The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Cocaine Smuggling Into Russia Up Tenfold Since Invasion of Ukraine

January 21, 2025



Cocaine seized at the Sheremetyevo airport. **Moskva News Agency**

The volume of cocaine seized by Russian authorities has surged since the country launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, reflecting a significant shift in international smuggling routes and techniques, the pro-Kremlin daily Izvestia has reported.

Between 2023 and 2024, Russian officials confiscated approximately 5.2 tons of cocaine valued at 350 billion rubles ($3.4 billion), a tenfold increase on earlier levels, according to the Moscow-based outlet.

The surge is linked to the rerouting of international drug trafficking channels. After the closure of Ukraine's Odesa port, a consequence of Moscow's invasion, smugglers redirected shipments through Russia, which has become a key transit hub for cocaine destined for European markets.

This change coincides with a 24% increase in global cocaine production in 2022, according to

the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The oversupply in global markets has driven traffickers to explore new routes.

In 2024, Russia reported record cocaine confiscations, seizing over 3.7 tons. This included a 1.2-ton shipment intercepted at St. Petersburg's port and other large-scale operations targeting cartels from Latin America and Europe.

Smugglers have also adapted their methods, increasing their reliance on ground transportation in addition to maritime routes.

Related article: Russia Says Seized EU-Bound Cocaine Haul Worth Millions

Concealment techniques have become more sophisticated, with fruit shipments, particularly bananas, being a favored method. These perishable goods are often transported in sealed, temperature-controlled containers, which are rarely inspected to avoid spoilage. Traffickers have also hidden cocaine in shipments of coffee, cocoa and porcelain.

Despite the significant influx, most of the cocaine entering Russia is bound for other markets, with criminal groups using the country as an entry point into Europe. This has elevated Russia's role as a transit hub in global smuggling networks.

Domestically, demand for cocaine remains limited due to its high cost, priced at 10,000-14,000 rubles ($100-140) per gram, making it uncompetitive against cheaper synthetic drugs like mephedrone, which dominate the market.

However, the growing volume of cocaine transiting through Russia has spurred a rise in wholesale trade and associated criminal activities.

Darknet platforms have become a primary venue for wholesale transactions, while cities such as St. Petersburg and Moscow — due to their ports and affluent populations — are hotspots for this activity.

Russian law enforcement has stepped up efforts to combat the trend, including the shutdown of major darknet platforms, in response to the escalating challenge.

This article was originally published *by bne IntelliNews.*

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/01/21/cocaine-smuggling-into-russia-up-tenfold-since-invasion-of-ukraine-a87687