

US embassy cable - 09ROME1222**ITALY: INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL STRATEGY REPORT (INCRS)****Identifier:** 09ROME1222**Origin:** Embassy Rome**Created:** 2009-11-03 15:22:00**Classification:****Tags:** SNAR IT

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(INCRS)

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Italy

I. Summary

Italy is a consumer country and a major transit point for heroin transiting from the Middle East and Southwest Asia through the Balkans and for cocaine originating from South America en route to western and central Europe. Italian and Italy-based foreign organized crime groups are heavily involved in international drug trafficking. The Government of Italy (GOI) is firmly committed to the fight against drug trafficking domestically and internationally. The Berlusconi government continues Italy's strong counternarcotics stand with capable Italian law enforcement agencies. GOI cooperation with U.S. law enforcement agencies continues to be exemplary. Italy is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

II. Status of Country

Italy is mainly a narcotics transit and consumption country. Law enforcement officials focus their efforts on heroin, cocaine, hashish and synthetic drugs. Although Italy produces some precursor chemicals, they are well controlled in accordance with international norms and are not known to have been diverted to any significant extent. Law enforcement agencies with a counternarcotics mandate are effective.

III. Country Actions against Drugs in 2008

Policy Initiatives. Italy continues to combat narcotics aggressively and effectively. In 2006, Italy adopted a tough new drug law that eliminates distinctions between hard and soft drugs, increases penalties for those convicted of trafficking and establishes administrative penalties for lesser offenses. All forms of possession and trafficking are illegal but punishment depends on the severity of the infraction. Stiff penalties for those convicted of trafficking or possessing drugs include jail sentences from six to 20 years and fines of over \$300,000. The law provides alternatives to jail time for minor infractions, including drug therapy,

community service hours, and house arrest.

Italy has contributed an average of \$12 million to UNODC, over the last several years, making it one of the largest donors to the UNODC budget. However, recent budget cuts will reduce future contributions. Italy has supported key U.S. objectives at the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), and chairs the Dublin Group of countries coordinating narcotics sector assistance projects for Central Asia.

Law Enforcement Efforts. The fight against drugs is a major priority for the National Police, Carabinieri, and Guardia di Finanza (GdF) counternarcotics units. The Italian Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services (DCSA) coordinates the counternarcotics units of the three national police services and directs liaison activities with the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and other foreign law enforcement agencies. Working with the liaison offices of the U.S. and western European countries, DCSA has 22 drug liaison officers in 20 countries (including the U.S.) that focus on major traffickers and their organizations. In 2006, DCSA stationed liaison officers in Tehran, Iran and Tashkent, Uzbekistan; in 2007 they added liaison officers in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Islamabad, Pakistan.

Investigations of international narcotics organizations often overlap with the investigations of Italy's traditional organized crime groups (e.g. the Sicilian Mafia, the Calabrian N'drangheta, the Naples-based Camorra, and the Puglia-based Sacra Corona Unita). Additional narcotics trafficking groups include West African, Albanian, and other Balkan organized crime groups responsible for smuggling heroin and cocaine into Italy. In 2009, Italian drug investigations revealed that Serbian groups have begun importing large quantities of cocaine (+100 kg shipments) into Italy. Colombian, Dominican, and other Latin American trafficking groups are also involved in the importation of cocaine. Italian law enforcement officials employ the same narcotics investigation techniques used by other western countries. Adequate financial resources, money laundering laws, and asset seizure/forfeiture laws help ensure the effectiveness of these efforts.

From January 1 to June 30, 2009, Italian authorities seized 2,473 kilograms of cocaine; 690 kilograms of heroin; 10,264 kilograms of hashish; 2,272 kilograms of marijuana; 27,400 marijuana plants; and 52,958 doses of synthetic drugs. The single largest drug seizures during the same period were: January 2009 - 28,700 tablets of ecstasy in Turin; April 2009 - 180 kilograms of heroin in Milan; April 2009 - 723 kilograms of marijuana in Ancona; May 2009 - 2,010 kilograms of hashish in Naples; June 2009 - 400 kilograms of cocaine in Padua. Also during this period, 14,412 individuals were arrested in Italy on drug-related charges, 1,721 of which were arrested for the more serious drug trafficking / conspiracy violations. 64% of those arrested were Italian nationals, while the remaining 36% of the arrestees were primarily Moroccan, Tunisian, Albanian and Nigerian nationals.

The DEA Rome Office is coordinating a container flow analysis between Italy and Ecuador at the request of law enforcement authorities in both countries as a result of significant numbers of cocaine seizures in recent months on shipments to Italy originating

in Ecuador, including a 400 kilogram cocaine seizure in June 2009 in Padua and another 200 kilograms of cocaine seized at the Calabrian port of Gioia Tauro in October 2009.

Between May and June 2009, the DEA Rome office coordinated multi-lateral assistance with the Italian Guardia di Finanza in an investigation into a Rome-based Italian organized crime group responsible for the importation of significant quantities of cocaine into Europe utilizing Colombian cocaine brokers resident in Europe with sources of cocaine supply in Colombia and Venezuela. This investigative effort resulted in the maritime seizure of approximately 300 kilograms of cocaine and utilized the modern and sophisticated air and sea assets available to the Guardia di Finanza.

In late 2008, the DEA Milan office and the Italian Carabinieri in

Milan initiated a hashish and cocaine trafficking investigation targeting a Moroccan trafficking organization based in Milan, that was smuggling large quantities of hashish from Morocco and multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine from South America, both for distribution in northern Italy. The investigation ultimately yielded the January 2009 seizure of 1,200 kilograms of hashish from a tractor trailer in Italy. Numerous associated arrests and additional hashish, cocaine and money seizures were also conducted throughout the course of the investigation.

In 2009, Italian law enforcement agencies concluded several long-term criminal investigations targeting drug trafficking organizations operating throughout the country. Operation Red Man (Operazione Uomo Rosso) began in 2007 and targeted two West African criminal groups responsible for transporting cocaine and heroin from the Netherlands to Italy. The investigation linked the African groups to members of rival Italian Camorra (Naples-based) organized crime families and resulted in the arrest of 74 individuals and the seizure of cocaine, heroin and marijuana. Operation Como Hills (Operazione Colline Comasche) began in 2006 and targeted a large network of Albanian nationals operating in northern Italy and Tuscany. This organization was responsible for importing cocaine into Italy from the Netherlands and drug distribution throughout Europe. The investigation resulted in the seizure of cocaine and heroin and the arrest of 174 people. In June 2009, Italian police officials in Trento and Genoa concluded Operation Sutka (Operazione Sutka) with the arrest of 49 members of a predominately ethnic Romanian crime group importing cocaine from Spain. Over the course of this two-year investigation, Italian law enforcement seized 36 kilograms of cocaine and 60 kilograms of marijuana.

From 2009 to 2009, the DEA Rome office, in conjunction with Italian law enforcement officials and numerous other DEA domestic and foreign offices, participated in a multinational and multi-jurisdictional enforcement action-dubbed Operation Reckoning-which targeted a significant element of the Mexican based "Gulf Cartel" responsible for importing multi-ton quantities of cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine and marijuana from Mexico for distribution in the U.S. and elsewhere, including Italy. The joint DEA and Italian Carabinieri investigation targeted 'Ndrangheta organized crime cells operating between Calabria, Italy and New York City as part of the overall operation. In mid-September 2008, ten other subjects were arrested in Italy and six were arrested in New York. This investigation has increased law enforcement attention and focus on drug trafficking links between Italy and Mexico.

Agreements and Treaties. Italy is a party to the 1961 UN Single Convention as amended by its 1972 Protocol, as well as the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 UN Drug Convention. Italy is a party to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its three protocols and ratified the UN Convention against Corruption in August 2009. Italy has bilateral extradition and mutual legal assistance treaties with the U.S. In 2006, the U.S. and Italy signed bilateral instruments on extradition and mutual legal assistance to implement the U.S.-EU Agreements on Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance signed in 2003; Italy has yet to ratify these instruments. In fact, Italy is one of only three EU countries that have failed to ratify the new network of bilateral extradition and mutual legal assistance treaties with the U.S. The other two countries are Greece and Belgium.

Cultivation /Production. There is no known large-scale cultivation of narcotic plants in Italy, although small-scale marijuana production in remote areas does exist mainly for domestic consumption. No heroin laboratories or processing sites have been discovered in Italy since 1992. However, opium poppy grows naturally in the southern part of Italy, including Sicily. It is not commercially viable due to the low alkaloid content. No MDMA-Ecstasy laboratories have been found in Italy.

Drug Flow/Transit. Italy is a consumer country and a major transit point for heroin coming from southwest Asia through the Balkans en route to western and central Europe. A large percentage of all

heroin seized in Italy is shipped from Turkey through overland routes in Balkan countries. Balkan heroin traffickers work with Italian criminal organizations as transporters and suppliers of drugs. Heroin is smuggled into Italy via automobiles, ferryboats and commercial cargo. Italy maintains liaison offices in Ankara and Istanbul, Turkey to assist counterparts in interdicting narcotics originating there and destined for Italy.

Almost all cocaine found in Italy originates with Colombian and other South American criminal groups and is managed in Italy by Calabria and Campania-based organized crime groups. Multi-hundred

kilogram shipments enter Italy via seaports concealed in commercial cargo. Although the traditional Atlantic trafficking route is still in use, stepped-up international scrutiny and cooperation are forcing traffickers to use alternative avenues. As noted above, in 2009, Italian drug investigations have identified increased activity by Serbian criminal groups involved in the importation of large amounts of cocaine.

Italian officials have detected traffickers using transit ports in West Africa where drugs are off-loaded to smaller fishing vessels that ultimately reach Spain and other Mediterranean destinations. Cocaine shipments off-loaded in Spain, the Netherlands and the Balkan Region are eventually transported to Italy and other European countries by land vehicles. Smaller amounts of cocaine (usually concealed in luggage) enter Italy via express parcels or airline couriers traveling from South America.

Ecstasy found in Italy primarily originates in the Netherlands and is usually smuggled into the country couriers utilizing commercial airlines, trains or land vehicles. The couriers originating in Amsterdam often conceal thousands of Ecstasy tablets in luggage and travel by train or airline to Italy. The EU's open borders make this journey somewhat less risky.

Hashish comes predominately from Morocco through Spain, entering the Iberian Peninsula (and the rest of Europe) via sea access points using fast boats. As with cocaine, larger hashish shipments are smuggled into Spain and eventually transported to Italy by vehicle. Hashish is also smuggled into Italy on fishing and pleasure boats from Lebanon.

Catha Edulus (aka Khat) is a shrub grown in the southern part of Arabia and Eastern Africa, primarily in the countries of Yemen,

Somalia, and Ethiopia. The leaves of this plant contain the alkaloids cathine and cathinone (chewed for stimulant effects), which are controlled substances in Italy and the U.S. Italy is one of several European countries used by East African trafficking organizations for the transshipment of khat to major urban areas across the U.S. These organizations primarily use international parcel delivery systems and airline passenger luggage to transport multi-kilogram to multi-hundred kilogram quantities of khat. Italian law enforcement officials continue to cooperate with DEA in joint investigations targeting these groups in Italy and the U.S.

Domestic Programs/Demand Reduction. The GOI promotes drug prevention programs using abstinence messages and treatment aimed at the full rehabilitation of drug addicts. The Italian Ministry of Health funds 555 public health offices operated at the regional level; the Ministry of Interior identified 726 residential, 210

semi-residential facilities, and 188 walk-in facilities. Of about 500,000 estimated drug addicts and 385,000 estimated eligible for treatment in Italy, 174,000 receive services at public agencies.

About 71 percent of the total used heroine. Others either are not receiving treatment or arrange for treatment privately. The government continues to promote more responsible use of methadone at the public treatment facilities. Regional and local governments spent about 32 million Euro for drug prevention programs.

IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs

Bilateral Cooperation. The U.S. and Italy continue to enjoy exemplary counternarcotics cooperation. In January 2007, the Italian Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services (DCSA) hosted a working group conference of law enforcement counterparts from Europe and

Africa as part of the DEA's annual International Drug Enforcement Conference (IDEC). At the July 2008 IDEC, the Director of DCSA met with DEA's Acting Administrator in furtherance of bilateral cooperation and operations. DEA and DCSA personnel continue to conduct intelligence-sharing and coordinate joint criminal investigations on a daily basis. Based on the October 1997 International Conference on Multilateral Reporting in Lisbon, Portugal, the DEA Headquarters Chemical Section and DCSA continue to exchange pre-shipment notifications for dual-use drug precursor chemicals. (Note: Italy has not been identified as a significant international producer or distributor of methamphetamine precursor chemicals.)

In June 2008, the Italian 'Ndrangheta Organized Crime group was added to the U.S. Treasury Department Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) Foreign Drug Kingpin list after close coordination between American and Italian counterparts. The designation by President Bush is aimed at reducing the ability of 'Ndrangheta members to use the U.S. and international banking systems in furtherance of their drug trafficking operations. The GOI's stated intention to enforce the provision is an indication of the Italian government's commitment to target and dismantle 'Ndrangheta's financial infrastructure. During 2009, DEA continued the Drug Sample Program with the GOI, which consists of the analysis of seized narcotics to determine purity, cutting agents, and source countries. From October 2008 to September 2009, DEA received approximately 65 samples of heroin, cocaine, and Ecstasy. The sample collection from Italy and other Balkans countries is essential in determining production methods and trafficking trends that ultimately impact Italy.

DEA independently conducted drug awareness programs at international schools in Rome and Milan. DEA also provided training to Italian counterparts on asset forfeiture and drug law enforcement operations.

The Road Ahead. The USG will continue to work closely with Italian officials to break up trafficking networks into and through Italy as well as to enhance both countries' ability to apply effective demand

reduction policies. The USG will also continue to work with Italy in multilateral settings such as the Dublin Group of countries that coordinate counternarcotics and UNODC policies.