



Commission launches the European Ports Alliance Public Private Partnership to fight organised crime and drug trafficking

Brussels, 24 January 2024

Today, the Commission and the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU, together with Member States, ports authorities, European associations, EU Agencies (Europol, EMCDDA) and representatives from customs and law enforcement authorities are launching the **European Ports Alliance Public Private Partnership**. The partnership aims to bring all relevant stakeholders together, to form solutions to protect ports from drug trafficking and criminal infiltration.

This follows up on the [EU Roadmap to fight Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime](#) and is in line with President von der Leyen's commitment to take action in 2024 to fight drugs smuggling and criminal infiltration into European ports.

The launch of the European Ports Alliance Public Private Partnership comes against a backdrop of criminal networks using extreme violence, corruption and intimidation in their search for profits. Seizures of cocaine in the EU are at record levels, with more than 300 tonnes seized on an annual basis in recent years. In Belgium alone, authorities seized a record 121 metric tonnes of cocaine at the Port of Antwerp-Bruges in 2023, a 10% increase from the previous year.

Ports contribute to 75% of EU external trade volumes and 31% of EU internal trade volumes. As such, ports are particularly vulnerable to drug smuggling and exploitation by high-risk criminal networks. Criminals use ports to organise the passage of containers containing illicit goods into the EU. This includes drugs trafficking, one of the most lucrative criminal activities, which poses significant security threats to the EU. This is why public and private port operators, from port authorities to terminal operators and shipping and logistics companies, play a crucial role in protecting ports and EU's security.

The European Ports Alliance aims at:

1. **Mobilising the customs community against drugs trafficking** to strengthen risk management and more targeted and effective controls in ports, to account for the fact that 70% of drugs seizures made by customs take place in ports;
2. **Strengthening law enforcement operations in ports** and against the criminal organisations orchestrating drugs trafficking with support from Europol, Eurojust, the European Public Prosecutor's Office and through dedicated actions within the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats; and
3. **Setting up a Public Private Partnership helping against drugs smuggling** to raise awareness among the different actors but also to support port authorities and private shipping companies in their role in the fight against drug trafficking and criminal infiltration.

This public private partnership will **strengthen the resilience of ports and step up the fight against drug trafficking and criminal infiltration**. It will focus on identifying vulnerabilities, sharing best practices and finding practical solutions to strengthen port security. It will address intimidation, corruption and criminal infiltration in ports, through the implementation of international and EU security standards and cooperation between law enforcement and customs with public and private operators working in the ports.

The launch will be followed by a **joint declaration**, stating the commitment of law enforcement, customs and public and private operators working in ports, to address together the threats posed by organised crime.

The work of the European Ports Alliance will be further supported by the results of the **Schengen evaluation on drugs trafficking**, which was concluded in November 2023. This thematic evaluation constituted the first such type of exercise under the new Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Mechanism Regulation. As a follow up to the evaluation, the Commission is adopting today a **proposal for the Council to consider the best practices identified during the 2023 thematic Schengen evaluation**. The 2023 evaluation assessed Member States' capabilities in the area of

police cooperation, protection of external borders, and management of IT systems to fight against drug trafficking in the EU.

Next steps

Following the launch event, the Public Private Partnership will meet annually at ministerial level, to identify remaining challenges, set strategic priorities and exchange on progress made. Senior official meetings will take place to prepare and follow up on the priorities set by the annual ministerial meeting.

Background

Fighting organised crime and drug trafficking is a priority for the Commission as outlined in the EU Security Union Strategy, the [EU Strategy to Tackle Organised crime](#) and the [EU Strategy on Drugs](#).

On 18 October 2023 the Commission adopted the [EU Roadmap to fight Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime](#) which included the European Ports Alliance as a flagship initiative, bringing together all relevant public and private actors in the fight against drugs smuggling and criminal infiltration of logistic hubs.

For More Information

[EU Roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime](#)

[Commission kicks off work to further mobilise EU customs against drug-trafficking - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

[A new way forward on internal security](#)

[Factsheet: EUROPEAN PORTS ALLIANCE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP](#)

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Quotes:

"The vast majority of illicit drugs into the EU are trafficked along maritime route. 70% of drug seizures are in EU Ports. That is why cooperation between National & EU Authorities and EU Ports is vital. Organised Crime is adept at moving from one port to another, as opportunities rise and fall. To challenge this network we must build a network. The violent consequences of drug trafficking are as big as the threat of terrorism. That is why I am encouraged to see this EU Port Alliance launched today."
Ylva Johansson, Commissioner for Home Affairs - 24/01/2024

"Europe has a drug problem – and it is getting worse. To tackle the growing inflows of cocaine and other illicit substances into the EU, we need customs, law enforcement and port authorities to work more closely and more effectively together. That's what the European Ports Alliance aims to do. By bringing together local, national and European authorities in this public-private partnership, we can pool the expertise and resources needed to tackle this scourge. It is equally crucial that the ambitious reform of EU Customs that the European Commission proposed last year is agreed as soon as possible. This will allow for more efficient exchange of information between customs and law enforcement. Because our Customs Union is only as strong as its weakest link, we must work better together to ensure that all our ports have the tools they need to stop the drug traffickers in their tracks."
Paolo Gentiloni, Commissioner for Economy - 24/01/2024

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