



United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Office of Special Investigations

B-285932

July 31, 2000

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Caucus on International Narcotics Control
United States Senate

Subject: Ireland Is Not a Major Transshipment Point for International
Narcotics Traffickers

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As requested, enclosed with this letter is a copy of a briefing that GAO's Office of Special Investigations gave to William Olson, Staff Director, Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, on July 6, 2000. At that time, we presented the results of our work that focused on determining whether Ireland, which encompasses both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, is a major transshipment point for international narcotics traffickers.

We inquired about the movement of cocaine from the Western Hemisphere through Ireland for eventual distribution in Europe. We also inquired about the movement through Ireland of heroin originating in Southwest Asia and the synthetic drug ecstasy originating in the Netherlands for eventual distribution in the United States.

We interviewed knowledgeable officials of the U.S. government (Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Customs, U.S. Secret Service, and Immigration and Naturalization Service); Irish Customs and Excise; Garda Siochana (Irish National Police); Royal Ulster Constabulary; British Customs and Excise, United Nations Drug Control Program; and the European Police Office. We also reviewed records concerning recent seizures of cocaine, heroin, and ecstasy.

We found no evidence to indicate that Ireland is a major transshipment point for international narcotics traffickers. In 1996 and 1998 Irish authorities made three significant multikilogram seizures of cocaine that was destined for ultimate distribution in the United Kingdom and Europe. However, the officials we interviewed did not believe that such large cocaine shipments are regularly transshipped through Ireland. In addition, the officials had no information concerning any reported seizures of heroin or ecstasy in Ireland that was destined for the United States.

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We will make copies of this letter available to others. If you have any questions, please contact Assistant Director Patrick Sullivan at (202) 512-6722. Thomas Wiley was a key contributor to this case.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert H. Hast". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" being the most prominent part.

Robert H. Hast
Assistant Comptroller General
for Special Investigations

Enclosure

BRIEFING PAPER

Ireland Is Not a Major Transshipment Point for International Narcotics Traffickers

HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS

According to Irish law enforcement officials and corroboration by other officials, Ireland (which encompasses both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) has a growing drug abuse problem and illegal use of heroin and the synthetic drug ecstasy is a major concern. These officials said that cocaine use is not a major problem in Ireland at this time. The city of Dublin, with a population of about 500,000 has at least 15,000 hard-core heroin addicts and many more casual users of the drug. In June 2000, Dublin experienced an influx of tainted heroin among the city's addicts that resulted in numerous deaths.

According to Irish officials, the European Union, of which Ireland is a member, has created a "borderless" Europe. European Union citizens travel between member states without being subjected to the traditional customs inspections. Drug smugglers have exploited this situation.

Major Cocaine Seizures

- 1996 – 50 kilograms Seized aboard a cargo ship in the Shannon River near Limerick. The seizure was based on international drug intelligence.
- 1996 – 600 kilograms Seized aboard a fishing trawler docked in Cork Harbor. The seizure was based on suspicious activity observed by local citizens.
- 1998 – 329 kilograms Seized aboard a yacht docked in Kinsale Harbor (near Cork). Seizure was based on a search performed by Irish Customs after the yacht docked at the wrong buoy and failed to pay harbor dues.

Irish authorities said that the cocaine seized in the above three instances originated in the Caribbean Sea area and that most, if not all, of it was destined for ultimate distribution in the United Kingdom and Europe. They told us that they do not believe that such large cocaine shipments regularly pass through Ireland. They also said that although there is some domestic consumption of cocaine, it is not a major problem.

Major Heroin Seizures

- 1998 – 22 kilograms Seized from three vehicles on a ferry that arrived in Dublin from the United Kingdom. The seizure was based on police intelligence.

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- 1998 -- 7 kilograms Seized on a farm in Lusk (near Dublin). The seizure was based on police intelligence.

Irish officials told us that virtually all of the heroin that enters Ireland is intended for domestic consumption. The heroin originates in Southwest Asia and most of it passes through Holland or the United Kingdom before entering Ireland.

Major Ecstasy Seizure

- 1998 – 200,000 tablets Seized from a car in Dublin. The seizure was based on police intelligence.

Irish officials told us that virtually all of the ecstasy that enters Ireland is intended for domestic consumption. They said they believe that ecstasy is manufactured in either Eastern Europe or Holland, and smuggled into Ireland through Holland.

According to Irish officials, Ireland has experienced an influx of ethnic groups seeking asylum and residence over the past few years. Irish law enforcement authorities are concentrating on international concerns about the involvement of Nigerian criminals in drug smuggling. Of particular concern to authorities is the growing population of Nigerians who reside in the cities of Dublin, Cork, and Ennis. Irish authorities are working closely with U.S. law enforcement agencies, including the U.S. Secret Service, to combat a recent wave of criminal activity committed by Nigerian criminals in Ireland.

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