The Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Counter Drug Trafficking Mechanisms on the Northern Route in Eurasia

Natalia A. Sadovnikova, Vitaly G. Minashkin, Svetlana G. Babich, Maria O. Grigorieva, Ekaterina P. Samarina

Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Moscow, Russia

Abstract: The article covers a specific theme of the assessment of the effectiveness of the national drug traffic counteracting authorities on the Northern Afghan Route. The main hypothesis of the article is that the effectiveness of the drug counteracting authorities depends on the costs of drugs crossing the border of the country. The analysis allows to conclude that the North Route is effective for the cartels due to the low effectiveness of authorities' actions in counteracting drug trafficking and high corruption level. The authors provide the framework of the future cooperation strategies for the Central Asian countries and the EAEU. The article reveals the negative effect of the single EAEU custom borders on the drug trafficking in Russia and the deviation of the drug price in Turkmenistan.

1. Introduction

Drug trafficking in Eurasia, especially, in some regions of Asia (Central Asia, South-East Asia) is one of the most serious problems of security. Despite massive investments of counteracting the drug industry, it manages to survive and even to develop. The main issues, which the authorities meet in their pursue for drug-free Eurasia are the extremely high profits in the industry, which can be partially used by the cartels to achieve secure passage through the borders of the countries, especially those, which economic development is relatively low. Poverty makes the illegal business more attractive, as it allows to get out of the poverty circle, though through highly risky and non-legal activities (or at least, gives an impression of such possibilities). The hypothesis, put forward in this paper is a direct result of the previous statement. The effectiveness of border control of drugs trafficking directly depends on the price of drugs crossing the border of the country, if any of the drug smuggling corridors pass through its territory. The hypothesis proved to be true in the Latin America [1], so it is necessary to test it in another region, where due to the differences in development and control methods the idea may both prove true or false. The main aim of the paper is to find out the weak points in the counter-drug smuggling actions on the territory of Eurasia along the Northern Afghan Route. The further analysis of the problem will be focused on the measures to be taken by concrete countries and the EAEU in order to conduct a more effective policy in drug fighting

2. Methodology

The goals of the article can be achieved by introducing a methodology, based on a simplified method of correlative dependencies. It is based on the correlation analysis of the two variables, which may be dependent on each other. In the article this analysis is conducted for corruption and cost of 1 kilo drugs crossing the border of a country. If the correlation exists, it is proved that drug trafficking routes depend mostly on corruption and there is no need to research the dependencies of drug prices from the length of the route they pass and other geographical factors, in the other case, their price mainly depends on the geographical factors, in this way reminding of the logistic choice for any normal good.

The evaluation of the logistics price of drugs is based on the data from Afghanistan provinces,

which produce heroine for export. The difference in prices is divided by the distance and the price of 1 km. transportation is received. This number, surely highly depends on the country researched – for instance, in Russia, where the control of transport is on a high level, the infrastructure of control is highly developed, the price will inevitably be more significant. This research does not need extremely accurate data. The aims, put forward in the article, allow to divide the countries in two groups – where the drug counteracting mechanisms are efficient and where they need improvement.

The costs of crossing the countries' borders is counted by figuring out the distance drugs are to travel through the territory of this country and then by subtraction of the number received from the average cost of drugs in the country. This methodology is possible, because the national drug markets of the Central Asian countries are small and nearly all the drugs, imported to them are then exported to the next country on the Northern Route with final hub in Russia, from where the drugs are transported to the EU.

It is important to mention, that the authors chose the wholesale data, because it is less affected by the income level in the country and it is better to assess the drug control authorities' effectiveness by the wholesale prices, as they majorly reflect the cartel risks, not including the price of risks of the street pushers and reflect the income level of the population less

3. The Assessment of the Effectiveness of Borders Control over Drug Trafficking

First of all, it is necessary to determine, which countries are to be analyzed within this paper. This topic arises from the adaptive nature of drug trafficking, which is oriented on the most convenient routes and tends to secure the deliverance of goods. It is also subject to path dependence due to the necessity of the extremely cautious attitude to the recruiting of specialists because of high risks of treason and police agents insertion in the cartel structure, so the least defensed groups of population are most often recruited (children, youngsters, women etc.) [2], [3]. These two tendencies lead to the constant change of the concrete corridors of trafficking, but leaves the general routes usually the same (the exclusion will be discussed hereinafter).

The Northern Route incorporates several different corridors, which lie through the following countries: Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Uzbekistan and partially Turkmenistan (Fig. 1).
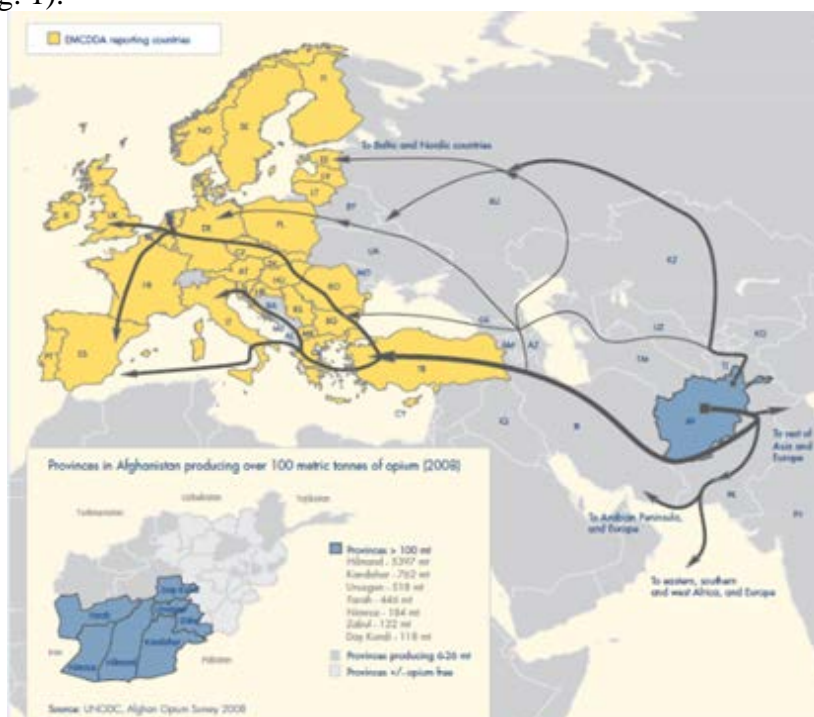

Figure 1 Main Trafficking Flows from Afghanistan to Europe [4]

The precise evaluation of the inclusiveness of a country's authorities in the drug trafficking is not

possible due to high risks of incorrect data, however it is possible to do a rough statement on it through the corruption in the country (Table 1).

Table 1 Corruption Index (Compiled by the Authors, Based on [5])

Country	Corruption index
Afghanistan	16
Tajikistan	25
Kyrgyzstan	29
Kazakhstan	31
Russian Federation	28
Uzbekistan	23
Turkmenistan	20

All in all, the situation with corruption in all the named countries is not good, so we can assume, that the named countries, except for Russia and Kazakhstan provide low risks for cartels due to the willingness of the authorities to cooperate with the cartels.

Let us discuss the situation around crossing the borders of the named countries by drugs. All the researched countries fight against the proliferation of drug trafficking, still their actions have a relatively low effect on the quantity of drugs transported through their territories.

The heroine prices (heroine is the most exported drug from Afghanistan [6]) are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Wholesale Prices of Heroine by the Latest Data Available (Compiled by the Authors Based on [7])

Country	Prices in $US per kilo
Afghanistan	3,294
Tajikistan	5,000
Kyrgyzstan	8,500
Kazakhstan	23,213
Russian Federation	21,343
Uzbekistan	22,500
Turkmenistan	188,400

The lowest prices are obviously observed in Afghanistan, with steady rises in prices on their way through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan, the Russian prices are somewhat lower. The same mechanics are true for the route via Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan, but the enormously large deviation in prices for Turkmenistan falls out of the main logic. In this way, we have two deviations from the common logic of drug prices rise on the Northern Route – lower prices in the Russian Federation and significantly higher prices in Turkmenistan.

In order to try to assess and explain this deviation, we should count the average price of intercountry transportation of drugs. It can be counted from the data on drug prices in Afghanistan on different drug-producing provinces, the products of which are then transported by the same way. By the data by UNODC [7], the price of heroin in Badakhshan equaled to $ 112 US per kilo, when in Herat it was $ 264 US. The distance between the two cities is 896 km (according to Google maps), which gives us a cost of 1 kg drugs transportation per 1 km equal to 17 cents per kilometer. This allows to estimate the costs of crossing the state border (Table 3).

Table 3 the Cost of Crossing the Border (Calculated by the Authors)

Country	Costs of crossing the border, $US
Afghanistan	0
Tajikistan	1,445
Kyrgyzstan	3,328
Kazakhstan	14,326
Russian Federation	-2,072
Uzbekistan	18,683
Turkmenistan	184,368

Table 3 Proves the Deviation Revealed in Table 2, So the Explanation is Needed.

The lower price of drugs in Russia is explained by the fact, that its market is much larger than

that of Kazakhstan. In addition to the traffic from Afghanistan, many routes of the Chinese drugs and drugs from South-East Asia lie through Russia, forcing it to decentralize its forces; economic, human and regulative [8], [9]. That is why, taking into account a higher corruption level than in Kazakhstan and a higher supply of drugs, the wholesale price tends to be lower. The other factor that contributes to it is that Russia is a transport hub for drugs, aimed at the EU market, which in turn, contributes to lower wholesale prices.

The situation with Turkmenistan is different and more complicated. The analysis is hard to conduct because of the high degree of isolative policy, conducted by the Turkmen authorities. Turkmenistan is the country, which implies numerous measures on counteracting drug trafficking. All in all, these measures are of annual character and involve a massive part of its population. Despite their effect on drug trafficking, it is doubtful, that only these steps led to the dramatic changes in drug prices [10]. It is highly likely, that the actions taken lead to the cut in numbers of drug consumers, which makes the Tajik market less attractive for cartels. In addition to that, the tensions between the Taliban forces and the Afghan Turkmens destabilizes the situation on the border [11], [12]. It is unlikely that the drug traffic through Turkmenistan stopped, it just became more difficult for the cartels.

The results of Table 3 allow to assess the effectiveness of the state borders of the researched countries. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have succeeded in building the strong defenses from the drug trafficking, when Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan borders are still easily penetrated by drugs. The creation of the EAEU has made the traffic on the territory of its member states easier, it is especially actual for the Russia-Kazakh border. The situation around the common EAEU border is under question, because additional financial resources are constantly required in order to enforce the Kazakh border and keep these enforcements working. The Turkmen border is hard to penetrate and the population of Turkmenistan are not eager to participate in drug trafficking, but due to the geographical position of Turkmenistan and the direct access to the Azerbaijan market via the Caspian Sea, and to the Russian shore of the Caspian with further traffic to the EU market or dealing drugs on the Russian market, the situation around the effectiveness of the Turkmen counter drug program remains dubious.

There is no direct correlation between the corruption index and the price of crossing the border, however the observation allows to conclude, that the higher the corruption level is, the lower the price of crossing the border is. Hence, there are numerous factors, contributing to the drug trafficking routes choice, except for the corruption level in the country.

4. The Possibilities of Tighter Cooperation in the Sphere of Drug Trafficking Counteraction

The discussed issue requires actions, taken by the researched countries in order to overcome the problem of drug trafficking through their territory. The main actions needed arise from the problems, pointed out earlier: these are corruption, poverty and high level of drug abuse in the named countries. The negative social effects of these problems are obvious, they bear negative economic effects, such as lower quality of living, higher costs of economy modernization and human capital development [13].

The actions based on the fighting with the production of drugs prove to be not that effective, as considered, so the other course of actions is to be taken. It should adopt the measures of proliferation of non-tolerance to drugs among the citizens of the country through information actions, and through effective fight with crime, corruption and poverty.

For the EAEU countries this course should include:

The creation of the common mechanisms of counteracting drug trafficking. Such mechanisms already exist, whereas their effectiveness leaves many open questions.

The creation of a special investment instrument under the Eurasian Development Bank, which will be aimed at crediting the projects, stimulating the development of the safe and transparent society in the countries of the EAEU. The directions of crediting are to include: the stimulation of e-customs (customs procedures are made clearer and faster), the development of medical facilities (better medicine will allow to form a more conscious approach to the health, which will cut down

the consumption of drugs), the formation of the new working places (the lower the unemployment is, the less drugs are consumed).

All the directions of EADB crediting are to be included in the priority national development programs in the EAEU countries.

The Central Asia economies need to stimulate the economic development. The first step to this goal is cutting down the corruption level, a problem, actual for all the countries, involved in drug trafficking from Afghanistan. The conceptual model of counteracting terrorism is to be adopted from Singapore [14], which managed to overcome extremely high corruption level in short terms. The second step is aimed at stimulating the economic development, the most convenient way to achieve this goal is to cooperate with both EAEU and Belt and Road Initiative, receive financial support from the Asian development banks.

In general, one of the most effective measures of fighting drug trafficking on global level is cutting down the demand for drugs in the destined countries, namely EU. This is impossible for the researched countries, and their only option in this difficult situation is to attract investments and fight drugs through economic development.

5. Conclusion

The efficiency of drugs trafficking counteraction measures on the territories of different countries is different. The least effective are the measures taken by the countries with the longest borders with Afghanistan, still some of its neighbors, such as Uzbekistan, have reached higher efficiency in their actions. At the same time, there are several deviations from the general model, which include Russia and Turkmenistan. The deviation to the lower prices, than expected in Russia is explained by the common territory of the EAEU and high volumes of drugs imports from other destinations, than Afghanistan, for Turkmenistan the situation is unclear. It is highly probable, that the deviation reflects higher risks of crossing the border because of the military tensions and the low internal demand for drugs.

The hypothesis, put forward in the article is proved, the most effective measures are taken in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, if not taking into account Turkmenistan, which is a subject of another research. The main steps of further cooperation between the researched countries lie in the sphere of creation of common mechanisms of drug trafficking counteraction and economic development, aimed at social impact of the taken measures. The general course of these countries should include cooperation with the Asian financial and security organizations.

References

[1] N. R. Magliocca, K. McSweeney, S. E. Sesnie, E. Tellman, J. A. Devine, E. A. Nielsen, Z. Pearson, and D. J. Wrathall, "Modeling cocaine traffickers and counterdrug interdiction forces as a complex adaptive system," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 116 (16), pp. 7784–7792, 2019. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1812459116

[2] S. Martel, "The Recruitment of Female "Mules" by Transnational Criminal Organizations Securitization of Drug Trafficking in the Philippines and Beyond," Social Transformations, 1 (2), 13–41, 2013. doi: 10.13185/ST2013.01202

[3] D. Gayle, "Drugs gangs recruiting children from small towns, research reveals," 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/26/rise-in-child-drug-runners-recruited-from-small-towns-research

[4] European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), Monitoring the Supply of Heroin to Europe, 2008. Retrieved from: http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/491/emcdda_tds_herointrafficking_2008_114708.pdf

[5] Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2018, 2018. Retrieved from:

https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018

[6] C. J. Coyne, A. R. H. Blanco, and S. Burns, "The war on drugs in Afghanistan: another failed experiment with interdiction," The Independent Review, 21 (1), pp. 95–119, 2016. doi: 10.2139/ssrn.2613428.

[7] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Afghan Opiate Trafficking along the Northern Route, 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/documents/publications/NR_Report_21.06.18_low.pdf

[8] A. Marshall, From drug war to culture war: Russia's growing role in the global drug debate, 2014. Retrieved from: https://www.swansea.ac.uk/media/From-drug-war-to-culture-war-Russia%27s-growing-role-in-the-global-drug-debate.pdf

[9] S. Oakford, How Russia Became the New Global Leader in the War on Drugs, 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/bjk3b4/how-russia-became-the-new-global-leader-in-the-war-on-drugs-ungass

[10] A. Chingin, and O. Fedorova, Turkmenistan: Drug Situation and Drug Policy, 2014. Retrieved from: https://rm.coe.int/drug-situation-and-drug-policy-by-alex-chingin-and-olga-fedorova-decem/168075f300

[11] A. Korybko, The Taliban's Victory Along The Turkmenistani Border Is One Of Its Most Important Yet, 2019. Retrieved from: https://orientalreview.org/2019/03/22/the-talibans-victory-along-the-turkmenistani-border-is-one-of-its-most-important-yet/

[12] RFE/RL's Turkmen Service, Turkmenistan Said To Register Reservists As Tension Mounts On Afghan Border, 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-said-to-register-reservists-as-tension-mounts-on-afghan-border/29711468.html

[13] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Economic and Social Consequences of Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, 1998. Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/pdf/technical_series_1998-01-01_1.pdf

[14] N. Lim Kah Hwee, Singapore's Experience in the Fight against Corruption, 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.unafei.or.jp/publications/pdf/GG11/23_GG11_CP_Singapore2.pdf