

December 2003

## ALBANIA COUNTRY BRIEF

### Drug Situation Report



## **STATUS IN INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING**

The collapse of the Albanian economy in 1997 which followed the 1991 failure of the communist way of life created the civil unrest that provided fertile ground for criminal elements to put in place methods and routes for the transshipment of heroin. Drug traffickers have taken advantage of drug law enforcement shortcomings stemming from the country's recent political, social, and economic transformations.

Albania's porous border and port controls, with large segments of unpatrolled frontiers, and under-resourced police and judicial systems, permit the virtually unhindered movement of thousands of illegal migrants from Albania, Turkey, and lands housing ethnic Kurds, as well as the facilitation of drug movements. In addition, Albania's full service maritime ports at Durres and Vlore are often exploited by crime groups moving contraband through the country.

The transshipment of Southwest Asian (SWA) heroin continues to be a problem. The expansion of organized crime activity in Albania coupled with the country's close proximity to Greece, Italy, and other Western European markets, has increased Albania's significance as a transit route for SWA heroin being smuggled along the Balkan Route to Western Europe. Traffickers also use Albania for stockpiling drugs destined for Western Europe.

Cocaine is not a major problem in Albania, so far, due to the unaffordable market prices, but ethnic Albanian drug traffickers are increasingly investing money in Colombian cocaine shipping ventures as reported in recent years.

Albania has experienced an upsurge in cannabis cultivation. Ever-larger quantities of marijuana are being produced throughout the country for export. Metric-ton quantities are smuggled to Greece and Italy. The Government of Albania recognizes the drug problem and is concerned the trend may continue.

## **CULTIVATION AND PROCESSING**

### *Cannabis*

Cannabis cultivation is a growing concern in Albania. In December 2003, the Albanian Government reported that marijuana is currently the only drug grown and produced in Albania, and is typically sold in Greece, Italy, Turkey, Bulgaria, Slovenia, the United Kingdom and Germany. Metric ton quantities of Albanian marijuana have been seized in Greece and Italy. The sizable amounts of Albanian marijuana seized by Greek and Italian authorities may indicate that marijuana cultivation continues to be a significant issue in Albania.

The Albanian police estimates that cannabis planted areas have been reduced from previous years, but the regions of Shkodra, Vlora and Fier remain problematic. In 2003, the Albanian Anti-Narcotics Unit, with the assistance of the Italian Interforza, destroyed 17,937 cannabis plants, as well as a number of plantations. This is a marked decrease from the approximately 115,673 plants eradicated in 2002 and 281,730 destroyed in 2001.

There are corroborated reports of cannabis being refined to hashish and hashish oil.

Uncorroborated reports indicate that Albanian traffickers might have recruited the expertise of Lebanese hashish producers to help them with the processing.

#### *Other drugs*

More uncorroborated press reports suggest that Albanian traffickers are experimenting with both coca and opium poppy cultivation. Albania's Anti-Drug Unit believes that traffickers are attempting to see if poppy could thrive in Albania's climate.

#### *Chemicals*

Albania is not known as a producer of significant quantities of precursor chemicals.

### **TRAFFICKING**

Organized crime groups use Albania to stockpile drugs, primarily SWA heroin, for transport to Western Europe. Albania is a transit point for drugs due to its strategic location, seaports, under-resourced police and judicial systems, and lax border controls.

#### *Heroin*

An INTERPOL report states that the Albanians control a significant amount of the drug trafficking in some North European countries and play an increased role in heroin trafficking in Western Europe. Albania continues to be a major transit point for heroin from Turkey being smuggled along the Balkan Route to Western Europe. For example, heroin is smuggled from Istanbul, Turkey, to Sofia, Bulgaria, and then to Skopje, FYROM, from where it is transported through the ports of Durres and Vlore, Albania, to Italy and Greece. From those countries, heroin is transshipped to northern European markets. During May 2003, 30 kilograms of heroin were seized at the Port of Durres, Albania, with a total of 114 kgs, 475 grams seized in 2003.

Drug traffickers also exploit smuggling routes across the Adriatic Sea between Italy and Albania. Most drug shipments transported across the Adriatic Sea to Italy take place using small go-fast boats, often intermingled with a thriving trade in illegal aliens, arms, and cigarettes. Albania is likely a storage location for SWA heroin being smuggled to Western Europe. The U.S. Department of State reports that SWA heroin is smuggled into Albania from the FYROM.

#### *Cocaine*

Though domestic consumption of cocaine in Albania is low due to the relative high cost of cocaine, the country is emerging, although not documented by seizures, as a possible stockpiling location for cocaine destined for Western Europe. Albanian drug traffickers have been known to maintain contacts with Colombian cocaine traffickers, and might attempt to establish Albania as a deposit for cocaine for distribution to other European countries. Reports revealed cash investments made by Albanian drug traffickers in Colombian cocaine shipments to Europe via Greece, and from there to Western Europe through Albania, especially Italy. Albanian

traffickers have attempted to smuggle cocaine from the United States to Albania. During November 2003, approximately 10 kilograms of cocaine were seized at Malpensa International Airport, Milan, Italy. The cocaine, secreted in a suitcase that originated in Sao Paolo, Brazil, was destined for Tirana, Albania.

### *Cannabis*

Metric-ton quantities of Albanian marijuana are smuggled to Western Europe, primarily Greece and Italy. The U.S. Department of State reports that Albanian cannabis products are also smuggled to Belgium, France, and Germany. Reporting also indicates that cannabis has, on occasion, been smuggled to Turkey.

SECI authorities noted an apparent increase in the Western Balkan route to smuggle marijuana to Western Europe and to smuggle synthetic drugs from Western Europe to Southeastern Europe and beyond.

### *Trafficking Groups*

Albanian criminal groups are the primary drug traffickers in Albania. These organizations are based on clan structures. Targeting Albanian criminal groups pose several challenges due to their use of dialects in their communications and the strong crime family structure.

Recent information indicates the Turkish trafficking groups have developed operations in Albania.

Albania-based drug trafficking organizations are also operating between the Balkan countries and Western Europe, and in the United States. Albanian criminal networks, supported by extensive connections to Italian and Turkish crime families, and Albanian communities in Italy, Germany, and Switzerland, are heavily involved in the drug trade. Ethnic Albanians are now significant players in the European drug trade. Ethnic Albanians control a significant amount of the heroin distribution market in Scandinavia. They control most of the heroin distribution in Italy and Greece, and play a notable role in mid-level heroin distribution in Germany. Organizations from Albania now control heroin trafficking in Croatia as well. Lastly, Ethnic Albanians control a large portion of the drug trade in the Slovak Republic, and are the predominant group arrested for drug-related offenses in the FYROM.

## **DRUG RELATED MONEY LAUNDERING**

Albania continues to be without a stable and modern financial system. This was even more evident as a result of the turmoil and civil unrest caused during the 1997 failed pyramid schemes, which led to an estimated half million Albanians losing their life savings and investments. Any laundering of money takes place through the purchase of real estate and land.

According to the U.S. Department of State, asset seizure was legalized as an anti-smuggling weapon in 1998, when legislation was passed that allowed for the seizure and sale of boats used for drug trafficking. In August 2000, Parliament passed a new *Anti-Speedboat* law that enables

police to seize speedboats used in illicit trafficking activities, including drug trafficking, not only at sea, but on land as well. Also in 2000, the Albanian Government approved anti-money laundering legislation that requires financial institutions to report to an anti-money laundering agency all transactions that exceed USC \$10,000, as well as those that involve suspicious activity.

## **DRUG ABUSE/TREATMENT**

Heroin and marijuana are the primary drugs of abuse in Albania. Both heroin and marijuana are available in street-level quantities, with most of the heroin imported from the FYROM and the marijuana, locally produced.

Albania currently has a small, but growing, drug problem, which is of concern to the Albanian Government. Drug abuse is a comparatively new issue in Albania. Albania is experiencing an upsurge in drug abuse primarily by young Albanians. Marijuana continues to be the drug of choice among Albanians. Commercial cannabis is grown extensively in southwestern Albania and in home plots for domestic consumption. There has been a rise in the number of cases related to possession of marijuana. Poverty remains the primary reason for the relatively limited drug abuse in Albania. Lack of discretionary funds for high priced narcotics limits the popular drug choice to marijuana.

Cocaine is available in Albania, but due to the poor economy, there is not a large cocaine consumer population. According to the U.S. Department of State, local addicts use a powerful synthetic morphine called pethidine, which is sometimes used as a replacement for cocaine and heroin.

The U.S. Department of State reports that there are no special drug treatment centers for drug addicts. The government does not dedicate significant assets to tracking the problem and there are no independent organizations that compile data on drug use.

## **DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES**

The Ministry of Public Order's Crime Investigation Department is responsible for the internal security of the country. A separate unit under the Ministry has also been established to aid in the fight against organized crime. The Central Service for the Fight against Drugs has primary law enforcement responsibilities, and is tasked with arresting drug traffickers, seizing their contraband and eradicate cannabis plantations. The General Directorate of Customs is part of the Ministry of Finance and is responsible for border control at land borders, seaports and airports. The State Intelligence Service is responsible for both internal and external intelligence gathering and counterintelligence. The General Prosecutor's Office primarily focuses on specific crimes such as organized crime and drug trafficking.

## **DRUG ENFORCEMENT LEGISLATION**

In 2001 and 2002, Albania ratified the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. These laws call for national coordination of policies regarding use and trafficking in drugs.

On March 29, 2002 the Government of Albania approved the Law on the Control of Chemicals Used for the Illegal Manufacturing of Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances, regulating the import and use of precursor chemicals.

In 1994, law number 7491 was amended to outlaw "the preparation, import, possession or sale of drugs and other narcotic material." It provides for sentences of up to 15 years in prison for those convicted of drug offenses. Cultivation of cannabis is a penal offense punishable by 3 to 10 years in prison. U.S. and French officials were directly involved in assisting Albania in drafting a new penal code that went into effect in mid-1995 and specifies penalties for the production, cultivation, and sale of drugs.

An active participant in the stability pact and the Southeastern European Cooperative Initiative (SECI), Albania plans to participate in SECI's regional anti-crime center in Bucharest, which opened in 2000.

## **TREATIES AND CONVENTIONS**

In December 2002, Albania signed the U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols. In 2001, Albania also became a party to the 1988 U.N. Drug Convention and the 1961 U.N. Single Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol. In November 2002, Albania ratified the U.N. Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971. The U.S. and Albania signed an extradition treaty on November 13, 1935. This treaty remains in effect and has been used it has been used successfully several times in recent years. In 1997, the Italian Government committed its resources to assist Albania in restoring normalcy. This commitment constitutes not only financial assistance, but also physical assistance. In 1995, Albania concluded a bilateral agreement with Italy providing for close cooperation in drug interdiction. Albania also has bilateral agreements with several other European nations, including most of its immediate neighbors, which include anti-drug and money laundering provisions.

## **STATISTICAL TABLES**

### **PRICES (December 2003)**

<b>DRUG</b>	<b>AMOUNT</b>	<b>COST</b>
<b>COCAINE</b>	per gram	\$66
<b>HEROIN</b>	per dose (0.3 grams)	\$4.60-5.00
<b>MARIJUANA</b>	Per kilogram	\$93

**Source: Albanian Central Service for the Fight against Drugs**

## SEIZURES

DRUG	2000	2001	2002	2003
CANNABIS (in kilograms)	6,915	6,915	13,700	7,646
COCAINE (in kilograms)	4	266 grams	5.7 grams	1 kg, 285 grams
HEROIN (in kilograms)	42	4.5	66.7	114 kgs, 475 grams
CANNABIS PLANTS ERADICATED	256,857	281,730	115,673	17,937

Source: Albanian Central Service for the Fight against Drugs

## DRUG RELATED ARRESTS

2000	2001	2002	2003
641	353	295	284

Source: Albanian Central Service for the Fight against Drugs

## KEY JUDGEMENTS

- Albania will continue to be a transshipment point for SWA heroin smuggled along the Balkan Route to Western Europe.
- Heroin use in Albania will increase as a result of the transshipment of heroin through the region.
- Albanian trafficking organizations will increasingly expand their heroin distribution activities in other European countries.
- Albania will continue to be a source for metric-ton quantities of marijuana being smuggled to Greece, Italy, and other European countries.