

# Cocaine Trafficking

## Ethnic Albanian Criminal Networks and the Caribbean

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As part of the EU-funded *CAP1* (Caribbean-Albanian Poly-criminal Offshore Network Elicitation) project (co-funded by the European Commission from the ISF), various methods – both IT-based and “classic” investigative measures – are currently being used (January 2025 to December 2026) to pursue two main objectives: On the one hand, the legal basis for transnational investigations is being analysed in the light of international legal principles. On the other hand, *in-rem* and *in-situ* activities are being carried out simultaneously in the Caribbean and Albanian regions in order to identify possible additions and added value of a nexus-related methodology that needs to be systematised.<sup>1</sup>

### On Project CAP1

Led by the University of Applied Sciences for Public Administration Bremen (HfÖV),<sup>2</sup> the Institute for Police and Security Research (IPoS)<sup>3</sup> is currently implementing a consortium project in cooperation with the topic-specific research groups of the Jean Monet Centre of Excellence (CCICJ)<sup>4</sup> affiliated with the IPoS, is currently implementing a consortium project at the HfÖV with the aim of gaining structural insights into the thematic nexus of “illegal cocaine trafficking from South/Latin/Central America via the Caribbean islands, mainly affiliated with the Netherlands, by Albanian criminal networks”. This project is multi-layered in terms of content, subject matter, personnel and time, so that at this point in time it is not possible to summarise a comprehensive report on the results here, but rather to present an interim report.

This topic is of particular interest to law enforcement agencies that are located close to ports and are also considered to be highly relevant in terms of goods handling volumes. In the context of the CAP1 project, Bremerhaven (and Hamburg, although not represented in the project) are therefore the most notable consortium partners in this regard.<sup>5</sup> The Bremerhaven Local Police Authority (OPB BHV), in cooperation with the Bremen State Criminal Police Office (LKA Bremen), is also a consortium partner in the CAP1 project, as is the Albanian State Police (ASP).

Thanks to the consistently good and reliable contacts with the Dutch law enforcement agencies and, through these, the connections via Interpol that are particularly relevant with regard to the Caribbean, the CAP1 project is substantiated in its implementation at the knowledge level, especially with regard to the Dutch parts of the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup> The Federal Criminal Police Office

<sup>1</sup> <https://ipos-research.eu/project/cap1>

<sup>2</sup> [www.hfoev.bremen.de](http://www.hfoev.bremen.de)

<sup>3</sup> [www.ipos-research.eu](http://www.ipos-research.eu)

<sup>4</sup> [www.hfoev.bremen.de/forschung/jean-monnet-center-of-excellence-crime-investigations-and-criminal-justice-ccicj-16618](http://www.hfoev.bremen.de/forschung/jean-monnet-center-of-excellence-crime-investigations-and-criminal-justice-ccicj-16618)

<sup>5</sup> <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/239221/umfrage/groesste-haefen-in-deutschland-nach-gueterumschlag>

<sup>6</sup> <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/ronl-a11e0f7e6531059e36685f1ca1c8572ac682d01e/pdf>

(BKA) is primarily involved in the design of project activities in Albania, in conjunction with and against the backdrop of the German-Albanian “police agreement”<sup>7</sup>.

As this is an EU-funded project originating from the ISF, the EU dimension of the initiatives underlying this project cannot go unmentioned (without going into further detail here): *El Pacto*,<sup>8</sup> *EU-CELAC*,<sup>9</sup> and *MAOC-N*<sup>10</sup>.

## A European-American Melting Pot

Due to the territorial and cultural interface between the “EU catchment area” and the US hemisphere in the Caribbean region, including the associated political and criminal links to northern parts of South America, which are currently becoming increasingly problematic, particular attention must be paid to the measures taken under the banner of “*drug terrorism*”<sup>11</sup> against ships<sup>12</sup> suspected of carrying cocaine and their crews: here, (border protection) police activities are mixed with those of a military nature; added to this are (geo)political aspects, notably the not unfounded suspicion of an intention by US forces to bring about regime change in *Venezuela*.<sup>13</sup>

Articles 198-204 TFEU (via Article 52(2) TEU in conjunction with Article 355(2) TFEU and Annex II TFEU) recognise that (following the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU) three EU Member States have special links with certain overseas countries and territories (OCTs): *Denmark* (Greenland), *France* (French Polynesia, French Southern and Antarctic Territories, New Caledonia and Dependencies, Saint Barthélemy, St. Pierre and Miquelon, Wallis and Futuna Islands) and the *Netherlands* (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, Saba, Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten) – for the purposes of the CAP1 *Curaçao* project, the focus is on the latter, largely through the support of the local consortium partner *CIPOS* (Civic Institute to Promote Order and Society).<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, Curaçao is located near the coast of Venezuela and is therefore significant in the context of US measures and in light of EU interests: Legal relations between the EU and these 13 OCTs are governed by EU law, not the constitutional law of the respective EU country: Although the OCTs are part of the territory of individual EU Member States, they are not part of the EU customs territory, i.e. the OCTs are not part of the EU internal market (Art. 26(2) TFEU) and must comply with obligations laid down for third countries in the area of trade (in principle: Art. 199(1)-(5) TFEU). Customs and trade law aspects are therefore of particular importance, as is the fact that OCT nationals are also EU citizens,<sup>15</sup> which gives rise to elements of free movement of persons, for example.

<sup>7</sup> [www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/gesetzgebungsverfahren/DE/gesetz-zur-innerstaatlichen-inkraftsetzung-d-ok-abkommens-m-albanien.html](http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/gesetzgebungsverfahren/DE/gesetz-zur-innerstaatlichen-inkraftsetzung-d-ok-abkommens-m-albanien.html)

<sup>8</sup> [www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2024\)762286](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2024)762286)

<sup>9</sup> [www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-celac-roadmap-summits\\_en](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-celac-roadmap-summits_en)

<sup>10</sup> <https://maoc.eu>

<sup>11</sup> Will, David, *Warum der Konflikt zwischen den USA und Venezuela eskaliert*, Die ZEIT, 15.11.2025, [www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2025-10/usa-venezuela-bombenangriffe-trump-rubio-maduro-drogen-gxe](http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2025-10/usa-venezuela-bombenangriffe-trump-rubio-maduro-drogen-gxe)

<sup>12</sup> Maher, Kit, *US military carried out 21st strike on alleged drug boat, killing 3*, 16.11.2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/11/16/politics/us-military-drug-boat-strike-21>

<sup>13</sup> Paton Walsh, Nick, *Whatever Trump’s goal in Venezuela, US military action is unlikely to achieve it*, 17.11.2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/11/17/americas/analysis-trump-military-action-venezuela-intl-latam>; US-Angriffe auf Venezuela: Trump meldet Gefangennahme von Staatschef Maduro, 03.01.2026, [www.tagesschau.de/ausland/amerika/maduro-festnahme-usa-trump-100.html](http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/amerika/maduro-festnahme-usa-trump-100.html)

<sup>14</sup> [www.cipos.eu](http://www.cipos.eu)

<sup>15</sup> cf. Kreuzschitz, Viktor, Vorbemerkung zu den Artikeln 45 bis 48 AEUV, in: von der Groeben, Hans, Jürgen Schwarze und Armin Hatje, *Europäisches Unionsrecht*, Rn. 59, 2015, C.H. Beck

*Aruba, Curaçao* and *St. Maarten* (belong to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, but are each to be understood as an autonomous country (gemeente) within the Kingdom; according to the constitution, the Netherlands is responsible for the defence and foreign affairs of Curaçao (like the other two territories, it is therefore only an observer in CARICOM)<sup>16</sup>, which could become more important in light of current US activities. In contrast, the islands of *Bonaire, St. Eustatius* and *Saba*, collectively known as the Caribbean Netherlands, are “special municipalities” (bijzondere gemeenten). The political oscillation between the EU and CARICOM is a delicate balancing act, which is not surprising to observers in Curaçao who are aware of it.

## Insights into Curaçao and Albania

As part of the implementation of the CAP1 project, a Legal Mechanisms Report (LMR) was compiled, which focuses on the following elements: *The LMR deals with the legal framework and shortcomings in the fight against cocaine trafficking networks*, focuses on the Netherlands’ domestic response to cocaine trafficking via the (former) Netherlands Antilles, particularly by Albanian criminal networks, and addresses the role of the ports of Bremen in this nexus. It includes legal provisions, case studies, insights from practitioners and recommendations. This also reflects the in-rem and in-situ activities; the data for this article was collected by the authors between January 2025 and November 2025.

A previous article published here<sup>17</sup> highlighted that the Hells Angels are active in the Caribbean region and visible on Curaçao; of more local relevance is “Buena Vista City”. An in-depth investigation on site has revealed that biker gangs are not significantly involved in the local cocaine trade within the logistics chain; but what does their presence on site indicate? The possibility of a distribution function elsewhere, for example in Germany, remains conjecture in terms of nexus, although perhaps not entirely unfounded by analogy. The No Limits Soldiers (NLS) group, which is not affiliated with the Motorcycle Clubs (MC), appears to play a different role.

While the MC thus receded into the background during the implementation of the CAP1 project, the assumption that “the Italian Mafia” was currently increasingly active in Curaçao, especially in cooperation with the NLS group, was reinforced. It was also recognised that “Balkan cartels” were taking over logistics, with Albania being highlighted:<sup>18</sup> This is precisely the thematic focus of the CAP1 project, as conceived in its original conceptual version in 2023. *In-situ observations made as part of the CAP1 project have shown that ethnic Albanian actors do not appear locally in Curaçao, but exclusively in the South American and Latin American countries of origin of the cocaine, i.e. the respective local distribution role along the logistics chain is highly diversified and makes use of locally available structures*, so that there have been indications of the involvement of the NLS in particular, including with regard to Venezuela.<sup>19</sup>

The number of cocaine seizures in the port of Bremerhaven remains consistently high at varying levels;<sup>20</sup> there are recurring links to ethnic Albanian criminal networks, including in relation to the countries of origin of the cocaine, such as Colombia and Venezuela, as well as transit or

<sup>16</sup> <https://caricom.org>

<sup>17</sup> Holland, Trygve Ben et al., *Hic Sunt Dracones*, Kriminallistik, 6/2022

<sup>18</sup> [www.curacaochronicle.com/post/main/italian-mafia-expanding-influence-in-curacao-through-local-crime-networks](http://www.curacaochronicle.com/post/main/italian-mafia-expanding-influence-in-curacao-through-local-crime-networks)

<sup>19</sup> this conclusion was confirmed by the Curaçao-based organised civil society actor Think TO DO, whose Fragile States Index report from 2025 draws the same conclusions, <https://thinktodoinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/fsi-2023-curacao-report.pdf>, S.19; [www.curacaochronicle.com/post/local/t2di-releases-fragile-state-report-2025-economic-growth-continues-but-societal-development-and-trust-erode](http://www.curacaochronicle.com/post/local/t2di-releases-fragile-state-report-2025-economic-growth-continues-but-societal-development-and-trust-erode)

<sup>20</sup> cf. Pressemitteilungen des HZA Bremen: [www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/pm/121225/6048516](http://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/pm/121225/6048516); [www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/pm/121225/5775976](http://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/pm/121225/5775976); [www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/pm/121225/5516139](http://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/pm/121225/5516139)

destination ports such as Antwerp and Hamburg<sup>21</sup> (the role of Hamburg appears to be becoming increasingly relevant in this regard)<sup>22</sup>.

***There are no known cases in South, Central or Latin America in which port employees belonging to the ethnic Albanian (or any other Balkan) group are involved in illegal cocaine trafficking; this finding can be confirmed on the basis of the in situ and in rem analyses carried out as part of the CAPI project with regard to the (former) Netherlands Antilles.***

Although there is no scientifically based study on the aspect of the “involvement” of port workers in Germany, experience and police reports show that organised crime resorts to corruption and intimidation of port workers – the connection in the sense of feedback with ethnic Albanian actors has repeatedly become apparent. In this respect, the connections seem to be different; however, the dysfunctionality of the reporting system for port-based drug smuggling was not conducive to better classifying potential offences.<sup>23</sup>

### **Albanian Measures Against Drug Trafficking**

With reference to a previous project co-financed by the EU from the ISF,<sup>24</sup> which was carried out by the HfÖV, and against the background of a technical discussion organised by the ASP, which included both content and personal support, as well as in-situ activities in the present CAPI project, the following should be noted:

According to Article 230/b of the Albanian Penal Code, the concealment of financial resources and objects – in this case also goods within the meaning of international trade law – for the purpose of financing terrorism is punishable by four to twelve years’ imprisonment and a fine. INTERPOL “has warned governments and law enforcement agencies that there is growing evidence of a link between intellectual property crime and terrorist financing [...] The problem could become even more serious in the future”, which is why it called for increased efforts to combat it, including a new partnership between industry and the police. “The link between organised criminal groups and counterfeit goods is well established. However, INTERPOL is sounding the alarm that intellectual property crime is becoming the preferred method of financing for a number of terrorist groups. [...] There are now enough examples of terrorist groups being financed in this way that we need to be concerned about public safety. We must take preventive action now”<sup>25</sup>.

In addition to the use of counterfeit goods to finance terrorism and money laundering, trade in illegal goods – especially drugs – is significant in connection with the Western Balkans (Albania).

It is important to note that Albania’s trade in goods mainly concerns trade routes with the EU: To this end, contact was made with the US company S2 Global (OSI Systems Company); Following a lengthy legal dispute with Albania over the date of entry into force of the 15-year

<sup>21</sup> [www.kreiszeitung.de/lokales/bremen/bremer-drogenprozess-mit-zitronen-gehandelt-93155262.html](http://www.kreiszeitung.de/lokales/bremen/bremer-drogenprozess-mit-zitronen-gehandelt-93155262.html); [www.welt.de/vermischtes/article253657984/Bremen-War-nicht-ueberrascht-als-der-Mann-enthuellte-dass-es-um-Kokain-ging.html](http://www.welt.de/vermischtes/article253657984/Bremen-War-nicht-ueberrascht-als-der-Mann-enthuellte-dass-es-um-Kokain-ging.html)

<sup>22</sup> [www.ndr.de/nachrichten/hamburg/Hamburg-im-Fokus-Wie-Kokain-Banden-deutsche-Haefen-infiltrieren,kokain488.html](http://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/hamburg/Hamburg-im-Fokus-Wie-Kokain-Banden-deutsche-Haefen-infiltrieren,kokain488.html)

<sup>23</sup> cf. Kohlwes, Till, *Bremer Meldeportal verschluckt jahrelang Drogenschmuggel-Hinweise*, 09.05.2025, [www.butenunbinnen.de/nachrichten/drogen-schmuggel-meldeportal-hafen-bremerhaven-100.html](http://www.butenunbinnen.de/nachrichten/drogen-schmuggel-meldeportal-hafen-bremerhaven-100.html)

<sup>24</sup> <https://innerersicherheitsfonds.de/foerderperiode-2014-2020/beguenstigtenverzeichnis>

<sup>25</sup> INTERPOL warnt vor Verbindung zwischen Fälschungen und Terrorismus, Medienmitteilung, 16.07.2003; [www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News/2003/PR019](http://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News/2003/PR019)

concession agreement,<sup>26</sup> S2 Global has been scanning goods transports in Albania since October 2015.

Starting with the port of Durrës, which is important for international freight transport, a total of five control points have since been set up in Albania: Durrës (sea border), Qafë Thanë (border with Macedonia), Kapshticë, Kakavijë and Morinë (each on the border with Greece); it should be noted that these control points do not cover all official border crossings.

The contractual mandate of the private company S2 Global is to scan 100% of goods – i.e. lorries and containers – before dispatch or upon arrival. However, it is questionable what the 100% quota actually means in practice. During the visit to S2 Global at the port of Durrës, this picture became clearer: the planned 100% of goods handling refers to 100% of deliveries selected for scanning by the port police (customs police), and not to 100% of all goods movements. It is therefore at the discretion of the authorities to select the goods movements to be scanned.

During the discussion with the operations manager of the scanning facility,<sup>27</sup> it also became apparent that, despite scanning – which is now recognised as only partially implemented – there are further gaps in the goods supply chain.<sup>28</sup>

Those arrested in one case were members of the local police and customs authorities; the company S2 Global was indirectly affected by this incident: the truck had been scanned by S2 Global when crossing the border between North Macedonia and Albania, and no irregularities had been detected. Apparently, after this check, the truck was loaded with marijuana on Albanian territory and smuggled past the S2 Global scanning facility in the port of Durrës by the officials who are now in custody (i.e. it was not one of the trucks that had been scanned by the officials). The reason given by the officers taken into custody for bypassing the scanning facility in Durrës was that the truck had ultimately been scanned upon entering Albania.

During the investigation, it also emerged that a number of customs officials had been working for organised crime networks: “Certain individuals from the state police had connections to marijuana growers or dealers. They were paid for their silence or collaborated with them. I believe that some local police chiefs deliberately kept quiet about this phenomenon,” said former Interior Minister Fatmir Xhafaj.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the corruption of government officials by organised crime networks, another aspect is significant in this case: Most of the loaded trucks are shipped to Italy, where customs officials are familiar with S2 Global on the Albanian side and do not re-inspect the vast majority of these trucks when they see from the documents that they have been scanned by S2 Global on the Albanian side.

Therefore, it is highly likely that such a lorry, which can provide proof of scanning from the border between North Macedonia and Albania, will be allowed to pass without further checks; the Italian customs authorities are not in direct contact with S2 Global in Albania, which means that in the event of forged scan documents allegedly proving that the scan took place at the port of Durrës, it would also be easier for the Italian authorities to bypass the checks.<sup>30</sup>

In the present case, a lorry bound for Belgium was stopped by the Italian police in Italy: “[...] the lorry was stopped by the Italian police shortly after its arrival at the port of Ancona”.

<sup>26</sup> Tirana Times, *Albania avoids arbitration penalties by restoring Rapiscan scanning concession*, 19. Juni 2015, abrufbar unter: <http://www.tiranatimes.com/?p=122141>

<sup>27</sup> Conversation during the visit to the port of Durrës at the premises of S2 Global.

<sup>28</sup> [www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2017/04/18/albania-arrests-police-customs-men-over-cannabis-traffic/](http://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2017/04/18/albania-arrests-police-customs-men-over-cannabis-traffic/)

<sup>29</sup> Tirana Times, *Minister admits to potential ties between police and organized crime*, 12.05.2017, [www.tiranatimes.com/?p=132377](http://www.tiranatimes.com/?p=132377); Tirana Times, *Organised Crime*, v. 12.05. 2017, [www.tiranatimes.com/?p=132377](http://www.tiranatimes.com/?p=132377)

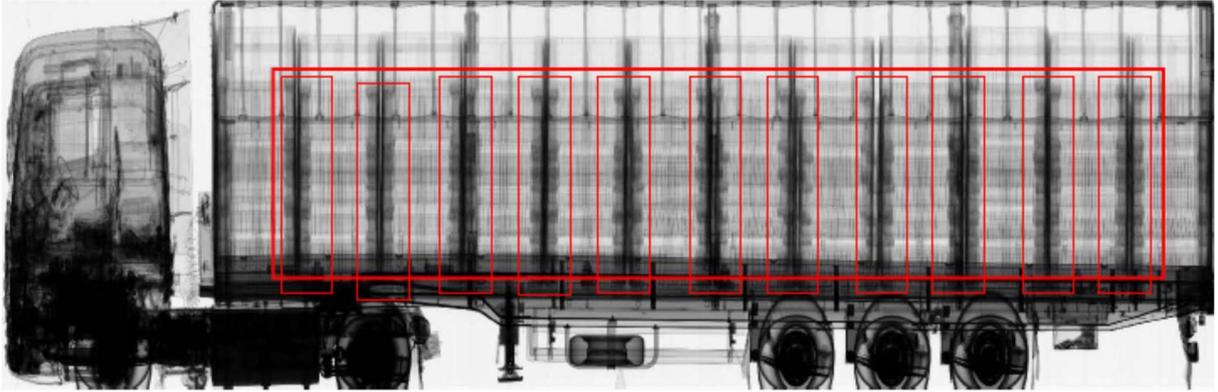
<sup>30</sup> Conversation during the visit to the port of Durrës at the premises of S2 Global in the year 2025.

Although the Albanian police denied any involvement – “The Albanian police denied any wrongdoing in Durrës” – “a second lorry carrying 2.2 tonnes of cannabis was seized in Italy”<sup>31</sup>.

The frequency of such incidents is consistent with the findings of Interpol, UNODC and BKA regarding the trafficking routes of illegal goods brought into the EU from or via Albania.

With regard to the working methods and functionality of S2 Global and its scanning software, it should be emphasised that the analysis of the scans is not carried out automatically: Every 30 minutes, employees take turns to operate the scanner, fill out documents and check images. This ensures that employees remain focused and that neither outsiders nor the employees themselves can identify who is performing which task at S2 Global at any given time. The software displays two aspects: Organic and inorganic materials, in red and blue respectively; as soon as a lorry pulls up in front of the scanning hall, the freight and vehicle documents are checked. On this basis, S2 Global employees know what weight class the vehicle should have and what the load should consist of; if the scans reveal discrepancies, particularly with regard to the expected organic/inorganic composition or material density, these are marked with a red frame on the images and forwarded to the police, who are then responsible for physically inspecting the lorry – the extent to which such inspections are actually carried out by the police is not coordinated with S2 Global.

The following shows findings by S2 Global in Albania since October 2015;<sup>32</sup> the area marked in red and enlarged in the lower part of the image indicates the presence of organic substances:

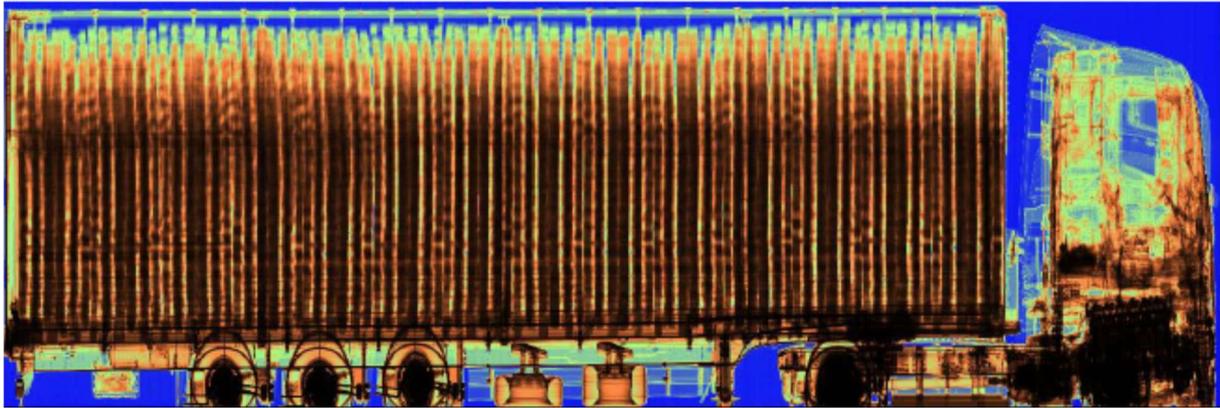


This involved 450 kg of marijuana.



The image below shows the presence of organic material in the wooden pallets:

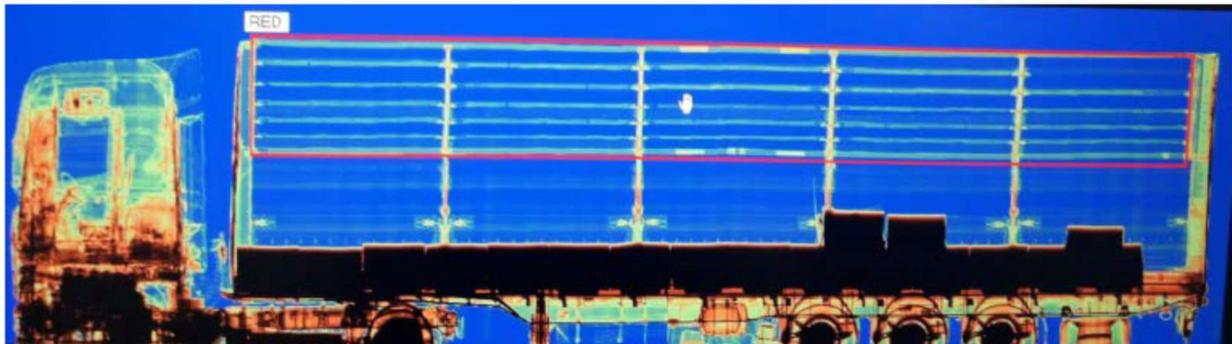
<sup>31</sup> [www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2017/04/18/albania-arrests-police-customs-men-over-cannabis-traffic/](http://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2017/04/18/albania-arrests-police-customs-men-over-cannabis-traffic/)  
<sup>32</sup> the illustrations were created by S2 Global for internal training purposes and released for publication as part of the implementation of the CAP1 project; Heffner, Gary, *Global Smuggling Trends Report*, S2 Global, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2017 (non-public)



This involved 273 kg of marijuana.



At the same time, struts were installed in the lorries and filled with marijuana:



The area marked in red indicates the presence of organic substances. These were filled into metal pipes that were attached to the truck as additional struts; the total weight was 79 kg of marijuana.

It is particularly clear here that Albania is not a destination country for any “deliveries” of cocaine from South/Latin/Central America; in this respect, it seems that a different perspective is needed. Consequently, this was done.

### The “Balkanisation” of the Caribbean?

It should be noted that the term “Balkanisation” can refer on the one hand to territorial fragmentation<sup>33</sup> (which would also apply to the Caribbean region), and on the other hand to the dimensions of instability, conflict and regression<sup>34</sup>. Since not every development has to be progress, this may serve as background information: With the geopolitical changes in the political

<sup>33</sup> cf. [www.britannica.com/topic/Balkanization](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Balkanization)

<sup>34</sup> cf. e.g. Hoffmann, C. (2008). The Balkanization of Ottoman Rule: Premodern Origins of the Modern International System in Southeastern Europe. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 43(4), 373-396.

(ruling) systems in (South) Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 1990s, Albania – which belonged neither to the “Eastern Bloc” nor to the “Yugoslavian hemisphere” –<sup>35</sup> gradually gained or expanded its freedom of travel and movement of goods; this also structurally promoted the intensification of illegal activities, locally existing marijuana cultivation areas in Albania (especially in the southern region/ Lazarath<sup>36</sup> and in the northern mountainous region, e.g. near the border with Kosovo, but also in densely populated areas around large cities, e.g. Shkodra<sup>37</sup>) took on supra-regional significance: Albania quickly became known as Europe’s largest producer of marijuana,<sup>38</sup> traded from its territory, particularly into the EU. This trade was initially organised by ethnic Albanian actors in cooperation with Italian criminal networks via Bulgaria, Italy and Greece, and later Croatia into the EU. It was then increasingly organised independently by Albanian actors, although the “old connections” still remain today.<sup>39</sup>

During implementation of project CAP1, the degree of organisation of the “Albanian mafia” was repeatedly discussed: Although the ASP, primarily its representatives in the form of investigators, tends to minimise this to purely “family” or “friendship structures”,<sup>40</sup> it can be countered that, at least since then, a more complex degree of organisation has been necessary in order to achieve and maintain the current “market power”: During the 2010s, the geographical scope of activity of ethnic Albanian actors expanded in direct cooperation with South/Latin and Central American organisations (“cartels”)<sup>41</sup> and the focus shifted to cocaine – to this end, trade in this commodity from the countries of origin via the Caribbean region, and thus already via Art. 355(2) TFEU, with the associated Member States<sup>42</sup> along the Caribbean-Netherlands/France and Belgium-Spain-Portugal routes,<sup>43</sup> however, this trade is also evident by direct sea route in Germany (e.g. Bremerhaven and Hamburg)<sup>44</sup> and Poland<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Schmitt, Jens, *Die Albaner: Eine Geschichte zwischen Orient und Okzident*, Ch. Beck, 2018

<sup>36</sup> <https://pulitzercenter.org/projects/lazarat-fall-pot-empire>

<sup>37</sup> [www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/cannabis-anbau-in-albanien-grasland-15161171.html](http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/cannabis-anbau-in-albanien-grasland-15161171.html)

<sup>38</sup> cf. e.g. Pressly, Linda, *Europe’s outdoor cannabis capital*, BBC, 2016, [www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38111945](http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38111945)

<sup>39</sup> Ljubas, Zdravko, *Major Drug Bust in Italy, Albania Seizes Millions, 52 Arrested*, 2025, [www.oc-cr.org/en/news/major-drug-bust-in-italy-albania-seizes-millions-52-arrested](http://www.oc-cr.org/en/news/major-drug-bust-in-italy-albania-seizes-millions-52-arrested); this sequence of development steps was confirmed during a technical discussion with the responsible manager and the lead investigator at ASP in September 2025.

<sup>40</sup> s.h.: Arsovska, Jana, *Decoding Albanian Organized Crime*, UOC, 2015

<sup>41</sup> o. V., *Sinaloa cartel allied with the Albanian mafia, the Mexican media reveals list of names*, <https://euronews.al/en/sinaloa-cartel-allied-with-the-albanian-mafia-the-mexican-media-reveals-list-of-names>; <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Lucia-Bird-et-al-Under-the-radar-Western-Balkans-cocaine-operations-in-West-Africa-GI-TOC-September-2025.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2021/1764 of 5 October 2021 on the association of the Overseas Countries and Territories with the European Union including relations between the European Union on the one hand, and Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark on the other (Decision on the Overseas Association, including Greenland), OJ L 355, 7.10.2021, pp. 6-134, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32021D1764>

<sup>43</sup> [www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn0w4e4e00jo](http://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn0w4e4e00jo)

<sup>44</sup> Haar, Christopher, *Kokain am Strand: Wie Drogenschmuggler deutsche Häfen nutzen*, 2025, [www.ndr.de/nachrichten/niedersachsen/oldenburg\\_ostfriesland/Kokain-am-Strand-Wie-Drogenschmuggler-deutsche-Haefen-nutzen,kokain586.html](http://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/niedersachsen/oldenburg_ostfriesland/Kokain-am-Strand-Wie-Drogenschmuggler-deutsche-Haefen-nutzen,kokain586.html); Maihold, Günther, *Europas Häfen und der internationale Kokainhandel – Weshalb Verbrechensbekämpfung auch der Resilienz von Logistikplattformen bedarf*, 2024, [www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024A07](http://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024A07)

<sup>45</sup> o. V., *Polnische Schiffsbesatzung vereitelt Kokain-Schmuggel*, Portal Polskiego Radia SA, 2014, [www.polskieradio.pl/400/7764/Artykul/3432653,Polnische-Schiffsbesatzung-vereitelt-KokainSchmuggel](http://www.polskieradio.pl/400/7764/Artykul/3432653,Polnische-Schiffsbesatzung-vereitelt-KokainSchmuggel); [www.mopo.de/hamburg/kurioses-versteck-unfassbare-menge-kokain-aus-hamburg-in-polen-sichergestellt-36825226](http://www.mopo.de/hamburg/kurioses-versteck-unfassbare-menge-kokain-aus-hamburg-in-polen-sichergestellt-36825226); Wassermann, Jakob, *40 Mio. € Kokain in Tropenholzdielen*, Holzkurier, 2023, [www.holzkuierer.com/uebrige\\_wirtschaft/2023/08/kokain-in-tropenholzdielen.html](http://www.holzkuierer.com/uebrige_wirtschaft/2023/08/kokain-in-tropenholzdielen.html)

The dubious success of this business model is currently evident in the significant changes taking place in the Albanian capital of Tirana<sup>46</sup> (it should also be noted that, according to an analysis, the number of foreign investors is not surprisingly large, but rather small and regional in origin), as well as in the dimension threatening the rule of law on both sides of the Atlantic –<sup>47</sup> especially within the EU.<sup>48</sup>

***Just because this group is not visibly present in Curaçao or in ports on the South and Central American mainland (unlike the “biker” groups and the NLS), this does not mean that its relevance and role in this nexus has changed – quite the contrary: It can therefore be stated with greater certainty that ethnic Albanian involvement has shifted away from the executive level towards strategic and organisational activities: On islands such as Curaçao, for example, there is little (and certainly no noticeable increase in) ethnic Albanian presence,<sup>49</sup> whereas in some South and Central American countries there is – here again explicitly contextualised with cocaine trafficking<sup>50</sup> and nexus-related deaths.<sup>51</sup> Data suggest that only a few people of Albanian origin have moved their centre of life directly or indirectly (e.g. via Italy) to South or Central America – meaning that no diaspora-based connection can be drawn –<sup>52</sup> whereas it is more likely that there is significant travel activity for reasons other than tourism. Latin America, namely Mexico, should also be taken into consideration.<sup>53</sup>***

The thrust of the association of the Western Balkan countries with the EU through the relevant agreements (SAA)<sup>54</sup> also corresponds to the diversification of the “Caribbean region”, but there is a lack of a comparable agreement-based foundation at this level on the part of the EU (and its Member States): The fragmented nature of the Western Balkans, as well as that of the “Caribbean region” (especially with regard to the OCTs) – exacerbated by the “insularity” of the area – makes a more regionalised approach that takes account of the (sub)structures in order to combat this effectively and efficiently appear promising, given the nexus (spatial and factual connection: Cocaine) makes a more regionalised approach that takes account of the (sub)structures appear promising in order to deal with these issues effectively and efficiently. The connection between this “thematic area” within the area of freedom, security and justice will have to be developed in institutional, personal and staffing terms.

<sup>46</sup> cf. Troelenberg, Anja, *Korruption in Albanien: Wie man mit Hochhäusern Geld wäscht*, 2024, [www.mdr.de/nachrichten/welt/osteuropa/politik/albanien-korruption-100.html](http://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/welt/osteuropa/politik/albanien-korruption-100.html)

<sup>47</sup> [https://publications.iai.spk-berlin.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/riai\\_derivate\\_00000052/BIA%20168\\_Kolumbien\\_heute\\_Final.pdf](https://publications.iai.spk-berlin.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/riai_derivate_00000052/BIA%20168_Kolumbien_heute_Final.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> e.g. Pribyl, Katrin, *Korruption, „mafiose Strukturen“, Gewalt – Der belgische Rechtsstaat ist bedroht*, Rheinische Post, 2025, <https://rp-online.de/info/consent>; Shankar, Priyanka, *Niederlande: Wie Drogenbanden den Rechtsstaat bedrohen*, Deutsche Welle, 2022, [www.dw.com/de/niederlande-wie-drogenbanden-den-rechtsstaat-an-seine-grenzen-bringen/a-64199137](http://www.dw.com/de/niederlande-wie-drogenbanden-den-rechtsstaat-an-seine-grenzen-bringen/a-64199137)

<sup>49</sup> For the purpose of gaining insights in this regard, in-situ observations were carried out, as were analyses of the commercial register, interviews with market participants and experts from the authorities and organised civil society – each of which was compared with OSInt-based applications.

<sup>50</sup> [www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/mafia-de-albania-en-latinoamerica-como-opera-717609](http://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/mafia-de-albania-en-latinoamerica-como-opera-717609); [www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/mafia-de-albania-en-latinoamerica-como-opera-717609](http://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/mafia-de-albania-en-latinoamerica-como-opera-717609); [https://eldeber.com.bo/bbc/como-opera-la-mafia-albanesa-en-america-latina-y-hasta-donde-llegan-sus-tentaculos\\_303908/](https://eldeber.com.bo/bbc/como-opera-la-mafia-albanesa-en-america-latina-y-hasta-donde-llegan-sus-tentaculos_303908/); [www.infobae.com/colombia/2024/02/07/red-de-narcos-albaneses-producia-coca-en-colombia-la-vendia-en-ecuador-y-la-enviaba-a-europa-hay-30-capturados/](http://www.infobae.com/colombia/2024/02/07/red-de-narcos-albaneses-producia-coca-en-colombia-la-vendia-en-ecuador-y-la-enviaba-a-europa-hay-30-capturados/);

<sup>51</sup> <https://politiko.al/english/e-tjera/te-tretet-ne-ballkan-sa-eshte-numri-shqiptareve-qe-jetojne-ne-ameriken-l-i436517>

<sup>52</sup> <https://telegrafi.com/en/the-number-of-Albanians-living-in-Latin-America-is-known/>; <https://koha.mk/en/meshohet-numri-shqiptareve-qe-jetojne-ne-ameriken-latine/>; <https://politiko.al/english/e-tjera/te-tretet-ne-ballkan-sa-eshte-numri-shqiptareve-qe-jetojne-ne-ameriken-l-i436517>

<sup>53</sup> <https://euronews.al/en/sinaloa-cartel-allied-with-the-albanian-mafia-the-mexican-media-reveals-list-of-names>

<sup>54</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/DE/legal-content/summary/the-stabilisation-and-association-process.html>

## Legal Basis

The Federal Republic of Germany has a large number of police cooperation agreements, as well as mutual legal assistance agreements with a significant judicial focus.<sup>55</sup> It is apparent that such agreements only partially cover the necessary or possible measures relevant to investigations in a manner that is relevant to the nexus – the gaps are greater than the currently available solutions: A comparison of the agreement with Albania<sup>56</sup> and that with the Netherlands<sup>57</sup> shows that very different approaches were taken in each case, with the result that neither of them, individually or in combination, necessarily meet the requirements arising from a thematic focus such as that of CAP1. The categorisation, classification and further development of such operationally relevant agreements are currently one of the tasks of the CAP1 project.

## What Remains to be Reported

The next contribution within the framework of the CAP1 project will be an in-depth examination of the international legal basis underlying cross-border (i.e. transnational) investigations in the given spatial-factual nexus, which is lacking, as well as those that should (and could) be created. In addition, an approach tailored to the topic will be modelled in the context of the CAP1 project, which should be transferable to actors such as MAOC-N, even if the current activities of the USA are sending different signals here, so that the interregional dimension at the local law enforcement level will probably come to the fore, or at least be emphasised.

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<sup>55</sup> Holland, Trygve Ben et al., *Internationale Ermittlungen: Polizeiabkommen zwischen den Mitgliedstaaten der Europäischen Sicherheitsunion (unter Einbeziehung von Drittstaaten)*, Verlag für Polizeiwissenschaften 2024

<sup>56</sup> [www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger\\_BGBI&jumpTo=bgbl217s0002.pdf](http://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&jumpTo=bgbl217s0002.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/16/000/1600057.pdf>