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THE ROLE OF EUROPOL AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES OF OTHER COUNTRIES IN COMBATING INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING: THE PARTICIPATION OF MEXICAN CRIMINALS IN THE EU DRUG MARKET

Europol – a specialized body of the European Union that was created on the basis of the Maastricht Treaty of February 7, 1992. (Article K1 (9) of the Treaty on ensuring police cooperation between EU member states. Also, the Treaty contains a direct reference to the establishment of the European Police Agency (Europol).)

Today, the full name of EUROPOL is the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. At the same time, there is another name – the European Police Office.

The goals of EUROPOL are formulated in the second chapter of the EUROPOL Convention. Among the main directions of EUROPOL's work, it is possible to single out the fight against terrorism, illegal arms trade, child pornography, money laundering and drug trafficking. The global drug trade has become a serious threat to global security and public health. International drug crime groups, particularly Mexican cartels, have grown to become influential players in this market. The drug market of the European Union (EU) has become one of the key points where they carry out their activities. That is why the role of Europol and law enforcement agencies is of great importance in combating the international drug trade and reducing the influence of Mexican criminals on this market.

Mexican cartels are known to cooperate with EU-based criminal networks to traffic both methamphetamine and cocaine to EU ports for further distribution in and outside of EU MS. Recent seizures of methamphetamine trafficked from Mexico to the EU include the interception of 2.5 tons of methamphetamine in Spain in

2021, 1.5 tons of methamphetamine trafficked through Croatia to Slovakia in 2020 and 1.9 tons of methamphetamine seized in Rotterdam in 2019. It is likely that most of the methamphetamine trafficked from Mexico to the EU only transits the EU on the way to more profitable markets in Oceania and Asia given the higher wholesale and retail prices of methamphetamine in those regions.

In addition to the trafficking of methamphetamine, Mexican cartels are also involved in smuggling large consignments of cocaine to the EU. In February 2020, Italian law enforcement authorities uncovered a drug trafficking operation run by the Sinaloa Cartel, where cartel members and their EU-based associates were trafficking drugs into and throughout the EU. For this operation in particular, the cartel was planning to establish cocaine smuggling routes from Colombia to airports in southern Italy using private jets. Another law enforcement operation, which concluded in 2021, revealed that a criminal network based in Spain worked with the Beltrán Leyva.

Organization to traffic 1.3 tons of cocaine and 2.5 tons of methamphetamine to Spain, concealed in blocks of cellular thermal concrete. Working together with their EU counterparts, Mexican cartels generally use maritime shipments and air cargo for smuggling larger quantities of drugs from Latin America to the EU. Concealment within legal commodities is the most frequently used method to smuggle large drug consignments. Most often, drugs are concealed in food, construction materials and equipment as well as other commodities, such as water filters and wooden doorframes.

Europol (the European Police) and national law enforcement agencies play an important role in combating international drug trafficking, including cases involving Mexican criminals and their involvement in the European Union (EU) drug market. Here are some aspects of their role:

1) Exchange of information: Europol serves as a center for the exchange of information between national law enforcement agencies of EU countries and cooperates with other international organizations such as Interpol. This allows for the coordination of joint operations and the exchange of intelligence on drug-trafficking criminals.

2) Operations and investigations: If there is specific information or intelligence about the involvement of Mexican criminals in drug trafficking in the EU, Europol can facilitate joint operations and investigations with national law enforcement authorities to apprehend and prosecute criminals.

3) Interdiction and Control of Money Transfers: To suppress international drug trafficking, law enforcement also works with

banks and financial institutions to detect and stop illegal money transfers related to drug trafficking.

4) Border measures: This includes strengthening security measures at EU borders and joint action to detect and stop drug smuggling.

5) Prevention and education: An important component of combating the international drug trade is informing and educating the public about the consequences and risks of drug use. Europol and national authorities cooperate in this area to prevent drug addiction and reduce the demand for drugs.

All these measures are aimed at reducing the spread and negative consequences of the international drug trade, including the activities of Mexican criminals in the EU drug market.

The international drug trade is a global threat that requires joint efforts and cooperation between law enforcement agencies of different countries. The involvement of Mexican criminals in the EU drug market makes this problem even more complex. The role of Europol and national law enforcement agencies in countering this problem is of key importance and requires further cooperation and innovative approaches for its effective solution.

Once the drugs arrive at EU entry points, local criminal networks working with Mexican cartels are responsible for moving the drug cargo to its final destination. The most common ferry and land transportation are vehicles with hidden compartments and tractors. For small retail quantities, mail and parcels are also used to smuggle drugs from Mexico to EU countries.

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