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Benelux



7th Expert Network Session on General Aviation

10-11 June 2026

Strasbourg, France

Abridged report

Introduction

The General Aviation session brought together experts from law enforcement, international organisations, and EU institutions to address the growing misuse of general aviation in drug trafficking and organised crime. The discussions highlighted the increasing complexity of criminal networks and the urgent need for coordinated, intelligence-led, and multidisciplinary responses at both European and international levels.

The session combined strategic perspectives, operational case studies, and technical solutions, providing a comprehensive overview of current threats, vulnerabilities, and best practices in tackling the misuse of general aviation.

Key messages and conclusions

General aviation was identified as a growing vulnerability due to regulatory gaps, lack of harmonised data systems, and limited visibility of private flights. The EMPACT framework remains central to EU cooperation, providing structured Operational Action Plans and multidisciplinary engagement to address drug trafficking threats.

1. Threat Assessment and Criminal Modus Operandi

General aviation offers criminal networks flexibility, speed, and reduced visibility. Criminal groups exploit facilitators and infrastructure rather than only aircraft, operating through structured phases of preparation, transport, and delivery. Their adaptability and use of encrypted communication complicate detection.

2. Operational and Technical Approaches

Several initiatives demonstrated effective approaches, including data-driven systems such as SPAVIS, multidisciplinary intelligence hubs such as GAMAH and GAIH, and the MAOC-N coordination platform. These systems enhance detection, intelligence sharing, and operational coordination.

3. Operational Experiences and Case Studies

Case studies from Belgium, Portugal, Austria, and Ireland demonstrated the scale and complexity of general aviation misuse. These cases highlighted insider threats, transnational networks, sophisticated concealment methods, and the exploitation of regulatory gaps.

4. Preventive Models and Operational Methodologies

The Barrier Model and the Benelux SENN-AVI initiative provide structured approaches to identify vulnerabilities and disrupt criminal activities. Data-driven operations such as Operation Silent Skies illustrate the importance of real-time coordination and intelligence sharing.

5. Key Challenges Identified

Key challenges include limited visibility of flights, lack of harmonised frameworks, fragmented intelligence, insufficient expertise, and rapid criminal adaptation, including the emergence of drone-based threats.

6. Global Conclusions

General aviation is a significant and growing risk. Criminal networks exploit systemic vulnerabilities, requiring coordinated international responses. Intelligence integration, operational cooperation, and data-driven approaches are essential.

7. Policy Recommendations

Strengthen intelligence sharing, harmonise data collection, enhance international cooperation, implement preventive models, invest in technology, and improve training and regulatory frameworks.

8. Final Remark

General aviation represents both a vulnerability and an opportunity. By enhancing cooperation, improving visibility, and adopting innovative approaches, law enforcement can significantly strengthen its response to organised crime in this domain.

Report delivered by Mr Tony Verachtert (Chair) and Mr Marc Vancoillie (Consultant) of the Pompidou Groups Expert Network on General Aviation.