

## Drug trafficking: 1.5 million dollars from the US

With a ceremony held on April 1, 2014, at the US Embassy in Rome, the United States handed over 1.5 million dollars to Italy in recognition of Italy's important contribution to Operation Fire and Ice, a DEA and Polizia di Stato joint operation against drug trafficking. This amount of money is part of seized and forfeited assets resulting from the undercover operation.

All details of Operation Fire and Ice are available on a fact sheet drafted by the US Embassy.

The sum will be allocated to the Italian government's asset forfeiture fund, or "Fondo unico di giustizia" (FUG). It is a milestone in drug enforcement cooperation as well as a significant step forward in transnational investigations aimed at identifying illicit proceeds in online financial transactions.

The asset sharing ceremony was held in the presence of US Ambassador to Italy John Phillips, DEA Acting Regional Director Mark Hamlet, Italian Police Chief Alessandro Pansa, and Rome Chief Prosecutor Giuseppe Pignatone.

Police Chief Alessandro Pansa mentioned a new frontier in the fight against drug trafficking : "We have to target directly illicit funds and capitals, without waiting for them to be converted into assets which are much more difficult to detect and seize".

"Italy", added Pansa, "is seizing a large number of assets or firms in the hands of criminal syndicates, but a little less cash than Americans, who are more pragmatic in this respect". It is therefore necessary that the police "become more creative and intervene as soon as criminal organizations start making money, confiscating cash obtained through illicit means before it is converted into assets".

Police Chief Pansa also stressed the importance of collaboration between Italy and the United States, a partnership based on a longstanding relationship which has always been very effective, and that no longer concerns investigations only.

"We are moving towards a new horizon", he concluded, "we must endeavour to become self-financing using the proceeds confiscated from criminal organizations". This money will be allocated to the "Fondo Unico di Giustizia", the Italian government's asset forfeiture fund, and from there it will go directly to the police and the judiciary involved in the fight against criminal organizations.

Once back at the Interior Ministry, Police Chief Pansa handed over the cheque to Interior Minister Angelino Alfano, who will use these resources to combat the most dangerous forms of organized crime, as he mentioned in a tweet just after the ceremony.

Italian

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