

Zagaria clan leader apprehended in Romania

13 April 2018

Yesterday, during the early morning hours, a joint operation was conducted by the Italian and Romanian police and the competent judicial authorities of the Romanian Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism –Buzau Territorial Service and Pitesti Territorial Service, and by the District Antimafia Prosecutor of Naples in a complex and lengthy organised crime investigation concerning a powerful, well-established mafia-style transnational criminal association.

In Italy, the investigation was led by the Italian DIA (*Direzione Investigativa Antimafia*) under the leadership of the Prosecutor's Office of Naples.

Eurojust provided continuous support in coordinating the investigations and enhancing the judicial cooperation procedures to identify the location of a key member of the criminal group (*camorra*) and its assets.

According to the Italian investigation, the prime suspect and his Italian accomplices have, for many years, been laundering in Romania the proceeds of crime of a powerful criminal 'family', the well-known Italian clan, Zagaria, the criminal activities of which have generated a financial empire over the last 30 years and have adversely affected a large area of southern Italy, using systematic extortion and corruption of public officials, and have altered and influenced the voting in the local elections.

The suspect, who has now been arrested in execution of an Italian European Arrest Warrant, was a trusted member of this criminal organisation, able to set up numerous commercial companies and business activities in Romania to launder millions of euro for the criminal organisation.

He also ensured – via fictitious transactions – the repatriation of laundered funds to Italy to sustain the numerous members of the criminal 'family' currently in detention. Funds were provided to the families of those in detention to prevent their cooperation with law enforcement and judicial authorities.

The success of this very sensitive operation was made possible due to the active role of both the Italian and the Romanian Desks at Eurojust, through several coordination meetings at Eurojust, during which the information was shared in a timely manner and the procedural measures were prepared so that they could be executed in a coordinated and efficient way. The coordination meetings, chaired jointly by the National Members of Italy and Romania, brought together both the Italian PPO of Naples and its Romanian counterpart from DIICOT Buzau, as well as police representatives of the Italian DDA and their Romanian counterparts.

The Italian and the Romanian Desks at Eurojust also provided crucial advice on the application of judicial cooperation procedures for freezing properties in accordance with FD 577/2003 based the principle of mutual recognition, only recently implemented in Italian legislation.

Thursday's operation resulted in the total disruption of the financial empire that had supported this criminal organisation.

A huge amount of illegal assets have been seized in Romania for possible future confiscation. The complexity of the illicit profits that have been seized will require an accurate estimation of their value to determine the total amount of goods frozen by the Romanian authorities at the request of the Italian judicial authorities.