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THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

European and Latin American scenarios of international judicial cooperation

Programma
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THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

European and Latin American scenarios of international judicial cooperation

Meetings in memory of
Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino
(Palermo, 18–19 July 2025)

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Videoconference
of the full event

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Foreword

The papers collected in this volume document the second stage of a process which, over the course of just a few years, has acquired a clear and distinctive identity: transforming the legacy of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino into a working method, and that working method into effective judicial cooperation.

The meeting held in Palermo on 18 and 19 July 2025, on the thirty-third anniversary of the Via D'Amelio massacre, was conceived in continuity with the study and coordination meetings held in the same city in May 2024, devoted to asset-based approaches to combating drug trafficking in honour of Giovanni Falcone. That first edition had clearly identified a direction: to bring together, in the same place and around the same case files, European and Latin American magistrates and investigators, moving beyond the logic of occasional cooperation and fostering direct mutual knowledge among prosecutorial offices, legal systems and investigative practices. The objective was not merely to commemorate a legacy. More concretely, it was to put that legacy into operation.

The second edition consolidated this approach and broadened its scope. The theme selected, "The challenges posed by transnational organised crime and the European and Latin American dimensions of international judicial cooperation", made it possible to address, through a unified approach, phenomena that can no longer be analysed in isolation: drug trafficking, money laundering, infiltration of the legal economy, corruption, control of logistical infrastructures, the use of digital technologies, and the expansion of criminal networks into financial markets and virtual platforms.

The discussions brought to light a fundamental reality. Contemporary criminal organisations do not merely cross borders: they use them, exploit them and, whenever possible, neutralise them. They build functional alliances and share routes, logistical expertise, financial instruments and technologies. If it is to remain credible, the response of States must therefore be equally integrated. Isolated requests for judicial assistance, or occasional contacts between authorities, are no longer sufficient. What is required are stable relationships, professional trust, mutual knowledge and the capacity for timely coordination.

From this perspective, Palermo 2025 produced at least three particularly significant outcomes.

The first was the expansion of the professional community involved. Alongside Italian and Latin American magistrates, representatives of major European experiences also took part, thereby strengthening an interregional dimension that has now become indispensable. The sessions devoted to Latin America, Brazilian criminal systems, European experiences and the The growing demand for judicial cooperation with Italy made it possible to bring into dialogue different, yet convergent, interpretations of the same threat.

The second outcome concerns the quality of the exchange. The contributions collected in this volume do not reflect an abstract debate, but rather an exercise in practical analysis. Discussions focused on the expansion of criminal groups such as the Primeiro Comando da Capital, the Comando Vermelho and the Tren de Aragua; their connections with Italian mafia organisations; the strategic role of the Triple Frontier; seizures, extraditions, operational protocols and joint investigative teams; as well as the need to target illicit assets and trace financial flows even when they move into the digital sphere.

The third outcome, perhaps the most significant, was the strengthening of a shared culture of cooperation. Throughout the proceedings, it became evident that the effectiveness of judicial action depends upon the ability to reduce informational asymmetries among prosecutorial authorities, share inve-

stigative models and develop a common operational language.

This second edition also further underscored the role of Italian legal diplomacy. Through the contribution of the National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Directorate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, IILA, the Falcone Borsellino Programme and EL PACCTO 2.0, together with the other programmes involved, Italy reaffirmed its capacity to support judicial action through instruments of institutional engagement, technical assistance and network-building.

The third edition, scheduled to take place between Rome and Palermo in May 2026, builds upon this legacy and seeks to take a further step forward. The perspective identified, from *follow the money to follow the data*, represents a natural evolution of Giovanni Falcone's teaching. Today, following the money also means following the data: digital traces, financial intermediation mechanisms, corporate shielding mechanisms, wallets, platforms, crypto-assets and the technological ecosystems through which criminal wealth is concealed, transferred and reinvested.

Within this framework, the gradual development of the Palermo Platform as a stable forum for exchange among specialised judicial authorities represents the coherent outcome of the process initiated in 2024 and consolidated in 2025. Its aim is to transform personal relationships and opportunities for dialogue into a permanent infrastructure of institutional trust, knowledge-sharing, investigative coordination and the development of joint initiatives.

These proceedings should therefore be read not merely as the record of an event, but as testimony to meaningful progress. Palermo 2025 confirmed that international judicial cooperation, when grounded in specialisation, continuity and mutual trust, can become an effective operational instrument in the fight against transnational organised crime. It also demonstrated that the legacy of Falcone and Borsellino belongs not only to Italian history, but continues to resonate with European and Latin American institutions committed to the defence of the rule of law.

The challenge that still lies before us is clear: to render stable what was born as an encounter, to render systematic what has been tested as good practice, and to render common what each legal system has learned through its own experience. It is within this continuity — memory, knowledge, cooperation and action — that the Palermo process, strongly supported by the National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Prosecutor since 2024, finds both its deepest significance and its most tangible future trajectory.

Giovanni Tartaglia Polcini
Director of the Italian Falcone Borsellino Programme and
Deputy Director of the European initiative EL PACCTO 2.0

Matteo
Frasca

President of the Court of Appeal of Palermo

I greet all the authorities, colleagues, and all participants. I thank the National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor Giovanni Melillo for having wished for and organized, together with the valuable contribution of the other entities, this event which stands in continuity with the one held in 2024, again here in this hall. I also express my particular gratitude to all those who, with their customary and exceptional commitment, made this event possible.

The meeting revisits and renews the theme of international cooperation in the fight against criminal organizations, made even more necessary by the transnational dimension that these have progressively consolidated over the past decades, with devastating effects on the economies of countries and on the fundamental rights of citizens. The initiative is even more valuable because it seeks to pay tribute to the memory of Paolo Borsellino, 33 years after the Via D'Amelio attack and, as already happened for Giovanni Falcone, intends to do so outside any commemorative rhetoric, often rendered stale and turned into an occasion for instrumental and sterile polemics. Giuseppe D'Avanzo, in one of his writings entitled "The Contested Thought," underlined the institutional isolation that Giovanni Falcone suffered during his life and the casual, if not outright unscrupulous, attempt to appropriate his memory, what the journalist defines as "a removal of a corpse", perpetrated through the use of his story, his words, and his decisions.

And this is what was repeated with Paolo Borsellino after Giovanni's death, whom he described as his shield, he too left alone by the institutions and victim of a death foretold, he too the object of instrumental appropriations of his story. I am convinced that there are two paths to authentically honor Paolo Borsellino and give meaning to his sacrifice. The first is the attainment of truth, a right to which President Mattarella also constantly refers. In international law, the right to truth has several recognitions and is addressed in various UN resolutions and documents. In our legal system, although there is no explicit recognition of the right to truth, there is a shared view that it constitutes a meta-value, an axiological antecedent of every other right. A personality right, articulated both in individual terms and in a collective dimension, because, as Antonio Ruggeri states, in addition to the right to truth of those directly concerned, there is also that of the entire community, which is always wounded by traumatic events that strike directly at the heart of the Republic.

There exists a widespread need to know facts that constitute parts of the identity of the State and whose violation can affect the democratic order, because, as Stefano Rodotà warns, everyone's right to truth is essential to prevent certain events from being repeated in the future. It is therefore a right which, like all rights, receives its natural protection in and through jurisdiction, but which does not end there, because the right to truth corresponds to the duty to seek it and to provide it, especially on the part of those who hold roles in institutions and who are required to do so also by virtue of the duty of loyalty to those institutions. And although the right to truth, as a fundamental right of the individual and of the community, may be balanced like any other personality right with interests of equal rank, it cannot be sacrificed in favor of alleged reasons of State.

Antonio Ruggeri further states that the right to truth is inseparable from the corresponding duty and presents an autoreferential character. There exists, that is, the duty of the organs of the apparatus of the Republic to satisfy a right that also belongs to them and, through them, to the entire institution to which they belong. Truth plays a decisive role in trust and social cooperation, and a democratic regime preserves its identity if collective memory is formed without reticence and without lies. We cannot and do not intend to resign ourselves to not knowing the whole truth about the massacres. A missing or incomplete truth does not allow mourning to be processed nor peace to be found, consigning this and other events to a tragic but now concluded past. And this commitment does not concern only the magistrates who have honored and continue to honor it intensely. It is a duty that must involve all the healthy forces of this country. We owe it to the memory of the victims and to the pain of their families, and we owe it to our democracy, otherwise destined to remain incomplete.

The other path is the implementation and the updating of Paolo Borsellino's thought and ideas.

In a collective work entitled «Justice and Truth» some of his writings are collected, whose reading allows one to appreciate the extraordinary lucidity and uncommon analytical capacity that Borsellino, like Falcone, possessed regarding criminal phenomena and, in particular, organized crime and the strategies necessary to confront them effectively. Strategies that went beyond mere repression because, in the awareness of the longstanding capacity of the mafia to infiltrate the social and economic fabric of a community, they had to transform into a cultural and civic movement in which the main protagonists had to be young people. It is striking how he too, in natural harmony with his fraternal friend, had understood well in advance the need for international cooperation for an effective action against the transnational dimension that even at that time had not yet been fully grasped. And likewise, his 360-degree analytical capacity is impressive, ranging from the multifaceted repercussions of the mafia to the also social issue of drugs, from the denunciation of the danger of normalization in the fight against the mafia and the consequent demobilization, to the institutional reforms of the time, addressed with a critical but always constructive spirit.

In an incisive speech delivered in Marsala in December 1987 on the role of the Public Prosecutor, as shaped by the new Code of Criminal Procedure and examined also from a comparative perspective, he had lucidly identified its central role, defining its activity as the most exciting within the new process, because to it is entrusted the concrete implementation of those principles of legal civilization of the adversarial system.

And with extraordinary predictive capacity he had stigmatized the recurring temptations of political power to objectively undermine Public Prosecutors, foreshadowing their separation from the judiciary also through the first step of the definitive separation of careers, underlining that this did not encourage judges, who all feel themselves to be such, to direct their aspirations toward prosecutorial offices. He was, like few others, a visionary who combined this innate quality with a profound humanity that permeated his way of being a judge.

I, who had the privilege of being his student, was able to appreciate his wisdom in always grasping the human aspect of every criminal case and above all his ability to be tough with the tough and understanding with the weak, without ever retreating from the proper application of the law and respect for guarantees toward anyone. In Paolo Borsellino, the man and the magistrate merge and blend into an extraordinary harmony. Magistrates like him are part of the noble history of humanity, but we must not limit ourselves to consigning him to history books. Toward him, as toward the other martyrs who fell in this "beautiful and unfortunate land," as he defined Sicily, we have a debt of gratitude that we must strive to honor in the daily exercise of our commitment. Making his ideas live is the best way to cultivate his memory and share his hope because, just as it is true that a people without memory has no future, it is equally true that a country without hope is a country already dead.

Thank you, and I wish you all fruitful discussions.

Lia Sava

Attorney General at the Court of Appeal of Palermo

I extend the greetings of the prosecutorial judiciary of the district of Palermo to all of you. The common path aimed at a revision and a refinement of the schemes useful for the reconstruction of the dynamics that characterize transnational organized crime through the lens of judicial cooperation continues. The internationalization of organized crime imposes the rapid circulation of data and organizational models functional to an effective and productive coordination of investigations. Criminal organizations of mafia type insert themselves into global markets, interacting with other organizations, accelerating the processes of accumulation of enormous capital of illicit origin. We are facing troubling collaborations among distant criminal structures, carried out through a network of articulated economic processes founded on criminal conduct, which are also realized through the control of strategic logistical structures, ports and cargo terminals controlled by the same criminal organizations. Let us think of the drug trafficking cartels in Latin America, which control the main ports and the distribution routes. In this way criminal organizations influence at the same time both the modalities of drug trafficking and the modalities of global financial markets. All of this aimed at the accumulation of illicit capital, evading control systems through sophisticated instruments and through the use of new technologies. Let us think of *underground banking*, which allows the transfer of goods and currency without using traditional banking channels. In this way criminal organizations enter the circuit of legal markets, camouflaging themselves in different countries between Europe and Latin America.
In the face of this scenario, solid international cooperation is the central instrument to contain these phenomena. What is at stake is extremely high.
Indeed, if organized crime infiltrates massively into the economic system, the effectiveness of anti-mafia action is compromised. It is necessary to prevent the reciprocal adaptation between the legal economy and the illegal economy through an integrated approach among judicial cooperation, customs cooperation and police cooperation. Transnational organized crime is now projected into the virtual world, through the introduction of immaterial payment instruments, cryptocurrencies, which are becoming the system most used by mafia groups in the transnational landscape.
Furthermore, international cooperation is functional and essential to counter *cyber laundering*, the mechanism that, through advanced techniques of software use, cleans not only money but also capital, assets, and values of criminal origin that are located in various parts of the globe, resorting to cyber systems to evade the traceability of the related financial flows. It is also necessary to regulate together the global-scale diffusion of online platforms through which it is possible to sell these instruments, because it is precisely the reinvestment of capital in the cryptocurrency sector that represents one of the main projections of cybercrime, which guarantees transnational criminal organizations greater anonymity compared to conventional schemes.
International cooperation also allows us to contain the dangers connected to NFTs, acronym of *non-fungible token*, that is, a non-replicable token, a product of digital nature created on the network to be identified in a non-modifiable manner. It may refer, for example, to a work of art of inestimable value and constitutes a form of reinvestment of capital of criminal origin that is beginning to be used by transnational organised crime. Once again, only investigative and judicial synergy can allow us to overcome the enormous difficulties of reconstructing the location of digital commercialization activities and therefore identifying the applicable national regulation. International cooperation is also functional to the development of an inter-institutional debate

on artificial intelligence to govern the phenomenon of laundering mafia capital through its use. Artificial intelligence in the hands of organized crime may be not only a means to commit crimes, but also itself an author of crimes. Therefore, through forms of international cooperation, it is necessary that artificial intelligence becomes a valid aid in the phase of controls of crypto-transactions that are recorded on the *dark web*. We must invest in this.

It is also necessary to have a program of shared technical-scientific training among all of us through the promotion of joint study activities to improve the operational capacity of law enforcement in order to identify investigative standards useful to bring to light crimes committed through the dark web. It is therefore necessary to have common trust, which is realized precisely through the exchange among the various experiences. Laundering carried out in a virtual space implemented by an organized group, located with its own representatives in several countries, through fictitious financial companies, also imposes uniform legislative instruments.

The objective must therefore be pursued, among others, of creating a solid system, not only European, for cybersecurity that must be realized through networking. Uniform regulations are necessary, in the face of a virtual market that is essentially unified, to address the phenomenon and useful to dismantle the actors of cyber threats. We must overcome asymmetries, refining the definitions of the Palermo Convention and projecting it increasingly toward the enhancement of conventional international criminal law.

We are aware of the difficulties of this path linked to the different legislations of individual states and to the different legal sensitivities, but only international cooperation and therefore synergy can allow us to confront the threat of transnational criminality between Europe, Latin America, Caribbean regions, and the enhanced threat of cybercrime also used for the laundering of enormous illicit proceeds generated through drug trafficking, the point we reached last year.

Relevant policies and strategies are therefore needed, alignment in legislation is needed, it is necessary to be capable of integrating, at the transnational level, all operational tools available. We said it last year: planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating are the key words of this magmatic scenario, in the firm hope that international institutions support multidisciplinary cooperation to allow us to keep pace with ever-new criminal threats, identifying through exchange and through these moments of study the priorities of this cooperation connected, in my view, precisely to cybercrime.

With this hope, on this day of July, remembering the sacrifice of Paolo Borsellino, I wish all of you fruitful common work.

Antonella **Cavallari**

Secretary General of the International Italo-Latin American Organization – IILA

Greetings to all the esteemed magistrates who are here and who come from Latin America, welcome to everyone. It is for me a great honor to be able to speak at this moment of profound reflection and remembrance that celebrates the vision and the action of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, two figures who were able to transform the fight against the mafia into a global project of justice and legality.

The words we have heard from President Frasca moved us, and the description by Prosecutor Sava of the internationalization of crime pushes us to think that truly what we do is a duty, and I want first of all to assure that IILA will continue to contribute, in its own small way, to this very great and indispensable action to counter transnational crime. In this framework I would like to recall the role that IILA carries out today as an operational instrument at the service of the Farnesina and of Italy to internationalize the best practices of Italian institutions in the sectors of justice, security, and legality, which are indispensable to proceed along the path of eco- and sustainable development that only with strong institutions, with a safe and cohesive society, we can guarantee. IILA, in constant coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, currently manages projects with an overall value, on a four-year basis, of almost 70 million euros in European funding, of which about 40% directly concerns the sector of justice and security.

These numbers confirm how much the fight against organized crime is considered a fundamental priority, both at the Italian level and at the European level. Within the framework of this commitment it is necessary to mention some emblematic programs that represent the heart of our joint action with Europe and with the countries of Latin America, through which it has been possible to carry out today's event. I also take this opportunity to thank the coordinator, the officials of IILA, and the experts who make its proper implementation possible.

The first is the program precisely entitled Falcone-Borsellino, now in its fifth edition, funded by the Directorate for Globalization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. It is a multidisciplinary program that has made it possible to train and specialize more than 3,000 magistrates, officials, and members of law enforcement from 23 countries, creating a network of valuable contacts both between Italy and Latin America and at the intra-regional level. Precisely the creation of networks represents, in my opinion, a fundamental concept, because it goes beyond the immediate result and constitutes a stable asset made available to the countries involved.

Another program of great importance is EL PAcCTO 2.0, the main regional program of the European Union, within which Italy, through IILA, which is its implementing entity, leads the action on combating the economic dimension of organized crime, corruption, and mafia infiltration in penitentiary institutions.

ITAJUST should also be recalled, an innovative program financed with debt-conversion funds between Italy and Ecuador, coordinated by Magistrate Paolo Di Sciuva, present here today, whom I greet and thank. This program has contributed to reducing violent deaths in prisons almost to zero, starting from a dramatic initial figure of more than 400 victims per year. It is a historic result, which has significantly strengthened the bilateral relationship between the two countries, as the distinguished Ecuadorian guests present at this event will certainly be able to testify.

COPOLAD is a program aimed at strengthe-

ning the governance of drug policies in a perspective of social development and human rights, with growing attention also to the judicial and repressive aspects connected to drug trafficking, while maintaining a holistic vision of anti-drug policies. The program involves numerous Italian institutions, including the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, through the Department for Anti-Drug Policies, as well as the Ministries of Justice and Interior, the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services, and the National Agency for seized and confiscated assets from organized crime.
Finally, the bilateral programs financed by Italy deserve to be mentioned, aimed at sharing with the countries of Latin America the best expertise and specializations of the Carabinieri Corps and the Guardia di Finanza Corps, two institutions of great prestige and effectiveness that are already achieving significant results in partner countries. Added to these is also a bilateral European Union project in Peru, likewise focused on the fight against drugs and organized crime.
All these programs are based on a key principle, the construction of an international community of justice, founded on mutual trust, on the exchange of experiences, and on the sharing of information and tools. And it is precisely this the spirit that Paolo Borsellino left us as a legacy. The fight against organized crime as a collective endeavor, beyond borders, beyond cultures, in the name of the same right to freedom and legality.
Falcone and Borsellino opened the way. Falcone said that ideas walk on the legs of men. Today, also thanks to IILA, those ideas cross the borders of Italy and traverse Latin America, they speak Spanish and Portuguese, they translate into cooperation, training, and shared justice. IILA is the instrument through which those moral tensions, born from the struggle of Falcone and Borsellino, continue to live and to grow in the world, transforming themselves into concrete action and collective hope.

Giovanni
Tartaglia Polcini

Deputy Director of the European Programme EL PACCTO 2.0

Against a new modus operandi of transnational organised crime, we are together building a new modus operandi of international judicial cooperation.
This process has already contributed to consolidating a practice of cooperation that revolves around three strategic directions:
1. Knowledge of mafia operational models in the different regional contexts;
2. Analysis of the connections between transnational criminal organisations;
3. Sharing of innovative tools and practices to strengthen international judicial cooperation.
Today's meeting is only a further stage in the path begun on 23 May last year, which will continue next year with a new meeting in Portugal and an intermediate session.
There are, however, two further dimensions of the activity of legal and security diplomacy, which develops through programmes such as EL PACCTO 2.0, about which I would like to speak to you today in this brief address of greeting.
The first is support in the implementation of reforms and in strengthening institutional architectures for the prevention of and fight against organised crime, a process which in Latin America is producing significant results.
At the national level, it is worth recalling:
1. the recent Argentine anti-mafia law, inspired by the Italian model of the special anti-mafia statute, an important step of multidimensional legislative modernisation in that country.
2. the establishment of GAECO, the specialised group of prosecutors against federal organised crime in Brazil, inaugurated by the National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Prosecutor of the Italian Republic in Brasília on 23 June 2025.
3. the important reform approved last week by the Chilean Parliament, which establishes the supra-territorial prosecution office, inspired by the National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Directorate of the Italian Republic, strongly supported by Prosecutor Ángel Valencia. In this case, technical assistance will accompany the training and specialisation of the magistrates assigned to the new judicial office.
4. At the regional level, also during this period, a historic step has been recorded within the framework of the Mercosur organisation. Aware of the transnational nature of the organised crime threat, the Ministers of Justice and of the Interior of Mercosur, with the institutional support of justice and security programmes, have launched the process for the establishment of an international anti-mafia agency, the first of its kind worldwide. In this case as well, the model is inspired by the National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Directorate of the Italian Republic, with the technical contribution of experts from all the countries concerned, led by magistrates of the National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Directorate.
The other dimension, more operational, which I would like to share today, concerns a part of the EL PACCTO 2.0 programme. The movement of international fugitives who evade the rule of law and justice severely tests not only good governance but also trust in law enforcement and public security. In 2017, the European Union (EU) launched Phase 1 of its EL PACCTO programme (Europe–Latin America Assistance Programme against Transnational Organised Crime) to promote security and justice in Latin America. In 2024, it launched Phase 2 to further improve cooperation between Latin America, the Caribbean, and the European Union.
In this context, INTERPOL's support to EL PACCTO 2.0 is achieving remarkable results: it is a project that focuses on building EU–LAC cooperation to improve investigations concerning fugitives.
The official data provided by Interpol on the outcomes of this effort are as follows:

• Total arrests: 117
• Total positive locations: 49
• Arrests of Italian fugitives: 18
• Arrests carried out on national territory for persons wanted by foreign judicial authorities: 9

I conclude by returning to the reform that provides for the establishment of a supra-territorial prosecution office in Chile. I do so because we are here also to remember the work of heroic European and Latin American magistrates, drawing inspiration from them, from their sacrifice and from their technical and moral legacy. Precisely to them is dedicated a part of the Falcone and Borsellino programme, of which we are particularly proud and which bears the title "*Ser Fiscales*: being public prosecutors". This activity is an example of the sharing of experiences not only of a professional nature, but also on the human and ethical level, of the high function and the service to which the magistrate is called in investigative activities and in proceedings against transnational organised crime. According to this way of working, in the spirit of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, I am convinced that we will be able, together, to do even more.

Giovanni
Melillo

National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Prosecutor

"The reasons for a new season of shared commitment"

I must begin with thanks to all the authorities present, to the MAECI, represented by the Undersecretaries of State Giorgio Silli and Maria Tripodi, by the Secretary General of IILA, Antonella Cavallari, but above all to all the Italian, European and Latin American prosecutors who for some time have decided to embark upon the path of dialogue and common work. Thanks naturally to the President of the Court of Appeal of Palermo Matteo Frasca, and to the Chief Prosecutor of Palermo, Maurizio De Lucia, who are hosting us. Thanks to the European and Latin American police forces with whom we share daily efforts. Finally, thanks to all of you for your presence, especially to the people who have worked to make this event possible, in particular to Barbara Sargenti, brilliant weaver of the system of international relations of my office (DNA ed.), to the staff of the Court of Appeal and of the Attorney General's Office of Palermo, to the staff of IILA and of my office.
The video just shown and the days we are experiencing call to mind a painful parallel between the destiny of the Italian judiciary and that of the Latin American judiciaries. Our heartfelt remembrance goes to the colleagues who have lost their lives in the performance of their service, Paolo Borsellino of course, on the anniversary of his death, but also to the Latin American colleagues Antonio José Machado, César Suárez and Marcello Pecci Albertini.
Before beginning, however, allow me to read the message that the President of the Republic wished to address to my office in order to greet all of you.

Message from the President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella

On the occasion of the meeting between magistrates engaged in Europe and in Latin America in combating transnational organised crime and in the related processes of illicit accumulation of assets, I wish to convey my greetings; the commitment of the Italian Republic towards the Latin American reality is full.
Today's conference takes place approximately thirty years after the killing of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, whose passionate work in resolutely defending institutions and citizens from mafia violence is indelibly impressed upon the Italian and international collective conscience. The challenge of increasingly pervasive transnational crime and the response of States allow neither distraction nor irresolution. The health and the future of our communities are at stake.
International cooperation in investigations is essential for combating organised crime and must be conducted by strengthening the institutions and legal frameworks established by the International Community for the protection of citizens, overcoming particularisms and inadequacies in order to promote effective coordination.
To all those present I extend my best wishes for productive work.

Today a path of analysis and reflection begun some time ago together with colleagues from other European countries and, above all, with colleagues from Latin America, is resumed — colleagues who have chosen to look to Italy as a privileged partner in the construction of modern and effective arrangements of international judicial cooperation. The meetings held in this very hall in May 2024 have already been recalled. On that occasion as well we chose to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Giovanni Falcone in the same way in which today and tomorrow we remember Paolo Borsellino: by working. The proceedings of those meetings testify to the quality and the intensity of a climate of concrete and operational collaboration.

The meetings in Palermo were followed by those in Foz do Iguaçu in September 2024, in a more specifically Italian-Brazilian dimension. On that occasion a declaration of intent was adopted between the Brazilian Federal Public Ministry and the Italian National Anti-Mafia Directorate, opening the way to a structured system of collaboration. That system is based on the sharing of investigative teams, increasingly numerous between Italy and Brazil, and on stable coordination between Italian judicial offices, the Federal Prosecution Service of Brazil and the Prosecutors General of the Brazilian States, in particular São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Paraná. Paraná itself represents a strategic area, as it is closely connected to the so-called "*triple frontier*", an emblematic location of the processes of integration between criminal organisations originally distant from one another.

This path has not remained confined to the bilateral sphere. The presence of the Spanish Anti-Drug Prosecutor and the contribution of the Dutch National Prosecutor demonstrate the progressive extension of the cooperation network, developed according to the same formula, with shared objectives and methodological continuity with respect to the Palermo meetings. All this allows us to look at reality with confidence, but also with realism. Criminal systems are integrating on a global scale, outlining a new dimension of transnational organised crime capable of affecting the stability and security not only of the countries of Latin America and of other areas of the planet, but also of Europe itself. This demonstrates the strategic importance of cooperation between European systems and Latin American systems. It is a necessary alliance and, at the same time, one without alternatives: a possible alliance between the European Union and the countries of Latin America, founded on the common defence of the *rule of law*, the State governed by law and democratic principles. This is the guiding thread of the work that will unfold in the forthcoming sessions.

The first section is dedicated to drug trafficking, money laundering and the risks of destabilisation of democratic systems in Latin America. It will be moderated by Professor Nando Dalla Chiesa, and will involve individuals whom my colleagues and I have learned to admire. Francisco Roberto Barbosa Delgado, former Attorney General of Colombia, to whom is owed the investigative work that led to the arrest and conviction of the material perpetrators of the murder of Marcello Pecci Albertini. However, the fundamental issue of identifying the masterminds of the crime remains open, responsibility which concerns the authorities of Paraguay. This will be followed by the intervention of Diana Salazar Méndez, former Attorney General of Ecuador, a country crucial in the balances of regional drug trafficking. Her experience in combating criminal cartels, developed also alongside colleague César Suárez, testifies to the level of exposure and responsibility borne by magistrates engaged on the front line. It is an experience that imposes upon all of us, Italian and European magistrates, not only respect but genuine institutional solidarity. Ignazio Castillo will also intervene, director of the specialised unit on organised crime of the Chilean Public Prosecutor's Office, whose director, Attorney General Ángel Valencia, has formally recognised the role that the DNA has played in the reform of the Chilean Public Prosecutor's system. His contribution will allow analysis of the expansion of the "*Tren de Aragua*", a criminal organisation still little known in Europe but already rooted in several European contexts, confirming the transcontinental dimension of the new criminal networks.

The second session will be dedicated to Brazilian criminal systems. These are macro-systems that cannot be observed with detachment, as they are deeply integrated with Italian mafia organisations. It is no coincidence that some of the most significant arrests of 'ndrangheta figures in recent years have taken place in Rio de Janeiro, and that the related extraditions have been made possible thanks to the cooperation of the Brazilian judicial authority. The session will be coordinated by Hindemburgo Chateaubriand, Deputy Attorney General of Brazil, and will include the participation of Antonio José Campos Moreira, Attorney General of the State of Rio de Janeiro, who will illustrate the experience gained in combating organisations such as *Comando Vermelho and the "milícias"*.

Fabio Ramazzini Bechara will also intervene, public prosecutor of the Public Ministry of the State of São Paulo and member of the GAECO group, a structure specialised in combating organised crime. With the State of São Paulo the Na-

tional Anti-Mafia Prosecution Office has already signed a cooperation protocol which, precisely in these days, will be replicated with the Attorney General's Office of Rio de Janeiro and with the Attorney General's Office of Paraná, further strengthening the framework of operational cooperation. Particular importance will be given to the intervention of Francisco Zanicotti, Attorney General of the State of Paraná, who will examine in depth the dynamics of criminal organisations operating in the area of the so-called *"triple frontier"*, a territory emblematic of the processes of integration between criminal structures originally distant from one another.
The third session will be coordinated by Barbara Sargenti and will be dedicated to European experiences in combating organised crime. The proceedings will open with the intervention of Mladen Nenadić, Chief Prosecutor for Organised Crime of Serbia, followed by contributions from Rosa Ana Morán Martínez, Special Anti-Drug Prosecutor of Spain, and Amadeu Francisco Ribeiro Guerra, Attorney General of Portugal. The Attorney General of Albania, Olsian Çela, will also intervene.
This more consolidated dimension of cooperation within the European sphere will be followed by a session dedicated to the fundamental lines of the Italian demand for international judicial cooperation. District prosecutors will intervene, holders of prosecutorial functions in organised crime proceedings and principal interlocutors in mechanisms of transnational cooperation.
The session will be coordinated by Salvatore De Luca, Prosecutor of the Republic of Caltanissetta, the office to which the Italian legal system assigns jurisdiction over investigations relating to the massacres that cost the lives of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino. The session will include the participation of the Prosecutors of the Republic of Turin, Palermo, Bologna and Bari, with an operational exchange on the concrete needs of cooperation and international coordination.
The final session will be coordinated by Eduardo Ezequiel Casal, Attorney General of the Argentine Republic and President of the Ibero-American Association of Public Prosecutors' Offices.
The session will include senior representatives of the Public Prosecutors' Offices of Latin America: Hindemburgo Chateaubriand, Deputy Attorney General of Brazil; Delia Milagro Espinoza Valenzuela, Attorney General of Peru; Ángel Valencia Vásquez, Attorney General of Chile; and Luis Carlos Gómez Rudy, Attorney General of Panama, a strategic country in drug trafficking routes and in international laundering circuits.
The composition of this session clearly reflects the sign of a concrete willingness for common work and for systematic exchange of experiences. However, I would like to address my Italian colleagues to emphasise that today is a day of particular importance, as were those of last year, perhaps this year even more intensely. Also in remembrance of Antonio José Machado, César Suárez and Marcello Pecci Albertini, this is a day in which the Italian judiciary — which many countries regard with respect and admiration as a model of organisation of prosecutorial functions in matters of organised crime and terrorism — is called to an exercise of responsibility and openness.
It is a day in which we are here, essentially, to listen and to learn from the experience and the voice of Latin American colleagues. Thank you.

Giorgio
Silli

Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

I believe this is fundamental, as I have both the honor and the responsibility of serving as the Government's delegate within the Italian-Latin American Organization and of acting as a bridge between politics and the judiciary through these international cooperation projects.
I work daily with Dr. Tartaglia Polcini, Secretary General Antonella Cavallari, and many of you whom I have had the pleasure of meeting while traveling around the world. Beyond protocol and ceremony, Mr. Prosecutor—rather than reading a prepared speech, as often happens when a Government representative speaks—I would like to address you more directly.
As you may have noticed from my accent, I am neither from Palermo nor Sicilian: I am Tuscan. Perhaps precisely because I am not a technician but a politician, I speak to you with a deep sense of emotion. I experienced, as an ordinary citizen, the mafia massacres and the events that marked Italy's history. I watched on television the deaths of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino—moments that remain etched in the memory of every Italian. Like September 11, I remember clearly where I was when we first heard the news of Falcone's death, and then Borsellino's.
I firmly believe that judicial cooperation is a tool for which politics owes a great deal to the history of our country, to the work of its magistrates, and to the justice system that enables us to cooperate and build relationships between States.
If, on the one hand, it is uncomfortable to be known worldwide for events that took place in past decades, on the other hand it is a source of great pride to be regarded as the cradle of law and as a reliable partner by the vast majority of countries, especially in Latin America. Foreign policy operates in a relatively straightforward way—it is a form of do ut des—but with friendly countries, the future is built together, brick by brick. This type of cooperation is the binding force, the glue, the cement that ultimately allows many doors to be opened.
Mr. Prosecutor, you have read the message from the President of the Republic, whom I have the honor—together with colleagues from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—to accompany during official visits and state trips. Just two weeks ago, on the margins of a meeting with the President of Ecuador, we had the opportunity to briefly discuss judicial cooperation between our countries. In some contexts, the focus is primarily on combating organized crime and drug trafficking; in others, counter-terrorism cooperation plays a more central role. In all cases, Italy represents a point of reference. This is something that clearly emerges in international dialogue and, in the various contexts in which we operate, facilitates immediate and constructive engagement.
I would therefore like to thank the Prosecutor for organizing this meeting, which is rightly focused on technical and operational exchange. On this occasion, I speak with institutional respect to convey the Government's greetings—that political dimension which, throughout the world, is responsible for providing the judiciary with the tools necessary to combat the enemies of the rule of law and democracy.

First
Working Session

Drug trafficking, money laundering and risks of destabilisation of democratic systems in Latin America

Introduction

Nando
Dalla Chiesa

Professor of Sociology of Organised Crime
at the University of Milan

It is an honour to participate in this important event. These are not rhetorical words; this is a meeting that has a solemn and particular value, and for me even more so. We find ourselves in the city of Palermo, the setting of a terrible history of bloodshed, speaking about how to combat the mafia phenomenon, also being able to transmit an experience of successes, victories and passions, through which Palermo and Italy have met with officials, magistrates and democracies of Latin America. It is a meeting that demonstrates its necessity in the face of the transnational nature of organised crime. A meeting that is taking place not only on the level of the administration of justice, which is the most important one, but also on the cultural level, on the level of universities. The figures that have been recalled of the magistrates killed by criminal organisations in Latin America tell us that the risk and the danger for democracies is high and that the possibility that organised crime may strengthen itself or draw courage from certain international conditions is significant. As a scholar, I have never been able to overlook the importance that global disorder and wars have for the development of criminal organisations. The experience of these last 20, 30, 40 years tells us of armed conflicts that lead to new forms of organised crime, that strengthen the boldness of organised crime, their arrogance towards political systems, and it is a lesson that we cannot forget.

We know what is happening in the world at this moment, we know that great international disorder exists, we do not know in what form it will manifest itself on the level of the landscape of criminal organisations. It is in this context, therefore, that we find ourselves, an important context from a historical point of view, for what Palermo's past is, for what the 19th of July represented for the history of Palermo and for the history of the nation. At the same time it is a context that goes beyond the past and poses important uncertainties about the future. For this reason I will try to follow with the greatest possible interest what our guests will say, speaking about drug trafficking, money laundering and risks of destabilisation

of democratic systems in Latin America.

Francisco Roberto Barbosa Delgado

Lawyer and academic, former Attorney General of Colombia

"The fight against drug trafficking in light of recent geopolitical developments in Latin America"

A special and very warm greeting to Giovanni Melillo, Italian National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Prosecutor, to Giovanni Tartaglia Polcini for having invited me, greetings to my colleagues on the panel, to the former Attorney General of Ecuador Diana Salazar, a colleague whom I can define as a survivor, like me, in those countries that today represent a challenge for criminality, Colombia and Ecuador. A warm greeting to Ignazio Castillo, Director of the specialised unit on organised crime and of the Attorney General's Office, and also to my friend Ángel Valencia, Chilean Attorney General, to the President of the Euro-American Association of Public Prosecutors, Dr Eduardo Casal, my great admiration. To all those present, thanks also to Professor Nando Dalla Chiesa, professor of organised crime at the University of Milan.

I wish to begin with a few words in Italian. Being in Palermo is an honour for me, a city that is fundamental for understanding the struggle for justice as an essential power of the rule of law. It is here that two great jurists and two great magistrates and judges were formed, the first Paolo Borsellino and the second Giovanni Falcone. But it is also in this city that the Cosa Nostra mafia assassinated these two heroes of justice, together with others, sending the message that it was possible to bend the rule of law — a grave error. I come from a country such as Colombia that has suffered in a similar way. Our State has faced major challenges, such as defeating the Medellín cartel, the Cali cartel, the Norte del Valle cartel, guerrilla groups and paramilitaries. Today we face an additional challenge: preventing our institutional framework and our Constitution from being undermined by the current President of Colombia, who has chosen to stand on the side of that criminal history that we have already defeated, turning his back on our struggle. The battle never ends; this is why we must remember it so that it is not repeated. Being here, in Palermo, reminds us of the struggles of Borsellino and Falcone, as well as those of many others who have fallen in Latin America, such as Marcello Pecci, Albertini, César Suárez and Antonio José Machado.

Drug trafficking is a threat to democratic stability, to institutions, to the way in which societies are shaped in our countries, because it has an impact on youth, deteriorates institutions and therefore increases corruption, since it is a crime that has no link with other types of behaviour. Drug trafficking fuels in our countries not only the export of narcotics, but at the same time generates phenomena of extortion in our cities, generates kidnappings, generates other types of criminal activities, for example the retail sale of narcotics in our cities. We have spoken extensively in Latin America about two very important perspectives in terms of drug trafficking: large-scale trafficking and micro-trafficking, which becomes a very important connecting element across the various areas of our country.

Drug trafficking in Latin America used to be seen as a product entirely for export, whereas today the perspective is different: there is a vision of domestic consumption. Demand for narcotics in our cities has increased because the economies of our countries have become progressively stronger, and traffickers find themselves with an internal market and do not necessarily organise their efforts to reach an international market. When I was at the Office of the Attorney General of the Nation from 2020 to 2024, the period in which I worked under a constitutional mandate and during which I collaborated with two Presidents in Colombia — one who supported the process of combating crime and another who made everything much more complicated because he attempted to undermine institutional structures by seeking to suspend arrest warrants for major drug traffickers in order to release them from prison — as Attorney General of Colombia I systematically refused to support this situation. However, these circumstances represented a challenge for the Attorney General and also a challenge for the prosecution of criminal activity.

We knew that we could not pursue criminality solely by applying the criminal code, applying criminal law in order to imprison those responsible; it was absolutely necessary to pursue assets, to follow the money. If we do not trace the resources, we cannot do anything. Drug trafficking and other criminal activities in the vast majority of cases have a profit motive, and in this sense it was absolutely necessary to have laws on the confiscation of assets of illicit origin. In these four years we seized from the mafia 6 billion dollars, which were handed over to the State, to the Government, to an institution in Colombia in order to strike these structures.

This struggle had to be a very special struggle; drug trafficking could not and cannot be countered simply by looking at criminal activities — action is required in terms of the confiscation of illicit assets. In Latin America, as was also discussed with the prosecutors of the IAM, we know very well the difficulties that we have had to face. In 2024, 121,000 violent deaths were recorded in the region, 20 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. It is extremely important to pursue criminal organisations on both sides of the border between Ecuador and Colombia. Ecuador, for example, was a country which in the years 2000–2005–2006 had a homicide rate of 7–8 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants; today we are at 45–46 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. In Colombia we had 300 deaths per 6,000 inhabitants during the period of the Medellín Cartel, and when you spoke about Falcone and Borsellino, for us it was almost natural to see judges killed every day, prosecutors killed — it became a matter of daily news reporting. We had to create the figure of the “faceless” judge and prosecutor because of the virulence and violence of the drug cartels. Today Colombia is a country that has 26–25 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants; we have made progress over the last 30 years, but recently we have also begun to lose ground.

I want to tell you the following: we cannot think that we have won the fight against criminality and that we are here all united — criminals also gather, criminals also make agreements. Just as the transnational nature of crime exists, and the prosecution of crime at a transnational level exists, there is also the idea of making a mockery of the law at an international level, and drug trafficking falls within an interesting discussion because today these traffickers do not use the natural, traditional channels of circulation of resources; today they use cyber circulation. There are different mechanisms: a person can be in Colombia and transfer billions to Palermo, from Palermo to Moscow, from Moscow to Ukraine, from Ukraine to the United States — they can do whatever they want in the transfer of resources. It is no longer normal for people to be caught at airports with suitcases full of money; today this no longer happens — today other criminal behaviours exist. From the point of view of management, of attack, of countering these behaviours in the region, we see that the effort of international cooperation linked to the application of the Palermo Convention of 2000 is a fundamental instrument. Public prosecutors must communicate with each other; working groups must exist; thematic working groups must exist to deal with the prosecution of crime. Sometimes there is no real equivalence from the point of view of criminal codes and procedures, but if collaboration exists we can obtain more information regarding these criminal networks that have formed over time.

The challenges are increasingly greater. A few years ago one began to see criminality arriving in Chile, already very common in Mexico, such as, for example, the link between politics and criminality, and certain areas of the country that are controlled by crime. You will remember the son of the leader Chapo Guzmán who was captured and then released in order not to create public order problems. That is to say, the capture of a criminal would have created public order problems for the President of the country, and the President, with no respect whatsoever for the judicial order of his country, ordered his release. One therefore began to see how criminal networks had started to interfere with the legal systems of our countries, and Chile did not have this type of experience.

Today we can see how the *Tren de Aragua* has become a problem not only for Latin America, not only because of this massive circulation of migration coming from Venezuela that starts from Colombia, moves towards Ecuador, then to Peru and then to Chile, to Argentina, to Uruguay, or simply moves up towards Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras and reaches Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico in order to enter the United States. Today the United States also finds itself facing similar circumstances. There is growing concern about the expansion of *Tren de Aragua* and its presence in cities such as New York, where this organisation has progressively occupied spaces of legality and infiltrated institutional and social contexts.

In the face of this scenario, it can be stated clearly that drug trafficking has affected institutions and has undermined the very quality of democracy. In Ecuador and in Colombia we have once again begun to witness attacks against presidential candidates. It is a phenomenon that brings back to memory the most dramatic years of Latin American history, in particular 1989 in Colombia, when four presidential candidates were assassinated at the moment when the Medellín cartel exercised a dominant influence over the political sphere of the country.

Today we are once again witnessing a direct aggression against institutional structures by criminal organisations.

Before leaving the Office of the Attorney General of the Nation, I was speaking with a General of the Colombian Armed Forces at that time, and he told me that if we are unable to contain crime, if we yield even by a single centimetre, it will be crime that takes possession of the institutions. And I believe that, in many countries, this process has already begun. What, then, are the solutions that we can put forward in terms of combating criminality, responding to this scourge, and achieving a deep understanding of criminal phenomena? The first is greater international collaboration: more dialogue, more coordination, a better understanding of criminal phenomena. We have discussed normative identities at length, but it is essential to remember that everything begins with a clear and shared reading of criminal phenomena.

Within this framework, networks such as AIAMP and the Egmont Group — central in the fight against money laundering — make it possible to define more precisely how resources and assets move between different countries. We see this, for example, in Argentina: we have spoken several times with the Attorney General about how assets and capital of illicit origin, which left Colombia, subsequently found refuge in other areas of the continent, for example in Chile or Uruguay, in contexts where asset prosecution and confiscation laws do not exist. This results in “safe” spaces where families relocate, casinos are purchased, sometimes even high-value properties or properties in historic areas — as has occurred, for example, in Antofagasta — multiplying money laundering in our territories. This dialogue is fundamental, just as it is equally fundamental that our prosecutors and our public prosecution services are respected by governments, that there is independence, that there is autonomy.

I have been firm — and I continue to be so — in affirming that justice must be autonomous in order to safeguard the rule of law and democracy. Presidents must feel that they do not possess all the necessary instruments to understand the challenges of Justice. When, instead, a President feels that he has all the elements necessary to do whatever he wishes in a country, then the space for the risk of authoritarianism opens up. Justice therefore represents an essential element to interrupt these dynamics or, at the very least, to prevent the rule of law from being attacked.

I wish to conclude my remarks by expressing my deep honour at being here, and at being able to offer some elements for reflection on what is happening in our regions.

Allow me to recall a clear figure, although painful for Colombia: at the global level, approximately 367,000 hectares cultivated with coca are estimated — according to UN reports — and 67% of them are located in our country. In recent years we have moved from a share of 30% to 67%.

As Colombians we have overcome many challenges and faced serious crises throughout our history. This represents an additional difficulty, which is added to those already existing. Nevertheless, it is necessary that the region, and the international community as a whole, understand that where political will to combat organised crime is lacking, a serious problem of the protection of democracy inevitably arises.

Diana
Salazar Mendez

Former Attorney General of Ecuador

“A balance of the recent years in the fight against criminal cartels in Ecuador (in memory of César Suárez)”

Good morning to everyone present, especially to the national and international authorities who have gathered at this Palermo Meeting; to its organisers, the speakers and the technical teams who have worked to reach this moment, good morning; I am sure that these will be two very fruitful days for the exchange of technical and operational experiences.
I am deeply grateful for this invitation, which reflects the support that the Office of the Attorney General of Ecuador has received over the last six years from different states and institutions, which have trusted in the capacity, effectiveness and transparency with which we fight organised crime linked to drug trafficking, especially to Giovanni Melillo, National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor.
Thank you, because you allow us to share concepts, strategies and actions, and to jointly put forward, within the framework of this specialised forum that seeks to promote dialogue around judicial cooperation and global criminal dynamics, the main challenges of transnational organised crime and the European and Latin American scenarios of international judicial cooperation.
I would like to begin this short intervention, in which I will propose to you an analysis of the last years in the fight against criminal cartels in Ecuador, from the perspective and experience of the Office of the Attorney General, with a recognition of the work, effort and sacrifice of those who form part of the pillars of justice in our countries: officials, judges, prosecutors and police officers who day after day put their integrity and their lives at risk so that the rule of law prevails in our societies. A job that requires honesty and courage, and that sometimes exacts very high costs. A complex and demanding job, yes, but also hopeful, because through their actions they protect the weakest and most vulnerable, restore balance to society, allow it to survive the rule of force and project a more just, more human shared future.
My admiration and respect to all of you and to your teams; and my tribute to Dr César Suárez, Ecuadorian prosecutor, murdered for fulfilling his duties. To his wife and to his four children, my solidarity and affection.
Organised crime is a complex, multidimensional and global phenomenon, and drug trafficking is the most visible expression of its implications and effects, associated with extremely high levels of violence and enormous sums of money.
International integration and technological development have produced a series of multi-level changes. Geopolitical dynamics, for their part, have become more complex and have generated substantial changes in fields such as the economic and legal spheres.
The great ease of creating or expanding markets and the high mobility of goods, people and services have also opened opportunities for the formation of networks of illicit markets, linked to transnational criminal activities. Thus, organised crime has increasingly and aggressively configured itself as the main threat to democratic institutional order, stability and the internal security of states.
In recent decades, Latin America has become the global epicentre of the war against cocaine trafficking, which has involved enormous economic investments by the states of the Region, especially in the development of reactive measures of a judicial or military nature.
However, that approach is insufficient in the midst of a reality of growing violence and insecurity, given that criminal networks, with a vision comparable to that of large corporations, carry out meticulous risk assessments and deploy strategies to minimise them, adapt rapidly to the measures imposed by states, constantly explore new transport routes, take advantage of the geographical conditions of certain countries that may facilitate internal and cross-border mobility, and establish their production centres there.
This scenario is particularly visible in the Ecuadorian case, a historically peaceful country where drug trafficking has evolved at an alarming pace in recent years, causing it to move from being a transit point to becoming a centre for production, processing, storage and distribution of cocaine, much of which has as its final destination the markets and streets of Europe and the United States.

According to the World Cocaine Report 2023 of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, between 2020 and 2021 coca cultivation in Ecuadorian territory grew exponentially, as did seizures of the alkaloid: around 356 tonnes.

How did this happen? To what extent had corruption, drug trafficking and organised crime penetrated the country? The successive investigations carried out by the Ecuadorian Prosecutor's Office between 2019 and 2025 made it possible to discover how transnational criminal networks had managed to intimidate the State as a whole, while also consolidating their power in the collective imagination and in the social fabric.

They had established strong links with local criminal groups, which fought brutally for control of routes and markets; and they had permeated the structures of society, going beyond the public sphere, corrupting the administration of justice, security institutions and elected authorities, and contaminating — at least — the private sector in its productive, commercial and export apparatus.

I propose that we review some examples:

• networks of bribes and illegal kickback collections that were generated from the Presidency and Vice-Presidency of the Republic, crossed the structure of the State and reached large private companies, as in the cases *"Sobornos", "Synohidro", "Danubio" or "Encuentro"*;

• corruption rooted in the public procurement system and in the health system, which collapsed during the pandemic, revealed structures that had been operating for years and gave rise to dozens of cases, such as the so-called *"Muñecos" or "Jordán";*

• the Office of the Comptroller General, the entity responsible for state oversight, which in reality turned out to be the cradle of dealings and contracts outside the law, as in the case *"Las Torres"*;

• or the relentless fight against terrorism, money laundering and criminal structures, with cases such as *"Poseidón R7", "Júpiter Sur", "Arma Pico", "Los Lobos", "Pip Master", "Amistad", "Zeus", "Los Pepes" or "Pampa"*, the latter involving the Albanian mafia;

• cases such as those known as *"Pantalla", "Independencia Judicial", "Purga", "Plaga"* or *"Ligados"* revealed how high judicial, legislative and oversight authorities, as well as politicians, lawyers, candidates and journalists, maintained links with criminal groups, intervened in the execution of illicit acts, formed part of the decision-making spheres of organisations and operated to achieve the return of assets, the reduction of sentences, the release and even the restoration of the political rights of their convicted leaders;

• only through the case *"Metástasis"* was a criminal structure dismantled that had allowed drug trafficking to infiltrate the National Court of Justice, the Prosecutor's Office, the National Police and the Service for the Care of Adults Deprived of Liberty and Juvenile Offenders (SNAI), using private practice lawyers, digital media that thrive on scandal and politicians.

That interference was also evidenced in systematic attempts by certain political groups — supported by strong economic investments — to delegitimise and hinder investigations, misinform the media and spread falsehoods through digital platforms and social networks.

They also exerted strong pressure on prosecutorial teams, who not only devoted thousands of hours of work to sustain complex proceedings, but also sacrificed their peace of mind, their freedom and, in some cases, even their lives so that justice would prevail over crime, because, moreover, the State was unable to provide them with sufficient protection while they were defending the public interest, or left them at risk once their work had been completed.

So then, how can such a violent, widespread and well-articulated offensive be confronted? It goes without saying that any initiative proposed should transcend the national legal sphere and would require the well-coordinated participation of all sectors and actors of society, as well as the coordinated implementation of public policies and structural measures — cross-cutting, multisectoral and comprehensive — sustained in the medium and long term, without expecting immediate results, because organised crime takes root in societies characterised by high levels of inequality and poverty, weak states and inefficient institutions.

Now, from the experience of the Ecuadorian Prosecutor's Office between 2019 and 2025, the emphasis in combating transnational organised crime was based on several pillars: on the one hand, the creation of specialised units, such as those for Transparency and the Fight against Corruption, against Transnational and International Organised Crime, against Money Laundering, against Cybercrime, and the Asset Investigation Unit for Extinction of Domain, the latter dedicated to the identification and seizure of finances of illicit origin or destination, in order to hinder the functioning of such networks and prevent their assets from entering the economy. The technical and technological

strength of these units made it possible to identify important routes and storage points, dismantle entire structures and prosecute their leaders, collaborators, operators and accomplices.
On the other hand, the reduction of cross-border barriers — to which I referred at the beginning — has opened the doors to interstate interconnection and mutual legal assistance, enabling rapid and effective responses in complex investigations, and has been reflected in various international cooperation instruments with the other countries of the Region and with global strategic partners, such as the host country of this International Meeting, Italy, Great Britain, the United States, Canada and the European Union — and its specialised agencies — based on the construction of relationships of trust and respect, and through the application of technical tools that became fundamental elements for joint action against this criminal phenomenon, as they accelerated the exchange of intelligence information with foreign police and prosecutorial units, allowed the use of advanced investigative techniques, the execution of coordinated operations — such as controlled drug seizures or the arrest of criminal leaders — and the opening of parallel judicial proceedings.
In summary: technical specialisation, transparency, the use of technology and international cooperation have been crucial for the investigations carried out by the Ecuadorian Prosecutor's Office in recent years to progress and materialise into judicial proceedings and historic rulings that have struck at the heart of criminal organisations.

And although my work at the head of this institution ended a couple of months ago, the State's responsibility to investigate crimes must be further strengthened, ensuring continuity of existing strategies and ongoing investigations, and guaranteeing prosecutorial teams sufficient protection while they carry out their duties and after they have fulfilled them, when they remain exposed to possible retaliation.
As has been stated, not everything lies in the hands of the justice system: the mere application of a reactive, judicial or military approach is not sufficient to confront a problem of this magnitude; nor are there quick or simple solutions, because criminal organisations associated with drug trafficking have spent years weaving their networks within society, co-opting authorities and businesspeople, laundering assets and bending laws to their advantage, to the point of becoming the greatest threat to democracy and the security of states.
I would like to conclude this intervention by returning to an idea I mentioned at the beginning: the work of justice is very hard, yes, but it is also hopeful, deeply human and, above all, it has no option to lower its arms or surrender; sometimes we need to pause and reinvent ourselves in order to continue, because that is the only alternative we have. Meanwhile, we must continue preparing ourselves, strengthening ourselves and coordinating even more to prevent the advance of organised crime. Thank you for continuing to assume that commitment. Good morning.

Ignacio
Castillo Val

Director of the specialised organised crime unit of the Office of the Attorney General of Chile

"The expansion in Latin America of the criminal cartel 'Tren de Aragua'"

D I would like to thank the National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor, Giovanni Melillo, for the invitation, as well as Giovanni Tartaglia Polcini. Not only for the opportunity to be here, in this extraordinary setting of shared work, but above all for what they have represented for us in terms of inspiration, institutional relations and joint work, at a time that is by no means easy for Chile.

In Chile, organised crime has grown significantly in recent years. I will speak about this phenomenon shortly. Today we face organised crime that is also transnational in nature, characterised by a very high level of violence. Rates of homicide, kidnapping and extortion have increased markedly; there is therefore a serious and structural national problem.

The National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor Giovanni Melillo, Giovanni Tartaglia Polcini and all those who collaborate with them — including Barbara Sargenti — have been a fundamental point of reference for us.

I will now turn to the *Tren de Aragua*, an organisation that may not yet be fully known in Europe. It is a mafia-type association, comparable — to be clear — to what is provided for under Article 416-bis of the Italian Criminal Code. If criminal proceedings were to be brought against the *Tren de Aragua* in a legal system such as Italy's, the most coherent legal classification would be precisely that of a mafia-type association.

The *Tren de Aragua* is a criminal organisation that shares features common to many structures in Latin America, such as Brazilian or Ecuadorian ones, which colleagues will discuss later, and which have as a distinctive trait their origin within prisons — a phenomenon quite frequent in Latin America and less common in Europe. These organisations consolidate their power inside penitentiary institutions and, from there, expand outward, projecting their influence over the territory.

The *Tren de Aragua* had its operational centre in the Tocorón prison, in the State of Aragua (Ecuador). In particular, between 2009 and 2010 the organisation strengthened significantly, to the point of becoming the most powerful criminal structure in Venezuela. So much so that the literature and investigative reconstructions describe total control of the prison: leaders decided who entered and who left, which activities were permitted and which were not. The prison even had facilities such as a swimming pool, as evidence of the level of control exercised.

Originally, the *Tren de Aragua* had three main leaders. Among them is Héctor "Niño" Guerrero, currently considered the main leader, a figure about whom relatively little is known. Another prominent leader was Larry Álvarez, known as Larry "Changa", who rose to second or third place in the *Tren de Aragua* hierarchy and who moved to Chile in 2018. His arrival in our country probably marked the beginning of the structuring and expansion of the *Tren de Aragua* on Chilean territory.

Larry Changa was recently arrested in Colombia, in a joint operation between the Chilean and Colombian police and prosecution services. He is currently awaiting extradition to Chile, where we intend to try him and obtain his conviction for offences committed in connection with illicit drug trafficking, including kidnappings, extortion and homicides.

As anticipated, the *Tren de Aragua*'s main activities concern drug trafficking, kidnappings, extortion, contract killings, as well as migrant smuggling and human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Just two days ago, on 16 July, a network linked to the *Tren de Aragua* was dismantled in Costa Rica, which used numerous women in trafficking and smuggling activities. The investigation arose from a series of homicides connected to those activities, and those behind these operations were precisely members of the *Tren de Aragua*.

In 2018 the *Tren de Aragua* began to expand across Latin America, above all by following migratory flows from Venezuela towards South America. The organisation exploited those

flows as a true operational corridor. Where many of us saw poverty, vulnerability and migration for humanitarian reasons — people walking across the continent from Venezuela to Chile — the *Tren de Aragua* identified an opportunity for profit, exploiting migrants' conditions of extreme vulnerability.
Borders were turned into informal transit spaces controlled by the organisation. Women migrating from Venezuela to Ecuador and then towards Chile in search of a better life became victims of sexual exploitation; in some cases, they were forced to carry drugs on behalf of the organisation, under threat of death if they refused.
The *Tren de Aragua* has also demonstrated a remarkable ability to cooperate with other transnational criminal organisations. There are indicators suggesting relationships with groups operating in Brazil and Colombia, including armed actors such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), which in practice controls another highly relevant activity in Latin America in terms of organised crime: illegal mining. It is precisely in this sphere that the role currently played by the third of the *Tren de Aragua* leaders, Johan Petrica, is situated.
At a certain point Petrica escapes from Tocorón prison and is currently considered the main person responsible for illegal mining activities in northern Venezuela.
If you observe, the three leaders — Larry Changa, Héctor "Niño" Guerrero and Johan Petrica — are no longer in Tocorón prison today. This is significant and should not be forgotten. In 2023, when, following international pressure, the government decided to intervene in Tocorón prison, in an entirely suspicious manner, a few days before the operation almost a thousand *Tren de Aragua* members, including its leadership, fled the prison. This also confirms the level of control the organisation exercised over the prison structure, as I mentioned earlier.
Why do they arrive in Chile? What makes Chile attractive, like Costa Rica or the United States — which has declared the *Tren de Aragua* a terrorist organisation?
We can identify at least four key factors. First: Chile has one of the highest levels of per capita income in South America, which makes it economically attractive.
Second: migratory flows. Chile had never recorded migratory flows of this magnitude like the one from Venezuela; even without criminalising migration, within these flows individuals functional to the organisation's expansion have inserted themselves.
Third: Chile's level of "banking penetration", that is, broad access to the banking system, current accounts and debt instruments. In Chile this level is comparatively very high: most Chilean citizens have access to the banking system, and the same applies to many foreign citizens. In a global context in which crypto-assets and virtual financial flows are increasingly frequent, countries with a high degree of banking penetration represent an incentive for criminal organisations, because they offer greater possibilities to move and reinvest wealth.
There are then further factors that I consider fundamental. It was mentioned a short while ago that in many Latin American countries the homicide rate reaches 20 per 100,000 inhabitants, and in some cases even 40 or 50 per 100,000 — a figure that evidences high levels of territorial conflict.
Chile, historically, has recorded a homicide rate around 3 per 100,000 inhabitants. In a certain period we reached 4.5, but these are still levels significantly lower than other regional contexts. This means that criminal activity in Chile has traditionally been less violent, with organisations that did not systematically resort to homicides, contract killings or extreme violence as a tool of control.
In this scenario, transnational organisations probably believed they could enter the country without having to face strong competition or a high risk of confrontation with local criminal groups, as happened instead in Colombia. When the *Tren de Aragua* arrived in Colombia, for example in the Kennedy neighbourhood in Bogotá, in a single weekend between 20 and 30 homicides were recorded, mainly linked to conflicts between the *Tren de Aragua* and Colombian criminal organisations.
In Chile this did not happen, because there was no strong initial opposition. Our organised crime index was relatively low. In Chile, organised crime was predominantly associated with illicit drug trafficking on a local scale. The *Tren de Aragua*, as I have already said, is characterised as a multi-crime organisation. It exerts strong territorial control and, on the basis of that control, develops various activities: drug trafficking, illicit migrant smuggling, trafficking

in persons for sexual exploitation, arms trafficking and, above all, predatory offences — in Italy also defined as "parasitic" — such as kidnapping for ransom and systematic extortion — the "pizzo" — which is what we are experiencing today in Chile.

If we look quickly at the evolution of the phenomenon, we see that since 2018 — the year Larry Álvarez, known as Larry Changa, one of the *Tren de Aragua* leaders, arrived — the organisation has progressively strengthened its presence in the country. A fundamental element concerns the organisational nature of the Tren de Aragua. According to all investigations conducted, the *Tren de Aragua* does not behave like Cosa Nostra. It is not a rigidly hierarchical organisation, formally structured with bosses, commissions and clearly defined levels.

Rather, as often happens in Latin America, it is an organisation that operates through factions or groups. These are cells that belong to the *Tren de Aragua* brand or structure, but which enjoy a significant degree of autonomy. The relationship is far more horizontal, the average age of members is generally low — they are often very young individuals — and leadership changes frequently.

The different factions also have territorial autonomy with respect to the activities they carry out, which makes the phenomenon more difficult to control and to counter from an investigative standpoint.

Ultimately, if you allow me a comparison with the Italian context, the *Tren de Aragua* is closer to the Camorra model than to that of Cosa Nostra: a more fluid, less hierarchical structure, fragmented into groups or factions that refer to a common identity, often with connections outside Chile.

I would like to highlight one final point. In 2024 and 2025 we delivered very significant blows to the *Tren de Aragua*, which resulted in convictions. One judgment is already final; another was handed down at first instance. These are results that attest to the work carried out by the Office of the National Prosecutor, under the leadership of Ángel Valencia and together with the entire prosecution team, in countering this organisation.

On the map we can observe two fundamental elements. The first concerns what I have just described: the nature of the *Tren de Aragua*'s criminal activity and the way this model is distributed across different countries. The second element concerns the organisation's operational flow, which clearly mirrors migratory flows: from Venezuela to Colombia, from Colombia to Ecuador, from Ecuador to Peru, then Bolivia and Chile. In the same way, the organisation's financial flow also developed.

Continuing, we can see the main activities. As I said, we view the *Tren de Aragua* not only as a criminal organisation in the strict sense, but as a true illicit enterprise, with illegal economic activities aimed at profit. The proceeds are reinvested, both in national economies and abroad. For this reason, it is not only a problem for Chile, but an issue that concerns everyone.

Among the main activities are drug trafficking, human trafficking, migrant smuggling and, in particular, predatory crimes: kidnapping for extortion and systematic extortion. It is an extremely violent group, with characteristics similar to those of other organisations operating in different countries in the region.

We will give a brief overview of some important operations we have carried out in Chile which deserve to be highlighted.

First operation

The first is Operation *Los Gallegos*. *Los Gallegos* was an operational group linked to the *Tren de Aragua* that had established itself in northern Chile, in Arica, on the border with Peru. It was not an organisation directly affiliated with the *Tren de Aragua*, but rather a faction connected through a group operating in Peru, known as the Jayallón dynasty. The geographical chain of connection was therefore: Arica – Peru – Venezuela.

Los Gallegos was an organisation which, while not a formal component of the *Tren de Aragua*, represented one of its operational factions, with trafficking and criminal liaison functions.

To give you an idea of the impact on public security, before 2018 Arica recorded a homicide rate similar to the rest of Chile, around 5–6 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. During the period of peak activity of the *Los Gallegos* group — made up of about 44 members — the homicide rate rose to around 22 per 100,000 inhabitants, i.e. a fivefold increase, with clear repercussions on citizens' perception of safety.

In the end, thanks to a targeted operation, we managed to arrest 44 members of the group. Of these, 24 have already been convicted with sentences that, in total, amount to around 570 years of imprisonment. These convictions are

currently final and the 24 members are in prison.
This example leads us to reflect on a broader challenge for Chile in the coming years. The Tren de Aragua is an organisation that was born and strengthened within prisons. If in Chile we fail to develop a prison system that, at least in part, is inspired by models such as the so-called Italian 41-bis, we will face a serious problem in managing this phenomenon.

Second operation

This operation strikes at the core of the Tren de Aragua. It is the operation we have called TDA 1, promoted by the Office of the Prosecutor of the Tarapacá and Iquique Region.
Why is it significant? Because in this operation Larry Álvarez, known as Larry Changa, is detained and awaiting extradition. In practice, we have been able to bring from Colombian territory to Chile a senior figure of the Tren de Aragua; we will charge and try him in this case, and in these proceedings we will have in the dock the organisation's second or third-ranking figure.
This investigation concerns northern Chile — not the border strip with Peru (Arica), but the border region with Bolivia, namely Tarapacá and Iquique. In this area, the *Tren de Aragua* has stood out for drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, trafficking for sexual exploitation, contract killings and kidnappings.
The Tren de Aragua's second operational leader in Chile, Carlos González Vaca, known as Estrella, was sentenced to life imprisonment about a month ago. Almost all members of the organisation involved in this case have received custodial sentences, and many of them will remain in prison for many years.
To give an example, *Estrella* received sentences that varied — seven years, ten years, twelve years and fifteen years of imprisonment, and a life sentence — depending on the offences charged. This, as the National Prosecutor also underlined, poses a significant challenge: our prisons will come under pressure in terms of control and of the criminal organisation's resilience, which may attempt to continue its activities within the penitentiary system.

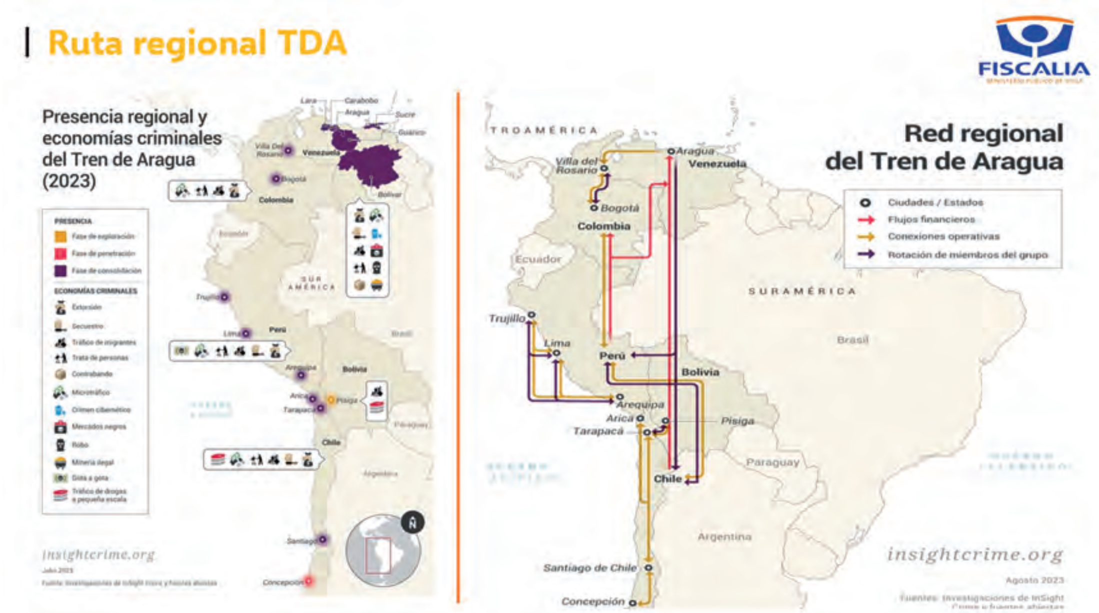
Third operation

The slide shows another significant operation, carried out in Valparaíso, which we called Tren del Mar. Here too, it involved dismantling a Tren de Aragua cell engaged in drug trafficking, kidnappings and extortion. Some members have already been brought to justice.

Fourth operation

This is a highly significant operation: "Los Piratas del Agua", which arose following a kidnapping and, subsequently, a homicide with concealment of the body. The victim was a former Venezuelan serviceman, kidnapped in particularly serious circumstances by a criminal group linked to the Tren de Aragua. The case demonstrates these groups' organisational capacity to kidnap a Venezuelan national on Chilean territory and, within a few days, kill him and bury his body.
The last operation I wish to mention is the one we called "Los Hermanos Cartier". It is significant for two main reasons. The first is that it demonstrates the Tren de Aragua's extraordinary capacity for mobility. The "Hermanos Cartier" were a faction of the organisation operating in southern Chile. If I asked many of you what you think of when you imagine Chile, you would probably say that it is a long, narrow and very extensive country, stretching from Arica in the north to Punta Arenas in the far south.
Well, today our investigations into the Tren de Aragua cover territory ranging from Arica to Puerto Montt: roughly 2,000–2,500 kilometres. The organisation moved along this entire axis, establishing itself in areas where the state was weaker, especially in poor or marginal settlements. From there it exercised territorial control, social control, and developed the criminal activities already described. The second relevant element of the "Hermanos Cartier" operation concerns their main leader, Gabriel Escalante. Escalante has never set foot in Chile. He directed the entire criminal activity remotely, through digital communications and direct messages. He was in Colombia, where he was identified and arrested; he is currently detained in Colombia awaiting extradition to Chile. Without ever physically operating in the country, he coordinated all activities of the faction. We reconstructed this through analysis of seized mobile devices, which made it possible to map the entire remote command structure.
I conclude by returning to the central theme of our meeting: money laundering and its impact on democracy. On the map you see — even if the graphic details are not fully legible — two types of flows: solid lines and dashed lines. About a month ago, the National Prosecutor coordinated an asset operation in three

regions of the country: Tarapacá (north), Valparaíso (centre) and Puerto Montt (south). This was an investigation focused exclusively on financial aspects. We knew the organisation had consolidated its illicit activities. The next step was to follow the "money trail", to verify how and where criminal proceeds were being reinvested. The aim was to understand the organisation's real financial capacity.
What did we discover? Between 2018 and 2022–2023, around 13 million dollars (approximately 13 billion Chilean pesos) were transferred abroad. These funds were mainly sent to Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico and the United States.
Further investigations showed that part of the flows also reached Spain, the Netherlands and Italy. This is the meaning of the different lines shown on the map.
When we speak about strengthening international cooperation, this first and foremost means tracing financial flows, understanding how far the money goes and working jointly. If we manage to strike the organisation's financial structure, we substantially weaken its operational capacity.
Cooperation is also essential for another reason: by analysing the methods used to transfer the funds, we identified systematic exploitation of vulnerabilities in the banking system and, above all, the use of crypto-activities. Crypto-assets proved to be a key tool for transferring significant sums — 13 million dollars is not a marginal figure — from Chile to other countries, with the aim of strengthening the organisation outside our territory.



Session two

Brazilian Criminal Systems

Introduction

Hindenburgo Chateaubriand Filho

Hindenburgo Chateaubriand Filho, Deputy Attorney General of Brazil

I am pleased to be here. I thank Giovanni Melillo for the invitation to participate in this very important event, as well as Giovanni Tartaglia Polcini and IILA for their support within the framework of the Falcone-Borsellino Program.
I have the pleasure of announcing the next speakers, members of the Brazilian State Public Prosecutors' Offices, who will share their experiences and reflections on the phenomenon of organized crime based on the realities of the regions in which they operate. Although many of these criminal groups have by now achieved considerable expansion beyond their territorial borders, these colleagues — specialists in their respective fields — possess solid experience and will be able to offer an overview of the fight against organizations that originated in the territories where they work.
Our speakers are: Antonio José Campos Moreira, Attorney General of Justice of Rio de Janeiro, who will address the issue of the Comando Vermelho and the militias of Rio de Janeiro, with an analysis of the structures and dynamics of organized crime in that State.
He will be followed by Francisco Zanicotti, Attorney General of Justice of Paraná, who will speak about the role of Brazilian criminal organizations in the Tri-Border Area.
Finally, Fabio Ramazzini Bechara, member of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of São Paulo and of GAECO — the Special Action Group against Organized Crime — will speak about the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), illustrating its structure and operating methods in the State of São Paulo.
Allow me just one observation: Brazil, as many of you know, is a federation. There is a Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, competent for the prosecution of federal crimes, and there are also the Public Prosecutors' Offices of the individual federated States, competent for crimes of a state nature.
The power to exercise criminal prosecution is nevertheless unitary in its public function: each office acts according to territorial and subject-matter jurisdiction, depending on where and how the crime was committed.
I now give the floor to Antonio José Campos Moreira.

Josè
Campos Moreira

Attorney General of the State of Rio de Janeiro

Comando Vermelho" and the "Militia": Structure and Dynamics of Organized Crime in the State of Rio de Janeiro

First of all, I wish to extend my greetings and express my thanks to the National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Prosecutor of Italy, Giovanni Melillo, for the opportunity granted to the Brazilian Public Prosecutor's Office, here represented by the Deputy Attorney General of the Republic, by the Attorney General of Justice of the State of Paraná, by Dr. Fabio Bechara, public prosecutor of the State of São Paulo, representatives of some of the principal States of our federation, with very extensive experience in this field.

The privilege that has been granted to me, in my capacity as Attorney General of Justice of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro, is that of bringing these considerations to your attention.

This intervention has, in fact, been prepared jointly by two persons. The institutional commitments of the Attorney General of Justice have prevented me, in recent days, from drafting a more extensive text, but I have prepared some written notes to facilitate translation.

Before entering into the text, however, I wish to provide a brief general context.

The impression — and I believe that today in Brazil this represents a consensus — is that the Brazilian State has taken a long time to recognize that the activity of criminal organizations constitutes a direct threat to the democratic rule of law, undermines the credibility of the institutions that form the foundation of democracy and, above all today, destabilizes the economy.

For many years, the idea prevailed in Brazil that crime was simply a phenomenon deriving from our profound social and regional inequalities. Based on this approach, the Brazilian State has been — and in my view continues to be, particularly from the perspective of criminal legislation — relatively lenient. This has allowed local criminal organizations to expand, grow, and operate not only within Brazilian territory, among the different States of the Federation, but also to extend their activities abroad, especially toward Europe.

I will speak specifically about two of these criminal organizations. I will refer to Comando Vermelho, which is not the only one, but is one of the principal criminal organizations with predominant activity in drug trafficking, and to the Militias, a relatively recent phenomenon, originating in the State of Rio de Janeiro at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s.

I now turn to the current panorama and to the relevance of these international meetings.

In 2024 — and here I adhere to the written text in order to facilitate translation — Brazil recorded 38,772 homicides, equivalent to a rate of 17.9 per 100,000 inhabitants, the lowest level in more than a decade. However, this still represents a figure almost double the limit considered tolerable by the World Health Organization, which is 10 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.

In my State, Rio de Janeiro, areas such as the West Zone — originally a predominantly rural area, which since the 1990s has transformed into the most populous region of the city — recorded an increase of 44% in homicides in 2023: 733 deaths compared to 509 in 2022. This increase is mainly due to the dispute, to a veritable war between criminal organizations for territorial control of very extensive and now densely populated areas.

The militias, which originated at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, are estimated to control approximately 25% of the metropolitan area, involving nearly 2 million people. Therefore, one quarter of the metropolitan area is under the domination of these organizations. Comando Vermelho, especially in the last year — in a context of conflict still ongoing — has reconquered part of this territory and currently exercises control over approxi-

mately 52% of the territorial area of the municipality of Rio de Janeiro.
That is, more than half of the territory is, in fact, outside State action. The State does not enter. The rifle — a weapon of war — has become a weapon of common use. I believe that here in Europe this is something difficult to imagine and, even in other countries of South America, I do not believe there is such a dramatic experience. Today the rifle is used even for the theft of mobile phones: a completely disproportionate, absurd phenomenon.
This scenario demonstrates that, even if national indicators are declining, the impact of organized crime in Rio de Janeiro remains serious and acute, with human, economic, and reputational implications at the international level. The images of disputes for territorial control, disseminated by the local and international press, drive away tourism, and tourism represents one of the principal sources of revenue for the State of Rio de Janeiro. This profoundly compromises our economy.
I now turn to the organizational structure and the internal dynamics of these organizations.

Comando Vermelho

Comando Vermelho was founded in 1979, at the end of the 1970s, in the penitentiary of Ilha Grande, now deactivated. Originally called *Falange Vermelha*, it arose from the encounter between political detainees — highly politicized and with a high cultural level — and the ordinary prison population. From this encounter emerged an organizational capacity that led detainees to unite within the prison and subsequently to expand activities outside.
Comando Vermelho, which is not the only but is the principal criminal organization of Rio de Janeiro, today operates with interstate and transnational activities. Born in prison, it progressively expanded its sphere of action. Currently, Comando Vermelho is not limited to drug trafficking. Starting from territorial control — which today exceeds half of the municipal territory — the organization has diversified its activities. As is well known, **organized crime is an entrepreneurial activity**, an economic activity oriented toward profit and the accumulation of wealth.
Comando Vermelho has therefore diversified its sources of income and, today, it can be stated that drug trafficking has become a secondary activity. The principal activity is the exploitation of services that should be provided by the State. For example: internet, supplied in some areas by clandestine enterprises or formally regular companies but controlled by criminal groups; electricity; water; gas; transport; and naturally extortion.
In this context of territorial domination, drug trafficking has become, paradoxically, a secondary activity. The process of expansion currently underway in Rio de Janeiro is impressive.
From 2020 until today, armed conflicts between traffickers and militiamen have officially caused 28% of deaths in the metropolitan region. I believe the real number may be higher, but the official figure is 28%.
Comando Vermelho, in addition to expanding and diversifying its activities in Brazil, has expanded trafficking toward the Amazon region, an extremely sensitive area, very close to the Andean producing countries. This has resulted in a reduction in the price of cocaine, facilitating its sale toward Europe. Brazil is not a producing country, but it is a transit corridor toward Europe and the United States, with very high profits, especially due to the control of portions of the Amazon region, which today represents an issue of national sovereignty.

The militias

The militias originated in the 2000s. Initially they were composed mainly of public security agents: civil and military police officers, partly still in service, but above all former agents. One of the structural problems concerns precisely the exclusion or expulsion of members of law enforcement — particularly of the military police — who, once out of service, enter organized crime in a direct and visible manner. That initial militia model is progressively disappearing, although militias were born in Rio with the applause and support of a significant part of the population, since initially they presented themselves as groups created to combat drug trafficking. Over time they proved, in many respects, more serious and more dangerous than drug trafficking itself. Today that model is entering into crisis due to ongoing conflicts, and in many of these areas Comando Vermelho has prevailed in territorial disputes.

Former traffickers today act as true military actors. And where there is no conflict — which in my view is the most dangerous situation — traffickers and militiamen unite, aggregate, cooperate, and proceed to exploit together drug trafficking, extortion, and all other illicit activities, highly profitable.
The most serious problem is the increasingly close link between organized crime and sectors of the State. I would say the police forces, but not only the police forces. In other institutions today there is discussion, more specifically, of the PCC — an organization more sophisticated, at least compared with our experience in Rio de Janeiro — which finances preparatory courses so that lawyers may pass public examinations and enter the Public Prosecutor's Office or the judiciary, with the objective of representing, from within State careers, the interests of organized crime.
And there is also the expansion of organized crime into politics, which is certainly the most serious aspect. It is evident that organized crime does not yet dominate politics, but it is already present in some relevant municipalities, in significant numbers in city councils and in other parliaments.

Impacts on public security

A high incidence of armed clashes that leave the civilian population in conditions of vulnerability and, moreover, obstruct police operations, both through ambushes and through road blockages, such as the use of buses to prevent law enforcement action.
And here there is something new in Rio de Janeiro. These groups have always maintained armed confrontation with the police. Today, however, in order to prevent police operations, they go so far as to deliberately target the civilian population. There was an episode in which one of the main circulation arteries of the city was closed because, in response to a police operation in a certain community, another community — in order to prevent the success of the operation — began firing toward the public road, causing the death of several persons.
The high incidence of these clashes entails a progressive loss of the institutional presence of the State in the areas in which militias and Comando Vermelho operate. In reality, these criminal organizations end up replacing the State: they themselves become the State, establish their own rules and apply them through true summary courts. With regard to the economy and citizenship, extortion compromises the quality of services, drives away investors, and imposes on communities a parallel citizenship. In other words, in many communities there is no full citizenship, but a total submission to the power of criminality.

Challenges and possibilities of counteraction

The problem is large, complex, but solutions must be elaborated and implemented. First of all, inter-institutional integration, with a strong orientation toward intelligence. Unfortunately, in Brazil police forces compete with one another; governments do not coordinate; there exists an ideological conflict today devoid of meaning. And while criminality becomes increasingly organized, the State — despite efforts — remains in part disorganized. We have recently had cases of arrest of leaders of Comando Vermelho, of Terceiro Comando Puro — another criminal organization — and of militia members, as a demonstration of this model of integration.
With regard to public services intended for citizens and for the most vulnerable sectors of the population, the ideal is that, parallel to security actions, social reintegration interventions and social services directed toward these poorer communities should be developed, as an antidote to counter the vacuum left by the absence of the State.
And here, as I move toward the conclusion, it is necessary to reiterate that crime today is no longer local, is no longer only interstate: it is transnational. This reinforces the idea of the need to promote and intensify international judicial cooperation.
Meetings such as this do not only allow the presentation of different realities, but above all allow participants to become personally acquainted. And from this knowledge, from this personal proximity, concrete joint actions may arise.
Parallel to the strengthening of integration at the local and national level — among police forces, public prosecutors, and State, municipal, and federal governments — it is fun-

damental, as the most effective repressive action, to concentrate efforts on the financial suffocation of these organizations.
We must modify our legislation, because in Brazil we do not possess the instrument with which Italy is equipped: civil asset confiscation, that is, the possibility of ordering seizure and asset forfeiture even independently of a criminal conviction, in order to strike assets manifestly incompatible with the lawful income of their owner.

Francisco **Zanicotti**

Attorney General of the State of Paraná

The Role of Brazilian Criminal Organizations in the Triple Frontier

On October 24, 1983, the mafioso Tommaso Buscetta was arrested in Brazil. Convicted of murder in Italy, he had escaped with the assistance of a member of parliament. His arrest prompted the magistrate Giovanni Falcone to cross the ocean to interrogate him. Buscetta therefore broke the omertà, the law of silence, and revealed for the first time the internal structure of the Sicilian mafia.

From that moment onward, Italy inaugurated the model of the collaborating witness and initiated the historic Maxi Trial, which led to the conviction of hundreds of mafiosi and forever transformed the fight against organized crime. But this progress had a high cost. In 1992, Falcone and his colleague Paolo Borsellino were assassinated in bomb attacks. They became martyrs of justice and universal symbols of the fight against organized crime. The year following their deaths, on the other side of the Atlantic, the Primeiro Comando da Capital, the PCC, emerged inside a prison in São Paulo. Thirty-two years later, this Brazilian criminal organization counts more than 40,000 members in the country and another 2,078 members distributed in at least 28 countries, many of whom are today detained in European prisons, in Spain, France, the Netherlands, and Ireland. Over time, the PCC has assassinated public prosecutors, judges, and prison officers, increasingly approaching a mafia-type structure.

Being in Palermo and recalling the Italian experience therefore also means looking toward Brazil. It means recognizing that what began here as institutional resistance against the terror of organized crime still echoes and inspires firm, coordinated, and courageous responses that we must build together among our countries. It is with this spirit, the spirit of Palermo, that I address all of you in this city which symbolizes, at the same time, pain and resistance. Palermo carries with it the living memory of two giants of justice, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino. Their names belong not only to the history of Italy, but to the history of humanity, to the universal struggle for legality, institutional courage, and the dignity of victims.

Falcone and Borsellino did not limit themselves to confronting criminals, but also faced corrupt power structures, pacts of silence, threats, and institutional isolation. They did so with lucidity, ethics, and a sense of duty. They paid with their lives, but they left a legacy that inspires all of us, also in Brazil, never to normalize criminality, never to yield to intimidation, and above all to believe in the power of justice built with courage and cooperation.

It is with this spirit, therefore, the spirit of Palermo, that the Public Prosecutor's Office of Paraná presents itself here today to share its experiences and reaffirm its commitment in the global fight against organized crime. I am particularly grateful to the EL PAcCTO Program for having organized this crucial event, which reinforces the importance of international cooperation for security and justice in our continents. I would like to begin by outlining the Brazilian institutional model.

Brazil is a federation of continental dimensions, with judicial and prosecutorial structures — as Prosecutor Hindenburgo recalled — articulated at two levels: federal and state. While cross-border crimes fall within the jurisdiction of the federal judicial system and the Federal Prosecution Service, the majority of crimes of an internal nature are handled by state institutions.

I speak here in my capacity as Attorney General of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of Paraná, a federative unit with a strategic position in South America. Paraná borders Argentina and Paraguay, forming part of the region known as the Triple Frontier, characterized both by the natural exuberance of the Iguazú Falls and by its geopolitical and criminal complexity.

Since the 1940s, the region has experien-

ced significant immigration originating from Syrian, Lebanese, Chinese, and Korean communities, which have come to dominate international cross-border commerce. This economic dynamism, combined with the circulation of large volumes of money, both legal and illicit, has favored the entrenchment of transnational organized crime.
There is evidence, emerging from federal investigations, indicating the presence of activities of the Hezbollah group in the Triple Frontier. It is believed that such presence is linked to Lebanese immigration of the 1980s, particularly within certain Shiite communities, with infiltrations into religious, educational, and commercial activities. Although there is no evidence of terrorist acts, there is solid evidence of involvement in drug trafficking, smuggling, human trafficking, and money laundering. An emblematic case is that of Assad Ahmad Barakat, considered one of Hezbollah's treasurers.
He was arrested in 2018 in Foz do Iguaçu and was extradited to Paraguay in 2020. According to Argentine authorities, he is believed to have laundered more than 10 million dollars in the casinos of the region. Moreover, recent investigations by the Federal Police indicate a close link between Hezbollah and the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC). The connection derives from the use of logistical routes controlled by the PCC, such as the Triple Frontier and the Guarulhos airport, for the transport of narcotics. The presence of the PCC in the Paraná region consolidated itself in the 2000s through the control of trafficking routes, infiltration into the prison system, coercion of local communities, and exploitation of social vulnerabilities.
A strategic point of operations is the port of Paranaguá, an important corridor for legal and illegal exports, with strong links to international criminal networks.
The PCC's operations in Europe take place mainly in partnership with the Calabrian mafia of the 'Ndrangheta. Initially, drugs originating from Brazil arrived at the port of Gioia Tauro, but subsequently began to transit also through Antwerp, in Belgium, and Rotterdam, in the Netherlands. The alliance between these organizations does not represent a merger, but rather a pragmatic relationship based on logistical complementarity. The PCC supplies and distributes; the European mafia receives and commercializes. This entrepreneurial logic of criminality requires an equally rational approach in order to be countered. The response of the Brazilian State to this complex scenario has been multifaceted.
The Public Prosecutor's Office of Paraná, through the special task force GAECO, headquartered in Foz do Iguaçu, has operated on several fronts: the investigation and dismantling of the PCC leadership; the fight against drug trafficking, arms trafficking, and money laundering; as well as the strengthening of international cooperation with law enforcement agencies. One may cite, for example, the recent operation "Floating," launched in July 2025, which resulted in the pre-trial detention of a PCC member, the freezing of one and a half million euros, the seizure of luxury real estate valued at one million euros, and the seizure of luxury vehicles. The name of the operation, which evokes shameless ostentation, symbolizes the conduct of the person under investigation, involved in money laundering and international trafficking, who openly displayed his economic power in defiance of public authority.
Organization, cooperation, and purpose are concepts that criminals have learned and are putting into practice, intensifying their capacity to cause harm and the scope of their actions, which are not limited to specific types of crime.
We must recognize that organized crime has already understood the value of international cooperation, efficient management, and division of labor. They form adaptable networks that migrate between different activities according to profitability or the level of repression.
If drug trafficking becomes more risky, they shift toward smuggling, money laundering, theft of goods, cybercrime, or even infiltration into apparently lawful sectors, such as the fuel trade or the real estate sector.
This convergence of interests and this community of objectives should also be better valued by us, operators of law enforcement. Without protagonism, with attention to the common good, and in remembrance of the victims of crimes, I am certain that we can progress in the fight against these criminal and violent associations.

In the deep south of Brazil, in a region characterized by complex land and maritime borders, which constantly test the action of the State, the Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of Paraná has confronted with firmness and coordination the threats of organized crime. Members of criminal factions under our custody are duly identified, mapped, and monitored. With the support of state and federal police forces, we have managed to impose significant obstacles to the operations of these organizations.
But containment is not sufficient. Our objective is not only to resist, but to advance. And to do so we need allies. We will not win this war alone. The experience of EL PAcCTO, with its integrated approach, represents a clear example of how international cooperation can have a transformative impact. Coordination among police, judicial, and penitentiary systems, combined with normative harmonization and the exchange of strategic intelligence between Latin America and Europe, constitutes an essential foundation for a qualified and coordinated response to transnational crime.
It is a response that transcends borders and recognizes that organized crime operates in networks and, therefore, must be countered with institutional networks that are even more solid and coordinated, committed to the protection of legality and the protection of citizens. Ultimately, combating transnational organized crime does not require isolated efforts, but rather a collective commitment, constant dialogue, and effective cooperation among institutions that share the same values and face the same challenges. The Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of Paraná is fully committed to this mission.
We are ready to collaborate, to learn, and to contribute with our experience in the fight against a phenomenon that, ignoring geographic borders, represents a concrete and urgent threat both to Latin America and to Europe.
May this meeting represent a further step toward a solid, strategic, and lasting alliance between our continents.

Fabio
Bechara

Public Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of São Paulo, GAECO Group

The "Primeiro Comando da Capital": Structure and Dynamics of Organized Crime in the State of São Paulo

Good morning to everyone.
I wish to express my profound gratitude to the National Anti-Mafia and Anti-Terrorism Prosecutor of Italy, Dr. Giovanni Melillo, for the invitation and for his constant commitment to the promotion of international cooperation, as well as to his entire team.
A special thanks to Dr. Giovanni Tartaglia Polcini and Dr. Claudia Gatti, at the head of the project and of EL PAcCTO, for the hospitality and generosity. I extend my thanks to Dr. Hindemburgo Chateaubriand, Deputy Attorney General of the Republic of Brazil, and to Dr. Paolo Gonê for their commitment and leadership capacity in favor of the unity of the Brazilian Public Prosecutor's Office.
I thank Attorney General Antonio José Campos Moreira of Rio de Janeiro and Francisco Zanicotti of Paraná, and I address a very heartfelt thanks to my colleague Lincoln Gakiya, a companion in work and in the fight against organized crime for almost twenty years.
I would like to make a premise. Twenty-five years ago I was here to participate in the Falcone and Borsellino course with Italian colleagues. That experience, in July 2000, changed my mindset and marked a turning point in my life and in my career as a prosecutor. I allow myself to begin this presentation with a reflection. We live in times of war. Today in the world there are more than fifty conflicts underway. War represents an economic opportunity for organized crime.
We must be aware of this.
I would like to pose three provocative questions.
The first: is the Primeiro Comando da Capital today a truly transnational criminal organization?
The second: has it integrated itself into international networks?
The third: what are the most effective strategies to counter it at the global level?
The available evidence — based on investigations, interceptions, international operations, and analysis of financial flows — suggests an affirmative answer.
The PCC is today one of the most relevant non-state actors in the international criminal scenario. Its structure, its coordination capacity, its presence in at least 23 countries, and its operational versatility make it a paradigmatic case for the study of the new forms of organized crime.
Criminal economies form a convergent and borderless ecosystem. Drug trafficking, money laundering, human trafficking, corruption, and environmental crimes integrate into a complex network. The PCC inserts itself into this system as a central, dynamic, and adaptable actor, endowed with its own transcontinental connections.
The decision-making time of our institutions has changed. The need for cooperation has also changed, both at the operational level and at the strategic level.
The Primeiro Comando da Capital, as already recalled, was born on August 31, 1993, in the Custody Facility of Taubaté, in the State of São Paulo, following the bloody massacre that occurred in the Carandiru prison in 1992. A small group of detainees initially organized themselves for mutual protection against abuses of the penitentiary system, but rapidly structured an internal code, a statute, and an operational hierarchy.
The name, evocative of a revolutionary force, subsequently transformed into a symbol of power, discipline, and command. The organization established a rudimentary form of prison governance, imposing rules, punishments, and developing an ideological narrative that mixed social struggle and criminal pragmatism. From the outset, the PCC has maintained a segmented but efficient structure, articulated in "brothers" (baptized members), opera-

tional "sintonias," sectoral leaderships, and disciplinary commissions.
Activities initially concentrated on prison control, extortion, and internal drug trafficking. Over time, the organization extended its sphere of action at the national level and subsequently internationally, while nevertheless maintaining the command base within the penitentiary system.
Prison, however, is not only a place of detention: it is also an environment for building ties, recruitment, and co-optation. It is in the prison space, but also in the territories controlled by criminal organizations, that connections are established, alliances consolidated, and an operational method exported. The transnational projection of the PCC is the direct result of this dynamic. Prison becomes the incubator of a worldview, a mentality, and a praxis that are reflected in society, in the economy, and in the relationship with the State. This structure has guaranteed the PCC an incredible operational resilience. Even with the main leaders incarcerated, operations continue, financed through a "common fund" and coordinated thanks to the use of encrypted communications, shared rules, and an almost religious loyalty among members.
Leadership is entrusted to the "*Final Sintonia*," with sectoral branches dedicated to logistics, finance, international expansion, and regional coordinations present in all Brazilian states and in numerous foreign countries. Members swear loyalty through a true "baptism" and are subject to strict rules of internal discipline, to their own judicial system, and to reserved communication channels. The PCC is today active in countries of Latin America, in Europe, in Asia, and in the United States. Paraguay represents the principal external hub, with hundreds of members. Connections have been reported in Venezuela, Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, Colombia, Switzerland, Ireland, and other countries.
The port of Santos constitutes the principal hub for the export of cocaine to Europe. The PCC uses contaminated containers, triangulations through African countries, artisanal submarines, and private jets. Logistics are based on false documents, shell companies, and corrupt officials.
An emblematic case is the homicide of Antonio Vinícius Gritzbach, a cooperating witness, in 2024, which revealed real estate investments and suspicious financial flows. Investments in real estate, fintech, and crypto-assets emerged. The PCC launders money through fuel stations, construction companies, digital banks, cryptocurrencies, reorganized companies, betting platforms, football teams, churches, and public procurement contracts. Moreover, infiltration into the public transport system of São Paulo has emerged, as we demonstrated last year during an investigation.
Further operations of the Federal Police and the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office in Brazil have confirmed links with Balkan mafias, Italian organizations, and Colombian cartels.
Transfers amounting to 371 million euros and cocaine transports with private jets toward Belgium, Spain, and the United Kingdom have been documented. Among the names involved are Armando Pacani and Aleksandar Nesic, arrested in Brazil.
In 2024, the Public Prosecutor's Office of São Paulo also exposed a covert financing operation aimed at influencing municipal elections through NGOs, public contracts, and fictitious companies. This is proof of the PCC's capacity to destabilize the democratic State, as stated by Antonio José Campos Moreira.
The PCC provides a form of parallel justice, social assistance, and security in peripheries abandoned by the State, creating genuine para-state structures. Conflicts with other factions generate violence, as demonstrated by disputes over the control of betting markets in Rio, Ceará, and Rondônia.
Joint operations with Europol, Interpol, the DEA, and other agencies represent a major challenge: it is necessary to promote legislative harmonization, ensure access and analytical capacity regarding blockchain and cloud environments, strengthen asset investigations, and improve interoperability between databases.
It is essential to strengthen joint investigative teams, include financial oversight authorities, intensify port monitoring, use asset confiscation tools, and invest in education and social prevention — and to do so simultaneously.
But all of this will not be sufficient without a profound change in approach and mindset.

A more interdisciplinary and interinstitutional vision is required, capable of overcoming bureaucratic and sectoral barriers. It is also necessary to reinterpret the complexity of the criminal phenomenon and adapt the planning and execution of responses.

The time of decisions has accelerated, while State structures often remain anchored to a bureaucratic, dysfunctional, and asymmetrical model, unsuitable to confront flexible, transnational, and continuously evolving threats. Should we perhaps also adopt in Latin America the term "mafia"? A common language strengthens cooperation.

Brazil plays a key role as a logistical hub and regional power. The challenge is global, and the response must be equally global. The PCC is today, in all respects, a transnational mafia, endowed with military, economic, political, and social capacities. It is imperative to understand it in order to prevent it.

Only through an integrated vision, effective international coordination, and clear political will will it be possible to build an adequate response. Its networks extend across four continents, and its model is potentially replicable by other criminal groups. Its networks extend across four continents, and its model has already been replicated by other groups. It is therefore imperative to act not only to repress the phenomenon, but to understand it, anticipate it, and prevent it.

Ultimately, the study of the PCC requires revisiting the classical concepts of organized crime.

Its capacity for international articulation, infiltration into economic and legal sectors, and management of consensus in urban peripheries constitute new challenges for criminal law, public policies, and international judicial cooperation. Strengthening asset investigation tools, digital forensics, the regulated development of open-source intelligence, and interoperability between databases represent some of the priorities. The fight is no longer only national, but global, and requires an integrated, continuous, and multilevel vision.

Thank you again for your attention and for the shared commitment in building an effective, fair, and coordinated response against organized crime.

I would like to conclude with a brief story that was told to me. A person went to his therapist. The therapist placed before him a glass of water filled halfway and asked whether he was an optimist or a pessimist. The person drank the water and replied that he was a problem solver.

All of us are problem solvers.

Thank you.

Third Session

European Experiences in Combating the Laundering of Proceeds from Drug Trafficking

Introduction

Barbara Sargenti

Magistrate Coordinator of the International Co-operation Service of the National Anti-Mafia and Anti-Terrorism Directorate

We resume our work with the third session. As you can see from the program, this panel is dedicated to the analysis of the other segment, namely the European one, in relation to the transnational fight against the criminal activities about which we have already heard this morning.
We have had a detailed overview of the integrations and connections between criminal systems not only in Latin America, but also between Latin America and European countries.
We have heard how it is necessary to consider in a unified manner that part of the criminal world which we could summarize as the area in which the logic of drug exportation prevails, as the most evident manifestation of criminal activity, around which, however, revolve significant activities connected to the financial world: the flow of payments, underground banking, cyber activities instrumental both to transactions and to communications, and, moreover, the entire laundering phase. We consider it important to distinguish, not only as a conceptual category, laundering understood as the investment of criminal proceeds, from the further activities relating to financial flows, which include payments, advances, or compensations of corrupt transactions, a phenomenon intimately connected with this criminal system. One thus moves from a perspective of distribution logic, typically European, to that of countries in which export logic prevails.
Both in investigative activities in Europe and in those carried out in the other part of the world, it has been observed how these integrations between criminal systems operate in both blocks. It is not therefore an alliance between individual criminal groups that requires exclusively the creation of a bridge between two separate realities, but rather an integration already existing within each block, with respect to which it is necessary to strengthen the connection between two already structured systems.
We have heard the Brazilian colleagues speak of an integrated presence of members of Brazilian criminal organizations, in particular the Primeiro Comando da Capital, in 28 countries outside Brazil. With regard to Europe, reference has been made in particular to Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands. We have also heard about integration with the Albanian mafia, present not only in Europe but also in several areas of South America.
This is the starting scenario on which our colleagues are invited to intervene. I therefore immediately give the floor, according to the order of the program, to the Chief Prosecutor for Organized Crime at the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the Republic of Serbia.

Mladen Nenadič

Chief Prosecutor for Organized Crime at the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the Republic of Serbia

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Serbia and, in particular, the Public Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime of the Republic of Serbia.

Today, organized crime is an extremely harsh global reality. While our nations are still struggling to build truly effective mutual cooperation, criminals have long overcome these obstacles, forming multi-ethnic networks and rendering national borders irrelevant for their activities. Over the past 15–20 years, organized criminal groups originating from the Balkans have significantly expanded their sphere of action beyond their region of origin. Today, we can speak of true global actors exporting their activities not only beyond the Balkans, but also beyond Europe.

The experience gained in supplying scarce goods during the war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s constituted the foundation for the development of criminal activities in drug trafficking and for the acquisition of shares in the global market.

Membership in organized crime in this region is often associated with Serbia. However, it is necessary to emphasize that citizens are involved not only from Serbia, but also from Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia — all citizens who previously belonged to a single State, the former Yugoslavia, and who share a common language, customs, and traditions.

Balkan criminal groups have become key actors in the drug trafficking chain, from procurement to distribution. They often maintain direct and exclusive connections with cartels and cocaine producers in Latin America and have established themselves as key suppliers in Europe and other countries. In addition to organizing transatlantic transport, these groups have solid contacts in loading ports in countries such as Ecuador, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Aruba. They use increasingly sophisticated tools to conceal illicit goods and evade customs controls: specially modified vehicles, aircraft for the distribution of narcotics, and for the transport of money.

Trafficking destinations include ports in Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, and Croatia. In recent years, Serbian authorities have not received information indicating Italy as a primary destination country for narcotics transported by Balkan traffickers; however, links with Italian criminals exist, particularly in the distribution phase.

Organized criminal groups under investigation by the Serbian Public Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime have been prosecuted in recent years in 40 criminal proceedings, with charges relating to the trafficking of more than 20 tons of cocaine seized in Western Europe, originating from European and Latin American ports. This demonstrates the seriousness of the criminal organizations that Serbian authorities and partner services of other countries have had to confront.

These organized criminal groups are at the forefront in the use of the most modern technologies available to conceal their communications. The seizure of Sky ECC servers by the competent judicial authorities of the French Republic, whose data were shared with Serbian authorities through international judicial assistance, led to the discovery of millions of communications and exchanges of information between members of organized criminal groups, in which the operations of procurement, transport, and distribution of narcotics were detailed.

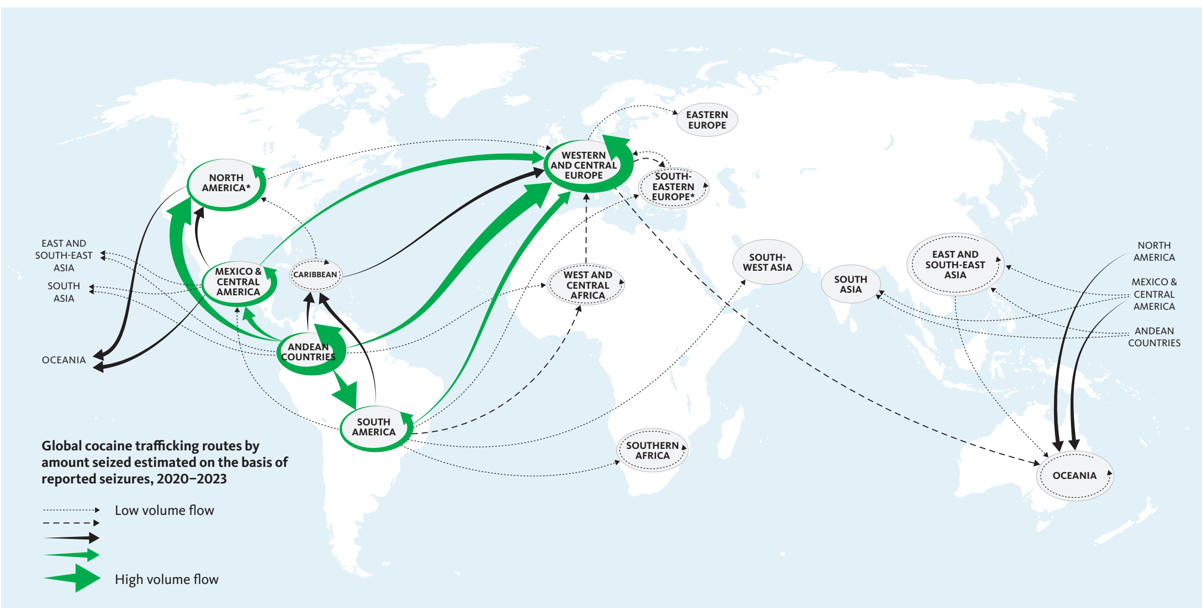
Following the dismantling of Sky ECC and other platforms, criminals moved to new secure communication channels. Considering that French colleagues possess a legal framework that allows the decryption of such platforms, it will be necessary to adapt the legal frameworks of other countries to new communication technologies, in order to be able to use such materials as evidence in criminal proceedin-

gs, since traditional interception methods are now outdated.
In addition to drug trafficking, Balkan groups are involved in numerous other illegal activities aimed at acquiring and consolidating a dominant role in the criminal environment and obtaining control of the market; these groups do not hesitate to commit the most serious crimes. The brutality they employ against their competitors in the drug market is comparable to that of the most notorious Mexican criminal cartels: in some cases, they have dismembered rivals, shredding their bodies with machinery and throwing the remains into rivers. The case of the murder of Hela Milov in Ecuador demonstrates that Serbian criminals settle accounts with their adversaries and with disloyal members of the clan anywhere in the world. This murder was ordered by the leader of an organized criminal group convicted in Serbia for trafficking more than six tons of cocaine, who is currently subject to a third criminal proceeding. In addition to these mafia-type organized criminal groups, Serbian prosecutors have also identified organizations that today export their know-how in marijuana production to countries of Western Europe.
In recent times, the importance of organized criminal groups that provide services and logistical support to other organized criminal groups, as well as to individual actors within the criminal world, has increased. These activities include the counterfeiting of personal documents, driver's licenses, and certificates, as well as professional money laundering as an autonomous and specialized activity.
Considering that the purpose of organized crime and the aim of committing crimes is the acquisition of financial profit and the attainment of economic and even social power, the constant tendency to integrate illicit proceeds into legal channels through money laundering is evident, as is the effort to confer an appearance of legality and social acceptability upon their activities. In most cases, money originating from drug trafficking is laundered predominantly within the national jurisdiction, through investments in the real estate sector, in modern and profitable economic sectors, as well as through the purchase of luxury cars, watches, and jewelry, using family members and close relatives as nominees.
However, in recent years, a tendency has also been observed to invest in the real estate sector in other countries, in locations of neighboring States or European Union countries that constitute destinations of smuggled cocaine and in which these groups have developed their activities.
In this context, it is necessary to intensify international cooperation with regard to the identification of assets and the tracing of financial flows in all countries involved in the development of these activities, from Latin America to Europe. It is essential that the exchange of information on drug trafficking activities be accompanied by the exchange of data relating to the assets of criminals, in order to make their confiscation more efficient both in countries of origin and in countries where criminal activities have been developed. Consideration should also be given to concluding agreements on the sharing of confiscated assets, in order to provide both parties with an additional incentive to act more quickly and effectively in the management and allocation of such assets.
In the case of the so-called "Balkan Cartel," a financial investigation conducted by the Public Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime identified significant assets belonging to the organizer and members of the criminal group in Serbia and Montenegro, with a value exceeding 6.5 million euros. A similar situation exists in the case of Darko Šarić, against whom criminal proceedings for money laundering are ongoing. Assets of illicit origin belonging to members of his clan, amounting to tens of millions of euros, have been seized.
However, in addition to the traditional laundering methods already mentioned, this group went further, investing dirty money in the acquisition and privatization of agricultural companies, manufacturing enterprises, hotels, and other activities.
Organized criminal groups use the construction sector to launder illicit money, investing in the construction of luxury residential and commercial complexes. For this purpose, they established or used already existing companies registered in the names of nominees, which allowed them to further "clean" criminally derived capital. Furthermore, money is invested in legal businesses that generate legi-

timate income, thus making the identification and seizure of illicit funds more difficult. To introduce dirty money into legal circuits, criminals rely on professional intermediaries such as lawyers, bank officials, accountants, tax advisors, currency exchange operators, and other actors.
Money derived from drug sales is transported across borders through hidden compartments in vehicles or luggage, and even on trucks transporting goods destined for Serbia. In one case, for example, we discovered large amounts of cash derived from drug sales in Europe transported on refrigerated trucks carrying flowers.
This group, specialized in transporting narcotics and laundering money from Antwerp towards Europe, provided services to Serbian criminals, as well as to criminals from other countries in the region, including Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and other States.
Although it is observed that dirty money is still integrated into the financial system through traditionally used sectors, criminals continue to seek new and increasingly sophisticated methods to launder illicit proceeds. Investments of dirty money in cryptocurrencies have been detected, which represents an additional challenge for the tracing of financial flows.
Such activity would not be possible without corruption, the crucial link that allows the machinery of organized crime and money laundering to function without obstacles. Corruption is the lubricant of this machine. It allows criminals to evade the law, gain access to confidential information, obtain false documents, and influence judicial proceedings. When public officials — operating within administration, police forces, or the judiciary — allow themselves to be corrupted, they open the doors wide to organized crime. At that moment, such a connection becomes a systemic challenge that erodes State authority, undermines citizens' trust, and endangers democracy itself.
In the Balkans, including Serbia, we are witnessing attempts by organized criminal groups to establish deep connections with the police, the judiciary, and even political circles. Over the past five years, the Public Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime of Serbia has criminally prosecuted a former State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior, a Deputy Director of Police, the Head of the Police Administration of the second largest city in Serbia, several commanders of police units responsible precisely for combating organized crime and corruption, as well as members of various intelligence agencies.
Connections between organized crime in the Balkans and Europe do not constitute a new phenomenon, nor are they exclusive to our region. History is rich with examples of criminal organizations that have managed to penetrate different levels of the State apparatus.
But precisely here we must draw a parallel with Italy, with its heroic fight against the mafia and with the sacrifices Italy has made to contain the tentacles of the mafia. We recall — and today we commemorate the anniversary — that turning point in the fight against organized crime. I cannot help but reflect on those events at the end of the twentieth century, when the mafia was at the peak of its power. It did not hesitate to challenge the State directly, convinced of its own strength.
In that battle, two names shine as solemn symbols of integrity and unwavering determination: Judge Giovanni Falcone and Judge Paolo Borsellino, who personally embodied the fight for the rule of law. Despite threats, knowing that their lives were in danger, Falcone and Borsellino continued to confront mafia networks and their connections with State structures.
Following the Maxi Trial, which inflicted a devastating blow on the mafia, the criminal organization assassinated them in the most brutal manner possible. Those explosions were not mere murders: they were true acts of war against the State, a message intended to demonstrate that no one would be safe if they dared to oppose it.
Their tragic fate shook Italy and not only Italy: it shook the entire world. At the same time, however, it ignited an extraordinary reaction of resistance and determination. The State and society understood that it was a matter of survival. The fight intensified, stricter measures were adopted, and awareness of the mafia threat increased further. The mafia was weakened, its power reduced, and its connections with State structures were at least partially severed.

We too today face a similar challenge. We confront organized crime that attempts to penetrate every segment of society. We must not allow fear to paralyze us, nor allow power to blind us. We must assume our responsibilities and demonstrate integrity in this crucial confrontation.
This means:
1. determination in applying the law without exceptions and regardless of the name, position, or power of an individual: justice must be impartial;
2. stronger cooperation between all competent State institutions and with international partners. We all agree: crime knows no borders, and our fight must know none;
3. zero tolerance for corruption at every level, especially within police forces, prosecution offices, and the judiciary. Those called to protect the law must not be those who violate it;
4. protection and support for those who dare to oppose crime, whether prosecutors, police officers, journalists, or ordinary citizens.
And every episode of struggle and its consequences should remind us of the cost of inaction, but above all of the strength of the individual and the State when united in the fight for justice, integrity, and fairness, which must not be hindered. Let sacrifice be an example and motivation for us, here and now, to demonstrate the same determination. Only through uncompromising dedication can we build a society in which the rule of law is inviolable and organized crime is pushed to the margins.
The fight is long, but we must be determined to win it.
Thank you very much.

7.3.1 Main cocaine trafficking flows as described in reported seizures, 2020–2023



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

The size of the route is based on the total amount seized on that route, according to the information on trafficking routes provided by Member States in the annual report questionnaire, individual drug seizures and other official documents, over the 2020–2023 period. The routes are determined on the basis of reported country of departure/transit and destination in these sources. As such, they need to be considered as broadly indicative of existing trafficking routes while several secondary routes may not be reflected. Route arrows represent the direction of trafficking: origins of the arrows indicate either the area of departure or the one of last provenance, end points of arrows indicate either the area of consumption or the one of next destination of trafficking. Therefore, the trafficking origin may not reflect the country in which the substance was produced. Please see the Methodology section of this document.

** North America excluding Mexico. South-Eastern Europe including Türkiye.*

Sources: UNODC.

Rosa Ana
Morán Martínez

Head Prosecutor of the Special Anti-Drug Prosecutor's Office

Good evening. It is an immense honor for me to be here.

I am deeply moved to be present in this room. The image of the Italian magistrates Falcone and Borsellino before me represents both a profound emotion and a great responsibility. It was precisely they who initiated international cooperation in this field, particularly in money laundering; if today we can rely on such significant tools and results, it is thanks to them. As Newton said, if we have reached this point and are able to see further, it is because we stand on the shoulders of giants.

With regard to my area of competence on money laundering, I will simply recall that the latest United Nations report states that between 2% and 5% of global GDP derives from money laundering — that is, money originating from illegal activities and subsequently laundered. Concretely, in Spain this amounts to approximately two million euros laundered each year. Most of these illegal markets, according to the latest European report, originate from drug trafficking, which continues to be the main source of money laundering.

Sometimes, when observing what we do, the outcome may appear discouraging. However, we cannot give up: we must continue working. In this context, my intention is first to present the Prosecutor's Office where I work, in order to explain how we are organized. Just as the Italian Anti-Mafia Directorate was created in response to the mafia phenomenon, in Spain in 1988 — in response to massive drug trafficking concentrated in Galicia, based on heroin and responsible for numerous deaths among young people — the Special Anti-Drug Prosecutor's Office was established.

The Special Anti-Drug Prosecutor's Office assumed part of the powers previously attributed to the Prosecutor's Office before the Audiencia Nacional, resulting in the creation of two separate prosecution bodies. We operate largely within the central structure, in the operational section that I direct at the Audiencia Nacional, with jurisdiction over drug trafficking offenses.

The *Audiencia Nacional* is a court that, to facilitate understanding, may be compared to a federal court: it centralizes jurisdiction from all provinces in drug-related matters involving criminal organizations. This is the first jurisdictional criterion.

The second criterion concerns cases involving the territory of more than one province. That criterion was certainly appropriate in 1988, but today it is no longer sufficient. Since taking office at the Anti-Drug Prosecutor's Office, I have sought to promote a review of jurisdictional rules, because today the relevant dimension is not intra-provincial but international.

For example, a major international drug trafficking organization may operate in Spain, and from an evidentiary standpoint only a connection with the province of Valencia may emerge because a container with twenty tons of drugs entered through that port. Under the current criterion, the proceedings should be handled in Valencia. However, the structure of the *Audiencia Nacional* and that of the Anti-Drug Prosecutor's Office would be more appropriate to assume jurisdiction, precisely because of the international and organized nature of the phenomenon.

On the other hand, we are observing that most criminal organizations involved in drug trafficking maintain relationships with public officials or port workers and are therefore closely linked to corruption phenomena. Corruption, if investigated exclusively at the regional level, is in practice impossible to combat effectively. In order to prevent certain situations, it should be investigated already at the moment suspicious shipments or anomalous activities are detected.

Currently we are seventeen prosecutors within the Prosecutor's Office operating before the *Audiencia Nacional*. We perform a coordination function: I am responsible for coordinating the fight against drug trafficking throughout

Spain through delegates located in various provinces. Not all provinces have delegates; they are mainly present in coastal provinces, since drugs enter predominantly by sea, as well as in certain inland provinces such as Madrid, Seville, Lleida, Toledo, and Guadalajara. In total there are thirty-one anti-drug delegates who operate in a coordinated manner with the Anti-Drug Prosecutor's Office: they work in a decentralized manner but under unified coordination.

From the international perspective, I consider it appropriate to highlight several fundamental aspects. The Anti-Drug Prosecutor's Office is competent — subject to the final decision of the judges — to handle extradition requests and European arrest warrants when they concern drug trafficking offenses or money laundering deriving from drug trafficking.

For example, this morning, within the networking activities we conduct in REFAIC, we received an urgent communication from Argentina informing us of the arrest of a female drug trafficker. This type of notification is extremely useful.

Yesterday we arrested one of the main individuals sought by Italy, but we had received no prior notification. It is always useful for us to receive any information — even through a simple message or email — to inform us of the arrest of a person who may appear before the *Audiencia Nacional*, so that we can be updated promptly.

If necessary, we can request pre-trial detention, but the judge does not always order detention: we must provide all evidentiary material so that the judge can assess the request.

We also intervene in all proceedings initiated abroad that, through mechanisms of transfer or consolidation of jurisdiction, are handled before the Audiencia Nacional, for example in cases of extradition or transfer of jurisdiction, as well as in the execution of requests for international judicial assistance and European Investigation Orders relating to drug trafficking offenses committed by organizations operating in several provinces.

We have a historic and particularly productive memorandum with France, under which all investigative activities in drug trafficking conducted in jurisdictions specialized in organized crime are transmitted and executed through the Special Anti-Drug Prosecutor's Office.

This is a model that we consider worthy of being shared, because it allows not only the acceleration of procedures but also the acquisition of relevant information about organizations operating in Spain. Through letters rogatory and assistance requests, we can identify operational networks and, where appropriate, establish joint investigative teams to conduct coordinated and parallel investigations.

In addition to jurisdiction over drug trafficking, the Special Anti-Drug Prosecutor's Office also deals with money laundering, particularly where there is a predicate offense connected to drug trafficking.

The Spanish Anti-Money Laundering Service has identified that approximately 75% of money laundering proceedings show a strong correlation with drug trafficking.

For this reason, we decided to adopt a new strategy aimed at increasing the number of investigations in the field of money laundering. The lines of action we have established — and which I personally consider fundamental — are three.

First, the systematic opening of asset investigation files whenever drug trafficking proceedings are initiated, particularly when there are indications of significant or disproportionate assets. I am thinking, for example, of cases in which formally indigent individuals deposit large amounts as bail to obtain release, sometimes through front persons or via particularly wealthy lawyers. Situations of this type constitute a clear indicator of possible illicit financial flows.

Second, we have initiated periodic collection of information from the delegated anti-drug prosecutors in order to maintain an updated and coordinated overview of risk situations from an asset perspective.

Finally — and I consider this an essential point — we have organized a system of asset investigations targeting individuals subject to extradition requests or European arrest warrants. We have indeed observed that many of these individuals live far beyond their declared means. In numerous cases, even when the individual is subject to extradition, family members continue to reside in Spain in conditions of evident economic prosperity. These are situations in which entire families maintain an extremely high standard of living without a clear source of financial resources. I will not mention names, but we are referring to drug traffickers well known in Latin America. In one such case, we informed the Paraguayan Prosecutor's Office so that a money laundering investigation could be initiated.

Regarding the legal framework, I will not go into the technical details of European directives, but it is important to recall that the European Union has reached its sixth Anti-Money Laundering Directive, imposing increasingly stringent obligations on Member States.

In Spain this has resulted in legislative amendments and the introduction of new operational tools. The Fourth Directive, in particular, emphasized transparency and control of financial transactions.

The Fourth Directive of 2015 — as I mentioned — represents a turning point and introduces fundamental measures: it aims to ensure greater transparency regarding beneficial ownership, imposing the identification of the ultimate beneficial owner and strengthening customer due diligence obligations on banks and financial institutions, which must submit reports to the Anti-Money Laundering Service (SEPBLAC). It also expands the definition of politically exposed persons, extending the list of individuals subject to enhanced scrutiny. Another central element is the introduction of a threshold for cash payments.

These rules may appear, at first glance, of limited practical relevance, but in reality they have had very concrete effects. The limitation on cash payments, for example, was decisive in a recent and significant anti-drug operation in which a very high-ranking official was arrested: the head of the Economic and Financial Crime Unit of the National Police of Madrid. In his case, approximately twenty million euros in cash were found hidden inside a wall.

The reason is clear: the impossibility of moving or using large quantities of cash without triggering reporting obligations to SEPBLAC makes it extremely difficult to introduce money into the legal financial circuit. Cash payments above certain thresholds are immediately reported to the anti-money laundering service. This demonstrates that, although in some areas there is still significant use of cash — because not all drug traffickers are particularly sophisticated — major cases continue to emerge. It has happened before: recently, for example, twenty-five individuals connected to an anti-drug operation were identified in which large amounts of money were hidden beneath the floor of a villa, in the so-called "*Miami case.*"

Subsequently, the Fifth EU Directive imposed additional obligations and led us to strengthen our operational structures. It requires all cryptocurrency operators to submit reports, establishes registers of beneficial ownership, further expands the list of politically exposed persons, introduces reporting obligations for high-value assets, and provides for enhanced due diligence in transfers to countries considered high risk.

I will not elaborate on the issue of high-risk countries, but it is well known that many of you — particularly our European colleagues — have followed closely the recent decision of the European Commission and Spain to remove a certain country, namely the United Arab Emirates, from the so-called grey list. This is a relevant issue, also because numerous drug traffickers — both yours and ours — operate or reside in that context.

This 2018 Directive, currently in full implementation, starts from a fundamental assumption: we can no longer search for money exclusively at the national level. It is essential to cooperate and strengthen international cooperation. To do so, we must have access to broad, timely, and shareable information.

Within this regulatory framework, one of the most useful tools created in Spain is the register of beneficial ownership, managed by the Anti-Money Laundering Service. It is an essential instrument for identifying ultimate beneficiaries and for more effectively tracing suspicious financial flows.

This register contains data updated every fifteen days relating to all current accounts and financial accounts held by natural or legal persons in Spain. In the past, to obtain information on bank accounts it was necessary to contact the Tax Agency, but data were updated only once a year. Today, updates occur every fifteen days.

The register of financial entities includes information relating to current accounts, financial accounts, account holders, and other identifying data. It does not include balances or transactions. However, once an investigation has been initiated, it is possible to submit a specific request to obtain from the register the complete list of accounts held by a particular person. Based on that information, balances, transactions, and any further necessary details can subsequently be requested.

It is an extremely effective tool. Initially its use was limited exclusively to terrorism and organized crime investigations. Currently its scope has been expanded. Moreover, whereas initially access to the data was reserved only to judges, today law enforcement authorities may also consult the register of account holders with financial institutions.

You may also request this information from us. This is the key point: the data contained in the register of financial account holders are available to you within the framework of international cooperation, provided that a duly reasoned judicial assistance request is transmitted containing the elements necessary to provide the requested data.

We also have a system called the "neutral point," which allows identification, within the course of a single morning, of all bank accounts held by a specific individual. It is a fully regulated mechanism; there are no difficulties in obtaining the information provided the request is justified. Naturally, data protection rules remain applicable. A similar regime applies to the new register of beneficial ownership. This is a register in which all real ownership interests relating to shareholdings — limited liability companies, joint-stock companies — registered in official registries are identified. Such information is also available to Spanish prosecutors and, within the framework of cooperation, may be shared with you.

Cooperation within the European Union has improved significantly, although some delays remain at times. The information we have in Europe for anti-money laundering purposes is shareable. European directives establish that measures adopted by the Union to combat money laundering must comply with international standards and be equally rigorous.

Another relevant aspect concerns Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) reports. As you know, such reports are confidential and cannot be used as evidence in criminal proceedings; however, they may constitute the basis for initiating an investigation. If you request such information, we can transmit it, specifying that it cannot be used directly as evidence in proceedings and that this limitation must be expressly indicated. In our case, subject to the consent of the Financial Intelligence Unit, we may share the data.

Regarding the transfer of financial data to third countries, the directive provides that this may occur only under the conditions established in Chapter V of Regulation 2016 and Chapter V of Directive 2016/680 concerning data protection and the safeguarding of sensitive information.

Today we have overcome bank secrecy, but we have encountered the obstacle of data protection and, above all, the difficulty of sharing information with third countries. Within the European Union these problems do not arise significantly; they arise instead in relations with non-EU countries. The European Commission, while imposing certain conditions, has not yet taken sufficient steps to formally declare the compatibility of data protection systems in certain Latin American countries with the European system. Yet substantial work has been carried out. I believe that countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia, and Brazil have systems fully compatible with European data protection standards. Nevertheless, difficulties in information sharing persist and additional constraints are imposed on us.

Another relevant issue concerns jurisdiction. In money laundering matters conflicts or overlaps of jurisdiction frequently arise, because prosecution is often limited to the country where the drugs are located or the country of origin, without adequate coordination of parallel investigations. I believe we should improve cooperation to carry out coordinated investigations, avoiding situations where investigative leads in Latin America remain unexplored.

I referred earlier also to extradition. We are extraditing a person to another country, where they will be tried for drug trafficking, but the money is located in Spain. If nobody informs us, the money laundering proceedings in Spain risk not being initiated. We have adopted a new strategy and will systematically initiate such investigations, but I am convinced that in most cases this does not occur, despite there being broad potential to conduct far more money laundering investigations than we currently do.

In this regard I wish to highlight what for us represents an extraordinary example. The work carried out with the Ecuadorian authorities has been excellent and exemplary, because Ecuador is transmitting information to us systematically. Ecuador convicts for drug trafficking and transmits the data so that we can initiate money laundering investigations.

We have, for example, the "*Pampa*" case. It is a shared proceeding: we expect to obtain a conviction as well, as has already occurred in Ecuador. The "*Pampa*" case concerns a criminal organization that sent containers from Guayaquil to Spain. Within the framework of international cooperation, we informed the Ecuadorian authorities that, in certain communication channels — Skype, as is known, and the FTP platform, an encryption system following EncroChat — information relating to criminal conduct in Ecuador was being exchanged.

With the consent of the French authorities, we transmitted to Ecuador the data derived from Spanish interceptions. That information was used in Ecuador to obtain a conviction against the criminal organization and to validate the evidentiary use of Skype communications, which I believe were recognized there earlier than in many other European countries. For us, in turn, these elements made it possible to develop an important money laundering investigation.

And this is not the only case. We currently have an investigative request received by the Ecuadorian Anti-Drug Prosecutor's Office. Last week, I believe, several individuals belonging to the so-called "Comando de la Frontera" were convicted, while we are conducting an investigation into investments made in Spain, particularly in Pozuelo, near Madrid, where various properties appear to have been purchased. In my opinion, this is the path through which we can all improve money laundering investigations.

I mentioned earlier the example of Falcone and Borsellino: having their image before us and having had the opportunity to look beyond, as they did, obliges us to continue along this path. It is not merely a matter of invoking their legacy, but of contributing concretely to ensuring that society is freer from drug trafficking and that crime can be combated also through asset deprivation — not only through seizure and confiscation, but through effective and coordinated money laundering investigations.

It is not easy, but it is possible. Cooperation is the key. The example with Ecuador demonstrates that much more can be done, and we are deeply proud of this. I thank the Ecuadorian authorities for their availability and willingness to share information.

Thank you

Amadeu Francisco
Ribeiro Guerra

Attorney General of Portugal

I will briefly present the situation of Portugal in the fight against drug trafficking, organized crime, and money laundering. I will focus in particular on drug importation, the dismantling of laboratories, and financial investigations related to money laundering.
At present, Portugal does not have a formally structured national strategy for the prevention and combating of organized crime. However, significant results have been achieved, particularly thanks to cooperation with Latin American and European countries. I refer, in particular, to the creation of cooperation networks among anti-drug prosecution offices, such as the Ibero-American network and the European judicial network against organized crime. At the formal level, a central role is played by Eurojust, through the execution of international letters rogatory, the establishment of joint investigation teams, the issuance of European Investigation Orders, and cooperation mechanisms with Latin America, including the El PAcCTO project and AIAMP.
This specialized cooperation has made it possible to counter criminal networks more effectively. Portugal, due to its geographical position and the presence of several seaports, is one of the main entry points for the cocaine that is flooding Europe. It is also an important entry point for hashish originating from North Africa. Traffickers use all types of vessels to transport drugs by sea from Latin America.
However, operational difficulties persist. The police do not have access to the Customs Authority databases concerning importing companies and, when they need to request information from the Customs Authority to determine whether a company has pending imports or, when they become aware of a contaminated container (for example through information received from another law enforcement authority), they request control of the container in order to know the date of arrival at the port and the port of destination.
In some cases, the Customs Authority asks the reason why the police are requesting the inspection of a specific container.
There are therefore multiple ways in which the managers of importing companies may become aware that the container will be inspected by the police. When the police go to a port to inspect the cargo of a suspicious container and, at the moment the container is opened, stevedores are present but also Customs Authority officials, the latter immediately become aware of any discovery of drugs by the police.
During some of our investigations, it was observed that importers had suddenly lost interest in the cargo, which leads us to suspect that they had been warned that the police were examining the container and had discovered the cocaine. There is therefore suspicion of corruption phenomena in seaports.
This year, an investigation was carried out with the aim of dismantling a group of customs officers who were collaborating with organized networks, allowing cocaine containers to pass through the seaports of Lisbon, Setúbal, and Sines, and five members of the Customs Authority were arrested.
After confirming the presence of cocaine inside the container, the police normally have two options: to wait for the importer to collect the container or to seize the cocaine while leaving a small quantity inside. The decision therefore consists of allowing everything to leave or only a small part and intervening on the remainder of the drug; the option will depend on the strategy to be followed in each case.
After receiving information from the Customs Authority that the container has been cleared, the police wait for the container to leave the port and follow it to the destination warehouse, where they will proceed with the arrest of the persons present and the seizure of the drugs.

Controlled deliveries

When a controlled delivery is carried out (the country of origin has detected the presence of cocaine inside the container and has informed the Portuguese police, agreeing on the seizure of the cocaine in Portugal), there is no concern that importers will become awa-

re of police monitoring of the container, since the police simply wait for the container to leave the port. When the police realize that the container is heading toward Spain, they contact the Spanish police to organize the controlled delivery. In situations where the drugs arrive in backpacks inside containers, the option of allowing the container to leave with the backpacks is excluded, and they are immediately seized, since the risk of losing control of the drugs is too high, given that the backpacks are generally removed from the container, while it remains in the port, by individuals (in particular stevedores) who collaborate with criminal organizations.
Within the police there is a group of inspectors (fewer than 20) specifically dedicated to this area of maritime drug transport at the national level (although they also work with other policing services). The police inspector assigned to the port of Leixões has an office (this is the only case in Portugal of an office located inside a seaport).
Sometimes the Customs Authority seizes cocaine through its own risk analysis and scanner system. The final recipients of the cocaine seized in Portugal, transported inside containers, are individuals operating in Spain, the Balkans, or Northern European countries.
The owner of the importing company is not the seller of the cocaine. He acts only as a transport facilitator, "offering" the company that imports the legal goods used to conceal the cocaine. When a Portuguese company imports through another country, for example Spain, the import cannot be monitored because there is no centralized control of the company, which at most is monitored only at the national level; there are no alert systems at the European level.
It is appropriate to consider whether or not to publicly communicate the seizure of cocaine after it has occurred. There are situations in which the seizure was not communicated and criminals, regardless of the origin or destination of the drugs, sent individuals to Portugal to recover the cocaine from the importer by violent means, believing that the importer had deceived them and appropriated the shipment.
As regards means of transport, high-speed vessels are frequently used to transfer drugs from the vessel that transported them from Latin America to the numerous beaches and coves along the Portuguese Atlantic coast. The perception is that these fast vessels transport cocaine mainly toward Spanish territory. In this area, deficiencies are observed in operational cooperation between Portugal and Spain, particularly with regard to intercepting these fast vessels. In Portugal, these boats operate as a true "taxi service," with a transport cost of approximately €40,000.
There are also difficulties within the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre for Narcotics (MAOC-N), particularly regarding verification and exchange of information on vessels, including fishing vessels, transporting cocaine across the Atlantic toward Europe. Interception on the high seas requires the joint intervention of the Navy and air forces, but this is not always possible due to lack of resources, resulting in missed operational opportunities.
With regard to boarding large vessels with suspicious cargo on the high seas, Article 17 of the 1988 Vienna Convention applies. However, it is not always easy to obtain timely authorization from the flag State of the vessel to access it. Similar situations also occur with some vessels flying the flag of European Union Member States. Greater decision-making speed on the part of the States concerned would therefore be desirable. Among the various methods used is also the so-called "drop off," that is, the dumping of drugs at sea for subsequent recovery.

Narco-submarines: the invisible threat

The presence of narco-submarines has also been recorded, constituting a particularly insidious threat. In cooperation with the authorities of the United States, Brazil, and Spain, Portugal dismantled a criminal organization dedicated to transporting large quantities of cocaine from Brazil to Portugal and Spain. A submarine built in the Brazilian Amazon rainforest was seized, carrying more than six tons of cocaine; five persons were arrested.

Dismantling of laboratories

Another area of intervention concerns the dismantling of clandestine laboratories. At the end of 2024, in the framework of an investigation conducted in the central region of the country, a laboratory for extracting cocaine was identified, managed by two Colombian nationals with specialized chemical expertise. The transformation of paste into powder (cocaine hydrochloride), which previously took place in

Colombia, is now carried out in Europe. The paste, in fact, can easily be impregnated into various materials, such as clothing, coffee beans, or sheets of paper, making detection difficult.

Parallel money laundering investigations

During investigations into drug trafficking offenses, it is necessary to begin as early as possible to focus investigative efforts on the assets and bank account balances linked to members of the organization. It is essential to develop a strategy specifically oriented toward asset recovery.

In Portugal, prosecutors specialized in combating drug trafficking and identifying assets belonging to criminal organizations operate. Experience shows that asset confiscation constitutes a more incisive instrument than imprisonment alone: the loss of assets significantly impacts criminal organizations. Today, the proceeds of illicit activities are reinvested in real estate, movable property, and increasingly in cryptocurrencies. Investments are often concentrated in countries where judicial cooperation is more complex, such as Dubai or Turkey.

In conclusion

- cocaine originating from South America reaches Europe also through routes passing via Africa and Portuguese ports;
- there is a need for police access to certain confidential data and information currently available exclusively to customs authorities;
- there is also a need to combat the infiltration of criminal organizations into seaports;
- for this purpose, police require greater human and technical resources dedicated to this type of investigation;
- international cooperation still needs to be improved, both judicially and at the police level, particularly through broader information exchange, controlled deliveries, and undercover operations;
- this represents the most effective way to dismantle criminal organizations, insofar as efforts must not be limited to the simple seizure of cocaine in ports or at sea;
- alternative forms of combating drug trafficking are necessary, recognizing that the response must be global and must necessarily include the asset recovery component.

Thank you.

Olsian
Çela
Attorney General of Albania

Dear colleagues, as an Albanian it is almost impossible to resist the temptation to say a few words in Italian. I recall that, as a young prosecutor about twenty years ago, I entered the Anti-Mafia Prosecutor's Office for the first time and met National Prosecutor Vigna and other colleagues. We were taking the first steps in cooperation between Italy and Albania in the fight against organized crime. We were trying to identify the most effective ways to cooperate, asking ourselves how we could do better. We discussed how to exchange documents and how to initiate parallel investigations. It was not at all simple.

In 2017, the first Joint Investigation Team between Albania and Italy was established. The then Serious Crimes Prosecution Office and the Bari Prosecutor's Office succeeded in launching this initiative, which proved successful. Since then, we have lost count of the number of joint investigation teams that have been activated; this means that the progress has been enormous.

For this reason, I wish to express sincere thanks for the contribution made, in particular to National Prosecutor Melillo, who, in my opinion — and according to all my colleagues — has been the principal and decisive supporter of this very important development.

I am firmly convinced that all of us perceive the urgent need to strengthen and consolidate cooperation at the transnational level. We come from different experiences and national realities, with specific priorities determined by the needs of each country. However, we all feel that no one is immune from the harm caused by any form of crime. Organized crime, in particular, represents a serious threat to our fundamental values, because it transcends national borders and affects each of us in one way or another.

The challenges have become more complex than ever. The world is changing rapidly, and crime is changing with it. Alongside traditional criminality, new dynamics are emerging in the landscape of transnational crime, putting our response capacity to the test. Cybercrime and the increasingly massive use of technology for the commission of transnational offences urgently require the strengthening of our human and technical capacities so that they are adequate to understand and counter them. At the global level, there is growing interaction among criminals of all kinds. They successfully exploit all the opportunities offered by digitalization. The exponential increase in the use of cryptocurrencies and the risks they entail in terms of security — for example, the opportunities they offer to facilitate money laundering — constitute a clear example of the urgent need to redefine strategies and models for combating crime. Technological progress is advancing at such a pace that we risk falling behind and becoming obsolete in the way we address these issues. There is no time to lose: we are obliged to adapt our structures and our priorities to these trends.

We are all aware that addressing such problems from an exclusively national perspective reveals a significant asymmetry between our limited capacities and the global dimension of the challenges. Therefore, the path forward is that of close cooperation, making use of all international instruments of mutual assistance and of the existing international structures. By moving closer to one another, we will be able to consolidate experience and capacities, as well as strengthen the cohesion of the organized institutional response to these serious threats to our common security. A clear and forward-looking strategic approach is necessary, combining a global perspective on the impact of transnational crime with national strategies aimed at adapting human, technical and financial capacities and institutional policies to a different world.

For Albania, transnational crime is a relatively new phenomenon, due to the strict control exercised by the communist regime over the borders and the country in general. After the fall of the regime, a subsequent and prolonged economic and institutional crisis, in a country with a very young and dynamic population and with a high rate of emigration toward the West, created favorable conditions for the flourishing of crime that crossed national borders, a development also facilitated by the country's strategic geographical position for organized criminal activities.

Drug trafficking and human trafficking became the main activities of organized crime. The fragility of newly established state structures, corruption, and a large number of young people without prospects in their own country contributed to its rapid evolution and consolidation, while the high level of violence used to acquire influence, superiority, and new markets quickly secured it a place in the landscape of transnational organized crime. Mass emigration toward Western and Central Europe allowed Albanian crime to connect immediately with criminal organizations in those countries, rapidly extending its activities beyond the limited borders of the national territory. The permeability of land and maritime borders proved ideal for the transit of drugs, migrants and trafficking victims, and was exploited by local criminal groups to insert themselves into transnational criminal networks. This development was strongly supported by a flexible and network-based organization in Europe, where individuals from the diaspora, already numerous, were or have been involved in criminal activities. This provided Albanian groups with the necessary space to consolidate themselves and constituted the basis upon which they subsequently expanded their operational capacities.

The picture would be incomplete without considering the ease with which, for years, illicit proceeds returned to the country and were invested in economic activities. The construction sector became a preferred target for money laundering, since the high level of the informal economy and a relatively weak banking system allowed criminal organizations to easily penetrate legal economic activities.

I considered it useful to provide you with a brief historical overview of the birth and rise of Albanian organized crime, in order to better understand the scale of the legislative reforms undertaken to address the harsh reality that the country had to face during that period.

The year 2004 marked a turning point in the fight against organized crime. We realized that a completely new approach was indispensable. The strategy included important legislative measures aimed at strengthening institutional capacities on three levels: first, the reorganization of institutions responsible for combating organized crime; second, the introduction of new legislative instruments for law enforcement; third, operational interventions.

There was a clear and immediate need to centralize the competent bodies within the judiciary, the prosecution service and the police. In the same year, the Court and the Prosecution Office for Serious Crimes were established as specialized bodies in combating organized crime. Within the State Police, a special structure was created at the central level, coordinated with the organization of the prosecution service.

The most important step in strengthening legislation remains the adoption of the law on the seizure and confiscation of assets of criminal origin. We developed a new approach, considering asset recovery to be of fundamental importance. The reversal of the burden of proof, as well as the extension of measures to criminal acts committed in the past, aimed to weaken the economic power of persons involved in organized crime, thereby undermining the stability and capacities of their networks. At the same time, we expanded the use of special investigative techniques, strengthening the technical capacities of law enforcement. Proactive investigations, combined with these techniques, produced significant results in combating organized crime and various forms of trafficking.

We redefined priorities and invested heavily in international cooperation. We launched parallel investigations with the Italian authorities, inaugurating a new level of interaction, different from the traditional approach previously adopted. Communication and the daily exchange of data require great determination and mutual trust. Despite the difficulties, the experience proved successful and represents for us the precursor of joint investigation teams, as it allowed coordination of investigations and real-time information exchange.

In 2016, a new wave of legislative reforms became necessary to address further problems related to corruption and organized crime. The changes affected the entire judicial system, including the internal organization of the prosecution service, career management and disciplinary proceedings. Independence of prosecutors and decentralization constitute the defining features of the new system.

At the end of 2019, the Special Prosecution Office replaced the Serious Crimes Prosecution Office, with jurisdiction over corruption, organized crime and terrorism. Prosecutor's offices of ordinary jurisdiction remain competent for other crimes, including drug trafficking and money laundering.

Money laundering represents a significant threat to social security, the integrity of the legal system and economic stability. In Albania, the main sources of laundering are linked to drug trafficking and other organized criminal activities.

Albania is politically and institutionally committed to the prevention and combating of money laundering and to the confiscation of assets con-

nected to such activities.
Albanian legislation provides for two confiscation systems:
1. Conviction-based confiscation;
2. *Non-Conviction Based* confiscation, based on the 2009 Anti-Mafia Law, modeled on the Italian Anti-Mafia Code.
The law allows *in rem* confiscation, that is, directed at assets, independently of a criminal conviction, with reversal of the burden of proof.
The court orders confiscation when there are reasonable indications of participation in offences provided for by law, when the assets are in the direct or indirect availability of the subject, and when their lawful origin is not demonstrated.
I can state with pride that these measures have produced significant results: assets worth hundreds of millions of euros have been seized and confiscated.
However, critical issues persist, in particular the difficulty of obtaining convictions for money laundering in the absence of a conviction for the predicate offence. Further jurisprudential development is necessary.
It remains fundamental to "go beyond the apparent ownership of assets," since criminals use nominees, family members and shell companies to conceal wealth.
It is also essential to strengthen the training of investigators, judicial police officers and magistrates, especially in the field of autonomous money laundering, parallel financial investigations and third-party involvement.
Despite the difficulties, the future appears promising. The results achieved with joint investigation teams demonstrate our potential. In Albania you will find reliable and professional prosecutors, both within the Special Prosecution Office and in the ordinary prosecution offices. We must continue to work together and strengthen our response to all transnational criminal activities.
Thank you for your attention.

Fourth Session

The Italian Experience in Judicial Cooperation against Transnational Organized Crime

Introduction

Salvatore
De Luca

Chief Prosecutor of Caltanissetta

Good afternoon, everyone.
I would like to thank the organizers for this important opportunity for discussion on transnational organized crime. Let us proceed immediately with the session, given the limited time available.
International cooperation and investigative activities carried out at the supranational level are certainly not new. Today we commemorate Paolo Borsellino and, together with him, Giovanni Falcone, who were pioneers and masters of international cooperation. The close working relationships that Giovanni Falcone maintained with the FBI are well known, for example.
We begin with Prosecutor Giovanni Bombardieri. Considering that international cooperation now has well-established roots, after outlining your personal experiences, what do you consider today to be the most significant distinguishing element concerning the transnational nature of the criminal phenomenon and international cooperation?

Giovanni **Bombardieri**

Chief Prosecutor of Turin

Good evening, everyone.
I believe that the most significant development in international cooperation today is represented by Joint Investigation Teams. Any reflection on cooperation must begin with a preliminary consideration: the relevance and international projection of Italian organized crime and, in particular, in recent years, of the 'ndrangheta.
This is a criminal organization whose international ramifications increasingly lead us to discuss it in contexts such as this one. There is now a growing awareness of the dangerousness of the 'ndrangheta in its settlements across various countries worldwide. One need only consider Australia, which in the past was reluctant to acknowledge its presence on its territory but in recent years has requested the support of our judicial authorities to counter the phenomenon. I recall, for example, an international conference held in Melbourne in 2022 dedicated to Italian organized crime with a specific focus on the 'ndrangheta.
In 2019, there was the first ruling by a Canadian Superior Court judge who, in convicting an Italian citizen for drug trafficking, recognized his membership in the 'ndrangheta. In international drug trafficking, the 'ndrangheta now represents a primary partner for South American criminal organizations.
The importance of international cooperation is therefore evident. The distinguishing feature of recent years has been the development of Joint Investigation Teams, which make it possible to address an investigation in its entirety, observing and reconstructing the criminal phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Combating drug trafficking by limiting the reconstruction to the Italian supply chain alone is reductive. Only by investigating both in the country of destination and in the country of origin is it possible to reconstruct not only the organizational structure of the shipments but also the reinvestment of illicit proceeds.
International cooperation makes it possible to target the entire criminal cycle. Experiences such as *"Pollino," "Eureka"* in Europe, and "Samba" — the first Joint Investigation Team between an Italian prosecution office and Brazilian federal and state judicial authorities — demonstrate the effectiveness of this method. The ability to share investigative results in real time and progressively guide operational decisions constitutes a winning model.
Just in recent days, for example, the German colleague involved in Operation "Pollino" informed us with satisfaction that, at the conclusion of a long and complex trial, a German regional court recognized at first instance the membership of an individual from Locride in the local 'ndrangheta cell of San Luca. This is a highly significant result, stemming from virtuous cooperation developed through a Joint Investigation Team between the Reggio Calabria Prosecutor's Office, the Duisburg Prosecutor's Office, and the Dutch federal judicial authority.
Operation *"Samba"* represents another significant example. The investigation originated from the observation of Calabrian individuals who had moved to Brazil, where they had established contacts with members of the PCC and other organizations involved in drug trafficking. The arrest carried out in 2019 led to convergence between the investigation of the Turin DDA and those of the Brazilian prosecutor's offices of Paraná and Paraíba. In 2020, the Joint Investigation Team was formally established between the Turin Prosecutor's Office, the Brazilian Federal Prosecutor's Office, and the involved state prosecutor's offices, with the support of the respective judicial police forces and the ROS Carabinieri.
A shared cloud platform was created, enabling the real-time exchange of data and documents. Forensic copies of devices seized in Brazil were shared, as well as Brazilian judicial and police acts. The development of these elements made it possible to reconstruct the role of a Brazilian national in establishing a logistical network for the procurement and shipment

of narcotics, as well as for the reinvestment of illicit capital.
The Joint Investigation Team also enabled the rapid extradition of a cooperating witness, questioning in Italy by Brazilian judicial authorities, and the organization of an Action Day on 10 December 2024, with simultaneous arrests in Italy and Brazil.
Similar experiences have been developed in Reggio Calabria, including in relation to the port of Gioia Tauro. I recall, in 2021, a controlled delivery shared with Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, and North Macedonia: a shipment departing from the port of Gioia Tauro was subsequently divided along different routes, enabling arrests in destination countries thanks to the activated cooperation.
International cooperation has also enabled the execution of significant seizures and confiscations abroad. I recall the preventive confiscation of a property in central Paris, carried out within proceedings of the Reggio Calabria DDA and subsequently allocated, through a protocol between the Italian and French Ministries of Justice, to social purposes in favor of women victims of trafficking and violence. Similarly, within Operation “Eureka,” seizures were carried out in Portugal with the support of local authorities.
Alongside the positive aspects, critical issues remain. Differences between legal systems may affect the effectiveness of cooperation, as may the need to correctly identify institutional counterparts. In Italy, the powers attributed to the National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor contribute to coordinating the various District Anti-Mafia Directorates, preventing overlaps or interference between parallel investigations.
In other countries, however, the role of judicial police may make interaction solely with prosecution offices insufficient, particularly when operational decisions are not coordinated in terms of timing.
At the basis of every cooperation lies mutual trust between the authorities involved. Loyal cooperation is an essential prerequisite. Meetings such as this one, promoted by the National Anti-Mafia Directorate and European programs such as El PAcCTO, are fundamental in strengthening the trust that arises from mutual knowledge and the exchange of professional experiences.
The objective must be the construction not of occasional relationships but of a stable network of cooperation among the countries involved in our investigations. Only in this way will it be possible to effectively address the challenges of transnational organized crime.
Thank you.

Giuseppe Borrelli

Chief Prosecutor of Salerno

Good afternoon to everyone.
I will resume the remarks initiated by Giovanni Bombardieri by formulating two preliminary considerations, also in light of what emerged this morning.
First, I believe that the global character of drug trafficking, from a territorial perspective, must be emphasized. The movements of narcotic substances involve countries thousands of kilometers apart and entail relationships between criminal organizations whose centers of interest are located in equally distant states.
In this regard, it should be recalled that investigative activities carried out by the Prosecutor's Office of Reggio Calabria and other district prosecutor's offices have long highlighted the central role of the 'ndrangheta in international drug trafficking and the privileged relationships it has established not only with other national mafia organizations, but also with criminal organizations in numerous European countries, in the American continent — the United States, Canada, South America — and even in Australia. This confirms the global nature of the criminal phenomenon.
It is well known that South American organizations continue to recognize the 'ndrangheta as fully reliable, both because of its significant financial resources and its capacity to guarantee the arrival in Europe, across various countries of the continent, of substantial shipments of cocaine, which are subsequently distributed to local criminal organizations. Numerous judicial decisions attest to these relationships and to this role of Calabrian criminal groups.
It should also be recalled that several important fugitives belonging to the 'ndrangheta have been arrested in South America. In May 2023, Operation "Eureka," conducted by the Prosecutor's Office of Reggio Calabria, documented the relationships between organizations connected to the clans of the Ionian District of Reggio Calabria and criminal groups from Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Brazil, highlighting the capacity to manage a drug import channel from South America to Australia.
The global scope of the 'ndrangheta's trafficking activities does not concern only the movement of narcotic substances, but also the circulation of illicit proceeds. These are financial flows that, on the one hand, constitute a significant component of the gross domestic product of certain producing states and, on the other hand, possess the capacity to contaminate the global economy, due to the territorial breadth of money laundering phenomena and the modern techniques used to transfer and reinvest illicit capital.
The second consideration concerns the subversive impact of drug trafficking and organized crime. This aspect was also mentioned in the interventions of our South American colleagues. Italy has had direct experience of what it means to face organized crime that believes it can confront state institutions, as occurred in 1992 during the season of mafia massacres.
It is entirely rational that criminal structures capable of significantly influencing the wealth produced in a country may consider conditioning its institutional framework or, in the event of resistance, opposing state institutions in an attempt to subvert them.
Starting from these premises — the global character and the subversive dimension of the phenomenon — it becomes evident that effective counteraction is not possible without synergies among states. Not only among those directly involved in trafficking, such as producing and importing countries, but also among states that suffer the indirect effects of laundering and economic contamination resulting from the circulation of illicit proceeds. This cooperation must first and foremost translate into cooperation among judicial authorities. Effective counteraction is inconceivable without the coordinated conduct of investigations taking place in different parts of the world, through real-time information exchanges and shared decisions on investigative strate-

gies. In this regard, it is important to emphasize the willingness demonstrated over time by many South American magistrates and by the Italian judiciary, particularly the Prosecutor's Office of Reggio Calabria, which in a few days I will have the honor of leading, and which boasts a well-established tradition of initiatives and joint investigative teams with countries of the South American continent.
However, it must be acknowledged that mutual willingness is not always sufficient in the absence of legislative interventions aimed at harmonizing legal systems. Difficulties arise, for example, regarding the possibility for certain foreign police forces to use environmental or telematic interception tools, sometimes due to investigative traditions and different legal frameworks. In some legal systems, influenced by the United States model, police forces enjoy marked autonomy vis-à-vis the judiciary, with the risk that operational initiatives may develop outside the coordination agreed upon between judicial authorities. In federal systems, moreover, there may be a need for internal harmonization in addition to international harmonization, since the fragmentation of competences can make it complex to identify the competent authority and to interact with prosecutors of individual federated states. Finally, the absence, in certain countries, of coordination structures comparable to the National Anti-Mafia Directorate or Eurojust must be considered, as these play a fundamental coordinating role in Italy and Europe.
These difficulties have been addressed through a willingness to cooperate that is also personal and direct. Such willingness must be encouraged and, above all, made more rapid and effective. I believe that initiatives such as today's are particularly important, because direct contact and mutual knowledge facilitate the understanding of different legal systems and constitute the foundation for properly structuring joint investigative activities.
It is essential that cooperation translate into direct and stable relationships among authorities. Consistent with the tradition of the Prosecutor's Office of Reggio Calabria, I wish to assure you that this willingness to cooperate will continue in the years to come in the role I am about to assume.
Thank you.

Paolo
Guido

Chief Prosecutor of Bologna

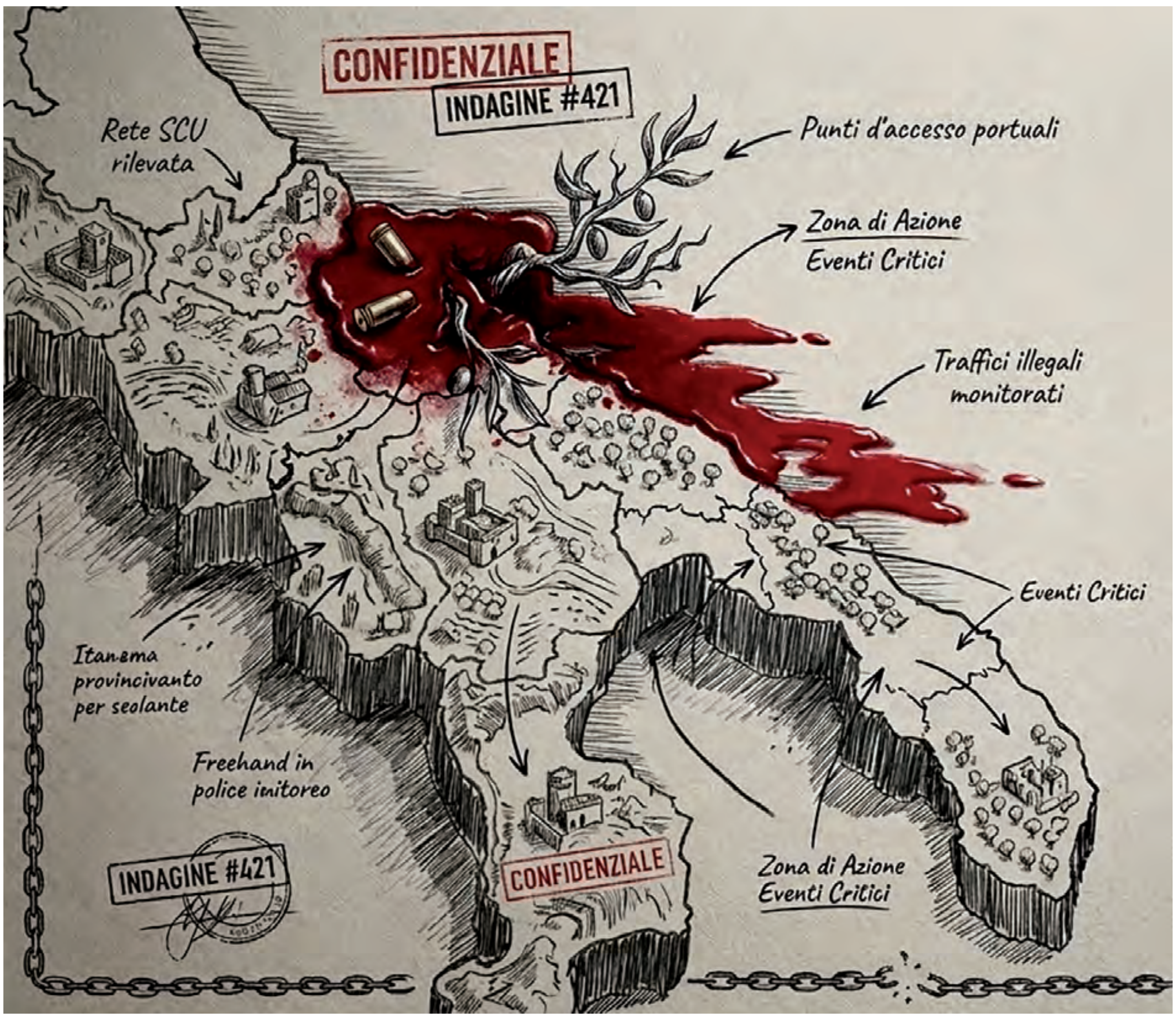
Good afternoon, everyone.
Based on what I have been able to observe in these first few days — because it truly has only been a few days — since I assumed the position of Chief Prosecutor at the District Prosecutor's Office of Bologna, I will limit myself to a few brief remarks.
The first evident fact concerns drug trafficking, which in Emilia-Romagna represents the primary source of economic extraction by criminal organizations. These organizations are no longer simple projections of the "mother organizations" operating in their territories of origin: they are no longer merely branches of individual 'ndrine or mafia or Camorra families. They are now structures that are firmly rooted in the territories where they operate, where the mafia method has consolidated itself and territorial control is exercised through typically mafia-type practices.
In Bologna, for several years now, we have begun to observe not only economic activities carried out in the interest of the mother organization, but directly the mafia method itself, namely the exercise of territorial control through intimidation and subjugation. This is particularly concerning: there are no longer only mafia-derived capital flows, but also a mafia culture that is taking root and spreading.
Drug trafficking in our territory is largely managed by Albanian groups, which exercise significant control particularly along the Adriatic coast. This is an area where large amounts of liquidity circulate, often with limited traceability, due to the high concentration of tourism, hospitality, and entertainment activities. It represents an ideal context for infiltration and reinvestment of illicit capital. With the Albanian authorities, it would be desirable not only to establish joint investigative teams, but also to develop forms of continuous, day-to-day cooperation, overcoming occasional mechanisms that, by their very nature, risk being too slow compared to the speed of criminal phenomena.
Drug flows are substantial: in some investigations, the entry of as much as 40 to 50 kilograms per day has been documented. The Port of Ravenna, historically considered marginal with respect to major drug trafficking routes, has instead emerged in certain investigations as a significant transit point. Connections with Calabrian groups persist, a fact that is now well established.
Another innovative element concerns a structural evolution of the organizations: individuals who begin with street-level dealing or drug trafficking progressively develop a genuine entrepreneurial structure, rely on professionals, and invest in logistics and front companies.
Particularly sophisticated import methods have been identified, such as cocaine attached to ship hull partitions and subsequently recovered by divers. This implies significant investments and the use of specialized expertise.
The capital generated is reinvested directly within the territory, giving rise to organizations that do not merely manage resources originating from the "mother organizations," but instead produce and accumulate criminal wealth locally. These are therefore rooted, autonomous, and structured organizations.
Combating these phenomena requires a significant cooperative effort. As mentioned this morning, one of the main obstacles is the factor of time. Criminal organizations are capable of moving millions of euros in a matter of moments; judicial procedures, on the other hand, often remain excessively complex and slow, sometimes proving incompatible with the need for timely investigative action.
Initiatives such as this therefore represent fundamental opportunities to strengthen cooperation, create direct relationships, and give greater momentum to investigations.
Thank you.

Roberto
Rossi

Chief Prosecutor of Bari

Good afternoon, everyone.
I will try, in concise terms, to identify some areas of growth in Italian international cooperation, and then examine them through the practical experience of the Prosecutor's Office of Bari.
The first element, apparently curious but in reality fundamental, is food. International cooperation is based on personal relationships, and personal relationships are also built at the table. Meetings such as this are essential because they create trust. In my experience, important cooperation results have emerged from relationships developed in informal contexts. This is not a secondary aspect. The issue of trust, already mentioned, has decisive operational implications.
A second element is the independence of the public prosecutor. International cooperation cannot be driven by diplomatic or political logic, but exclusively by legal criteria. At times, difficulties arise when interaction takes place with judicial police forces that respond to different operational logics. In an international context in which judicial independence is under pressure, this aspect becomes central.
Third element: knowledge of the internal dynamics of organized crime. This is also an aspect that emerged this morning. Understanding the origins and development patterns of criminal organizations allows us to grasp their international dimension. Many South American groups originated in prisons; organized crime in Apulia also had a prison-based origin. This common feature demonstrates how the exchange of experiences helps to better understand the structural characteristics of organizations.
Another element is investigative coordination, which represents one of the defining features of the Italian experience and one of Giovanni Falcone's most significant lessons. Coordination requires the free, direct, and timely exchange of information. But this presupposes trust: if trust is lacking, information does not circulate. And in the time spent reflecting, we risk being overtaken by criminal organizations that internally operate on very rapid trust mechanisms.
Another relevant aspect is the exchange of investigative methodologies. I have learned a great deal from foreign colleagues, and I believe that the Prosecutor's Office of Bari has also provided significant contributions to international partners.
I will mention two concrete examples.
The first concerns an escape from a high-security prison involving a fugitive from Foggia. From the outset, intensive cooperation was activated with the Prosecutor's Office of Cagliari and the National Anti-Mafia Directorate, with daily information exchanges. The fugitive was later arrested in France thanks to the cooperation of the French authorities. From that moment, structured cooperation developed: the statements of the cooperating witness concerned not only Italian facts but also murders and trafficking activities in France and Spain. Information was transmitted to the French and Spanish authorities, with the involvement of Eurojust as well.
The cooperation produced concrete results, including arrests in France and an expansion of investigations into trafficking managed also by Albanian groups with South American connections. From a single episode, a significant investigative expansion emerged, made possible by mutual trust and the willingness to understand each other's procedural systems and evidentiary rules.
The second example concerns cooperation with Albania. Since 2017, numerous joint investigative teams have been established. At the beginning, there was mutual caution: questions arose about how far information sharing should go. We decided to cooperate fully. From 2017 to today, five joint investigative teams have been carried out, with numerous precautionary measures and seizures of sub-

stantial amounts. Problems were not lacking, including incidents involving disloyalty by individual members of police forces on both sides. However, cooperation endured because it was based on a strong personal relationship, which was then progressively institutionalized.
And this is the concluding point: cooperation cannot remain solely interpersonal. It must evolve into a structural relationship, capable of institutional consolidation, based on frankness and the ability to address difficulties as well. Trust does not mean the absence of problems, but a shared willingness to overcome them.
There are many opportunities for cooperation, but I will stop here, also to leave space for that relational dimension which, as I said at the beginning, remains essential.



Maurizio
De Lucia

Chief Prosecutor of Palermo

I am the District Anti-Mafia Prosecutor of Palermo. We are in Palermo and, for us, it is an honour to host this conference, as the Attorney General already stated this morning. I too would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed to its organisation, but above all the National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Prosecutor, who has invested significantly in Palermo, not so much in terms of resources as in terms of expertise, proximity and guidance.

"Everything changes so that everything may remain the same": we have quoted *The Leopard*. And we may start precisely from The Leopard, because it is true that the mafias, and above all the Sicilian mafia — Cosa Nostra — a criminal structure that has operated in these territories for more than 170 years, has always possessed the ability to renew itself while preserving its tradition.

Even at a time that we have for years defined as a period of crisis for this criminal organisation, and also in the investigations we are conducting these days, we observe precisely these two characteristics: on the one hand, the constant attempt to restructure itself; on the other, the search for new contacts, within the country — engaging with other criminal organisations — and outside the country, engaging with international criminal structures.

At present, my District Anti-Mafia Directorate — which I have the privilege of coordinating — maintains constant contacts and relations particularly with certain South American countries: with Brazil, where we have extremely important cooperation; with Peru, and with other entities mainly in South America. We also maintain relations with the United States and with certain parts of Europe. There we detect the presence of criminal phenomena attributable to Sicilian Cosa Nostra from a dual perspective: on the one hand, certainly, the traditional one of drug trafficking, through alliances first and foremost national — particularly with the 'ndrangheta — and then immediately international. There is a reactivation of this international drug trafficking.

However, there is also another phenomenon that has emerged in recent months: the identification of assets belonging to prominent members of traditional Sicilian Cosa Nostra reinvested in South America, particularly in Brazil — and I have already mentioned Peru. In this regard, we have made significant evidentiary and procedural acquisitions and have carried out seizures precisely through the promotion of forms of cooperation.

The instrument that is currently most relevant and, in my opinion, most effective is certainly that of Joint Investigation Teams. This is a form of cooperation that we are also able to develop through the creation of shared cloud platforms — as mentioned by the Prosecutor of Turin, Giovanni Bombardieri. Especially with Brazil, these tools are active. Ours was among the first to be activated; subsequently, links were established with Reggio Calabria and Turin. But what matters is the possibility of bringing together and connecting different bodies of knowledge and expertise, allowing proceedings to progress in Palermo and, in parallel, in the countries that provide cooperation.

The fundamental advantage of this model is reciprocity: investigations progress insofar as there is a return in terms of results, first and foremost judicial, but also investigative. And these results are obtained only through cooperation.

Indeed, Palermo has always been a "champion" of cooperation. As Salvo De Luca recalled, cooperation was born in Palermo and grew thanks to the extraordinary work of Giovanni Falcone, who was the first to understand — and here I echo a thought expressed by Prosecutor Roberto Rossi — that the primary tool of cooperation is not so much the legal instrument, but rather the possibility for prosecutors to know each other. At that time people spoke of "the telephone"; today we may refer

to online communication tools. It is true: legal systems differ and must find ways to communicate. But, based on decades of experience, while legal systems may differ, the actors are very similar: in particular public prosecutors, *fiscales, prosecutors* — those who exercise criminal action in democratic legal systems. Some maintain closer institutional relationships with the executive; others enjoy full autonomy and independence. Yet in all of them we find a shared sense of justice and the exercise of their function in the protection of rights, particularly the rights of the most vulnerable.
And often, in the faces of South American, North American and European colleagues with whom we engage, this "*common spirit*" clearly emerges. For us in Palermo — a martyr city in the fight against the mafia — this represents a profound value to preserve, cultivate and transmit. We cite Falcone and Borsellino, but many men of the institutions — magistrates, police officers, carabinieri — have lost their lives.
Cosa Nostra in Palermo has suffered significant blows in recent years; blows that we know have not extinguished the organisation. And yet this organisation must be eradicated. This is achieved by walking together: through cooperation that involves first and foremost law enforcement agencies — without which the work of the prosecutor in building evidence to present to the judge would be impossible — and then through communication and exchange.
This is what we have learned, this is what we preserve, and this is what we seek to transmit, exercise and demonstrate every day.
I could provide you with a review of concrete cases, but I will not do so: considering the very high level of those who preceded me, whom I have listened to with respect and from whom I have learned, I will conclude briefly with the words of Giovanni Falcone, because we always start from his example and sacrifice, but also from the immense cultural contribution he produced during the years in which he served as a magistrate in this courthouse.
In 1990, speaking to police officers of the Swiss Confederation, Falcone concluded as follows: awareness has emerged that the mafia is not an emergency criminal phenomenon, but a deeply rooted scourge with which we will need to confront ourselves for a long time, strengthened by the experiences — both positive and negative — that have been acquired. It is time to move forward with the necessary ordinary commitment of everyone, in a battle that is above all one of civilisation and that can and must be won. And in any case, one thing is certain: there is no turning back.
Thank you.

19 of July 2025

Maria Tripodi

Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Good morning to everyone.
I would like to thank the National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor Giovanni Melillo, President Frasca, all the participants, our magistrates and the magistrates from Latin America present today, on a day of truly profound significance, dedicated to the memory of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, as well as the officers of their escort details, precisely as we mark the thirty-third anniversary of the Via D'Amelio massacre.
I will be brief in my remarks, but it is truly worth recalling how these two magistrates, these two heroes, left behind a method and a vision that today, more than ever, remain relevant.
It is our duty to recognize that mafias have changed: languages have changed, strategies have changed — and I say this to you, who know it very well — and even the reference markets have changed. That is why we support your action in confronting a threat of this magnitude, that of transnational crime, which requires new tools and cannot be addressed with those of the past.
We support the vision of the National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor, who has been able to interpret the signals of the present and anticipate the challenges of the future. For this reason, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, which I have the honour of representing here, strongly promotes all forms of international judicial cooperation. We believe that the first effective response to the global criminal threat lies precisely here: in inter-institutional coordination between justice, interior affairs, the judiciary, and in an increasingly active role of legal diplomacy.
In this regard, allow me also to share a personal experience. There is no bilateral meeting in which I am not thanked for the remarkable work that our magistrates not only carry out in Italy, but also export abroad in the fight against drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. It is a clear signal: today Italy is recognized as the country of anti-mafia, not of mafia. For this we must be profoundly grateful to Paolo Borsellino and Giovanni Falcone, who were the first to export this model and who still represent today an example that makes us proud and admired worldwide.
The Falcone-Borsellino Programme and all the activities carried out by IILA, as well as the European initiatives coordinated by the Farnesina, are concrete demonstrations of this. They are operational instruments that convey values, build relationships, and strengthen an international community of justice.
This commitment is all the more effective because it is built upon a network of trust. Today more than ever, I perceive a climate of extraordinary harmony among magistrates from different countries of the world, who learn from one another and strengthen one another. It is not merely a technical exchange, but a true moral and operational alliance.
It is precisely by virtue of this network of trust and cooperation that it is for me a genuine privilege to present, together with the President of the Court of Appeal of Palermo, the first International Falcone and Borsellino Award to the Argentine magistrate Carlos Mahiques. This is a lifetime achievement recognition for his extraordinary commitment in the fight against organized crime and terrorism and for his tireless dedication to international legal cooperation.
Following the path traced by Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, we therefore continue to work together to strengthen a global anti-mafia network capable of protecting our democracies and the fundamental rights of individuals.
Thank you.

Matteo Frasca

President of the Court of Appeal of Palermo

Good morning once again.
Yesterday I delivered a greeting address in which I expressed some reflections on these initiatives. Today's event — the recognition already mentioned by my predecessor to Carlos Mahiques — represents, I believe, the appropriate corollary, almost the consecration of the spirit of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino.
Last year, Roberto Mazola, speaking at the European Parliament, recalled that he would have wished for a Europe of which Falcone and Borsellino were sons. I believe that today this event, in continuity with last year's, contributes to providing an international recognition of which Falcone and Borsellino would certainly be proud, because it realizes that international cooperation in which they deeply believed: speaking the common language of legality against the common enemy of organized crime, which disintegrates any national community — undermining its founding values, its principles, its social values, and its economy.
The recognition awarded to Carlos Mahiques, as well as the one that will subsequently be conferred upon Peppino Di Raimondo, to whom I am connected by an affectionate memory from my earliest formative experiences — an indelible past that cannot fade — concerns a figure whose history would be too long to retrace, but who is well known to all. He is an extraordinary example of professional merit, competence, capability, and vision: precisely the model to which Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino referred.
Palermo today stands at the center of this international event, as it did last year, and I believe this is the best tribute that can be paid to the memory of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino.
Thank you, Carlos.

Carlos
Mahiques

Judge of the Federal Criminal Court of Cassation (Argentina)

Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart.
This is for me a very special opportunity, so much so that it deserves that I temporarily renounce my linguistic sovereignty and try to speak to you in Italian.
I recall that in the early 1990s, when I was still a young investigating judge, one day one of my sons, then twelve years old, while accompanying me to my office, pointed to a clearly visible portrait showing two smiling men and asked me who they were, because he did not recognize them. It was one of the well-known photographs of Judges Falcone and Borsellino, assassinated only a few months earlier by the mafia.
I tried to explain to him that those images were there because they represented an inspiration, an example of commitment, sacrifice, and courage in a profession as arduous, difficult, and risky as criminal justice. I spoke to him about their sacrifice, about the fact that they were martyrs and victims of their heroism in the service of legality.
Today that child, Juan Bautista, is the current Attorney General of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and President of the International Association of Prosecutors. He accompanies me at this event together with his mother, my beloved wife Roxana.
Yesterday, seeing so many friends and colleagues, a phrase came back to my mind — seeming appropriate for this occasion — that Saint Thomas Aquinas includes among the forms of pietas:
«Homo efficitur diversis modis aliis debitor secundum eorum diversam excellentiam et diversa beneficia ab eis suscepta.»
“Man becomes indebted to different persons in different ways, according to their differing excellence and the various benefits received from them.”
I believe this phrase summarizes my gratitude, first of all toward Italy, which years ago conferred upon me the title of Grand Officer of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic, toward all of you, and toward those who, throughout my long career of more than fifty years, have taught me and continue to represent an example of how to carry out this role with dignity.
I wish to express my sincere and profound gratitude for this award, which represents at the same time recognition of my career and a sign of adherence to a shared cause and shared values.
In particular, I thank Giovanni Tartaglia Polcini, Giovanni Melillo, Michele Papa — colleagues and dear friends, promoters of this lifetime achievement award in the judiciary — and naturally the Undersecretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Maria Tripodi, as well as the President of the Court of Appeal of Palermo, Dr. Matteo Frasca, for their gesture and for the honor granted to me precisely in the Aula Magna of a court that has been the stage for historic trials and a judiciary of excellence.
The Italian judiciary must today be recognized for the enormous merit of having achieved significant progress in the fight against organized crime and terrorism, contributing to profound reforms of the criminal justice system.
In Argentina it took a long time to respond to jihadist terrorism that caused the two most serious attacks in our history. The current challenge is also represented by narco-criminality, a protean phenomenon that threatens social and institutional stability and requires coordinated action by those who play a crucial role in courts, law enforcement agencies, and intelligence services.
The path undertaken by Argentina with the return to democracy has not been, and still is not, free from errors and setbacks, sometimes inexplicable. An emblematic and current example is the request advanced for more

than twenty years by Italy for the revocation of an absurd decree that granted political refugee status to a well-known terrorist of the Red Brigades, Leonardo Bertulazzi,
allowing him to live in a condition of impunity justified by the pseudo-guarantee-based ideology of the previous Argentine government.
Today, dear Giovanni, I can state that — not without effort, tenacity, and determination — Italy will soon obtain a legal, judicial, and diplomatic victory before the Argentine Federal Supreme Court, which will make the immediate extradition of Bertulazzi possible. Although delayed, such a decision will restore honor to our country and to its justice system, responding to the legitimate demands of Italian justice.
We know that organized crime and terrorism impose on magistrates the obligation to deeply understand every phenomenon and the methods of its extreme violence. This is the purpose of our presence here. It is not merely a security or legal issue, but above all a political phenomenon that requires analysis by prosecutors and judges with the attitude of an archaeologist, who works from the traces of crime to reconstruct its original design, methodologies, and evolution.
In this task we cannot afford mistakes.
My personal experience as a magistrate, like yours, has always been an exceptional opportunity, a significant challenge, and a work of historical reconstruction and legal evaluation of enormous proportions, with many difficulties in determining and assessing evidence and in attributing responsibility.
Legislators, political officials, and other actors of the judicial and investigative system must confront the urgent need to plan, on the basis of empirical evidence, a criminal policy differentiated and proportionate to the complexity and seriousness of the criminal phenomenon.
Organized crime endangers political order, permeates its structure, and contaminates the State. To combat and prevent it, it is essential to understand its mechanisms of operation.
Justice must define, with clear and performative language, not only the responsibility of the individuals involved in the organization, planning, and execution of crimes, but must also redefine the concepts of information and intelligence, as well as the role of the agencies responsible for obtaining them.
There is an urgent need for regulatory coordination that allows such information to be transformed into judicially admissible evidence, useful for understanding the dynamics of mafia criminal activity. For this purpose, it would be useful to consider in the future, in our country, the establishment of a specialized jurisdiction at national and regional level, with territorial and supranational competence limited to macro-criminality and terrorism in all its forms. We know that the State is a vertical, bureaucratic, and institutionalized structure. By contrast, terrorism and organized crime operate in a dimension characterized by mobility, transnationality, intelligence, and power.
Judicial jurisdiction is a practice and cannot, in the face of this urgent reality, take refuge in ideologies or abstractions. Strategies must strike the organization and sanction once and for all criminal provisions such as that provided by Article 416-bis of the Italian Criminal Code, aimed at dismantling associative strength and neutralizing links between large and small criminal groups.
The notion of organized crime and terrorism can be approached from both a legal and political perspective: it is a concept that belongs both to domestic law and to international law. And, like the rest of criminal law, it is based more on questions and jurisprudential practice than on the sole rationality of the legislator. Law today is no longer built solely within academic or doctrinal commissions, but on the ground and through dialogue among judges, prosecutors, policymakers, and civil society.
The legal definition, when dealing with associative or terrorist crimes, poses a normative problem for the legislator, because it is always necessary to resort to a flexible, relative definition conceived according to a principle of adaptable legality. Every country suffers from this vulnerability, which becomes more severe when — as in the case of Argentina — there are porous borders, inadequate federal investigative agencies, outdated legislation, and an intelligence apparatus with serious operational deficiencies.
The new jurisprudential doctrine and recent legislation against organized and mafia-type

crime — as well as the introduction of trials in absentia — take this reality into account and represent positive signs of work that must continue.

Today marks another anniversary of the Via D'Amelio massacre, and this leads me to a final reflection: the profession of judge and prosecutor requires courage. It is a quality particularly necessary for those who hold leadership and decision-making roles: a personal and political courage that is an ordering virtue, but also a passion that directs inner strength to resist fear. Guided by a just, strong, and moral idea, courage is an individual capacity built over time and tested through experience. It is not an isolated or occasional act, but a constant and enduring disposition of character to confront moral conflict, evil, and its consequences. The political courage of a judge and prosecutor does not consist only in defending and arguing an idea, but in doing so while facing the risk of reaction from adversaries, today amplified by media and ideological circuits.

I often say that before, in Argentina, threats came from those who had been accused or convicted, whereas today they also come from politics and social networks. The judiciary is today in conflict with the political world in Argentina. In this scenario of growing delegitimization, judges must not lose their course. Our compass is more moral than legal: it is truth.

Finally, as an actor within the judicial system and a witness of my time, I cannot fail to pay tribute to the silent heroism of those judges, prosecutors, and members of the security forces — police officers who, directly or indirectly — have been victims of the atrocious violence of organized crime and terrorism on our continent.

Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart.

Session 5

The Experience of Latin American Countries in Combating Transnational Organized Crime and the Prospects for Judicial Cooperation with Europe

Introduction

Eduardo Ezequiel Casal

President of the Ibero-American Association of Public Prosecutors (AIAMP)

Good morning. We begin this panel, which I have the honor of moderating, dedicated to the Latin American experience in combating transnational organized crime and to the prospects for judicial cooperation with Europe.

First of all, I would like to thank the host country, and in particular our esteemed colleague Giovanni Melillo, Italy's National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Prosecutor, for his commitment to strengthening dialogue between Latin America and Europe.

I also wish to thank all those who support the National Prosecutor in this effort, such as the EL PAcCTO 2.0 program, managed by Director-Counsellor Giovanni Tartaglia Polcini, as well as the Falcone and Borsellino programs, COPOLAD 3, and ITAJUS.

I extend my thanks to all the Italian authorities present and, in particular, to Judge Matteo Frasca for providing us with this opportunity for dialogue in this context.

In my capacity as Attorney General of the Argentine Republic and President of the Ibero-American Association of Public Prosecutors (AIAMP), I would like to share some institutional reflections regarding our experience in combating transnational organized crime and the prospects for judicial cooperation with Europe.

The common diagnosis that emerges from previous meetings and from the presentations heard yesterday is that we are facing phenomena of a fully transnational scale. These are organizations without borders or geographical limitations, operating with substantial financial resources, combining methods of violence, institutional infiltration, and structural corruption, together with increasingly advanced technological sophistication.

During the annual meeting in Lima of the El Paccto 2.0 Program, it clearly emerged that the international context now represents a space of criminal risk convergence in which multiple actors operate, with the emergence of new routes for trafficking illicit goods and the expansion of so-called "grey zones," within which brokers and specialized criminal figures operate.

In particular, drug trafficking continues to be an extremely widespread practice, which endangers state governance and citizens' security through dynamics of territorial control and the exploitation of vulnerable communities.

Combating these dynamics requires political will and a vision of shared responsibility that necessarily includes strengthening international judicial cooperation. Through the Ibero-American Association of Public Prosecutors itself, we work in this direction. We are 22 Ibero-American prosecution services, together with Andorra, Portugal, and Spain, united under a highly structured institutional statute, with operational networks and a clearly defined strategy aimed at fostering effective cooperation through joint investigative teams and the construction of interregional alliances.

Within the AIAMP framework, direct cooperation is organized at two distinct levels: on the one hand, a general level, rooted in an agreement that establishes mechanisms of interinstitutional and direct cooperation through which other formal and traditional channels are integrated; on the other hand, a more specific level, which takes shape through specialized networks dedicated to combating drug trafficking, corruption, human trafficking, and other particularly significant crimes.

This network operates on a daily basis: it connects different prosecutors, who communicate with one another fluidly. Moreover, we have promoted the use of so-called joint investigative teams. At the same time, we have encouraged the broader use of joint investigation teams — JITs, as we refer to them — which re-

present a qualitative leap compared to traditional cooperation based on formal requests that allowed prosecutors to work simultaneously; today, instead, cases are analyzed jointly, with real-time information exchange and direct coordination.
This instrument has expanded significantly in the region in recent years and constitutes one of the pillars of the AIAMP strategy in the field of cooperation. Since 2019, within the framework agreement of AIAMP, 62 joint investigative teams have been promoted in Ibero-America, eight of which have been developed with European authorities, particularly with Spain, Italy, Albania, and Poland.
Of these 62 joint investigative teams, the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Argentine Republic has promoted 16, although four are still in the signing phase. Of these 16 teams, two have been formalized with European prosecution services — one jointly with Spain and Italy and another exclusively with Italy — while a third is currently being defined with the Italian authorities.
In this context, we have a consolidated association with clear priorities, active networks, and successful cases. Our strategy is oriented toward two main objectives:

1. transforming the dynamics of international cooperation in order to make them more effective and efficient;
2. building strategic alliances with other regions.

Within this framework, Europe represents a priority for us in light of the intercontinental links we have identified. This is not merely a strategic decision but a necessity based on empirical evidence and concrete analysis of the cases handled by the prosecution services that form part of our association. Many of the criminal organizations operating in Latin America have financial, logistical, or market branches in Europe.
With this perspective, at our most recent General Assembly, held in Madrid last May, we signed agreements with the prosecution offices of Montenegro, the Prosecutor's Office of Turkey, and the Prosecutor's Office of Portugal. We are also negotiating with other prosecution offices and bodies. These agreements include operational mechanisms, information-exchange frameworks, and the transfer of knowledge and best practices.
If crime is increasingly transnational, we must be able to rely on alliances and tools that allow our investigations to reach wherever necessary. These exchanges and coordination mechanisms enable us to move toward an association with an ever greater operational and strategic reach. Spaces such as the one in which we are gathered today become effective platforms that allow us to expand into other latitudes and improve international cooperation, with the objective that no region or criminal phenomenon remains outside our institutional radar.
The Ibero-American Association clearly understands the evolutionary path required to confront today's complex challenges, with a solid foundation of prosecution services working in a coordinated manner and with bonds of trust built over 70 years. Along this path, we will continue strengthening our association and striving to improve, with commitment, the tools offered by international cooperation, establishing concrete operational strategies and expanding our action toward other regions.
And since I have been invited in my dual role — not only as President of the Ibero-American Association but also as Attorney General of the Argentine Republic — I would like to briefly refer to the specific experience of our country.
Within our Public Prosecutor's Office, in recent years we have worked to consolidate an institutional model that combines internal specialization with external cooperation for the investigation of organized crime. This is reflected, on the one hand, in the strengthening and creation of specialized structures for investigating this phenomenon, economic crimes, money laundering, cybercrime, as well as in the prosecution of illicit financial flows with the aim of their recovery.
In this process, I recently approved general guidelines for action in the criminal prosecution of organized crime, which define the strategic axes for guiding prosecutors' activities in investigating and prosecuting cases related to this criminal phenomenon. These guidelines

systematize the actions that the Argentine Public Prosecutor's Office is developing based on greater team specialization, financial-economic investigations, and an approach focused on illicit profits and their recovery, special investigative techniques, corporate criminal liability, international cooperation, and also active interinstitutional coordination at the domestic level.

This is a guidance instrument aimed at ensuring greater coherence and effectiveness in criminal prosecution, without affecting the functional autonomy that prosecutors possess in applying their own judgment in accordance with the specific characteristics of each case. This institutional policy is based on the recognition that organized crime operates in a structured, hierarchical, and transnational manner, generating profound impacts on the social fabric and on the functioning of democratic institutions.

For this reason, it is essential to adopt an approach that combines the internal strengthening of the Public Prosecutor's Office with agile, modern, and effective international cooperation, together with proactive interinstitutional coordination and cooperation at the domestic level. Also in this regard, the Ibero-American Association continues to play a relevant role through all the instruments that have been made available.

In conclusion, I reiterate the institutional commitment incumbent upon us — both from the Office of the Attorney General of the Argentine Republic and from the Ibero-American Association — to continue strengthening specialized networks, promoting joint investigative teams, and building alliances with other regions, particularly with Europe.

The promotion of joint investigative teams and the construction of alliances with other regions, particularly with Europe, are part of a common strategy aimed at responding comprehensively to these challenges. Experience shows that no institution can face these problems alone. Only through joint work, strengthening our national capacities, and developing solid ties with other prosecution services and international bodies will we be able to effectively combat this phenomenon.

In the face of increasingly transnational organized crime, there is no alternative: only by working together, in a coordinated manner and with a growing number of allies, will we be able to confront the challenges it imposes. The Ibero-American Association assumes this commitment by consolidating a network of prosecution services, strengthening international cooperation ties, and expanding its scope through new alliances. Our commitment is to build, together with other actors, a justice system that is stronger, more agile, more effective, and better prepared to protect our societies.

And in accordance with the principle that must always guide our action — namely that crime, like any manifestation of injustice, is not to be tolerated but to be fought — I would finally like to express special thanks to the organizers of this event, also from a human and emotional perspective. First of all, for allowing me to participate in this panel together with such distinguished colleagues, who are also members of the Ibero-American Association that I have the honor to represent today. Their initiatives and constant support contribute significantly to the consolidation and development of this space for cooperation.

I would also like to express my gratitude because this panel has had the honor of taking place on a particularly significant date, namely that of the attack against Magistrate Golecín. The fact that the date was maintained, despite being a painful anniversary, demonstrates the importance that we all attribute to his legacy and to the commitment we continue to uphold in his name.

I would also like to recall that yesterday marked the 31st anniversary of the attack against the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA). Argentine Judge Mahiques, who today received recognition for his career, distinguished himself — among the many contributions of his long professional activity — precisely for the significance of the decision issued in that case.

In this regard, I wish to emphasize — also in line with the concerns highlighted by Dr. Mahiques — the importance of prosecuting organized crime and terrorism and the commitment

of the Argentine Public Prosecutor's Office, which has established a Secretariat for comprehensive assistance concerning the terrorist phenomenon with the objective of supporting prosecutors called upon to intervene in cases of this nature.
Precisely through this assistance structure, in 2023 a cooperation agreement was concluded with the National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Prosecutor's Office directed by Dr. Giovanni Melillo, concerning crimes of this nature. I trust that this agreement will constitute a valuable precedent for further deepening cooperation between our institutions.
Thank you very much.

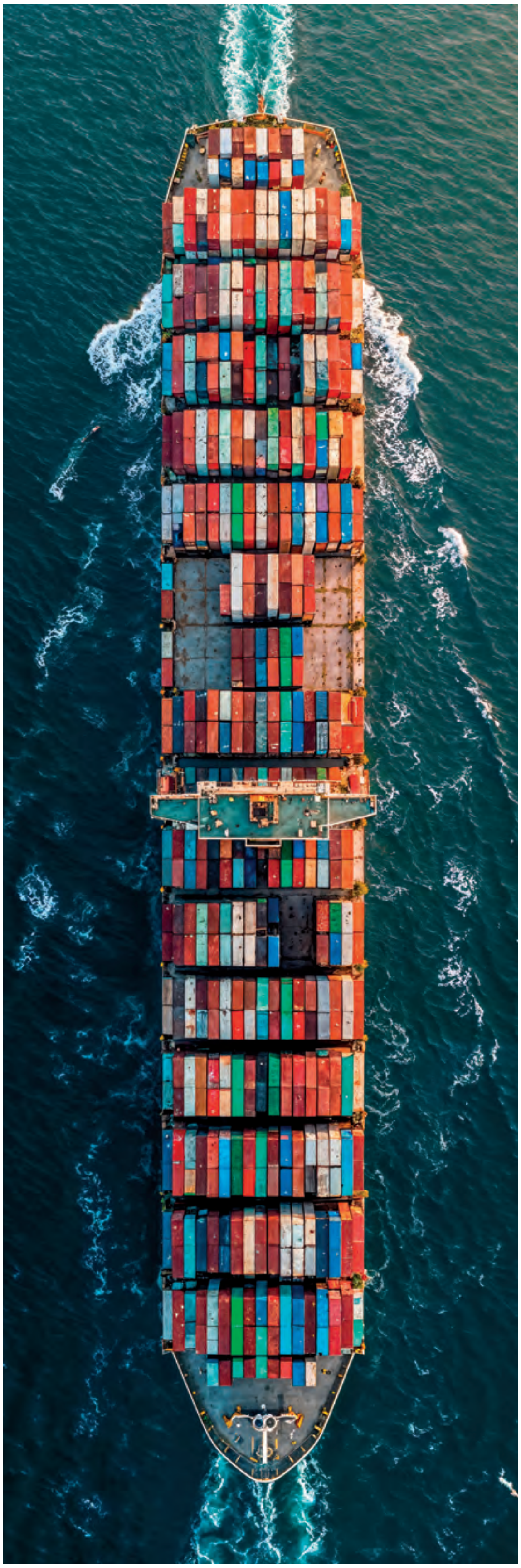
Hindenburgo Chateaubriand Filho

Deputy Attorney General of Brazil

Good morning to everyone. I would like once again to thank dear Giovanni Melillo, Giovanni Tartaglia, the EL Paccto 2.0 programme, and the organisers of this important event.
The reason that brings us together today is to renew our tribute to all those who, despite knowing that organised crime is a chronic disease — perhaps incurable — born of social inequalities, corruption, and institutional fragility, have never stopped believing in another option: that of fighting it. This is, after all, our role — to find together the most effective ways to confront it, especially when we realise that evil, once limited to nearby realities, is increasingly becoming an indivisible phenomenon.
Let us take the case of Brazil, where Brazilian criminal organisations have consolidated themselves as key actors in international drug trafficking, acting as a bridge between South American producers and European consumer markets. These are groups that originated in a local reality but have surpassed their origins to become networks of international reach, operating with remarkable sophistication in drug trafficking and money laundering.
Their logistical fragmentation and strategic collaborations are present throughout the entire criminal chain. They use multiple routes and means of transport — air, maritime, and river — exploiting, in Brazil's case, its long borders and control vulnerabilities. Our ports and airports are also strategic points.
The use of encrypted communication applications provides them with a significant operational advantage. They have direct access to major cocaine suppliers and exploit corruption among public officials. They are capable of rapidly replacing their leaders and easily adapt to seizures or police operations. Moreover, they are connected to other serious crimes, such as illegal mining, deforestation, human trafficking, and money laundering, blending licit and illicit activities.
Drug trafficking routes departing from Brazil are extensive, covering the Amazon basin and reaching Europe, Africa, and Asia. The PCC, as illustrated yesterday in Fabio Bechara's intervention, has become an emblematic example. This organisation, founded in 1993, is today the most powerful in Brazil and perhaps in the world. With a rigid hierarchical structure, divided into cells and governed by an internal statute, it has already triggered prison riots, murders — including of judicial authorities — and attacks against security forces, resulting in more than one hundred police officers killed.
I also refer to the words of the Attorney General of Justice of Paraná regarding organised crime in the Triple Border region between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay, where crimes such as drug trafficking, arms trafficking, smuggling, illicit trade, and above all the so-called "dollar wire" are intensifying. It is precisely through these practices that illicit financial flows gain strength and mobility, feeding criminal organisations in Brazil and abroad, as well as violence and corruption among public officials. Not surprisingly, the region is suspected of hosting and financing extremist cells that threaten the security of several countries.
In this context, strengthening international cooperation in the region remains a priority, and the establishment by MERCOSUR countries of a specialised agency for closer operational cooperation among security forces and national police is currently under consideration. On the other hand, Brazil also appears to be directly involved in the interests of foreign criminal organisations, and I cite Italian ones as the best example. The effective and permanent activity of the 'Ndrangheta in Brazil was revealed with the arrest of the brothers Nicola Assisi — the "Ghost of Calabria" — and Patrick Assisi, in July 2019, in the city of Praia Grande. With them were found documents, weapons, drugs, container seals, and sophisticated equipment demonstrating their connection with

Brazilian organisations.
Another revealing element of the presence of the 'Ndrangheta in Brazil was the arrest, on national territory, of Italian citizen Vincenzo Pasquino, with established links to the PCC. Even before being extradited to Italy, Pasquino concluded a cooperation agreement with Italian authorities, with the support of the Brazilian Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, providing relevant information on connections between Brazilian and Italian criminal organisations.
The case led to the establishment of a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) between the authorities of the two countries, which uncovered extensive drug trafficking through the port of Paranaguá, with branches in Santos, Rio de Janeiro, Antwerp, and destinations such as Gioia Tauro (Italy), Cisnes (Chile), Le Havre (France), and Morocco. Criminals used methods such as inserting drugs into legitimate cargo without the exporters' knowledge and storing them in the ships' sea chests with the assistance of divers. The operations resulted in 18 seizures totalling 6 tonnes of drugs. Leaders and members of the criminal groups were killed under suspicion of misappropriating merchandise. The sharing of evidence, testimonies, and information extracted from messages from applications such as SKYECC was fundamental to the success of the joint operations.
The second example concerns Cosa Nostra, which partnered with Brazilian criminals to launder money in the states of Rio Grande do Norte and Paraíba, where they had operated for nearly a decade. The joint investigation team established in 2022 revealed the use of shell companies and nominees to move and conceal approximately 55 million euros. Investments included restaurants, apartments, houses, and developments along the northeastern coast, all financed with profits from trafficking and extortion carried out in Palermo. Searches were conducted in Brazil, Italy, and Switzerland, involving more than one hundred agents, and those involved were arrested, including Giuseppe Bruno, considered one of the organisation's leaders. Five search and seizure warrants were executed in three Brazilian states. The evidence collected allowed the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office to charge three Italian citizens and six Brazilians for participating in this transnational criminal organisation aimed at money laundering.
All these examples demonstrate that combating transnational crime requires effective institutional coordination with the participation of police forces from the countries involved, but always under the supervision of the Public Prosecutor's Office. There is no legitimate investigation without the direct or indirect involvement of the Public Prosecutor, and this is particularly true for Joint Investigation Teams (JITs), where the Public Prosecutor must play a guiding, controlling, and supervisory role, including regarding the entry and activities of the police forces involved. (I say this because there are initiatives to create joint teams composed solely of police officers.) Public Prosecutor's Offices are recognised, in the main judicial systems, as independent bodies responsible for ensuring the legality of evidence, legally qualifying facts, overseeing respect for procedural guarantees, and protecting fundamental rights. There is no serious criminal trial without a properly conducted investigation, but neither is there a legitimate investigation without coordination by the Public Prosecutor.
With regard to international cooperation, it is also essential that it become increasingly less bureaucratic and that direct exchanges of information between competent authorities be encouraged.
Other necessary measures include improving the operational effectiveness of Joint Investigation Teams, controlled deliveries, the identification of criminal networks through intelligence operations, combating corruption in ports, and tracing financial flows, with particular attention to the construction sector and cryptocurrencies.
We must also invest in the continuous training of Public Prosecutors. Federal and state prosecutors must be well acquainted with new technologies used by criminal organisations, from encryption on digital platforms to the use of blockchain for money laundering. Training specialised personnel integrated into international cooperation networks is fundamental for the effectiveness of our work. And perhaps we should be even more ambitious, because any measure designed to combat transnatio-

nal organised crime will be insufficient if we do not begin to consider the creation of mechanisms for continuous and structured collaboration. It is not possible to combat transnational organised crime through scattered and isolated actions, simply because criminal organisations operate permanently and possess a great capacity for adaptation.
This is the great challenge ahead of us: to think of ambitious solutions capable of making this objective effective, such as permanent Joint Investigation Teams, common systems for the exchange of information among investigative authorities of different countries, and the expansion of transnational agencies coordinating criminal activity, following the example of EUROJUST.
These are not easy solutions, but they must at least be discussed.
I conclude my remarks by once again thanking the organisers of the event.
Thank you very much for your attention.



Delia Milagros Espinoza Valenzuela

Attorney General of Peru

Good morning.

Colleagues representing Public Prosecutor's Offices from Europe and Latin America, I would like to extend a warm greeting on behalf of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Peru.

I sincerely thank you for the invitation to take part in this meeting, which pays tribute not only to the memory of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, but also to the daily commitment of prosecutors who, with a strong vocation for justice, confront organized crime. It is a great honor for me to speak in my capacity as Attorney General of Peru, in this city that symbolizes the courage of magistrates and remains a living memory of their struggle against organized crime.

We are here not only to share experiences and strategies, but also to strengthen our ties and to pay rightful tribute to those who sacrificed their lives for justice and truth: Giovanni Falcone, Paolo Borsellino, Marcelo Pecci, César Suárez, Antonio José Machado Díaz. These names no longer belong only to their countries of origin, but to the entire international community committed to defending the rule of law.

In contexts where transnational crime transforms, evolves, and infiltrates institutions, their example reminds us that there are no instruments of cooperation or innovations more powerful than integrity, collective work, and the decision to act despite personal risks.

Peru also faces similar challenges, linked to drug trafficking, illegal mining, human trafficking, money laundering, kidnappings, and structural corruption. Our presence here therefore has not only symbolic value, but represents a renewed commitment to a justice without borders, founded on cooperation among prosecutorial authorities operating in territories affected by these phenomena. More than thirty years after the massacres of Capaci and Via D'Amelio, we reaffirm with conviction that this struggle is today also our struggle.

Allow me to briefly share Peru's experience in combating transnational organized crime, focusing in particular on the role of the prosecutor in our criminal justice system. In the Peruvian procedural model, the fight against organized crime is structured in two areas: internal and external.

On the internal side, the prosecutor is responsible for and directs the criminal action from the outset through the trial stage. Unlike other systems, there is no investigating judge: it is the prosecutor who leads the investigation, authorizes the use of special investigative techniques, requests restrictive measures, and files the formal charges. This role translates into direct involvement in complex investigations, coordination with specialized police, supervision of forensic work, and analysis of the criminal phenomenon, as well as cooperation with other national jurisdictions.

External dimension: when crimes have an international dimension, the prosecutor becomes a key actor in judicial cooperation, activating both formal channels and direct contact mechanisms among competent authorities—mechanisms that today should be prioritized to ensure speed and investigative effectiveness. As established by the Criminal Procedure Code, the Office of the Attorney General is the central body for international judicial cooperation and extraditions, coordinating a set of very important mechanisms to combat organized crime.

By way of reference, we inform you that in 2024 we achieved 501 convictions against various organizations and criminal gangs. However, we have not yet achieved our most significant results against transnational groups; we have focused mainly on internal and local aspects. In 2005 we achieved 207 convictions (July 2025, editor's note).

In recent years there has been institutional strengthening, reflected also in the presence of specialized structures to increase effectiveness in the fight against complex criminal structures. Among the most relevant subsystems are the Specialized Prosecutor's Offices against Organized Crime, and to date we have 55 offices nationwide. These offices work in close coordination with other areas, including prosecutors specialized in drug trafficking crimes or specialized in terrorism.

Peru currently has 36 specialized prosecutors' offices for drug trafficking, distributed nationwide. They operate both on micro-trafficking and large-scale trafficking, with particular attention to combating structured criminal organizations.

Alongside these, the system also relies on specialized prosecutors' offices for terrorism, which intervene both domestically and in investigations connected to drug trafficking, in the phenomenon known as narco-terrorism. An emblematic example is Sendero Luminoso, which clearly shows the convergence between organized crime and terrorist structures. In such contexts, criminal groups seek to control transport routes, production laboratories, armed protection systems, and above all illicit financial flows.

These investigations often take on an international dimension, since the relevance of economic flows requires external support, including certain arms trafficking cases for which extradition may be requested.

There are also special investigative teams that operate on complex phenomena with transnational features. A significant example is the special investigative team "Lava Jato," whose investigations were linked to the international corruption case involving the construction company Odebrecht. This case led to major asset confiscations in Brazil, Switzerland, Spain, and other countries, and required intensive use of international cooperation tools for asset recovery and access to evidence through multilateral bodies.

As for the characteristics of transnational organized crime in Peru, a strong diversification of illegal economies emerges first and foremost. Beyond drug trafficking, there are numerous profit-driven illicit activities that rely on complex organized structures.

A particularly relevant case is illegal mining. Between 2022 and 2025, Peru's Financial Intelligence Unit identified suspicious movements linked to this activity amounting to approximately USD 2,248 million, about 80% of a total of USD 2,804 million, concentrated mainly in the departments of Madre de Dios, Puno, and La Libertad.

This activity generates severe consequences: armed violence, human trafficking, environmental contamination, corruption, and other connected forms of crime. It is significant to note that, in Peru, illegal mining mobilizes and launders capital up to seven times greater than illicit drug trafficking, confirming the growing centrality of this phenomenon in the national criminal economy.

With respect to illegal logging, according to the 2024 report of the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), over the past ten years Peru has experienced forest plundering totaling 2,774,563 hectares—an area that, to give an order of magnitude, corresponds approximately to the territory of Haiti.

These criminal networks do not limit themselves to illegal logging in the Amazon forests; they use armed violence and kill environmental leaders from Indigenous communities living in these areas. Another identified phenomenon is human trafficking, closely linked to illegal mining exploitation and clandestine logging, because it involves the enslavement of human beings. In particular, in mining and border areas there are forms of modern slavery, sexual exploitation of minors, and child labor, used as low-cost financing mechanisms for criminal activities. All of this is connected to international networks already identified by investigative authorities.

Another relevant area is capital laundering, carried out through the use of shell or fictitious companies, enabling international financial transfers and the creation of transnational economic links, including with companies based in the United States. There is also the phenomenon of extortion, which affects the national territory particularly severely, especially the capital Lima, characterized by the highest population density. This phenomenon is today one of the most visible and violent manifestations of crime in Peru. It is no longer an isolated activity or directed only at the economically strongest sectors: extortion has become a systematic activity sustained by national and transnational criminal networks, often linked to foreign organizations such as Los Choneros of Ecuador and the Tren de Aragua, which exploit institutional fragilities in certain regions to expand.
Extortion is frequently associated with contract killing and kidnappings, phenomena that contribute significantly to the population's sense of insecurity. It does not affect only large companies or the most economically relevant actors, but reaches entrepreneurs, workers, and ordinary citizens regardless of socio-economic level, with the aim of extracting their resources.
This context has led us to identify an operational modality of transnational criminal organizations that is not limited to major financial flows—sometimes also moved through cryptocurrencies—but follows what we have called the "little ant method," based on the widespread collection of money at all levels of society.
We must not forget that such organizations have highly flexible and adaptable structures, articulated in cells of varying size, with considerable capacity for logistical and operational expansion and a high level of protection ensured by the use of weapons. This allows them to reconstitute themselves rapidly: in Peru we are combating various mid-level gangs with determination, but they tend to reorganize quickly thanks to the support of larger organizations that provide logistical and operational backing.
A further relevant characteristic is the ability of criminal organizations to infiltrate and influence public institutions at the local level. Numerous cases have been documented involving local authorities, mayors, police officials, and other public officers who directly or indirectly facilitated illicit activities. Several proceedings for corruption connected to such conduct are currently pending, especially in areas where the state's presence is weak and illegal economies converge, in particular deforestation and illegal mining.
Criminal organizations also have significant corruptive capacity: groups operating in Peru have financed judges, prosecutors, politicians, and police officials to secure impunity. In parallel, they resort to selective violence—threats, killings of community leaders, and clandestine persecution—to exercise control over vulnerable communities, especially in the most remote areas of the country. In such contexts, true informal systems of criminal governance develop, in which the presence of authorities colluding with illicit activities is tolerated.
The work of the public prosecutor in Peru, as you can easily understand, is not without difficulties. Over the past three years, legislative reforms have been adopted by Congress that have limited the use of fundamental procedural tools, negatively affecting the effectiveness of criminal investigations. Among these, we note the amendment to Law No. 30077 on organized crime, with provisions considered to be in conflict with the principles of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (the Palermo Convention), with direct effects on international cooperation.
At one point, the law on pre-trial detention was suspended and later—following public pressure—this important legislation was reinstated to enable the prosecution of crime.
More recently, among other affected norms, there is serious concern that the effectiveness of the forfeiture (asset extinction) law has been reduced—an instrument that in

Peru has enabled the recovery of very large amounts of illicit proceeds. We must also mention the adoption of laws that severely facilitate the deforestation of our forests. These reforms have been criticized both by prosecutors and by international bodies, which have pointed out that they limit the Public Prosecutor's Office's capacity to investigate complex transnational criminal structures.

This is compounded by a context in which there are attempts to politically and publicly delegitimize the Public Prosecutor's Office through political pressure, particularly when criminal networks linked to actors with economic power or political influence are investigated. This narrative aims to weaken prosecutors' independence and institutional autonomy, and it negatively affects citizens' trust in justice institutions, also with the support of an influential segment of the press and the media, including social networks.

Other structural constraints we have faced for years also persist. Since 2000, we have achieved numerous results in the fight against corruption linked to the period of the dictatorship in the 1990s (1990–2000); however, the institutional budget has been progressively reduced, preventing us from adequately covering operating costs, technical staff, and travel to hard-to-reach areas. There is also a shortage of police units specialized in more sophisticated investigative techniques, which forces prosecutors to take on tasks that would require specific training. Nonetheless, colleagues and ladies and gentlemen, these difficulties have not stopped our work, which we continue to carry out with great commitment, dedication, and determination.

What are the prospects for international judicial cooperation, particularly with Europe?

Thanks to the experience gained by Peru's Public Prosecutor's Office, the results achieved in the fight against transnational organized crime—especially in drug trafficking and money laundering cases—have been made possible by prosecutors' specialization, coordination with foreign authorities, and the use of advanced investigative techniques.

However, we must acknowledge that one of the main challenges we face concerns the limited institutional capacity to fully understand the operating methods and reconfiguration dynamics of European cartels and mafias in the Latin American context.

Unlike South American criminal networks—such as Venezuela's Tren de Aragua or Brazil's Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC)—the European component remains, for us, an area requiring further investigative deepening. For this reason, strengthening cooperation with Europe is essential. In some cases, the complexity of these phenomena exceeds our independent operational capacity, making it necessary to continue consolidating international collaboration mechanisms.

The recent capture in Bogotá of Giuseppe Palermo, a key 'ndrangheta figure in Latin America, confirms the operational presence of European mafia structures in our region. Although links with Colombia and Peru have been identified and the ways in which such individuals establish contacts with local criminal chains have been documented, a significant knowledge gap remains, highlighting the urgent need for a more specialized and integrated approach. Similarly, the capture and detention of Pasquale Bifulco—also linked to 'ndrangheta groups operating in Peruvian territory—constitutes another indicator of the presence and expansion of European mafias in our country. In the context of these investigations, an Albanian national was also identified who trafficked more than two tons of cocaine destined for the European market, transiting through the port of Callao. This was a joint operation called "*Poseidon*" with European authorities, which revealed a structural deficit in the capacity of Peruvian prosecutors to identify and monitor the presence of foreign mafia criminality.

Unlike local or regional criminal organizations, European mafias operate with greater discretion, high logistical sophistication, advanced technologies, and global financial

networks—elements that require a specific and differentiated institutional response.
Money-laundering operations linked to structures associated with the Sicilian mafia have also been identified without being intercepted by our financial and tax systems; however, the alert emerged not through autonomous internal mechanisms, but thanks to information exchange within the framework of international judicial cooperation with European prosecution offices.
This once again demonstrates the need to strengthen the Peruvian State's capacity to identify these phenomena promptly, considering that, at present, our response still depends to a large extent on information coming from abroad. Despite these difficulties, we continue our work with determination, aware that strengthening international cooperation is an indispensable tool for effectively tackling transnational organized crime.
This is the formal dimension of cooperation. However, there is also an informal dimension to which we must give greater emphasis. Information must be shared rapidly, flexibly, and promptly, on the basis of a principle of mutual trust among the competent authorities.
For this reason, Peru's Public Prosecutor's Office, drawing on its concrete experience, wishes to propose certain operational measures.
First, the creation in Peru of joint groups of prosecutors and police forces dedicated exclusively to the transnational component of Latin American and European organized crime. Such groups should have specialized knowledge of the operating methods of criminal organizations, as well as advanced capabilities in financial analysis, traceability of economic flows, territorial mapping, logistical monitoring, and operational field intervention.
Second, we propose conducting joint missions through which European prosecutors and analysts can directly participate in investigations of complex cases handled by the prosecution offices of Peru and Latin America. This would help disseminate a deeper understanding of the real functioning of global criminal networks.
We also propose strengthening direct exchanges among prosecutors, including the sharing of information relating to high-risk individuals, sensitive areas, and strategic infrastructure—such as ports, tourist zones, and logistical hubs—that may constitute points of investigative interest.
Multilateral treaties and traditional diplomatic channels are not sufficient. It is necessary to build horizontal and functional relationships among prosecutors on both continents, enabling real-time information exchange, the identification of shared interests, and the building of trust through day-to-day work.
We further propose activating and consolidating joint investigation teams, particularly for investigations aimed at identifying criminal routes between Latin America and Europe. In parallel, we consider it essential to strengthen agreements with specialized prosecutors capable of analyzing common criminal patterns and defining preventive and coordinated responses.
Another priority area concerns training and the exchange of knowledge on European criminal networks. Many Latin American prosecution offices still do not have sufficiently clear information on the operating mechanisms of Balkan mafias, Albanian organizations, or Eastern European criminal networks. Therefore, it is urgent to promote the sharing of structural intelligence and lessons learned.
Finally, we propose strengthening ties with European countries with which there are still no cooperation tools or bilateral agreements—still the majority—in order to tackle transnational organized crime more effectively.
In this context, I would like to recall that in The Hague, on 10 June 2024, a working arrangement was signed between Eurojust and Peru's Public Prosecutor's Office. Subsequently, on 28 May of this year, during the thirty-second Assembly of the Ibero-American Association of Public Prosecutors held

in Madrid, a cooperation agreement was signed between the European Public Prosecutor's Office and the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Peru.

In conclusion, Peru's experience—and more broadly that of Latin America—shows that the fight against transnational organized crime requires adequate legal instruments, institutional will, committed prosecutors, effective formal and informal international cooperation, and a solid operational understanding of the criminal phenomenon.

In extremely complex contexts such as those we face in Peru, characterized by illegal economies, structural corruption, and criminal networks with transcontinental projections, the analysis of financial flows and economic routes has been fundamental to dismantling criminal organizations, despite difficulties arising from legislative reforms that have weakened investigative tools. This experience also highlights another reality: fragmented knowledge of the operating methods of international mafias and the inadequacy of cooperation based exclusively on official channels.

For this reason, we call for more agile and direct cooperation, operational exchanges among prosecutors, specialized joint training, and the creation of binational groups with real investigative capacity.

Only through this architecture of trust and this shared action will we be able to anticipate, neutralize, and effectively prosecute the criminal networks that today threaten the security of our nations, affect our development, and put justice in our continents at risk.

Thank you for your attention.

Angel
Valencia

Attorney General of Chile

I would like to extend my greetings to everyone. Thank you for the invitation and for the opportunity to be here.
The question that arises in a forum such as this, and to which perhaps we should respond, is the following: how can we respond to organized crime without doing so in a disorganized way? How can we, collectively, address this phenomenon?
Reflecting in light of the memory and example of Falcone and Borsellino, I believe the first issue is to understand how we can maximize our efforts within the rules and treaties that already exist, that are already available to us. How can we operate better within these rules to defend the right to truth, the right to democracy, judicial guarantees, and the right of citizens to live in a free and safe environment, to exercise their freedom under conditions of security?
At the same time, however, we must also ask ourselves how to find new solutions and new responses that may help enable our States to modify existing rules so that systems function more effectively.
On this point, I would like to offer a few reflections.
First, I would like to say that, at least from our perspective, we are not performing well. And we must do better. Unfortunately, if we share a common diagnosis, it is that — although Italy has succeeded in moving from exporting the mafia to exporting anti-mafia practices — at the global level we have not improved. Every year we continue to share our professional experiences, the efforts we undertake individually, each prosecution service separately or through cooperation initiatives, but at the same time we also share the effects of the growth and expansion of transnational organized crime across our continents.
Therefore, the obvious conclusion — at least from the South, from Chile — is that continuing to do the same things will not allow us to solve the problem. On the contrary: we continue to do the same things and the problem worsens.
The question, then, is: what can we do to change?
I believe that, at least from my perspective, there are two fairly clear ways to address this issue. The first concerns the local and national level; the second concerns what we can do at the international level.
Allow me to briefly focus on what is happening at the national level, on what has occurred in my country. In simple terms, today my country faces a challenge unprecedented in its republican history: the activity of transnational organized crime groups.
You may look at me with some surprise, because many of you are already accustomed to confronting this phenomenon, but it is a reality that had never previously occurred in my country. It has caused strong public concern, a significant increase in violence, and a doubling of the homicide rate, reaching levels that for us are unacceptable and intolerable at the national level.
We have confronted this growth in homicides and violence, and the National Congress has adopted — some time ago and, in my view, clearly and unequivocally — a reform inspired by the model of the Italian National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor's Office. A supra-territorial prosecutor's office has in fact been established and will become operational within the next six months: Congress has already approved its creation.
This new structure will allow us to have a specialized prosecution office within the Public Prosecutor's Office dedicated to combating organized crime, with particular attention to transnational crime and phenomena that produce effects across the entire national territory.
In a country that was highly regionalized and characterized by prosecution offices with predominantly local jurisdiction, we will now be able to rely on a national-level institution with

central administration, specialized in combating organized crime, particularly of a transnational nature. We have made a significant effort and, in this regard, I would like to thank Italian cooperation for promoting a project that allows us to train these prosecutors, together with all other prosecutors in the service and those who today, with more than 3,000 suspects, are involved in investigations.
The objective concerns not only the techniques and technical aspects of this specialized action, but also the commitment to judicial guarantees, human rights, the rule of law, and due process.
Because if we are fighting for democracy, democracy represents the path and not the supposed obstacle; the rule of law is the solution and not the problem; and combating crime is possible effectively within the rules of the rule of law and fundamental guarantees.
I believe that, in this respect, the Italian example is particularly commendable.
We therefore have these two main efforts: on the one hand, the creation of a supra-territorial prosecution office; on the other, a significant investment in the training of prosecutors.
However, in conclusion, I would also like to make a public appeal: what we are doing is not enough.
We have joint investigative teams, working groups, cooperation networks, but often we do not go beyond episodic cooperation. We need a strategic vision of cooperation. And to have a strategic vision of cooperation, better levels of coordination between our prosecution services are required. It is not enough — as I have said elsewhere — to be able to rely on a joint investigative team in one context or a cooperation effort in another if we do not have an organized commitment as strong as, or stronger than, that of organized crime itself, capable of directing actions and producing a real impact on the criminal phenomenon and on the organizations we are pursuing.
Faced with organized crime, we need an organized response, and that organized response requires — indeed demands — higher levels of coordination and a strategic vision of the efforts we are jointly undertaking within judicial cooperation to combat transnational organized crime.
Thank you very much.

Luis Carlos Manuel
Gómez Rudy

Attorney General of Panama

Good morning to the distinguished authorities, to the honorable Mr. Giovanni Melillo, National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Prosecutor, to the honorable Mr. Eduardo Ezequiel Casal, Attorney General of the Argentine Republic and President of the Ibero-American Association of Public Prosecutors, distinguished prosecutors, attorneys general and other representatives of prosecution services from the countries of Europe and Latin America, Italian authorities, experts and representatives of international organizations, ladies and gentlemen.

Panama, due to its strategic geographic position and the services it offers at the financial, logistical, corporate and commercial levels, is a location with a high degree of vulnerability to the development of illicit activities by organized crime, including, in addition to crimes such as human trafficking, arms trafficking and money laundering, a particular relevance of illicit drug trafficking.

Within this transnational illicit drug connectivity between Panama and Europe, ports play a decisive role.

To provide some context, please allow me to briefly share with you a video that I promise will not exceed two minutes, in respect of your time, about the situation in Panama.

In the context of the port logistics situation of the Republic of Panama, I reiterate once again that Panama is located between South America and North America, at a key point of global trade thanks to the Panama Canal. This position makes it a mandatory passage for thousands of containers every day, which attracts criminal networks that exploit transit to contaminate cargo with illicit substances.

It is also an intermediate point between production zones, originating from Colombia, the Republic of Ecuador and other countries, and consumption zones such as the United States and Europe. Panama has world-class ports, such as the Port of Cristóbal in the north and the Port of Balboa in the south, which handle large volumes of containers every year.

It is a leading country in container transshipment: many shipments are neither opened nor inspected but simply transferred from one vessel to another, which facilitates contamination since full inspections are not carried out. This enormous volume makes it impossible to manually and exhaustively inspect each container, as is the case in most major port systems worldwide.

In Panama, several security entities participate in the fight against drug trafficking in ports and along maritime routes, carrying out functions across various activities within these facilities and implementing actions aimed at countering cross-border trafficking of illicit substances developed by criminal organizations. Seizures have been carried out thanks to risk profiling, irregular movements, alerts and intelligence sources that enable more effective investigations.

In Panama, specialized senior prosecutors' offices for drug-related crimes, together with their auxiliary bodies, have conducted operations in the country's port facilities, where they analyze routes, concealment methods and operational results related to illicit shipments of controlled substances destined for Europe, within the framework of the fight against organized crime.

Among the criminal methods used to contaminate containers in ports, criminal organizations must develop interconnected activities to achieve their objectives. They create shell companies that appear as owners of the cargo, corrupt port employees to ensure the proper handling of contaminated containers so they reach their final destination, or alter security structures to contaminate cargo using

the "*rip-off*" method.
Regarding maritime routes used by transnational organized crime to send illicit substances, ports of origin with greater recurrence have been identified, including those from the Republic of Ecuador, particularly the Port of Guayaquil; in Peru, the Port of Paita; and as destinations the ports of European countries such as Belgium with the Port of Antwerp, Italy with the Port of Gioia Tauro, and Germany through the Port of Hamburg.
Europe is the continent with the highest percentage of seizures, accounting for 67%, with a total of 87.9 tons, according to 2025 data.
Transnational organized crime evaluates certain characteristics of ports and containers for concealment purposes and considers specific elements related to both containers and port facilities. The Port of Balboa in southern Panama shows the highest incidence.
A relevant aspect is that criminal organizations conceal drugs inside refrigerated containers, known as reefers, which transport perishable products such as fruit, meat or seafood. These containers are selected because perishable cargo typically receives high priority, thus avoiding economic losses and product deterioration.
In this sense, international drug trafficking, particularly toward Europe, uses containers as one of the main channels for transporting large quantities of illicit substances. To achieve this, transnational organized crime relies on a combination of corruption, falsification and illegal access.
Internal corruption is perhaps our greatest challenge in port security. Employees with privileged access can facilitate the entry and manipulation of illicit containers without raising suspicion.
Unauthorized access to restricted areas highlights weaknesses in physical security and surveillance protocols. The use of false or cloned seals is a common technique: seals are used that imitate official customs security seals. Opening the original container, inserting drugs, and then placing a cloned seal that simulates that the container has not been altered allows the use of containers with apparently legitimate documentation and standard trade routes without detection.
These practices demonstrate how drug trafficking has developed sophisticated and coordinated mechanisms to move drugs through maritime routes toward Europe. Therefore, combating this phenomenon ultimately requires close international collaboration, rigorous port controls and advanced technologies capable of detecting manipulation and suspicious activities.
Between January and May 2025 alone, the Public Prosecutor's Office of Panama, in close collaboration with its auxiliary bodies, including the Ministry of Security and the Panamanian National Customs Authority, managed to prevent the introduction of a total of 88 containers carrying more than 30,000 kilograms of illicit substances destined for Europe.
This significant joint action reflects the country's institutional commitment and effectiveness in combating international drug trafficking through strengthened customs controls, inter-institutional cooperation and strategic operations at key entry and exit points for goods.
As an example, the most significant seizure occurred recently, on May 30, 2025, when an alert was received from the National Anti-Drug Directorate, Colón section, on the Atlantic side of the country, regarding the possible presence of illicit substances in a container located at the Colón Container Terminal.
This prompted a search and inspection operation, during which 16,000 packages containing white powder were found. After forensic analysis, the substance tested positive for cocaine, with a total weight of 8,279.7 kilograms.
This quantity represents one of the most significant seizures in the region and highlights the scale of drug trafficking operating along maritime routes.
Regarding container traceability, in this specific case the container had been loaded in Guayaquil, Ecuador, with final destination Antwerp, Belgium. However, the contai-

ner was unloaded in Panama, a circumstance that did not correspond to the authorized itinerary. This indicates possible clandestine access or unauthorized manipulation of the container on Panamanian territory, revealing vulnerabilities in port controls that may be exploited by criminal organizations.
By observing the table shown in the slide, we verify the origin and destination of inspected containers in which illicit substances were found: 23 events in 2025 as country of origin and 41 destination events, particularly Belgium, Port of Antwerp.
Regarding seizure scenarios between 2018 and 2025, the total amount of drugs seized reached 114.8 tons, producing an economic impact on transnational organized crime of 3,962,770,000 dollars.
In the most relevant event, the seizure of 1,000 packages of cocaine in 2025 was carried out using the container contamination method. This result was possible thanks to the combination of operational intelligence, technical inspection, inter-institutional cooperation and, naturally, also international support and information.
The heat map shows the different drug trafficking routes, clearly illustrating flows from Panama's ports to various areas of Europe, as previously explained.
Within drug trafficking investigations, the analysis of markings and stamps found on seized illicit substances is essential. These elements constitute key indicators that allow authorities to identify origin, quality and distribution routes of drugs, as well as to establish links between seizures carried out in different jurisdictions and determine the involvement of specific criminal organizations.
Markings are visual signs printed or engraved on packages containing illicit drugs. They may consist of symbols, letters, numbers or specific designs functioning as a signature or code used by different criminal organizations to distinguish their shipment batch.
Stamps are embossed seals pressed onto the surface of the drug or packaging and function as authentication elements certifying the quality and origin of the substances.

However, as in any law enforcement activity, there are challenges and difficulties in criminal investigations that create obstacles in this type of investigative work. Investigations related to the detection and control of illicit substances in maritime containers face multiple challenges to ensure effectiveness and speed of action.
First, there are delays in responses from ports: slow responses and coordination by authorities affect inspection and search timelines, allowing rapid manipulation or clandestine transfer of suspicious containers.
Second, data regarding container movements is often delayed, meaning information is not always available in real time.
There are also seemingly basic deficiencies, such as insufficient surveillance cameras, resulting in information gaps and limiting the ability to monitor activities in loading and unloading areas, allowing unauthorized access or irregular movements without detection.
Finally, there is a shortage of container scanners and insufficient sophisticated equipment capable of detecting illicit cargo.
Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that significant operations have been carried out in collaboration with European countries and cities. Among them:
• Operation Coribin, associated with a seizure at Paris Airport, France;
• Operation Orion, linked to seizures in ports such as Antwerp and Felsø, involving cocaine shipments in containers;
• Operation Corsario, an investigation developed with Spain.
Finally, among the main crimes investigated by the Republic of Panama, numerous requests for international cooperation are recorded in cases of international drug trafficking, criminal association and money laundering.
However, as in any activity combating transnational organized crime, there are also challenges and difficulties in international cooperation.
First, it is necessary to guarantee real-time information exchange by strengthening communication channels between anti-drug

agencies, port authorities, customs services, law enforcement agencies and competent authorities.
Second, it is essential to interconnect networks that are fundamental for international cooperation, such as anti-drug prosecutors' networks with European prosecutors.
Third, existing cooperation instruments must be strengthened, promoting the use of spontaneous information transmission to enable the initiation of new investigations or the improvement of ongoing investigations, alongside institutional and technological strengthening.
Finally, shared responsibility is indispensable: drug trafficking is not an isolated phenomenon, and therefore public security authorities must promote coordination mechanisms to achieve an effective response.
International legal cooperation must translate into shared investigative capacity, system interoperability and synchronized judicial action. Only in this way will it be possible not only to seize drugs but also to dismantle entire criminal networks, target their assets and prevent their regeneration.
We are facing a structural threat, but also a historic opportunity: to transform our maritime borders and ports into spaces of more effective cooperation and oversight.
Thank you very much to all of you.

Conclusion

Giovanni Melillo

National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor

The time has come for concluding remarks, which necessarily require, first and foremost, renewing my thanks for the participation of so many distinguished Italian, European, and Latin American prosecutors in these meetings. We call them "meetings" because, at the same time, in the neighboring rooms, bilateral and trilateral sessions are taking place, allowing the exchange of information and laying the groundwork for the establishment of joint investigation teams. Some have already been formalized, and the constitutive agreements were signed right here.

This is therefore important work, for which I owe particular thanks to Barbara Sargenti and to the other magistrates of the National Anti-Mafia Directorate, the office I have the honor to lead.

Further acknowledgements are also due: to Piero Grasso, President Emeritus of the Senate and former National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor and Prosecutor of the Republic of Palermo; to Giuseppe Antoci, Member of the European Parliament and President of the Med Commission; to the Hon. Provenzano; to Undersecretary Tripodi.

A special thanks—besides Matteo Frasca and Lia Sava, who shared the burden of organizing this event—is owed to Giulio Romano and Pasquale Fimiani, Deputy Attorney General and Advocate General of the Court of Cassation. I extend this thanks also to Piero Gaeta, Attorney General at the Court of Cassation, whom they represent here. This is not a routine acknowledgement, but rather a sign of a shared determination to weave together the paths, functions, and responsibilities of my office and of the district prosecutors with those of the Attorney General at the Court of Cassation and the prosecutors general at the courts of appeal.

It will be a long journey to give a unified, coherent, and rigorous direction to the action of the public prosecutor, but it is a journey that—like international cooperation—has no alternative.

Above all, I owe thanks to many people who are not usually mentioned and whom I believe it is right to recall.

Thanks to the staff of the IILA: Claudia Gatti, Chiara Di Gaetano, Fabio Rossi, Eleonora Banfi, Marilisa De Nigris, Patrizio Mancini, Marika Vitale, Maria Rosaria Andreozzi, Maria Grazia Passamano, Luca Bianchi, Cristian Cavicchiolo, Manuele Manente, Walter Rotondo, Nunzio Fiorillo.

To the Court of Appeal team: Maria Teresa Gianbruno, Daniela Di Benedetto, Peppino Bonaventura, Caterina Serio, Simone Luca, Giuseppina Ministeri, Emilia Orlando, Rosaria Mansione, Enrica Frenda, Cristina Sciarrino, Eleonora De Simone, Claudia Candido, Girolamo Patrellaro, Salvatore Chiarelli, Vincenzo Saporito, Valentina Leggio, Elisa Sucameli, Flavio Gebbia.

To the Palermo Attorney General's Office team: Monica Di Giorgio, Federica Arnau, Gabriella Costanzo, Giuseppe Mesi, Rosalia Marchese, Claudia Barone, Licia La Nigra, Valentina Speciale.

To the National Anti-Mafia and Counter-Terrorism Directorate team: Lieutenant Colonel Stefano Scartozzi, Major Eugenio Marmorale, Warrant Officer Angelo Di Santo, and Dr. Maria Silvana Forte and Dr. Luana Tricalico.

As you can see, there are many names; but perhaps more than anything else, this conveys the scale and complexity of the preparatory and support activities required to carry out these meetings.

I must say that the spirit of these meetings—and above all their coincidence with the day dedicated to commemorating the sacrifice of Paolo Borsellino and the members of his secu-

rity detail—had led me to hope for a brief pause in the polemical tensions surrounding justice and the Italian judiciary.
Unfortunately, that was not the case, and I regret it.
I regret it because I believe that the search for new balances around the principle of judicial independence is certainly legitimate, but I do not think it can be achieved unless suspicion and distrust are replaced by attention and respect, and invective and polemical confrontation are replaced by dialogue and the sharing of a common sense of responsibility.
Otherwise—without such substitutions—the institutional fabric, essential to the credibility of both the judiciary and politics, is progressively worn away.
These days may help to restore awareness of this necessity.
These days have also reminded us of a fundamental point, recalled more than once in the interventions of Diana Salazar, Francisco Barbosa, as well as Ángel Valencia, Hindenburgo Chateaubriand, Carlos Mahiques, and many others: namely, how essential—across different latitudes, in different historical periods, and under different institutional circumstances—the contribution has been, for the defense of democracy and the security of our Republics and other States, of magistrates protected from every risk of political influence and improper conditioning.
This, I believe—if one were to identify a common denominator across all the interventions I have heard, and which I had easily predicted in my introduction would be a source of many lessons given the richness of the underlying experiences—is the value to be preserved and associated with these meetings: the awareness of the need to safeguard a principle of independence that is easy to pay formal tribute to, but far more complex to uphold concretely, so as to avoid any unjustified thinning of the normative framework—first and foremost constitutional—that constitutes its necessary safeguard.
That principle of autonomy and independence of the judiciary is essential. And once again, citing Ángel Valencia is appropriate to recall that without an independent judiciary it is even difficult—if not impossible—to formulate rigorous diagnoses of criminal phenomena and, consequently, to develop effective strategies. Because diagnoses, even before strategies, must be made without fear of looking squarely at the complexity and gravity of criminal phenomena.
We therefore have a duty to face reality by drawing on the gift of independence—a gift painstakingly won and defended through the sacrifice of many—acknowledging that the criminal systems that today define the new dimension of organized crime threaten more than ever the stability and security not only of distant regions of the planet, but also of the European continent.
For some time now, on a global scale and increasingly also within Europe, we have witnessed processes of structural integration among criminal organizations that share control over major infrastructures and adopt common strategies for financial transfers and speculative investment. These are phenomena destined not only to remain chronic—as Hindenburgo Chateaubriand, with a note of realistic pessimism, anticipated—but also to worsen for multiple reasons that are plain for all to see.
Trade and tariff wars are bound to multiply opportunities for criminal networks that possess the infrastructures and decisive expertise to manage commercial triangulations used to evade embargoes and sanctions; to provide substitutes—bearing counterfeit trademarks—for goods that may become inaccessible to most; and to increase the volume of customs fraud and tax fraud through false invoicing or under-invoicing.
A realistic analysis therefore depicts criminal phenomena acting as a powerful multiplier of the processes of political and social destabilization underway in Europe and worldwide. In turn, conflicts and war economies create ideal conditions for the expansion of major criminal organizations.
Colleagues from Serbia and Albania who took part in this conference could testify to the effects of war and war economies in accelerating the expansion of organized crime in the Balkans.
War theaters are immense laboratories for the experimentation of technologies that will soon also be employed for purposes pursued by criminal organizations.
Those who have learned to use such tech-

nologies in wartime contexts will constitute the next major recruitment pool for terrorist networks and mafia organizations.

More broadly, we will witness—indeed, we are already witnessing—profound transformations in the structure and even the "genetic code" of major criminal systems.

The technological dimension now drives the selection of leadership, but also the growth of genuine intelligence functions within criminal cartels, which exploit the global black market in personal data to protect their impunity.

New technologies foster synergies among criminal networks, expand the transnational web of financial relationships that serve money laundering, and shape the strategic objectives of major criminal cartels themselves. Deep changes are underway in the business models of criminal networks, increasingly oriented toward becoming constellations of global-scale financial enterprises, expanding their corruptive power internationally.

In this dimension, complicit relationships cloak themselves in the apparent neutrality of business dealings, yet become ever more solid and increasingly difficult to detect and strike.

I believe these considerations should contribute to formulating a rigorous and shared diagnosis of the criminal phenomena we are called upon to confront, because that diagnosis is the prerequisite for making international cooperation a strategic instrument rather than a mere formal fulfillment of legal obligations.

From this perspective, these meetings offer reasons for hope, because you have heard how, across the entire Latin American continent, efforts are underway to create judicial and police structures specialized in combating organized crime, also looking to the Italian model.

This is an effort we are committed to supporting, because upon it depends their—and our—capacity to analyze criminal phenomena and to deploy increasingly complex investigative techniques.

The alternative is fragmentation of knowledge and the dispersal of any possibility of a strategic vision of investigations.

A coherent and unified action by national judicial systems is essential to give a strategic dimension to European investigative coordination.

We have a particularly acute need for all this because—echoing Ángel Valencia—what we are doing is not enough. We must have access to national judicial databases. We do, but other national systems must also develop them, and we must create rigorous forms of information exchange that cannot be entrusted to paper or to email.

We must build ways of sharing information that are rigorous and respectful of rights, yet effective. We must develop shared projects for new investigative technologies, beginning with the use of generative artificial intelligence.

We must introduce a supranational normative framework—and this is a shortcoming in our system—and I hope the parliamentary representatives present today will grasp its necessity.

We must also provide a regulatory framework for the secrecy of algorithms and techniques that use artificial intelligence.

It is not conceivable that they should become subject to disclosure in the adversarial phase of criminal proceedings.

The French Code of Criminal Procedure already provides a safeguard of this kind. It is necessary—urgently necessary—to introduce similar protection in our system as well.

And there is another need that is particularly evident in all systems, but even more pronounced in ours: to create a true plan for generational renewal and joint training among judicial structures, police forces, and intelligence services.

It is not possible to meet the challenge of generative artificial intelligence with ordinary mechanisms of generational turnover: in this respect, a major acceleration is required.

There are also other objectives that are more readily achievable—indeed, we may even be somewhat late—such as faster and fuller implementation of the anti-money-laundering directive, to ensure the resilience of a system designed to prevent the financial system from being used for laundering purposes, now challenged by underground banking and cryptocurrencies.

We, as public prosecutors and judicial police, need that directive and its coherent application above all, in order to project investigations toward the most sophisticated components of mafia organizations, which—as has been recalled in many interventions—have long made

use of underground banking and cryptocurrencies.
We also need to build a privileged network of cooperative relationships with the judicial systems of Latin American democracies. Many Central American democracies now retain only formal vestiges, because they are corroded by the disease of corruption and by the intimidatory pressure of drug trafficking.
For this very reason, it is necessary to forge ties with democracies that remain strong, even if—like ours—they are traversed by extremely serious risk factors. Doing so also requires a measure of courage, and the abandonment of rigid and sometimes sterile formal schemes of judicial cooperation.
I hope that all this can also become central to the project of a Prosecutor's Office against transnational organized crime, approved in recent weeks by the Ministers of Justice and of the Interior of the Mercosur countries.
We need this; but we also need to strengthen solidarity with those countries to guarantee the safety of magistrates engaged in the most delicate investigations, because there are contexts in which such safety cannot be ensured within their own national territories.
I believe these meetings deliver many results, many advances in knowledge, and many opportunities to share experiences—but they also deliver to us a great responsibility.
It is a responsibility that rests on the shoulders of each of us, and one that I trust I can shoulder together with the district prosecutors and all the magistrates of the public prosecutor's offices, to whom—despite the mistakes that anyone can make—I truly believe the country owes a great deal.

Chiara
Colosimo

President of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the Phenomenon of Mafias and Other Criminal Associations, Including Foreign Ones

Good morning to everyone.
Allow me — in light of the closing remarks and the esteem I hold for the National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor — a brief remark before turning to the acknowledgements and the substance of the discussion.
If I am here today, it is also to position the Parliamentary Commission as a liaison body between independent institutions that must and wish to respect one another.
This is demonstrated by the path we have taken over these past two years, and I hope to be able to return here again to thank all those who are rowing in the same direction, toward the justice in which we believe.
That said, I must thank IILA for this invitation, the National Anti-Mafia Directorate, and all the prosecutors present. I must also attempt to bring together what you have said, what you have suggested over these days, but above all the paths we can pursue together in the fight against organized crime.
The Commission I chair — not everyone may know this in detail — is not only Parliament, not only investigation, but all these elements combined; it has been, and still intends to be above all, the presence of the State when fighting the mafia.
This process began, remarkably, in 1962 — the people of Palermo will remember — after the Ciaculli massacre, with the establishment of the Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission, even before prosecutors' offices and police forces were specifically organized to combat organized crime. It continued in 1982, after the terrible murders of La Torre and Dalla Chiesa, with that law which still today teaches the world how to fight organized crime, namely the introduction of Article 416-bis.
It then progressed with the extraordinary intuition of Giovanni Falcone, who decided to unify the system by creating the DNA and transforming prosecutors' offices into DDAs, together with the DIA, the NIC, the ROS, the SCICO — all those structures that we know today and to which we look when we discuss anti-mafia strategies.
Then came 1992, the hell that we paid for at a very high price and that marked the life of this nation. But I look at this audience and I know perfectly well that around the world, especially in Latin America, this hell is something you are living today and paying for at the same high price.
That is why we remember magistrates Pecci, Albertini, Suárez and Machado Díaz.
However, my task here today is not only to remember where we come from and where we may go: it is to bring together a common thread, and that thread — unfortunately — is the main connective tissue of organized crime, and it is called drug trafficking. It tells the story of the evolution of the mafia, how it has moved from being a local phenomenon to a global one.
We could say "glocal," to simplify, but in reality we are speaking of a tree with roots firmly planted in territories of origin and branches reaching across the world, into every State where evil can take root.
I will outline what I consider the main priorities of this fight. The first can only be an updated follow the money, understood as recovering assets and returning them to local communities. This too is an intuition of this country, which over the years has seen the FATF, GAFILAT and the European Union in 2024 recognize and support it.
There is nothing more powerful, as an image, than taking a villa away from a mafia boss and returning it to the social spaces of our cities. On this point we need renewed momentum on preventive measures, a renewed narrative telling our citizens that we are not waging war against those who engage in economic activity: we restore healthy economies to our cities

when we seize assets from criminal organizations, and we are particularly proud of this.
The second point — which today is perfectly and extraordinarily represented here — is anti-mafia diplomacy: the one promoted by the National Anti-Mafia Directorate and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when they bring together these States and these prosecutors' offices.
It was first a trip by Paolo Borsellino and Giovanni Falcone, and then Falcone's trip in 1991 — which I found mentioned in an article by Argentine journalist Gabriela Cerruti — that showed how it was already clear then that this was the territory Cosa Nostra intended to colonize, that drug trafficking routes risked becoming one of the main sources of enrichment for mafia organizations. That is why cooperation between prosecutors' offices, promoted today thanks to the National Prosecutor, represents, in my view, an extraordinary success of anti-mafia diplomacy.
Another point I wish to emphasize — and which I know is central depending on the States and contexts we discuss — concerns prisons, which increasingly risk becoming the agoras of crime: places from which organized crime is born or reborn.
For this reason, we firmly maintain the 41-bis regime, because there is nothing inhumane about interrupting the connections between those who seek to command and those who must no longer be commanded.
On the contrary, I believe an increasingly advanced specialization of the prison police is essential.
Recently — and this is a figure I want to share — the GOM, the Mobile Operational Group of the prison police, provided me with a study on the economic and financial flows related to detainees under the 41-bis regime. We are talking about nearly three million euros per year.
Cosa Nostra alone moves €539,000 annually related to detainees under 41-bis: money that arrives in cash, without traceability, but which demonstrates the economic power of incarcerated individuals in relation to whom we cannot afford any retreat.
The final point concerns what the National Prosecutor emphasized at the beginning of his speech — and which I fully share, including through the creation of a specific committee within the Parliamentary Commission — namely the issue of technologies. We face organized crime that continues to maintain strong territorial control, but at the same time has decided not to abandon the digital dimension; indeed, it often anticipates developments through the web.
This is not only about encrypted communications or cryptocurrencies, which are perhaps the most well-known aspects: we are talking about anonymity mixers, DeFi platforms, stablecoins and many other technological tools that we risk underestimating, but on which our police forces — and police forces worldwide — could do much more.
In conclusion, I will provide some figures, because I believe that on occasions like this numbers must come before emotions; but it is emotions — and Dr. Di Lello is right — that must guide actions against organized crime, otherwise we risk losing sight of the objective.
The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that in 2023 there were 316 million men and women who used drugs. We are obviously talking about cocaine, synthetic drugs, a market generating hundreds of billions of dollars in revenue and producing increased violence not only in Latin America but even in the Caribbean.
We are therefore speaking of growing social costs, because these individuals require assistance, and not only because videos of certain neighborhoods with "fentanyl zombies" have gone viral: beyond fentanyl there are at least twenty types of nitazenes circulating in the synthetic drug market.
But what concerns me most, from my perspective, is the increase in the number of young people using these substances and who, through drugs, often end up becoming manpower for organized crime. These are data emerging from your investigations and unfortunately confirming a real concern. A concern that certainly affects younger generations but must also concern the economy, because when we speak of money laundering estimated between 2% and 5% of global GDP, we are speaking of approximately €715 billion in alternative economy.
Perhaps this alone should concern us and put us all on the same path to stop drug trafficking routes.

We are therefore facing a plurality of illegal markets which, as you well know, use the same channels for different trafficking activities. Alongside drugs there is arms trafficking, human trafficking, sometimes even organ trafficking. And we are facing the challenge of all challenges: stopping the colonization of new territories. To achieve this, your work is necessary, but also that of States and governments, which must implement all policies capable of discouraging criminal penetration into the most vulnerable territories. This does not always happen, and we are here also to remind of it.

But I was speaking about emotions: July 19 is the day of Paolo Borsellino, Emanuela Loi, Agostino Catalano, Vincenzo Li Muli, Walter Eddie Cosina and Claudio Traina. It is the day of all those men and women who, even aware of the destiny — or design, for those who believe — that sometimes accompanies those who choose to fight this battle, did not step back, did not hesitate. They even hid their smiles from their families to prepare them for that day, because they knew the explosives had already arrived.

For those men and women, the Commission I chair is here.

And also for you, to say thank you for what you are doing.