

Smuggling and organized crime in Kyrgyzstan

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Introduction

Smuggling has been an increasing problem in Kyrgyzstan since the break up of the Soviet Union. The country, situated on the ancient Silk Road is a natural transit point for various legal and illegal goods. Illicit trade has already grown to a point where it threatens the national security of the country since it destroys the internal market for legal goods, promotes bribery, strengthens organized crime groups and various political-criminal clans and encourages money laundering. In general corruption, the presence of organized crime and a high level of collusion on the one hand and illicit trade on the other are mutually reinforcing.

This paper discusses smuggling trends, groups complicit in smuggling and contraband-related corruption in Kyrgyzstan. Firstly, general smuggling trends are overviewed, secondly the involvement of white collar officials and organized crime groups in illicit trade is discussed and thirdly, a general introduction to the drugs trade is given.

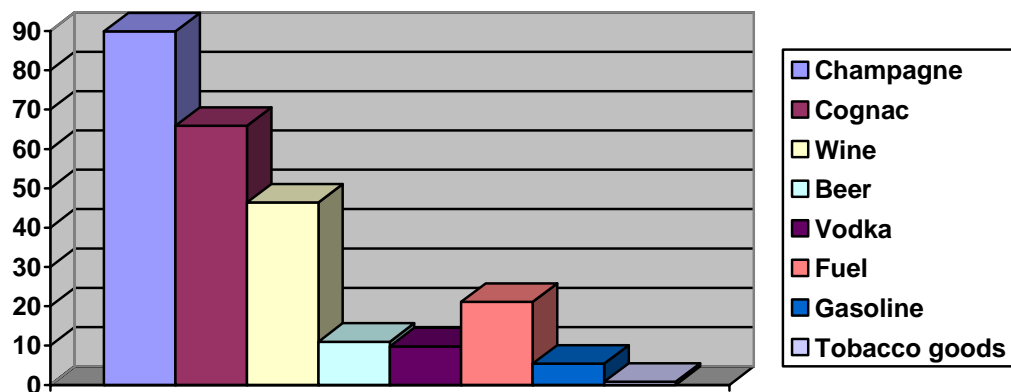
Smuggling trends

Kyrgyzstan is a poor, mountainous country with a gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$440 in 2005 (Atlas method). Despite some improvement in the past few years, the country remains one of the poorest in the world with about 40 percent of the population living below the poverty line. The agricultural and industrial production base

is small. Cotton, tobacco, wool, and meat are the main agricultural products and these products together with gold and hydro-electricity make up the bulk of the country's exports.¹

The size of the shadow economy is quite high and is estimated to be 53 percent of GDP and is worth 50.5 billion som (around 1.222 billion USD) per annum.² Smuggling and corruption are rampant. According to the state customs committee the main items smuggled are fuel, diesel, spirits, wheat and wheat flour.³ Nutritional products and medicines are also frequently smuggled.⁴ The UNDP report of 2006 suggests that a huge quantity of excisable goods is smuggled, especially champagne, wine, cognac and beer.⁵

Chart 1. Smuggling by sector of activity (2004)⁶



However contrary to the official statistics, some Kyrgyz experts argue that smuggling scales are greater. According to them around 40 percent of the fuel sold in the republic is contraband.⁷ The situation has significantly improved in recent years: in 2002

¹ Country briefs, World Bank and CIA world fact book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>

² The shadow economy in the Kyrgyz republic: trends, estimates and policy options, UNDP, Bishkek, 2006, p.9-10

³ Source: State Customs Committee of the Kyrgyz republic, <http://www.customs.gov.kg/>

⁴ Interview with a Financial police officer, May 3rd 2007 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

⁵ The shadow economy in the Kyrgyz republic: trends, estimates and policy options, UNDP, Bishkek, 2006, p.10

⁶ Source: data of the National Statistics Committee in The shadow economy in the Kyrgyz republic: trends, estimates and policy options, UNDP, Bishkek, 2006, p.9

⁷ Segodnia, N 26(113), July 5, 2007

over 70 per cent of oil products consumed in Kyrgyzstan was contraband.⁸ Fuel smuggling still represents a major problem for the Kyrgyz economy: overall the capacity of the local market in fuel is around 450 thousand tons per year, which means that 180 thousand tons of fuel is smuggled annually resulting in the loss of more than 500 million soms (USD 12 million) annually for the state budget.⁹ Kazakh and Russian fuel is mainly smuggled to Kyrgyzstan via the Chui River in the North.

Smuggling of tobacco products was also a major problem for the country. For instance in the mid 1990s around 70-90 percent of tobacco products sold in the country was smuggled. However, smuggling cigarettes has gradually died out and in 2003 it amounted to only 5 percent of overall volume.¹⁰ Alcoholic products are also widely smuggled into Kyrgyzstan. For instance, in late 90s the state budget was losing 600 million som (14.5 million USD) annually from the illegal sale of alcohol.¹¹ The situation has not changed much since then.

Now the main problem is illicit trade on the Kyrgyz-Chinese border. In 2005 the Minister of Finance emphasized that the main sources of illegal income from customs are trade from China and Turkey.¹² Smuggling from China has been on the rise in recent years. Several Kyrgyz experts reported that when President Bakiev went to China in 2006 and had a meeting with his Chinese counterpart, he allegedly expressed a desire to increase trade with China up to 1 billion USD. However the former mentioned that trade had already reached that level and this put the Kyrgyz president in an embarrassing situation.¹³

Thus, the discrepancies in the official figures reported by the Chinese and Kyrgyz authorities raise particular concerns. The Kyrgyz statistics committee reports that imports from China in 2005 amounted to approx. 103 million US dollars, while official sources of China say that Chinese exports to Kyrgyzstan amounted to 972 million USD.

⁸ Black Market in Fuel Damages the Kyrgyz Economy, RCA No. 196, April 4, 2003, IWPR

⁹ Broadcasting company NTS, March 7th 2006 available at http://nts.kg/main_news_page.php?id=1352; Segodnia, N 26(113), July 5th 2007

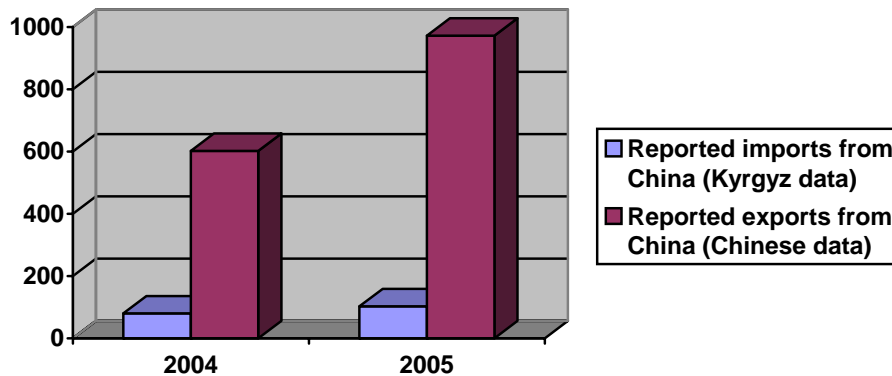
¹⁰ Tobacco Control Resource Centre, <http://contact.tobinfo.org/2003/02/kg-030224.htm>

¹¹ V Kirgizstancie atmechen rost ekonomicheskoi prestupnosti, <http://www.ctaj.elcat.kg/tolsty/k/k004.shtml>

¹² Finance Minister quoted in Newspaper Delo N, 14 (591), April 13th 2005

¹³ Interviews with Kyrgyz experts, March-May, 2007 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Chart 2. Comparison of Kyrgyz and Chinese sources on trade with Kyrgyzstan (in million USD)¹⁴



This chart shows huge volumes of unrecorded imports from China to Kyrgyzstan. Many of the smuggled Chinese goods do not stay in Kyrgyzstan. Most are re-exported, for the most part illegally, to Kazakhstan and then onwards to Russia and a smaller proportion goes to Uzbekistan. It should be noted here that Kyrgyzstan, alone of its Central Asian neighbours, belongs to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and imposes customs duties of just five per cent – three times less than Kazakhstan. Thus traders prefer to bring Chinese foodstuffs and consumer goods first to Kyrgyzstan and then take it onwards to Kazakhstan.¹⁵ The increasing problem of illicit trade on the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border has obliged Nazarbayev’s government to take strict measures. Just recently, in June 2007, the Kazakh authorities decided to tighten control over the border with Kyrgyzstan.¹⁶

According to a UNDP study, the main moving forces behind re-exports are shuttle traders through two large centres of the shuttle trade: Dordoi market in Bishkek and Karasuu market near Osh. Commodities imported from China, Turkey and some other countries are sold there to shuttle traders from neighbouring countries or Kyrgyz traders serving these countries. Uzbek cotton destined for Europe is dealt with in a similar way: the existing government system of low-priced mandatory supplies of cotton by Uzbek

¹⁴ Kyrgyz data comes from the State Department of Statistics of Kyrgyzstan, Directory of Trade Statistics: Imports - Quarterly Data, available at <http://www.stat.kg/Eng/Subann/SMc.html#Top1> retrieved April 10th 2007; Chinese data from the State Department of Statistics of China, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/nds/2006/indexeh.htm>, retrieved April 10, 2007

¹⁵ Kazakhstan: Smugglers Target Open Border, RCA No. 334, December 14th 2004 IWPR

¹⁶ Akipress, June 28th 2007

agricultural enterprises creates an economic rationale to import it illegally to Kyrgyzstan and sell the cotton through Kyrgyz traders.¹⁷ Interestingly petty smuggling/shuttle trading is largely tolerated, because it provides hundreds of jobs for impoverished people.

Nevertheless, apart from petty smuggling by shuttle traders, some of the illegal trade in legal goods is organized. It is very difficult to give any estimates of the proportion of organized smuggling in the overall smuggling of legal goods, which is certainly less compared to drugs trafficking, which is almost one hundred percent organized. However anecdotal evidence suggests that the illegal flows of goods are protected, and sometimes directly controlled, by high-ranking officials, organized crime groups with political connections and representatives of law enforcement structures. The following sections concentrate on the complicity of the aforementioned groups in illicit trade.

Smuggling related corruption and white-collar complicity in contraband trade

Due to pressure from influential groups and bribery, legal provisions in the country are vague and often arbitrarily and inconsistently enforced. Bureaucracy is inefficient and by the government's own admission corruption is widespread. Bribes as a proportion of the annual sales of the companies are greater in Kyrgyzstan than the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) average and fifty one percent of companies, an unusually high number, almost double the CIS average, indicate that unofficial payments are frequent.¹⁸ The average bribe paid to officials by businesses is 5 thousand som (120 USD).¹⁹ Corruption is pervasive in every branch of the government, especially the police, security service (SNB, successor of the Soviet KGB), tax department, customs and courts. The level of collusion between the 'upperworld' and 'underworld' is extremely high and sometimes the representatives of official structures are directly involved in criminal activities, such as smuggling. The arrest of high-level officials is rare and if they occur, it indicates a clash between groups of larger influence. At the middle level, the

¹⁷ Country Background Study for the Kyrgyz Republic, UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS, 2004-5, p.24

¹⁸ EBRD, BEEPS, Kyrgyzstan, 2006

¹⁹ The shadow economy in the Kyrgyz republic: trends, estimates and policy options, UNDP, Bishkek, 2006, p.10

chances of a corrupt bureaucrat going to prison largely depends on the power of his/her *krysha* - protector in the upper level of bureaucracy.

Thus, the high level of collusion between official and unofficial structures and widespread bribery has made the law enforcers primary criminals. The representatives of law enforcement structures are frequently involved in smuggling, especially in drugs trafficking. According to one local observer in Osh “the police are getting more involved in drugs and now primarily it’s the police and local authorities that are engaged in drug trafficking”.²⁰ However the drugs trade is protected and controlled from the highest level of bureaucracy in Kyrgyzstan. Now an MP, a former racketeer and criminal, gained a share in the drugs business after Bayman Erkinbaev, also a member of the Jogorku Kenesh and drug baron of the South was killed in September 2005. Interestingly the brother of this MP is on the state customs committee.

Nevertheless, this person is not a key player according to several observers and journalists and he is controlled from an even higher level that goes as far as the very top of the Kyrgyz bureaucracy. Moreover, several allegations that have some plausibility as they are corroborated by numerous sources, suggest that two brothers of President Bakiev are heavily involved in drugs smuggling.²¹

White-collar complicity also concerns the smuggling of legal goods, which is less organized than drugs trafficking though. However several high-ranking officials are involved here as well. After the “revolution”, the Minister of Finance stated that the people who had come to power in the key positions are interested in maintaining the flows of illegal incomes from the customs.²² One well-informed Kyrgyz expert argued that the main *kryshas* of smuggling in legal goods are mostly regional government administrations,²³ for instance an activist in the ‘tulip revolution’ who was subsequently appointed to a high-level position in the Osh regional administration. Other well-known examples of white-collar involvement are: an MP from the South is involved in smuggling cotton and other goods on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border; The family of a former

²⁰ Interview with a local observer, May 2007 Osh, Kyrgyzstan

²¹ Interviews with Kyrgyz experts, March-May, 2007 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

²² Finance Minister quoted in Newspaper Delo N, 14 (591), April 13th 2005

²³ Interview with a Kyrgyz economist, March 29th 2007, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

high-ranking official and close ally of President Bakiev, dubbed the ‘power broker’, who allegedly controls various contraband operations from China.²⁴

Overall four structures are responsible for combatting smuggling: SNB, MIA (Ministry of Interior), Customs committee and Finance police. There is no formal division of functions between the agencies and no collaboration between them at an official level. Informally these organizations are frequently involved in fighting with each other for control of lucrative contraband flows and sometimes they collaborate in levying illegal payments from the smugglers. However, generally the customs department is considered to be most corrupt among these four organizations.

Interestingly the high-ranking officials of the customs committee are always considered to be the main illegal financiers of the ruling families, dubbed as ‘*kashlioks*’ (purse). Thus Muratbek Malabaev, a high-ranking official in the customs department from 1998-2003, was one of the closest people to Akaev’s family and according to Kyrgyz experts, monthly payments, a share of the illegal revenue from illicit trade (around 20 percent²⁵) was paid to the family by him.²⁶ Malabaev was a businessman as well and managed to win a seat in the Jogorku Kenesh in 2000. He was re-elected in 2005, although he was obliged to flee after the ‘tulip revolution’ and was subsequently expelled from the legislative body in 2006.²⁷ Malabaev was linked to a number of former and current officials, including a former General Prosecutor, former Minister of Interior, Bayman Erkinbaev, the assassinated drug baron in the South and others.²⁸ He used his contacts to avoid prosecution and create problems for competitors even after the ‘tulip revolution,’ despite his pro-Akaev stance. He also managed to keep some of his property, including a casino in Bishkek.

In the “post-revolutionary” period, new ‘*kashlioks*’ were born according to the Kyrgyz press. Salai Aidarov, brother of Nurgazi Aidarov, an alleged drug trafficker and son-in-law of the very influential Usen Sydykov, former head of the Presidential administration, was appointed in 2006. Several journalists and experts referred to him as

²⁴ Interviews with Kyrgyz experts, March-May, 2007 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

²⁵ Interview with a policeman, March, 2007, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

²⁶ Interviews with Kyrgyz experts, March-May, 2007 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

²⁷ RIA novosti, October 5th 2006, <http://www.utro.ru/news/2006/10/05/590005.shtml>

²⁸ Interview with a Kyrgyz politician and NGO leader, March 2007 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

'Kashiliok 2' and alleged that he is providing illegal monthly payments to President Bakiev's family.²⁹

At a lower level, representatives of law enforcement structures take bribes to turn a blind eye to contraband activities. A member of the Jogorku Kenesh stated in December 2006: I have evidence that representatives of the SNB take bribes from the head of customs checkpoints and the latter, for their part, let the contraband goods enter Kyrgyzstan.³⁰ Sometimes, representatives of law enforcement structures escort illegal goods to their destination themselves, for instance an officer in the financial police was arrested in Osh in April 2007 for escorting a truck loaded with contraband metal pipes.³¹ Allegedly officers of the same organisation escort trucks of contraband goods from Dordoy market in Bishkek.³²

Thus corruption pyramids can be seen in every structure fighting smuggling. The bribes collected from personnel (for appointments, promotion, ranks), individuals and businesses (for letting illegal goods pass, escort services, etc) are distributed from the bottom up, reaching the highest levels of the ruling regime. As a result, influential political-criminal clans maintain an interest in keeping contraband goods flowing and this also makes the fight against smuggling meaningless. Therefore only petty smuggling is fought and highly organized contraband frequently goes unimpeded. The following chart based on the data of the customs committee proves this observation:

Chart 3. Criminal cases of smuggling filed by the Customs Department, January – November 2006³³

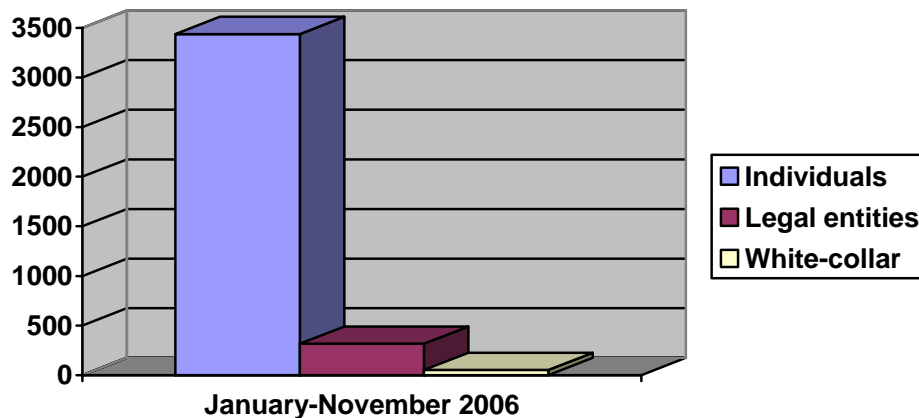
²⁹ Interviews with Kyrgyz experts, March-May, 2007 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

³⁰ Online journalist, December 18th 2006; <http://www.media.in.kg/ru/news/?news=6269>

³¹ Pr.kg, May 2nd 2007, <http://www.pr.kg/n/detail.php?id=16681>

³² Interview with a corruption expert, May 10th 2007, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

³³ Source: State Customs Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic



It also should be noted here that many influential politicians own shares in various markets/bazaars in Bishkek as well as in the regions. Frequently they co-own these markets together with criminals. All these bazaars are supplied with contraband goods to a large extent and this also adds to the argument of high-level interest in sustaining smuggling.

Organized crime groups involved in smuggling

There are about 22 criminal groups operating in Kyrgyzstan. Most of these are concentrated around the capital city, Bishkek, and the Osh area in southern Kyrgyzstan. These gangs are either directly involved in legal and illicit businesses or provide protection for wealthy businessmen.³⁴

Organized crime groups are more involved in the smuggling of illegal goods, such as drugs. For instance the group of Jenish Rahimov in Osh, South Kyrgyzstan and the family of Chechen criminal leader Aziz Batukaev in the Chui region of the North both control part of the drugs trafficking routes in their respective regions.³⁵ However empirical evidence shows that organized crime groups engage in anything that generates high profits. For instance, the Karabaltinskaia group in the North controls the smuggling

³⁴ E. Marat, Criminal state of play - An examination of state-crime relations in post-Soviet Union Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Jane's Intelligence Review, February 2007

³⁵ Interviews with Mamat Tursugbaev, Deputy head of the Organized Crime fighting unit, regional directorate of the MIA, Osh, May, 2007 and Melis Turganbaev, Colonel of police, Head of the central directorate for fighting organized crime of the MIA, June, 2007, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

of wheat, alcoholic beverages and fuel from Kazakhstan.³⁶ The head of the group is Almaz Bokushev, a former freestyle wrestler having links with several former and serving officials, among them a former Minister of Internal Affairs.

In the South, an Uzbek organized criminal group is involved in smuggling legal goods to and from Uzbekistan. The group is linked to and protected by an MP of Uzbek origin from the South and the mayor of Karasuu, site of Karasuu market.³⁷ A. Jumabaev, an influential criminal from the town of Jalalabad in the South is involved in the smuggling of burr walnut³⁸ to Uzbekistan.³⁹

Organized crime groups not only protect or directly engage in smuggling activities, but they frequently control local markets/bazaars and moreover, dominate economic activity in certain regions. For instance, in Talas region the organized crime group having links to the regional and district administration controls the prices of haricot beans, the main agricultural product grown in the region. The normal buyers are Turkish businessmen, who are obliged to buy the product through this crime group since they are prevented from talking directly to local producers. The same applies to cotton production in the South, according to Kyrgyz experts.⁴⁰

Despite the significant involvement of organized crime groups in smuggling legal goods the main contributor to the criminal economy of Kyrgyzstan is the drugs trade, which is briefly discussed in the following section.

Drugs trade

Kyrgyzstan is a significant actor in trans-national drugs trafficking due to its geopolitical location, insecure borders and corruption in law enforcement. Drugs transiting Kyrgyzstan are mainly distributed in the Russian market, especially to Siberia and the Ural region⁴¹ although trafficking to China is already a problem and is expected

³⁶ Interview with a policeman, March 2007, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

³⁷ Interview with a Kyrgyz expert, June 2007, Osh, Kyrgyzstan

³⁸ According to gazeta.kg, woodknob (*kap* in Russian) is mainly available in Southern Kyrgyzstan and is the most valuable material for making furniture (<http://www.gazeta.kg/week/2006/06/29/wood/>)

³⁹ Interview with Mamat Tursugbaev, Deputy head of the Organized Crime fighting unit, regional directorate of the MIA, Osh, May 2007

⁴⁰ Interview with freelance observer, April 3, 2007, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

⁴¹ Interview with A. Kniyazev, Professor of the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavonic University, April, 2007

to grow in the coming years considering opiate and heroin trafficking has become more professional and international and the increasing drugs market in China.

There are 7300 officially registered drug consumers in Kyrgyzstan,⁴² however unofficial estimates range from 70 thousand up to 250 thousand. Local production is limited and mainly includes cannabis, marihuana and opium. Thus Kyrgyzstan is not considered to be a major producer of drugs, although in Soviet times, about 98 collective farms (kolkhoz) in the Issyk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan provided 80% of the Soviet Union's legal supply of opium, or 16% of the world's legal supply from roughly 1916 to 1973.⁴³ Opium poppies were widely cultivated in the South and the city of Osh was previously known as the "Bogota of the East".⁴⁴ Drugs are still produced in both regions, involving numbers of impoverished people. For instance, in Issyk-Kul region, cannabis is grown on around 4353 hectares of land that can be used to produce around 3 thousand tons of marihuana and 100 tons of hashish. The criminal groups have divided the plantations among themselves and mobilize around 200 peasants daily to work on the plantations. The drugs are then trafficked through Kazakhstan to Russia.⁴⁵ Likewise, in Osh entire families go to plantations to pick opium poppies. The parents make hashish and marihuana and the children sell it.⁴⁶

Nevertheless the main problem is the trafficking of Afghan drugs through Kyrgyzstan. The drugs mainly pass through the Osh region, the so-called "Osh knot", along the Osh-Bishkek highway or the Talas region to Kazakhstan and Russia. Basically, the drugs trafficking routes to the North coincide with the trade routes for goods arriving from China.⁴⁷

According to different estimates 60 thousand kg of heroin is trafficked through Kyrgyzstan annually,⁴⁸ however seizures are minor. For instance in 2005 202 kg and in

⁴² UNODC, Kyrgyzstan profile, 2006, <http://www.unodc.org>

⁴³ Kyrgyzstan profile, Country Factsheets, Eurasian Narcotics, Silk Road Studies program, Uppsala University, Sweden, 2004, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org>

⁴⁴ S. Redo, Organized crime and its control in Central Asia, Office of International Criminal Justice (OICJ), 2004, p.98

⁴⁵ Newspaper Anti-corruption, N 426, March 2007

⁴⁶ Vse darogi idut v osh, February 13, 2007, karakg.net/crim?id=1311200751

⁴⁷ See for instance J. Townsend, The Logistics of Opiate Trafficking in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, Volume 4, No. 1 (2006) p. 8

⁴⁸ M. Mardi, Drug trade in Kyrgyzstan: structure, implications and countermeasures, Central Asian Survey, December 2004, 23 (3-4), p.262

2006 – 260 kg of heroin was seized in Kyrgyzstan,⁴⁹ that means that only 0.34% in 2005 and 0.43% in 2006 of overall heroin traffic was detected. As one knowledgeable journalist from Osh argued ‘only small portions of drugs are seized; the big ones pass freely’.⁵⁰ The big seizures take place when competing groups “inform the law enforcement agencies about the location of future shipments”.⁵¹

As already mentioned several high-ranking officials are involved in drugs smuggling. However, it has to be noted that the lines are totally blurred when it comes to distinguishing and categorizing the groups complicit in the drugs trade. It can be argued that mainly mixed groups, networks comprising the representatives of purely criminal groups, law enforcement structures, sportsmen and quasi-legal businessmen being protected by high-ranking officials in the executive and legislative branches of the Kyrgyz government are operating. Empirical evidence also suggests that after the assassination of Bayman Erkinbaev in 2005, representatives of the police and special services became more important actors in the smuggling chains. For instance, allegedly at least three mid-level officers of the Drugs Control Agency of Kyrgyzstan are involved in drugs trafficking.⁵² In the South the majority of law enforcement personnel is complicit in the illegal trade in drugs.⁵³

The intra-agency struggles for the control of drug flows have also been reported. For instance one expert mentioned that in early 2007 several police officers were arrested on charges of being involved in drugs smuggling in Osh, South Kyrgyzstan. As it appeared later, these policemen had become the victims of internal strife among various groups of policemen/traffickers over controlling the lucrative drugs trade.⁵⁴ Re-sale of seized drugs by policemen is also a common occurrence.

To sum up, the drugs trade in Kyrgyzstan has become a serious problem since it has involved white-collar officials. The period of chaotic trading with no high level involvement in the early 1990s has been replaced by organized trading by sophisticated

⁴⁹ Information on activities of law enforcement structures of Kyrgyz republic on fighting illegal trade of drugs, statistical review, 2005-2006, Agency for Drugs Control of Kyrgyz Republic, www.dca.gov.kg

⁵⁰ Personal communication, Osh, May 30, 2007

⁵¹ M. Mardi, 2004, p.262

⁵² A statement by a former officer of the Kyrgyz law enforcement structures, at a roundtable dedicated to corruption issues, May 2007, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

⁵³ Interview with a scholar, expert on drugs trade, Bishkek, April, 2007

⁵⁴ Personal communication, May 2007, Osh, Kyrgyzstan

criminal groups with political connections. Over the past few years, drugs traffickers have managed to infiltrate the government and on the other hand, corrupt representatives of law enforcement structures and various groups linked with high-ranking officials have succeeded in getting their share of the illicit narcotics trade.

Conclusions

The smuggling of legal and illegal goods in Kyrgyzstan is closely related to bribery and collusion between official and unofficial structures. The geopolitical location of the country, its insecure borders, presence of organized crime groups, corrupt and inefficient law enforcement are the main factors facilitating illicit cross-border trade.

The networks of smuggling in legal goods and those engaged in trading illicit goods frequently overlap in Kyrgyzstan. The well-elaborated smuggling channels for Chinese goods for instance can easily be used for drugs trafficking or vice versa. Organized crime groups and political-criminal clans engage in everything that generates high profits. Representatives of law enforcement structures either take bribes and facilitate smuggling or are directly engaged in smuggling.

Unlike drug trafficking, the smuggling of legal goods is mainly implemented by petty traders, although white-collar officials and organized crime groups are also involved. High-level interest in sustaining smuggling is clearly shown by corruption in the structures that are supposed to fight smuggling and the ownership of markets by high-ranking officials.