

## Geo-Political Position and Importance of Turkey in the Crime Trafficking Between the Continents Asia, Europe and Africa

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**Abstract:** According to the 2006 data of Turkish National Police (TNP), throughout Turkey, 1742 cases comprised of organized crime, collective or individual smuggling, nuclear stuff smuggling were recorded. Between 2000 and 2006, 11600 organized crimes had been recorded. It is known that the high number of crime is closely related to the geo-strategic and geo-political position of Turkey. Turkey functions as a bridge between Asia and Europe, the West and East blocks, European and Middle East countries, and Muslim and Christian cultures in many aspects. Moreover, it has borders with eight countries in Asia and Europe (Georgia, Armenia, Nakhichevan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Greece and Bulgaria). With such a position, Turkey is involved in all the routes of human trafficking. In this study, the reasons for Turkey to be a bridge in this intercontinental crime trafficking were defined with respect to its geo-strategic and geo-political position. The study is comprised of three sections first of which presents the crime routes related to the geo-strategic and geo-political position of Turkey. In the second part, the spatial distribution and gates of the crimes committed over Turkey were specified and the motives behind these crimes were analysed. In the conclusion part, suggestions were put forward for the existing problems and their solutions.

**Key words:** Turkey's position, Crime Trafficking, Smuggling.

### INTRODUCTION

Due to its geographical position, Turkey has been more susceptible to various international illegal trafficking and organized crimes between western and eastern countries than individual ones (Ünlü, 2007). Analysing the 2006 data of Turkish National Police (TNP), it is understood that 431 organized crimes, 84 collective smuggling, 129 individual smuggling and 8 nuclear stuff smuggling – total 1742 cases- have been committed. Between 2000 and 2006, total 11.600 organized smuggling cases occurred (TNP Statistics, 2007). The huge number of these cases is related to the fact that Turkey has become a bridge in crime trafficking due to its geo-strategic and geo-political position. Turkey is rather important in geographical and geo-political aspects, which is because of its both natural and economic characteristics. It has enormous advantages thanks to its geographical position (Özey, 2002).

However, Turkey's position on the main overland trade route between Asia and Europe makes it a significant transit point for narcotics; for instance, morphine base and heroin from Pakistan and Afghanistan are smuggled into Turkey across its eastern frontier or through its ports. Besides, non-heroin opiates are often refined into heroin in laboratories near Istanbul or in the more isolated south eastern regions from where they are moved most often in truck loads, but are also transported in bulk by ship and air cargo,

and in smaller lots by private car, packed by air travellers or by mail ( www.hri.org, 2007).

Illegal immigration and human trafficking, on the other hand, have been occupying an important place in global agenda as problems jeopardizing both national and individual safety on national, regional and international basis. Turkey, due to its delicate position, is one of the countries where these problems are encountered daily (Çiçekli, 2005:44). The reasons why Turkey has become a favourite transition place for western countries are that Turkey is a sort of a bridge between Asia and Europe due to its geographical position; that the northern passage (Turkmenistan, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Romania) is longer, has harder climate conditions and covers more countries; that the Iran-Iraq-Syria-Mediterranean passage is too risky due to the war there to be used; that Turkey has ragged and mountainous eastern land borders which are difficult to control, and indented coastal western borders; and that Turkey is very close to the Aegean islands, which makes the passage to Europe easier (Firat:2006). The land route of the narcotics to Europe over Afghanistan and Iran is Turkey-Bulgaria-Italy or Macedonia-Bosnia-Austria-Germany-Holland-Denmark, while the sea route is to France over Lebanon or Syria and from there to other countries. A third route is via Black Sea over Bulgaria, Romania-Poland to the European countries (Çitlioglu, 2007). In this respect, while, on the one hand, Turkey has many legal visitors for tourism, scientific research, employment, education and commerce, on the other hand, it has become a

haven for those who want to immigrate illegally to the third countries over Turkey (Firat, 2006). As a result, more crimes are committed in the cities near the borders due to their geographical positions (www.onsayfa.com).

In this context, in this study, the reasons for Turkey to be a passage in this trafficking will be explained with reference to its geo-political and geo-strategic position. The study is composed of three main parts. In the first chapter, the geo-political and geo-strategic position of Turkey and the transition routes will be analysed; in the second chapter, the spatial distribution of the crimes committed over Turkey and their entrance and exit points will be shown and the reasons for this passage will be discussed. The final chapter will present the current problems and suggest solutions.

### The Geographical Position and Importance of Turkey

Turkey is, in many aspects, a sort of bridge between Asia and Europe, between the countries of the Western and Eastern blocks and between Muslim and Christian countries (Şahin and Doğanay, 2003:329), and also has borders with eight countries of Asia and Europe (Georgia, Armenia, Nakhichevan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Greece and Bulgaria) (Kolukisa, 2004:24-29). Although it seems like a coastal country due to its geographical position, Turkey is, in fact, a continental country due to its geo-political conditions. While it is surrounded with seas, it is between the Mediterranean and the continents (Şahin et al, 2004:483).

The linear measure of the land in Turkey is 2,949 km. and the coastal span is 6,530 km. (the islands and Marmara Sea excluded). Its borders span 9,479 km.; 269 km. with Bulgaria, 203 km. with Greece, 911 km. with Syria, 384 km. with Iraq, 560 km. with Iran, 18 km. with Nakhichevan (Azerbaijani), 328 km. with Armenia and 276 km. with Georgia ( Library of Congress, 2006).

As seen above, Turkey is a country of borders in geo-political aspects. In fact, it is so in many aspects; it is the connecting point of Asia and Europe by being at the

point where the Eastern and the Western civilizations, democratic and autocratic governments, market economies and central ones, Christianity and Muslim, different ideological applications and finally developed and developing parts of the world meet (İlhan, 1992: 12-18). With regard to international relations, it must be pointed out that Turkey has gained more importance than ever before due to the strategic advantages of its geographical position (Doğanay, 1997: 87). The collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991, recent crises in the Balkans (Bosnia and Kosovo), the Gulf War of 1991 and the recent Iraq invasion, for example, have increased Turkey's importance as an ally for the EU and the US. In addition, Turkey's long-standing relationships with the Arab world and Turkey's Muslim religious affiliation may enable it to play an important role in negotiating the crisis in Iraq. Also, Turkey's democratic government may serve as a model for Iraq and other neighbouring states such as Syria and Iran (Taş, 2005). As Bir (1998) stated, Turkey's role in the new world order is now taking shape.

### Turkey and Crime Trafficking

The illegal immigration wave having started in 1980s also affected Turkey to a great extent. While one aspect of this illegal immigration involves the immigrants who go to other countries - especially European ones- over Turkey, another aspect is related to those who stay in Turkey illegally. Turkey, within the context of the relevant illegal immigration, serves as a bridge from the Asian, Middle East – even African-countries and European ones, and has a better welfare level than the above immigrating countries. Therefore, it becomes one of the most suitable stations / routes for illegal immigration from Central Asia and Middle East countries to the developed, wealthy, democratic supporters of human-rights. In other words, besides being a bridge between the east and the west in all aspects, Turkey is a country where the source, transition and target characteristics can all be seen together (IOM, 1996).



Figure 1: The Geographical Location of Turkey

The illegal immigration in Turkey is comprised of illegal or legal foreigners from certain Asian and African countries – especially Middle East- who come to Turkey by land, sea or air. Through illegal immigration crime organizations which are composed of foreigners and Turks, these immigrants head for such European countries as Greece, Italy, Germany, Holland, France and England. It has been found that these crime organizations do the trafficking through the borders in the eastern and southern east regions. The illegal immigrants are transferred to the coastal cities in the Mediterranean and Aegean regions. From here, they are transferred to Greece on small boats or to Italy on big ships, and from there to the other European countries. On the other hand, it has been determined that another route is by land through border crossings to Bulgaria and Greece. It has also been observed that the victims of this crime are mostly the women and girls from mostly Moldavia, Ukraine and other neighbouring countries of Turkey on the east. In all the routes of human trafficking, Turkey is included, and these routes are;

-over Iran-Iraq or Syria towards Turkey-Bulgaria-Romania-Hungary-Austria-Czech Republic (or Slovakia)-Germany,

-Over Iran-Iraq or Syria towards Turkey-Bulgaria (or Greece)-Macedonia-Albania-Italy-West European countries,

-Over Iran-Iraq or Syria towards Turkey-Southeast European countries-West European countries (Çitlioğlu, 2007).

The illegal entrances to Turkey are found by the authorities to be:

Armenia-Georgia border: Iğdır, Kars-Digor-Tuzluca, Ardahan-Posof, Artvin-Sarp,

Iran border: Little Ararat Mount/Doğu Beyazıt, Van/Özalp/Başkale, Hakkâri/Yüksekova,

Iraq border: Hakkâri/Şemdinli-Çukurca, Şırnak/Uludere,

Syria border: Şanlıurfa/Suruç-Mert village, Akçakale village, Hatay/Yayladağı-Güveççi Köyü, Altınözü-Turfanda-Avut tepe villages, Hatay/Kar beyaz village, Reyhanlı, Saman Mount, Adana-Karataş region, Gaziantep/İslâhiye-Kara baba region, while the exit points are:

Antalya-Kaş-Meis, Muğla/Datça-Simi island, Bodrum/Kos island, Aydın-Didim-Kuşadası coasts/Sisam island, Edirne-Pazarkule-Karaağaç, Trakya-Meriç-Sufli, Trakya/Kumdere-Paşaköy-Karpuzlu-İpsala-Enez region, İstanbul Atatürk Airport (Çitlioğlu, 2007).

Before presenting the extent of the crime trafficking in Turkey, it must be emphasized that the data is composed only of what the authorities have had in hand; therefore, it is estimated that the current situation is worse than documented (Mutluer, 2003:63).

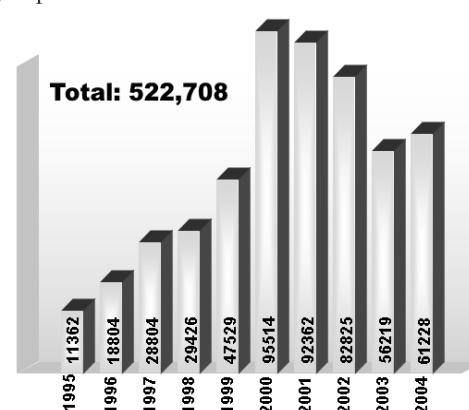
While in 1995, 11362 illegal immigrants were seized in Turkey, this number increased to 94514 with a %900 rise in 2000, and in 2001, 92.365 illegal immigrants were determined.

The number of the illegal immigration organisations who earn a huge amount of easy money by

organising the illegal immigrants of hundreds of thousands has recently risen significantly. Whereas 98 organizers were arrested in 1998, this number came up to 850 in 2000 and to 1155 in 2001.

The total number of the illegal immigrants seized in Turkey between 1995 and 2004 is 522708 according to TNP, Department of Aliens' Affairs, Asylum Section.

When the operations against organized crime in 2005 are analysed, it is seen that %43 of the cases were in the Marmara Region, %18 in the Central Anatolia, %15 in the Mediterranean Region and %10 in the Aegean Region, which means the trafficking occurred mostly in the west. While the Marmara Region hosts many native and foreign industrial institutions and companies due to its being a connection point between Asia and Europe, this also caused many organized crime groups to accumulate in this area.



**Figure 2:** The number of illegal immigrants seized in Turkey per year (Drawn upon the data from TNP, Department of Aliens' Affairs, Asylum Section)

When the weapon smuggling cases in Turkey in 2005 are analysed, it is understood that the fabricated ones mostly come from the north of Iraq. These enter the country from the border cities and are first brought Şırnak, Mardin, Urfa, Diyarbakır and Gaziantep, and then are transferred to other cities.

It is seen above that the cities in the list are in the South eastern Anatolia Region, which is close to Iraq. %66 of the weapons seized in the operations in Turkey in 2005 were captured in the cities in this region. The fact that Turkey is a bridge between Asia and Europe due to its geographical position makes it vulnerable to almost every type of narcotics. Turkey is particularly affected by the Balkan route. This effect shows itself by the trafficking of south western Asia-based opium and its derivatives from East to West; the synthetic drugs from West to Middle East and Southeast; the intermediate chemicals from West to east and Southeast and from North to East.

Turkey is affected by the smuggling of chemicals from West Europe and Russia. However, while less acetic anhydride have been seized in Turkey in the last two years as a result of intensive efforts, there has been a significant rise in the smuggling of such chemicals used in making synthetic drugs as amphetamine and caffeine. Eastern Europe-based amphetamine is

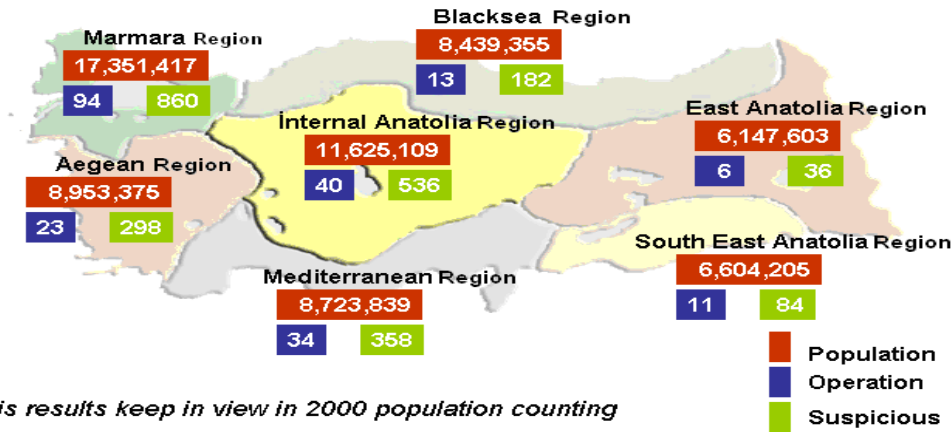


Figure 3: The operations against organized crime in Turkey in 2005 (drawn upon the data from EGM-KOM, 2005)

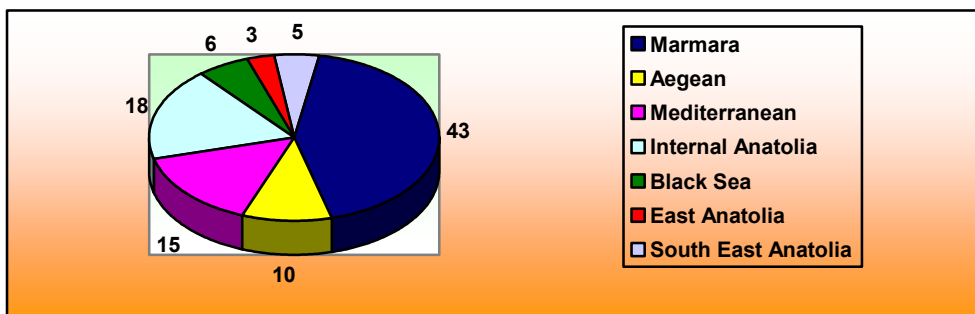


Figure 4: The regional distribution of the operations against organized crime in 2005 (%)



Figure 5: The Weapon and munitions smuggling routes in Turkey (drawn upon the data from EGM-KOM, 2005)

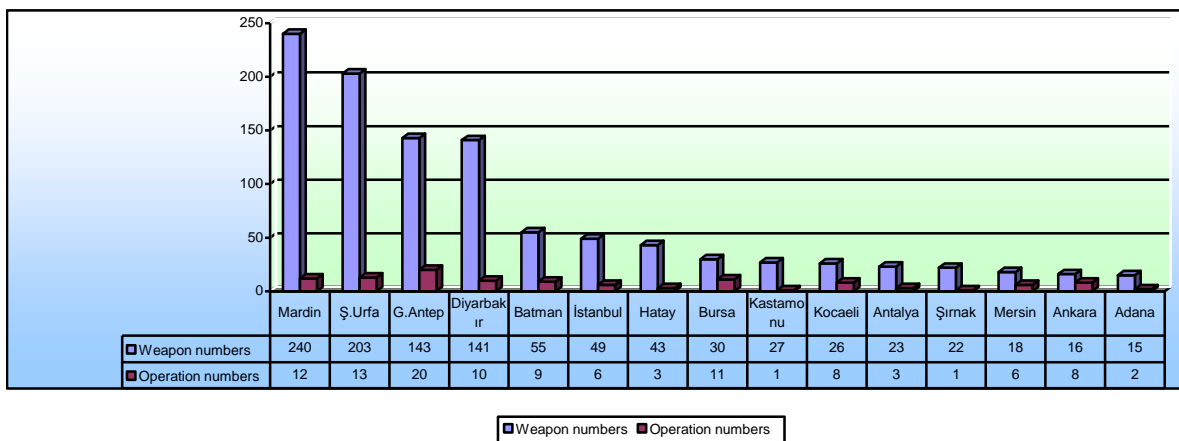
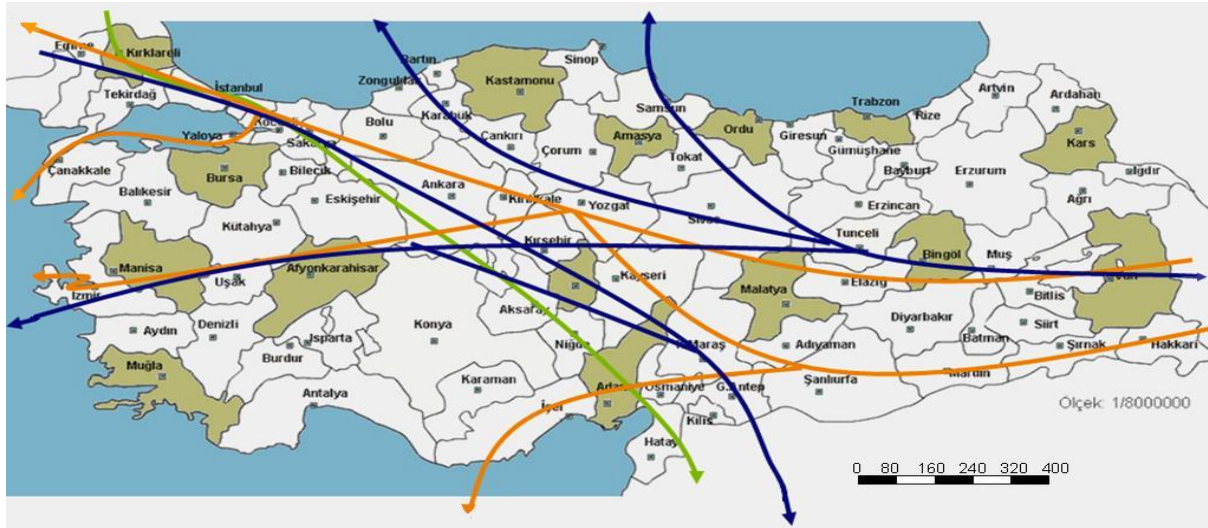


Figure 6: The operations against weapon smuggling and the number of the weapons seized in Turkey (drawn upon the data from EGM-KOM, 2005)



Main Heroin Routes – Main Synthetic Drugs Routes – Main Intermediate Chemicals Routes

Figure 7: The main routes of drug trafficking over Turkey (drawn upon the data from EGM-KOM, 2005)

transferred to the Middle East over Turkey. It is also seen that while captagon used to be transferred over Turkey to the Middle Eastern countries ready for use, the chemicals used in making this substance has also been transferred over Turkey to the Middle Eastern countries lately. However, the synthetic one that has struck Turkey the worst is ecstasy. This substance comes to Turkey especially from Holland over the Western European countries mainly for domestic use in Turkey. In 2005, there was a significant increase in the number of cases and suspects arrested, and the amount of ecstasy seized.

In 2005, %70,7 of the drug opium and its derivatives seized in Turkey was captured in Istanbul and Van. The importance of Istanbul lies in the facts that it is the junction between Asia and Europe, and thus a vital commercial centre; that it is where most of the land-sea-air gates of Turkey exist; and that it is one of the biggest metropolises of the world with its cosmopolite structure. Van is, on the other hand, important because it is where the substance heroine enters Turkey. All these data show that Turkey has a transition position in drug smuggling.

The fact that %18,2 of the opium captured in Turkey in 2005 was seized in Van and Ağrı, the cities bordering Iran shows that the opium substance entering Turkey through southwest Asia route comes from Iran, and that the amount captured is small shows that the objective of this smuggling is for the use of the immigrants living in this area. However, the biggest amount of seizure has been carried out only in Istanbul, which is attributed to the cosmopolitan and geographical structure of this city as mentioned above.

The fact that more than 1 kg heroin was captured in %29 of the heroin cases occurred in Turkey in 2005 clearly show the transit position of Turkey on the Balkan route and that the heroin trafficking in Turkey has been more for its trade than its use inside the country.

%58,6 of the heroin seized in 2005 in Turkey was captured in Istanbul. Furthermore, it is obvious that Van

is the second city after Istanbul and for the last few years it has been among the five cities where the most heroin has been captured, which is followed by Şırnak, Adana, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep and Hakkâri.

%95,4 of the cocaine seized in 2005 was captured in İstanbul and Hakkâri. It is thought that the reason why İstanbul stands out in cocaine seizure is attributed to its being an important transit and trade point between Europe and Asia, its huge population density and that the most vital airports of Turkey are in this city.

With its position on the Balkan route, Turkey is affected by the transition of south western Asia-based opium and its derivatives from east to west, European-based synthetic drugs (ecstasy-captagon) from west to south, and again European-based chemicals (acetic anhydride) from west to south. Besides the recent hashish smuggling by Macedonian and Albanian smugglers over Albania, Macedonia and other Balkan countries, it is also affected by hashish trafficking by Iranian smugglers over Afghanistan.

It is then natural that many foreigners are seized due to drug smuggling in Turkey because of the intensive trafficking over the country. When the most seized foreigners are analysed according to their nationalities, the Iranians are the first with %30, followed by Bulgarians with %9, Macedonians with %8, and Somali and Syria nationalities with %4 of share. It is understood that Iranians and Macedonians are mostly

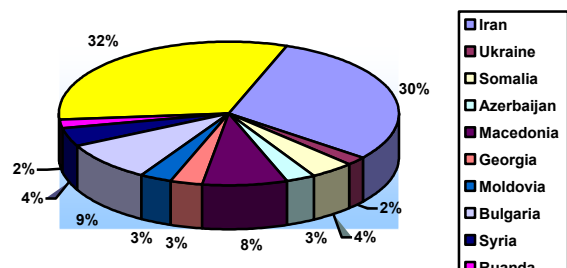


Figure 8: The percentage distribution of the foreigners involved in drug smuggling in Turkey (drawn upon the data from EGM-KOM, 2005)

involved in heroin, opium, hashish and ecstasy; Bulgarians in hashish, heroin, cocaine, ecstasy, captagon and other synthetic drugs; Somalians in heroin and cocaine; and Syrians in cocaine, heroin and captagon smuggling.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Turkey is a country of borders with its geo-political and geo-strategic position; and thus, it has become a bridge to the Western countries. Therefore, it has been involved in almost all sorts of illegal trafficking besides legal transitions.

The crime organizations usually use the borders in the eastern and south eastern regions so as to introduce the illegal immigrants to Turkey who are, then, transferred to the coastal cities in the Aegean and Mediterranean Regions and from there to either Greece in small boats or to Italy in big ships. Their final destination is the other European countries.

Looking at the recent operations against organized crime, we can see that most of them have been in the western part of Turkey – especially in the Marmara Region due to its geographical position. Whereas the fabricated weapons enter Turkey via northern Iraq, the drug smuggling is carried out on the Balkan route. Moreover, Turkish officials report that this narcotics smuggling has become an important source of revenue for Kurdish radical organizations. Thus, Turkey must go farther in tightening border controls, which would aid in reducing the flow of drugs through Turkey.

Considering the socioeconomic and, more importantly, geographical dimensions besides the crime aspects of the cases above, policies should be developed to deal with them; that is, we should take the factors effecting the origin of the crime into consideration while taking the measures (Çiçekli, 2005:54).

Due to the geo-political position of Turkey, and keeping the reasons explained above in mind, crime organizations are heading for various strategies and applications for their own sakes by complying with the developing and changing global conditions without respect to any borders. These groups are increasing their power and effect day by day thanks to the improvements in technology and communication facilities and by making use of the opportunities and abilities due to the instability in areas lacking authority. In this respect, unfortunately, it is hardly possible for an individual country exposed to such threats to tackle with such organizations with any continual success.

It is, thus, evident that such an attempt will by no means yield any success unless reinforced by international cooperation and collaboration. The key for success can be said to be fast and effective exchange of information on the international basis and raising the problem up to an international platform, which will accelerate the process immensely.

The free circulation of goods and products thanks to the developments in technology with no respect to borders between the countries puts the notion of political globalisation on the other side of the coin, which makes the increasing activities of crime organizations exceeding borders still a current subject in

the international arena however much they are tend to be ignored. The sine qua non of the struggle against these crime organizations, who are as cooperative and collaborative among each other as the legal forces, is a multi-dimensional, long term strategy reinforced by international cooperation and coordination. International collaboration must be emphasized in this struggle, which means common action among the legal forces of different countries against organized crime that can be binary, multilateral and regional cooperation.

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