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METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF INVESTIGATING CRIMES COMMITTED  
BY INDIVIDUALS WITH DRUG ADDICTION

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**Summary**

*The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the dimension of crimes committed by drug-dependent individuals in the Republic of Moldova. It presents current statistical data, typologies of committed offenses, behavioral aspects of drug users, as well as tactical recommendations for criminal investigation officers. The text addresses the importance of medico-legal examination, specialized forensic expertise, and conducting interviews adapted to the psychological characteristics of persons with drug dependence.*

**Keywords:** *drug addiction, interview, injection marks, criminal behavior, forensic science, medico-legal expertise, criminal investigation, investigative tactics, drug use.*

**Introduction.** In recent decades, the Republic of Moldova has undergone a period marked by profound economic, social, and political transformations which, alongside the positive effects of transition, have also generated a series of major challenges in the area of public security. One of the most serious emerging threats is the expansion of drug-related crime, including both consumption and trafficking. This issue can no longer be addressed solely from a legal or punitive perspective, as it involves complex dimensions – social, medical, psychological, and criminological in nature.

The evolution of criminality in Moldova is characterized by a process of adaptation and increasing sophistication of criminal behavior, including in the case of groups involved in the trafficking of illegal substances. These groups develop, specialize, and interact with transnational networks, thereby increasing risks and challenges for law enforcement institutions. At the same time, drug users are becoming increasingly involved in the criminal chain – not only as consumers but also as intermediaries or occasional dealers, driven by the urgent need to obtain their required doses.

Statistical data show that in recent years there has been an increase in the number of drug-related crimes and misdemeanors, a phenomenon also marked by significant underreporting due to users' fear of being included in official registries and the associated

social stigma. In parallel, there is a clear link observed between the use of psychoactive substances and other forms of criminal activity, such as theft, violence, or offenses against public health.

**Discussions and results obtained.** Starting from the premise that addiction directly influences criminal conduct, this paper focuses on the distinctive features of criminal investigations in cases involving the consumption of narcotic substances. The aforementioned transformations have led to a series of complex effects, including negative consequences felt at the level of public safety. These include an increase in certain types of crimes, a qualitative shift in the structure of criminality, and the refinement of criminal organization and technical means used in illicit activities [1].

A distinct phenomenon is the consolidation of criminal groups, the integration of economic crime with conventional crime, and their specialization in various areas of criminal activity [2, p.34-48]. In this context, drug-related crime – both trafficking and consumption – is undergoing rapid expansion, becoming one of the most dynamic and dangerous forms of social deviance [3].

According to available official data, drug-related offenses in the Republic of Moldova have shown a slight increase in recent years, while the use of psychoactive substances continues to pose a significant public health issue. In 2024, authorities in the Republic of Moldova recorded 1033 drug-related crimes, an increase of 74 cases compared to the previous year. Additionally, 4310 drug-related misdemeanors were registered, 900 more than in 2023. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2023 4.2% of all individuals convicted at first instance were sentenced for drug-related offenses [4].

At the end of 2023 the total number of officially registered drug users in the Republic of Moldova was 12032 individuals [5]. During the same year, 612 new cases of drug users were added to the national drug user registry. It is important to note that these figures reflect only officially recorded cases. According to some estimates, over 70% of drug users in Moldova have never sought help from the country's medical institutions, largely due to the fear of being registered at the Republican Narcology Dispensary – a situation that may lead to social stigma and various restrictions [6].

In the Republic of Moldova, official data do not provide an exact statistic regarding the number of offenses committed by drug users. Although there are no official figures indicating precisely how many crimes are committed directly by individuals who use drugs, various international studies and local observations reveal a clear link between the use of psychoactive substances and criminal behavior. Regular drug use can significantly impair an individual's ability to make rational decisions, follow social norms, and maintain functional relationships with family or the community. In many cases, addiction creates a constant pressure on the individual to obtain resources to support their drug use, which may lead to the commission of property-related crimes such as home burglaries, car break-ins, fraud, or even robberies and muggings.

In 2023, among individuals aged 14 to 29 who committed offenses, nearly one in four committed thefts (28.0%), 8.6% were involved in acts of hooliganism, and 6.9% committed drug-related offenses. Out of every 10000 young people aged 14 to 29, there were 110 individuals who committed crimes [7].

In the Republic of Moldova, the phenomenon of drug addiction became a serious issue with the onset of the drug use epidemic in 1985. At the beginning of the epidemic, the number of individuals affected doubled every two years overall, and every two years

among adolescents specifically [8, pp.365-373]. In recent years, this trend has accelerated significantly, with the number of affected individuals now doubling annually—an indication of delayed and incomplete detection.

Today, drug addiction can no longer be seen merely as a problem of deviant behavior or as an individual dependency with psychophysiological roots. It must be approached as a phenomenon with deep social and demographic implications, with the potential to erode social cohesion, contribute to the degradation of human capital, and, in the long term, increase the vulnerability of society as a whole [9, p.55-66].

Public health and criminology experts emphasize that the issue is not merely a criminal one, but also deeply social and medical in nature. The lack of access to effective rehabilitation services, the stigmatization of individuals with addiction, and their official registration in special medical records (which may result in the loss of certain rights) lead many drug users to avoid the healthcare system and remain outside any form of institutional support. This social exclusion further increases their vulnerability and the risk of involvement in illegal activities.

Moreover, drug use is often associated with other types of offenses, such as domestic violence, driving under the influence of psychoactive substances, or participation in drug trafficking networks. As such, the user becomes not only a potential perpetrator of crime, but also a victim of their own addictive behavior and of a system insufficiently equipped to address the complex nature of this problem.

The indisputable motive – present in 95% of thefts and assaults committed with the intention of stealing property – behind the overwhelming majority of offenses committed by individuals with drug addiction is the need to obtain drugs or the means to purchase them [10, p.22].

The severity of this phenomenon is also recognized at the international level. The United Nations places the drug problem in the same category of global threats as the risk of nuclear conflict or the danger of an ecological catastrophe, highlighting the existential nature of these risks for the future of humanity [11].

Given the complexity and gravity of criminal behavior associated with drug consumption, a rigorous and specialized approach to investigating such offenses becomes essential. Methodological and forensic aspects gain major importance in the process of identifying and proving crimes committed by drug users, taking into account their specific behavioral and psychological characteristics. In order to enhance the efficiency of criminal investigation bodies, it is necessary to develop forensic methodologies that are adapted to the particularities of offenses arising from drug dependence, as well as to foster effective interdisciplinary collaboration among forensic experts, public health professionals, psychologists, forensic psychiatrists, and medical examiners.

The following sections will analyze certain methodological particularities in the investigation of crimes committed by drug users, highlighting practical challenges and providing recommendations for optimizing criminal investigations in this sensitive and dynamic area.

A necessary condition for successfully developing a specialized methodology for investigating offenses committed by individuals with drug dependence is to consider the specific traits of the offender, including signs of a particular form of addiction. These factors characterize the personality of the offender, their behavior, motivation, choice of method used in committing the crime, and other distinctive features. For instance,

the actions of a person dependent on drugs during and after committing a crime may be irrational, such as unjustified changes in the arrangement of objects at the crime scene. There are documented cases where drug-dependent individuals left behind personal items, tools used in the offense, or drugs and drug traces at the scene [12, p.46]. Thus, in the investigation of crimes committed by drug users, it becomes reasonable to analyze relevant forensic information concerning the nature and types of offenses committed by such individuals. Particular attention should be paid to the fact that the main objective of a drug-dependent offender is to satisfy the urge to consume drugs or to obtain the necessary means to do so. It is logical to assume and identify a correlation between the type of addiction and the nature of the offense committed. Certain crimes, such as those related to economic activities, are generally not characteristic of individuals suffering from drug dependence. This consideration should be factored into the development of investigative hypotheses and the planning of the criminal investigation.

Drug dependence influences both the offender's behavior and the choice of offense, which constitutes a common and distinctive feature. Offenses committed by drug addicts are classified in the legal literature according to various criteria. However, authors differ in their opinions on this matter [13, p.63].

Based on the analysis of judicial practice materials, we draw attention to the following groups of offenses (classified according to the method of commission):

Offenses related to drug trafficking. In these cases, drugs serve as the object or means of the criminal act. This category includes operations such as purchasing, producing, sending, or cultivating prohibited plants. Drug addicts initially obtain drugs for personal use, but inevitably come into contact with traffickers, developing both financial and psychological dependence on them. When they run out of money, they acquire drugs "on credit" and are subsequently forced to sell to others, transitioning from mere consumers to small-scale traffickers.

Offenses committed to obtain drugs or money to buy them. These are typically offenses against material property, including theft, robbery, mugging, and extortion. This group also includes specific acts such as stealing drugs or blackmailing individuals known to hide drugs in specific locations and stealing those meant for clandestine sales. Due to increasing drug tolerance, addicts require larger doses but, lacking income, resort to criminal acts. For them, money is no longer an end in itself but merely a means to acquire drugs.

Violent offenses committed under the influence of drugs, such as murder, bodily harm, rape, and others. In states of euphoria or withdrawal, addicts can become extremely aggressive. Those under the influence of hallucinogens lose touch with reality and may display suicidal or violent behaviors. Analysis shows that these offenses are often particularly brutal and, in some cases, committed by groups. Moreover, some drugs have sexually stimulating effects, which may explain certain instances of sexual assault.

Transmission of venereal diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Drug addicts are a key factor in the spread of HIV, primarily through shared needle use or sexual contact. It is estimated that a single drug addict can infect up to 120 people in one year.

Offenses against the health of minors. These include involving minors in criminal or misdemeanor activities. Lacking financial resources, some addicts recruit young people into drug use as a means to secure their own doses. Youth are especially vulnerable due to curiosity, a desire to belong to adult groups, and lack of experience. Their bodies also

become addicted more quickly, and in a short time, they begin committing thefts or other crimes [10, p.75].

The typology of offenses committed by individuals with drug dependence, structured according to motivation, behavior, and the object of criminal activity, reflects a distinct criminological profile – one situated at the intersection of personal vulnerability and heightened social danger. This observation is not merely theoretical; rather, it directly influences the selection of appropriate tactical means and methods for the effective investigation of such offenses. Understanding the behavioral and criminogenic particularities of drug-dependent individuals enables not only the classification of offenses, but also the development of forensic tactics tailored to this category of offenders. For example, the impulsive, chaotic, and unpredictable behavior often exhibited by drug addicts requires heightened attention from the criminal investigation officer during the initial phase of the investigation, particularly when examining the crime scene and collecting physical evidence.

Given the complexity of criminal manifestations associated with drug use, it is essential to move from a descriptive approach to a tactical-procedural one, focused on evidentiary efficiency. In this context, the most relevant tactical aspects of criminal investigation in such cases are outlined below.

One of the most important initial procedural actions in the investigation of offenses committed by drug-dependent individuals – an action that significantly determines the scope and sequence of subsequent activities – is the crime scene investigation [14, p.207-213]. This activity must be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Moldova and established methodologies for investigating crimes such as theft, robbery, mugging, homicide, or drug trafficking. However, in cases involving drug addicts, the crime scene investigation takes on a specific character due to the presence of traces and objects that clearly indicate behavior associated with drug use. During the preparation of the crime scene investigation, the criminal investigation officer must establish a set of objectives that allow for the formulation of concrete hypotheses regarding the perpetrator's identity. These include: searching for biological and physical traces – fingerprints, shoe prints, vomit, saliva, urine, blood; lingering odors – the preliminary analysis of which may indicate that the act was committed by a person under the influence of drugs; searching for drug-specific traces such as vials, syringes, needles, improvised instruments, medical prescriptions, or pharmaceutical packaging; and assessing the overall situation at the scene and identifying significant environmental changes (apparent chaos, overturned furniture, scattered objects), all of which suggest the typical behavior of a person under narcotic intoxication.

Even during the static phase of the crime scene investigation, the criminal investigation officer must pay special attention to object-traces, as they may contain residual substances such as particles of opium, hashish, poppy powder, or traces of liquid or solid extracts from narcotic plants. Due to the small size of these traces, their identification must be guided by the context of the offense. For instance, in cases involving violent crimes, substance-traces are often found on drug paraphernalia such as syringes, small bottles, cotton or gauze pads, and cigarette butts. A cigarette butt containing traces of cannabis, for example, may indicate joint use by both the victim and the suspect. During the investigation, the officer must instruct the specialist to collect swabs from the victim's hands, oral cavity, samples from under the nails and nail clippings, as well as particles

from clothing seams and pockets. These will later be analyzed during chemical forensic examinations to identify narcotic substances.

In cases involving drug thefts from medical institutions or storage facilities, the stolen drugs may be stored or transferred using specific containers – cabinets, safes, jars, packages, bags, or boxes. Additionally, improvised processing tools such as grinders, sieves, or scales may also be identified. Relevant traces can also be found on seemingly “abandoned” objects, indicating drug use directly at the scene. A common mistake made by investigative bodies is to limit the search to the room where the crime was committed. However, practice has shown that it is often necessary to extend the perimeter of the search, especially when traces may appear along the perpetrator’s route of movement.

Discovered objects must be examined thoroughly for fingerprints and drug residues, described in detail in the official crime scene report, and collected either in their entirety or using techniques recommended by forensic specialists [15, p.50-61].

The investigation of offenses in the category under discussion highlights the necessity of combining a body search with a physical examination of the detained person. Grounds for conducting such an examination in these types of cases should be based on information indicating the individual’s use of narcotic substances. Performing the examination shortly after detention is reasonable, in order to determine the presence of injection marks on the suspect’s body and to assess their age. This allows the criminal investigation officer to be aware from the very beginning of the investigation that the person is a drug user.

Failure to conduct a timely examination to identify injection marks may result in the loss of critical evidence. In particular, in cases of narcotic use, any area of the body with visible veins may be used for injection, but such marks may disappear if different areas are used or if the injections are administered professionally. As a result, after one or two weeks, the injection marks may no longer be detectable. Additionally, if injection marks are not documented at the outset and their origin is not clarified, various interpretations may later arise regarding how they appeared on the body.

One of the specific features of intravenous and intramuscular drug administration is that some individuals who have used narcotics for a short period inject themselves not intravenously but subcutaneously or intramuscularly, using any accessible site. Medical personnel do not administer medication in such areas, except in cases where a person is in a long-term critical condition and has received a large number of injections – such situations are clearly recorded in medical documentation. Therefore, conducting a physical examination at the moment of detention is both necessary and mandatory.

The examination must be carried out by a person of the same sex as the detainee and in the presence of a specialist who can provide a professional opinion regarding the presence of skin lesions and the approximate time of their appearance.

In the event that skin redness is detected, the specialist assists in describing its characteristics, identifying the possible substance that caused it, and collecting samples. When describing injection sites, for example on the thigh, the general condition of the veins is noted, along with the likelihood that the marks may have resulted from medical procedures. Typically, different types of drugs cause varying skin reactions [16, p.5].

Given that the subject of the examination is a living person, it must be noted that it shall be carried out either with the person’s consent or based on a reasoned order by the criminal investigation body, with the authorization of the investigating judge, in order to

establish whether there are signs of a crime or distinctive marks on their body, in cases where a forensic medical examination is not required [17].

When deciding on the ordering of a biological forensic examination, the criminal investigation officer in the initial stage of the criminal investigation must decide on the collection of samples from the suspect's fingers and subungual content. These samples must be sent for forensic examination to determine the presence of opiate alkaloids or cannabinoids on the suspect's fingers. When collecting the samples, it must be explicitly stated what is being collected—samples from hands, neck, etc. Each sample is to be packaged separately [10, p.77].

If a person is holding drugs, transporting them, or, more seriously, producing them, then due to the general property of objects to retain traces, there will be traces of substances on their body and clothes. Therefore, conducting a forensic examination to detect such traces is absolutely necessary. However, such examinations are rarely found in case files.

The criminal investigation officer may not examine a person of the opposite sex if such examination requires undressing. In these cases, the criminal investigation officer delegates the direct physical examination of the body to a doctor or another specialist trained in medicine, while retaining overall responsibility for the procedural action. If necessary, the specialist may be heard in connection with how the examination was conducted and its findings, but only within the criminal investigation phase. The need to involve a specialist in a procedural action arises when the criminal investigation officer, during evidence collection, analysis, or when using technical means, requires specialized knowledge. For the examination of a person's body, a medical specialist is needed to ensure the possibility of detecting, documenting, and collecting traces (objects) of the offense found on the person's body. Medical participation is also required in cases where technical means must be used or simple medical procedures must be performed (e.g., examination of body cavities to detect the presence of drugs inside).

To prove that the detained person was involved in drug-related operations, it is crucial to collect samples for analysis: swabs from the hands (using alcohol or a hydroalcoholic solution), nail clippings (to prove contact with drugs), swabs from the lips and mouth, and samples of biological fluids (blood, urine, saliva) in order to determine drug use.

Collected samples must be packaged and sealed separately. The control sample of the material used for swabbing (e.g., gauze soaked in hydroalcoholic solution) must also be packaged separately. Depending on the nature of the committed offense and the surrounding circumstances, the criminal investigation officer may assume that the suspect's body and clothing bear traces resulting from contact with various objects at the crime scene (during the overcoming of obstacles), as well as traces from the victim's body and clothing. Because drug-dependent individuals often neglect their appearance, such traces can persist for a longer period. Therefore, during the examination process, drug users may show particles from forced obstacles, injuries to the body and clothes, foreign hairs, bite marks, nail scratches, etc. Successfully achieving these goals involves a logical sequence of actions, including: examination of the suspect's clothing and exposed body areas; analysis and comparison of traces on the clothing and body; identification of specific traces of the offense.

A key role in investigating crimes committed by drug addicts is played by the in-

terview of the victim and witnesses. Without delving into the tactics of interviewing, we will highlight only the specific aspects of conducting interviews in this category of cases. During the victim's interview, the investigator must establish gender, age, social status, family situation, the victim's behavior (before, during, and after the offense), any medical conditions (alcoholism, drug addiction, mental disorders), character references, criminal history, and relationship with the perpetrator. After identifying the features defining the victim's personality and behavior, connections with other individuals, and other elements of the criminal mechanism, it becomes possible to formulate typical versions, for example, regarding motives or the subject of the offense. The gathered information may serve as the basis for probabilistic conclusions about the criminal event and may also be useful in further procedural actions such as confrontations and follow-up interviews.

In the interest of criminal investigation, the first witnesses to be identified and interviewed should be: eyewitnesses to the crime; individuals who observed suspicious persons near the scene; relatives, friends, co-workers, and neighbors of the victim who are familiar with their lifestyle, connections, and conflicts; individuals who saw the victim shortly before the incident and can indicate where they were going and with whom; and those who found the victim in a serious or deceased condition.

A special place is occupied by the interview of the drug-addicted suspect. Typically, this individual appears at the initial stage of the investigation when the criminal investigation officer does not yet have sufficient information about their involvement in the crime or their personal background. The difficulties of the initial interview are also due to the suspect's condition: whether at the time of the interview they are under the influence of narcotics (euphoria) or, conversely, in withdrawal. When the suspect is euphoric, the interview is not feasible. It is necessary to consider the particularities of drug intoxication depending on the type and stage of addiction. For novice or tolerant addicts, euphoria lasts briefly from a few minutes to several hours, depending on the drug and the psychophysiological traits of the individual. The interview must begin immediately after the euphoria subsides. For chronic and active drug users, euphoria is inevitably followed by withdrawal, which persists until a new dose is administered.

After identifying signs of drug intoxication, the criminal investigation officer must decide: to postpone the interview and request the examination of the suspect by a specialist (addiction doctor or psychiatrist). The specialist will assess the individual and issue a preliminary opinion on their condition, indicating when the interview can be conducted.

Nevertheless, there are cases when the suspect's condition is not clearly established, and the interview proceeds. When the suspect is in severe withdrawal – a common situation for addicts in advanced stages – conducting the interview is, in our opinion, inadmissible. The suspect's thoughts and behavior are driven solely by the urgent need to obtain drugs. Some argue that, if necessary, a dose of the drug may be administered to a person in withdrawal, and the interview could begin after they return to a normal state. The administration must be documented in the interview report. We disagree with such practice, as drug administration leads back to euphoria, followed by another withdrawal phase, creating a vicious cycle. If the dose does not match the usual norm, the withdrawal symptoms may worsen. In such a case, the person must be isolated in a medical facility. The inadequate condition may lead to contradictory statements, memory lapses, and conscious distortion of facts.

Law enforcement officers often encounter drug-addicted suspects who exhibit mild

withdrawal symptoms. Such individuals tend to be cooperative, retain cognitive function, and are capable of critically assessing the questions asked and providing objective answers.

As with any suspect, the interview of a drug-dependent individual should begin with the establishment of psychological rapport. In this regard, it is useful for the criminal investigation officer to be familiar with drug addiction as a serious illness, the dynamics of relationships among members of drug-using groups, and the suspect's connections with family, acquaintances, and other members of the community. The personal, professional, and social qualities of the officer also play an important role. In most cases, drug users are aware of the harm caused by their addiction. The officer's tone should be calm, even, and devoid of emotional or accusatory inflection. Sometimes, a preliminary conversation is held in the presence of a drug enforcement officer to demonstrate the extent of law enforcement's knowledge about the suspect's criminal activity. The involvement of a specialist (psychiatrist or narcologist) in the suspect's interview is a subject of debate. The question arises whether the presence of such a specialist facilitates the establishment of contact with the suspect [18, p.26-31].

The tactics used during the interview of a drug addict depend on the nature of the procedural situation – whether it is conflictual or non-conflictual. To establish an effective psychological connection, the criminal investigation officer must gather the following information about the suspect: reasons for drug use, the circumstances under which the use began, age of first use, preferred substance, level of dependency, family situation and living conditions, environment at work or school, peer group, role in informal networks, and positive traits (e.g., interests or hobbies).

The suspect's identity is verified based on identification data, criminal records, and other special registers.

Once psychological contact has been established, the drug addict may be given the opportunity to freely recount the facts. Subsequently, the criminal investigation officer must thoroughly detail the suspect's statements. In some individuals who were under the influence of drugs at the time of the incident, perception of time and space may be distorted. Withdrawal reduces focus, and cannabis intoxication can lead to severe difficulties in recalling events that occurred just minutes earlier [19, p.73]. It is important to note that spatial perception, object shape, and colors are severely distorted in drug addicts who commit crimes under the influence of narcotics. Auditory or visual hallucinations may occur. Memory capacity is impaired, as is psychological stability. Temporary amnesia may occur, or real memories may be replaced with similar but false ones. In cases of long-term drug use, intellectual degradation is observed – manifested through misunderstanding of questions and unintentional deviation in answers. In such situations, questions must be formulated clearly and concisely.

During the interview, available information about the drug used must be taken into account. These details may come from the medical record, from witnesses, or from the suspect themselves. Many criminal investigation officers are unaware of the correlations between the type of drug used and the subject's behavior. For example, those who use morphine tend to be more organized and communicative, while poly-drug users often show incoherent thinking, poor memory, and scattered attention. Drug addicts are easily influenced and manipulated. Therefore, unverified sources or a single version of events must not be relied upon during the interview. It is advisable to record the entire interview

using audio and video equipment. It has been observed that drug addicts are more willing to admit to robberies, thefts, and muggings than to drug-related offenses—due to their desire to hide their addiction.

**Conclusions.** The criminal phenomenon generated by drug use in the Republic of Moldova can no longer be addressed through conventional and isolated means. Its complexity demands a coordinated, multidisciplinary intervention, in which criminalistics, forensic medicine, forensic psychology, and public health work together actively to enable effective investigation and an appropriate societal response. Crimes committed by drug addicts bear the distinctive mark of addiction – impulsivity, disorganization, and a sole motivation to obtain the drug – giving them a unique structure within the contemporary criminological landscape.

Understanding these particularities is not just contextual but an essential condition for the success of the criminal process. Criminal investigation officers must be able to quickly identify signs of drug use, manage interviews under conditions of vulnerability, and effectively utilize biological evidence or material traces left by perpetrators. Crime scene investigations, bodily examinations, the collection and analysis of evidence must be adapted to the behavioral realities of drug-dependent individuals.

At the same time, a humane and balanced approach to this phenomenon is crucial. Drug-dependent individuals should not be viewed only as offenders, but also as patients and citizens in need of support. The inaction of rehabilitation services, stigmatization, and purely repressive treatment inevitably lead to recidivism and marginalization. Only through a combination of firm penal reaction and consistent social and medical interventions can real progress be achieved in reducing the criminal impact of drug use. Therefore, the future of effectively combating drug-related crime depends both on the professionalism of investigations and the state and society's capacity to address the root causes of addiction and social exclusion.

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