

## **Uruguayan Approaches to Fighting Drug Threat**

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### **Abstract**

In the territory of contemporary Latin America addictive plants cultivation was known by the ancient pre-Columbian civilizations since as early as the 3rd Millennium BC. Nowadays, drug trafficking is one of the main threats to the modern community, this is due to the huge harm which the dependence that appears from the consumption of these substances caused to a person. This problem affects all regions of the world, and drug trafficking is a complex of illegal activities involving different States, including production, transportation, and distribution. That is why it is reasonable to consider drug trafficking as a threat to international security. This article examines the Uruguayan approaches to the drug problem, which fully reflect the Latin American drug-liberal trend.

Keywords: drug trafficking, Latin America, Uruguay, drug-liberal trend.

### **Main body**

Long before the discovery of America by Columbus the ancient Mayan, Aztec and Inca civilizations were engaged in the cultivation of addictive plant species – mostly Coca, to produce primitive drugs. This is recorded in written monuments that have survived to this day, monuments of fine art, architecture and is confirmed by modern archaeological excavations. Coca leaves were exclusively available to the priests and nobles and were inaccessible to the common people. As Coca had the properties of increasing endurance, it was also used by messengers, who delivered all urgent messages made by nodal writing between the cities mostly located in the Highland, as well as urgent reports to the troops. The use of Coca leaves accelerated the movement of messengers on mountain roads in conditions of lack of oxygen and made it possible to travel long distances in the shortest possible time.

Colonizers got addicted to this primitive drug extracted from Coca leaves rapidly, later it has begun to make extensive use as a natural medicine for a number of diseases, often without any medical control, as well as a substance used for leisure purposes. In the 20th century, it became clear that cocaine – a substance based on Coca leaves extract, is a deadly narcotic substance. For example, only in the United States, there were 5 thousand fatal cases connected with the cocaine use. In the 1912 International opium Convention, cocaine was called a narcotic substance, and in 1922, cocaine was declared a drug and was outlawed.

Due to the restrictions imposed and the synthesis of new local anesthetics, by the middle of the 20th century, cocaine was virtually completely removed from medical practice. However, despite that fact, the production of cocaine continued to grow.

In 1963, the United Nations decided to add cocaine to the list of prohibited substances, but this did not help to limit the growth of drug use. In the 1970s, the number of imported drugs in the United States doubled, and the number of drug crimes increased sharply. This situation had a strong impact on public order and economy of the country, so in 1982, President Ronald Reagan announced the beginning of an active fight against cocaine.

In most cases, cocaine was shipped to the United States from South America via Central America and Mexico. The United States, in an effort to fight drug trafficking, began to cooperate with the authorities of Latin American countries. For example, the US has concluded extradition treaties with a number of Latin American countries. The purpose of these agreements was to extradite to the USA and bring to justice criminals associated with the organization of drug shipments to the United States, so that they could not use their influence in their home country and escape responsibility for their crimes. For example, the extradition agreement firmed between US and Colombia has permitted to bring to justice Colombian nationals Carlos Leder and Fabio Ochoa, who were close associates of the legendary drug Lord Pablo Escobar. Although those measures have helped to weaken major drug Latin American cartels, they have proved ineffective to fight

drug trafficking phenomena and even have caused bloody conflicts in Mexico and Central America. That is why some Latin American countries have opted to search another way to combat drug trafficking – so called drug-liberal trend. Oriental Republic of Uruguay is one of the most active advocates of drug-liberalism in Latin America.

From a geographical point of view Uruguay is a very convenient country for drug trafficking. In the XX century Uruguay has become a transit point for marijuana and cocaine cultivated in Paraguay and Bolivia to European countries. It is estimated that most drugs are delivered through the port of Montevideo.

According to the International Narcotics Control Board in Uruguay in 2014, the volume of marijuana seizures was 1,457 tons. This figure is almost three times that of Paraguay and almost seven times that of Colombia. The report also notes that during the period from 2001 to 2011, according to the information provided the use of cannabis among the population in the country increased six-fold. The Government of Uruguay confirmed that the annual prevalence of marijuana abuse is still high (9.3 per cent of the adult population).(UNODC World Drug Report, 2016) To combat criminal organizations, the Uruguayan Government has adopted several legislative acts aimed at curbing drug trafficking.

At the same time the Uruguayan authorities believe that an effective anti-drug strategy should include preventive measures, like treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts, and also easing of national drug control regime related to the light drugs.(Maltsagov, 2018) The Government carried out health policy reforms to treat people with drug addiction. Also, Uruguay has become the most advanced country in Latin America in the field of marijuana legalization. In 2012, the Government of Uruguay announced its intention to allow the cultivation and use of cannabis for recreational purposes, for persons aged 18 years and older. In 2013, the Law came into force, and in 2014, the first Legal Acts were issued to regulate this new area. The Law and relevant bylaws allow the sale of cannabis through pharmacies for non-medical use in an amount of no more than 40 grams per month to people

registered with the Institute for regulation and control in the field of cannabis (IRCC).

It is worth to mention that the process of legalization of marijuana in Uruguay was different from other countries. For example, the initiative came directly from the legislature (not from the population), and was supported, according to some estimates, by only a third of the country's population. Prior to the adoption of new laws in 2012, possession of cannabis in the country was not a criminal offense, unlike its production.

To date, according to the new legislation there are three completely legal ways to obtain the drug. The first is the legalization of cultivating up to six bushes of the drug at home. The second is a membership in special clubs, which, in fact, are horticultural associations, where it is allowed to grow no more than 99 bushes. The third way to legally obtain cannabis in the country is to buy it in retail pharmacies in the amount of no more than 40 grams per person per month. For legal use of the drug, a citizen must choose one of the proposed methods and declare it during registration in the register of drug users.

It is necessary to mention that because of the registration system, foreign citizens in Uruguay cannot buy cannabis unlike in the Netherlands and other countries where drugs are legalized.(Kovaleva, 2016) The system is designed in such a way that only citizens of Uruguay who are registered as marijuana users can buy the drug.

Along with legalization, a campaign to reduce drug use has been launched countrywide, with special attention to the development of sports. Thus, the Government of Uruguay supports the aspirations of adolescents and young athletes to develop their athletic abilities and realize their psychological potential, thereby reducing the risk factors that can lead to drug abuse. This program is supported by national bodies that cooperate with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Also new programs for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts are being developed in the country, new rehabilitation centers are being created, and specialists are being trained to work with adolescent drug addiction.

According to the Uruguayans, it is wrong to draw parallels between the approaches of Uruguay and other countries, such as the Netherlands and Canada. Uruguay has its own policy that differs from other states. It is also noted that Uruguay adheres to the principles of the "cannabis dossier", which consists of three main elements, namely, regulation of the production, distribution and consumption of marijuana, prevention of the growth of production and use of the drug in the country and prohibition, by strengthening law enforcement mechanisms in the field of drug trafficking.

## **Conclusion**

Latin America, while remaining the main producer and supplier of cocaine, strives to combat this threat, that's why every year more and more new initiatives similar to Uruguay arise. Thus, Latin Americans are increasingly inclined to believe that an effective anti-drug strategy should include preventive measures, alternative methods of punishment for drug addicts, and, instead of imprisonment, their treatment and rehabilitation. An important role in reducing drug production is played by measures of socio-economic development of territories, which involve reducing the lag in the development between different regions, creating opportunities for obtaining legal income for the population engaged in drug production and providing additional opportunities in the field of education health and access to public services. At the same time, excessive interest in legalizing light drugs may pose a threat to the growth of drug dependence among the population in the future.

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