

CENTRAL AFRICA'S ESCALATING THREATS:

GEOPOLITICS, CRIME AND VIOLENCE – AND THEIR POLICY
IMPLICATIONS

EU CRIME FIGHTING WEEK SIDE EVENT

19 June 2026
Time: 9.00–11.00

Venue: NH Brussels EU
Berlaymont

Organized by the Observatory on Organized Crime and Violence in Central Africa – an EU-funded initiative led by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)

About the event

Central Africa sits at the intersection of three of the EU's most pressing strategic concerns:

- Supply chain security: the region holds critical mineral reserves indispensable to Europe's green and digital transition, yet these are deeply entangled with armed conflict and criminal networks.
- Organized crime: illicit financial flows, cryptocurrency laundering and shadow fleet logistics are rooted in Central Africa and operate through European financial centres, meaning Europe is not a bystander but part of the system.
- Migration and stability: over 31 million people have been displaced, and accelerating demographic pressures generate spillovers that directly affect European security.

The region is now dominated by transnational criminal networks that thrive within an enabling geopolitical environment. These networks are sustained by external powers operating through proxies and mercenaries; local elites embedded in clientelist structures; and criminal architectures that facilitate the circulation of illicit weapons, resource extraction and the consolidation of power beyond state control. Understanding these dynamics and addressing the policy gaps they expose is an EU strategic interest, not merely a development concern.

This side event will showcase some of the Observatory's latest research, including ongoing fieldwork and analysis as well as published reports. These investigations will be reflected in the presentations and findings shared during the session.

Key themes explored

The research focuses on four critical systems driving the evolution of organized crime:

- Enabling infrastructures – How shadow fleets and cargo aircraft sustain trafficking and sanctions evasion.
- Illicit financial flows – Adaptive, innovative and untraceable.
- Criminal convergence – Coastal and hinterland networks in the Gulf of Guinea.
- Commodity and resource markets – A focus on critical minerals.

Programme highlights

08.30–09.00	Guest arrival and welcome coffee
09.00–09.10	Opening remarks Mark Shaw, Executive Director, GI-TOC
09.10–09.30	Panel 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flags of convenience: How shadow fleets and big cargo aircraft sustain trafficking and sanction evasion – Nathalia Dukhan, Central Africa Director, GI-TOC• Critical minerals: Organized crime, geopolitical rivalries and the implications for European supply chains – Zobel Behalal, Senior Expert, GI-TOC
09.30–10.00	Q&A
10.00–11.25	Panel 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hybrid crimes: Adaptive, innovative and untraceable illicit financing in Central Africa – Saibou Issa, Central Africa Director, ISS• Criminal convergence in the Gulf of Guinea – Raoul Sumo Tayo, Senior Researcher, ISS
11.25–10.55	Q&A
10.55–11.00	Closing remarks
11.00–11.30	Coffee