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Chapter III

White Shipments, Sour Transactions

The Dutch Cocaine Market in European Perspective

"I suppose that its influence is physically a bad one. I find it, however, so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its second action is a matter of small moment".

Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*

3.1. The European Market

3.1.1. Old European cocaine markets

Cocaine in Europe until 1930

Long before Colombia had anything to do with it, Europe already had extensive experience with the pharmacological properties and the economic profitability of cocaine. Although many scientists, explorers and physicians¹ wrote about the coca plant from the sixteenth century onward, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the plant and its properties began to generate a great deal of interest as a 'wonder drug' (Phillips and Wynne 1980: 27).

Cocaine was first isolated and named in 1859 by A. Niemann, a German professor from the University of Göttingen. Both coca and cocaine subsequently acquired sudden fame and popularity in Europe until the late 1920's. These substances were broadly welcomed by physicians in the United States and Europe.² The initial enthusiasm about their positive effects and uses as a general stimulant against fatigue or depression, to treat opium, morphine and alcohol addiction, as a local anaesthetic, as an aphrodisiac, to treat asthma, cachexia or stomach disorders, and so on, remained virtually uncontested for 25 years.

Most of the early experimentation was done with coca infusions, giving rise to all sorts of coca-based drinks and elixirs, presented to the general public as wonder tonics for innumerable disorders. The most successful beverage in Europe came to be *Vin Mariani* (a dark coca-based wine) introduced to the public in 1863 by A. Mariani, a Corsican physician, who quickly gained fame and fortune with his product.³ In America, an even more successful medicinal tonic appeared in 1886. Instead of alcohol, it was a syrup containing cocaine,

¹ Amongst others Ramon Pave, Tomas Ortiz, Garcilaso de la Vega (Inca), Amerigo Vespucci, Nicolas Monardes and Humboldt. In 1750, J. de Jussieu was the first botanist to send coca plants to Europe. In 1783, Lamarck classified the plant as the genus *Erythroxylon*. Miller, von Tschudi, Weddell, Pöppig, Prescott, Gibbon and Herndon, Gaedecke, and Markham, from different angles and places, continued experimentation, description and debate in Europe on coca properties during the first half of the nineteenth century.

² Prestigious scientists such as Mantegazza, De Marles, Fauvel, Aschenbrandt, Palmer, Searle, Christison, Moreno y Maiz, Schraff and von Anrep, Koller, Corning, Bentley, Hammond, Halstead, and, of course, Freud were all strong advocates of the new drug, having high expectations (neglecting thus possible abuse) on its potential positive effects. They should be regarded as the first cocaine 'pushers' and some of them, the first known regular consumers and addicts.

³ Towards the end of the century, its popularity was immense. Not only amongst doctors that would prescribe it, or people that would buy it in public saloons or popular drugstores, but many celebrities - as in modern advertising - endorsed the wine for its beneficial aspects: Zola, Grant, Bartholdi, Verne, Edison, Ibsen, Sara Bernhardt, the Prince of Wales, the Russian Tsar, or the pope Leo XIII, who decorated Mariani and allowed his effigy to be used on the bottle label.

caffeine and extracts from cola nuts, mixed in soda water: Coca-Cola was on the market, born from the enthusiasm about the beneficial properties of coca and cocaine.

At the turn of the century, cocaine had already spread beyond the strict medical or para-medical realm to be consumed in a recreational fashion by intellectuals, bohemians, writers, musicians, and jet-setters, as well as by prostitutes, pimps and petty criminals of the main European cities. This potential recreational use of cocaine was pushed forward by the discovery, between 1890 and 1900, of the possibility of sniffing cocaine powder. However, at least until 1910, most of the heavy or chronic cocaine use was still concentrated within the world of 'doctors and patients'.

This expanded and diversified demand (doctors that shoot-up, brain tonic drinking people, sniffing night-life habitués) is clearly illustrated by the increase of coca leaf exports from Peru, the main producer even then: 8 tons in 1877, 580 tons in 1894, 2800 tons in 1906 and 543 tons in 1920 (Escotado, part II 1996: 84). In Germany, *Merck* had a rather monopolistic control over production by 1885, given that Hamburg was the main trading centre for coca leaf. Willing to promote and sell cocaine as a new panacea, and despite the fact that after 1890 some physicians started to be more cautious about cocaine,⁴ the pharmaceutical industry was very active in denying or underplaying undesirable effects, while clearly manipulating some positive statements on cocaine use (Escotado, part II 1996: 78-79).

Java and the Nederlandsche Cocainefabriek

The Netherlands played an important role in coca and, to a lesser extent, cocaine production. In 1878 the first coca plants were brought from Peru to the Dutch colony of Java and during the 1880s commercial cultivation and transportation to Europe expanded with the impulse of the *Koloniale Bank* from Amsterdam. Dutch coca did very well, even surpassing Peruvian production after 1910.⁵ Until 1900 crops were mainly sold in Germany, *Merck* being the main buyer. However, that year the *Koloniale Bank* established the first Dutch cocaine factory in Amsterdam, the *Nederlandsche Cocainefabriek*. Small in the beginnings, the factory expanded to become the world largest cocaine producer after 1910, maintaining a leading position until 1928, and surviving with the same name until as late as 1975 due to the timely diversification to other hard drugs: novocaine, morphine, codeine, heroin and amphetamines. (Korf and de Kort 1989: 5).

From panacea to evil vice

By the early 1900's, cocaine popularity in European cities slowly started to be the subject of debate and pressure. There were worries along the three fronts of cocaine use: as a therapeutic drug, it was being slowly limited or replaced after increasing doubts and failure; as a popular tonic in patent medicines or drinks, it was increasingly under attack from physicians and pharmacists, and finally, as a recreational drug in underworld and bohemian circles, it became a concern for moral panics and social control campaigners. Counter-reactions to the supposed excesses of cocaine use that eventually resulted in stringent regulation of the drug, first in the

⁴ After the first signs of abuse or addiction - including lethal cases of cocaine intoxication among practitioners and patients - were acknowledged between 1880 and 1890, debate within the medical world took virulent proportions and even people like Freud became cautious of earlier statements and research results. In his polemic with Erlenmeyer, Freud calls him a 'crusader', in a prophetic critique against the overlap between pharmacology and morality. However, in his last essay on cocaine, he also recognises premature and blind optimism and revises his own positions on cocaine use against morphinism or alcoholism, and the problem of cocaine tolerance and addiction (Freud 1995: 80).

⁵ In 1891, almost 20 tons of coca from Java were sold by the *Koloniale Bank*, which handled yearly between 34 tons and 81 tons until 1900. Java coca exports boomed after that: 200 tons in 1907, 1300 tons in 1914 and 1700 tons in 1920 (Korf and de Kort 1989: 5; Escotado, part II 1996: 84).

United States in 1914 and later in Europe at the end of 1920's, included a mix of medical, moral and social arguments which in many cases reflected or coincided with deeper - and hidden - political and economic anxieties and agendas.

The dramatic change in attitude - from the panacea of 1890 to the most dangerous and evil vice only thirty years later - shows that the real issue with cocaine does not lay in the substance in itself - always a remedy and a poison, always a medicine as well as a potential 'toy' - but rather on the power struggle between distinct social groups - with different social and individual interests - to define and categorise it, and to give the drug one or other social meaning.

A combination of factors can be identified to account for that change. Some refer more specifically to the American situation, but despite some initial opposition due to closer links with cocaine production,⁶ Europe followed also the same path.

a) Physicians were increasingly worried about cases of fatal cocaine intoxication, cocaine addiction and, more important, on expansion of non-medical use. With the search for antidotes to cocaine, the substitution with other more secure local anaesthetics such as procaine or novocaine, by the end of the 1920's, cocaine had lost most of its potential usefulness to physicians.

b) Increasing professionalisation and institutionalisation of physicians and pharmacists meant stronger negative attitudes to para-medical products, including uncontrolled coca or cocaine-based patent medicines, tonics and drinks. Pharmacists in particular did not want to be seen as responsible for producing cocaine abusers.

c) The popular press was beginning to print horror stories about cocaine addiction, which resulted in widespread, especially middle-class fear of drugs as addicting and vicious (Phillips and Wynne 1980: 57).

d) Non-medical cocaine users, especially those from the lower classes, were considered dangerous to both themselves and society. Cocaine was increasingly linked with moral degradation, and grew to be associated with criminal and violent behaviour, and above all, in America, with 'black' crime.

e) Although in Europe cocaine also started to be associated with prostitutes, bohemians, petty criminals and the decadent night life of Berlin, Paris, Vienna or London, there was also concern about cocaine abuse among soldiers, especially during the First World War. The country to blame was, both as the main cocaine producer and war enemy, Germany.

f) Both in America and Europe, two processes were already under way by the end of the nineteenth century: on the one hand, a revival of traditional theological and anti-liberal discourses, which depicted 'artificial paradises' created by drugs (and drunkenness) as evil and immoral social threats. On the other, the expansion of State interventionism and welfare, that gave room for 'muckraking' social reformers of all sorts, willing both to legislate people's morals and to protect them through the 'therapeutic' State.

Cocaine in Europe 1930-1970

Between 1915 and the late 1920's, Europe went through the process of regulation and finally prohibition. Cocaine still enjoyed some years of underground popularity. The first illegal users were gamblers, prostitutes, pimps, petty criminals, musicians and artists (Korf and Verbraeck 1993: 104). In Germany, illicit cocaine use became a notorious feature of Weimar nightlife. Cocaine was easy available in Berlin, and as the main producing country a source for cocaine

⁶ France and England followed first, Germany and the Netherlands later. In general terms, European countries had strong interests in production or trafficking of opium and cocaine (colonies, strong pharmaceutical industry, and so forth) and were reluctant to immediately enforce regulation or prohibition.

used in neighbouring capital cities. The First World War seems to have been both a time for extended illegal use - by soldiers - as well as an opportunity for moving and smuggling cocaine (Phillips and Wynne 1980: 83).

Cocaine was used - sniffed - by some jazz musicians, some of the popular movie actors and by avant-garde and popular writers and artists. This use is reflected in the lyrics of some songs of the era, as well as in the central theme of several novels, plays and movies.⁷

A consequence of anti-drug laws was a temporary enlargement of the underground market for cocaine and a sharp increase in its price. However, that market was based on diversion from legitimate medical sources, and there was a dramatic drop-off in production after 1928. The Council of the League of Nations reported in 1931 that compared with 1929, cocaine production declined 58%, while cocaine stocks in manufacturing countries dropped by 85% (Phillips and Wynne 1980: 86-87). Many casual users responded to the price increases by cutting back or stopping consumption, and heavy users moved to alternatives such as heroin or new synthetic stimulants.

Indeed, the major factor accounting for the demise in cocaine's popularity in United States and Europe, and for the fact that for the next four decades, from 1930 to 1970, cocaine remained marginal or very limited for potential illegal drug users, was the result of pharmacological research. After 1932, a new group of synthetic drugs, the amphetamines, were widely and legally available far more cheaply than cocaine. If substantial illegal cocaine production was ever going to re-emerge somewhere again to supply the European market, it was not going to be in Germany or the Netherlands, but certainly much closer to coca leaf cultivation regions.

Cocaine renaissance

The American cocaine revival in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as explained in chapter II, is the result of many factors: growing methadone programmes for heroin addicts that started mixing with cocaine, tighter restrictions on amphetamines making cocaine an attractive alternative, demographic changes and political turmoil increasing the likelihood of young people experimenting with new drugs, open promotion by showbiz celebrities (as it was the case a century before with the *Vin Mariani* endorsed by eminencies), media coverage and legitimising illicit cocaine use as a symbol of sexual prowess, conspicuous consumption and 'white' success. (Courtwright 1995: 215-217).

Supply followed these developments with some delay. A clear bottle-neck occurred during the 1970s between an expanding demand in the United States and a still-to-come massive supply from South America: for many years cocaine remained scarce, expensive and those who succeeded in the business were people who managed to get the proper contacts at source. In this way, the role played by anti-Castro Cuban exiles first and Colombians later, with their trafficking expertise and their South American connections, was pivotal. Next to them, many individual traffickers could make, during the early 1970s, a couple of smuggling operations a year without fearing police intervention.⁸

However, only some of these factors account for the re-emergence of an illicit cocaine market in Europe. In general terms, two main differences should be indicated between both markets. Firstly, although following the same curve trends, cocaine use did not manage to reach the same epidemic levels in Europe that it did in the States. Both volumes of cocaine

⁷ Although more notorious in New Orleans Jazz or Hollywood rings, European arts and letters from 1910 to 1930 also reflect cocaine use in many ways: from support and satiric or comic treatment, to moralistic 'anti-dope' melodramas.

⁸ See for these early cocaine entrepreneurs the novel of Sabbag (1978) and the ethnography of Adler (1985).

seizures and rates of year prevalence consumption in times of market expansion reveal that the European cocaine market never came close to American levels.

Secondly, the European cocaine market dynamics followed developments in America with a gap of some years. In United States, on the one hand, cocaine dynamics can be broken down into three stages: a) a slow but sustained increase in cocaine use, mostly sniffing, from 1969 through the early 1980s;⁹ b) an explosive growth of cocaine sniffing from the early 1980s and crack smoking from mid-1980s; and c) a decline after 1988 among younger, casual and affluent users, though not among low classes and poly-drug addicts (Courtwright 1995: 215). In Europe, on the other hand, market developments can be summarised as follows: a) a limited but slow growing use from 1975 until the late 1980s; b) a fast increase from 1989 onwards; and c) an stabilisation or decline of cocaine use since the mid-1990s among younger and affluent, though a - limited - increase in crack smoking and among poly-drug users, besides market expansion to new regions in Europe (for example, East countries).

This gap in time - of 6 or 7 years - between American and European developments, is crucial since it partially explains the different magnitude reached by both markets: cocaine arrived in Europe once it had already lost its early uncontested positive and harmless image. Moreover, Europe lacked - only to some extent - both the cultural values associated with cocaine and the deep social conflicts that could make a crack-cocaine culture fully develop.¹⁰

The reasons for this gap should be sought at the supply side. Massive cocaine import into Europe was only possible once South American cocaine exporters were able to expand to Europe. Maybe also attracted by potential better prices (Van Doorn 1993: 100) and by cocaine availability at source, they required some years to develop new and more entrepreneurial marketing resources (bulk transportation, and so on) and strong business contacts in a more remote and unfamiliar region.

Following the fact that stagnation in United States coincides with expansion in Europe, many authors have indicated saturation of the American market as the main explanation for cocaine expansion in Europe (Lewis 1989: 36; Roth and Frey 1994: 255; Van Duyn 1995: 78). However, this argument seems rather simplistic and difficult to test. First of all, this view ignores the power of demand in drug economies. There is evidence of increased cocaine demand and acceptability from the 1970s among recreational users or heroin addicts in London, Paris or elsewhere in Europe (Lewis 1989: 35 and 41). Secondly, cocaine was indeed supplied through the 1970s and 1980s by individual entrepreneurs, native amateur and part-time dealers, as well as by many groups and individuals belonging to former (or current) European colonies. Besides, the early presence in Europe of leading Colombian entrepreneurs is well documented.¹¹ They were interested in both doing business and using European financial resources, but they showed slowness or problems in establishing reliable partnerships and opening lines.

⁹ See, for example, the pioneering book on 'drugtakers' (Young 1971) in which the word 'cocaine' is only mentioned three times through the 240 pages.

¹⁰ In both 'affluent cocaine sniffing' and 'ghettoised crack smoking' versions, cocaine embodies, as no other illegal drug, key markers of savage capitalism: conspicuous and mass consumption, sexual virility, the search for individual success, power and recognition, high productivity, conformism to dominant values and fast experiences. Cocaine left its footprints in its paradigmatic extreme expressions: Wall Street and the Ghetto.

¹¹ Rodríguez Orejuela and Jorge Ochoa were detained in Spain in the mid-1980s. Despite the fact that the story of a supposed meeting between Pablo Escobar and Carlos Ledher with a couple of Surinamese dealers in Schiphol, the Netherlands, as early as 1981 is very hard to believe (being the typical fable of those informants or 'repentants' trying to score high with the police and to impress the general public), there are many cases of Colombian and South American entrepreneurs active or imprisoned before 1988 (Bovenkerk 1995b; Haenen and Buddingh' 1994).

3.1.2. Cocaine demand

Trends

Data on cocaine use in Europe is fragmentary; most of the in-depth studies are local and often target a very specific kind of user. Non problematic consumption, users belonging to non-deviant groups, without any contact with police, street corner work or health-care institutions remain a rather unknown quantity. Sometimes the studies follow different methods. Numbers given by European or international institutions, as well as those exposed by media, are at least highly speculative. They tend to overplay the problem or assume that national or local surveys are an underestimation of the real trends (EMCDDA 1995: 6).

Local or regional studies on consumption trends and levels make clear that they can differ from place to place, some witnessing an increase in problematic consumption - crack, poly-drug use, and so on - with new groups of consumers, other showing stabilisation or even decrease, and still others - as for example some East European countries - showing patterns that parallel those found in Western regions ten or fifteen years ago.

As it was suggested before, the European cocaine scene is not a mere retarded emulation of the experience in the United States. Different values and social structure, more popularity of amphetamines as an illicit stimulant, and the new synthetic drugs for younger users, put limits to cocaine-crack demand in Europe.

During the 1980s, cocaine was regarded in Europe as the caviar or champagne among drugs, expensive, and with a generally positive status. On the one hand, cocaine was appreciated and consumed by regular opiate users. *"If God invented anything better, He must have kept it for Himself"* declared a heroin addict from Amsterdam interviewed by Grapendaal et al. (1995: 147-148) referring to the effect of the 'speedball'. The popularity of this combination of - injected - heroin and cocaine, a constant from the 1970s through the 1990s among heroin users, lays in the fact that cocaine allows the addict to continue his hyperactive life, introduces an element of enjoyment, adventure and speed, while controlled by heroin, and is easy to give up, if needed, from time to time.

Cocaine inhalation ('sniffing' or 'snorting') has been a fairly controlled, invisible and sporadic fashion among actors, writers, lawyers, financiers, businessmen, and the traditional professionals, and within the world of advertising, consulting and media (Bieleman et al. 1993: 24). Within this recreational cocaine use among the wealthy and the middle classes, a sharp difference with the United States can be observed: cocaine did not spread so pervasively among European teenagers and youngsters. In 1982 as many as 19% of the age group between 18 and 25 years were estimated to have used cocaine at least once in the preceding year in the United States (Bieleman et al. 1993: 25). For the same age and prevalence group, around a 3% is indicated by the various studies conducted in some European cities for the early and mid-1990s (Sandwijk et al. 1995; Bieleman et al. 1993; OGD 1997a). Lifetime prevalence amongst students 15-16 years old is even smaller, European school surveys indicating a modest 1% to 2% for the mid-1990s (EMCDDA 1998: 19). 'Socially integrated' cocaine users tend to be young male adults aged 25-40 years with above average educational and/or occupational status. They use low doses intermittently rather than frequently, and only a small minority develop a more intensive and problematic pattern of use (EMCDDA 1995: 7). In his study on 'non-deviant' cocaine users in Amsterdam (Cohen 1989) and a later follow-up research (Cohen and Sas 1993), Cohen concludes that the main tendency of experienced cocaine users over time is towards decreasing or ending use. Most display a capacity to control and modify their drug use.

Despite many predictions and panic promoted after the crack epidemic in America, an overwhelming 'crack attack' on the European streets did not occur (Ruggiero and South 1995:

24; Boekhout van Solinge 1996; OGD 1996b). However, modest to sizeable local markets in crack did develop through the early 1990s first in Britain and later in France,¹² especially in cities like London, Paris and Amsterdam (Power et al. 1995: 378). Crack smoking or 'free-basing' in deprived inner-cities or suburban areas has often been linked to economic, social and health problems suffered by both native and ethnic minority groups, mostly young, problems that are again amplified by crack use (unemployment, family break-down, poly-drug use, more contact with health services or police, violence,¹³ emergency room episodes, diagnosed 'crack babies', and so on) (OGD 1996a: 79-80; Power et al. 1995: 378). Again, available data make clear that crack use has remained limited, that in fact some users have been smoking a self-made, better quality crack even from the 1980s, and that stories about crack have been over-dramatised (Boekhout van Solinge 1996; OGD 1997a; Kools 1997). Recent Dutch studies have shown a general increase in cocaine sniffing for 1997 (Abraham et al 1999), a 'come back' of coke sniffing amongst 'clubbers and ravers', and a spread of crack smoking amongst deprived neighbourhood youth and homeless drug addicts (Nabben and Korf 1999: 633-641).

In quantitative terms, European demand is above world average. Table IV shows some estimations on prevalence use rates, number of users and cocaine quantity yearly consumed in the late 1990s. On average, between 1% and 2% of the total European population (370 millions) tried cocaine at least once, between 0,6% and 0,9% used it at least once in the last year, and a core of 0,2% to 0,4% (around 1 million) consumed cocaine during the last month.¹⁴ In Amsterdam, where as in any other large city consumption is high above the European average, the year prevalence of cocaine use shows a relative stability through the years, with some recent increase: 1,5% in 1987, 1,2% in 1990, 1,6% in 1994 and 2,6% in 1997 (Sandwijk et al. 1995; Abraham et al. 1999). The French *Observatoire Géopolitique des Drogues* estimated that, from the five larger countries of the EU, Spain and Britain have the higher consumption rates, followed by Italy, and after that by France and Germany with slightly less consumption.

Although the OGD suggested that between 120 and 130 tons of cocaine are consumed every year in the EU (OGD 1997a: 77-78), this number is most probably an overestimation.¹⁵ An average of 90 to 100 tons a year seems more reasonable and coherent with other demand and supply indicators.

¹² In both cases, there were Caribbean networks (Jamaicans in London and French Antilleans in Paris) who introduced and controlled retail in these crack markets. (Boekhout van Solinge 1996). Crack use has also been reported in the Netherlands, Germany and Spain.

¹³ Cocaine - and crack - use has been readily blamed for criminal behaviour. However, most of the studies show that a very small proportion of cocaine users are involved in criminal acts other than drug dealing, basically property offences and *macho* and dare-devil behaviour (Bieleman et al. 1993: 73; Cohen 1989); that its effects are always mediated by the norms, practices and circumstances of their users (Waldorf et al. 1991: 10), and that drug use and crime do not have a straightforward causal relationship (Grapendaal et al. 1995: 197).

¹⁴ Although the main source is OGD (1997a) - a unique study on cocaine consumption in Europe combining interesting qualitative dimensions, own fieldwork and sampling, and quantitative calculations - data presented in Table IV are my own estimations based also in other studies and calculations (EMCDDA 1998).

¹⁵ Their calculation, based on their own sampling, is extremely unclear and implying very high levels of average consumption per person, since the rates and number of users they handle are not exaggerated. Some researchers have criticised this mistake. The 90-100 tons of cocaine consumed every year in the EU represent around the 25% of the world market, estimated in 400 tons per year (see chapter II). By the mid-1990s United States held 65% of the total consumption, maybe less, giving the other 10% to the growing Latin American, Asian and Eastern European markets.

The tendencies of European cocaine demand for the second half of the 1990s are somewhat puzzling and suggest many directions:

Table IV. Cocaine Demand in the European Union, end of the 1990s (Average Estimations)

	Average Rate	Number of Users
Life Prevalence	1,0% - 2,0%	3.700.000 - 7.400.000
Year Prevalence	0,6% - 0,9%	2.220.000 - 3.330.000
Month Prevalence	0,2% - 0,4%	740.000 - 1.480.000
Cocaine Consumed per year in the EU		90-100 tons

Source: Own estimations based on OGD (1997a: 77-78), Sandwijk et al (1995), Bieleman et al. (1993) and EMCDDA (1998: 15-19).

a) A general tendency towards stabilisation of cocaine demand in Western Europe from 1995 onwards. Annual international official reports seem to be erratic and inconsistent: meanwhile "*cocaine abuse in most Western European countries is declining*" (INCB 1996), "*increasing cocaine abuse was reported in Denmark, France and Germany in 1996*" (INCB 1997). However, studies all over suggest ageing, fashion changes, awareness about negative cocaine effects and successful replacement by amphetamines or other synthetic drugs as the central factors for a stagnation or decline in recreational cocaine use.

b) Cocaine consumption in the 1990s reaches a more heterogeneous population (Power et al. 1995: 377; Nabben and Korf 1999). Cocaine is no longer the preserve of the elite and the 'yuppies', or of heroin addicts who use it as a 'speedball', but also used by middle-class populations as well as increasingly smoked as crack by younger and more vulnerable individuals in big cities (problematic drug addicts, margined and deprived groups, and so on).¹⁶

c) Linked with this process of diffusion, cocaine use has become more 'visible' by spreading amongst more problematic (and public) users like homeless addicts and poor youth.

d) Cocaine use has modestly increased in East European countries, following social and economic changes.¹⁷ Although cocaine is increasingly available in domestic Eastern European markets, consumption seems to remain low and limited to specific groups (EMCDDA 1998: 69; INCB 1998a).

Prices

Cocaine prices are very sensitive to various factors, and demonstrate remarkable variations regarding time, space and setting. However, average European wholesale and retail prices follow rather clear patterns through the last two decades. In both cases, prices from the mid-1990s onwards are only half of those in the early 1980s.

¹⁶ For a good overview on the different types of cocaine and crack users in Europe in the late 1990s, especially on the referred heterogeneity, see OGD 1997a: 40-79.

¹⁷ The INCB reported increased consumption in Belarius, Latvia and the Russian Federation (INCB 1997).

Average wholesale European cocaine prices were 52,000 US\$ per kg in 1983. They dropped but made a quick recovery by 1987. After that year, prices experimented a sustained decline to average 25,000 US\$ in 1993 (Farrell et al. 1996: 267). Since then, a remarkable stability can be found toward the late 1990s. The Netherlands is no exception. In Amsterdam, wholesale prices of 45,000 US\$ / 60,000 US\$ per kg in the 1980s, dropped to 20,000 US\$ / 25,000 US\$ in the 1990s (Korf and Verbraeck 1993: 125-126), to remain at that price level after 1993.

Regarding average retail prices, the same pattern should be indicated. They are US\$ 105 per gram in 1983 and 1987, with a drop in between. Again, a sustained decrease to reach the average of US\$ 65 in 1993 (Farrell et al. 1996: 266). However, retail prices have a wider range of variety, even regarding neighbourhood.¹⁸ In Amsterdam, a gram of pure cocaine for specialised customers can cost between US\$ 50 and US\$ 85,¹⁹ while the same gram sold in the streets in smaller units and with more cuts, can be worth between US\$ 100 and US\$ 175 (Korf and Verbraeck 1993: 125). In France, retail prices are clearly higher (around US\$ 130) and in line with Switzerland and Britain, two other expensive countries (Farrell et al. 1996: 263; Boekhout van Solinge 1996).

Despite the fact that it is quite difficult to determine the main reason for a particular variation in price, it is possible to identify those factors responsible for cocaine price fluctuations:

a) Over-supply due to over-production or to a bottleneck in demand can drive prices down. This seems to have been the main factor for both the fall of cocaine prices after 1987 and the stabilisation after 1993, with supply and demand coming to a balance. In the same way, the price recovery between 1985 and 1987 would have been related to a growing demand not yet satisfied by still-to-come massive cocaine import.²⁰

b) Changes in trafficking that lower risks: bulk transportation and more professionalised networks have implied, despite repression efforts, lower personal risks. Insurance mechanisms and over-stocking²¹ lower, despite seizures, economic risks. These changes had also an impact in the overall decrease of cocaine prices in Europe.

c) In the opposite direction, an increase in repression (longer sentences and improved rates of interception) has had a negligible effect in driving prices up. As convincingly argued by Farrell (1995), only repressive scenarios with physical violence, life sentences and interception rates above 80% could raise prices, but these scenarios are both undesirable and unattainable. Lenient enforcement policies below a minimum can bring prices down, since more suppliers have been trying to enter the market and compete for the same consumers.

d) Increased competition at wholesale or retail level can account for local decrease in price.

e) Proximity to import, stocking and distribution centres. Wholesale prices (and retail as well) are lower in direct entry countries such as Spain and the Netherlands. Major metropolitan centres often enjoy price advantages.

¹⁸ Occasionally making, for example in London, a 30% profit by only crossing the River Thames (Lewis 1989: 47).

¹⁹ Dutch wholesale prices are kept in US\$, which explains the recent increase in kilo prices from f 50,000 to f 75,000. In contrast, Dutch gram prices are local and do not immediately react to currency changes. Therefore, the US\$ retail prices indicated in the literature during the 1990s should be reduced in 20% to account for the current prices.

²⁰ See for changes in cocaine prices in Europe: Farrell et al. (1996).

²¹ Floating and temporary stocks as a growing integral part of distribution networks have a 'pillow' effect against losses, seizures and theft (OGD 1997a: 20).

f) The amount of stages between importer and consumer has a local impact in retail prices.²² The lesser the stages (the Netherlands, Spain) the cheaper the price. In France, with relatively low wholesale prices (transit between Spain and Italy, French Antilles, and so on), the relatively high retail prices may be partly explained by the presence of more intermediaries willing to introduce a mark-up (Farrell et al. 1996: 265).

g) Differences in transparency of local markets (information transmission) also account for price contrasts, since more transparent markets react quicker to changes in the environment.

h) Retail price varies also regarding purity, amount unit and setting. The smaller the unit and the more impure it is, the more expensive becomes per pure cocaine gram. Street and unconnected dealers handle higher prices than house and well connected ones.

i) Cocaine prices across countries have also some correlation with consumer price indices for legal goods. Switzerland, for example, is the most expensive country in Europe for many things, including cocaine (Farrell et al. 1996: 262).

Purity

The fact that cocaine is sold in powdered form makes it relatively easy to dilute with much cheaper psychotropically-active substances such as procaine, lignocaine, aspirin, paracetamol or amphetamine sulphate, with relatively inert substances such as glucose, lactose, sugar, or mannitol, and even with damaging things like washing powder or lime. Cocaine is usually cut to add weight and increase margin profits.

However, next to the gradual price decrease, cocaine has witnessed a sustained improvement in purity over the last ten years. Cocaine at point of import frequently approaches 80% to 98%. While Britain has witnessed a purity improvement in the last years (OGD 1996a: 79), in France cocaine purity has increased from 55% in 1985 to 75% in 1995 (OGD 1997a: 22). In Amsterdam, meanwhile large volumes seized by the police in 1991 showed excellent purity levels, many retailers also reported some reservations for cutting cocaine (Korf and Verbraeck 1993: 127). Especially in times of increased competition and supply, dealers tend to improve purity as a way of staying in business. Many cocaine traffickers, at all levels, even make the question of 'purity' a matter of personal prestige and reputation as also often happens with legal goods.

In theory, a price decrease and the spread of cocaine use among lower strata should have worked in the opposite direction, reducing purity. However, an overall sustained improvement of purity at retail level has been the case, indicating: a) a strong over-supply as the main cause for price decrease; and b) a strong bargaining position of consumers, pushing for quality improvements (Lewis 1989: 39).

At retail level, purity can vary very much between the middle-class recreational (50% up to 80%) and the street-addict circuits (never below 30%). Those willing to pay less or get smaller units are often confronted with more impure cocaine. Dealers selling small pre-wrapped units in the street, often more interested in rapid turnovers, are able to cut more since testing is impossible, the purchase has to be quick, and customers are more distant and willing to accept poorer qualities. However, individuals who persist in ripping people off with purity levels are often ostracised, expelled from the market, or subject to retaliatory action.

²² There are fewer intermediate stages between importer and consumer on European cocaine markets compared to North American markets in heroin and cocaine (Lewis 1989: 46).

3.1.3. Cocaine supply

Supply and demand trends, although tracking each other in the long run, did not follow the same timing in Europe. These gaps are partly responsible for the changes in price. Until 1987, a growing demand was not followed by a proportional increase in supply. Cocaine was expensive, scarce and erratically available. The period between 1987 and 1994²³ shows a still growing demand, but clearly behind the explosive character evidenced by supply. Why did this occur and what happened with the surplus cocaine?

It was already explained how by 1987-1989 a number of factors coincided that led Colombian exporters to multiply and enlarge cocaine shipments to Europe: a growing demand, very good prices, availability of cocaine at source and the establishment of cargo transportation and business partnerships with local organised groups, which lowered risks and encouraged them to send more and more cocaine.

However, not all cocaine reached European consumers. First of all, given the huge profit margins and the lowered risks involved in bulk operations, Colombian exporters could now afford to lose more cocaine than before. While individual or small entrepreneurs could not sacrifice many kilos without being put out from business, larger exporters (or co-operatives) sending big volumes could, on the contrary, increase the proportion of cocaine losses and still make profits. More cocaine, even in relative terms, ended at the bottom of the ocean or in the hands of the police.²⁴

Secondly, with an increased supply, wholesale dealers and distributors could ensure a continuous availability by increasing the so-called 'floating stocks'. Substantial cocaine stocks do not exist but as an integral part of distribution mechanisms (OGD 1997a: 20). Low level distributors can, at times, have some grams stashed as reserve, but in higher levels permanent or even temporary stocks are absent in the cocaine trade. Stashing the drug is indeed one of the most risky and difficult operations in the business, and almost every illegal entrepreneur would try to keep only the exact cocaine amount traded for a minimum time (Korf and Verbraeck 1993: 135). Moreover, the active properties of cocaine start to deteriorate after two years, making cocaine something to be consumed relatively 'fresh'. Abundant stocks kept for difficult times, implying also well organised long-term planning and strategies, are a typical construct pushed by police sources and accepted by some researchers (Van Duyne 1995: 79). The police have never seized any real cocaine 'stock' in Europe, with one exception in Italy.

However, it is possible to talk about a 'mobile' or 'floating stock'. This means that a surplus cocaine is always 'on the road', moving in and through Europe, allowing for continuous supply and neutralising the effects of losses and seizures (OGD 1997a: 20). Some cocaine, especially regarding big operations, is also aimed as try-out samples or advances.

Thirdly, cocaine entering Europe has also been used, in some cases, as exchange for other illegal goods (weapons, heroin, and so on), delaying deliveries or redirecting cocaine to other markets. Finally, as mentioned before, some increase in demand, especially in East Europe, is not well quantified.

All these reasons explain why in the period of 1987 to 1994 the gap widened between cocaine on the market and cocaine actually consumed. From the mid-1990s on this gap seems to stabilise, with a slow down in supply, presumably influenced on the one hand by a saturation point regarding demand and, on the other, by a strong restructuring of cocaine production and export.

²³ In this period, prices dropped to a half, purity improved by 30% and seizures multiplied sevenfold.

²⁴ Seizures increasing from 5% to 30% of the cocaine volumes actually imported. The meaning of these seizures will be later analysed.

Who controls supply in Europe?

If the idea of a few and closed 'cartels' controlling exports was criticised for production countries, that holds even more strongly for supply and distribution levels in Europe.²⁵ All along the line, cocaine is supplied by different sorts of networks, all very flexible, organised and unorganised, both competing and co-operating, and including a variety of ethnic or national groups.

Some small cocaine laboratories have been found in Europe, especially in Southern countries (Santino and La Fiura 1993: 155). However, they seem to be rare, more the initiative of individual or small organisations than by well-established and diversified groups. Seizures of cocaine base in Britain, Germany and the Netherlands have been indications of such attempts. Small cocaine laboratories controlled by local groups have also been identified in Croatia, Georgia and Lebanon (OGD 1996a: 90; 1997a: 23 and 27). Even with increased control over chemical precursors, the risks involved in establishing illegal laboratories in European territory are still very high.

Cocaine import to European countries is basically organised and conducted by independent groups who manage to establish links with South American exporters (Ruggiero and South 1995: 74). Some of these groups are not local but operate in many countries, and some belong in one way or another to larger and long established illegal organisations active in contraband or other illegal businesses. In some places, as it will be described in chapter V, Colombian or other South American groups and individuals are involved in cocaine import into Europe in many different ways. Spain and the Netherlands are the two countries where Colombians have been more active in import activities.

In contrast with the United States, where Colombian networks controlled wholesale distribution, this market level has been fairly shared in Europe: an international spectrum of local groups, partnerships or individuals selling to lower distributors across the countries.

Both import and wholesale distribution experienced, along the 1990s, a process of professionalisation. As Ruggiero observed:

"Wholesale operations are increasingly conducted by well organised groups who have access to large quantities of drugs and are in a position to invest large quantities of money. In order to minimise risks, but also thanks to the increasing finance at their disposal, these groups undertake a reduced number of operations involving larger amounts of drugs. Wholesalers, in other words, experienced a selective process whereby only those endowed with effectiveness, professionalism and larger funds were left in operation." (Ruggiero 1995: 144)

The idea of an increasing control of import and wholesale distribution by more professional and international organisations has been consistently highlighted by every researcher and source in the field. Some authors, however, have extrapolated and forced this tendency to account for highly structured hierarchical systems (Bieleman et al. 1993: 22), for large and closed groups conspiring and making all sort of secret agreements (Clawson and Lee III 1996: 67-86), or for the existence of 'foreign' criminal groups (Van Duyne 1993a: 14-15). With little more evidence than some - often misinterpreted - 'big cases', these approaches usually ignore that notions of professionalisation and internationalisation can also mean high competition, loose organisations and agreements, less well known criminals and criminal

²⁵ After almost twenty years, media and law enforcers still insist in discovering and pointing out the activities and 'representatives' of this or that Colombian 'cartel' (typically, they prefer to refer to the *Calí* Cartel). Many groups - some with no connection between themselves - from the Cauca Valley region have indeed been very active in export to Europe, but also groups based in other cities (Bogotá, Medellín, Pereira, and so on) or countries (Venezuela, Suriname, Brazil).

groups, or even small enterprises. In fact, it can be argued that large, hierarchical multinational enterprises are extremely rare (Ruggiero and South 1995; Savona et al. 1993; Dorn et al. 1992), and that their regular detection by law enforcers can also be interpreted as a sign of their weakness.

The general picture differs from country to country regarding each particular involvement. In Spain, the most important bridgehead for cocaine entering Europe, import activities are mainly shared by Colombian and local networks. Despite the presence of small independent entrepreneurs and some Colombian groups²⁶ operating in Madrid or Andalucia (Savona et al. 1993), most import and wholesale is arranged by Spanish networks, especially from the Galician region. The area, geographically suited to sea smuggling, is the base of groups traditionally dedicated to contraband (mainly cigarettes) and fishing. They have linked - and not replaced - to these activities hashish and cocaine traffic (OGD 1997b). Quite a number of cases involving Colombian and Galician participation are also facilitated by police and customs corruption (OGD 2000: 97). Southern Spain has also been the scenario for business contacts between Colombian and Italian groups (OGD 1996a: 97) and a popular place for money laundering and conspicuous consumption. Again, too often, these international business operations have been wrongly described in terms of 'master mind' agreements between certain cartels, clans, and so on (Van Duyne 1995: 78; Ruth et al. 1996: 265-266).

Italy also plays an important role with regard to the organisation of cocaine import into Europe. Import activities are shared by South Americans and groups or individuals linked to *mafia*-type organisations, especially the Neapolitan *Camorra*, which although not making drugs their main source of income, have successfully diversified from heroin to cocaine and been able to construct strong business partnerships with Colombian exporters, not only in Italy (OGD 1996a: 99-100; Clawson and Lee III 1996: 62-66). However, even more emphatically than in the Spanish case, a number of journalists and law enforcement officers have tended to see 'alliances', conspiracies and long-term arrangements between two cities (Palermo and Medellín, for example), or two groups ('the' *Camorra* and 'the' *Cali Cartel*), things that, of course, do not exist. Colombian-Italian deals can better be seen as single or multiple buyer-seller transactions, some including shipping arrangements, distribution to other parts of Europe, money laundering facilities and even co-operation on intelligence issues. Firstly, evidence shows that money invested into drugs by *mafiosi* has usually been a rather personal initiative and a private affair, which in fact gave some families or groups the opportunity to claim independence from more central bodies and build partnerships with external investors or people. Drug traffic made 'men of honour' mix and go into business with 'ordinary men' (Gambetta 1996: 238-239; Ruggiero 1995: 136). Secondly, many of these Italian illegal entrepreneurs and networks doing business with South American exporters are not even linked with *mafia*-type organisations, but belong to the so-called local 'underworld' (Santino 1993: 111; Bovenkerk 1995b: 210-211; Ruggiero 1995: 135). At the level of wholesale distribution, especially in Rome and several Northern cities, this presence - next to some limited Colombian involvement - is even stronger (Lewis 1989: 40; Clawson and Lee III 1996: 65).

In Britain,

"free-lance suppliers, South American importers and British professional crime groups have all been involved in importation and wholesale supply." (Lewis 1989: 43)

²⁶ The particular role of Colombians and their relation with local groups will be treated in chapters V and VI.

However, the upper level market has been dominated by Britons, with South Americans having difficulty in establishing themselves in the business and forging links with British groups.²⁷ (Lewis 1989: 43). Next to the professional white illegal entrepreneurs, most with a previous involvement in serious predatory crime and some also active in continental Europe, networks of Caribbean and African (Nigerian) origin are active in cocaine import and smuggling, though moving smaller amounts and usually by plane (Savona et al. 1993). Nigerian networks, organised along ethnic lines and traditionally active in trading and contraband, have increasingly expanded their involvement both in source countries such as Brazil, as well as in other regions of Europe (Germany, Central and Easter Europe), especially as middlemen between larger importers and distributors (OGD 1997a: 15; OGD 1997b).

Due to its central position between important cocaine import centres, Germany seems very international regarding involvement in upper levels. Germans, Italians, Dutch, Colombians or East Europeans are among those arrested for wholesale operations, which seem to be shared and splinter by many different groups (OGD 1997b). In cases of Colombian-German co-operation, other groups and individuals are also usually involved (Roth et al. 1994: 278-282). The same international picture can also be drawn for France, combining mixed Colombian-French networks (OGD 1996a: 76), Italian and Spanish wholesalers, and smaller independent smugglers.

Since the early 1990s, South American exporters have also established ties with trafficking groups in Eastern Europe and Russia. Colombians have tried to sell cocaine to local groups in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Russia, who would buy important quantities both for their expanding markets and for distribution to Western Europe through their own networks there (for example, Clawson and Lee III 1996: 87; Van Duyne 1995: 79). In many cases, Colombians themselves established their own import-export bridgeheads. Members and ex-members of security forces (secret and national police, customs, and so on) have been involved in these networks in a very active way.

Cocaine import and wholesale distribution in Europe has also made room for Lebanese, Israelis, Portuguese, Croats, Serbs, Kosovars, Argentineans, Peruvians, and many other groups, both working as ethnic or national networks or as individuals belonging to internationally integrated local groups.

With regard to middle-level distribution and retail selling, suppliers are even more heterogeneous and fragmented, their background differing very much as far as place and milieu are concerned. Next to the whole range of consumers that have been drawn into selling, from 'yuppies' to crack smokers, it is possible to find also some people with privileged access to wholesale networks or local groups and individuals involved in trafficking with other illegal drugs. Crack retail distribution has been mainly in hands of distinctive ethnic groups, particularly Afro-Caribbeans. Sometimes as users themselves, crack smoking has been pushed by Jamaicans in London and by Antilleans and later Africans in Paris (Boekhout van Solinge 1996).

Cocaine and colonialism

Cocaine comes from areas linked to the European colonial past. Although tied in different ways, some cultural, economic, political and demographic relations exist between Spain and Colombia, Peru or Bolivia; Portugal and Brazil; the Netherlands and Suriname or the Netherlands Antilles; United Kingdom and Jamaica, Trinidad or Nigeria, and so forth. These ties have obviously played a role in the development of cocaine routes, especially in the early

²⁷ Given that the Colombian community in Britain is the second largest in Europe (around 80,000 people) this statement deserves further analysis, also to be discussed in later chapters.

days. Commercial links, frequent flights, constant exchange of people and ethnic communities from ex-colonies living in Europe, combined with their access to supply source, were all factors that allowed these groups to gain a place in the illegal business. Yet not at all of its levels. During the 1980s, when small quantities were smuggled by plane, markets were geographically more fragmented and intermediaries between import and consumption were fewer than today, ethnic groups belonging to former colonies were very active as air couriers. Although some studies on foreign drug couriers (Green et al. 1994; Green 1996) show the selective practices of customs, it is undeniable that many Nigerians have been found with cocaine in Heathrow or Gatwick, many Surinamese caught in Schiphol, many Francophone Caribbeans in France, and far too many South Americans in Spain and the rest of Europe. However, instead of thinking in terms of some immanent colonial past, the involvement and success of these ethnic groups in the cocaine business seems clearly related to other issues: links and access to exporters and to local distribution networks, willingness and skills to enter, and so on. As I will later show in relation to the Dutch case, Colombians and Dutch can grasp, for many reasons, a position within the market that is sometimes closed to ethnic minorities from the former colonies.

Furthermore, three interrelated developments during the 1990s have made the ethnic or national element within the European cocaine market even more problematic.

Firstly, the explosion of volumes smuggled, from a few kilos by plane to many hundreds by cargo ships. Import, transport and distribution of large shipments required new and more sophisticated tasks, arrangements and infrastructure. Rather than in a primitive flow or presence of 'own' people - ethnic or co-national group - successful organisation of these high levels had to rely on more entrepreneurial considerations and conditions, hardly provided by established groups from cocaine production and transshipment countries. While for the smuggling of few kilos or for retail distribution ethnic ties were and still are important for minimising risks, they turned out to be insufficient and even dysfunctional for providing what is required to organise large-scale cocaine transport and distribution in Europe. Good legal commercial and financial opportunities, strong legal and illegal local networks able to organise import-export operations, and the possibilities of neutralising police enforcement are at the base of the main decisions made by large cocaine entrepreneurs when deciding where and with whom to do business.

Secondly, increased police repression on cocaine trafficking has also weakened those supposed traditional routes and ties. The answer to increasing stigmatisation on particular groups or individuals (Colombians, Nigerians, and so on) was in many cases the search for 'clean' partners or employees, both native or from less known backgrounds. It also gave traditional and new local organisations a stronger position in the business.

Thirdly, the full internationalisation of cocaine market dynamics has also weakened the opportunities for single ethnic groups within it. Ethnic ties may guarantee business at a very local level or in a hardly-to-find point to point line operation, but the fact is that when a kilo is delivered somewhere in Europe, it has already crossed maybe five different countries, often more. Next to that, new European countries gaining a role as transshipment or consumption centres have opened the game for new actors. The fact that cocaine production has also expanded to countries other than Colombia (Brazil, Peru, Bolivia) and export or transshipment to even further latitudes (Argentina, Caribbean, South Africa, Cape Verde, and so on) helped to diversify routes, which in no way follow the historic footsteps of colonialism. Finally, internationalisation of cocaine business has also meant increased integration with other legal (bulk transportation, financial) and illegal (weapons, other illicit drugs) markets, narrowing further the role of ethnicity in the cocaine business. Ethnic minorities linked to the European colonial past (Latin Americans, Surinamese, Nigerians, and so forth) could only

survive in strong positions where they were able both to enclose their illegal activities within large migrant enclaves and to establish good links with European and international organisations.

3.1.4. Reading European seizures

Cocaine seizure data, not only that collected by the UNCDP from the Member States or through individual seizure reports - containing additional information on drug origin, smuggling methods and people arrested - but also that reported by newspapers, is a valuable and interesting source of information and analysis when studying the European cocaine market. It allows some questions and hypotheses to be formulated far beyond the problem of law enforcement performance: seizures can also be regarded as clues to uncover smuggling trends and routes, technological and organisational developments within the business, and in a broader sense the interaction between cocaine trade and law enforcement.

Seizures by national law enforcement agencies are very variable and susceptible of being influenced by changes in four different factors. The number of seizures, the average cocaine quantity seized each time, and the total volumes confiscated are always a reflection of:

- a) Changes in reporting and/or recording (new systems of records, new countries reporting, and so on).
- b) Changes in law enforcement activities (changes and allocation of material resources, routine checks vs. long-run investigations, priorities on different market levels - transport, import or distribution - or specific products, and so on).
- c) Quantitative changes in supply-demand dynamic (more or less supply and/or demand, new by-products, new local markets, changes in consumption habits, and so on).
- d) Qualitative changes in trafficking strategies (changing and diversification of smuggling methods and amount smuggled, changing routes, changing in the nature of trafficking networks - ethnic, international, related to other illegal markets, and so on).

Table V. Cocaine Seizures in Europe 1987-1998 (in kg)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Spain	1134	3461	1852	5382	7574	4454	5350	4016	6897	13743	18419	11688
Netherlands	406	517	1425	4288	2492	3433	3720	8200	4851	9222	11489	11452
France	754	593	939	1845	831	1625	1715	4743	865	1742	844	1051
Germany ^a	296	496	1406	2474	964	1332	1051	767	1846	1373	1721	1133
Italy	321	616	668	805	1300	1345	1101	6636	2603	2379	1650	2144
Belgium	270	404	89	537	756	1222	2892	479	576	838	3329	2088
UK	407	323	499	611	1078	2248	717	2261	672	1219	2074	2808
Portugal	222	302	793	360	1094	1860	216	1719	2116	812	3162	621
Other EU ^b	96	37	118	136	415	171	130	304	200	934	216	786
Non EU ^c	65	245	324	471	761	458	1749	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
Total Europe	4163	6994	8113	16909	17265	18148	18641	29125	20626	32262	42904	33771

Source: EMCDDA (1998, 1999). For 1997 and 1998, figures from Europol (Prisma Team 2000). In bold, figures for the EU only.

a Figures for Germany combine East and West Germany for 1987 and 1988.

b EU Member States in 1998 (15).

c Farrell et al. (1996), from UNDCP data.

The most challenging exercise when reading seizures is to identify the extent to which each variable plays a role in local and general terms. Table V shows cocaine seizures in different European countries from 1987 to 1998. These figures, combined with available data on number of seizures, average seizure weights, price variations, consumption levels, and factual circumstances involved in trafficking operations and police detection, allow for several interpretative remarks.

Naturally, they are not exempt from a certain degree of uncertainty and some are just hypothetical statements that deserve further testing, but many are shared by other's findings and by cocaine traffickers and enforcers themselves as related to me:

a) Sustained growth in seizures from 4 tons in 1987 to 34 tons in 1998 has mainly to do with increased cocaine supply into the continent. However, following from what has been explained in sections 3.1.2. and 3.1.3. on demand and supply trends, some of the increase can indeed be attributed to improved rates of interception. They would have been 10% in the mid-1980s, before the first big shipments started to arrive. Prices were high, supply was still in fact in line or even behind demand growth, cocaine was more carefully taken care of, and police or customs had little experience with large-scale cocaine smuggling, which was not even at the top of enforcement agendas. The average interception rate in the EU since the mid-1990s seems to have improved and stabilised at 30%.²⁸ Despite more trafficking professionalisation, a clear over-supply of cocaine while a drop-off in prices increased both the amount of cocaine ready to be sacrificed and the competition levels between export-import groups, who increased collaboration with law enforcers against rival shipments and competitors.²⁹ It can be argued, as a hypothesis, that interception rates tend to improve when the gap between supply and demand expands.

b) Growing international trade and the liberalisation of both trade and money flows are factors that facilitate cocaine smuggling, imposing structural limits to any effort on interdiction or enforcement. The answer from law enforcers has been a constant plea for growing powers and resources. "*Detecting illicit cargo is almost impossible without prior intelligence*", claims the World Drug Report (UNDCP 1997: 231). This false assumption, typical from the 'war on drugs' discourse, is based in the fact that, indeed, more seizures than before are the product of pro-active investigation. However, and especially when analysing

²⁸ This 30% results from an average of 30 tons seized annually since 1994 upon some 100 tons cocaine actually consumed within the EU. This estimation is above the 20%-25% indicated by the OGD (1997a: 79), which overstates the volumes consumed; above Farrell (1995: 142), who wrongly manages a 30% as the global rate by overstating cocaine production volumes, but in line with all studies indicating global rates of 45% (see chapter II, Figure I).

²⁹ This improvement of 20% should not be regarded, as many law enforcers do, as a 'victory' over cocaine trafficking. It seems to be a logical consequence of drug trafficking rather than a police development, and, to the contrary, shows how illegal entrepreneurs can keep making profits sacrificing more cocaine. The replacement costs (export price plus transportation) of intercepted drugs are so low in relation to the profits made upon sale, that it makes little difference for large exporters and importers to loose 10% or 50% of the shipments. Besides, a price decrease while rates improved evidences how marginal is the impact of interception. Farrell estimates that only interception rates above 75% - 92% could drive prices up and illegal entrepreneurs out (Farrell 1995: 145). Furthermore, with demand stabilised or slightly expanding, more seizure rates can only stimulate cocaine production and hit the weaker or the more amateurish illegal entrepreneurs, contributing to the described process of professionalisation. Finally, it is unclear the effect of all the late-1990s police developments - European police co-operation, pro-active intelligence, new control laws, new institutional special bodies, higher performance of customs, and so forth. They are, on the one hand, not primarily aimed to seize more kg - law enforcers usually prefer to get 100 kg with 5 suspects than 500 kg with no detentions. On the other hand, the closer law enforcers get to cocaine entrepreneurs, the more police and custom corruption it is likely to appear - by the way, also a sign of professionalisation - which have a neutralising effect upon possible police improvements.

cases of sea transportation, tipping from anonymous sources, selective - by some criteria - or routine controls, and chance, are by far the most used methods of detection.

c) Larger shipments by sea during the 1990s, while these have resulted in a sustained increase of the average seizure weight, are responsible for important skews and alterations regarding countries and years, firstly due to periodic spectacular seizures of one or more tons (see Table VI), and, to a lesser extent, to changes in sea routes. These large seizures pictured in Table VI do not go unnoticed within the national figures of Table V. In general terms, eight countries concentrate most of the seizures, those countries that are the main import (Spain, The Netherlands) and wholesale distribution (France, Germany, Italy) regions. The still limited amounts seized in Eastern Europe could be partially to do with smaller interception rates than in Western Europe, and with the fact that most cocaine seized transits by land (TIR trucks) and by air, and barely by sea.³⁰

d) While European seizures represent the 10% of global seizures, consumption in Europe accounts for around 25% of the total. Large amounts of cocaine earmarked for the European market are then intercepted in production or transit countries outside Europe, especially in South America.³¹ This makes Europe the region with less cocaine interception compared with its own consumption. While seizures represent 45% of worldwide consumed cocaine, the European rate floats around the 30%.

e) Cocaine seized in each country often has, more and more, another country as its final destination. Cocaine moving across Europe remains within the European space. This is confirmed by the growing volume of land seizures and their average volume (TIR trucks), and by the multiplication of small vessels and boats involved, both used for transshipping from large cargo ships and as a mean of internal distribution.

f) Air volumes seized kept growing, not in relative but in absolute terms. A stabilisation or even a decrease in the average weight of those seizures implies a multiplication in the number of 'mules', even considering improved interception rates. Far from disappearing, air smuggling is still the only option for thousands of small exporters and importers, who have even professionalised this method of transportation - by transferring new risks to the smugglers, by replacing and using plenty of them, by sacrificing them, by diversifying routes, and so on.

Table VI. Multi-ton Seizures in Europe 1988-1999 (relevant cases)

Year	Description
1988	1,0 ton in Irún (Spain). Colombian involvement.
1990	2,7 tons in Ijmuiden (the Netherlands). Harbour warehouse. Colombian involvement. Operation <i>Holle Vaten</i> .
	1,2 tons in Madrid (Spain). Loaded van. Operation <i>Job</i> .
1991	2,0 tons in the Canary Islands (Spain). Ship <i>El Bongo</i> .
	1,3 tons in Ferrol (Spain). Floating in the ocean.
	1,0 ton near Lisbon (Portugal). Ship <i>Rand</i> . Spanish operation.

³⁰ Even the record seizure of February 1993 of 1,1 tons of Colombian cocaine in Vyborg, near St. Petersburg, was made in a Russian TIR truck container.

³¹ In March 1995, for example, a Dutch citizen was detained in Brazil with 660 kg ready to be shipped to the Netherlands (*NRC Handelsblad*, 11-3-95).

Year	Description
1992	1,1 ton in Amsterdam (the Netherlands). Loaded van. Colombian involvement.
1993	1,1 tons in Vyborg (Russia). TIR truck. Colombian-Russian-Israeli involvement.
	2,0 tons near Cadiz (Spain). Ship <i>Mar Tere</i> .
	2,0 tons in Antwerp (Belgium). Harbour storehouse. Dutch involvement.
1994	1,2 tons in Toulouse (France). TIR truck. Italian-Spanish involvement.
	5,5 tons in Turin (Italy). TIR truck. Involvement of former police officers and current customs agents.
	1,1 tons next to Galicia (Spain). Ship <i>Zwanet</i> . Colombian-Dutch-Spanish involvement.
	1,4 tons next to the coast (Portugal). Honduran ship. Spanish involvement.
	1,3 tons in Saint-Barthelemy (French Antilles). Abandoned on the beach.
	3,0 tons in Zeewolde (the Netherlands).
	1,1 tons in Amsterdam (the Netherlands). Colombian-Dutch-Surinamese involvement.
1995	2,5 tons in the Atlantic Ocean (Spain). Oil tanker <i>Archangelos</i> . Colombian-Galician involvement. Operation <i>Matorral</i> .
	1,0 ton in Rotterdam (the Netherlands). Storehouse. Antillean involvement.
1996	2,6 tons in Corme (Spain). Fishing ship <i>Mae Yemanjá</i> .
	1,9 tons near Canary Islands (Spain). Swedish ship <i>Siva</i> . Operation <i>Brasil</i> .
	1,2 tons in Muriedas (Spain). Harbour warehouse.
	1,1 tons near Vigo (Spain). Ship <i>San José II</i> .
	1,0 ton in Ijmuiden (the Netherlands). Brazilian ship <i>Odimirense</i> .
1997	1,5 tons near Canary Islands (Spain). Fishing ship <i>Martínez Alvarez</i> . Operation <i>Manzanal</i> .
	2,8 tons in Cambados (Spain). Ship <i>Segundo Arrogante</i> . Operation <i>Cabezón</i> .
	1,2 tons in Zeeland (the Netherlands). Antillean ship <i>Fogo Isle</i> . Routine control.
	1,0 ton in Hoorn (the Netherlands). Container and tip from Belgium.
	4,7 tons in Tapia de Casariego (Spain). Hidden in cliffs once unloaded. Tip from neighbours.
1998	1,3 tons in Vigo (Spain), hidden in aluminium cables. Destination Rotterdam.
	1,0 ton in the Canary Islands (Spain) on a sailing boat to the Netherlands.
1999	1,2 tons in France, loaded in a caravan, going to Rotterdam and England.
	4,0 tons in Rotterdam (the Netherlands), in a ship amongst jeans textile in transit to Spain or Portugal.
	1,4 tons in Gioia Tauro (Italy) in frozen fruit juice going to the Netherlands.
	10,0 tons (record) near the Canary Islands (Spain). Operation <i>Temple</i> . Ship <i>De Tammsaare</i> , with Russian crewmen. Colombian-Galician operation.
	5,0 tons in La Coruña (Spain). Connected with the former case.
	2,0 tons in Amsterdam (the Netherlands), hidden in the structure of the ship <i>Pearl II</i> .

Source: Various newspapers (*El País*, *De Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* 1988-1998); OGD (1996a, 1997a and 1997b) and Prisma Team (2000).

3.1.5. Lines across Europe: the cartography of cocaine trafficking

Geographically speaking, cocaine forms a cross throughout Europe. Though smuggling and distribution lines can follow almost any available route by air, sea or land, there are four main import centres, not surprisingly located at the four extremes of the continent. They can be considered centres not only for the amount of cocaine entering through them, but for their

importance in terms of organisation, operational matters and integration with broader economic or political arrangements. They are, in order of importance, Spain - particularly Galicia; the Netherlands - in fact the centre of a broader set of North Sea harbours including Antwerp and Hamburg; Italy - significant in organisational terms; and East Europe - an emerging diffused centre including the CIS from the Baltic to the Balkan route and other countries such as Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary. These four centres are not isolated from each other. On the contrary, they have become increasingly interdependent in business terms, especially due to all sorts of co-operation, partnerships and deals between groups active in those four regions. These developments have been at least stimulated by several major political changes taking place during the 1990s within Europe. Firstly, the fall of the iron curtain in the former Eastern bloc opened a new market and a centre for organising smuggling into Europe. Secondly, the war in the former Yugoslavia, by intensifying internal diasporas, temporary migration enclaves and the need for essential resources including weapons, affected heroin trafficking along the Balkan Route, pushing Italy and Central Europe to become more active in cocaine traffic. Finally, the opening of internal borders within the EU also encouraged, at least symbolically, the internal movement of people and drugs. However, this may be more true for the movement of small quantities for sale or personal consumption. Large quantities transported by land are rarely detected at border controls. Moreover, these cocaine flows move beyond the Schengen area or even the EU. In fact, although drug entrepreneurs fear borders to a certain extent, they also have more means to control them - by corruption, by studying their routines, by covering the loads, and so on - than to cope with urban or unexpected police surveillance.

Since the Netherlands will be separately treated in section 3.2, I will now give some brief remarks on the other European regions.

Spain and the Atlantic Coast

Spain's role as the major entry point for cocaine reaching Europe has not been contested over the years.³² By sea, large cargos transporting legal goods - from oil to flowers to jeans - load the cocaine before weighing anchor, while especially rented ships receive the illegal merchandise at open sea. Although variations, these ships often depart from the Caribbean, Chile or Brazil carrying between tens of kilos and 5 tons of cocaine, pass through one or many transhipment or stop points (Atlantic Ocean, West Africa, Canary Islands, Cape Verde, and so on) and approach Spain both delivering the merchandise to smaller - fishing - vessels and speed boats, which reach the coast unnoticed, or by stopping at a port where the cocaine containers can be unloaded. From these two modalities, the first one seems more common in Spain, especially regarding those operations arranged by Galician networks. Cocaine arrives to Galicia through the same fishing and tobacco contraband networks, which at the same time traffic marihuana from South America and hashish from North Africa. Next to the hidden Galician *Rias* around Vigo, Pontevedra and La Coruña, large cocaine shipments also arrive to the Cantabrian coast - from Asturias to the Basque Country -, to the Portuguese ports of Lisbon, Figueira da Foz, Leixoes and Viana do Castelo, and to the Mediterranean harbours of Gibraltar, Málaga and Valencia (OGD 1996a and 1997b). From these areas, the cocaine is transported to Madrid for further distribution or sent directly, by land or by sea, to other European regions. For many years, the Barajas airport in Madrid, although smaller than

³² Considering the difficulties in controlling longer coasts with scarce resources and the higher corruption levels, interception rates in Spain can be slightly below European average. The fact that Spain sizes between one third and one half of all cocaine seized in the EU (see Table V) is a serious indication of such a major import role.

Frankfurt or Schiphol, has been the main target for cocaine couriers arriving by plane from Latin America.

Spain has also become the largest Colombian drug money-laundering centre in Europe (OGD 2000).

Italy

Although many Italian groups are rather active in organising cocaine import and wholesale distribution, most of the cocaine enters by land from the North (France, Switzerland) than directly by sea. However, some large shipments have arrived to Sicily and to the main ports of Livorno and Genoa. It was here that in 1994 a shipment of 5,5 tons arrived from Cartagena (Colombia). The load was seized in Turin, a European record only broken in 1999 with the discovery of 10 tons near the Canary Islands. In some cases, cocaine lines are channelled by the same networks moving heroin and weapons, especially from and to the Balkan region. In fact, traditional heroin traffic in Italy seems to become more restricted since the mid-1990s, while the cocaine trade has tended to expand (Savona et al. 1993).

Eastern Europe and the Baltic

In 1991, seizures between 30 kg and 150 kg were made in places such as Gothenburg, Helsinki, Gdansk and Prague, most of them in containers, drawing the attention of media and law enforcers about the increasing role of Eastern Europe as transit areas for cocaine into Europe, as well as new consumption markets (Van Duyne 1995: 79; OGD 1997a: 29; OGD 1997b; Clawson and Lee III 1996). Since then, continuous seizures have been taken place especially along the many ports of the Baltic Sea, or in their way to further destinations.³³

Smaller quantities by aeroplane, both for the domestic markets and as 'first transshipment' for Western airports, have been increasingly arriving to the international airports of Warsaw, Prague, Budapest and Moscow. Couriers from several nationalities have frequently been arrested at these airports, while many others in Havana, Buenos Aires, Brazil or Venezuela as they were about to travel to Eastern Europe. It should be noticed that a remarkable number of these shipments, both by air and sea, are destined to the Netherlands and Belgium, where further distribution is arranged.

The Balkan route

Although this traditional smuggling route should still be primarily regarded as the main entrance for heroin coming from Afghanistan and Turkey (Bovenkerk and Yesilgöz 1998: 77), the growing presence of other drugs, especially cocaine, has been noticed in the region in recent years. In 1995, some 500 kg of cocaine bound for Albania were seized in the Greek harbour of Patras (OGD 1997b). Several reasons can be identified for such a development. Firstly, increasing drug trade internationalisation and integration has 'mixed' more and more different illegal networks, both operating there (Serbia, Croatia, Albania, Bulgarian Black Sea, and so forth) and in other countries such as Italy or Germany (Colombians, Turks, Russians, and so on). Cases involving the exchange of cocaine for heroin or weapons have been occasionally indicated by many sources all over Europe (OGD 1997a and 1997b; Fijnaut et al. 1996). Secondly, radical political changes including market liberalisation, wars, weapon

³³ Many ports are active along the Baltic Route: Rostock, Gdansk, Helsinki, Kotka, Vyborg, St. Petersburg, etc., all of them downloading containers and transporting them by truck to the West. Although the 375 kg of cocaine seized in the whole Russia in 1995 seem to indicate low interception rates, many cocaine shipments with such a far destination have been intercepted both at source or during stopovers. Many cocaine loaded trucks have also been seized in Poland and the Czech Republic. Even remote ports such as Archangelsk have been used for large shipments targeting St. Petersburg or Moscow (OGD 1997a and 1997b).

embargoes, etc. have deeply affected countries such as the former Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria or Rumania, encouraging growing local cocaine markets as well as international cocaine lines in all directions.³⁴ Thirdly, the region is a natural transit area between other old and new cocaine import points: Italy, Lebanon, Syria, Georgia and other Caucasian regions, Russia, and so on. Finally, the growing presence of Greek vessels and harbours can also be indicating a reaction of illegal entrepreneurs against tougher selective controls on cargoes. Due to the huge number of Greek ships in dry dock, and many freight or merchant companies owned by Greek and Cypriots having experienced financial hardship, many vessels have been implicated in drug trafficking cases in Poland, Russia, Benelux, Egypt, and on the high seas (OGD 1997a).³⁵

Other lines

In between the main sea import routes, countries such as Germany and France have played a role as central wholesale transit areas. In France, more than the 80% of the cocaine seized in 1994 was already in transit through French territory. Beside direct shipments reaching the Atlantic port of Le Havre and the Mediterranean harbour of Marseille, most of the bulk activity seems to be concentrated in the Southern strip between Spain and Italy.³⁶ This importance of France as a transit country is also revealed by periodic large seizures in the French Antilles and Guyana, a transshipment area for both the American and the European markets.³⁷ Smaller quantities also enter France from the Netherlands - per land, for limited distribution or personal consumption, including 'drug tourism' - and from North and West Africa - mainly per couriers by plane or by sea through the Mediterranean.

Germany is also an obligatory crossroad between the Netherlands, Italy, Eastern Europe and the Balkan Route. Cocaine arriving by sea is delivered to the harbours of Bremenhaven, Hamburg and Rostock, and then loaded on TIR trucks bound for the Czech Republic, Poland and the Netherlands. Frankfurt Airport, both as a final destination and as a stopover, receives couriers from all over the world. However, most cocaine passes through by land in smaller batches, already belonging to first or second range wholesalers. This is confirmed by the fact that, despite the efforts of the BKA (*Bundeskriminalamt*) and the Federal Customs Service, no spectacular cocaine seizures have been made, with amounts clearly under the European average seizure weight. Especially from the Netherlands, cocaine travels south along *Nordrhein-Westfalen* and up the river Rhein. Next to wholesale, a large number of small distributors and consumers move modest quantities through the Dutch-German border, by car or train.

Separated from the continent, and despite some cases of flight stopovers or involving the *Eurostar* train from London, most of the cocaine entering UK is intended for domestic

³⁴ Cocaine activity around the region includes: cocaine laboratories in Croatia and Georgia, lines between Venezuela-Romania, Brazil-Beirut-West Europe and Greece-Albania-West Europe, shipments by sea reaching Turkey or moving north to Russia, and so on (OGD 1997a: 27-28).

³⁵ The Panama-registered tanker *Archangelos*, transporting 2,5 tons of cocaine, was boarded by Spanish customs in the Atlantic Ocean in 1995. Although a Colombian-Galician operation, the ship departed from the Greek port of Piraeus, where business contacts were made and illegal companies created (*El País*, 29-1-95).

³⁶ In 1992, 613 kg were intercepted in the Eastern Pyrenees. A year later, 406 kg of pure cocaine were seized in a motorway toll in *Perpignan*. A seizure of 1 ton took place in January 1994, between *Toulouse* and *Narbonne* (Dubois 1997: 33). Finally, a record seizure of 1,2 tons in February 1999 has been made in a TIR truck near Paris.

³⁷ In July 1987, 445 kg of cocaine coming from Colombia were seized in the Marie-Galante Island, in Guadeloupe. In 1990, 551 kg were found in the French part of the Saint-Martin Island and 438 kg in Cayenne. Later almost a ton was seized again in Saint-Martin. The 'good' year of 1994 for French cocaine seizures (see Table IV) has also an spectacular double-seizure in Saint-Barthelemy amounting in total some 1,3 tons.

consumption. Cocaine enters by the several international airports but mainly by sea, both in unnoticed small vessels after transshipment - the Galician method -, and on ferry 'day-trips' by smaller and individual couriers crossing from the continent.

Bi-directional lines and transshipment areas

Cocaine lines are often bi-directional, mainly due to the diversification and democratisation of cocaine traffic. Risk minimising strategies include the mobility of some floating stock through common borders: for example, in 1995 an identical amount of 60 kg of ongoing cocaine was seized in each side of the French-German border (OGD 1997b: 22). It is also very common to find shipments entering one continental extreme that passes through undivided to a very far point, from where distribution starts. Evidence of far-away bi-directional lines includes the Netherlands-Italy, Spain-Italy, East Europe-West Europe, Balkans-Germany or even Denmark-Middle East. France is also a good example of the bi-directional nature of cocaine lines: Spain, the Netherlands and Italy are both sources and main destinations of cocaine passing through France (O.C.R.T.I.S. 1995: 92).

Bi-directionality is also the product of increasingly mixed networks trading different drugs or goods. What was explained before about some mix with heroin routes is even more applicable to cannabis. Large quantities of cannabis coming by sea from South America or North Africa often follow the same cocaine routes, and very often the same importers (especially Dutch, Galician and Colombians) tend to move cocaine and cannabis at the same time.³⁸

Diversity in cocaine routes is finally stimulated by the increasing number of transshipment areas of inter-oceanic transportation to Europe. Cocaine transshipment practices are the logical result of the widening of trade lines and flows connected to Europe on the one hand, and the strategies of illegal entrepreneurs to disguise the shipment's point of origin on the other. Since transportation is a minor cost in relation to final profits, location of these areas is important but tied to other factors: economic linkages with source and with target countries, trade restrictions and controls, and so on (Friman 1995: 68). Mexico, the main transshipment area for cocaine to the American market, does not play a role regarding Europe. For this market, the most usual stopovers before crossing the ocean are Venezuela and Brazil (both also real export countries), the entire Caribbean region and Argentina.

Since the mid-1990s, Africa also became a very important transshipment centre for cocaine bound for the European market (INCB 1996). In particular, South Africa, West Africa (Nigeria) and Cape Verde have been involved in large smuggling operations.³⁹

³⁸ In 1996, 35 tons of cannabis were seized in Colombia on a ship destined for Poland (INBC 1997). Many large combined seizures have taken place throughout the last decade, especially in Spain, the Netherlands and Germany.

³⁹ African couriers, especially Nigerians, have not only been detained in many European airports but also in South America - over 200 were reported locked up in Brazilian jails in 1997 (OGD 1997b). Nigerian networks also organise sea shipments from Brazil to many African harbours - Durban, Maputo, Cape Verde, and so on - from where the cocaine is sent to Europe by air or sea. A seizure of 350 kg in Hamburg in 1992 turned to be a Nigerian-Polish operation (OGD 1997a: 15). Also countries such as Hungary and Czech Republic have been the targets of Nigerian smuggling operations. Finally, a growing number of shipments passing through Cape Verde Islands are destined to Europe, especially Portugal and the Netherlands.

3.2. Why through the Netherlands? Some Views from Traquetos

Why do Colombian *traquetos* move large cocaine shipments through a small location such as the Netherlands? Geography, economy and drug policies are quickly called upon when pointing out the reasons for such decisions:

"The Netherlands has been a site of major illicit trafficking in cocaine (...) The geographical position of the Netherlands, its economic structure, the opening of borders in Europe and some elements of its policy have contributed to that situation". (INCB 1996).

Though the answer remains multi-factorial and in some cases very obvious, general statements particularly from international drug enforcement bodies deserve a closer look. I will try to do this by exploring some thoughts and impressions from the cocaine entrepreneurs themselves.

As with many other entrepreneurs, cocaine traffickers measure risks and local conditions and resources when they have to define the target of any smuggling operation. As explained in chapter II, when the 'comparative advantage' of Colombia was assessed, risks minimising strategies are the main concern of drug entrepreneurs, and local conditions and resources can reduce or increase risks. They generally regard the Netherlands as an overall low risk base, both for import and wholesale distribution operations. Let us see how the different variables are positively or negatively judged and how these judgements fit with reality.

3.2.1. Economic activity and communication infrastructure

A first set of explanations refers to the enormous - concentrated - economic activity of the Netherlands, especially as a major import-export centre of Europe. Since cocaine, as described before, follows routes and uses the same infrastructural resources as legal goods, it is clear that these resources and conditions present in the Netherlands have an effect in lowering illegal entrepreneur's risks. When commenting on this economic environment, they usually refer to four different aspects: a) the huge volumes of airports and seaports such as Schiphol and Rotterdam; b) the good communication infrastructure (trains and roads) and the central place of the Netherlands in between other countries of West Europe; c) the good 'entrepreneurial' atmosphere both regarding the existence of big and small legal import-export firms as well as a more general international 'trading' mentality that speeds both legal and illegal transactions; and d) the existence of enough financial and banking resources.

Miguel is a professional courier who was detained in Schiphol only after an earlier successful 'cross':

"You never know what is going to happen. If you are lucky there are many planes coming at the same time, you know Schiphol, people from all over the world. I don't think it is a particularly safe airport, but it's big, many can walk through."

Indeed, movement through the international airport of Schiphol has doubled between 1986 and 1996, from 190 to 335 thousand flights per year, and from 12 to 27 million people passing through its gates (CBS 1997). The fact that it does not have direct flights from and to Colombia does not seem to be a problem for cocaine exporters and couriers, who know the higher risks involved in direct connections from 'hot' places. Miguel:

"It is more dangerous for us [Colombians] but they also know that anyone can be smuggling drugs, from wherever... Of course you change airports, can you imagine a direct flight from Cali? Who would want to take that flight? (laughs)."

Schiphol has very good links with other Latin American and European airports, and of course privileged connections with Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles, both permanently sending and receiving visitors and overseas migrants. Caribbean destinations score high amongst Dutch holidaymakers, and business ties with countries such as Venezuela account for some frequent flyers. However, the name 'Schiphol' is not so familiar in Colombia amongst cocaine entrepreneurs: many considered it just another European airport. In fact, it could be argued that Schiphol Airport has been mainly targeted by non-Colombian individuals or organisations sending small cocaine amounts to Europe: people operating in Venezuela, Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, Brazil, Chile or Peru.

A much more infamous reputation amongst Colombian cocaine entrepreneurs, when recalled, were the names of Rotterdam and Antwerp. Both places were considered to be rather safe by all people I had contact with. Joel, a Colombian wholesale distributor active in Amsterdam, explains:

"Yes, you can say that a small place is better, but they just keep sending to Rotterdam. Sometimes you lose something, as a month ago when the divers did not find it and I had to pay. I also take risks. Nobody knows what happened, but the thing disappeared. See, what is good in Rotterdam is that it goes fast, you take the thing and you sleep elsewhere [the cocaine container or bulk can be quickly moved to stash]. The mess is often made before, but if you follow the rules, the papers are in order and nobody 'sold' you, man, you 'crown'."

Even those with no personal experience of the harbour, in the Netherlands and in Colombia, always referred to it as being thoroughly praiseworthy.⁴⁰ Their impression is well validated by official statistics: a full free transit harbour equipped with modern automated and specialised terminals that in 1997 off-loaded 1.9 million containers and flats transporting 21 million tons of goods. (Hofland et al. 1994; CBS 1998). Although most of them come from other European countries, Asia and North America, some 250,000 containers still arrive in Rotterdam every year from Africa, Central and South America, thus from potential cocaine export and transshipment countries.⁴¹

However, Rotterdam is only a symbol for a broader positive view about smaller Dutch ports such as Amsterdam, Vlissingen or IJmuiden. The same goes for Antwerp, widely used and considered by local cocaine importers as a 'local' port. Amsterdam harbour, for example, looks very small with its modest 66,000 downloaded containers in 1996 - in fact an abnormal record year - if compared with the volumes moved through Rotterdam. However, for cocaine entrepreneurs it still generates a great deal of interest: 90% of the containers came from 'sensitive' origins in Africa, Central and South America, and it received four times more containers from Colombia (5,300) than its competitor (CBS 1997). Even small ports such as Delfzijl, Zeewolde or the Texel Island are interesting and have been targeted by smaller boats in operations including containers and cocaine hidden in and under the ship structure.

⁴⁰ For example amongst peripheral connoisseurs of the illegal business circuit in Colombia, or amongst drug couriers imprisoned in the Netherlands. See also the testimony of the drug entrepreneur B. Gordon (Bovenkerk 1995b: 166).

⁴¹ This means almost 700 containers per day entering the port from cocaine export and transshipment regions. In 1998, from the 120,482 containers arrived from South and Central America, only 7,300 came from Colombia. Suriname and Venezuela sent even fewer. More than 50% came from Brazil and Argentina (CBS, Container Statistics 1999).

In the ten years from 1986 to 1996, goods downloaded in containers at Dutch sea harbours increased from 14 to 24 million tons⁴² (CBS 1997). The role of the Netherlands as a main 'door' for all sort of goods entering Europe is also revealed by import-export destinations: 415 million tons of goods imported in 1996, from which half from Europe and half from the rest of the world, and 366 million tons exported, from which 90% to other European countries (CBS 1997). The Netherlands is, after Germany, the most important destination for Colombian exports to Europe. In 1998, Colombian legal exports to the Netherlands amounted to f 556 million (EVD 2000).

The variety of goods traded, the number of leading companies involved and the diversity of routes followed by cocaine shipments, suggest that the election of a specific harbour relates to the legal arrangement established for the smuggling: cocaine follows the lines of legal trade, so it is the legitimate business world that in fact decides, even unwillingly, the faith of cocaine shipments.

Tano explains about further communication facilities:

"Joel goes to Antwerp very easily, he goes and comes back the same day. Public transportation here, no, you can't complain, the train and the tram are secure. One is accustomed to larger distances, and the routes there [in Colombia] are like hell. Here you know what you can expect, for example, yesterday they announced the train delay."

Good communication infrastructure (train connections, good highways, public and mobile telephone facilities, and so on) are all important for business performance, especially since the cocaine trade consists of connecting people who are distant and do not know each other, and moving merchandise and people through space. Finally, a well developed system of TIR truck transportation ranges the whole continent from Dutch download points, offering cocaine entrepreneurs excellent opportunities to move large drug amounts to further destinations unnoticed.

When asked about the geographical position of the Netherlands for establishing the cocaine lines, none of my informants seemed to take this factor into serious account. The Netherlands are objectively well placed for receiving cocaine - on a sea coast, close to other centres and markets, halfway between West and East extremes - although other neighbouring places share the same features, and countries such as Spain or Russia have even longer and wilder coasts, with larger non populated and inaccessible areas better suited for smuggling and concealing cocaine bulks. However, these considerations were absent in illegal entrepreneur's accounts. It has already been explained that distance does not play an important role for cocaine exporters, for whom transportation costs are very small in comparison to the benefits. All efforts are devoted to reducing risks, and if that implies a particular shipment should enter through the remote port of Archangelsk, Russia, before being returned to Germany, so be it.

Many people suggested that, in the cocaine business, the 'with whom' and the 'how' very often precede and determine further decisions about the 'when' and the 'where'. Ernesto claims to have worked in the heydays of Cali for Santacruz Londoño 'The Student'. He explains about particular choices of location:

"See, the thing goes in many ways and to many places. Some are better than others, but it all depends on the sort of *flecha* ['arrow', business partner] and the *cruce* ['cross'] you make. First the line, you open the line with some group there or some *paisano* that organises it from there. Then you arrange the *cruce*, and you see the quantity, your financial situation, your contacts and your *tapadera* [front-store]. You know all the possible methods, you can go everywhere. I would say,

⁴² Goods in containers are only a part of the total goods unloaded, which increased from 79 to 85 million tons in the same period.

every operation is unique, especially big operations. The cocaine gets sick before getting there, it travels all over."

Another positive factor indicated by cocaine entrepreneurs in the Netherlands was its 'entrepreneurial' atmosphere and mentality. During the 1990s, the Netherlands opened the door for many foreign companies to establish themselves there by granting business and tax facilities. This meant that not only many leading companies established their headquarters, but also many small import-export firms opened or fixed a branch here, sometimes a single office with one or two employees. An ideal situation for cocaine entrepreneurs. Pollo, a Colombian economist and drug entrepreneur active in Amsterdam, explains:

"It's not just cocaine. Look what happens here with under and over-invoicing, or with ghost subsidised products. They can do what they want with import-export infrastructure. They talk about us, but they have a longer experience in doing business, all sort of business."

Remarks about Dutch entrepreneurship by Colombian dealers were not only limited to pointing out the actual infrastructure and the long merchant tradition, but also referred to more general cultural features such as the existence of a business 'mentality'. Even when they were negative or derogatory, stressing for example notions of distance, indifference, meanness or materialist interest, they were usually linked to other more positive characteristics around professionalism, efficiency and pragmatism. They were not confined to describing only entrepreneurs, but seemed to be broader and generalising statements about ordinary native Dutch people in their daily environment and social interaction. Pragmatism, for example, is a useful attribute for an illegal business based on flexible arrangements, changing people and strong uncertainties.

Finally, others referred to enough good banking and financial facilities in the Netherlands, which without being exceptional or extraordinary, largely fulfil their needs for moving or sending money away.

The single market

As is the case for legal goods, cocaine import and wholesale distribution dynamics at national level can only be understood within the broader picture of a single European cocaine market. Most of the cocaine entering the Netherlands is intended for neighbouring or far away European countries, the Netherlands being assessed by cocaine entrepreneurs for its role in such a larger context.

In fact, all European entry points are regarded beyond their local dimension. The single European cocaine market is non-transparent, in the sense that gaps in information, law enforcement and opportunities can create over- or under-supply at specific points. Cocaine entrepreneurs react to price changes or local saturation by re-localising trade activities. All interviewed people agreed that although compared with other countries local kilo prices are moderate, the Netherlands shows a remarkable price stability - i.e. mild bottle-necks, no 'overstocking' - with a fast circulation of the incoming cocaine.

Although somewhat vaguely, people often referred to short distances and to the international environment found in the Netherlands as a positive input for doing business. Tano, for example, liked the fact that English and Spanish were widespread business languages. Joel seemed to be at ease with the fact that business trips, even to Belgium and Germany, were short and rather safe.

3.2.2. The international meeting point

Next to the economic infrastructure, proper human resources are essential for business performance. I already explained that in the European cocaine trade, even at national level, individuals and groups from many countries are involved. Countries or regions either with strong local groups able to articulate upper and lower business levels - for example Galician organisations as middlemen between Colombian exporters and European distributors - or with a local palette of multinational groups and individuals able to operate and get in contact with each other - for example the Amsterdam international legal and illegal business scene - have better chances of hosting a significant share of cocaine transactions.

As I argued earlier, during the 1990s the cocaine business has experienced further processes of internationalisation (geographical dispersion, new routes, and so on), integration with other legal and illegal activities (with other illicit drugs, the weapons industry and the legal economy), professionalisation (more expertise, strategic management, re- and de-qualification in a dual tendency) and flexibilisation (multiple tasks, entrepreneurs without enterprises, increased sub-contracting, temporary and unskilled workers). Local scenarios with various groups or individuals - from legal and illegal entrepreneurs to petty criminals - strongly linked with external resources, networks or markets - such as migrant business, labour enclaves or local middlemen -, certainly offer fertile ground for those tendencies to be pushed forward.

The Netherlands offers an international meeting point for potential partners, operations and intermediations to arise: native Dutch, British, Colombians, Surinamese, Antilleans, Turks, Yugoslavs, Russians, Chileans, Italians, all nationalities likely to be found and linked in the Netherlands. They manage in various forms privileged access to source, transit or destination areas, to heroin or weapons trade and routes, or to international financial resources.

The international nature of the Dutch cocaine business becomes evident not only by analysing detentions in relevant cocaine cases, but also by listening and observing the very actors involved. Former local studies based on in-depth interviewing with cocaine entrepreneurs (Korf and Verbraeck 1993; Bovenkerk 1995a, 1995b) have indicated the international nature of the Dutch cocaine scene. More general surveys on the nature of organised crime, mainly based on judicial dossiers, also highlight the international nature of local 'criminal networks' (Fijnaut et al. 1996; Kleemans et al. 1998). Colombian importers, for example, are often explicitly enthusiastic about the Netherlands as a market place for meeting people from all over. Miguel explains from prison:

"It's nice to do business with Italians. Here in prison we get along very well, we eat together."

And Tano claims that:

"I meet people from places I never imagined before. The owners of the coffee-shop are Dutch, they did time in Spain. Montes is from Venezuela. Then you find Surinamese, Antilleans and Moroccans, all trying to get something when you enter and tell you are a Colombian. Joel sells to Germans, and so on. It is fantastic, so many different people, I learnt a lot in Amsterdam, I don't want to leave."

Opportunities to meet and establish business relations, for example between Colombians and Dutchmen, can also develop far from the *polders*. The Netherlands Antilles, for example, has been repeatedly indicated as a major meeting point for drug entrepreneurs. Many informants stressed the fact that the place is strategically located as transshipment area,

that a large Colombian community lives in Aruba, and that mostly Aruba and Curaçao are frequented by Colombian drug entrepreneurs, either for holidays, for family visits or for business. Many deals are closed there, mostly all Colombian cocaine targeting the United States and the Netherlands.⁴³

3.2.3. The repression factor

A final issue addressed by cocaine entrepreneurs is the problem of police control and the penal reaction. They do take in account penal answers and strategies, incorporating them into their own practices aimed to minimise risks. As illegal entrepreneurs, they are obsessed with illegality, and spend much time talking about Custom controls, about police moves and corruption, about judicial details concerning themselves or their criminal lawyers, and about prison conditions if they happen to have been caught. Daily life is also shaped by their efforts to avoid detection. Regarding the intensity of law enforcement - one can logically suppose - a drug entrepreneur would rather choose to operate in a tolerant, less punitive country.

The Netherlands is supposed to have a rather mild criminal justice system, being especially lenient with regard to drug offences. Prison conditions are amongst the least bad in the world, while sentences for cocaine smuggling, import and distribution are very flexible depending on quantities and groups involved. For international cocaine traffic, prison sentences can go up to a maximum of 12 years. Still adding fines and economic forfeitures, or additional punishments for 'belonging to a criminal organisation', for money laundering, or for violent offences, the sentence can vary very much according to the amount involved, the personal background, the organisational aspects and other circumstances. It can range from the 1 year given to the vulnerable, first-time foreign courier, to the 16 years imposed upon a leading, well-known - and badly defended - violent cocaine entrepreneur. Medium and large Colombian importers would normally receive between 4 and 6 years. Regarding effective drug enforcement, there is no reason to believe that Dutch cocaine interception rates are lower than elsewhere in Europe. On the contrary, it can be speculated that land smuggling (cars and TIR trucks at cross-borders and inner roads) are even more difficult to control than air and sea shipments; that local pressure for the police to 'score' is high; and that Dutch police and Custom officers are difficult to corrupt.

Although it can be claimed that the mild environment has changed over the last decade, with present Dutch law enforcement at a European average, it is also true that compared with the rest of Europe prison conditions are better, sentences for small quantities or smugglers are still shorter, police violence is lower, and a tolerant social climate is still a diffuse cultural mark.⁴⁴ In any case, these 'relaxed' images prevail amongst Colombian cocaine entrepreneurs regardless whether these are real or not.

This has led to the acceptance of a couple of simple assumptions. A first general idea alleges that a more repressive drug law enforcement - by longer sentences, worse prison conditions, more effective preventive and repressive police investigation and co-operation measures, and so on - increases drug entrepreneur's risks and shapes his elections about smuggling routes. A second more specific related hypothesis claims that the Dutch mild penal climate has indeed attracted them to deal through the *polders*.

The observations of several drug experts (Bovenkerk 1995b; Caulkins and Reuter 1997; Farrell et al. 1996; Dorn et al. 1992; Friman 1995) suggest that the first claims have weak empirical grounds. Firstly, it is agreed that law enforcement has a disproportional effect:

⁴³ In 1997, 4,300 kg were sized in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba.

⁴⁴ Both as a form of social control and as a mere indifferent attitude about other's choices and businesses.

prohibition and a minimum enforcement radically affect risks - so entrepreneur's decisions and drug prices - while enforcement graduations until certain unachievable level has only a marginal effect regarding risks and prices, can be easily manipulated and neutralised by drug entrepreneurs, and in fact only shape more conjunctural aspects concerning smuggling methods or surplus smuggled cocaine. For example, longer sentences or improved interception rates hardly affect drug entrepreneur's decisions, but no control - by impunity or paying-off corrupted authorities - or total control - by physical annihilation or complete interception - may on the contrary play a central role in shaping their choices about where and how to trade.

However, in more concrete terms, a particular multi-ton seizure can affect exporter decisions: he will not send cocaine to the same place in the same way again.⁴⁵ He might move to another harbour, or look for new smuggling facilities. The same could happen if particular pieces of the puzzle are suddenly changed - i.e. the importer is caught, a corrupted official turns his back, and so forth. However, this readiness to change arrangements, to keep things moving, is rarely the result of a particular event but a more general and constant attitude of cocaine entrepreneurs who have to remain alert in a highly changing environment.

Secondly, drug entrepreneurs are capable of avoiding controls - by transferring personal risks to other people or keeping innovative and ahead of police developments - or even profiting from a supposedly more effective reaction - by feeding the police with cocaine and small couriers, taking advantage of formal procedural delays, mistakes and abuses, or becoming closer to the criminal justice system and to other illegal markets.

The second claim concerning the specific Dutch case is more paradoxical. The Netherlands is far from being tolerant at the level of cocaine import and wholesale distribution. However, interventions have different intensity regarding diverse law enforcement domains, agencies and market levels. As mentioned earlier, actual prison sentences are on European average for drug offences involving many kilos and organised criminal networks, but remain low, if compared with other European countries, regarding for example the smuggling of a couple of kilos by vulnerable and inexperienced couriers, or for retail selling. Prison conditions are generally better. Miguel:

"I was 3 years in Portugal and it was the law of the jungle. Esserheem looks like a luxury hotel, even compared with De Koepel."

Yet better prison conditions in the Netherlands do not seem to be taken into account by those people organising cocaine export in Colombia. Marisol, a criminal lawyer from Cali, claims that:

"Many of the big guys are already imprisoned here [in Colombia]. They send people with balls in their stomachs, they tip European airports about their own couriers, and they hardly help them with a lawyer or with money. These people are disposable to them. It doesn't matter what happens after arrest. They only care about the merchandise, and if somebody is caught, about people's silence."

In fact, most of the people making the key decisions about cocaine transports and overseas transactions (i.e. Colombian cocaine exporters) do not have any reason to fear European criminal laws and enforcement as far as they enjoy impunity in their own place of origin or they will not be extradited if caught. This is particularly clear for 'cut out' capitalized

⁴⁵ Surprisingly, there have been cases of 'serial' seizures, obviously from the same exporter. Depending on his size, he is either wiped out from business or not even bothered about some losses.

exporters well able to neutralise strategic (arrest, charge and conviction) risks (Dorn et al. 1998).

During the 1990s, the Dutch Customs, the Tax Office and the police have developed many specialised bodies (CoPa Team, Prisma Team, FIOD, DIC, Europol Drugs Unit, and so on) and they have joined in many co-ordinated efforts (Schiphol Team, IRT Teams, Hit and Run Container Teams and so on) for fighting cocaine trade. This has meant large budgetary expenses, international co-operation, technological investments and human resources development to a high degree. Colombian drug entrepreneurs do not seem very impressed with computers and complex police investigation. Tano argues that:

"The guys are more worried with random controls. In fact, they feel safe if police is observing them: it means that they are going to stay cool for a while. Yes, everybody imagine DEA officers everywhere, but the people I know do not fear the police here."

Indeed, a rather ambiguous and paradoxical attitude seems to prevail amongst many medium cocaine entrepreneurs (importers and distributors) towards local penal policies and police controls. On the one hand, they either claim to feel unthreatened by criminal laws and police investigation or they accept them or ignore them as given, natural risks inherent to the illegal business. Some make it clear that they more greatly feared the possibility of being killed or ripped-off by people in the circuit than having to go or being already in prison. On the other hand, they do take measures to avoid detection, like phoning from secure phones, avoiding 'hot' places or behaving with low-key profiles. These measures are often aimed to avoid accidental, unnecessary police control rather than to neutralise long-term, complex, strategic police investigation. Explanations for this go in two different directions.

Firstly, they are in many cases unable to undertake complicated intelligence counter-measures: they lack contacts with law enforcers, they simply ignore the details of police surveillance or they lack the infrastructure to neutralise police efforts. When the Dutch police react astonished about 'amateurish' mistakes made by 'professional' drug dealers - passing sensible information through the phone or working with the 'wrong' people - the truth is that, in many cases, cocaine entrepreneurs cannot do otherwise.⁴⁶

Secondly, they seem to underplay the existence of pro-active police activities, and behave as if the only thing to fear was unexpected detection. They try to avoid trouble, restrict public appearances, or even limit the chances of getting caught on public transport or motorways, acting as if the police did not yet know about them. In other cases, they would acknowledge that they are being 'followed', but would surprisingly underplay the fact all together. Tico explains:

"Yea, I laugh about the *tombos* [police]. I never saw something more cowardly, compare it with Colombia! They can't cross the line so easily. They take their time to build their case, to observe, to follow people for months before doing anything. It is just gambling to know the space you have to move, but they just let you work. I don't give a shit about the cops."

Many remarks on "poor control" referred in fact about the limited resources to handle illegal activities that are concealed within legal economic ones. In 1996, 157 million tons of goods - dry goods and parcel bulks - were unloaded in Dutch seaports (CBS 1997), more than 430,000 tons a day. The physical control of these goods is technically impossible and would

⁴⁶ Van de Bunt et al. (1999) argue that the 'arms race' view on the interaction between drug dealers and law enforcement often departs from misleading assumptions: both parties often under- or overestimate each other (Van de Bunt et al. 1999: 400-401).

imply the total collapse of Dutch economic activity. Cocaine entrepreneurs reckon on this fact. Other voices stressing the lack of control pointed to the police.

Some referred to the general tolerant climate as a proper environment for doing business. Others claimed, in contrast, that although the police were invisible on the streets and *razzias* on illegal foreigners were rare, control through technological means – video-cameras, high-speed radars, scanners, and so on – was ever present and should be avoided.

In short, Colombian drug entrepreneurs tended to have, despite police and prison developments towards European average, a mild and tolerant image about the Netherlands. There is a number of reasons for this: a) in specific interventions the Dutch system is indeed milder; b) they reproduce known stereotypes often held abroad about tolerance in the Netherlands; c) despite police developments they do not feel threatened by computers or long-term investigations; d) they often refer to broader collective and individual feelings of freedom and social tolerance where they frame the dimension of penal control; and e) there is a lack or deficit of control that is often attributed to the large amount of social and material legal arrangements to be controlled. A couple of informants did however consider social control in the Netherlands to be highly formalised and visible.

In general terms, Colombian drug entrepreneurs perceive and comment on the Dutch criminal justice system as being lenient, mild and invisible, often referring in fact to the local social and cultural climate or to the intrinsic limits that a small, democratic country like the Netherlands faces in handling disproportional volumes of legal transactions, businesses and trade routes. These considerations are all important for the identity construction and self-legitimation of drug entrepreneurs, and become in some cases a social censure or a general critical discourse about the Netherlands. However, they are marginal or absent when assessing and explaining the Dutch role in cocaine import, where more positive economic, geo-strategic and logistic factors are by far the most influential.

3.2.4. The obstacles

The Dutch 'comparative advantage' to import cocaine for the European market is nevertheless limited by two negative factors, all referred by Colombian cocaine entrepreneurs. The first one is the difficulty in finding strong and reliable local Dutch partners. Colombians often regard the native drug milieu as polarised between a truly 'Dutch *mafia*', as they call it, experienced in illegal business, locally and internationally well connected, but more interested in less risky soft and synthetic drugs than in cocaine, and those individuals ready to become business partners, often belonging to the criminal underworld with no connections, no experience and no infrastructure and capability to handle multi-kilo import transactions by themselves. Even when a family tie exists between a Colombian and one of these entrepreneurs, they are portrayed as unreliable, cowardly and ready to talk with the police if necessary. In other words, it is difficult for Colombians to identify native Dutch individuals or groups willing to engage in large import operations who are neither vulnerable members of the so called *penose*,⁴⁷ or drug enforcers trying to get a grip on them. The contrast is always made with regions such as Galicia or South Italy, where native illegal entrepreneurs do count on the protection of local power brokers. However, as explained earlier, this gap is solved by the existence of a very dynamic local market place for multi-ethnic and multi-national groups in which Colombian entrepreneurs can compete and operate by keeping a low profile.

⁴⁷ The Dutch word *penose* comes from the Yiddish (occupation, livelihood) and refers to the criminal, not powerful underworld.

The second obstacle, closely linked with the absence of local *mafia*-like groups, is the lack of structural corruption within Dutch Custom and police authorities. As a key resource for risk minimising, corruption neutralises criminal justice system intervention, allowing a shipment to pass through, a suspect to remain uncaught, or a penal process to fail. In other countries such as Russia, Spain or Italy better conditions exist for the development of collusion between the State and the illegal business: a) clientelism, b) deficit in accountability, legitimisation or democratic control of institutions, and c) existence of strong inter- and para-state power brokers. Colombians often refer to cases of passive and active corruption, but those cases seem to be far from their domain: they either make up stories about supposed local protection they enjoy, or they refer to the cases as if they would have only heard about them. In fact, some explain these limitations not so much in absolute terms referring to the context, but in more relative terms regarding their position. Joel:

"They wouldn't accept my money. The Dutch *mafia*, because there is a Dutch *mafia*, they can bribe whomever they want. For Surinamese people it was also easier, but nobody wants to get involved directly with Colombians, it's too hot. When somebody tells me that he has a cop in his pocket I really doubt, I tell him to watch out."

Colombian drug entrepreneurs feel far removed from local drug enforcers, their strategies being primarily oriented to evading them.

In summary, from the Colombian trafficker's point of view, the Netherlands offers a comparative advantage heavily based on its economic infrastructure and international business environment.⁴⁸ It is doubtful that its tolerant penal climate, at least in what still remains milder than the European average, has a real impact on its comparative advantage: even those cocaine exporters and importers who experience a lenient climate do not seem to base their business decisions on those sorts of considerations. This comparative advantage is limited by the lack of *mafia*-type native groups engaged in cocaine import and the absence of structural corruption amongst drug enforcers. The first obstacle is partially overcome by the presence of other multi-national groups in cocaine import, groups in which Colombian nationals play an important role.

⁴⁸ The same point has been suggested or argued by Fijnaut et al. (1996), Farrell (1998: 30) and Van de Bunt et al. (1999: 403). However, the argument has remained hypothetical since empirical evidence is scarce and difficult to operationalise. While my material is also fragmented and only reflects subjective perceptions from Colombian *traquetos*, it clearly provides some evidence that supports the hypothesis. A more refined and localised study - for example regarding different places, transport methods, cocaine entrepreneurs or initiatives - may reveal interesting variations in terms of the primary and secondary factors that shape cocaine routes into Europe.