

# A Recipe against Cannabis Cultivation

By Xhavit Shala

In Albania<sup>1</sup>, the region Fier until the year 2000 occupied the worst position in the map of cannabis cultivation in the country. Facing this massive phenomenon presented a great challenge for me as Director of Police for this region at that time. Working together with my staff, we put the fight against cannabis cultivation as one of the main challenges in our fight against crime and moved to confront it.

The strategy for the fight against cannabis cultivation introduced new methods of work not employed before by the Albanian police. It intended first of all to prevent cannabis cultivation by cooperating with the community, local government structures and non-governmental organizations. The strategy was first launched in the region of Fier in early 2001.

The strategy set forth the following tasks:

**1. Frequent meetings with the communities affected** in every village, especially in the areas known for cultivation in earlier years. Farmers would be approached by groups made up of representatives of the Police Directorate, prefect's office, local government representatives, education department and even religious communities representatives. The aim of these meetings would be to sensitize the citizens on the legal consequences facing those that would cultivate cannabis. These meetings would be sending a clear and firm message that no cases of cultivation would be tolerated.

*\* Those involved in this activity would have on "their back" not only the police but also the other state structures and the local government. The engagement of all the state structures in preventing the cultivation of narcotic plants would transform the fight against this phenomenon into a problem of all the society. The involvement of other structures in the fight against cannabis cultivation would also increase police access to information on cases of cannabis cultivation.*

**2- Intensification of the fight against narcotics** by carrying out frequent police operations to arrest and prosecute all persons implicated in narcotic's activity with a special focus on those responsible for the organization and direction of cannabis cultivation, and those processing and trafficking cannabis.

*\* This sent a clear message that all those encouraging or organizing the cultivation and those of collecting it would be hit hard. This would enable us to target those ordering and managing the cannabis production. This would bring about a*

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*decrease in the demand to buy cannabis from the farmers leading to decreased interest in cannabis cultivation.*

**3. -Provision of information to the citizens** on the legal consequences foreseen by the Albanian legislation for those implicated in cases of cannabis cultivation. Information would be distributed through leaflets, which aside from the legal information also provided the contact phone numbers for the police.

*\* These leaflets contained quotes from the Penal Code provisions on the cultivation, possession and transportation of narcotics. They were handed out in villages to each family, with a particular attention to areas most affected by cannabis cultivation with the purpose of informing the public and preventing in time massive cultivation of narcotic plants.*

**4. - Close Cooperation with Local Media outlets** to raise public awareness on the dangers coming from drugs. The goal to make citizens aware of the dangers coming from drugs and to seek their cooperation in the fight against narcotic plant cultivation.

*\* Special TV programs and ads were aired dealing with the consequences of narcotics in general, and those coming from the cultivation of narcotics plants in particular. Police officials, doctors, lawyers, journalists and others attended the shows. The campaign aimed at making the public aware of the consequences of narcotics cultivation and to inform them about the legal responsibility for those involved in this activity. It also provided a forum to present on permanent basis the work done by the Police Directorate in the fight against narcotics.*

**5 – Preparation of lectures** for schools dealing with the consequences of narcotics cultivation, penalties against those that break the law by growing, processing and trafficking narcotic substances.

*\* These lectures were made available to the Educational Department in the region to discuss with students in schools where the use of cannabis had become a cause for concern.*

**6 – Assistance by State Agencies with small crediting and business support projects** for the people in areas affected by narcotics cultivation. These projects would help shift the focus of farmers towards other legal economic activities encouraging them to cultivate other agricultural plants.

*\* We had often sought to find funding with small loans for farmers in the affected areas. In the capacity of Director of Criminal Police in the Ministry of Public Order from April 10-17, 2000, I attended the UN 10-th Congress for the Prevention of Crime. During the proceedings of the Congress we had a meeting with Mr. Pino Arlachi, Deputy Secretary of the UN and Executive Director of UNODCCP in Vienna. We discussed possible ways*

*for bringing down the level of cannabis cultivation in Albania. We asked Mr. Arlachi for assistance in the form of programs that would support the development of business in the areas affected by the cultivation. Of course, many promises were made that never became reality. At the end of the day, the burden of solving the problem was left to us.*

*\* With the involvement of the Prefect's Office, efforts were made to intervene with programs of assistance and crediting for the inhabitants of areas most affected by cannabis cultivation so the focus of the farmers could shift to other legitimate crops. One thousand phone numbers were provided and a new police station was set up in Cakran. Schools were repaired and sewage systems were updated. We are conscious that more should have been done to encourage the development of small business and in supporting farms with low interest loans, equipment and selected seeds.*

**7 - Preparation and handing out of Forms** that farmers would sign affirming that they would not cultivate cannabis and that they did not possess any quantity of cannabis produced in the past. Police inspectors in the areas and village heads would follow the process.

*\* This effort would have more of a psychological effect. The farmer's statement would have no legal value but these forms would help in getting the right information to the farmers on the consequences awaiting those who grew cannabis.*

**8. -Close cooperation with the Prosecutor's office and the Courts** in the various districts of the region. The cooperation would aim at ensuring a stricter penal policy against transgressors with a focus on those responsible for organizing this activity but without excluding from criminal responsibility the regular narcotic cultivator as well.

*\* Aside from efforts to inform and persuade the farmers against growing cannabis, the law would be enforced, justice served and those challenging the law would receive the merited and un-compromised punishment of the law. In most of the cases, the prosecution of individuals for narcotic plant cultivation took place with the person kept in detention.*

**9 – Coordination of the Operation** with the Central Anti-Narcotics Service and services of neighboring countries.

**10 – Assigning specific professional tasks** to the various Commissariats and sections of the Police Directorate in the Region in support of the implementation of the anti-cannabis strategy.

**11- Setting up of a Central Staff** at the Regional Police Directorate to constantly follow the progress of implementation of the tasks laid out in the plan and to analyze the dynamics of the situation and come up with the required decisions.

*\*The Staff of the Directorate would convene twice a week. All units would report on the status of the implementation of the objectives of the strategy. Police Inspectors in*

*the districts would submit weekly reports on the cases of narcotics cultivation in their areas and measures taken. If later on it was found that the report submitted had been inaccurate or not based on observations in the field disciplinary measures were taken against the Inspector that as a last action included dismissal from duty.*

**12- Establishment of local staffs.** A working group under the leadership of the mayor would be set up in every Commune. In cooperation with school directors, and local government officials the police inspector would follow the implementation of the plan for the commune. The goal was to set up similar structures in each village.

*\* Local teams were set up attached to Local Government Structures that would follow the implementation of the objectives set forth in the action plan. Representative of the local government that were part of these groups carried a great part of the burden in conducting preventive operations and sensitizing the residents to destroy the plants in their plots of land. The work of these groups was conducted in cooperation with the Regional Police Directorate of Fier coordinating the police operation with the voluntary destruction of the plants by the residents of the area.*

### **Regional Conference on the Strategy**

These were in general lines the objectives that the strategy set for implementation. As you can see, most of these objectives aimed **at preventing the cultivation** of narcotic plants. It is better to prevent than to convict.<sup>2</sup>

By preventing the cultivation of narcotic plants both the police and the farmers would be winning. Farmers would not be wasting their efforts and money in growing plants that would be destroyed by the police and that would put them in trouble with justice.

Police, on the other hand, by preventing the cultivation of narcotic plants would be also sparing themselves the energy-demanding effort of destroying the narcotic plants in the peak of the summer heat. The police would thus be able to concentrate more efforts in the fight against other crimes.

The Regional Directorate of Police in Fier with the purpose of introducing this strategy to the public organized in cooperation with the Prefect's office on February 7, 2001 a Regional Conference "On the Prevention of Narcotic Plant Cultivation in the Region of Fier" (picture no.1)

The conference was attended by mayors of the communes of the region of Fier, village elders, and representatives from the prosecutor's office, courts, etc. All those that had a role to play in the implementation of this strategy attended the conference. The Conference was attended by representatives of the OSCE, UNDCP, religious

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<sup>2</sup>- C.Baccaria-"Tratatto dei delitti e delle penne"- Milano.

communities, local media, educational department, and civil society activists, all of who later on provided a significant contribution to the successful implementation of the strategic plan.<sup>3</sup>

One of the conclusions that the conferences reached was the need for preventive efforts in the cultivation of cannabis sativa if we wanted to ensure the success of the strategy. The police alone, without the support of the local government and other state structures, and without the cooperation of the local communities and the civil society, could not be successful in the effort to stop the cultivation

### **The results of the implementation of the strategy**

The detailed implementation of the plan<sup>4</sup> for the prevention of narcotics cultivation in the region of Fier produced impressive results within the first months of its implementation. Following intensive efforts, massive cultivation was stopped. There were still small sporadic cases of cultivation with no more than 20 plants, intended for seed production rather than marijuana, in remote plots of land that had no recognized owner, alongside water brooks and drainage canals planted randomly and that were not cared for.

During 2001 there were only 3080 narcotic plants registered and destroyed, a much lower figure than the 51.775 number destroyed during 2000. The result was a 17-fold decrease in the cultivation of cannabis. During that year, there were no cases of cultivation registered in the regions of Lushnjë and Mallakastër.

The number of criminal prosecutions decreased significantly. There were only 17 cases out of 77 during a year earlier. The decrease in criminal prosecution was 3.5 times. It was also noted that most of the cultivators were now women in age that did not have any man in the family capable of working and that had no other source of revenue.<sup>5</sup>

The achievement of these results in the early months of the implementation of the strategy indicated that the "right medicine" for fighting cannabis cultivation had been found. A general impression was established that the implementation of this strategy

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<sup>3</sup> The conference was attended by the Minister of Public Order who expressed high consideration for the strategy and recommended that it be implemented in a national scale.

<sup>4</sup> On January 30, 2001 the Regional Directorate of Police Fier through a press release announced the launching of a new Anti-Cannabis Strategy and called for support of the citizens in implementing it.

<sup>5</sup> Cultivators of narcotic plants when caught by the police would often declare as the owner of the narcotic plants the aged members of the families so as to escape arrest.

during upcoming years would reduce towards zero levels the phenomena of narcotic cultivation in the region of Fier.

The strategy introduced a new method of police work that focused on preventing crime in cooperation with the community and the results achieved received significant support from the public opinion and the media.<sup>6</sup>

This strategic plan implemented by the Fier Regional Police Department, though prepared and implemented without any prior instruction from political structures, was praised by the then Minister of Public Order and the State Police was ordered to apply the same plan in other areas of the country affected by the cultivation of narcotics, with a focus on Shkodra and Vlora in particular.

Straight Magazine, a publication of the Information Department of the Council of Ministers, carried a detailed report on the new anti-cannabis strategy of the Fier Police. In its 2001 issue, detailed information is provided on the regional anti-narcotics conference and the anti-cannabis strategy in general.

With small changes, the anti-cannabis strategy described above can be applicable and effective in our days. The results achieved in the fight against cannabis cultivation indicate that this method is not only the best tactical approach in fighting this phenomenon but also an indicator of the policy that should be followed against cannabis. The commitment to prevent the cultivation of narcotic plants should be considered as a measure of the political will to fight this illegal activity.

**Tirana,2006**

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<sup>6</sup> Korrieri of September 07. 2001, pg. 9, conducts a detailed analyses of the cannabis phenomenon in the country and focuses specifically on the strategy implemented in Fier and its success. Klan Magazine of March 18, 2001 in a report form Cakran village states that it has followed in the field the implementation of the anti-cannabis strategy. Other daily's, like Shekulli and Gazeta Shqiptare, and national TV stations devoted coverage to the strategy.

