

From foresight to operational impact: research and innovation in the fight against drug-related crime. Report on the international CERIS workshop

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Abstract

The report covers the workshop „Research and innovation against illicit drugs: from foresight to operational impact,” held in Brussels on 5–6 May 2026. The event was organized by the European Commission in cooperation with the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) under the CERIS platform.

Keywords: drugs, threats, organized crime, international training for law enforcement agencies, international cooperation.

From 5 to 6 May 2026, the workshop „Research and Innovation against Illicit Drugs: From Foresight to Operational Impact” was held in Brussels, Belgium.

The event was organised by the European Commission in cooperation with the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) under the CERIS platform. The workshop brought together around 100 participants representing European Union institutions, the scientific community, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organisations. The Central Forensic Laboratory of the Police was represented by Anna Czyż, Specialist at the Chemical Examination Department.

The discussions involved representatives of key international organisations and institutions, including the European Commission, EUDA, UNODC, Europol, EUCPN, and DG HOME. Operational and prosecutorial authorities from the EU Member States included the Belgian Federal Prosecutor’s Office, the Swedish Prosecution Authority, the Dutch Police, the Spanish Guardia Civil, the

Italian Carabinieri, and the Polish Central Bureau of Investigation of the Police (CBŚP). The forensic laboratory and research sector was represented by Sciensano (Belgium), the Trimbos Institute (the Netherlands), the Forensic Science Laboratory of Polícia Judiciária (Portugal), and the Forensic Laboratory of the Provincial Police Headquarters in Radom (Poland). The academic community was represented by experts from Malmö University, CENTRIC, the University of Greenwich, and the University of Limerick.

The main objective of the workshop was to exchange knowledge on current drug-related threats and organised crime in the European Union, while strengthening cooperation between researchers, law enforcement agencies, and policymakers to improve international operational collaboration.

The first day focused on the scale of current threats and the research foundations for analysing the European drug market. The opening session addressed the current drug situation in the European Union, data analysis, and forecasting

drug-related threats. Particular attention was given to the types of substances used, their forms, and their prices. Participants also highlighted challenges related to presenting analytical data, both in terms of the way it is communicated and the target audiences it should reach. The discussions also covered the impact of drugs on young people and society, as well as the activities of organised criminal groups, drug trafficking routes, and the threats these pose to the security of EU Member States.

The second day focused on practical tools, the work of forensic laboratories, and the use of research findings in operational activities and court proceedings. Participants discussed methods for identifying new psychoactive substances (NPS) and highlighted the challenges that continue to hinder their effective identification. The need to establish common standards and strengthen cooperation between forensic laboratories was emphasised in order to respond more quickly to changes in the drug market. Border protection, the role of customs authorities, and measures to combat drug trafficking were also key topics of discussion. Parti-

cipants pointed out existing gaps in border control systems and stressed the need to strengthen international cooperation in information exchange and joint operational activities.

The workshop also included presentations of EU co-funded projects related to drug market analysis, border control, and the detection of psychoactive substances, including PENTION, METEOR, REWIRE-D, SAUST, ARIEN, ARMADILLO, and OBLIVION.

In conclusion, combating drug trafficking effectively requires better information exchange between law enforcement agencies and other institutions, as one of the main challenges remains fragmented data and difficulties in the rapid detection of new psychoactive substances. During the discussions, participants emphasised the need to develop harmonised research standards that combine rapid response with reliable analytical results. More effective action against drug-related crime also requires close cooperation between the health sector, the police, and customs authorities. Only coordinated efforts can contribute to establishing an efficient early warning system and ensuring more effective use of EU funding dedicated to innovation and security.



Fig. 1. Participants of the panel discussion “Drugs, Forensics and Evidence”. From left to right: moderator Nada Milisavljevic, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission; Maria João Caldeira, Forensic Science Laboratory of Polícia Judiciária, Portugal; Giuliano Iacobellis, Carabinieri Scientific Investigation Group, Italy; Anna Czyż, Central Forensic Laboratory of the Police; Tomasz Olszewski, Forensic Laboratory of the Provincial Police Headquarters in Radom, Poland; and Inge Vinckier, Customs Laboratory, Belgium