

Cannabis: a feasible proposal

There's a heated debate on illegal drugs in the world today: from the true meaning of this term (also in light of new substance-free addictions such as that from gambling, recently included in the Italian National Health Care plan) to which policies are more effective to regulate them. I would like to put forward the proposal of a new Hemp (Cannabis, or Marijuana) regulation for Italy, that could bring about a number of positive legal, social, health and economic changes.

The proposal

Italy should remove Cannabis and its products from the current drug law (no. 309/1990), allowing its production, trade and consumption, and assimilate its regulation to the one on alcohol: prohibited for minors, for those who perform special tasks (during the performance of such tasks), for drivers, etc. This can be combined with other restrictions, as with tobacco: limit the consumption in public places, forbid advertising, indicate the possible negative consequences on the package, etc.. Hemp should be sold through separate channels (as it is for tobacco) and similarly taxed. The Italian state should protect the cultivation of local varieties and encourage the development of quality hemp products.

Legal and social effects

It would restore dignity to millions of Italians (according to the UN "about 14.6% of Italian citizens aged between 15 and 65 has used Cannabis¹"). It would allow the Police to focus on more dangerous substances, such as the new synthetic drugs, very common among young people and cause of growing public concern. It would make really effective the prohibition to minors, very difficult to exercise today because of its illegality: "20.8% of Italian teenagers admit to having smoked cannabis," says a report by NGO Telefono Azzurro².

Health

It would allow extensive testing on the medical applications of Hemp, which are many: the EU has authorized the trial of Cannabis to treat a variety of ailments, from Glaucoma to Alzheimer³. By contrast, it would allow more systematic and widespread studies on adverse effects, and thus promote a more conscious consumption, as it has been the case with tobacco and alcohol. It would also contribute to the adoption of methods of assumption other than smoking, such as food or electric vaporizers (deep smoke inhalation is considered one of the biggest hazards of Hemp use).

Economy and taxation

Being illegal, the Hemp trade in Italy is in the hands of organized crime. A regulation of this kind would deprive it of a source of immense revenue: the retail price of Cannabis is between 5 and 20 Euros per gram⁴. These

profits would become legal, visible, taxed and from a local agricultural production, rather than illegal import as it is today. It would give a significant boost to three very strategic areas for Italy: excellence of agricultural productions, tourism and youth employment.

Italian Excellence

The cultivation and processing of Hemp should be integrated with the agricultural know-how for which Italy is well known: local varieties, appellation of origin, areas of excellence, limited luxury productions, etc. The leader nation in this industry today is Holland, which has a rather unsuitable climate for agriculture - in fact most of the production takes place indoors⁵. Italy would be the perfect place for Hemp: the plant is extremely adaptable, and its features change profoundly in different climates, altitudes, exposures, etc. Moreover, the increasingly demanding market (both local and international) would certainly reward excellence in production, organic crops, the development of strains that are less bound to the "intensity of the effect" (Dutch products are very often the result of cross-breeding and manipulations⁶), the creation of new varieties and Hemp products (essential oils, cosmetics, etc.): that chain of excellence for which we are famous (and copied) worldwide.

Italy is synonymous with good living, and we already offer a varied and unique tourist experience. With the implementation of this proposal, we could seamlessly integrate this culture (pun intended) in the palette of pleasures (climatic, gastronomic, artistic, cultural, geographical, ecc.) that are among our best selling points (and certainly among the keys to our future). It should also not be underestimated the impact that this regulation would have on tourism: in the recent Dutch debate on the continuation of their permissive policy, this factor has been widely taken into account.

The adoption of this proposal (which has no economic costs) would put our country at the forefront on an issue that is the subject of profound revision worldwide, giving Italy the image of a country that can adopt innovative strategies to address both old problems (lifting Hemp prohibition has been proposed since the 1960s) and the current economic crisis. It would boost employment, especially among young people, creating new job opportunities in many different fields - from tourism to agriculture and trade⁷. Last, but by no means least, it would also establish new standards of excellence in a market that is already very appealing to both Big Tobacco and GMOs multinational companies⁸.

Sergio Messina
(info@sergiomessina.com)

1 [In Italia consumo di Cannabis da record](#) - Corriere della Sera online, July 7, 2012 (in italian)

2 [Rapporto Nazionale sulla Condizione dell'Infanzia e dell'Adolescenza](#), quoted by Aduc.it

3 [Medical cannabis](#) - Wikipedia

4 [Priceofweed.com](#)

5 [Cannabis production and markets in Europe](#) - *The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction* (p. 92 e 123)

6 [Drug policy of the Netherlands](#) - Wikipedia

7 [Giovani: ritorno all'agricoltura](#) - Impresamia.com (in italian)

8 [Big pot](#) - Blog of the New York Times, June 6th 2013