



**GLOBAL
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ORGANIZED CRIME

THE ARCONIAN OPERATION

ANATOMY OF A RECORD
ATLANTIC COCAINE SHIPMENT –
TRAFFICKING ON CARGO VESSELS
FROM WEST AFRICA TO EUROPE

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CONTENTS

- Introduction 1**
 - Methodology.....2
- Cocaine trafficking from West Africa to Europe 4**
 - Cocaine trafficking by cargo vessel: scale and timelines.....6
 - Sierra Leone: warehousing and trans-shipment.....8
 - Flags of convenience and other red flags..... 11
- Trans-shipment points 12**
 - North Africa..... 12
 - Canary Islands..... 13
- Interlinked ownership structures: Türkiye and Germany 15**
- Conclusion and implications..... 17**
- Notes 18



INTRODUCTION

On 1 May 2026, Spanish law enforcement seized over 30 tonnes of cocaine from the *Arconian*, a Comoros-flagged dry bulk vessel, in the biggest single seizure of cocaine in history. This did not occur in the waters off the coasts of Colombia or Mexico, which are long recognized as the world's cocaine trafficking hotspots. The *Arconian* was seized off the coast of Western Sahara, near the southern city of Dakhla. En route to Libya, the ship had last docked in Sierra Leone, a small country in coastal West Africa, which, while previously linked to the cocaine trade in the early 2000s, has only recently regained notoriety in this context. Current evidence suggests that the cocaine was most likely loaded onto the *Arconian* in Sierra Leone, and that the enormous consignment was intended to be transferred to smaller powerboats (go-fasts) near the Canary Islands and probably elsewhere off the coast of Europe.

In recent years, the *Arconian* had regularly shuttled between several West African ports, including Dakar, Senegal; Bissau, Guinea-Bissau; Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire; Kaolack, Senegal; and Cotonou, Benin. This changed in early February 2026, when the vessel was acquired by Serenity Shipping SL Ltd, a company headquartered in Sierra Leone with no prior shipping history or registered ownership of any other vessel. Between 4 and 22 April, the *Arconian* loitered close to Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital, spending four days docked at Elizabeth II Quay, the country's largest maritime port.

After leaving Freetown on 22 April, the vessel had sailed continuously, with no stopovers or loitering events, until its interception off the coast of Dakhla. Inspecting the vessel manned by a crew of 17 Filipino nationals, the Spanish Guardia Civil also found six armed men – five Dutch and one Surinamese national – hiding in the bow area of the vessel.¹ Several of them had previously been charged in connection with cocaine trafficking and money laundering. One Dutch national had been arrested at the Port of Rotterdam in 2023 in connection with the extraction of cocaine from shipping containers, while another had stood trial in the Netherlands in early 2026 for laundering over €100 000 worth of stolen goods.² The Guardia Civil subsequently discovered a metal door leading to a long gallery filled with bales of cocaine. These were later weighed and estimated to contain more than 30.2 tonnes of cocaine in total.

Attention quickly turned to Jos Leijdekkers – a major Dutch cocaine trafficker who has resided in Sierra Leone since at least mid-2022³ – as the likely lead coordinator of the shipment.⁴

However, as the investigation outlined in this report underscores, the *Arconian* was not an isolated incident. By tracing several vessels, the investigation reveals that, since at least 2024, several small



The Spanish Guardia Civil offload sacks containing cocaine from the *Arconian* on 1 May 2026, in the biggest single seizure of cocaine in history. Photo: Guardia Civil

cargo vessels departing from the Port of Freetown or nearby waters for North African ports have shown the same pattern of loitering near the coasts of Morocco, the Canary Islands and Spain, before docking in North African ports. While some vessels make this journey only once, others do so on multiple occasions.

Witness testimony, photographs taken by individuals close to the Leijdekkers network, and extensive analysis of the network's operations all support the suspicion that the *Arconian* and several other vessels assessed in this report were coordinated by the Leijdekkers network. Tracing these vessel patterns – and their consistent ownership trends – suggests that the Leijdekkers network has repeatedly used this modus operandi to traffic cocaine from West Africa to Europe since at least 2024.

The size of the *Arconian* seizure, particularly from a West African point of origin, was entirely unprecedented. It underscores the vast quantities of cocaine being trafficked on cargo vessels between West Africa and Europe. This modality – and the scale of the cocaine consignments it has likely facilitated – may help to explain how significant outbound flows of cocaine from West Africa to Europe have been able to evade disruption by European authorities, including at European ports. The scale also underscores once more the sheer volume of cocaine being stored in West Africa. It also highlights that the consignments were most likely pooled between several different owners, with the Leijdekkers network providing logistics services, as well as probably owning part of the consignment.

Unpacking the *Arconian* operation, plus case studies of two other vessels and a broader set of tracked vessel movements, offers insight into the modus operandi that underpins the enormous volumes of cocaine being shipped from West Africa to Europe. The analysis in this brief draws on marine traffic data, visual evidence and witness testimonies to reveal at least eight similar voyages from Freetown to Morocco and Libya since 2024. In doing so, it sheds new light on the key characteristics of cocaine trafficking on cargo vessels from West African storage points to Europe – a trafficking journey that has remained poorly understood since the resurgence of cocaine trafficking through West Africa in 2019.

Methodology

This report is based on a mixed method approach centred on analysis of the movement patterns of three vessels of interest: the *Arconian*, the *White Eagle* and the *White Labeille*.

The analysis draws on open-source intelligence and analysis of automatic identification system (AIS) tracking data and other databases, including vessel tracking platforms (such as MarineTraffic, VesselFinder, Skylight and Global Fishing Watch) to monitor port call history, dark vessel periods and

loitering activity; ship registry and ownership databases (including Equasis) to trace flag state registrations and beneficial ownership chains; and corporate registry tools (Sayari, Nexis and OpenCorporates) to map shell company structures. A second layer of open-source information gathering involved a literature review, including of court documents and industry reports.

The analysis presented herein is supported by extensive, long-form, unstructured interviews with port workers, individuals with first-hand information of the relevant vessels and dynamics in Sierra Leone, and national and international law enforcement agencies. For the safety and security of sources, these have been kept confidential.

The *Arconian*'s link to cocaine trafficking is evident in the May seizure. Although no conclusive public statement has connected the *Arconian* to Leijdekkers, it has been widely suggested in official statements and published interviews with the investigating team.⁵ It is also supported by interviews conducted by the research team in Sierra Leone.

Although cocaine has not been seized on the *White Eagle* or recently on the *White Labeille*,⁶ photographic material and witness testimony indicate ties between both vessels and the Leijdekkers network in Sierra Leone, and point to connections with cocaine trafficking. Links between the three vessels are further supported by this report's analysis of their recurring patterns of ownership, management, flagging, voyaging and vessel characteristics.

The behaviour of six other vessels, whose ownership, flagging or voyage patterns show clear links to these three, supports the analysis throughout this report. The *Arconian*, the *White Eagle* and the *White Labeille* are referred to as the 'case study vessels'. The six vessels in the broader dossier are referred to as 'broader dossier vessels'. Most of the ships fall into the category of dry bulk/general cargo vessels and display very similar sizes and gross tonnage capacities.⁷ The exception to this is a tug boat, which most likely served in a logistical capacity.

The extensive work of mapping and monitoring cocaine trafficking in West Africa carried out by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) over the past five years forms the backdrop to the case study analysis. This includes over 190 interviews with key stakeholders with different perspectives on West Africa's cocaine trade conducted in 2025 for a baseline study on regional cocaine trafficking.⁸ The findings of this case study were discussed with several close observers of cocaine trafficking in West Africa to test our hypotheses.



The other two case study vessels: the *White Labeille* (pictured left in Casablanca) and the *White Eagle* (formerly the *Breadbox Falcon* – pictured left in Las Palmas). © Tony Hogwood and Hans Hausmann/Marine Traffic



COCAINE TRAFFICKING FROM WEST AFRICA TO EUROPE

Since around 2019, the volume of cocaine trafficked through West Africa en route to Europe has exploded. This reflects both global trends in the cocaine market, which has reached unprecedented scale through a surge in production, and West Africa's growing attraction for sophisticated cocaine trafficking networks. Investment in trade infrastructure, particularly maritime ports, has made West Africa increasingly well connected to areas of cocaine production and consumption. Gaps in governance and intelligence, among both West African and European authorities, lessen the risks of disruption and contribute to making the West African route a particularly secure one.⁹

Existing law enforcement efforts have generated the greatest seizures on inbound routings from Latin America to West Africa, particularly on non-containerized vessels. Since 2023, the departure points for such vessels have shifted away from Brazil, which had been prominent, to Suriname and Guyana.¹⁰ In West Africa, drop-offs occur in the waters off the coast stretching from Ghana to Senegal, but Sierra Leone has become particularly prominent since 2025.¹¹ The growing volume of cocaine believed to be trafficked by the Leijdekkers network via West Africa is likely to be a factor in this, drawing on established connections in Suriname,¹² with a significant proportion trafficked through his operating base in Sierra Leone.

Most cocaine seizures on West African routings have been of non-containerized imports bound for the region. The uptick in such seizures clearly tracks the surge in cocaine trafficking through the region identified through other supply- and demand-side indicators: one international law enforcement organization calculated a seven-fold increase in such seizures from 2022 to 2024, when amounts seized reportedly reached 352 tonnes.¹³ Yet these unprecedented numbers represent a small proportion of total volumes, as seen in criminal networks' willingness to traffic ever-larger consignments on West African routes. One indicator of their growing confidence – shaped also by the sheer volume of total flows – is that the average size of non-containerized seizures on West African routings has more than doubled, from 2.4 tonnes in 2024 to 5.6 tonnes in 2025, according to data from the EU's Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics (MAOC-N).¹⁴

Seizures of containerized cocaine on West Africa routings are rarer. Within the region, the already limited seizures of inbound flows at seaports – where screening and scanning capacities are concentrated – have diminished since 2019. Notably, only four such seizures have been reported since the start of 2025, and all were in Lagos.¹⁵

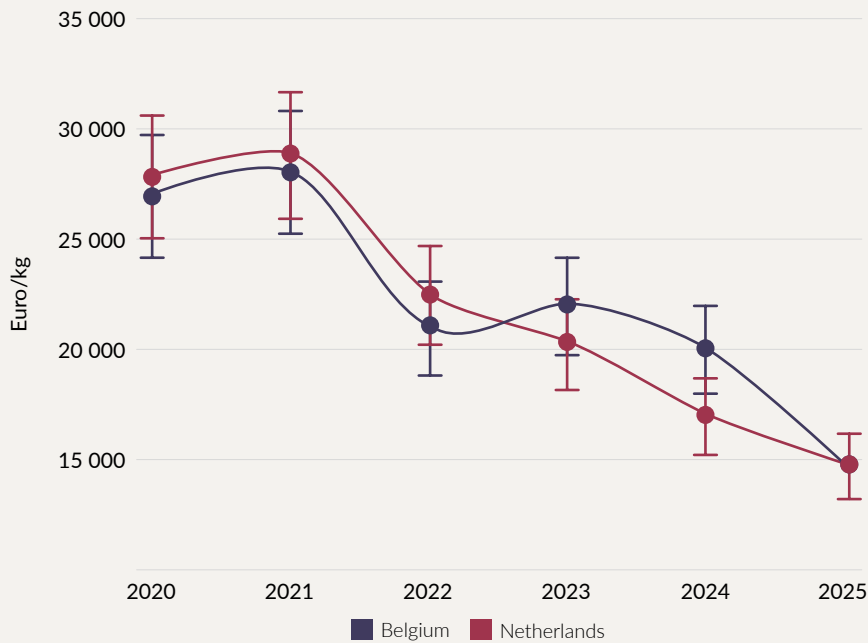


FIGURE 1 Mean wholesale prices (1 kilogram or more) of cocaine in Belgium and the Netherlands, 2020–2025.

SOURCE: Multiple sources consulted by the GI-TOC during fieldwork in 2025 and 2026

Outbound flows of cocaine from West Africa have consistently puzzled close observers. Europe is the main consumption market fed by the region,¹⁶ yet the numbers of reported seizures in European ports on container vessels leaving from West Africa are very low – even though they have increased over the last three years, and are typically of large volume.¹⁷ Most recently, on 3 June, German authorities publicly announced the seizure of 8 tonnes of cocaine in the German port of Wilhelmshaven, reportedly from a vessel that had departed from Sierra Leone in January and was originally destined for Barcelona.¹⁸

Intelligence gaps may be partly responsible for the limited seizures on such routings, but many argue that this does not fully explain the paucity.¹⁹ The evident surge in cocaine entering the region in the last five years has left many wondering: how is it trafficked out of West Africa? The broad parameters are well sketched – a reliance on maritime flows, both containerized and non-containerized – but some pieces of the puzzle were missing.



Tracking the journey of the *Arconian*, a Comoros-flagged dry bulk vessel intercepted off the coast of Western Sahara, sheds light on patterns of cocaine trafficking from West Africa to Europe, an increasingly utilized route in an expanding market. *Photo: Guardia Civil*

This question has become increasingly urgent as retail and wholesale cocaine prices continue to fall in many European countries, indicating a stable or growing supply. For example, wholesale prices in the Netherlands and Belgium fell to approximately €15 000 per kilogram in 2025 – the latest drop in a downwards trend from €28 000 in 2021.²⁰ Prices in Spain have followed a similar trajectory. These trends are widely understood by institutional and market actors as indicators of structural oversupply rather than declining demand. And yet, seizure volumes in Europe have decreased since 2024, particularly at Antwerp and Rotterdam, western Europe's major gateway ports.²¹

Cocaine trafficking by cargo vessel: scale and timelines

The *Arconian* seizure, and the modus operandi it highlights, may well provide some missing puzzle pieces.

The case of the *Arconian*, and broader vessel analysis in this report, indicates that trafficking by cargo vessels has been an important modus operandi for at least one major cocaine trafficking network operating between West Africa and Europe since 2024. It may also partly explain why bulk cocaine trafficking flows from West Africa to Europe have gone largely undisrupted.

The scale of the consignment is itself revealing: the fact that a network was willing to risk transporting such a large volume of cocaine in a single consignment speaks to extremely high – perhaps misjudged – levels of confidence. This suggests significant successful precedent, an assessment supported – albeit not evidenced – by our analysis of the case study and broader dossier vessels.

In the modality employed by the *Arconian*, a cargo vessel is loaded with a colossal volume of cocaine from West Africa. Off the coast of southern Europe, it drops off consignments to multiple smaller vessels operating closer to shore. Illustratively, the *Arconian* was carrying over 42 000 litres of gasoline when it was intercepted in 2026.²² As with most small cargo vessels, the *Arconian* operates on diesel, supporting analysis that the petrol consignment was likely intended to re-supply the go-fasts travelling to the vessel to onload cocaine. These smaller boats are used bring the cocaine onshore, without needing to use maritime ports.²³

While this method had been more commonly tracked on journeys from Latin America, there had been previous reports of similar modalities used on routings between West Africa and Europe. By January 2026, Europol was finding drop-offs not only off the coast of Spain, but also in northern Europe, and reading this as an adaptation by criminal networks that could well have contributed to the decline in seizures at major ports.²⁴

Unpacking this modus operandi further is critical to better understanding how significant volumes of cocaine continue to be trafficked into Europe from West Africa. In this analysis, tracking the dossier vessels helps to establish a probable timeline for these patterns. Although not comprehensive in scope, it does help to show how cargo vessels were a key method on this routing from at least 2024.

As set out below, patterns of shared ownership structures in the case study vessels start to emerge from 2019 and strengthen from 2022 onwards. By September 2022, all three vessels are operating under the same Türkiye-linked International Safety Management (ISM) manager and registered owner.²⁵

The journey patterns that most strongly mirror that of the *Arconian* – between Sierra Leone, the Canary Islands and Morocco/Libya – can be tracked from July 2024. The northbound journeys follow within months or weeks of reflagging to the Comoros and registration by Sierra Leonean companies.

The Leijdekkers network may have begun acquiring cargo vessels in late 2022, when his operations are tracked to have started in Sierra Leone,²⁶ but indicators of a consistent trafficking route underpinned by these voyage patterns strengthen from mid-2024. This timing could be linked to the high volume of seizures of cocaine in Antwerp onboard containerized cargo from Sierra Leone in 2024 and, from January 2025, the heightened publicity regarding Leijdekkers' operations in Sierra Leone. Both increased the visibility of cocaine trafficking from Sierra Leone, and could have called for ways to avoid major European ports and their heightened screening. While only one of several diversifications, it seems likely that this method became increasingly central to the network's operations, and therefore underpinned significant volumes on West Africa–Europe routings. It is impossible to sketch the volumes of possible cocaine consignments potentially carried by the *White Eagle* and the *White Labeille*, but both were certainly capable of carrying something similar to the *Arconian*'s 30.2-tonne load.

Mapping the case study vessels

The journeys of the *White Eagle* and the *White Labeille* in 2024 closely mirror that of the *Arconian* in April 2026 (Figure 2). All departed from Sierra Leone. Like the case study vessels, the broader dossier vessels launched their voyages to North African ports after prolonged stays at the Port of Freetown area, and followed similar loitering patterns.

The *White Eagle* headed north from the Port of Freetown in July 2024, with Lebanon as its stated destination. This followed several movements in and out of the port and a prolonged overlap with a tug boat linked to the Leijdekkers network. The ship travelled from Sierra Leone to the Canary Islands, where it had a three-hour loitering event about 8 nautical miles (15 kilometres) from the archipelago's waters, with no official docking at the archipelago's ports, before a fragmented loitering sequence near Casablanca, Morocco, in September. After this, it travelled towards the coast of Spain and back, marked by seven tracked loitering events, and then several movements in and around Morocco. The vessel turned off its AIS near the coast of Rabat and later berthed at Beni-Enzar, the Port of Nador in northern Morocco – officially due to technical difficulties. However, Nador has no repair facilities and the vessel's AIS was

switched off, arousing suspicion in surrounding communities.²⁷ The Filipino crew members were not allowed to leave the vessel and were later detained.²⁸ The vessel was reportedly carrying 80 containers – about 6 000 tonnes of cargo – at the time of docking.

The November 2024 voyage of the *White Labeille* exhibits strikingly similar patterns. After a four-month stay near the Port of Freetown, the vessel headed north via Mauritania (where it had an extensive loitering event off the coast of Nouadhibou) and the waters off the coast of the Canary Islands. Its arrival in Casablanca was similarly fragmented – it loitered at various locations near the port area starting on 1 December, before eventually docking at the port on 8 December. It stayed docked at the same berth at least until 31 December, when it went dark. The *White Labeille*'s official movements end at this point.

Vessels in the broader dossier also recorded departing from Freetown, docking in ports in Libya, and loitering patterns off the Canary Islands, Morocco and mainland Spain. Across both the case study and broader dossier vessels, repeat loitering patterns, sometimes within very short periods of time – for example, even three times in one day on the same leg – could point

to multiple offloads, as appears to have been intended with the *Arconian's* journey. Trafficking networks have now become so adept at making at-sea drop-offs to go-fasts that they need not slow down, meaning that drop-offs can be entirely invisible in vessel tracking data, and that the absence of loitering events is not, in and of itself, conclusive.

While the individual vessel patterns are intriguing, their cumulative patterns, repeated over years, seem too similar to be coincidental and start to look more like a repeating modus operandi. The additional interview data and ownership structure analysis supports indications that this method was linked to the cocaine trade, and more specifically to the Leijdekkers network. ■



FIGURE 2 Routes of the *Arconian* (May 2026), the *White Eagle* (July 2024) and the *White Labeille* (November 2024).

Sierra Leone: warehousing and trans-shipment

Analysis of the case study vessels suggests that all were loaded in or near Sierra Leone, most likely from stocks warehoused in the country. On 20 May, in an official government press conference held in the wake of the *Arconian* seizure, Sierra Leonean authorities rejected allegations that the vessel had been loaded with illicit goods in Freetown. While some analysts have suggested that the *Arconian* may have been loaded from vessels travelling from Latin America and the Caribbean,²⁹ this is not borne out by records of the vessel's movements, which do not evidence any vessel coming close to the *Arconian* after it left Freetown.³⁰

The probable loading of the vessels in Sierra Leone supports existing conclusions that significant volumes of cocaine are ‘near-shored’ in West Africa, one step closer to markets in Europe, and concentrated in areas where disruption is unlikely, including Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau.³¹ In these states, the 2025 retail cocaine prices were markedly lower than other countries in the region (Figure 3), a strong indicator of higher supply into domestic markets through overspill.

Sierra Leone was already operating as a cocaine trafficking hub in the early 2000s.³² While focus shifted away from the country after this period, regional trends indicate that the trade is likely to have experienced a resurgence in the country from the late 2010s. By 2020, Sierra Leone was already an operational base and warehousing area for the Montenegrin Kavač clan, supplying allied Balkan networks targeting the Canary Islands.³³ After 2022, however, when Leijdekkers established himself in the country, Sierra Leone’s role as a storage hub increased substantially.

Whether concealed in containers or imported through offshore trans-shipment,³⁴ existing evidence indicates that inbound volumes to Sierra Leone from this point are significant and growing. Local fishermen frequently report coming across floating packages of cocaine, probably the result of errors during trans-shipment or of small vessels capsizing.³⁵ Many note that these incidents became increasingly common from 2022.

Recent major tracked trans-shipments off the coast of Sierra Leone include two 10-tonne drop-offs in the six months preceding the *Arconian* seizure. Together with an additional 14-tonne drop-off reportedly tracked to reach Ghana in February 2026,³⁶ these total 34 tonnes – just slightly more than the *Arconian* seizure. Several interviewees believe all three incidents to be linked to the Leijdekkers network.³⁷ While these drop-offs may or may not have been the cocaine trafficked on the *Arconian*, it does show that there was enough stock in Sierra Leone and other coastal states to load the vessel regionally.

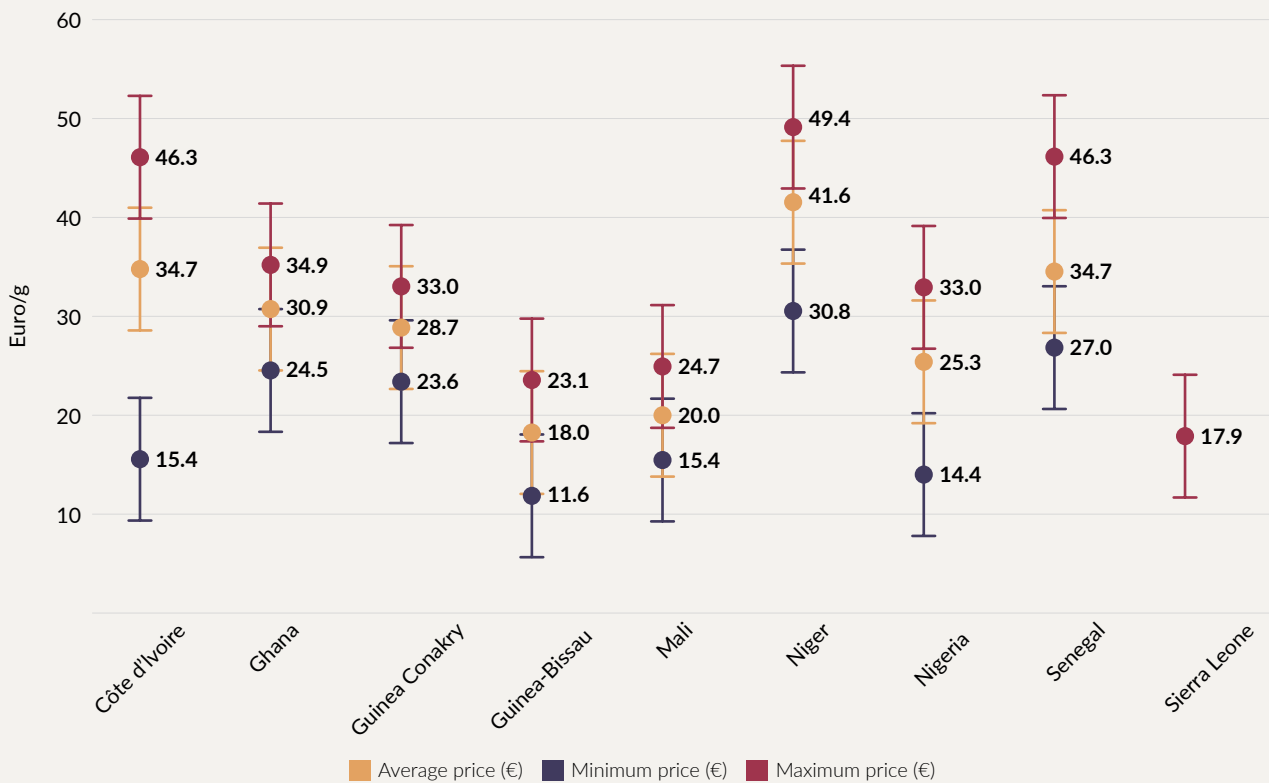


FIGURE 3 Cocaine pricing data (per gram) in retail markets across West Africa, November 2025.

A precedent for *Arconian* voyage and potential loading patterns may be found in the other case study vessels.

The *White Eagle* arrived in Freetown on 29 December 2023.³⁸ That same day, it was acquired by Imperial Shipping Agency SL, another Sierra Leone-registered company with no prior history of shipping or vessel ownership. An individual close to the network in Sierra Leone claimed that the network used this company to purchase the vessel and said that a network element in Freetown paid for the ship with a regular SWIFT transfer.³⁹

The vessel stayed in waters adjacent to the quay until 13 July 2024, docking twice during this period. A photograph, reportedly taken during this period by a source close to the network,⁴⁰ shows a Filipino national on the vessel who reportedly oversaw the recruitment of Filipino workers for Leijdekkers.⁴¹ A separate photograph, shared by a different source and taken at night,⁴² shows the *White Eagle* berthed at the port with at least three large sacks lined up next to the vessel.⁴³ Another photograph, reportedly from the same loading incident, depicts a convoy of police cars close to the vessel. A worker who was attending to the vessel at the time reported seeing white powder in the sacks once they had been loaded onto the vessel.⁴⁴ A video allegedly taken inside the vessel depicts two Filipino nationals,⁴⁵ one of whom was identified as the vessel's captain.⁴⁶

The *White Labeille*, the third of the case study vessels, follows a similar pattern. Although there is no photographic evidence of its loading, the vessel docked at Freetown for an extensive period before commencing its northbound journey.



The *Arconian* left the Port of Freetown on 22 April, sailing continuously until its interception. Current evidence suggests that this is where the cocaine was most likely loaded onto vessel, and that it was intended to be transferred to smaller powerboats near the Canary Islands. © Wolfgang Kaehler via Getty Images

The *White Labeille* – then named the *Hyrax* – arrived in Freetown on 18 August 2024 and remained in the broader Freetown port area until 3 November. The vessel's name was changed in October, when it was purchased by Diamond Line Shipping Ltd, a Sierra Leonean company with similar characteristics to Imperial Shipping Agency SL. According to a source close to the network, Leijdekkers paid US\$2 million for the purchase prior to the vessel's arrival in Sierra Leone.⁴⁷ A social media video dated September 2024 shows one of Leijdekkers' workers, identified by two distinct sources,⁴⁸ on a speedboat with another passenger cruising around the vessel, with the name *Hyrax* clearly visible in the footage.⁴⁹

Flags of convenience and other red flags

All three case study vessels were re-registered from Sierra Leone to the Comoros mere months before starting their 2024 and 2026 journeys from Sierra Leone to North Africa. Notably, all three followed almost identical flag progressions. The *White Eagle* and *White Labeille* transitioned through the same sequence: Panama, Togo, Sierra Leone and the Comoros.⁵⁰ The *Arconian* followed the same pattern, with an additional registration to the Cook Islands between Togo and Panama. Four vessels in the broader dossier had a similar reflagging pattern, where the newly acquired flags were used solely for voyages from Freetown to Libyan ports. The two vessels that repeated the same voyage changed flags again before sailing to Libya for the second time.

The Comoros is a popular registry for a wide range of operators seeking minimal oversight. It is known as a 'flag of convenience', where a vessel is registered in a particular country to avoid regulations in the territory in which it operates. The flag state bears nominal responsibility for the vessel's compliance with international maritime law but often exercises little to none. The states used by the tracked vessels all have open shipping registries whose administration is partly or fully outsourced to private companies. The administrative relationship between the flag state and the vessel is effectively symbolic.

Flags of convenience are a common stratagem to avoid insurance charges and maritime regulations, or to conceal ownership. Rapid reflagging adds another layer of opacity to the vessel's ownership structure and governance. Their joint appearance is often a red flag when assessing vessel behaviour. This is also commonly seen in the 'shadow fleet' of vessels evading international sanctions, often linked to Russian, Iranian or Venezuelan networks. A transition between Sierra Leone and Comoros flags has been repeatedly tracked in the shadow fleet of Russian sanctions-busters.⁵¹

The use of vessels old enough to fall outside regulatory frameworks, or with repeated infractions, also matches up with broader trends of recurring illicit behaviour. The three case study vessels are decades old, built between 1985 and 1989. Each one can also be linked to regulatory malpractice or illicit activities well before their transfer to Sierra Leonean companies.⁵² These characteristics – re-flagging, flags of convenience and a history of regulatory infractions – are shared by several other vessels in the broader vessel dossier.



TRANS-SHIPMENT POINTS

North Africa

The *Arconian's* stated destination in 2026 was Benghazi, in eastern Libya. After its cocaine shipment was seized, Libyan Prime Minister Abd al-Hamid Dabaiba ordered an investigation into the incident.⁵³ Dabaiba's move needs to be seen in the context of Libya's enduring political divide between rival eastern and western authorities: Dabaiba heads the Government of National Unity (GNU) based in Tripoli, while Benghazi falls under the influence of the eastern authorities and the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), dominated by the Haftar family.

The LAAF-aligned reaction has largely focused on denying or deflecting the Benghazi link, framing the case as politically motivated exploitation by Dabaiba's GNU rather than evidence of eastern Libyan involvement, with eastern authorities reportedly even threatening diplomatic measures against Spain over the reporting surrounding the case.⁵⁴

However, GI-TOC research has shown that there may be more links to Libya in this trafficking ecosystem. Since 2024, four vessels in the broader dossier have docked in Libyan ports on journeys from Freetown.⁵⁵ Two of these, following yet another reflagging and change of name, repeated the same voyage in 2026, docking in Freetown again after their return from the first voyage to Libya. This could suggest a repeating pattern and a possible connection to Libya beyond its convenient geography for docking vessels after off-shore cocaine drop-offs destined for Europe. It also suggests that vessels employed in cocaine trafficking operations are used more than once and only abandoned if suspicions are aroused. This appears to have been the case for the *White Eagle*, and possibly also for the *White Labeille*.⁵⁶

It is currently unclear whether the entire *Arconian* consignment would have been offloaded before the vessel docked or a proportion left on board for onwards distribution from Benghazi. The *Arconian* was carrying no cover load to conceal the cocaine, which would have made the consignment vulnerable to any checks on port entry. However, research carried out by the GI-TOC in North Africa suggests that at least a part of the *Arconian* cargo may have been destined for the east of Libya. A European security source reported that information obtained from contacts in eastern Libya indicated that a cocaine consignment was expected in the region during a timeframe broadly consistent with the *Arconian's* reported voyage towards Benghazi or Tobruk, another major port in eastern Libya. Nonetheless, the source stressed that he could not be confident that the information was necessarily related to the *Arconian*.⁵⁷

Independently, a GI-TOC source in eastern Libya said that while the size of the purported delivery was surprising, the case comes at a particularly sensitive juncture, when high-level political protectors of cocaine trafficking in the region have been striving to launder their image. The source argued that the receipt of a large consignment in these circumstances could have been an attempt by trafficking networks to push through one final major shipment under these waning arrangements while alternative routes and partnerships were being established.⁵⁸

Looking beyond the *Arconian*, three of the broader dossier vessels have journey patterns that include loitering events near Europe after docking in Libya. This could support analysis of Libya operating as a trans-shipment hub in this modality.⁵⁹

As cocaine trafficking from Latin America to Europe has grown, so has Libya's role as a trans-shipment and redistribution point feeding several consumption markets. Tracked trafficking routes include by land, entering from trans-Sahelian routings in the south, or by sea directly from Latin America.⁶⁰ While Libya's role in cocaine trafficking from West Africa by sea is less clearly sketched out, GI-TOC research in the region has long flagged the growing role of Libya's coast in the west and east of the country, with drugs entering through coastal ports on board cargo vessels before being held and moved onward by sea towards southern Italy and the Balkans.⁶¹ Together these elements point to the need for further investigation.

Further west along the North African coast, the *White Eagle* and the *White Labeille* have exhibited strong irregular activity along the coast of Morocco, including serial loitering events and prolonged stays near or within the Port of Casablanca. The *White Eagle* loitered in the Moroccan waters on six separate occasions before reaching the proximity of Casablanca; the *White Labeille* had five loitering events in the same segment of the journey. This offers a clearer potential link to the Leijdekkers network, which is suspected to be responsible for the *Arconian* consignment. Leijdekkers is widely reported to operate within the criminal ecosystem referred to as the Mocco Mafia,⁶² which has deep roots in Morocco and the Netherlands as well as Belgium. Indeed, the *Arconian* consignment – likely to have been pooled across several criminal factions, given its sheer size – has been widely linked to the Mocco Mafia.⁶³

Canary Islands

Criminal networks have long used the Canary Islands as a convenient stop-off for cocaine consignments heading for mainland Europe from storage locations in West Africa, including Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. In 2020–2021, at least two networks from the Western Balkans were making use of this approach.⁶⁴ One group, reportedly led by Croatian national Nenad Petrak, picked up shipments from Sierra Leone from a Balkan broker temporarily based there, before trafficking them on a sailing boat to Gran Canaria.⁶⁵ Spanish authorities have reported a dramatic escalation in cocaine trafficking towards the archipelago since early 2024.⁶⁶

Since mid-2024 in particular, recurring anomalies linked to the Canary Islands recorded for both the case study and broader dossier vessels involve often-repeated loitering events in its immediate vicinity, sometimes with accompanying AIS dark periods.⁶⁷

Although the precise links to criminal networks operating in the Canary Islands are unclear, Leijdekkers and the Mocco Mafia both have extensive operational connections in Spain.⁶⁸ Leijdekkers also has tracked connections with networks from the Western Balkans,⁶⁹ who are prominent among the

Canaries' cocaine trafficking actors. The authors are not aware of any detected link between these actors and the *Arconian* to date.

In 2025, investigators found a cutting and processing laboratory operated by a criminal ring based in the archipelago,⁷⁰ pointing to the Canary Islands' growing entrenchment as a node in operations. This is consistent with a broader trend of cocaine value-adding stages (including adulteration, re-crystallization and branding) relocating closer to European consumer markets.⁷¹

Filipino workers

Another common denominator among the case study vessels believed to be linked to the Leijdekkers network is the employment of Filipino workers. Footage from inside Leijdekkers' offices and houses in Freetown depicts dozens of Filipino nationals.⁷² According to individuals with first-hand information, they served as both domestic help and support for maritime operations, starting in 2023.⁷³ Documents show that one Philippines-based employment agency recruited at least some of the Filipino nationals working for the network. The recruitment was reportedly organized by a Filipino woman based in Sierra Leone, who allegedly visited Leijdekkers' residences regularly.⁷⁴

Several Filipino nationals appear to play important strategic roles in the network, such as coordinating sea operations from Sierra Leone, or operating in senior roles on vessels. One in particular, who reportedly spoke both English and Krio, the Sierra Leonean creole language,⁷⁵ had

worked as an operations manager at a ship management company in the Philippines, according to his social media footprint.⁷⁶ He was reportedly well remunerated for his support, sending tens of thousands of US dollars back to his family in the Philippines through Western Union on a monthly basis.⁷⁷

At least two of the case study vessels, and at least one additional vessel, were crewed by Filipino nationals. A Spanish court document specified that the *Arconian* had 17 Filipino crew members on board when it was seized.⁷⁸ Crews of the other two vessels making the journey from Freetown were stranded in North African ports. The Gambia-flagged *White Arrow* left Freetown on 10 December 2024, around a month after the departure of *White Labelle*.⁷⁹ On 1 January 2025, the *White Arrow* was abandoned in Benghazi, Libya, with its crew of 16 Filipino sailors on board.⁸⁰ On the very same day, the *White Eagle* was abandoned in Nador, Morocco, with 15 Filipino crew members.⁸¹ ■



INTERLINKED OWNERSHIP STRUCTURES: TÜRKIYE AND GERMANY

Mapping the management and ownership structures of the three case study vessels demonstrates strong, consolidated links to Türkiye, as well as Germany, as unpacked below.

Leijdekkers has notably strong connections to Türkiye, including a Turkish brother-in-law, Abdullah Alp Üstün, who spent time with him in Sierra Leone.⁸² Leijdekkers was also based in Türkiye before establishing himself in Sierra Leone in 2022.⁸³ His brother, Harry Leijdekkers, stayed in Türkiye, where he has been arrested multiple times, most recently in May 2026.⁸⁴

Within months of their final voyages, the *White Eagle*, the *White Labeille* and the *Arconian* were acquired by different companies registered in Sierra Leone: Imperial Shipping, Diamond Line Shipping and Serenity Shipping, respectively. As highlighted above, none of these companies have publicly available prior commercial history, nor do they own other vessels. All three vessels share a common ownership and management thread with links to Türkiye and Germany that predate their acquisition by these Sierra Leonean companies.⁸⁵

The three case study vessels were all sold to the Sierra Leonian companies by companies registered in Germany: Toprak Shipping Inc. (*White Eagle*), Zeynep Shipping Co. Ltd (*White Labeille*) and Fırat Shipping Co. Ltd (*Arconian*). All three vessels were also managed before their Sierra Leonean acquisition by a fourth company, Tunaryan Schiffahrts GmbH, registered in Germany. Tunaryan was already registered as the commercial manager of the *Arconian* from 2019, but became registered for the *White Eagle* and the *White Labeille* on the day of their change of ownership – in October 2020 and February 2022, respectively. All three vessel owners and the management company share the same registered address in Germany: Landstrasse 65, Flensburg.

Then, in August–September 2022, Nisa Uluslararası Deniz, a Turkish ship management company registered in Gaziantep, joined as the international safety manager for all three vessels. Since then, all three vessels have been under identical dual management: German-registered Tunaryan as the ship and commercial manager and Turkish-registered Nisa as the ISM manager (Figure 4).

Company	Role	White Eagle	White Labelle	Arconian
Tunaryan Schifffahrts Gmbh (HQ: Flensburg, Germany)	Ship/commercial manager	From 11 October 2020	From 4 February 2022	From 1 February 2019
Nisa Uluslararası Deniz (HQ: Gaziantep, Türkiye)	ISM manager	From 3 September 2022	From 10 September 2022	From 25 August 2022
Toprak Shipping Inc. (HQ: Flensburg, Germany)	Registered owner	From 11 October 2020	—	—
Zeynep Shipping Co. Ltd (HQ: Flensburg, Germany)	Registered owner	—	From 4 February 2022	—
Firat Shipping Co. Ltd (HQ: Flensburg, Germany)	Registered owner	—	—	From 20 December 2018

FIGURE 4 Consolidated management structure of the case study vessels.

Available data demonstrates that neither Tunaryan nor Nisa are major shipping companies. Only three other vessels are managed by Tunaryan, and all three are also under Nisa's ISM management. Nisa has been an ISM manager to only two additional vessels, one of which is owned by Toprak through its Marshall Islands office.

This mapping clearly shows a consistent pattern of ownership among the case study vessels, with consolidated nodes linked to Türkiye and Germany. While it certainly does not establish culpability among registered ownership or management, it highlights a significant degree of consistency across the case study vessels since at least 2022.



CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The record-breaking *Arconian* cocaine seizure opens a window into a method of operations in which vast quantities of cocaine are being carried by cargo vessels from storage hubs across the coast of West Africa to consumption markets in Europe. This brief tracks several vessels with operating patterns that are likely tied to one criminal network, that of Jos Leijdekkers. However, broader analysis, including by Europol, suggests this modality may be increasingly prominent in a wider, shifting criminal ecosystem and potentially used by other networks operating on West Africa–Europe routings.⁸⁶

The movement of cocaine in bulk from storage points in West Africa to drop-off points near Europe by cargo vessels is likely to be part of the reason why large quantities of cocaine have been able to evade detection at major European ports, particularly since 2024. This helps to explain why European cocaine prices have continued to fall since 2024, alongside a decrease in seizure volumes.

The scale of the *Arconian* seizure also supports ongoing assessments of West Africa's growing role as a storage hub close to Europe, effectively a 'near shoring' of cocaine stocks.

Mapping the broader dossier vessels reveals striking commonalities in vessel journey patterns, which also mirror behaviours that are common across the shadow fleet used to evade sanctions globally, with vessels sometimes moving between illicit activities. Further, the case study vessels demonstrate consistent long-running nodes in ownership and management structures .

The repeated voyages to North Africa – particularly to Libya – raise questions about the extent of connections with trafficking ecosystems in that country, both involving the Leijdekkers network and West African routings using this modality more broadly. While it remains unclear whether Libya was the intended destination for part of the *Arconian* consignment, existing source reports and the voyage patterns of other vessels make this an ongoing possibility.

The vessels that run northbound routings towards North Africa and Europe are also well positioned to shift cocaine between different storage and export points across West Africa, with established voyage patterns across primary and secondary ports.

The interception of the *Arconian* may undermine the criminal network's confidence that this strategy will carry on without disruption. To hedge their risk, cocaine consignments trafficked using cargo ships could then return to smaller volumes. However, this trafficking dynamic is likely to continue as a pivotal tool in the West Africa–Europe cocaine trafficking routes that supply a significant percentage of European demand. Continuing to strengthen analysis of West Africa–Europe routings is critical in order to undermine their long-term security and, therefore, their attractiveness.



NOTES

- 1 Central Investigating Court No. 2, Spanish National High Court, Madrid, Order – Preliminary proceedings, 0000035/2026, NIG 28079 27 2 2026 0001379, 6 May 2026.
- 2 *Nederlanders met machinegeweren bewaakten recordpartij van 30.000 kilo cocaïne*, AD Nieuws, 8 May 2026, <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/nederlanders-met-machinegeweren-bewaakten-recordpartij-van-30-000-kilo-cocaine-af9c477f>.
- 3 Interview with a private sector operator in Freetown, May 2025, remote.
- 4 See, for example: *Van Weel praat met collega Sierra Leone over uitlevering crimineel Jos Leijdekkers*, NOS Nieuws, 12 May 2026, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2614113-van-weel-praat-met-collega-sierra-leone-over-uitlevering-crimineel-jos-leijdekkers>; Oscar Lopez-Fonseca, *La Guardia Civil vincula el alijo récord de cocaína con la Mocro Maffia y el fugitivo holandés Jos 'El Gordito'*, *El País*, 5 May 2026, <https://elpais.com/espana/2026-05-05/la-guardia-civil-vincula-el-alijo-record-de-cocaina-con-la-mocro-maffia-y-el-fugitivo-holandes-jos-el-gordito.html>.
- 5 See, for example: *Van Weel praat met collega Sierra Leone over uitlevering crimineel Jos Leijdekkers*, NOS Nieuws, 12 May 2026, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2614113-van-weel-praat-met-collega-sierra-leone-over-uitlevering-crimineel-jos-leijdekkers>.
- 6 In 2019, 9 tonnes of cocaine were seized on the *White Labeille*, then named the *Eser*, although this was linked to a separate criminal network.
- 7 The broader dossier vessels are slightly smaller than the case study vessels, with marginally smaller gross tonnage capacities.
- 8 This includes semi-structured interviews with investigative journalists, law enforcement officials, judicial representatives, academics, public officials and private-sector employees at maritime ports and airports, criminal actors in different roles in the cocaine trade, people who use drugs, health professionals, researchers, academics, representatives of international and regional organizations, and members of communities across West Africa. See: Lucia Bird, Kingsley Madueke and Mouhamadou Kane, *Cocaine markets in West Africa: Mapping impacts, routes, trends, and actors*, GI-TOC, March 2026, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/mapping-drug-markets-in-west-africa>.
- 9 Lucia Bird, Kingsley Madueke and Mouhamadou Kane, *Cocaine markets in West Africa, Mapping impacts, routes, trends and actors*, GI-TOC, March 2026, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/mapping-drug-markets-in-west-africa>.
- 10 MAOC-N presentation during a GI-TOC webinar titled 'Mapping today's cocaine geography in West Africa: Logistics, criminal kingpins and corruption', 9 April 2026, <https://gitoc.heysummit.com/talks/mapping-todays-cocaine-geography-in-west-africa-logistics-criminal-kingpins-and-corruption>.
- 11 Interview with an international law enforcement organization, 13 May 2026, remote.
- 12 Hans Werdmölder, *Bolle Jos: Drugscrimineel van Hollandse bodem*, Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2025.
- 13 Interview with an international law enforcement organization, March 2026, remote. MAOC-N data also points to a material increase in non-container vessels suspected of carrying cocaine travelling to the region from 2021. See also Lucia Bird, Kingsley Madueke and Mouhamadou Kane, *Cocaine markets in West Africa, Mapping impacts, routes, trends and actors*, GI-TOC, March 2026, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/mapping-drug-markets-in-west-africa>.
- 14 MAOC-N presentation during a GI-TOC webinar titled 'Mapping today's cocaine geography in West Africa: Logistics, criminal kingpins and corruption', 9 April 2026, <https://gitoc.heysummit.com/talks/mapping-todays-cocaine-geography-in-west-africa-logistics-criminal-kingpins-and-corruption>.
- 15 Bertram Nwannekanma and Adaku Onyenucheya, *Customs intercepts N29.4b cocaine shipment from Sierra Leone at Lagos terminal*, *The Guardian* (Nigeria), 12 November 2025, <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/metro/customs-intercepts-n29-4b-cocaine-shipment-from-sierra-leone-at-lagos-terminal>; NDLEA intercept 20kg cocaine on Brazilian vessel at Lagos seaport, arrest 20 Filipino crew members (video), *The Street Journal*, 21 November 2025, <https://>

- thastreetjournal.org/ndlea-intercept-20kg-cocaine-on-brazilian-vessel-at-lagos-seaport-arrest-20-filipino-crew-members-video; Sunday Dennis, NDLEA secures court order to detain vessel, crew over N25.5kg cocaine seizure at Lagos port, *Daily Post*, 17 December 2025, <https://dailypost.ng/2025/12/17/ndlea-secures-court-order-to-detain-vessel-crew-over-n25-5kg-cocaine-seizure-at-lagos-port>;
- AFP, Nigeria arrests 22 Indian ship crew members in cocaine seizure, *Wio News*, 4 January 2026, <https://www.wionews.com/world/nigeria-arrests-22-indian-ship-crew-members-in-cocaine-seizure-1767548639666>.
- 16 However, it is not the only market. Cocaine trafficking from West Africa is also believed to feed emerging consumption markets in Asia and the Middle East.
- 17 See, for example, the 4.5 tonne seizure made in Amsterdam coming from Tema: Dutch customs, Dutch customs seize 4,500 kilograms of cocaine hidden in Amsterdam port shipment, 14 June 2025, <https://www.douane.nl/douane-onderschept-minder-cocaine-in-2025-smokkel-steeds-diverser>.
- 18 Antonius Kempmann, Mandy Sarti and Benedikt Strunz, *Zoll stellt in Wilhelmshaven Rekordmenge Kokain Sicher*, NDR, 3 June 2026, <https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/investigation/zoll-stellt-in-wilhelmshaven-rekordmenge-kokain-sicher,kokain-rekordfund-wilhelmshaven-100.html>.
- 19 Most seizures on containerized cocaine flows are intelligence-led: in 2023, according to the World Customs Organization, 88% of drugs (by volume) were seized through intelligence. In other words, limited intelligence drastically undermines disruption. See World Customs Organization, *Illicit Trade Report 2023*, https://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/enforcement-and-compliance/activities-and-programmes/illicit-trade-report/itr_2023_en.pdf.
- 20 GI-TOC, *European Drug Trends Monitor*, Issue 4, March 2026 <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/european-drug-trends-monitor-1>.
- 21 The persistence of supply despite declining seizure tonnage at major ports appears partly linked to route diversification, including the Morocco–Spain corridor and offshore delivery techniques in the Sicily Channel. See: GI-TOC, *European Drug Trends Monitor*, Issue 4, March 2026 <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/european-drug-trends-monitor-1>.
- 22 Central Investigating Court No. 2, Spanish National High Court, Madrid, Order – Preliminary proceedings, 0000035/2026, NIG 28079 27 2 2026 0001379, 6 May 2026.
- 23 This kind of trans-shipment from a ‘mother vessel’ (fishing boats, cargo ships, bulk carriers) to ‘daughter vessels’ (often tug boats, smaller fishing vessels or motorboats), either directly or by throwing consignments overboard and locating them using GPS technology, allows traffickers to separate long-haul maritime transport from coastal retrieval, and reduces their risk of interception at both stages. It has been well tracked for years, including across European waters. with growing use seen in the Sicily Channel. See GI-TOC, *European Drug Trends Monitor*, Issue 4, March 2026, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/european-drug-trends-monitor-1>.
- 24 Europol, *Diversification in maritime cocaine trafficking modi operandi*, 27 January 2026, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/publications/diversification-in-maritime-cocaine-trafficking-modi-operandi>.
- 25 The International Maritime Organization’s ISM code sets out requirements and responsibilities for the safe operation of ships, including the designation of an ISM manager and the responsible owner/company. Compliance is mandatory for large cargo ships that travel internationally.
- 26 Exchanges with two individuals with first-hand information, 2025–2026, in person (West Africa) and remote.
- 27 *Unscheduled docking of cargo vessel White Eagle sparks fears*, *Maritime News*, 4 February 2025, <https://www.marinetraffic.com/ge/maritime-news/15/maritime-security/2026/11828/unscheduled-docking-of-cargo-vessel-white-eagle-sparks-fears>.
- 28 *Vessel Tracker, White Eagle – cargo ship*, <https://www.vesseltracker.com/en/Ships/White-Eagle-8812930.html>.
- 29 Discussions with stakeholders close to the seizure, May 2026, online.
- 30 For example, assessment of open-source intelligence data does not show any loitering events or meeting with a different vessel after the *Arconian’s* departure from the Port of Freetown. Further, while loading over 30 tonnes of cocaine at sea would certainly be feasible, it would nonetheless be logistically tricky, and a potentially unnecessary complication in this case. GI-TOC vessel tracking; interview with an international law enforcement organization, 13 May 2026, remote.
- 31 Guinea-Bissau has long played the role of safe haven for Colombian, and to a lesser extent Balkan, cocaine trafficking networks that stashed their multi-tonne consignments until the outwards journeys were confirmed, thus supplying European customers from closer warehousing areas. See: Lucia Bird, Fatjona Mejdini and Sasa Djordevic, *Under the radar: Western Balkans’ cocaine operations in West Africa*, GI-TOC, August 2025, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/under-the-radar-western-balkans-cocaine-operations-in-west-africa>.
- 32 UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Cocaine trafficking in Western Africa: Situation report, 2007*, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Cocaine-trafficking-Africa-en.pdf>.
- 33 Lucia Bird, Fatjona Mejdini and Sasa Djordevic, *Under the radar: Western Balkans’ cocaine operations in West Africa*, GI-TOC, August 2025, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/under-the-radar-western-balkans-cocaine-operations-in-west-africa>.

- 34 MAOC-N monitoring in 2025 tracked a particular uptick in mother vessels trans-shipping cocaine consignments onto daughter vessels off the coast of Sierra Leone, for disembarkation into the country.
- 35 Interviews with eight Sierra Leonean fishermen and community members in Funkia, Banana Islands, and several points on the Freetown Peninsula, Sierra Leone, August 2025.
- 36 Interview with an international law enforcement organization, 12 May 2026, remote; interview with an international law enforcement organization, 13 May 2026, remote.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Arriving at 01:00 UCT on 30 December 2023.
- 39 Exchanges with an individual with first-hand information, 2025–2026, in person (West Africa) and remote.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Photograph seen and reviewed by the authors.
- 42 A time stamp is not available for this photograph.
- 43 Photograph of the *White Eagle* at Queen Elizabeth II Quay, seen and reviewed by the authors. Analysis of the vessel in the photograph confirms that it is the *White Eagle*, while vessel tracking records confirm that it was docked at Queen Elizabeth II Quay during this period.
- 44 Exchanges with an individual with first-hand information, 2025–2026, in person (West Africa) and remote.
- 45 Video footage reportedly taken aboard the *White Eagle*, seen and reviewed by the authors. The photograph did not contain metadata so the time stamp cannot be confirmed. It is not possible to confirm from the video footage itself that it is taken on the *White Eagle*.
- 46 Exchanges with an individual with first-hand information, 2025–2026, in person (West Africa) and remote.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Exchanges with an individual with first-hand information, 2025–2026, in person (West Africa) and remote. A separate source, also reported that the worker in the video was seen attending to boats linked to Leijdekkers as recently as April 2026. Exchanges with an individual with first-hand information, 2025–2026, in person (West Africa) and remote.
- 49 Video footage, TikTok, September 2024, seen and reviewed by the authors.
- 50 The most tightly coordinated flag move was Togo to Sierra Leone: the *White Eagle* was reflagged in August 2022 and the *White Labeille* one month later, in September 2022.
- 51 GI-TOC monitoring of vessel dynamics through open-source intelligence.
- 52 The *White Eagle* – under its former name, the *Breadbox Falcon* – was listed on the Black Sea ship watch list in 2020, indicating that it had been detained over regulatory non-compliance in the region three or more times within the 24 months prior; see <https://bsmou.org/downloads/watch-lists/202012.pdf>. The *White Labeille* was linked to cocaine trafficking activity in 2019, when Cape Verde detained the vessel in Praia for transporting 9.5 tonnes of cocaine between Colon, Panama and Tangier, Morocco. In 2021, after investigations were concluded, Cape Verdean authorities sold it through public tender. The vessel is absent from open-source voyage records from 27 December 2018 until its reappearance on 13 January 2022, on a Cape Verde–Senegal routing.
- 53 Safa Alharathy, Dbeibah orders investigation into cocaine shipment bound for Libya, *Libya Observer*, 7 May 2026, <https://libyaobserver.ly/crimes/dbeibah-orders-investigation-cocaine-shipment-bound-libya>.
- 54 *El LNA libio amenaza con romper relaciones diplomáticas con España*, *La Razon*, 11 May 2026, https://www.larazon.es/espana/lna-libia-amenaza-romper-relaciones-diplomaticas-espana_202605116a01adc0716e9c57146b4c4c.html.
- 55 Notably, Benghazi, Sirte, Misrata and al-Khoms.
- 56 Although there has been no public reporting of an investigation into the *White Labeille*, the vessel has remained anchored in Morocco since the final tracked voyage.
- 57 Interview with an EU security official, May 2026, online.
- 58 Interview with source based in eastern Libya, May 2026, online.
- 59 Two of the broader dossier vessels show similar repeated patterns of loitering events near the coasts of Italy and Spain on their way back from Benghazi to Freetown. Another vessel in the broader dossier, also on its return from Benghazi to Freetown, went dark for 27 hours near the territorial waters of Spain. After spending almost a month at the Port of Sirte, one of the two vessels that repeated their voyage from Freetown to Libya continued to Türkiye, undertaking three more loitering events in Libyan and Greek waters on the way.
- 60 UNODC, Drug trafficking dynamics in Libya and across North Africa: Trends and implications, January 2026, <https://libya.un.org/en/308283-unodc-releases-first-report-drug-trafficking-dynamics-libya-and-across-north-africa>.
- 61 Mark Micallef, Shifting sands: Libya's changing drug trafficking dynamics on the coastal and desert borders, European Union Drugs Agency, November 2019, https://www.euda.europa.eu/drugs-library/shifting-sands---libya's-changing-drug-trafficking-dynamics-coastal-and-desert-borders_en.
- 62 The term 'Mocro Mafia' warrants some qualification. Originally coined by Dutch media to describe criminal networks linked to the Dutch–Moroccan community, it has been widely criticized as reductive for misrepresenting the actual structure of these networks, as they are neither ethnically homogenous nor organized hierarchically in the manner the label implies. Membership typically extends well beyond individuals of Moroccan or North African origin. See also: Daniel Brombacher, Ruggero Scaturro and Sarah Fares, Domestic challenge or transcontinental threat? Africa-linked organised crime in Europe, ENACT Research Paper 56, January 2026, <https://enact-africa.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/pages/1770204171581-research-paper-56.pdf>.

- 63 Oscar Lopez-Fonseca, *La Guardia Civil vincula el alijo récord de cocaína con la Mocro Maffia y el fugitivo holandés Jos 'El Gordito'*, *El País*, 5 May 2026, <https://elpais.com/espana/2026-05-05/la-guardia-civil-vincula-el-alijo-record-de-cocaina-con-la-mocro-maffia-y-el-fugitivo-holandes-jos-el-gordito.html>.
- 64 By January 2021, the Montenegro-based Škaljari-allied group, led by a Bosnian national, were using Gran Canaria as a key logistics and distribution hub for both direct routings from Brazil and those from West African storage hubs, including Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. The network was moving significant volumes – in one case, discussing the shipment of a 3-tonne consignment stored in Guinea-Bissau on to Gran Canaria. Interview with an international investigative journalist, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, November 2024; Sky ECC communications were made available to the GI-TOC during the interview.
- 65 Croatian Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime (USKOK), Indictment against Nenad Petrak and others, KO-US-57/2024, 1 October 2024.
- 66 Interview with the representative of a Spanish prosecution authority, the Netherlands, March 2025.
- 67 One of the broader dossier vessel turned off its AIS on the two occasions as it passed by the archipelago en route from Freetown to Libya in 2024–2025 and 2026.
- 68 Hans Werdmölder, *Bolle Jos: Drugscrimineel van Hollandse bodem*, Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2025.
- 69 Lucia Bird, Fatjona Mejdini and Sasa Djordevic, Under the radar: Western Balkans' cocaine operations in West Africa, GITOC, August 2025, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/under-the-radar-western-balkans-cocaine-operations-in-west-africa>.
- 70 More than two tons of cocaine seized and 34 arrested belonging to a criminal organization centered in the Canary Islands, Agencia Tributaria, 23 September 2025, https://sede.agenciatributaria.gob.es/Sede/en_gb/notas-prensa/notas-prensa/2025/septiembre/23/dos-toneladas-cocaina-intervenidas-34-canarias.html.
- 71 GI-TOC, European Drug Trends Monitor, Issue 4, March 2026, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/european-drug-trends-monitor-1>.
- 72 Pictures and videos seen and reviewed by the authors.
- 73 Exchanges with an individual with first-hand information, 2025–2026, in person (West Africa) and remote.
- 74 Documents obtained by the authors.
- 75 Exchanges with an individual with first-hand information, 2025–2026, in person (West Africa) and remote.
- 76 Information from the individual's LinkedIn profile.
- 77 Exchanges with an individual with first-hand information, 2025–2026, in person (West Africa) and remote.
- 78 Central Investigating Court No. 2, Spanish National High Court, Madrid, Order – Preliminary proceedings, 0000035/2026, NIG 28079 27 2 2026 0001379, 6 May 2026.
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- 80 International Labour Organization, ILO/IMO Joint Database on Abandonment of Seafarers, https://wwwex.ilo.org/dyn/r/abandonment/seafarers/details?p3_abandonment_id=1255&p_lang=en.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 Exchanges with an individual with first-hand information, 2025–2026, in person (West Africa) and remote.
- 83 Hans Werdmölder, *Bolle Jos: Drugscrimineel van Hollandse bodem*, Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2025; Levent Kenez, Turkey turns into a revolving door for drug lords, *Nordic Monitor*, 19 May 2026, <https://nordicmonitor.com/2026/05/turkey-turns-into-a-revolving-door-for-drug-lords>.
- 84 Court convicts Bolle Jos and 20 accomplices in 550 million euro cocaine trafficking case, *NL Times*, 19 May 2026, <https://nltimes.nl/2026/05/19/court-convicts-bolle-jos-20-accomplices-550-million-euro-cocaine-trafficcing-case>.
- 85 Consistent strands in ownership structure stretch back further, to a larger commercial company registered in the Netherlands. These more historical ownership patterns are not analyzed within this report, and their meaning is unclear.
- 86 Europol, Diversification in maritime cocaine trafficking modi operandi, 27 January 2026, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/publications/diversification-in-maritime-cocaine-trafficcing-modi-operandi>.



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