



International Narcotics Control Strategy Report -2008

Released by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
March 2008

Macedonia

I. Summary

Macedonia is neither a major producer nor a major regional transit point for illicit drugs. The Government of Macedonia (GOM) made some progress in combating drug trafficking in the reporting period—illicit drug seizures in Macedonia significantly increased during the first 10 months of 2007, compared to the previous year, including a major seizure of nearly 500 kg of cocaine at the Kosovo-Macedonia border in January. Domestic use of illicit drugs continued to grow. Macedonian law enforcement authorities cooperated closely with regional counterparts, including the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), in counternarcotics operations. Such operations in some cases were hindered by ineffective interagency coordination and planning, although there were some modest improvements in interagency coordination compared to the previous year. Macedonia is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

II. Status of Country

Macedonia lies along one of several overland routes used to deliver Afghan heroin (through Turkey and Bulgaria) to Western Europe. Hashish and marijuana produced in Albania travel along the same routes to Turkey, where they are exchanged for heroin that is then transported to Western European markets. Synthetic drugs on the Macedonian market are smuggled in from neighboring Bulgaria and Serbia. A favorable climate in southern Macedonia encourages small amounts of marijuana cultivation mainly for personal use. According to government sources, there were no reports of the production of precursor chemicals or synthetic drugs in Macedonia. A major seizure of nearly 500 kg of cocaine in January 2007 suggested that, unlike previously, cocaine is being transported to or through Macedonia in increasing quantities. According to MOI sources, trafficking in synthetic drugs appeared to increase in 2007, but seizures were not higher than in 2006. Macedonia produced, on approximately 500 hectares, licit poppy straw and poppy straw concentrate, but in quantities insufficient for the country's pharmaceuticals industry. As a result, some poppy straw was imported under license.

III. Country Actions against Drugs in 2007

Policy Initiatives. Macedonia's National Anti-drug Strategy, approved in 2006, was followed, in May 2007, by the government's adoption of a National Action Plan for implementing that strategy.

Law Enforcement Efforts. According to MOI statistics, in the first ten months of 2007, criminal charges were brought against 326 persons (slightly less than in the preceding year), including twelve juveniles and one police officer. Those charges involved 282 actual cases of illicit drug trafficking, or 33 cases more than in 2006. In 2007, police seizures of cocaine and hashish were on average significantly higher than in the previous year. Seizures of other drugs, such as heroin, marijuana, and other psychotropic substances were slightly lower or the same as during the previous year. Some MOI sources believe trafficking in some synthetic drugs, such as Ecstasy, actually rose in 2007, as evidenced by lower prices for such narcotics, reflecting an increased supply on the market.

The MOI reported the following quantities of drugs and psychotropic substances seized in the first nine months of 2007:

- cocaine: 486 kg (compared to less than 300 grams in 2006);
- heroin: 60 kg (two and a half times less than in 2006);
- marijuana: 208 kg (30 per cent less than in 2006);
- cannabis: 4413 plants seized (a significant increase from the 142 plants seized and destroyed the previous year);
- hashish: 851 grams (compared to only 16 grams in 2006);
- raw opium: one kg (compared to three kg of opium seized in 2006); and
- Ecstasy: 1,862 pills (slightly more than the 1,377 seized in 2006).

In January 2007, Macedonian authorities—in cooperation with UNMIK and the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)—seized nearly 500 kilograms of cocaine which allegedly had originated in Venezuela and was destined for Greece. The May 2005 Witness Protection Law and legislation, passed in 2006, that enhanced the ability of prosecutors to use wiretaps as evidence in criminal proceedings, were used to positive effect in several counternarcotics cases. The Customs Administration continued to strengthen its intelligence units and mobile teams. Police officials claimed cooperation with their Customs colleagues improved compared to past years. In late November, a Macedonian court convicted the two defendants involved in the major cocaine seizure case on drug smuggling charges and sentenced them to 14.5 years in prison each.

Corruption. Corruption is pervasive in Macedonia, with low salaries and high unemployment fostering graft among law enforcement officials. However, public perceptions of the degree of corruption in Macedonia decreased in 2007, and public confidence in the government's ability to combat corruption rose. A recent poll, in which 44

percent of the respondents said they had paid bribes, indicates that the problem remains acute. The judiciary remains weak and is frequently accused of corruption. As a matter of policy and practice, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia does not encourage or facilitate the illicit production or distribution of drugs, or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions.

Agreements and Treaties. Macedonia is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1961 Single Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol, and the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances. A 1902 Extradition Treaty between the United States and Serbia, applies to Macedonia as a successor state. Macedonia is a party to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols against trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling. In April 2007 Macedonia acceded to the UN Convention against Corruption.

Cultivation/Production. Macedonia is neither a major cultivator nor producer of illicit narcotics. There are no reports of local illicit production or refining of heroin or illegal synthetic drugs. Only one pharmaceutical company in the country was authorized to licitly cultivate and process poppy for medicines. Authorized poppy production, some 500 hectares in 2007, is monitored by the Ministry of Health, which shares production data regularly with the Vienna-based International Narcotics Control Board. Marijuana cultivation in southeast Macedonia continued to present a challenge to authorities, although MOI sources reported only small quantities of the drug were cultivated, mostly for personal consumption.

Drug Flow/Transit. Macedonia is on the southern branch of the Balkan Route used to ship Afghan heroin to the western European consumer market. The quantity of synthetic narcotics trafficked to Macedonia in 2007 appeared to increase, largely due to the low cost of such drugs on the street in Macedonia. Most synthetic drugs aimed at the Macedonian market originated in Bulgaria and Serbia, and arrived in small amounts by vehicle. As noted above, Macedonian authorities seized a shipment of nearly 500 kilograms of cocaine, destined for Greece, at a border crossing with Kosovo.

Domestic Programs/Demand Reduction. Official Macedonian statistics regarding drug abuse and addiction are unreliable, but the government estimated there were between 7,000-8,000 drug users in the country. The most frequently used drug was marijuana, followed by heroin and Ecstasy. There were an estimated 1,000 cocaine users in the country in 2007, according to official sources. Treatment and rehabilitation activities are carried out in the one state-run outpatient medical clinic for drug users that dispenses methadone to registered heroin addicts. There are also seven specialized local centers for methadone substitution treatment, which treat 1,550 drug addicts. One of the seven centers is located in the largest prison in the country (with over 60 percent of the total prisoner population). Of the 1,500 prisoners in the country's main prison, an estimated 600 were identified as drug addicts. Macedonian health officials acknowledged that rehabilitation centers were overcrowded. The Ministry of Health announced the opening of four more rehabilitation centers in Skopje, and seven in the smaller towns, including along

a major internal drug supply route. In-patient treatment in specialized facilities consisted of detoxification accompanied by medicinal/vitamin therapy, as well as limited family therapy, counseling and social work. Follow-up services after detoxification, or social reintegration programs for treated drug abusers, were inadequate. Educators and NGOs continued to support programs to increase public awareness of the harmful consequences of drug abuse, targeting drug use among youth in particular.

IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs

Bilateral Cooperation. During 2007, DEA agents worked with the Macedonian police to support coordination of regional counternarcotics efforts, including a major cocaine seizure in January 2007. MOI police, the financial police, Customs officers, prosecutors, and judges continued to receive USG-funded training in anti-organized crime operations and techniques. USG representatives continued to provide training, technical advice, equipment, and other assistance to Macedonian Customs and MOI Border Police units.

The Road Ahead. Macedonia's porous borders, and the influence of regional narcotics trafficking groups, will continue to make the country an attractive secondary route for the transit of illegal drugs. DEA officials continue to expect increased use by traffickers of Macedonia as a "warehousing" base during transshipments. The United States Government, through law enforcement training programs, will continue to strengthen the ability of Macedonian police, prosecutors and judges to monitor, arrest, prosecute, and sanction narcotics traffickers. In cooperation with EU and other international community partners, the U.S. will press for full implementation of the national counternarcotics action plan. USG law enforcement training agencies in Macedonia will focus on working with GOM counterparts to use the Wiretapping Law and other legislative tools to strengthen the ability of prosecutors to successfully pursue counternarcotics cases. The USG will continue to work with the GOM and international partners to strengthen Macedonia's criminal intelligence system, and to improve the government's ability to provide reliable statistics on drug use, arrests, prosecutions, and convictions of traffickers.

With the passage of wiretapping legislation in November, USG law enforcement training agencies in Macedonia can now focus on working with GOM counterparts to implement the law in order to strengthen the hand of prosecutors in counternarcotics cases. The USG will continue to work with the GOM and our international partners to strengthen the criminal intelligence system, and to improve the government's ability to provide reliable statistics on drug use, as well as on arrests, prosecutions and convictions of traffickers.