

THE SPREAD OF CANNABIS CULTIVATION IN ALBANIA CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By **Xhavit Shala**

There are several factors¹ that have influenced in the spread of this phenomenon in parts of the Albanian territory:

1- Political Factors

The opening up of the country after a long period of isolation, the subsequent political crises accompanied by the absence of the rule of the law in the country created an conducive environment for the cultivation, possession and trafficking of the narcotic plant *cannabis sativa*.

Following the fall of the communist regime, Albania, once the most isolated country in Europe, became a potential ground for the expansion of local and foreign criminal groups. The opening up of the country's borders and the political confusion that followed led to Albania becoming an alternative of choice in the traditional Balkan illegal routes, that once used to cross via Yugoslavia, a route that was interrupted due to the ethnic conflicts there during the first part of '90's².

The 1997 unrest and the humanitarian crises following the conflict in Kosova had their effect in the worsening of the internal security environment in our country.³ According to Italian statistics, during this year only there were 13985.109 kg marijuana confiscated coming from Albania. The quantity of narcotics seized is not more than 5-6% of the quantity that comes into the country, Pier Luigi Vinja, a principle Anti-Mafia Italian authority, said in a statement in September, 1997.⁴

The creation of the so-called "gray areas" has also served as encouragement for the cultivation of narcotic plants. These are areas where the state cannot control the situation and ensure the enforcement of the law. These areas known for the cultivation of cannabis have often enjoyed the tacit support of various political forces. These forces because of electoral reasons did not openly distance themselves from the cultivators of narcotic plants. *Instead of anti-cannabis they opted for Cannabis politics*

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² - "Threats from International Organized Crime" –piece on the Balkans - National Security Council, US, Washington2000.

³ - National Security Strategy of the Republic of Albania. III-23.

⁴ - Interview, AFP-Bari. September 1997.

Examples of this can be found in the region of Fier, in the areas of Cakran, Levan and Ndërnenas before 2000 and more recently in 2004, in the district of Lazarat. The cultivators and the ones ordering the product, by proclaiming themselves as supporters of this or that political force, and by making much fuss, were able to keep the police from intervening until the crop had been reaped. **Cannabis Politics** has often proved beneficiary for the cultivators and the traffickers of cannabis.

2. Social and Economic Factors

The economic and political changes brought about deep changes in the standard of living for many of the Albanian families. While uniformity and a certain level of equality was the norm during communist years, the reforms during the transition period affected the living conditions of many Albanian families. The economic crises, unemployment, poverty, etc, created the premises for people's association in criminal activities.

In many families and this was more so in rural areas, there was a considerable decrease in the level of income. The cost of living, on the other side, increased significantly. Cost of living required much more spending power now. Only during 1994, total family expenses compared to 1993 increased by 30 %. Considering the galloping increase in prices and the fact that inflation during this period was at around 15%, the factual increase in family expenditure was 1.2 times.⁵

The impoverishment of the population in the country, the rise in the levels of unemployment, and failure to reach the growth objectives are some of main factors that can deepen the polarization, and weaken the social cohesion of our people which when exploited by the networks of organized crime can threaten the stability, security and the constitutional order in the country.⁶

All of these factors and a rush for a quick profit lead many families in the rural areas to focus on the cultivation of cannabis. A person living in a village could out of an area of 30 m² make about 1000 \$ per year. This sum is equal to his annual level of revenue.⁷

The uncontrolled movement of the population out of the country put many Albanian individuals with criminal tendencies in touch with powerful criminal organizations abroad. "Large Albanian communities have settled in southern Italy where natural connection have been established with the Calabrian mafia and the Sacra Corona

⁵ - INSTAT- Annual Statistics Book 1991-1999, f. 75.

⁶ - The Military Strategy of the Republic of Albania, pg. 19.

⁷ - Nikolas Miletitch-"Trafficking and crimes in the Balkans", pg. 101- Dritëro Publishing House"-Tirana 2000

Unita⁸. The Albanian Diaspora provides a perfect cover for the illegal penetration of group members into the EU countries and the US.⁹

High level of unemployment in rural areas, among the young and able bodies in particular, has caused people to look for new routes of making money, often these being illegal ones. If measures to provide jobs for people are not taken, criminality cannot be prevented.¹⁰ At the end of 1993, the level of employment decreased by 18% compared to 1989. As a result of the changes, during the period of 1989-1993, 34% of women working and 23 % of the men lost their jobs. At the end of 1999, the level of employment was 9 % lower compared to the end of 1994.¹¹

The fall in agricultural investments and the lack of policies that encouraged production in agriculture lead to a situation where many people living in rural areas would find their "salvation" in the cultivation of narcotic plants.

A low educational level in some areas of the country has also had an impact in the spread of this phenomenon. If we study the education of the narcotic plants cultivators in the region of Fier for year 2000 we note that 8 % of them have no level of education, 20 % have an elementary education, and 72 % have an eighth grade education.¹²

3. The Geo-strategic factors

The fitting geographic position of Albania at the doorsteps of the west enabled the criminal elements, at first, and later on the groups of Albanian organized crime to work together with Italian organized crime organizations in narcotic trafficking in particular. The Albanian groups provided couriers and sea routes for the smuggling of narcotics across the Adriatic.

This geographic position made Albanian criminal groups an important segment in the Balkan networks of narcotic trafficking. Some of the mafia clans in the Balkans and in Albania have had a decades-long traditional links with La Cosa Nostra. The establishment and the strengthening of the bilateral links enabled the Albanian narcotic

⁸ - Swecker, Chris FBI Assistant Director, Department for the investigation of organized crime; "Albanian Mafia a- a Paramilitary Structure"- CNN Interview.

⁹ - Klaus Ehrenfried Schmidt- European Commission Police Assistance to Albania-Tirana, September 19, 2002.

¹⁰ - Prof. Dr. Ismet Elezi-"Criminality as a social phenomenon, causes and ways of preventing it"- Scientific Bulletin "Criminality, Public Order and Policing" no.2, year 2001, pg. 15.

¹¹ - INSTAT- Annual Statistics Book 1991-1999, f. 92

¹² - Regional Anti-Narcotics, Fier, 2000.

trafficking elements to appropriate the skills of conducting this criminal activity and the ability to evade police efforts to arrest them.¹³

Cannabis plants require a warm climate to grow. The climacteric conditions from Gjirokastra to Shkodra provide are very favorable for the cultivation of this plant.

Particular areas in the various districts in our country have microclimatic conditions that are even more favorable for the cultivation of cannabis. The hills of Cakran, Vreshtaz, and Gorishovës, are the areas with the highest levels of production in the district of Fier. Thanks to characteristics in the soil and the climate, the high quality cannabis produced in this area grew in high demand in the other side of the Adriatic. The high demand not only kept alive the cultivation of cannabis in Albania but also contributed to an increase in the plots of land planted with narcotic plants.¹⁴

The general situation in the Balkans following the eruption of the war in Yugoslavia and the shifting of the so-called "Balkans drug-route" increased the demand for narcotics coming from Albania, which lead to an increase in the cultivation and trafficking of narcotic plants and of other type of narcotics.

Concluding this argument, we could say that the geographic position of Albania, the difficult economic and social conditions, the level of unemployment, poverty, loss of hope, and poor educational levels can serve as a precondition for our region, and our country in particular, to become a source and a favorable logistics base for traffickers¹⁵ in general, and for "cannabis managers " in particular.

4. -Legal problems

The absence of legislation for the prevention and fight against narcotics in the first years when Albanian opened up to the west lead to a swift expansion of the narcotics cultivation in Albania.

The cultivation of narcotic plants first began in 1993 but the Criminal Code qualified it a criminal offence only by 1995.¹⁶ Even though the Penal Code provides for

¹³ -W.K Williams- "FBI, intensifying the fight against Albanian crime clans in the US". VOA Interview , Septemebr 8, 2004.

¹⁴ - "Klan" Magazine, March 18, 2001, pg. 8, Ferdinand Dervishi, "A journey to the drug producing region", subtitled "A game of billions risking closure, Testimonies from local residents, Police Plan and ten year figures", says: "Do you know that in one of the universities in Rome you can find an inscription that says "Long live the Cakran Cannabis" and in the Netherlands sale is guaranteed for product that comes from this area ...".

¹⁵ - National Security Strategy of the Republic of Albania, paragraph IV - 29.5.

¹⁶ Law no. 7895, date 27.1.1995 "Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania", article 284 on cultivation narcotic plants states: "Creation by the persons, who as an outcome of their duties have the administration of such substances, of the facilities to take or use narcotics in contravention with the relevant legal dispositions is punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment".

the cultivators of narcotic plants a punishment of up to ten years in prison, just a few months after this measure was approved, the law no. 7975, dated 26.7.1995, "On Narcotic plants and Psychotropic Substances"¹⁷ called on the villagers themselves to destroy the narcotic crops that they had planted, treating this act as a criminal contravention.

It was only after ten years had passed, that law no. 8750, dated 26.3.2001, "For the Prevention and Fight against Trafficking of Narcotic and Psychotropic substances" provides for the establishment of the National Committee for the Coordination of the Fight against Narcotics. It is the task of this Committee to define the general policies for the prevention and the fight against the illegal production or distribution of narcotic and psychotropic substances.

However, even after the provisions in the Penal Code no proper work to sensitize the public in general and the cultivating community in particular was done.

In 2001, when police forces in the course of an operation arrested a member of family from Cakran of Fier for cultivation of narcotic plants, an elderly lady in a house was reported to have told to the police: "We did not know that one would go to prison for planting such grass. If you would have told us we wouldn't have planted it."

The lack of proper legislation coupled with poor enforcement of the sanctions in place has contributed to the increase in the cultivation of narcotic plants. During the course of the years, very few people have been arrested on charges of cultivating narcotic plants. Police would limit themselves to destroying the narcotic plants in the plots of land where it was cultivated. The absence of the enforcement of sanctions stipulated by the Penal Code was a factor that fostered the growth in the cultivation of narcotic plants.

5. Weaknesses in Police Performance, Corruption

Weaknesses in the level of preparation of the **police and other law enforcement structures** to face the negative phenomena that would accompany the opening of the borders and the free movement of people contributed to an inefficient fight of this activity. Police and other law enforcement personnel coming from an experience under the communist system had come across this activity only in books. .

¹⁷ -Law no. 7975 of July 26, 1995, "On Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances" article nine says: "The cultivation of hashish (*Papaver somniferum*) in Albania for the purpose of producing opium is prohibited; the cultivation of coca plants (*Erythroxylon coca*) for the purpose of producing haloids and aromatic substances is prohibited; the cultivation of Indian hemp (***Cannabis sativa var. indica***) for the purpose of producing cannabis or cannabis resin or for industrial purposes for the production of fibres and seeds is prohibited." Article 10 says: "The landowner or the one using the land or any other one employed by them are obliged to destroy plants mentioned in article 9 when found growing spontaneously in their plots of uncultivated land or that have been illegally cultivated by their predecessors."

The high level of **corruption** among police, prosecutor and judicial ranks served as stimulating factors for the cultivation and trafficking of narcotic plants. Trafficker did not hesitate to share part of the proceeds from this activity with their connections within the police, prosecutor and court personnel.¹⁸

6. Criminal Factors

The progressive increase in the interest of foreign criminal organization to expand their activity in Albania and the Balkans with the intention of finding resources, routes and markets for narcotics served as another impetus for the cultivation and trafficking of narcotic plants and other types of drugs in our country.

A significant interest was present among Italian criminal groups, of the region of Puglia in particular, that attempted to and were able to establish their presence in Albania. They consistently used Albania and its shore in particular as an area to conduct narcotic, weapons trafficking and other smuggling activities across the Adriatic to Italy.

According to the US National Security Council Report on "The threats from International Organized Crime" "Criminal Syndicates exert a powerful presence in the port cities of Vlora and Durres and in other large cities. By controlling the sea routes of the Adriatic and the illegal routes in the Balkans, the Albanian criminal groups have control over much of the black market of weapons, narcotics and other illicit goods. The Albanian criminal groups conduct **cultivation of marijuana over large parts of the territory of the country** producing it for distribution inside the country and the European market, to Italy and Greece in particular.¹⁹ In cooperation with the Greeks, they (Albanian criminal groups) conduct their illegal activity mainly in the narcotics trafficking (cannabis, heroine) from Albanian to Greece.²⁰

According to Western police data, Albanian criminals, working jointly with other regional criminal organizations and Italian criminal groups, have taken on to play a very active role in the trafficking of drugs, weapons and foreign clandestine and women across the region. Albanian criminal groups have made use of their contacts with foreign criminal organizations and a large number of compatriots to expand their activity in the EU countries. Albanian organized crime is considered as a growing threat to EU member countries.²¹

II.- Dynamics of Narcotic Plants Cultivation in our Country

¹⁸ - Xhavit Shala- "Characteristics of women trafficked for prostitution purposes in the region of Fier"- published on "Criminality, Public Order and Policing" Magazine, No.5, year 2002, pg. 44

¹⁹ - "Threats from International Organized Crime" - section on the Balkans - "US National Security Council Report" - Washington 2000.

²⁰ - Europol-2004 European Union Organized Crime Report - December 2004, f. 20.

²¹ - Europol-2004 European Union Organized Crime Report - December 2004, f. 8.

For a look on the dynamics of the cultivation of cannabis plants in our country we will take a case study on the cultivation of narcotic plants in the region of Fier and country wide in between two time periods: a. - Narcotic Plant Cultivation, 1990-2000, b. - Narcotic Plants Cultivation, 2001-2004.

II.a. Cultivation of Narcotic Plants 1993-2000

According to data available, the cultivation of *Cannabis sativa* was first introduced to the region of Fier in the 1990's. Police registered the first case of cannabis cultivation in 1993 in the Commune of Bishan. After that, other cases have been registered in the villages of Mbrostar, Frakull, and Ndërnenas, etc.²²

At almost the same time, we see signs of cultivation in other areas of the country. During this year, there were registered 14 cases of narcotics plants cultivation and 14 individuals were penalized.²³

During 1994 the number of land plots cultivated increased around the country. 46 cases of cultivation have been registered during this year followed by prosecution of 46 individuals.

During 1995 this phenomenon spread to 24 districts of the country. 110 cases of cultivation were registered and 167.417 cannabis plants were destroyed all over the country.

During this year the cultivation of *Cannabis sativa* in the region of Fier grew to alarming proportions spreading almost to every village. A considerable part of the village population became involved in this activity. One would find cannabis cultivated in the home garden of the village elder, of the teacher, regular village man, in the home of the mayor or of the police inspector himself.

During 1996 the cultivation of narcotic plants spread to 30 districts of the country and 291 villages. There are 69 cases registered and 69 individuals prosecuted and the number of plants destroyed doubled to 346.968 plants.

During 1997, statistics show that the cultivation occurred in only four districts. There have been 13 cases registered, 13 persons prosecuted and 807 plants destroyed. The turmoil in the country and the shock that the public order suffered, greatly worsened the situation. The data available for this year is not complete. There is no information available on the number of persons implicated and plants destroyed for the region of Fier.

During 1998, with the establishment of the specialized structure, the Central Service for the Fight against Narcotics, with regional offices in the country, the results of the campaign against narcotic plants improved. During this year, the cultivation was

²² - Anti-Narcotics Regional Office, Fier, year 2000

²³ - Central Anti-Narcotics Service, Criminal Police Directorate, year 2000.

present in 10 districts and 54 villages. There were 325 cases of cultivation reported and 314 persons prosecuted. A total of 58.577 plants of cannabis were destroyed and 2307.156 kg of marijuana seized.

After 1998, we find statistical data in the Police Directorate of Fier on the number of plants destroyed and of the persons implicated in this illegal activity.

In the region of Fier during this year there were only **21.586** plants destroyed in 110 plots of land out of a number of 58.577 plants destroyed countrywide. In percentage terms, the number of plants destroyed in this region amounted to 36.8 % of the total quantity destroyed in the country that year.

During 1998 in Fier there were 123 criminal offences related to narcotics that were registered. Out of the total, 113 offences were related to narcotic plants cultivation and 10 cases for possession of narcotic plants.

There were 118 persons implicated with this activity, out of whom nine were prosecuted while in detention. Out of a total of 2307 kg of marijuana seized in the country this year, 328 kg were seized in Fier, 14 % of the total quantity.

There were two narcotic plant labs seized in Fier out of total of four countrywide. During this year, the cultivation was more dominant in the Communes of Portëz, Levan and Frakull.

During 1999 the phenomenon of narcotics cultivation was present in 11 districts and 24 villages. There were 219 cases of cultivation reported and 218 persons prosecuted. A total of 91.267 plants were destroyed.

In the region of Fier alone during this year there were 134 narcotic related criminal offences registered, with a number of 136 individuals implicated, 116 of whom were involved in narcotics cultivation. There were 68.641 plants destroyed out of a country wide 91.267 plants destroyed; that is 75% of the total quantity destroyed in the country that year.

Areas most affected were Sulaj, Peshtan, Buzmadh, Çukas, and Golem. During 1999 operations against narcotics plants spread to the districts of Lushnje and Mallakaster of the Fier Region.

Police efforts in identifying and targeting marijuana traffickers intensified. As a result of this focus, there were 867 kg marijuana seized out of a total of 4395 kg seized countrywide. As indicated, the quantity of the marijuana seized in the region of Fier alone constituted 20% of all the quantity seized in the country. There were also two narcotic plants labs seized, out of a total of five seized in the country that year. Country wide, 60 % of the individuals prosecuted this year for offences related to narcotics activity were from the region of Fier.

During 2000 criminal offences related to narcotics cultivation were registered in 13 districts and 41 villages. Police identified 374 cases of cultivation. Countrywide there were 256.398 plants destroyed.

In the region of Fier alone there were 93 narcotic related criminal cases reported with 77 cases related to narcotic plants cultivation. In this region there were 52.905 plants destroyed out of a total of 256.398 plants destroyed country wide, comprising 20,6% of the total quantity.

There were 98 individuals implicated in this activity. There were 1172.68 kg of marijuana seized in the region of a total of 6604.2 kg seized in the country (percentage figure 18%).

Out of a total of six narcotic plant labs, two were seized in Fier. 19 kg of cannabis seeds were also seized.

It is worth noting that the narcotic cultivation during 2000 was present mainly in narrow strips of territory that had not witnessed any police action in the past.

In the district of Lushnja the cultivation was minimal. In the district Mallakstara cultivation was present only in the Commune of Kute. Cakran and Rruzhdie remained areas of serious concern, with cultivation reaching massive proportions.

II.a.1. Following is a presentation of the age groups and education of cultivators in the country during 2000²⁴.

Age Groups:

- Age 18-26 years - two individuals - 0,5% of the total number.
- Age 27-35 years - 46 individuals - 12,3% of the total number.
- Age 36-45 years - 136 individuals - 36,3% of the total number.
- Age 45- and up - 190 individuals - 50,8% of the total number.

Education Level:

- 79 individuals - 21,1% - fourth grade education.
- 250 individuals - 66,8% - eighth grade education.
- 43 individuals - 11,4% - high school education.
- 2 individuals - 0,5% - college graduates.

II.a.2. Graph 1 Dynamics of narcotic plant cultivation, 1990-2000

The extent of cannabis cultivation till year 2000, cases registered, persons prosecuted and number of plants destroyed:²⁵

²⁴ - Central Service for the Fight Against Narcotics, year 2000.

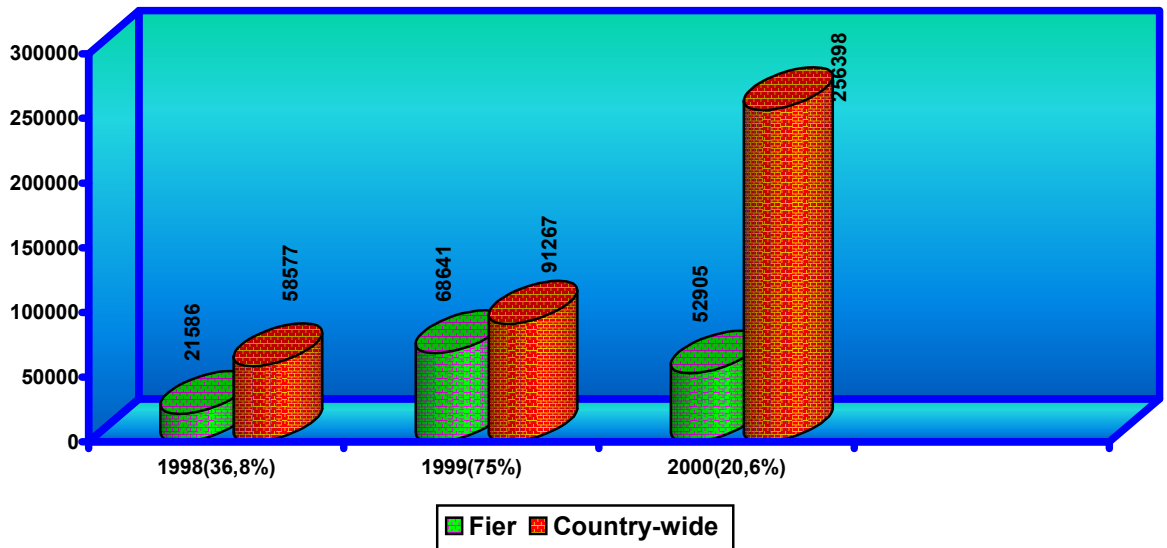
²⁵ - Central Directorate, Criminal Police, MOPO, year 2000

Table no. 1

Year	Districts affected	Cases Reported	Plants Destroyed	Individuals Prosecuted
1993	0	14	0	14
1994	0	46	0	46
1995	24	110	167417	110
1996	30	69	346968	69
1997	4	13	807	13
1998	10	325	58577	314
1999	11	219	91267	218
2000	13	374	256398	374

Graphic presentation of the number of plants destroyed in the region of Fier compared to those destroyed across the country²⁶

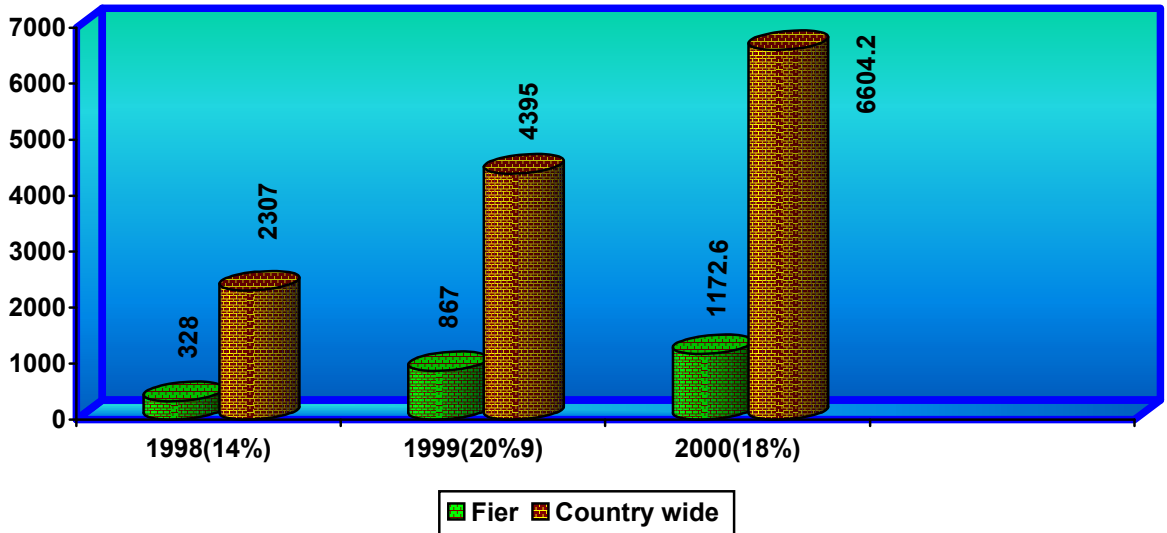
Chart no. 1



Graphic presentation of the comparison between the quantities of Marijuana seized in the country with that seized in the region of Fier only.

²⁶ - Graphic Presentation by the author

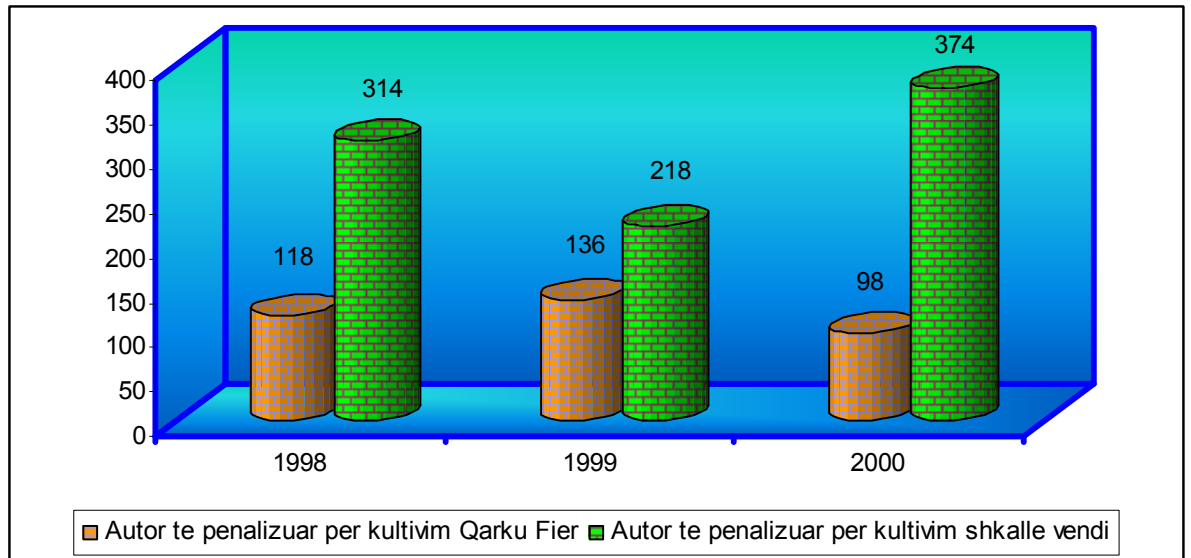
Chart no. 2



Graphic presentation of the number of individuals' prosecuted for cannabis cultivation across the country compared to those prosecuted in the Region of Fier 3

Graph Nr.3

Brown: Individuals prosecuted in the Region of Fier; Green: Individuals prosecuted across the country.



If we have a look at the dynamics of narcotics cultivation each year, the districts affected, individuals prosecuted, quantity of narcotics seized in the Region of Fier and all over the country (See Table 1 and Graphs 1, 2, 3) we would reach the following conclusions:

1. - In 1993, we have the first cases of cannabis cultivation and of persons prosecuted for this criminal offence.

2. - In 1996, cannabis cultivation reached climax proportions spreading to 30 districts in the country. The number of cases reported during this year is smaller while the number of plants destroyed is higher. We note a consolidation in the operation of the recidivist cultivators and of the networks of cannabis trafficking in Albania.

3. - During 1997 as a result of the powerlessness of the anti-crime structures, the number of plants destroyed and of the individuals prosecuted is the lowest of all years studied. During this year there are no accurate data to report on the extent of the narcotics cultivation in the country.

4. - During 1998-2000 the extent of the cultivation in the number of districts has been more limited. (10-13), while the number of cases reported, of persons prosecuted and of plants destroyed has increased.

5. - The number of plants destroyed in the country and of the quantity of marijuana seized has increased significantly during 1998-2000. This is an indication of the increase in the police capacity but also is an indication of the large extent of the phenomenon of *cannabis sativa* cultivation.

6. - During 1998-2000, narcotics cultivation was a very serious problem in the territory of the region of Fier. The quantity of plants destroyed in this region comprises from 20,6% to 75% of the total quantity of plants destroyed in the country, while the quantity of the marijuana seized in the region was 14-20% of the quantity seized across the country.

7. - During 2000, the number of individuals prosecuted across the country on narcotic cultivation charges when compared to 1999 increased by 58 %. During 1998-2000, the number of individuals prosecuted in the region of Fier reached 26 % to 62 % of the total number of those penalized for this criminal offence across the country.

8. - During the year 2000, cultivators with elementary and eighth grade education comprised 87,9% of the total number of individuals prosecuted for this criminal offence. The number of those above 35 years old was 87,1% of the total number of perpetrators. This attests the conclusion that the low level of education has had an impact in mass extent of the narcotic plants cultivation.

II.a.3. Albanian Marijuana seized by Italian Police, 1990 - 2000

In order to have a more complete understanding of the cultivation of narcotic plants in our country we will analyze the dynamics in the sequestration of Albanian marijuana by the Italian police.

According to the statistics of the DSCA (Anti-Narcotics Service of the Italian Police)²⁷, the first quantities of marijuana seized were in 1996. During this year there were 2368.286 kg of marijuana and 75.987 kg of hashish seized.

During 1997, there were 13985.109 kg of marijuana seized.

During 1998, there were 11.079 kg of marijuana seized and 86 kg of hashish.

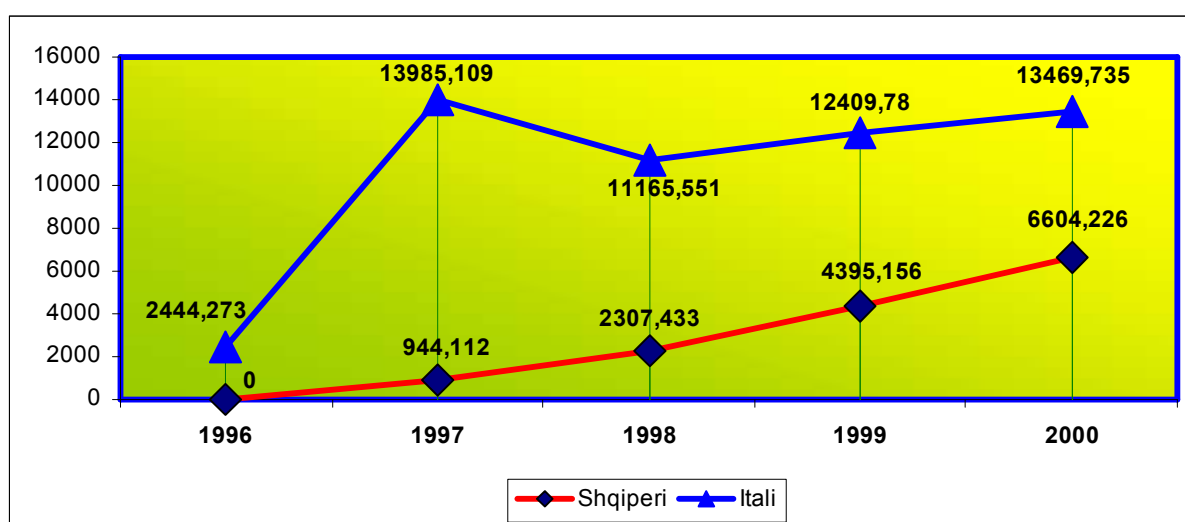
During 1998 there were 11369 kg of marijuana and 1039,866 kg hashish seized.

During 2000 Italian police seized 12 696.157 kg of marijuana and 773 578 kg of hashish.

II.a.4. Graph 2: Analyses of the narcotic cultivation dynamics in view of the sequestration of Albanian marijuana by Italian Police

Graphic presentation of the Albanian originated marijuana and hashish quantities seized in Italy compared to those seized in Albania²⁸:

Graph no. 4



²⁷ - Italian Police Anti Narcotics Service, material found in official web page,

²⁸ - Graphic presentation of statistics by the author of the study.

If we compare the quantities of marijuana and hashish seized in Italy with the ones seized in Albania we would have Chart 4. An analysis of this Chart would lead us to the following conclusions.

1- the first quantities of cannabis products seized in Italy were in 1996. The quantity seized was 2444,273 kg, while not a single kg was seized in Albania during this year. During 1993-1996 cannabis was mainly trafficked to Greece from where the seed had come to Albania.

2. - The biggest quantity of cannabis seized in Italy in the course of these years was during 1997. This year also marks the lowest quantity seized in Albania after 1996. The state during 1997 had collapsed. This is an indicator of the importance of the political factors in the levels of narcotics cultivation.

3. - Statistics show that the quantity of narcotics seized in Italy and Albania from 1996 until 2000 has continually increased. It is an indicator that shows that the cultivation of narcotic plants in Albanian during these years has been a growing and a lucrative business.

4. - The quantity of cannabis seized in Italy is several times higher than the quantity seized in Albania. It shows that there is a growing demand in the Italian market for the marijuana coming from Albania and it also shows the lack of proper attention to the fight against cannabis cultivation by the Albanian authorities. The quantity of cannabis seized in Italy during 1996 was 2444 times higher than the one seized in Albanian. During 1997 the quantity seized was 14,8 times higher than the one seized in Albania. During 1998 it was 4.8 times higher; in 1999, 2.8 times higher; while in 2000, the quantity of cannabis seized in Italy was twice that seized in Albania.

5. - From year to year, the rapport between the quantities seized in Italy and those seized in Albanian has been decreasing. It's an indicator that shows that the reaction of the Albanian police towards the cannabis phenomena has been growing each year

II.a.5.Factor that contributed to the massive rate of cannabis cultivation in the region of Fier

The results of the analyses of this phenomenon in the region of Fier and beyond show that during 1993-2000, the massive cultivation of narcotics plants was present in these areas due to the following specific causes:

-The Geographic position of the area

These areas are mainly found along the path of Vjosa River, in difficult terrain and away from inhabited centers. As a result, these areas escape police control and require multiple means and personnel to identify and destroy the cultivated plots of land.

Cultivators in these areas find it easier to sell the produce. By making use of the Vjosa River, they gain easy access to Vlora and from there to Italy.²⁹

-Favorable microclimate

Due to the geographic position these areas are located in, favorable climate boosts the cultivation of narcotic plants of good quality that is in high demand from the traffickers³⁰. The cultivation is also stimulated by the short maturity cycle of the plants (cannabis is planted in early March and is ready to be trafficked in August, a month very favorable for the maritime transportation of the product).

- Experience gained from the repeated cultivation of cannabis

The cultivation of cannabis for several years and the high productivity, about 0.5-1.5 kg of narcotic per plant, coupled by a attractive local sales price of around 1000 - 2000 lekë per kg, greatly increases the attraction to cultivate in these areas.

- Unemployment

High rate of unemployment, difficult economic conditions would lead the local population towards the cultivation of narcotic plants. Studies show that for the most part cultivators are unemployed.

- Low level of education

The low education and cultural level in these areas have contributed to the spread of this phenomenon in these areas. If we have a look at the level of education of the narcotic cultivators in the region of Fier, we will see that 8 % have no education, 20% have fourth grade education, and 72 % have an eighth grade education.³¹

II.a.6.Characteristics of the Fight against Narcotic Plants during 1993-2000

From a study of the cannabis cultivation and the efforts made to fight it during 1993-2000, we arrive to the following conclusions:

1. The fight against cannabis cultivation, though mounting through the years, has been limited only on the destruction of the cannabis plants before or at the period of maturation and on efforts to identify and target marijuana traffickers. Nothing has been done to prevent cannabis cultivation.³²

²⁹ - Cannabis produced in the villages of Vreshtaz, Cakran, Gorishovë was transported via the village of Hambar across the Vjosa river and then by speed boats it was "exported" to Italy.

³⁰ - Cannabis produced in Cakran was in high demand due to the high percentage of narcotic substance (13-16 %) found in the grown plants.

³¹ - Regional Office for the Fight against Narcotic, Fier, 2000.

2. There is a complete lack of information in the communities on the consequences and penalties for narcotics cultivation. In some areas they referred to cannabis as "grass" and were not aware that they could go to prison for cultivating it.

These perceptions have been supported also by court decisions. In the region of Fier, out of 207 individuals sentenced during 1998-2000, 95% of them were sentenced on parole³³. That is, the "penal policy" of the courts did not lead to reduction of narcotic plant cultivation but, quite on the contrary, it encouraged it.

3. Until 2000, only the police structures were involved in the fight against this phenomenon. And police on its part has produced results. What has been completely missing is the cooperation between the police and the local government structures. These structures have never considered the fight against narcotic cultivation as their responsibility too.

4. Narcotics cultivation by the residents in these areas is generally a spontaneous activity. It takes place in small plots of land near the homes with a number of plants varying from 10 to 2000 plants. Cultivators plant without having any guarantees for sale and look for occasional buyers.

From what was stated above, we reach the conclusion that the fight against this illegal activity was not met by an organized resistance on the part of the cultivator, a resistance that could have threatened the order and public security.

II.a.7.The consequences of narcotics cultivation on the community and the security of people

The massive cultivation of narcotic plants has brought about serious consequences for the community and the security of the citizens. Following are some of these consequences:

-It leads to an increase in criminality

Narcotics cultivation brings about a significant increase of criminality in the country. It encourages the creation of criminal groups active in processing and trafficking of narcotic plants. Conflicts between criminal groups involved in this activity are often accompanied by murders leading to blood feuds between individuals and clans. The disproportion existing between the insufficient instruments for investigating, fighting and

³² - In 1999, the then Minister of Public Order, Spartak Poçi, called for new methods to be employed in the fight against the cannabis phenomenon because the method of engaging the police in a harvest like campaign was inefficient.

³³ - Regional Office for the Fight Against Narcotics, Fier, released on February 7, 2001 in the course of the Regional Conference "For the Prevention of the Cultivation of Narcotic Plants"

punishing crime presents a real threat for the present and the future of the Republic of Albania.³⁴

- Delays the country's integration

The cultivation of narcotic plants conveys a very negative image about Albania to Europe and delays the integration of our country into the Euro-Atlantic structures. We can only imagine the impressions that the images of massive cannabis cultivation in large areas of Albania create in a European politician whose vote is sought for Albania's accession into Europe.

- Penalizes a large number of people

In areas with massive narcotics cultivation, the number of persons prosecuted has continually increased. Until 2000, narcotics cultivators identified and arrested by the police were prosecuted on bail and have been sentenced on parole. In areas with a "tradition" in narcotics cultivation every family has had a person prosecuted and sentenced.

A good part of the Albanians in prisons abroad have been sentenced on charges of narcotics trafficking. All the 152 inmates transferred to Albania from Greek prisons were sentenced on charges of marijuana trafficking from Albanian to Greece mainly after 1996³⁵.

If there were no narcotics cultivation there would not be any Albanians prosecuted and sentenced in the country or in other countries on charges related to cultivation and narcotic trafficking at least.

- It leads to an increase in the number of narcotic users

Generally speaking, in areas where cannabis is cultivated there is greater number of cannabis users mostly among the young. The easy access to marijuana leads to an increase of the number of users countrywide. This has led to a situation where we have many individuals suffering from Norco - dependence and cases when young people that are users have died. What we note also is that in many cases the users move from this type of narcotic to more heavy ones like Heroine, etc. Without doubt, these effects take a serious toll on the community and the security situation.

-The loss of interest on the part of the youth to focus on legal profit-making activities

The youth's desire to gain quick profit by growing narcotic plants or by trafficking narcotics not only leads to a growing incrimination on their part but it also contributes to them losing interest for legitimate economic activities. Those young individuals

³⁴ - National Security Strategy of the Republic of Albania, IV-28.1

³⁵ - General Directorate of Prisons

implicated in narcotics cultivation set a negative role model for their age group and other citizens causing a spread of this negative phenomenon in the society at large.

- Negative impact on agricultural development

During "the golden years" of the massive narcotics cultivation in, regions traditionally well-known for their agricultural products quit cultivating those plants and became cannabis farmer thinking that by cultivating this plant they would make more money in a shorter time. During these years, in the fields of Cakran and of the villages on both sides of river Vjosa one would see more cannabis than wheat grown.³⁶

II.b. Cultivation of narcotic plants, 2001 - 2004

What we presented so far were the dynamics of the cannabis cultivation in the Region of Fier and in the country until year 2000. We had a look at the factors that contributed to and permitted the cultivation of such plants, the evolution and elements of this phenomenon during the years, the threats that this present to the community, the forms and methods that the police have employed against this illegal activity and the reasons why cultivation continues but is spreading into areas that had not seen cultivation before.

II.b.1. The need for an anti-cannabis strategy

The analyses of the cannabis cultivation indicates that cannabis cultivation if not met with an uncompromising action presents a serious threat to security of Albania

In order for the fight against cannabis cultivation to be effective, a new anti-cannabis strategy should be put in place and implemented, a strategy that will aim first of all to prevent the cultivation of narcotic plants and also focus on the continued fight against this phenomenon in cooperation with the local communities, local government structures, educational institutions and non governmental organizations.

This strategic plan implemented by the Fier Regional Police Department, presented in chapter one of this book "BETWEEN ANTICANNABIS AND CANNABIS POLITICS", though prepared and implemented without any prior instruction from political structures, was praised by the then Minister of Public Order and the General Directorate of 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.

II.b.2. The Change in the situation after the year 2000

³⁶ - Nikolas Miletitch- "Trafficking and Crimes in the Balkans", pg. 101- "Dritero" publishing house-Tirana 2000.

The anti-cannabis strategy however, was not implemented in these two regions during the 2001-2002 period. This is demonstrated in the figures presented in **Table no. 2 and Chart 5**, where a comparison is made between the region of Fier, Vlora and Shkodra.

A comparison of the extent of the cultivation in various districts, and of the number of cases registered and of persons prosecuted, is presented in **Table 3**.

Table 4 presents a comparison between the quantities of cannabis seized in Albania and Italy (cannabis that originated from Albania)

Table Nr.2
Number of plants registered and destroyed in the regions Fier, Vlorë and Shkodër.

Year	FIER Region		QARKU VLORE		QARKU SHKODER	
	Cases	Plants destroyed	Cases	Plants destroyed	Cases	Plants destroyed
1998	113	21586	140	28130	12	6000
1999	116	68641	59	385	10	3543
2000	77	52905	223	162994	33	30141
2001	19	3080	86	258388	14	19245
2002	20	7061	63	369846	26	103199
2003	1	25	12	8410	79	146160
2004	16	1099	98	42581	17	17568

Chart no. 5

Graphic presentation of cannabis cultivation in the regions Fier, Vlorë and Shkodër from 1998-2004

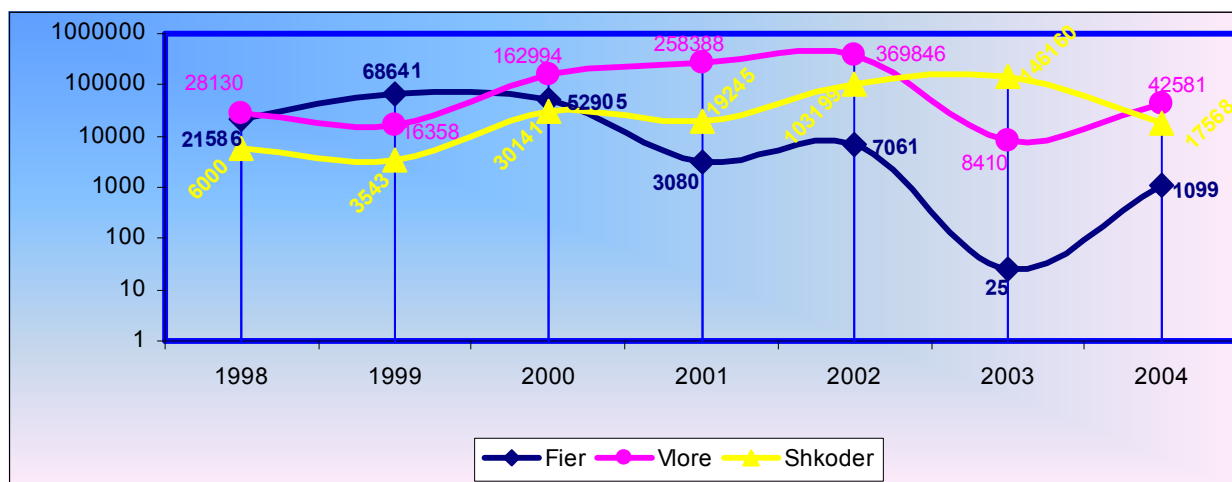


Table 3

Extent of the cultivation, cases registered, plants destroyed and persons persecuted

Year	Number of Districts affected	Cases Registered	Plants Destroyed	Persons Prosecuted
1993	0	14	0	14
1994	0	46	0	46
1995	24	110	167417	110
1996	30	69	346968	69
1997	4	13	807	13
1998	10	325	58577	314
1999	11	219	91267	218
2000	13	374	256398	374
2001	8	112	276803	112
2002	6	138	484958	56
2003	5	111	168298	6
First 6-months-2004	8	116	45685	59

Table 4

Quantities of cannabis seized in Albania and Italy

Years	Quantity seized in Albania Cannabis-marijuana- hashish (Kg)	Quantity seized in Italy Cannabis-marijuana- hashish (Kg)
1993		
1994		
1995		
1996		2444,273
1997	944,112	13985,109
1998	2307,433	11165,551
1999	4395,156	12409,78
2000	6604,226	13469,735
2001	6915,79	13658,705
2002	1371,7	5704,54
2003	7760,17	
First 6- months-2004	1680,241	

II.b.3.Chart 3, Analyses of the fight against cannabis after year 2000

From an analysis of Table no.2, No.3, No.4 and Chart no. 5 we reach the following conclusions

1.-The cultivation of narcotic plants during 1998-1999 in the region of Fier was much higher than cultivation in the regions of Vlorë dhe Shkodër.

2.- The cultivation of narcotics plants in the region of Vlora in 2000 increased by 423 times compared to a year earlier. After the region of Vlora, Fier is in the second place and then is Shkodra with an increase in the cultivation of cannabis during this year by 8.5 times.

3.- During 2001, the year the anti-cannabis strategy was first implemented, in the region of Fier we note a decrease in the level of cultivation by 17 times. In the region of Vlorë there was an increase of narcotics cultivation by 1.6 times. While in the region of Shkodra, we notice a level of cultivation 5.8 times higher than in Fier.

This indicates that in the region of Fier, the place where the anti-cannabis strategy was first implemented, surprising results were achieved in the prevention of the cultivation while at the same time we note a very significant increase in cultivation levels in the two other regions.

Across the country the number of cannabis plants registered and destroyed during 2001 is higher than in 2000, while the number of districts with cultivation, the number of cases registered and number of persons prosecuted is lower. The quantities of cannabis products seized in Albania and Italy also is higher than a year earlier.

4.- A year later, in 2002, the cultivation of cannabis in the region of Vlora was 52 times higher than in the region Fier. Compared to a year earlier, the cultivation of cannabis in Vlora grew by 70 %.

The cultivation of cannabis in the region of Shkodra as well was 14.6 times higher than in the region of Fier. Cultivation in the region compared to a year earlier grew by 5.3 times.

The main argument for the increase in the levels of cultivation in the regions of Vlorë and Shkodër is the non-implementation of the same anti-cannabis strategy in these areas. This strategy was not properly understood by these regions and there were no cooperation links established with the community and local government structures to prevent the cultivation. The focus of police work was only the destruction of plants and as a consequence the cultivation instead of decreasing continued to expand.

At the country's level, during 2002 compared to 2001, we again notice a decrease in the number of districts with cultivation of narcotic plants. Statistics show an increase by 20 % of cultivation cases registered and an increase by 57 % of the number of plants destroyed. Surprisingly enough, the number of persons prosecuted had decreased by twofold compared to a year earlier.

This was due to the mistaken policy of impunity followed against the cultivators rather than a failure to identify the cultivators. With the intention of not increasing the registered levels of criminality, senior police officials would verbally instruct police structures in the field against taking measures to punish the cultivators. This is clearly demonstrated by the statistics listed. During 2001, there are 112 cases of narcotics cultivation registered in the country with 112 individuals prosecuted. During 2002, there are 138 cases registered and only 56 individuals prosecuted on these charges. The enforcement of just sentences based on law by the courts, punishes the culprits and serves as a deterrent for others³⁷.

During this year the quantity of cannabis products seized in Albania has doubled while the quantity seized in Italy (that originated from Albania) has been reduced in half. Year 2002 marks the highest level in the number of plants registered and destroyed and of cannabis products seized by the police.

³⁷ - Prof.Dr. Skënder Kaçubi- "The Protection of the right to life in the Penal Code and the phenomenon of blood feuds" delivered at the National Conference "The right to life, a universal right"- December 11,12, 2002.

5. - During 2003, efforts to implement the anti-cannabis strategy were greater and better coordinated. A series of conferences were organized aimed at sensitizing the public, and greater preventive actions were taken in cooperation with local government structures. And the effort was followed by results.

The year 2003 marks the beginning of the downturn in the levels of cannabis cultivation in Albania. There were 168.298 cannabis plants registered and destroyed, that is 2.8 times less than in 2002. The number of cultivation cases registered has also decreased by 20 %. The number of persons prosecuted during this year is 18 times lower than the number of cultivation cases. It is clear that during this year also the same policy of not prosecuting the cultivators was followed.

During this year in Shkodra we notice again an increase in the levels of cultivation. The number of plants registered and destroyed in the region comprises 87% of the total number of plants destroyed countrywide. It is clear that no efforts were made to implement this new strategy in this region and that no work was done to prevent the cultivation of narcotic plants.

6. - During 2004 shows that the anti-cannabis strategy was implemented in the region of Shkodra as well. This year the number of plants cultivated decreased by eight times. At the national level, during the first six months of the year we have only five more cases of cultivation than in 2003 and there were 45684 plants registered and destroyed, that is 3.6 times less than a year earlier.

II.b.4.The results of the Strategy

The anti-cannabis strategy, first implemented in the region of Fier, was successful across the country with the following results. The phenomenon of massive cannabis cultivation disappeared. For the first time the fight against this criminal phenomena was waged in cooperation with local government structures and civil society organizations. An understating was established that wherever cooperation with the community exists, the results in the fight against crime are significantly improved. This strategy was implemented in partnership and cooperation with the community that benefited from the public service that the Police force provides.

Engaging the community is a necessary element for an effective police performance. Police alone can not fulfill the demands that the laws and the public security call for.³⁸ Community policing will continue to increase the capacity the police has to prevent crime.³⁹

This would be a new experience with regard to other strategies, like the fight against human trafficking for the purpose of prostitution exploitation, the trafficking of

³⁸ - Dr. Bajram Yzeiri "The law and Police"-pg. 255- Ilar- Tiranë, June 2002.

³⁹ - Matias, Graham; Kendrick,David; Peake,Gordon and Greonewald - "A study on community policing" SEESAK, Belgrade, 2003.

children, the campaign to collect the arms and ammunition that fell in the hands of the population during the 1997 unrest, etc.

II.b.5. Narcotics Cultivation, still a present phenomenon

Cannabis cultivation, though no longer a massive phenomena, is still present. In spite of the fact that the General Director of Police is still in the first stages of acknowledging the cannabis phenomena when he says: “That we are presently acknowledging that “cannabis sativa”⁴⁰ is cultivated in our country”, the General Prosecutor’s Office sees with great concern the abundant production especially in the south of the country⁴¹ considering it the only type of narcotic currently produced in our country.

Today Albania is no longer only a transit country for illegal narcotics substances but also a place where narcotics, mainly *Cannabis*, is cultivated, hashish oil and marijuana are produced. It is a place where narcotic substances are locally sold and abused with.⁴²

During 2004 there were 77 000 narcotic plants⁴³ registered and destroyed in eight districts of the country. During the first six months of 2005 there were 116 cases of narcotic plants cultivation registered. This situation is reported by various reports of international organizations.⁴⁴

II.b.6.Areas with cultivation

Districts with cases of narcotic plants cultivation for 2004⁴⁵ are outlined in Map no. 1. Following are the areas affected by the cultivation per each region:

1.-Vlora Region:

⁴⁰ - Remarks delivered by the General Director of Police, Bajram Ibraj, at the National Conference “The fight against narcotics, a priority of the Albanian Government –Tiranë 29.09.2004.

⁴¹ - Remarks delivered by the General Director of Police, Bajram Ibraj, at the National Conference “The fight against narcotics, a priority of the Albanian Government –Tiranë 29.09.2004..

⁴² National Anti-narcotics Strategy of the Republic of Albania, 2004-2010, pg. 4, approved by decision 292, date 7.05.2004, of the Council of Ministers.

⁴³ - Annual Performance Report of the Ministry of Public Order, Tiranë, 11 Janar 2005.

⁴⁴ The head of the UN Agency on narcotics and organized crime, Antonio Maria Costa, in his report released in Moscow in June 26, expressed his concern over the cultivation and trafficking of illicit drugs citing Albania as a source country in Europe that supplied with narcotics most of the countries in the region and Italy, ”.

⁴⁵ Information published by the State Intelligence Service at the National Conference “The fight against narcotics, a priority for the Albanian government” Tirana, September 29, 2004.

a.-In the district of Vlora, villages affected are:

Kuç, Xhuerinë, Rexhepaj, Ploçë, Llakatund, Babicë, Bunavi, Qeparo, Armen, Mekat, Trevllazër, Velçë, Mifol, Kotë, Peshkëpi, Lepenicë, Kaninë, Shushicë, Karbunar, Vranisht, Vllahinë e Kocul.

b.- In the district of Saranda, the villages of Fterrë and Borsh.

2.- Gjirokastra Region.

a.- In the district of Gjirokastra, villages of Dritë and Lazarat.

b- In the district of Tepelena, villages of Sinanaj and Salari.

3- Fier Region

a.-In the district of Mallakastra, Gjinoqar village.

4.- Elbasan Region

a.- District of Elbasan, villages of Dushk and Grekan.

5.- Tirana Region

a.- In the district of Tirana, a case of cultivation was registered in the area near Vora.

6.- Shkodra Region

In the district of Shkodra, villages of Bradhanjor, Temal, Shllak, Dushman, Koman, Topllan, etc.

II.b.7. Main directions of cannabis trafficking

Cannabis traffic routes (Map no. 2) have generally been close to the areas with cultivation.

Cannabis produced in the northern part of the country, in the villages around Shkodra and Malësia e Madhe, is mainly trafficked through Montenegro.

Cannabis grown in the southern part of the country, in the area of Gjirokastër, Tepelenë, Delvinë, Sarandë has mainly been destined for the Greek market.

Cannabis produced in the western part of Albania, in the districts of Lushnje, Fier and Vlorë, is mainly trafficked to Italy.

Cannabis cultivated in the eastern part of the country, districts of Librazhd and Pogradec and in some cases in Elbasan has been mainly trafficked to Macedonia.

That said, cannabis trafficking routes are not static. Traffickers are always looking for new safe routes. Police action taken in one area shifts their attention to new area less controlled by law enforcement agencies.

Cannabis is trafficked through various ways:

II.b.8. Cannabis trafficking routes

1. Water ways: By Sea, making use of speedboats on the Albanian coast. This is present along the entire coast, with an increased presence in Vlora towards the Italian coast.⁴⁶ In most cases, every speedboats carrying clandestine carried marijuana as well. This has been going on until the speedboat activity to Italy was contained. **Via Lakes,** This method has been used to traffic narcotics by boats in the lake of Shkodra and Ohrid. **Via Sea Ports,** Cannabis has been hidden in large or small sea vessels, inside vehicle or fishing boats with main destination Italy and Greece.

2. Land Routes, Through Official Border Crossing in Kakavija, Kapshtica, Tri Urat, Qafë Thanë, Tushemisht, Bllatë, and other border crossings with Montenegro, etc. **Via land Routes outside the official border crossings.** In the region Rrajca, Erseka, in the border of Gjirokastra with Greece. Narcotics have been carried by couriers and packing animals.

3. Air Routes. Through Rinas airport, a route that has however been used very rarely.

Finally, in order for the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics not only to be reduced, as foreseen in the National Anti-narcotics Strategy⁴⁷, but also to be eliminated, **we recommend** that the anti-cannabis strategy as outlined above be implemented during the upcoming years. With some corrections, this is the best method to definitively move Albania out of international map of cannabis cultivation countries.

The success of this strategy will be fully ensured when the Albanian political forces, both those in opposition and in power, will give up the politics of cannabis, of making political use of narcotics cultivators, and give their full support to the anti-cannabis strategy.

⁴⁶ - According to an analyses conducted by the Open Sources Department of the Intelligent Service, in 2000, 74 % of cannabis trafficked was transported by the Vlora speedboats, 14 % was trafficked through ferries and the remaining 12 % was transported by vehicles.

⁴⁷ - National Antinarcotics Strategy of the Republic of Albania

Map no.1

Areas affected by cannabis cultivation



Map no. 2

Cannabis, Main Routes of Trafficking



**Regional Conference "On the Prevention of Narcotic Plant Cultivation"
Fier, February 07, 2001**



Photo no. 1

Meeting in the Commune of Cakran on anti-cannabis strategy



Photo no. 2

The Orthodox priest of Cakran in a meeting of the anti-cannabis strategy



Photo no. 3

III. Summary and Recommendation

1. - The cultivation of *cannabis sativa*, as a criminal phenomenon was officially acknowledged in Albania in 1993, the year that marks the first cases of cannabis cultivation registered. In a few years this phenomenon was to spread swiftly.

2. - Albanian cannabis, first cultivated as a product destined for “export”, and the criminal groups trafficking it became fully integrated in the European market, leading to the creation of a very negative image for Albania and the Albanians. This image problem may have serious negative consequences for the process of Euro-Atlantic integration of our country and on our national security.

3. - The main cause for the lack of proper results in the fight against the cultivation of narcotic plants, among others, is the absence of an “anti-cannabis” strategy, the lack of proper attention to the issue and poor coordination between state structure assigned by law to fight this criminal phenomenon and the absence of community engagement in this process.

4. - Cannabis sativa is otherwise known as Indian hemp. From 1500 to 1000 BC, the ancient Hindus used it for medical treatment and as an anesthetic during surgery. Cannabis is processed into marijuana, hashish and hashish oil.

5. - Drugs are considered all of those substances recognized with the name psychotropic or narcotic, which when used in an appropriate dose can disrupt the psychological, physical and mental balance in the human nerve system, negatively affecting the health of the individual. The law prohibits the use, sale, or possession of these substances

6. - Marijuana as a cannabis by-product serves as a stimulant. It is made out of the mixing of the leaves and the blooming tips of the cannabis plants. Marijuana has been used in traditional medicine and when eaten or smoked produces a sense of pleasure.

7. - - Hashish is a drug produced by the processing of the resin of the plant with its leaves. The resin is collected in the upper part of the plant and the leaves when in full bloom. It contains 5-10 times more THC than marijuana.

8. - Hashish oil. a.k.a as *esrar* or marijuana oil. It is an active substance that contains up to 30 % of THC. It can be used by putting one to two drops in a cigarette and exerting a deep inhaling, or by pouring the same quantity into a drink. It reacts very quickly and has a greater effect than normal marijuana.

9. - There are a series of factors that have lead to the spread of cannabis cultivation in our country. They are political, economic or social factors. They are related to the geo-strategic position of our country, loopholes in the country’s legislation, low

levels of professionalism and corruption in the police force and other law enforcement agencies, criminal tendencies, etc.

10. - In 1996, cannabis cultivation reached its highest level spreading to 30 districts in the country. During this year, the number of cases registered was lower than a year earlier while the number of plants destroyed increased. We note a consolidation of recidivist cultivators and cannabis trafficking networks in the country.

11. - In 1997, due to the inefficiency of anti-crime structures, the number of narcotic plants destroyed and of persons prosecuted is the lowest of all of these years. There is no comprehensive data available to indicate the extent of cannabis cultivation during this year.

12. - During 1998-2000, the number of districts with cannabis cultivation was lower (10-13 districts), while the number of cases registered, of people prosecuted and of plants destroyed has increased.

13. - The number of narcotic plants destroyed in the country and of marijuana seized increased significantly during 1998-2000. It is an indicator of the growing efficiency of police operation and of the massive proportions that cannabis cultivation had taken.

14- The cultivation of narcotic plants in the region of Fier during 1998-2000 was a very serious problem. The quantity of plants destroyed in this region made up 20.6% to 75% of all the quantity destroyed in the country. The quantity of marijuana seized in Fier during this time is about 14-20% of the quantity seized countrywide.

15- The number of people prosecuted in 2000 compared to those in 1999 increased by 58 %. The number of those prosecuted in the region of Fier during 1998-2000, makes up 26-62% of the total number of those prosecuted across the country. In Fier were destroyed 20.6% of plants destroyed in the country and 18 % of the total quantity of marijuana seized.

16. - In Italy, the first quantities of cannabis products coming from Albania were seized in 1996. There were seized 2444.273 kg at a time when no quantities were seized in Albania. From 1993-1996, Albanian cannabis was exported mainly to Greece, the country from where the seeds had been first provided.

17. - From 1996 to 2000, the quantity of cannabis seized in Albania and in Italy increased. It shows the fact that the cultivation of narcotic plants in Albania during these years has been a growing and lucrative business.

18. - The quantities of cannabis seized in Italy each year are several times higher than the quantities seized in Albania. It shows a growing demand in the Italian market for Albanian marijuana and is an indicator of the lack of proper attention by the Albanian authorities to the fight of this phenomenon. Hence, in 1996 the quantity of cannabis

seized in Italy is 2444 times higher than the one seized in Albania. In 1997 the quantity seized in Italy is 14.8 times higher than in Albania, in 1998 is 4.8 times higher and in 1999 is 2.8 times higher. While in 2000, the quantity of cannabis seized in Italy is twice as high as that seized in Albania.

19. - The figures show that from year to year the difference between the quantities seized in Italy with that seized in Albania is narrowing. It shows that the reaction of Albanian police, though not at the required levels, has been improving.

20- From 1993-2000, the efforts to fight against cannabis cultivation, though increasing, have been focused only on the destruction of narcotic plants by the police and then in efforts to identify and target traffickers of marijuana. Nothing has been done to prevent the cultivation of narcotic plants.

21. - There has been a complete lack of information in the community about the consequences and legal sanctions against narcotic plant cultivation. In some areas people referred to cannabis simply as “grass” and had no information that one could go to prison for growing it.

22. - These mindsets were also re-enforced by the decisions of the courts. In the region of Fier, out of 207 persons sentenced, 95% of them were released on bail. The penal policy followed by the courts did not help to reduce the cultivation of narcotics plants.

23. - The fight against these phenomena until the year 2000 involved only police operations, and it should be noted that police efforts have improved each year. There has been a complete lack of cooperation between local government structures and police. Local structures have never felt that they shared in the responsibility to fight cannabis cultivation.

24. - From observations in the field, it results that the cultivation of narcotic plants by the inhabitants of the affected areas is generally a spontaneous activity. It is cultivated in small plots of land near the homes with number of plants reaching 10 to 2000 plants. Cultivators did not have their market guaranteed and were generally waiting for occasional buyers. This led us to the conclusion that the fight against this phenomenon would not be met by an organized resistance on the part of the cultivators, a resistance that could have threatened the order and the public security.

25. - The cultivation of narcotic plants brings serious negative consequences on the community. It contributes to an increased criminality and hampers the country's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures; it penalizes a large number of people in the country and abroad. Leads to an increase in the number of marijuana users in the local population, especially among the young; and causes a loss of interest for legitimate economic activities among the young; the local farmers in the areas with cultivation lose interest in the cultivation of the traditional agricultural plants.

26. – A strategy to fight cannabis should be put in place in order for the fight against the cultivation to be effective. The strategy should focus first of all on the prevention of cannabis cultivation, followed by a continued fight against this phenomenon in cooperation with the community, local government structures, departments of education and non-governmental associations.

27. - Among other elements, this strategy focused on:

- Intensification of the fight against narcotics by organizing constant operations to arrest and prosecute individuals who commit narcotic related criminal acts, with a special concentration on those committing criminal acts by encouraging, organizing and leading the cultivation of narcotic plants, and those who handle the processing and trafficking of cannabis;

- Organization of frequent meetings with the community in each neighborhood and village with the aim of making the citizens aware of legal consequences befalling those who cultivate narcotics plants;

- Preparation and handing out of fliers containing the necessary legal information on the provisions of the Albanian legislation on narcotics cultivation and police phone number to call in to give information;

- Close cooperation with the local media, with TV talk shows and ad's that deal with the consequences of narcotics in general and those coming from the cultivation of narcotic plants in particular;

- Presentation of papers in the local schools containing information on the consequences coming from narcotics, dangers this activity carries and the punishment for those who brake the law by cultivating, processing and trafficking narcotic substances;

- Support by state agencies through small loan programs to support the development of legitimate businesses in the areas affected by the cultivation;

- Preparation and handing out of forms through which the farmers would declare that they would not cultivate narcotic plants in the plots of land they owned and that they did not possess seeds and produce from the past years;

- Close working cooperation between the courts and district prosecutor's offices for the purpose of enforcing a harsher penal policy against those who commit narcotic related crimes with a special focus on those who play an organizing role in this activity but without letting off the ordinary cultivators;

- Establishment of structures at the Regional Police Department level and other police commissariats in the districts and local government units to follow the implementation of the strategy.

- Assignment of specific tasks to the various commissariats and agencies of the Police Department in the region in support of the implementation of the anti-cannabis strategy.

28.- The implementation of a strategic plan for the prevention of the cultivation of narcotic plants in the region of Fier gave immediate results within a few months. Following an intensive work, the phenomenon of massive cultivation was definitively stopped. Compared to a year earlier, the cultivation on narcotic plants in the region of Fier dropped by 17 %. The number of prosecutions dropped by 3.5 times.

29.- The strategic plan implemented by the Police Department of the Region of Fier, though drafted and implemented in the absence of any clear instruction from the central structures of the State, received a positive evaluation by the Minister of Public Order and the General Directorate of State Police was ordered to follow the implementation of this strategy in the other problematic region, in Vlora and Shkodër in particular.

30.- Year 2002 notes the highest levels in the number of plants registered and destroyed and of the quantity of cannabis seized by the police.

During 2002 in the Region of Vlora the level of cultivation of narcotic plants was 52 times higher than in the Region of Fier. In the same year, the cultivation of narcotic plants, when set against the figures of the earlier year, increased by 70%.

In the Region of Shkodër during 2002 were cultivated 14.6 times more plants than in the Region of Fier. During this year, in the Region of Shkodër the number of narcotic plants registered increased by 5.3 times.

31- The main reason why the cultivation of narcotics plants in the Regions of Shkodra and Vlora grew was the non-implementation of the anti-cannabis strategy. This strategy was not properly understood and was not taken seriously. No partnership with the community and the local government structures was established and the work of the police was focused only on the destruction of the plants and as the result the cultivation instead of diminishing, expanded.

32.- During 2003, there was a generally more organized effort to implement the anti-cannabis strategy. Various conferences were held in the main regions in the country to sensitize the public opinion and a greater preventive work was done in cooperation with the local government structures. And the results soon followed.

The year 2003 marks the beginning of the fall in the curb of narcotics cultivation in our country. During this year the number of plants registered and destroyed was 2.8 times less than during 2002.

33. During 2004 the anti-cannabis strategy was implemented in the Region of Shkodra as well and as a result the cultivation of narcotic plants compared to 2003 decreased by 3.6 times.

We can in conclusion say that the anti-cannabis strategy, implemented for the first time in 2001 in the Region of Fier, was implemented and gave positive results across the country.

34.- The implementation of this strategy across the nation put an end to the massive cultivation of narcotic plants. For the first time the fight against this criminal

activity was waged in cooperation with the local government structures and the civil society.

35.- A realization was established that only by cooperating with the community, we could achieve better results in the fight against crime. The anti-cannabis strategy was developed in partnership and cooperation with the community that benefit from the public service provided by the police.

36.- In spite of the achievements in the fight against cannabis, cultivation still remains a problem. During the first six months of 2004, there were 116 cases of cultivation registered in eight districts of the country. This situation is reported in various reports of the international organizations.

37.- Finally, with the purpose of not only reducing the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics plants, as foreseen in the National Anti-narcotics Strategy, but to bring to zero levels, we recommend the implementation of the anti-cannabis strategy as detailed above. With some possible corrections, this is the most efficient method to definitely bring Albania out of the international map of countries cultivating and exporting cannabis.

38.- But the success of this strategy will be fully guaranteed only when the Albanian political forces, in power or in opposition, will give up cannabis politics, the policy of playing politics with the cultivators of narcotic plants, and choose to fully support the anti-cannabis strategy.

Tirana, February 2005

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