**Observatoire ARGA**

Report on Sanctions and Compliance for 2025

# TRANSNATIONAL NARCOTIC ECONOMY AND DIGITAL MONEY LAUNDERING

## Eurasian Cartels, Shadow Digital Routes, the USDT Ecosystem, and Emerging Threats to International Security

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Paris, 18 November 2025

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# Executive Summary

Over the past five to seven years, the narcotics economy of Eurasia has undergone not an evolutionary shift, but a structural rupture. It is no longer a criminal substratum of the economy — it has become an autonomous financial sector with its own currencies, its own liquidity, its own payment standards, its own "banks," and its own clearing system. Production points, transit routes, and distribution channels remain important but no longer define the market. The core value has shifted to the infrastructure of capital movement, and it is precisely here that the revolution has occurred.

The traditional model — cash, physical intermediaries, couriers, and risk at every step — is now obsolete. Drug networks have learned to operate like digital fintech structures:

• USDT payments have become the dominant standard;

• TRON wallets have displaced offline exchange;

• Telegram bots have assumed the role of banks;

• OTC platforms in the UAE, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Turkey provide compliance-free off-ramps;

• mixers, multisig wallets, and transaction layering have become routine.

The illicit market now has its own currency — USDT. It has its own clearing system — OTC networks. It has its own payment rhythm — capital circulation through crypto-layers. In this system, money no longer merely *accompanies* the commodity, as before; money now lives independently, often outlasting the drug batch itself. Even if a physical route is intercepted, the financial balance continues to function — transferring funds, accumulating in cold wallets, flowing into brokerage structures, or being reinvested into circulation. The network has become self-reproducing.

Geography has also transformed. Afghan heroin no longer moves along a single consolidated route — it is distributed through digital corridors in which the real transport is hidden behind trade documents, parallel imports, and fictitious deliveries of spare parts. The Caucasus has become a central redistribution hub, Central Asia — a continuation of the opiate route, Russia — the largest domestic market, and Eastern Europe — a gateway to the EU. Logistic chains are masked as legal trade, while crypto-exchangers provide *financial invisibility* for transport.

Most critically, the boundary separating drug trafficking, crypto-finance, and shadow logistics has disappeared. These are no longer separate sectors — they constitute a unified infrastructure in which each layer reinforces the others. The narcotic commodity generates liquidity → liquidity sustains the network → the network ensures the continued production of the narcotic commodity. The resulting system is as resilient as a blockchain — decentralized, distributed, and extremely difficult to dismantle.

This report by ARGA Observatory interprets this transition as the emergence of a new narco-political model — a digital criminal sector embedded in global finance and functioning according to market logic rather than street dynamics. We analyse the routes, crypto-architecture, logistical nodes, actors, and the mechanisms of network reproduction. What we observe is not an underground — but an uncontrolled risk-economy operating parallel to the legal global system and potentially capable of destabilizing it.

# 1. Methodology

This report is based on a combined analytical toolkit enabling the tracing not only of criminal routes but also of the financial-digital infrastructure that supports the viability of the new narcotics economy. The methodology integrates OSINT + FININT + criminological analysis + reconstruction of transactional chains.

The study draws upon:

**1. Analysis of 220 criminal cases related to transnational drug trafficking (2016–2025).**

The cases were examined for factual narratives, movement of batches, intermediary chains, payment mechanics, and investigative materials. Special attention was given to cases where traditional logistics intersected with cryptocurrency schemes and shadow fintech solutions.

**2. Data from Europol, UNODC, FATF, and national Financial Intelligence Units (FIU).**

Sources included annual reports, STR/SAR statistics, national threat assessments, documentation from joint international operations, and FATF thematic working papers on cryptocurrencies and narcotics markets.

**3. OSINT/FININT investigations.**

We analysed open-source information, media investigations, leaks, court databases, Telegram channels, and darknet platforms. Financial analytics included tracing USDT transfers, wallet clustering, identifying off-ramp points, and mapping OTC concentration hubs.

**4. On-chain analysis of TRON, Ethereum, and Binance Smart Chain transactions.**

We tracked routes of financial flows, interactions with exchanges, P2P platforms, mixers, and cases of instant cash-out. Wallets with high correlation to drug trade activity were identified and categorised.

**5. Analysis of geographic routes and supply-chain frontiers.**

We examined the corridors: Afghanistan → Central Asia, Caucasus → Russia → EU, UAE → Turkey → Eurasia, Hong Kong → Singapore → fintech laundering. Models of surveillance circumvention and sanctions evasion were constructed.

**6. Research on digital marketplaces and Telegram-based infrastructure.**

We systematised escrow bots, encrypted channels, courier networks, digital point-of-sale mechanisms, and command panels.

**7. ARGA Observatory datasets on shadow crypto-ecosystems (2020–2025).**

We relied on previously collected datasets concerning the USDT-economy, OTC hubs, hidden fintech services, and digital-laundering mechanisms.

# 2. Introduction: The Digital Revolution of the Narcotics Economy

The drug trade in Eurasia has undergone an irreversible transformation. Ten years ago, it was built on physical routes, cash transactions, courier networks, and classic criminal hierarchies. Today, its core has shifted to a digital trading and financial infrastructure powered by technologies that previously existed on the periphery of law-enforcement attention.

2024–2025 became a point of rupture.

Narcotics trafficking stopped being merely a logistical operation. It evolved into a parallel digital economy in which the key role is played by:

• USDT payments, which have displaced cash and now account for more than 80% of transactions across Eurasian routes;

• Telegram marketplaces, which replaced street-level retail and created a model of distributed darknet retail;

• shadow crypto-banks and OTC exchangers, providing cartels with *"crypto in → fiat out"* services without a banking footprint;

• logistics brokers, who aggregate shipments and mask the movement of narcotics as electronics, textiles, or agricultural raw materials;

• hybrid security services, elements of which are involved in protecting channels, providing "cover," and eliminating competitors;

• transnational network cartels, which operate not territorially but through API-like integration — where payments, shipments, and distribution function as a single digital organism.

As a result, what has emerged is not simply a criminal economy, but an alternative financial architecture with its own liquidity, lending schemes, brokerage services, and risk-management mechanisms.

It is a system that functions without banks, without SWIFT, without KYC — yet with its own internal rules of trust, participant scoring, and reputation mechanisms embedded in Telegram and blockchain environments.

What used to be called *"drug trafficking"* is now closer to a USDT-driven digital supply-chain economy.

It is scalable, fragmented, resilient to disruption, and capable of bypassing state barriers faster than governments can build new mechanisms of control.

# 3. Architecture of the Modern Narcotics Economy

The contemporary narcotics economy of Eurasia is not a chaotic collection of routes or independent criminal groups. It is a market-like system divided into production zones, transit corridors, financial hubs, and digital infrastructure.

ARGA Observatory identifies a stable division of roles within this system — from field producers to elite financial operators, crypto-banks, and "white" logistical intermediaries.

## 3.1. Production Hubs

The key points of narcotics origin remain traditional; however, their scale and internal economics have changed and become digitalized.

**Regional centers:**

| Region | Product | Current Trends |
|---|---|---|
| **Afghanistan** | opium → heroin | increasing in-country processing; export in semi-processed form |
| **Iran** | opium transit → domestic production | involvement of security factions and paramilitary structures |
| **Syria** | captagon | growing exports to the Persian Gulf, Eastern Europe, and the Caucasus |
| **Latin America** | cocaine | emergence of direct channels to the UAE, Turkey, and the Black Sea region |

Production is now inseparably linked to cryptocurrency liquidity and digital payments, which ensures autonomy from banks and formalized channels.

## 3.2. Eurasian Transit Corridors

Drug trafficking is no longer linear. Instead of a single route, there is a network of parallel corridors that reconfigure in real time in response to sanctions, seizures, and changes in customs regulations.

**Main trajectories in 2024–2025:**

• **Turkey → Caucasus → Russia** — heroin and captagon line with an outlet to Saint Petersburg and Europe.

• **Central Asia (KG/KZ) → Russia → EU** — especially active after the closure of southern Balkan routes.

• **South Caucasus → Black Sea region** — mixed shipments, including synthetics.

• **UAE → Eastern Europe** — high-value cocaine, often with crypto-financing.

• **Northern Kazakhstan route** — less visible but growing due to high density of grey carriers.

These routes are masked as commercial cargo flows, and brokers act not only as intermediaries but as political-economic nodes trading access to transit.

### 3.3. Digital Infrastructure

This is the nervous system of the entire narco-economy.

It includes:

• **USDT/TRC-20 wallets** tied to Telegram IDs rather than real identities;

• **mixers and bridge protocols** that blur transaction trails;

• **OTC exchanges** in Dubai, Tbilisi, Almaty, Hong Kong;

• **P2P platforms** operating outside the banking system;

• **Telegram channels** automating payments, escrow, and "customer support."

Here, organized crime operates like a fintech market — with the speed, interface, and UX logic of a startup ecosystem.

### 3.4. Corrupted Security Structures

The narco-economy cannot exist without political protection.

In Eurasia, several systemic elements have been documented:

• facilitating transit through "friendly" checkpoints;

• paid non-interference with shipments crossing borders;

• using security actors to eliminate competitors;

• "licensing" routes for selected groups.

Thus emerges a hybrid of security and crime, where state institutions become part of the value chain.

### 3.5. Shadow Financial Systems

The financial layer of the drug network is no longer suitcases of cash but a global payment infrastructure.

Three basic mechanisms:

**1. Pseudo-banks and crypto-finance**

— operations via USDT, OTC desks, no-KYC exchanges;

— smart contracts for share distribution.

**2. Offshore SPV structures**

— company → contractor → logistics operator → withdrawal hub.

**3. Front companies in the UAE, Georgia, Kazakhstan**

— a legal façade for illegal commodity flows.

As a result, shadow finance becomes not only a service for drug trafficking but a form of economic sovereignty for criminal networks.

# 4. Main Digital Methods of Money Laundering

The modern narco-economy no longer depends on cash or traditional banking channels. The financial layer of the market has become crypto-centric, decentralized, and anonymized, with operations moving faster than compliance, monitoring, and legal procedures. Below is an expanded map of the key mechanisms used across Eurasia.

## 4.1. USDT Routes as the New Global Settlement Standard

Tether (USDT) on the Tron network (TRC-20) has become the universal currency of the narco-economy, replacing dollars and bank transfers.

Reasons: low fees, instant transfers, weak oversight of exchanges, and simple mobile interfaces.

Typical scheme:

1. TRC-20 → cold wallets

   Liquidity is accumulated in batches of 5,000–200,000 USDT.

2. Layering through chains of anonymous wallets

   10–40 transfers are used to obscure the link between source and withdrawal.

3. OTC conversion → quasi-banking services

   Exchange into cash or transfers to real business accounts.

4. Reinvestment → real estate, vehicles, commodities companies, high-risk imports

According to ARGA estimates, turnover of such networks in Central Asia and the Caucasus corridor may exceed USD 300–700 million per quarter.

## 4.2. OTC Platforms: Shadow Crypto-Banks

Countries with flexible or fragmented AML rules have become hubs of informal exchange: UAE (Dubai), Georgia (Tbilisi), Kazakhstan (Almaty), Lithuania, and partly Armenia.

Key characteristics:

| Indicator | Assessment |
|---|---|
| **Transaction volume** | $5–$50 million/day for major OTC hubs |
| **Documentation** | Often fictitious; KYC minimal or absent |
| **AML procedures** | Formal only; easily bypassed |
| **Clients** | Crypto exchangers, network brokers, logistics intermediaries |

OTC markets effectively perform the functions of a banking system for criminal capital, providing shadow cash-out services and conversion into real assets.

### 4.3. P2P marketplaces as a mass anonymous exchange layer

P2P exchanges (Binance P2P, Huobi, Bitget, OKX) operate as a distributed processing center.

Traffic is fragmented into thousands of small payments, making it nearly invisible to classical AML monitoring.

Key features of the schemes:

• each transaction amounts to 300–10,000 USDT;

• settlements occur through bank cards of proxy individuals;

• intermediaries are used — often migrants and courier-operators;

• derivatives and NFTs are employed as an additional layer masking the origin of funds.

P2P transforms large money flows into statistically “normal noise.”

### 4.4. Shadow fintech components and digital trace obfuscation

Modern criminal networks use fintech the way technology startups do — flexibly, scalably, and with built-in redundancy of routes.

The main tools include:

| Method | Essence |
|---|---|
| **spoof-transactions** | creating a false payment history to mislead tracing tools |
| **token-layering** | exchanging USDT → altcoins → wrapped tokens → returning to stablecoins |
| **on-chain / off-chain split** | breaking the transactional path between blockchain activity and exchange operations |
| **bridge-mixing** | transferring funds through DeFi bridges without a KYC trail |
| **wash-volume schemes** | “cleaning” capital through trading pairs and arbitrage |

**Conclusion:**

The movement of money stops looking criminal and loses any traceable link to its origin.

### 4.5. Offshore–corporate schemes

To give the funds a “white” legal status, the following are used:

• shell companies in the UAE, Singapore, Hong Kong, BVI;

• “nominal import” operations involving electronics, textiles, pharmaceuticals;

• fictitious procurement contracts used to transfer millions;

• Asian brokers and trading companies functioning as off-ramp mechanisms.

A corporate shell is formed through which shadow capital is absorbed into the legal economy.

## 5. Case Studies

**Case 1 — Central Asian corridor (an anonymized ARGA case)**

**Network turnover:** estimated USD 450–600 million per year

In 2023–2024, ARGA monitored a network controlling the flow of heroin and methamphetamine originating from the Afghan and Iranian production belt. The logistics relied on transit through Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, further distribution into Southern Russia, and then into Europe.

The financial contour functioned as follows:

1. **Primary payments — USDT (TRC-20).**

   Batches of 20–150k USDT moved through chains of cold-wallet → hot-split → P2P rotation.

2. **Layering — up to 40 transactions**, each below USD 10,000, avoiding automated monitoring by exchanges and banks.
3. **Coordination through Turkey and Dubai**, where the managing pool was located:

   — OTC exchange points → liquidation of crypto into cash,

   — offshore SPVs for subsequent investment.

4. **Pseudo-logistics:**

   — drugs transported under the guise of textiles, shoes, low-value electronics,

   — documents forged at the level of customs declarations of third countries.

The network operated like a commercial transport company but in fact ensured narcotics trafficking and laundering of the proceeds.

**Case 2 — Caucasus digital framework (an anonymized ARGA case)**

**Focus:** Telegram marketplaces + P2P finance + access to the EU

The network was built around a closed Telegram marketplace with more than 120,000 active participants.

The model worked as follows:

• Cocaine/MDMA entered through Turkey and Georgia.

• Within the network, intermediary operators managed P2P wallets, while curators handled logistics only.

• **Multi-entry mechanism:**

major batches went to Russia, while parallel micro-flows moved to Poland, Romania, and Germany.

**The payment system looked as follows:**

| **Stage** | **Mechanism** |
|---|---|
| Receipt of funds | Telegram bots with auto-generated wallets |
| Distribution | USDT → split → OTC cash-out |
| Concealment | NFT transfers, mixing, DeFi bridges |

Through P2P converters, the funds were returned to fiat already within the EU, creating an ideal exit route for drug capital into legal trade and services.

**Case 3 — Eastern European laundering network (anonymized ARGA case)**

**Model: offshore → OTC → EU bank → reinvestment**

In 2024, ARGA documented a network in which an Eastern European criminal group organized a systemic outflow of drug-related proceeds via corporate structures in the UAE and Hong Kong.

**Financial architecture:**

1. **Offshore companies (3–5 layers of SPVs)**

   Ownership was registered to nominee directors from South Asia.

2. **Crypto segment**

   — Large sums (200K–1.5M USDT) were sent to OTC platforms in Dubai and Tbilisi.

   — They were then transferred into European banks through fictitious equipment-supply contracts.

3. **EU phase**

   — Funds entered the EU as payments for B2B transactions.

   — Bank risk analysis did not detect the criminal origins of the USDT flow.

4. **Governance — clan-based**

   Connections inside the network were inherited within family lines, and control was exercised by security officers formerly affiliated with law-enforcement agencies.

**Result:** the criminal economy transformed into a legal investment ecosystem: capital settled in real estate, IT start-ups, and export companies within the EU.

# 6. International Risks

**1. Infiltration into the financial systems of the EU, the UAE, and third countries**

The digital narco-economy is no longer limited to cash transactions — its core has shifted to cryptocurrencies, the USDT ecosystem, and shadow fintech structures. This creates an environment in which criminal capital is disguised as investments, logistics services, import–export contracts, and digital-asset operations. Banking controls increasingly fail: transactions appear legitimate, documentation is electronic, and transfers remain below AML-trigger thresholds. As a result, the financial systems of the EU and the UAE are becoming channels for laundering drug proceeds.

**2. Expansion of Interpol Abuse by narco-cartels and criminal groups**

Some networks now use not only fintech but also political mechanisms of pressure. Criminal organizations linked to former or current security officers in post-Soviet states gain access to international policing tools. This opens the door to a new model of abuse — Interpol is used not only against businesspeople and political opponents, but also as a means of eliminating rival cartels and competing networks. There is a growing risk that narco-actors will attempt to imitate legal legitimacy of their requests through state and security channels.

**3. Growth of the digital criminal sector and formation of a parallel economy**

The USDT infrastructure, P2P marketplaces, DeFi mixers, and off-ramp operators form a new layer of the global economy, operating outside traditional banks, SWIFT, and regulated payment networks. Narco-finance becomes part of the global digital underground, where crypto is not just a payment method but a full-fledged asset-management tool. This strengthens the criminal autonomy of networks and complicates international disruption efforts.

**4. Increased vulnerability of migrants, refugees, and socially mobile groups**

Transnational narco groups increasingly use migrants as couriers, transit agents, bank-account providers, and P2P wallet operators. Migrant women are often subjected to exploitation, including coercion to transport goods through airports and land borders. Because identity verification within digital networks is minimal, responsibility shifts to these intermediary figures, while real organizers remain anonymous and unreachable.

**5. Consolidation of international cartels and growing difficulty of dismantling them**

Eurasian narco networks are becoming more resilient: they are vertically integrated, possess their own financial mechanisms, crypto-infrastructure, logistics routes, and cover in the form of legitimate businesses. Their dismantling no longer equals intercepting a drug shipment — it requires destroying digital and fintech structures, offshore SPVs, Telegram infrastructures, and

USDT cash-out chains. In effect, narco-cartels are turning into transnational criminal corporations operating according to market logic.

## 7. Forecast 2025–2027

**Growth of crypto-laundering through TRON and TON**

It is highly likely that TRON and TON will become the primary infrastructures for narco-finance in Eurasia. TRON is already used as a "transport blockchain" for USDT due to low fees and wide presence in the OTC environment. TON introduces an additional layer of risk: its integration with Telegram, built-in wallets, relative novelty, and currently weaker analytics tools create a convenient environment for "dissolving" drug proceeds within legitimate user traffic.

We can expect a shift from primitive "USDT → OTC → cash" schemes to more complex constructions: multi-layer cross-chain transfers, the use of DeFi protocols as intermediary "cleaning layers," and the growing role of custodial multisig structures disguised as family offices and crypto-funds.

**Shift of narco-logistics to Africa and the Caucasus**

As control tightens on traditional segments of drug routes (Turkey, the Balkans, parts of Central Europe) and monitoring grows in the UAE and certain Central Asian states, the logistical vector of narco-cartels will shift toward "less regulated" regions. Africa is already becoming a key transit zone for cocaine and synthetics; it is likely to turn into a strategic base for Eurasian networks seeking new transshipment points and ways to "blur the origin" of shipments.

The South Caucasus, in turn, will maintain and strengthen its role as a connecting hub: routes from Turkey, Central Asia, Russia, and the Middle East intersect here, and fintech/crypto tools are rapidly developing. This makes the region an ideal platform for combining physical transit with digital money-laundering.

**Creation of new digital "banks" in the UAE**

In the coming years, the UAE and affiliated jurisdictions may see the institutionalization of what currently exists in a semi-shadow form: OTC structures, crypto brokers and private "cash centers" will effectively function as unlicensed banks specializing in high-risk clients.

For narco-networks, this means access to stable infrastructure with familiar services: multi-currency wallets, fast USDT/fiat conversion, hidden client registries, and "customized" compliance schemes.

Parallel to this, some such structures will seek formal regulation — obtaining fintech, investment advisory, or family office licenses — which will further complicate their identification as elements of the narco-economy.

**Strengthening of special operations by the EU and the US**

Given the growth of digital narco-laundering and the integration of crypto into the drug economy, we can expect large-scale joint operations by law-enforcement and intelligence services of the EU, the US, and some Asian partners. The focus will shift from targeting individual groups to "network strikes": mass shutdowns of OTC platforms, synchronized arrests of operators, confiscation of

digital infrastructure, and targeted sanctions against individuals controlling key nodes of financial and logistical systems.

Such operations will increasingly use on-chain analytics, messenger data interception, and cooperation with major exchanges and fintech companies. This will create a "wave-pressure effect": major networks will periodically break but quickly reassemble in new jurisdictions and on less transparent platforms.

**International sanctions against narco-laundering networks**

A logical continuation of the evolving sanctions ecosystem will be the formation of a specialized sanctions segment targeting not only drug lords and specific cartels, but also the digital and financial infrastructure enabling their operations. This may include OTC operators, crypto exchanges, pseudo-banks, logistics companies servicing suspicious routes, and entities operating at the intersection of transport, finance, and IT.

Such measures will increase pressure on states that effectively provide political or regulatory "cover" for these structures and will force some of them to choose between access to global markets and maintaining narco-laundering flows.

As a result, the narco-economy will become even more fragmented and distributed, but the risks for participants — both criminal and formally legal — will rise significantly.

# 8. ARGA Observatory Recommendations

## For International Institutions

International organizations (UNODC, FATF, INTERPOL, Europol, the World Bank, and regional bodies of the EU/OAS/African Union) must shift from a fragmented approach to drug-related crime toward a systemic digital monitoring model. ARGA Observatory recommends the creation of a global Digital Narcotics Monitor — a permanent multilateral platform integrating:

- on-chain analytics (TRON, TON, Ethereum, BSC),
- FIU intelligence,
- reports from banks and fintech platforms,
- data on OTC markets,
- logistics-route information.

Such a system should not function as a centralized database under any single government, but rather as a federated risk-information exchange network, where nodes (EU, US, selected Asian and Middle Eastern jurisdictions) share aggregated risk indicators without violating national confidentiality laws.

A separate priority is the development of unified standards for OTC-market oversight. International institutions should define minimum criteria:

- mandatory identification of major clients,
- prohibition of transactions above certain thresholds without supporting documents,
- systematic exchange of typologies of suspicious schemes.

This is not about "banning USDT," but about market normalization: distinguishing legitimate operators and pushing shadow actors out. It is essential that sanctions regimes, SDN lists, and high-risk entity databases include not only drug cartels and individual actors, but also technological and financial operators knowingly servicing narco-laundering networks — crypto brokers, pseudo-banks, transportation and logistics companies operating in high-risk zones.

## For the EU, the US, and the United Kingdom

Regulators and law-enforcement agencies in the EU, US, and UK must integrate crypto-intelligence into the core AML/CTF framework, rather than treating it as a marginal or auxiliary domain.

In practice, this means that on-chain analytics, monitoring of major wallets, identification of clusters linked to drug trafficking, and analysis of OTC patterns should become part of standard banking and fintech procedures, on par with SWIFT-tracking and trade-finance monitoring.

AML guidance for banks and payment institutions should include specific indicators:

- recurring TRON → OTC → cash routes,
- typical fund-splitting schemes,
- links to certain geographic nodes (UAE, South Caucasus, Central Asia, etc.).

A separate priority is investigating shadow fintech networks that simultaneously serve the drug economy, parallel-import schemes, and corruption flows. These include informal "payment hubs" operating at the intersection of P2P-platforms, crypto exchanges, offshore companies, and logistics operators.

To dismantle them, regulators must combine:

- financial investigations,
- cyber operations,
- sanctions tools: asset freezes, bans on accessing EU/US financial systems,
- criminal cases,
- targeted operations to eliminate key network nodes.

In logistics, a shift is needed from abstract "anti-contraband" measures to closing specific corridors systematically used by narco-networks: ports, warehouse hubs, grey terminals, and operator companies known for repetitive anomalous routes.

## For Academia and Research Centers

Academic and analytical institutions must recognize that the Eurasian narco-economy no longer fits classical criminological frameworks and requires a separate discipline — digital criminology of drug trafficking.

This is an interdisciplinary field combining:

- law,
- international relations,
- economics,
- data science,

- blockchain analytics,
- sociology of organized crime.

Universities, research centres, and think-tanks can play a key role in creating long-term datasets:

- maps of digital routes,
- case repositories,
- typologies of laundering schemes,
- comparative regional studies.

ARGA Observatory recommends creating open and semi-open databases systematizing:

- anonymized criminal cases,
- on-chain routes,
- lists of OTC operators used by narco-networks,
- logistics cases involving raw materials, precursors, and finished substances.

These databases should serve as foundations for:

- new risk indicators,
- training datasets for automated monitoring systems,
- evidence bases for international reforms.

It is crucial that research not be confined solely to the criminal dimension. Scholars must study how narco-networks integrate into:

- parallel-import systems,
- kleptocratic capital flows,
- migration crises,
- the broader digital economy.

Only through such an integrated approach can the digital narco-economy be fully understood — and, ultimately, constrained.

# 9. Conclusion

The transnational narcotics economy has ceased to be a peripheral criminal phenomenon and has transformed into an independent parallel financial-logistical system operating at the same speed as the lawful global economy. Its infrastructure now includes digital currencies, USDT layers, illegal fintech services, Telegram markets, a network of crypto-laundering operators, and offshore-logistical nodes integrated into Eurasian supply and financial chains.

Drug cartels and criminal groups no longer operate in isolation — they interact with offshore consultants, logistics brokers, pseudo-banks, corrupt-friendly financial structures, and corrupt elements within state apparatuses. The shift to cryptocurrency settlements and P2P financing has made the narcotics economy distributed, resilient, and difficult to dismantle, while traditional law-enforcement measures have become insufficient. The network lives according to digital rules, quickly adapts to shutdowns, shifts routes to new jurisdictions, and uses TON/TRON architectures, digital mixers, OTC mutations, and “grey corridors” of logistics.

A new paradigm of response has formed: the problem is no longer limited to criminal law or drug-control frameworks — it lies at the intersection of international security, sanctions policy, export control, migration regimes, financial analytics, and high-tech investigations. Without a global system for monitoring crypto-finance, without a link between FIU → Interpol → AML structures → analytical institutions → logistics regulators, and without digital datasets and machine analysis of supply chains, the situation will continue to escalate.

The ARGA Observatory report provides the analytical foundation for building a new international strategy. Its purpose is to form an understanding of the architecture of the digital narcotics economy, identify its routes, describe its financial and logistical mechanisms, determine vulnerabilities, and propose instruments for intervention.

Future efforts are not only about intercepting drug shipments. They include:

• monitoring of digital transactions,

• regulation of OTC markets,

• sanctions against crypto-operators,

• real-time logistics monitoring,

• analysis of network graphs and clusters,

• international criminological cooperation,

• legal modernization and smart regulation.

The narcotics economy has changed — and international law must change with it.

ARGA Observatory identifies an entry point into a new era in which digital criminology and fintech control become as essential to global security as diplomacy, intelligence, and criminal jurisdiction.

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