

DYNAMICS OF THE ROMANIAN ILLEGAL DRUG MARKETS

Irina Caunic

“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași
irina_caunic@yahoo.com.

Mircea Tulica

“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași
valitulica@yahoo.com.sg.

Abstract: *Globalization has led to an increase in commercial activities running on the illegal markets, its dynamics being largely determined by the balance between profitability and the major risks involved. Revenues are significant, one example being those obtained from drug industry. In recent years, illicit drug trafficking has seen in Romania an unprecedented escalation, as a result of market liberalization and the movement of persons and because of the extending the phenomenon both among producers and consumers.*

This article examines the size of the Romanian illegal drug markets, the countries of origin and drug transit routes, as well as the profits made by the drug trafficking networks.

Keywords: drug trafficking, profit, illegal markets, cocaine, heroin, psychoactive substances.

JEL Classification: E26

1. ILLICIT TRAFFICKING IN DRUGS AND PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES

1.1. Countries of origin for the illicit drugs reaching the Romanian markets

The analysis developed by competent authorities in preventing and combating drug trafficking revealed that the heroin seized in Romania, in 2008, was produced mainly in Turkey and Iran, while Morocco, was the starting point for hashish, transported via Spain and Portugal. The cocaine is shipped from Colombia and Mexico, Bolivia and Venezuela, while amphetamines and ecstasy sold on the Romanian markets come from the Netherlands and Belgium (EMCDDA, 2009).

Romanian herbal cannabis market is stocked both by the producing European countries, such as Moldova, Netherlands, Belgium and the domestic production, which is in a continuous expansion (EMCDDA, 2010). Even if in 2008, the authorities discovered illicit hemp crop on an area of only 400 square meters (RMCDAA, 2009) in the last two years, there was an increasing trend of area cultivated with this plant, throughout the country. However analysis of the illicit nature of hemp crops especially highlighted the lack of interest in obtaining licenses required by law to carry out these activities and to a lesser extent, the intention of manufacturing drugs.

1.2. Size of the Romanian illegal drug markets

Heroin and cocaine are overall considered, the most important drugs in terms of involvement of organized crime groups or the financing of local conflicts.

In Romania, during 2007 - 2008, there were decreases in the amount of cocaine, cannabis and opium seized by the authorities, while for heroin, was an upward trend recorded. After this period, major changes have occurred on cocaine and heroin markets in Romania. Thus, in the case of cocaine could be seen a considerable increase in the amount seized, from about four kilograms in 2008 to 1283 kg in 2009, while for heroin, the amount confiscated in 2009 is five times lower compared with 2008, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - The volume of illicit drugs seized in Romania between 2003-2009

Drug Type (kg)	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Cocaine	12,68	24,57	109,71	10,71	46,695	3,92	1283
Cannabis plant/cannabis resin	72,1	298,31	510,04	1127,06	2120,085	242,08	235,6
Heroin	320,7	65,4	285,07	32,63	129,903	385,23	85,05
Opium	0,57	4,9	6,25	2,85	7,041	2,221	0,05
Other drugs	2,31	52,98	3,09	1,75	0,317	0,823	0,04

Source: Counter-Organised Crime Directorate, GIRP, ***EMCDDA, National Anti-drog Agency, *National Report on Drugs Situation 2010 – Romania*, pp. 106-109, http://www.igpr.ro/RO_National_Report_2010.pdf; ***European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), Country overview: Romania, 2009, <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/country-overviews/ro#dro>.

It is noteworthy that 84.2% of the total quantity of cocaine seized in 2009, is a unique catch, managed in the sea port of Constanta, in January 2009 (EMCDDA, 2010). An increasing trend is visible in the case of herbal cannabis seizures, by 30.4% from 596 to 777 and by 17.4% for cannabis resin seizures, from 506 to 594. Analysing the existing data in Table 1, it follows also that, during 2003-2009, the quantity of seized opium indicator ranged from a high of 7.041 kg, in 2007 to a low of 0.05 kg, in 2009 (EMCDDA, 2010). According to data provided by the Drug and Precursor Analysis and Profiling Central Laboratory and the Romanian Police General Inspectorate, in 2008, have been

reported, 1055 heroin seizures, of which 91 cocaine seizures, 5 opium seizures, 1202 cannabis seizures (596 cannabis herb seizures and 506 cannabis resin seizures) and 225 synthetic drugs seizures (amphetamines). At the national level, the Central Laboratory of Bucharest is the institution providing the highest number of seizures, as shown in Table 2, followed by the Regional Laboratory of Cluj (EMCDDA, 2009). Heroin seizures declined in 2009, from 1055 to 1038, when compared with 2008, while in the case of cocaine, the number of seizures increased with 13.19%, compared with the previous year. The increasing trend is also highlighted in the case of cannabis (both hashish and marijuana) (EMCDDA, 2010).

Table 2 - Distribution of seized drugs at central and regional level in 2008-2009

Drug type (number of seizures)	Central Laboratory of Bucharest		Regional Laboratory of Cluj		Regional Laboratory of Iasi		Regional Laboratory of Constanta		Regional Laboratory of Timisoara		Total	
	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
Heroin	1040	1013	7	7	4	7	2	3	2	8	1055	1038
Cocaine	44	61	25	21	1	3	19	16	2	2	91	103
Opium	4	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	4
Marijuana (cannabis plant)	275	328	155	178	105	128	41	59	21	84	596	777
Hashish (cannabis resin)	261	207	131	173	65	42	36	108	13	64	506	594
Synthetic drugs	123	32	60	25	20	3	27	14	2	2	232	76

Source: Table adapted from ***EMCDDA, National Anti-drug Agency, *National Report on Drugs Situation 2010 – Romania*, p. p. 106-109, http://www.igpr.ro/RO_National_Report_2010.pdf; ***Romanian Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drugs Addiction, *National Report on Drugs Situation 2009 - Romania New Developments, Trends and In-depth Information on Selected Issues*, 2009, Bucharest, Romania, 2009, p.p. 95-98, http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachelements.cfm/att_112095_EN_NR_2009_RO.pdf, apud Drug and Precursor Analysis and Profiling Central Laboratory, GIRP.

In the case of cannabis, the number of seizures indicator has a slightly different trend than the seized quantity indicator, emphasizing an upward trend both for resin and herbal cannabis. Thus, compared with 2007, there was a remarkable 39.58% increase in seizures of cannabis herb, in 2008, from 427 to 596 and a 49.70% increase in seizures of cannabis resin, from 338 to 506.

1.3. Aspects concerning transport of the illegal drugs

According to data provided by the competent authorities, Romania is mainly a transit area, only a fraction of the drug amount being retained for local consumption. Lately, Romania has also become a storage area, where drugs smuggled in through the southern border, has been store for a certain period and finally directed, to markets with high consumption in Western Europe (Government of Romania, 2005).

Romania is an active segment for trafficking drugs using the Balkan route that includes Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania (by customs Negru Voda, Vama Veche, Giurgiu, Bechet, Nadlac, Bors or Petea) Austria, Netherlands and United Kingdom. A second section of the Balkan route controls the eastern part of Romania, through Ukraine and Poland-Germany or Slovakia-Czech Republic, having as final destination for the illegal drugs the western European markets (Alexandru, 2006).

Trafficking routes depend on various categories of drugs provided for consumption on the illegal markets, or transiting the Romanian territory, *in the case of cannabis*, being outlined, the following routes in the last five years (RMCDDA, 2009):

- *the cannabis resin*: route Morocco - Spain - Italy - Austria - Hungary - Romania is responsible for the entry of nearly 85% of seized cannabis resin, the remaining 15% reaching the Romanian market coming from the Republic of Moldova;
- *the cannabis plant*: 80% of the seized amount follows the route including Afghanistan - Pakistan - Georgia - Moldova, and the remaining 20% comes from Republic of Moldova and Turkey.

Concerning *the synthetic drugs* reaching the Romanian markets, in the recent years, have been emerging new routes both from the West (Holland, Belgium, Germany) to Eastern Europe (Romania) and also from the North (Baltic countries, Ukraine).

Opiate trafficking in Romania is largely facilitated by the country`s location on a section of the Balkan route and close to the northern Black Sea route, as well as the presence of Turkish and Iranian organized crime groups, connected with destination or drug production countries. Regarding cocaine, the traffickers have focused on Constanta port as an entry point into Europe, the significant seizures (about 1300 kg), made in this seaport, in 2009, emphasizing this trend (EMCDDA, 2010).

The relatively stable routes transiting Romania do not exclude other options, their detection depending, to a large extent, on the ability of institutions involved in combating illicit drug trafficking

and drug consumption and, more importantly, how they cooperate with similar institutions in other European countries (Government of Romania, 2005).

In Romania, the transport of illegal drugs takes place using the infrastructure available to private companies specializing in international freight transport (companies managed by Turkish nationals or domestic companies) and through the concealment of these activities as legitimate commercial transactions (for instance the export of oil products or perishable food). In addition, small amounts of narcotics are shipped in packages, through the international transport of passengers or through the vehicles owned by the members of organized crime networks (EMCDDA, 2009).

1.4. The profit raised by the Romanian based drug trafficking networks

International drug trafficking is one of the most lucrative illegal business and the main attribute for the cross-border organized crime networks. Recent estimates of the international institutions (UN, United Nations International Drug Control), claim venues ranging from 300 to 500 billion dollars annually from drug transactions worldwide.

In Romania, the supply of drugs is influenced by risk factors, among which may be mentioned (Government of Romania, 2005):

- geographic location at the intersection of the main traditional routes used by the international drug traffickers;
 - since 2007, Romania is the eastern border of the European Union;
 - increasing the flow of immigrants to Romania and other European Union member states;
 - the development of trade through the border, with consequences on decreasing the control efficiency;
 - increasing the drug use and, in particular, the synthetic drugs use;
 - involvement in corruption of public officials who have direct responsibilities for border control activities;
 - the proliferation of terrorist networks interested in obtaining funds from the illicit drug trafficking;
- the inefficient cooperation between the responsible institutions in reducing the drug supply.

In Romania, the prices on these illegal markets depend on the type of drug, the purchased quantity and its quality, as shown in the table below:

Table 3 - Prices (minimum / maximum) of drugs most often smuggled on the Romanian illegal markets, in 2004-2009

En gros prices (in Euro / kg, l/ or 1000 doses)						
Drug Type	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Hashish (cannabis resin)	600-800	1600-2500	1600-2500	2,200– 2,400	8,000– 10,000	4,000– 7,000
Marijuana (cannabis herbal)	1600-2500	600-800	1300 - 1500	1300 - 1500	-	2,000 – 5,000
Cocaine	35,000 - 50,000	35,000 - 50,000	35,000-50,000	42,000 – 44,000	35,000– 55,000	40,000 – 60,000
Heroin	10,000 - 15,000	13,000 - 17,000	15,000-20,000	12,000 – 15,000	15,000 – 16,000	12,000 – 20,000
Amphetamine	3,000-4,000	3,000-4,000	3,000-5,000	5,000	5,000	-
Ecstasy (MDMA)	3,000-4,000	3,000-4,000	8,000-10,000	-	-	3,700 – 7,500

Source: Table adapted from ***EMCDDA, National Anti-drug Agency, *National Report on Drugs Situation 2010 – Romania*, p. p. 111, http://www.igpr.ro/RO_National_Report_2010.pdf; ***R.M.C.D.D.A, *National Report on Drugs Situation 2009 - Romania New Developments, Trends and In-depth Information on Selected Issues*, 2009, Bucharest, Romania, 2009, p. 99, http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att_112095_EN_NR_2009_RO.pdf, apud Counter-Organised Crime Directorate, GIRP, see also UNODC, *World Drug Report 2009*: Section 3.4 Prices, pp. 215 - 234, June 2009. http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2009/WDR2009_Statistical_annex_prices.pdf.

Analyzing data provided by the General Police Inspectorate in Table 3 and Table 4, for the period 2004-2009, the existing trends highlighted the evolution of wholesale and retail prices, considering the type of drug to be addressed (RMCDDA, 2009):

- *Cannabis*: until 2008, the wholesale price for cannabis resin stood on a rising trend (ranging from 8000 to 10000 Euro / kg) while in 2009, it was recorded a loss; retail price has been stable during 2007 - 2008, ranging between 7 and 9 Euro / g, and increasing in 2009 by almost two times when compared to 2008 and nearly four times when compared with 2004; for herbal cannabis, the wholesale price increased by almost 50% in recent years, while in 2009 the retail price was 25% higher compared to 2008 and five times higher than the price recorded in 2004; the street price for a gram of herbal cannabis ranged from 8 to 14 Euro / g, a slight increase compared to 2007, when ranging between 6 and 7 Euro / g. According to data provided by the Table 3 and the Table 4, in the last four years, has

been recorded a consistent trend of increase both in the price of cannabis resin and marijuana (cannabis herb). The trend is visible for the street price and it is confirmed by the wholesale sales.

- *Cocaine*: the wholesale prices increased in 2009, almost 10% compared with 2008, while the retail price has been kept relatively stable throughout the period 2004-2009;

- *Heroin*: in 2009, the wholesale prices recorded significant variations compared to 2008. Thus, in 2009, the minimum price for a kilogram of heroin was 20% lower than in 2008, and the maximum price was 25% higher than in 2008; the retail price decreased by 19.6% compared to 2008 and it was almost two times higher than in 2004;

- *Amphetamine*: the wholesale price increased in 2006 and then stabilized at the maximum;

Ecstasy (MDMA): the wholesale prices decreased compared with 2006 and is relatively similar with the lowest price recorded in 2004; the retail price has doubled compared to 2008, when the values were similar to those recorded in 2004;

- *LSD*: the price has remained relatively stable throughout the period 2004-2009.

Table 4 - Prices (minimum / maximum) of drugs most frequently trafficked on the Romanian illicit markets, 2004-2009

Retail prices (in Euro / g or doses)						
Drug Type	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Hashish (cannabis resin)	4-6	4-6	4-6	7-9	7-9	15 - 20
Marijuana (cannabis herbal)	2-4	5-7	2-4	6-7	8-14	10 - 20
Cocaine	60-120	80-120	80-150	80-120	80-120	80 - 120
Heroin	15-25	25-40	25-60	30-35	46-55	37 - 49
Amphetamine	5-10	7-13	7-13	10	-	-
Ecstasy (MDMA)	5-10	13-15	10-15	7-12	5-8	10 - 20
LSD	20-30	20-30	30-35	33	33	20 - 37

Source: Table adapted from ***EMCDDA, National Anti-drug Agency, *National Report on Drugs Situation 2010 – Romania*, p. p. 111, http://www.igpr.ro/RO_National_Report_2010.pdf; ***R.M.C.D.D.A, *National Report on Drugs Situation 2009 - Romania New Developments, Trends and In-depth Information on Selected Issues*, 2009, Bucharest, Romania, 2009, p. 99, http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachelements.cfm/att_112095_EN_NR_2009_RO.pdf., apud Counter-Organised Crime Directorate, GIRP, see also UNODC, *World Drug Report 2009*: Section 3.4 Prices, pp. 215 - 234, June 2009, http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2009/WDR2009_Statistical_annex_prices.pdf.

2. TRAFFICKING IN PLANTS AND SUBSTANCES WITH PSYCHOACTIVE PROPERTIES

2.1. Aspects regarding the distribution of plants and substances with psychoactive properties

Consumption of substances with psychoactive effect seems to be a relatively recent phenomenon on the European illegal drug markets. In Romania, the authorities were interested in counterring this phenomenon, particularly in the last two years, when distribution and consumption of these products increased sharply. According to a Romanian General Police Inspectorate report, in early 2009, there were 18 stores that sold substances with psychoactive properties, while, at the end of August 2009, where identified 121 such stores, the equivalent to an increase of 672 % of this market in just six

months. Despite the authorities efforts, this market continued to expand in 2010, and there were identified in October, 300 stores and 200 companies that dealing with this trade.

It is legal opening such a store, as its retail activity consists in selling the plants, flowers, seeds, animal feed - CAEN code 4776, or unspecialized products, CAEN code 4690. For this reason, there is not required a license from the Ministry of Health, being sufficient an authorization issued by the local mayor.

Considering the trend of increasing consumption of hallucinogenic substances and plants, in Romania, G.O. no. 6 / 2010 amending Law 143/2000 *on preventing and combating illicit drug trafficking and consumption* and the Law. 339/2005 *on the legal status of the plants, narcotics and psychotropic substances*, provided a new list of prohibited plants and psychoactive substances. But to effectively solve this problem, the Romanian authorities are currently working on a project regarding the prohibition of substitutes to ensure the population protection, having as model the regulations initiated in Poland, in late 2010. Thus, the project prohibits both manufacturing and trading of substances and plant with psychoactive properties, as well as shops selling these products. According to this regulations, it is considered a *substitute* any natural or synthetic substance, in any physical state, or any product, plant or fungus, independent of the packaging type, the management process, its content, presentation, advertising or its name, which may be used to produce psychoactive effects and / or has a negative impact on the health of individual, collective or social behaviour, which is not regulated by other legal measures in force.

Plants and substances with psychoactive properties sold in Romania come mainly from China but also from the European countries like Great Britain, Italy and the Netherlands. Products are brought into Romania by the courier companies, the declared value of the packages being always under 10 dollars, for avoiding the customs control (Adevarul, 2011).

Both Romania and other EU countries faced, in the last period, with an increasing trend of online sales of plants and substances with psychoactive effects. This problem is more difficult to solve as the specialized sites are hosted on servers outside the country to be hard to identify, there are different areas and the IPs are periodically changing. In this respect, consumers can purchase these plants and substances through the advertising, but also using the specialized sites, (for instance *generation2012.ro*).

2.2. The profit raised by the trafficking networks

Products with psychoactive effects are sold in the form of cigarettes, tablets, powders, herbal extracts and packaged in envelopes under different names. Plants considered the most commonly used in Romania (Ancuceanu et al., 2010), with a significant risk to the population health, therefore justifying their prohibition by the enforcement authorities are: *Amanita muscaria*, *Amanita pantherina* (DC.) Krombh, all species of the genus *Argyreia*, *Mitragyna speciosa* Korth, *Nymphaea caerulea* Savigny, all species of the genus *Psilocybe*, *Salvia divinorum* Epling & Jativa; *Tabernanthe iboga* Baill, *Turbina corymbosa* (L.) Raf., Syn. *Rivea corymbosa* (L.) Hallier f.

On the illegal markets, the retail prices for these products varying on the purchased amount, as shown in the table below.

Table 5 - Prices for the plants and substances with psychoactive effects sold on the Romanian markets, in 2010

Type of psychoactive substances	Package type	Amount	Prices (in EUR)
Special gold	salt	0,25 g	9.52
		0,75 g	21.43
Pulse	powder	0,5 g	7.14
		3 g	28.33
Fly Agaric Mushroom	dried mushroom	12 g	14.28
Spice Diamond	vegetable fragments	1 g	11.90
Spice Gold Spirit	powder	3 g	21.43
Euphoria	powder	0,25 g	17.85
Generation 2012	powder	0,5 g	19.05
Powder Report	powder	0,5 g	19.05
Frenzy Powder	powder	0,25 g	9.52
		1 g	23.81
Silver	powder	0,25 g	9.52
		0,75 g	21.43
Magic Powder	powder	0,3 g	11.90
		1 g	23.81
M6	vegetable fragments	0,5 g	9.52
		2 g	23.81

Source: Table adapted from Aurora Toma, *Magazinele de vise si comercializarea "legala" a produselor halucinogene*, Pharma Business. Revista de Management Farmaceutic, <http://www.pharma-business.ro/tendinte/magazinele-de-vise-si-comercializarea-legala-a-produselor-halucinogene.html>, see also *Noi produse etnobotanice au patruns pe piata din Romania*, Realitatea. Net, 13 aprilie 2010, http://www.realitatea.net/noi-produse-etnobotanice-au-patruns-pe-piata-din-romania_708762.html sau Weed World Legal Shop <http://www.weed-world.ro/index.html>.

As shown in Table 5, the retail prices of the herbs and psychoactive substances are quite large, most of them being sold with more than 12 Euro.

CONCLUSION

At the national level, the main trends concerning the emergence of drug crime phenomena are: the permanent change of the trafficking routes and the types of drugs trafficked on the illicit markets, varying methods of money laundering resulting from the illicit drug operations, increasing the number of drug users and especially, of those who prefer amphetamines and cannabis.

Currently in Romania, the institutional system of reducing the drug supply requires an additional effective coordination, along with the professionalizing staff, improving equipment and the institutional cooperation, allowing an appropriate response to prevent drug-related organized crime activities, the delimitation of competences and the partnership management in information resources.

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