

Europol's accusations towards Ukraine

The Europol report on the state of organised crime in Europe, published at the beginning of May, has identified Ukraine as one of the most dynamically developing markets for smuggling into the EU. The new report does not so much note Ukraine's problems with organised crime (although the scale of the phenomenon as described is amazing), as it states explicitly that introducing visa-free movement between Ukraine and the EU is inadvisable.

The Europol document is in line with the current anti-immigrant mood in the EU associated with the influx of migrants from the South. We may expect it to have an impact on the negotiations on visa liberalisation between the EU and Ukraine, particularly as Kyiv has dragged its heels with fulfilling its obligations to the EU/Ukraine action plan.

According to the report, a large part of the smuggling of drugs and other prohibited products along the so-called 'Black Sea route' (Ukraine–Bulgaria–Romania) is carried out through the port of Odessa, and this phenomenon has increased significantly in recent years. According to Europol, abolishing visa-free movement into the EU from Ukraine could result in an increase in smuggling along this route, and facilitate the work of criminal groups within the EU. Ukraine's ambassador to the EU has protested against this opinion, and has requested all references to issues of visa-free traffic be removed from the report.

Europol's position chimes well with the latest communiqué from the European Commission on immigration, which proposes a *de facto* tightening of visa policy; this in turn will push the issue of visa liberalisation with Ukraine even further into the distance. Ukraine's image has also been adversely affected by its delays in fulfilling its commitments towards the EU; Kyiv has only recently adopted a national action plan for visa liberalisation with the EU, and has not specified dates for the introduction of biometric passports. <MJA>