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NOTE

from : Chair of the Working Party on Drugs and Organized Crime

to : Article K.4 Committee

Subject: Combating drug trafficking and related criminal activities by Latin American criminal organizations

The curbing of illegal drug trafficking on European routes is singled out in the 66-point plan drawn up by the Group of Experts on Drugs, acting on the instructions given by the European Council in Madrid, as one of the points to be given priority in European Union working parties. Under that point, an investigation was begun during the Italian and Irish European Union Presidencies, in cooperation with EDU/Europol and experts from the Member States, into the involvement of Turkish dealers in heroin smuggling, in particular, within the European Union. In Dublin, in December 1996, the European Council once again emphasized that combating illegal drug trafficking within the European Union is a high priority. Smooth cooperation between Member States' law enforcement agencies is of considerable importance in this respect.

Given the quality of the EDU/Europol report on heroin trafficking, the Presidency proposes that attention be turned to a second important drugs crime threat to the EU: smuggling of cocaine and other drugs by Latin American criminal gangs.

At a meeting of experts on the subject at EDU/Europol in April 1995, a number of significant conclusions were drawn regarding the operations of Latin American criminal gangs. Europe is regarded by Latin American organizations engaged in smuggling cocaine and other drugs as a single market. Supply is controlled by a relatively small number of Latin American organizations. From this it may be deduced that those criminal organizations, which are very flexible in nature, operate in a number of Member States at once. Although it was established at the experts' meeting in April 1995 that Member States are already making great efforts to combat this form of crime, it emerged that more efficient use could often be made of the information available.

If this form of illegal drug smuggling and the related criminal activities are to be combated more effectively, it is important for European Union Member States' efforts in this area to be more closely coordinated. Cooperation on this between Member States' law enforcement agencies should not be confined to exchanging information. Greater operational and policy cooperation is also called for. The exchanging of strategic information available to Member States could be a first step here.

The Working Party on Drugs and Organized Crime and the Customs Cooperation Working Party therefore agreed at their joint meeting to brief EDU/Europol, in conjunction with police and customs experts from the Member States, to produce an analysis of the threat posed by the operations of Latin American criminal organizations. EDU/Europol said that it would do so following the same approach as for the strategic analysis regarding the involvement of Turkish drugs dealers in heroin trafficking in the EU.

From the picture presented by various delegations at that meeting, it emerged that there is already considerable expertise in this area within the EU. Use will be made of this, as well as the know-how of other relevant organizations, in producing the analysis. Depending on how work progresses, a first draft should be submitted to Heads of Europol National Units in March. A second draft will then be submitted to the Working Party on Drugs and Organized Crime and, for information, to the Customs Cooperation Working Party.

On the basis of that analysis, it will be possible to discuss setting joint priorities or agreeing on operational arrangements for dealing with Latin American organized crime.

The Working Party on Drugs and Organized Crime will keep the Article K.4 Committee posted on the progress of proceedings. If possible, the report or part of it will be submitted to the Committee at its April meeting.

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