

## **Drugs burning ceremony opens meeting on NATO-Russia counter-narcotics training project**

High-level representatives from countries involved in the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) counter-narcotics training initiative gathered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on Tuesday 26 June, to chart the future course of the project. The meeting opened with a drugs burning ceremony to mark the UN International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. 1,650 tons of drugs, including 499 kilos of heroin and 597 kilos of opium, seized by graduates of the NRC training initiative, were burned in the ceremony organized by the Uzbek government. The sixth high-level steering session was attended by representatives of the project's NRC donor countries and Ukraine, and the beneficiary countries – Afghanistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan – as well as staff from NATO and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The session focused on the future of the project and provided a forum for discussion about lessons learnt from the project so far. *"It was a valuable opportunity to mark our achievements, but more importantly to chart our course going forward,"* says Radoslava Stefanova, Chair of the Executive Steering Committee. *"We need to ensure that this important project maintains its momentum and builds upon the strong foundation we have created for strengthening counter-narcotics capacity across the region."* The meeting provided an excellent opportunity for the beneficiary countries to share their views on the training provided by this NRC project. This is important for NRC donor nations to understand where the project is fulfilling real needs, and where it can do more. Exchanges from the meeting will be central to the roadmap for the future of the project being developed by the UNODC.

## **Working together to combat the threat of narcotics**

The threat from narcotics is a serious threat to global security which is more effectively addressed by working together. The NRC Counter-Narcotics Training Project is a key joint effort to combat counter-narcotics trafficking by building up regional capacity in Afghanistan, Central Asia and Pakistan. The project is a joint endeavour of several countries of the NRC (Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States), as well as non-NRC nations Finland and Ukraine, plus the project's beneficiary countries: Afghanistan, the Central Asian nations and Pakistan. *"Since its start in 2006, NATO-Russia Council nations have been providing training to counter-narcotics officers from Afghanistan, the Central Asian nations and, since 2010, Pakistan,"* explains Radoslava Stefanova. *"The training continues to take place at fixed training sites in Russia, Turkey and the United States as well as in mobile training workshops throughout the Central Asian region."* The NRC counter-narcotics training project aims to build regional capacity by providing tactical training on counter-narcotics to officers from the region. As well as training courses at fixed centres and mobile training in the region, a first mentoring project began at the Anti-Narcotics Forces Academy in Islamabad at the end of 2011. The project also provides valuable networking opportunities between counter-narcotics agencies across the region, which in turn facilitate closer cooperation and encourage a regional approach to combating narcotics trafficking. Since its start in 2006, the project has proved its value. It has shown tangible results against the drugs trade and trainees have been involved in significant drugs seizures across the region. In 2010, Pakistan joined the project and in 2011, the second independent evaluation of the project concluded that it remains relevant, unique in scope, and is fulfilling a real need. By April 2012, 2000 officers had been trained under the project. At the meeting

in Tashkent, Uzbekistan's representative highlighted how this NRC initiative has helped strengthen his country's capacity to counter drug trafficking. *"Seventy officers trained under the project have been promoted in service and 36 officers have been shifted to executive positions. Our trainees have participated in the larger seizures made in 2011 (5, 404 kilos),"* he said.