



COUNTRY FACTSHEETS, EURASIAN NARCOTICS:

GEORGIA 2004

General Information

Population: 4,9 million
 UNDP Human development index ranking (2002): 97 (out of 174 states)
 TI Corruption indicators: 2,0 (10-highly clean, 0-highly corrupted)

Georgia is not a major producer of drugs, rather a transit an increasingly consumer country. Opium and hashish grow naturally in small parts of the south-western mountainous parts of Georgia. This is mainly used for domestic consumption. Due to the existence of uncontrolled territories, weak control of borders and an advantageous geographical location (situated between Turkey and the Caspian Sea and south of the Russian Federation), Georgia is increasingly used as a secondary transit territory for the Afghan opiates bound for Russia and western Europe. Out of all the countries in the region Georgia has elaborated forms of organized crime. Hence Georgia has high levels of organized criminal activities, such as trafficking in wide variety of illicit substances as well as human trafficking.

Smuggling of Drugs

Conflicts in early 1990s, the subsequent loss of the government control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia and corruption permeating state structures all contributed to Georgia's becoming a transit territory for Afghan heroin and morphine. It is estimated that only 5% of all opiates trafficked through Georgia is intercepted. Two drug routes are dominating. Drugs enter Georgia via Iran and Azerbaijan or via Iran, Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. The drugs entering Georgia are then shipped west towards Tbilisi. Another route ships drugs over the Caspian Sea from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, via Baku and then entering Georgia through the northeast. It is believed that three organised crime groups dominate drug trafficking through Abkhazia while one group called *Robota* dominates drug trafficking through South Ossetia. Law enforcement agencies and government structures from both sides of the conflict are heavily involved in criminal activities. Allegedly, there are heroin laboratories in Abkhazia, though no seizures have been recorded. Smuggling routes crossing the North Caucasus go through mountain passes or across the *Psou* or *Inguri* rivers whilst ships carry drugs into Spain and other European cities. The major seaport Sukhumi in Abkhazia is increasingly being used for trafficking drugs as well as Gudauta, where a Russian military base is located. Russian military cargo from Central Asia can go unchecked via Gudauta to Russia. It is alleged that small arms and even nuclear materials pass through the Russian bases in the South Caucasus. The Pankisi gorge is decreasing in importance as a drug transit point given the presence of well trained soldiers with good equipment.

Health and Economic Aspects

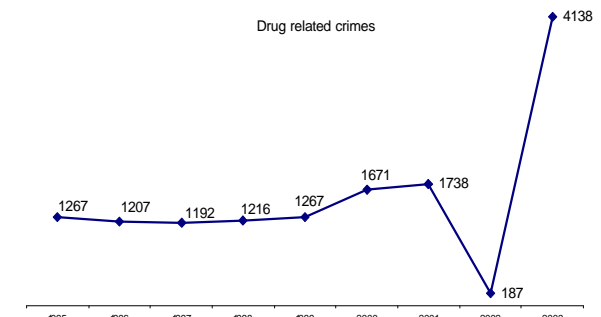
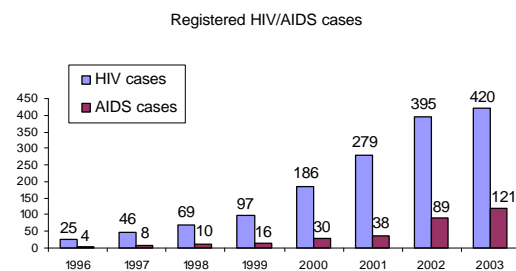
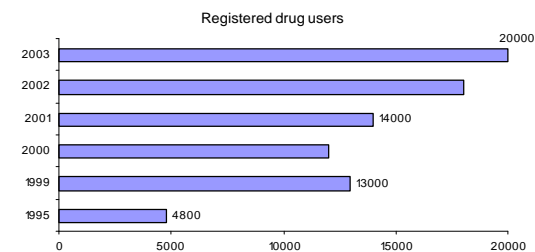
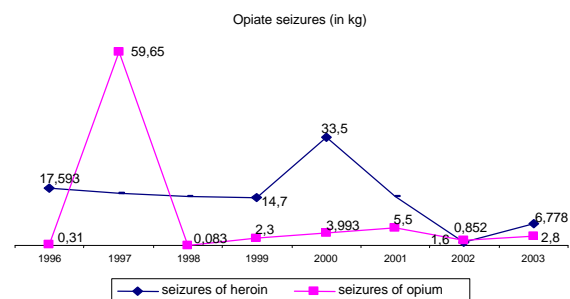
Corruption: Corruption in Georgia is endemic. During the Shevardnadze regime, it is believed that border guards, policemen, minister of interior were implicated in drug smuggling and refining.

Money laundering: 80% of the Georgian economy is cash-based and according to an OECD survey, up to 80% of the Georgian economy is in the shadow economy. Georgia lacks financial, legal, and technical tools to efficiently combat money laundering. Former President Shevardnadze signed an anti-money laundering bill in June 2003. These efforts were strengthened by the new government of Georgia, creating a National Money Laundering Prosecution unit. It is also expected that legislation related to confiscation, constitutionally banned in a 1997 case in the constitutional court, will be changed by the new government.

Drug abuse and HIV epidemics: Statistics for drug abuse are not comprehensive. Estimates by UNODC suggests that there are approximately 150,000 drug addicts in Georgia. Increased availability of heroin and cannabis might lead to an increase in users. Over 70% of new HIV cases are attributed to intravenous drug usage. In 2003, the Georgian AIDS and Clinical Research agency registered 420 HIV cases. According to estimates, the real number of HIV cases range between 5,000-10,000, which is ten times higher than the reported numbers.

Political and Societal Aspects

The lack of control over some territories and state borders makes Georgia highly vulnerable against transnational criminal groups. So far criminal groups operating on the Georgian territory have largely focused on the smuggling of petroleum, cigarettes and alcohol, though smuggling in drugs is growing. According to the Georgian Ministry of Interior, criminal groups based in Georgia are small in size, consisting of 10-50 people. According to the UNODC, some drug smuggling operations in Russia are also controlled by ethnic Georgians.



Counter-Narcotics Efforts

State

Georgia is a signatory to all existing United Nations drug control conventions. In 2003 an anti-corruption co-operation council was dismantled after the new government came to power and these issues are now the responsibility of the national Security Council. Administrative corruption is the major obstacle to fighting smuggling in Georgia. The new government has openly pledged to combat corruption. A few high profile arrests have been made. After paying substantial monetary fines, some persons have been released. It is unclear if this will lead to impunity. The arrests have been criticized by members of the Georgian civil society for including only political opponents. It is too early to judge if any lasting changes have occurred.

Georgian counter-narcotics efforts are severely hampered by the lack of control of the areas in South Ossetia and Abkhazia which are *de facto* independent. These have become safe havens for smuggling and trafficking in human beings, drugs and alcohol.

In 2003, a third project was initiated under the auspices of the UN and the European Union. Within the Ministry of Interior, a special internal investigating department was established in order reveal drug users and to curb corruption. This resulted in 20 employees being fired.

The current reforms of new government are impressive in scope and implications. It is expected that they should result in significant and positive changes in the legal and institutional framework of the country.

Civil Society

Existing social stigmas related to drug use and HIV/AIDS have made it difficult to raise awareness about the risks of intravenous drug usage and unprotected sex. There are currently both local organisations such as the National AIDS Center, Tanadgoma – Center of information on reproductive health, Bemoni, and international organisations Save the Children and World Vision working on raising awareness and HIV/AIDS prevention in Georgia.

Regional Cooperation

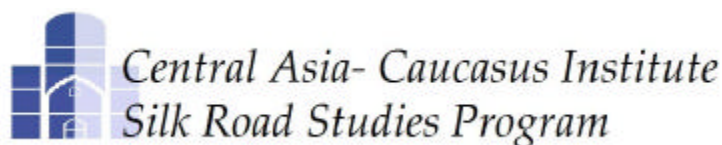
Since 2001, Georgia participates in the UN and European Union-sponsored South Caucasus Anti-Drug program (SCAD). With a total budget of Euros 1,500,000 for 2003, this program aims to strengthen cooperation between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia with regards to legislation, seaport and border control issues as well as training efforts in a joint effort curb the increase in drug-smuggling across the region.

In February 2004, the steering committee held a conference dedicated to the implementation of regional southern Caucasus anti-drug program. At that point the Georgian government joined the EU and UNDP in a regional drug program for the South Caucasus, which includes activities with Azerbaijan and Armenia to bolster their defense capabilities and foster cooperation among the three countries.

International

In May 2002, the U.S. initiated the Georgian Train and Equip Program (GTEP) with a budget of US\$ 64 million aimed at combating terrorism, strengthening borders and internal security to last through April 2004 (the Program was subsequently extended). As part of this effort, Georgian interior troops in 2002 and 2003 raided the infamous Pankisi Gorge in search for criminal elements and Chechen rebels. The Pankisi gorge is also home to approximately 3,000 Chechen refugees, out of which 80% are women and children.

Human trafficking is a major problem in Georgia. Georgians, both men and women destined for illegal work, prostitution and forced labour enter Western Europe through three routes. One through Turkey, Bulgaria, Macedonia to Greece. One through Latvia, Poland to Germany or through the Czech Republic to Germany. To the US, Georgians mostly travel through Russia and Mexico onwards to the US. In an effort to increase the cooperation between the Central Asian countries and the countries of the South Caucasus on issues related to Terrorism and Transnational Organised Crime, a regional network has been set up by the UNODC office in Turkey. Further cooperation and information sharing is expected to this effect.



Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center

The Project on Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security in Eurasia

The Project on Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security in Eurasia is conducted by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program. The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program form a Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center affiliated with the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC; and the Departments of East European Studies and Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden.

Latest publications:

Niklas L.P. Swanström, "Multilateralism and Narcotics control in Central Asia", *CEF Quarterly*, the journal of the China-Eurasia Forum, February 2005.

Niklas L. P. Swanström and Maral Madi, "International Cooperation Against Drug Trafficking, in Central Asia," *United Nations: Multilateralism and International Security*, in C. Uday Bhaskar et. al., eds, Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses & SHIPRA Publications, 2005.

Svante E. Cornell, "Stemming the Contagion: Regional Efforts to Curb Afghan Heroin's Impact", *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 6 no. 1, Winter/Spring 2005.

Kairat Osmonaliev, *Developing Counter-Narcotics Policy in Central Asia: Legal and Political Dimensions*, Silk Road Paper, January 2005.

Svante E. Cornell, *Narcotics, Radicalism and Security in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*, East European Studies Working Paper no. 84, December, 2004.

Maral Madi, "Drug Trade in Kyrgyzstan: Structure, Implications and Countermeasures", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 23, No 3-4, December, 2004.

Database:

The current version of the database contains information on illegal drugs and related issues in Central Eurasia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), Russia and the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan). These countries are the primary focus at Silk Road Studies. The database can be accessed at www.silkroadstudies.org/drugsdatabase.htm

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