

<sup>1</sup> Sergey Golunov is an International Policy Fellowship holder for 2005-06. More details of his work can be found at <http://www.policy.hu/golunov/index.html>

areas of Western Siberia. According to official estimations levels of drug consumption and drug-related crimes in the region bordering Kazakhstan and the Transcaucasian states is noticeably higher than in Russia on average. In such administrative regions as Krasnodar krai; Astrakhan, Novosibirsk, and Tiumen oblasts the rate of drug-related criminal activity is higher than in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

The structural organization of narco-business evolves from the prevalence of individuals and small groups into stronger large branch groupings. Some are well-organized systems encompassing all stages from producing, processing (e.g. from opium to heroin), smuggling, wholesale trade, to retailing. Nevertheless, there are not sufficient grounds to affirm that the transboundary drug-trafficking through Russia is evolving in a strictly centralizing fashion nor are there increasing signs of the creation of drug monopolies. At some stages in the narcotraffic trade, the role of "ethnic criminal groupings" is great, especially with smuggling and wholesale trade. But using official data on criminal prosecutions of drug-traffickers, representatives of ethnic minorities or "ethnic criminal groupings" are not the main players in the whole process of narcotraffic. In many cases the composition of such criminal groupings is international with increasing numbers of drugs being smuggled by Russian citizens or "ethnic Europeans" whose appearance arouse less suspicions.

In order to provide safety for their smuggling operations, drug-traffickers attempt to establish corrupt ties with border officials. These may facilitate the transboundary transportation of narcotics, insure them from criminal responsibility or even return confiscated drugs. Among the relevant structures are the border guard and customs services, the regional branches of the Agency for Control of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Narkokontrol'), and the police. The amount of the bribes proposed (especially at the stage of border and customs control) can be hundreds of times the salary of these officials. However, the risk of serious punishment, the possibilities for less risky illegal income (assistance for smuggling of consumer goods) and informal rules (for example, assistance to drug-dealers is censured even among bribable customs officials) has, to some extent, restrained the increase of "narco-corruption" within state structures controlling Russian borders.

On the whole, the smugglers have a wide range of ways to avoid border and customs control. Most drugs are brought through existing checkpoints and, taking into account these possibilities, there are no grounds to assume that more than 5-10% of such contraband is seized. Local achievements in some border regions (in 2003-2004 the prices for heroin increased significantly) are concerned first with the struggle against wholesale and retail structures. These efforts will almost certainly simply cause the reorganization of these networks. Unfortunately, in border regions and at national level demand reduction programs are poorly financed despite the fact that international experience shows that such programs are effective with far less significant investments than military and police measures.

To conclude, the current stress on border closures as the panacea for the struggle against transboundary drug-trafficking is inexpedient. Most smuggling goes through the existing checkpoints while the imperfection of the inspection procedures and the low salaries of officials (working for border guard and customs services, police of border regions and districts) make evident breaches within the system of control at Russian borders. Taking into account the special vulnerability of the enormous Russian land boundaries, the huge expenses required for the establishment of fully-fledged border control with sufficient salaries for responsible officials, should lead Russian decision-makers to pay far more attention to demand reduction. Finally, both policy decision-makers and the community should resist attempts to use the struggle with drug-trafficking as justification of extraordinary measures causing gross violations of human rights. Such measures will hardly lead to any essential improvements, but they can pose a serious threat to democracy and the human rights of Russian citizens.