

## EU ports urged to team up to fight 'very creative' drug smugglers

Drug smugglers in the EU have become so "very creative" that the bloc's seaports should join forces to combat their ever-changing tactics, Belgian Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden told AFP.

That idea is to be promoted Wednesday when Verlinden, along with the European Commission, meets top representatives from around 20 EU ports, Europol officials, other interior ministers and sea transport executives to launch the European Ports Alliance.

The inauguration will take place in Antwerp, the Belgian port city that is the main gateway for cocaine trafficked into Europe.

Despite stepped-up screening, cocaine seizures at the vast Antwerp port each year breaks records. Last year, 116 tons of the drug were intercepted there. And Antwerp is frequently rocked by violence linked to gangs fighting over the hugely lucrative smuggling. The traffickers "are always very creative and that is our challenge - they pay no heed to laws on working time, right to privacy, borders," Verlinden said.

"So, we need to cooperate to be effective," she said. "We need to create this network to combat organised crime."

The port alliance aims to crack down on both the smuggling and the infiltration of the ports by criminal networks.

Private sector buy-in is needed because the steps to be taken could impact legal trading, so a good "balance" needs to be found, the Belgian minister said.

The partnership has a goal of harmonising security measures, to reduce the ability of the gangs to cast around for ports with laxer checks - and also to avoid trading companies moving away to ports with less red tape and security delays.

"We know that the companies are very flexible and, if something isn't working, that they can go elsewhere in a heartbeat. We also want to avoid that," Verlinden said, stressing how economically crucial Antwerp's hub was to Belgium. "In Antwerp, we have a record number of seizures, but we never know what we didn't manage to seize," the minister said, listing reinforced measures with security services, customs officers and a port security corps.

Antwerp's hub now boasts a mobile scanner that passes over selected containers. Five other scanners are to be delivered this year.

Around 100 more customs officers are also expected to be assigned to the port.

According to Belgium's customs service, only 1-2 percent of arriving containers are scanned.

# FATF delists Iran from Recommendation 7

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has agreed to remove Iran from the list of Recommendation 7, backing down from its previous decision, IRNA reported.

In a letter of protest to the FATF on January 8, Iran's Finance Minister Ehsan Khandouzi called for the Islamic Republic of Iran's name to be removed from Recommendation 7 and other documents related to UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Following Khandouzi's letter, FATF President T. Raja Kumar announced the reforms and changes in its standards related to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 to all member countries and the global network of fight against money laundering. FATF Recommendation 7 requires countries to implement targeted financial sanctions to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their financing in compliance with UN Security

Council resolutions, IRNA reported on Monday.

UN Security Council Resolution 2231—adopted in 2015 to implement the Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - terminated previous UN resolutions on Iran (1373, 1747, 1803, and 1929) but introduced restrictive measures, including targeted financial sanctions.

The resolution's provisions would be applicable to Iran based on one of two conditions: up to eight years after the approval of the JCPOA, or upon the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) verification.

Given the JCPOA's approval date of October 18, 2015, the first condition applies to the Islamic Republic. Iran received a note from the UN Security Council Secretariat on October 19, which declared an end to restrictions the council had imposed on Iran's missile program.

The FATF is a non-bind-

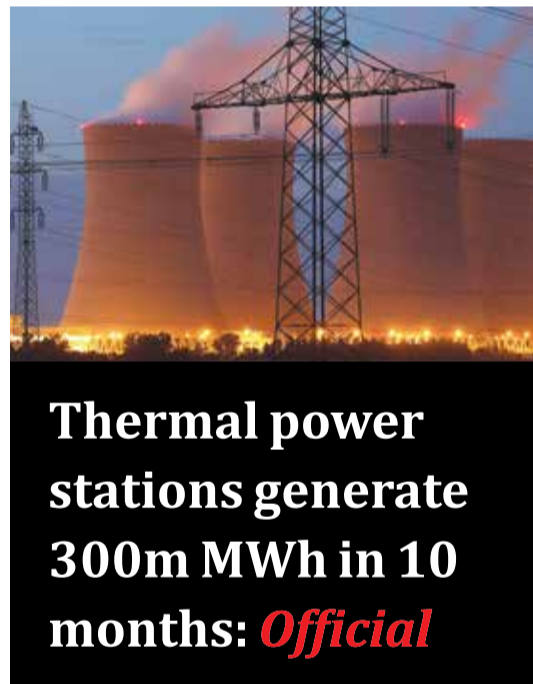


ing regulatory institution formed by the United States and its Western allies, supposedly to counter

terrorism financing and safeguard the integrity of the international financial system.

Critics, however, say the organization reflects the interests of powerful countries seeking to impose

preferences on other jurisdictions, and depends on funds from Western governments.



**Thermal power stations generate 300m MWh in 10 months: Official**

The electricity generation of Iran's thermal power plants reached 300 million megawatt/hour in the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (started March 21, 2023), announced the deputy head of Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH) for strategic affairs.

Iran's generation of electricity from the thermal power plants between March 21 and December 22, 2023 registered a three-percent hike compared to the same period a year earlier, Nasser Eskandari stated, according to IRNA.

In addition to meeting the electricity demands in the power grid of the country, thermal power plants have played a leading role in providing sustainable energy for subscribers nationwide, he added.

Of the total electricity generated, over 53 percent pertains to the combined-cycle power plant units, he said, putting the electricity generated by the combined-cycle power plant units in the country from March 21 to December 22, 2023 at 163 million MWh, showing an about four percent rise compared to the same period in 2022.

Converting gas-fired power plants to the combined cycle power plants is one of the most efficient methods to improve the efficiency of the thermal power plants in the country, Eskandari added.

## Iran's non-oil exports to Pakistan hit \$1b in 2023



Pakistan's Ministry of Commerce statistics indicated that Iran exported about \$1 billion worth of non-oil products to the South Asian country in 2023, registering a 13 percent growth compared to a year earlier.

Pakistan imported \$994 million worth of goods from Iran in 2023, the report said, according to Tasnim News Agency.

The country imported \$834 million

worth of non-oil goods from Iran in 2022.

Pakistan's official exports to Iran in 2023 were only \$155,000. Pakistan exported \$21,000 worth of products to Iran in 2022.

Statistics show that Pakistan's export of products to Iran has not exceeded \$200 million in recent years, and it has reached an almost zero level since 2020, registering a declining trend.

## Iran exports \$100m worth of medicine in 10 months: TPOI

The director general of the America and Europe Affairs Office of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) said \$100 million worth of drugs and medicine were exported so far in the current Iranian year (started March 21, 2023).

Ahmad Firouzi described the role of trade centers in offering high-quality services for the promotion of trade and economic ties as "important and effective,"

adding that the trade centers have played a more significant role in the incumbent administration, reported Mehr News Agency. About 50 trade centers of the country are active in the world, he said, noting that Iran has more than one trade center in some countries.

The official pointed to the lucrative market in Poland in the fields of importing and exporting medicine,



and noted that this European country imports \$8.5 billion worth of medicines annually. Firouzi said that Poland also exports \$4.5 billion worth of medicines per year to other countries. Poland and Norway are considered as emerging markets for Iran's pharmaceutical and technology-based

companies, he said, adding that half of Iran's medicine exports are destined to European countries.

IRNA also reported on Sunday that researchers at the University of Tehran have produced a polymer widely used in medical and pharmaceutical fields to meet domestic needs amid problems caused by Western sanctions restricting the import of medicines and medical supplies to the country. The copolymer, called poly lactic-co-glycolic acid or PLGA, is an environment-friendly chemical compound that is widely used in medical, pharmaceutical and research fields, including in producing surgical sutures, said Mohsen Shahrousvand, the chairman

of the Polymer Engineering Department at the Caspian Technical Faculty of the Tehran University.

He said that PLGA is also used in producing drug delivery systems (DDS) required for certain medicines that are currently imported to Iran. Because those DDSs are not produced domestically, Iranian pharmaceutical companies have to import PLGA at a high price, he added.

PLGA is globally priced at 100 dollars each gram for research activities and 10 to 20 dollars for medicinal purposes, Shahrousvand said, adding that the Iranian knowledge-based company in charge of producing PLGA is currently working on getting required permissions to

sell the product in internal and international markets. He said that Iranian researchers have already managed to produce PLGA in labs.

Now, with the mass production of this polymer, the current monopoly on its production by a handful of countries in the world will be broken as well, Shahrousvand noted, adding that PLGA is currently produced by the US, Germany, the Netherlands, China, and India.

Iran has been subjected to Western sanctions in the past years, which have mainly targeted its financial sector, making it difficult for the country to import medicines that are not produced domestically.