

INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION CONFERENCE 2024

Vilnius, Lithuania

18-21 June 2024

SESSION REPORT

*Please know you may design the structure of this report to better suit the session.
It's important to capture the key outcomes and solutions proposed for the future.*

Session Title: Tackling Corruption as an Enabler of Organised Crime

Date: 21 June 2024

Time: 03:30 PM - 05:00 PM (GMT +3)

Report prepared by:

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Moderated by:

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Panellists:

- Janina Berg
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- Borja Pastor
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- Gabriëlle op 't Hoog
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Project POSEIDON, Ecorys
- Oliver Erdmann
Senior Detective Chief Inspector
Port Security Center, Hamburg Police
- Niels van der Sanden
Deputy Commander of the Rotterdam Seaport Police
National Police of the Netherlands

Share the thematic focus of the session, its purpose and corruption risks?

This workshop explored the nexus between corruption and organised crime in European seaports. The discussions focused more specifically on the challenges of corruption and organised crime in major ports in Europe, the exchange of good practices in tackling them, and a look to the future of international collective action. The ultimate goal of this workshop is to highlight approaches to enhancing resilience of ports to the infiltration of corruption.

Summary of panellists' contributions & discussion points (please be as detailed as possible)

Seaports play an important role in the global economy and constitute an important gateway to and from Europe. As logistical hubs, they are part of critical infrastructure facilitating economic trade and movement of goods. Due to their key position in the logistical supply chains, seaports are also vulnerable to criminal exploitation. It is said that corruption is almost always needed in the trafficking of mainly drugs, but also wildlife, to Europe. The discussion underscored some specific elements that fuel corruption and organized crime in European seaports.

First, the type and origin of goods makes certain shipments and shipping routes more vulnerable to corruption than others. For example, shipments of perishable goods (e.g., fruit) originating from South American ports are vulnerable to cocaine trafficking and corrupted practices, as organized crime groups need insider help to successfully import the illicit drugs to Europe. This has been one of the main issues observed in ports of Rotterdam and Hamburg. Second, the human involvement is always one of the main corruption vulnerabilities. Despite rapid digitalization of the port sector, there are certain roles and jobs which necessitate human involvement, thereby either shifting corruption vulnerabilities to other sectors or a smaller number of people. Additionally, the level of automation and digitalization varies greatly across European seaports which can create a waterbed effect, where organised crime shifts operations to seaports with less controls. Third, social communities in and around the port can affect the corruption vulnerabilities. Tight-knitted groups and family-based communities create relationships of dependencies, which can offer a breeding ground for corrupted practices.

The panellists also identified approaches to tackle corruption and organized crime in seaports, specifically in connection to drugs trafficking. Cross-border cooperation is crucial in tackling *modi operandi* of organised crime, as they often operate in multiple countries and seaports. The police authorities in Rotterdam, Hamburg and Antwerp, among others, have demonstrated the power of cross-border cooperation by tackling the PIN-code fraud¹ used by organised crime groups. In addition, cross-border cooperation includes also financial investigations to follow the money and seize assets, which in turn, robs the organised crime groups the means to corrupt port personnel. It is worth highlighting, that all panellists laid importance on public-private cooperation to tackle corruption as an enabler of organized crime in European seaports. This is seen as key, as private actors play an important role in the logistical supply chain. There have already been great efforts between the public and private actors to tackle this issue together, most notably in the ports of Rotterdam and Hamburg.

¹ See: https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/Europol_Joint-report_Criminal%20networks%20in%20EU%20ports_Public_version.pdf

Main outcomes of the session (include quotes/highlights and interesting questions from the floor)

“Corruption is the grease that makes it possible to commit these serious crimes”.

“Corruption is a perfect enabler of organized crime”.

“OCGs want to have control over the logistical process”.

“To fight a network, it needs a network”.

Economic power and security checks are often competing with each other, which highlights the interests of different actors that are at play.

Panelists also highlighted that Europe should work together with South American countries to tackle the issue of corruption, organized crime and drugs trafficking together. This is based on the fact, that without a demand for cocaine in Europe, there would be no supply of cocaine from South America. It is crucial that authorities learn from each other and exchange information, as the problem is truly a common one.

Key recommendations for the future and concrete follow-up actions

Public-private partnerships and cooperation is key in tackling corruption and organized crime in seaports. Corruption is not only detrimental to the society, but hurts also private companies. Therefore, exchange of information to the extent possible and inclusion of private actors in the discussions is necessary. This helps in creating a more resilient logistical supply chain and systems thereby, reducing the security gaps, as well as, opportunities for corruption. This is already being implemented in the ports of Rotterdam and Hamburg.

Cross-border cooperation across European Member States and third countries is an important element. Seaports are global logistical hubs, as are organized crime groups. It is therefore, crucial to support and engage in cross-border cooperation by sharing information and intelligence, where possible. This includes also an essential focus on financial investigations and asset recovery. Europol plays a key role in facilitating cross-border operation and information exchange through SIENA.

The creation of an anti-corruption culture among citizens and private companies plays a key role in tackling corruption and organized crime in seaports. This contributes in developing a united front against corruption attempts by organized crime groups. In this sense, tight-knitted social communities could also work against corruption rather than offering a breeding ground for corrupt practices. It is therefore, essential that repressive measures are combined with these kind of preventive measures to tackle the issue from diverse angles.

The panellists highlighted various existing pan-European platforms and mechanisms which can be used to follow up on these actions, namely the European Ports Alliance and the public-private port stakeholders network of project POSEIDON.

Rapporteur's name

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Date submitted

22 June 2024

Action! This report needs to be emailed to iacc-av@transparency.org within 24 hours of the session. If you wish to update the report, please do so by 21 July. Thank you.