

Swiss convictions for membership

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Swiss courts have nevertheless convicted members of the 'Ndrangheta. On 20 January 2020 the Federal Supreme Court upheld the conviction of a 62-year-old Italian resident of the Bernese Seeland, sentenced to three years and eight months for participation in a criminal organization and arms trafficking.¹ On 29 December 2017 the Federal Criminal Court convicted two persons resident in Ticino, a case that the next section treats in detail.² Swiss authorities also took part in the investigation of the anti-Mafia directorate of Catanzaro that led in December 2019 to more than 330 arrests in Italy.³ On 6 December 2019 the Federal Council announced that it would act against the Mafia with an action plan and that the fight against this form of organized crime would be a priority of federal crime control until 2023.⁴

1 Why Switzerland, and why Ticino

The official sources and the case law allow a sober explanation of why Italian Mafia organizations are present in Switzerland and in Ticino in particular. The first reason is migration. The Calabrian, Sicilian and Campanian emigration of the 1950s to 1970s brought tens of thousands of workers to Swiss construction sites and factories. A small number of them belonged to or were later recruited by Mafia families, which used the emigrant communities as a social environment in which they could reproduce their structures abroad. The Frauenfeld cell, founded by emigrants from a single Calabrian village, is the clearest documented example. The second reason is proximity. The 'Ndrangheta has had established *locali* (local units) in Como, Varese and Milan since the 1970s, and reporting on the Italian anti-Mafia directorate (*Direzione Investigativa Antimafia*, DIA) has called Lombardy the Italian capital of the 'Ndrangheta. From these cities Lugano is less than an hour away.⁵

The third reason is the financial infrastructure. The MROS and fedpol both describe Switzerland as a place for the investment and laundering of proceeds, a function that requires banks, fiduciaries and real estate. Ticino offers these in Italian and close to the border. Its penalties are lower than in Italy, and Italian preventive measures such as the *interdittiva antimafia* (an administrative exclusion of companies suspected of Mafia infiltration from public contracts) and the confiscation without conviction under the Italian anti-Mafia code do not apply there. The fourth reason is logistics. The cases of 2021 described below show that cells in eastern Switzerland and in Ticino served as bases for cocaine trafficking and as sources of weapons for groups in Lombardy.

Essentials. Federal authorities consider that all major Italian Mafia organizations are present in Switzerland and that the *'Ndrangheta* is the most deeply rooted. In 2020 fedpol spoke of at least twenty cells with about 400 members, with Ticino, Valais and Graubünden most affected. The MROS names Ticino among the regional hotspots in 2025 and lists real estate, construction, catering, waste, energy, professional services and gambling as sectors of infiltration. The Frauenfeld case of 2014 showed both effective cooperation with Italy, which led to extraditions and convictions in Reggio Calabria, and the limits of the Swiss offence of criminal organization before its revision in 2021.

2 Notes

1. Nau.ch (above). ↩
2. Nau.ch (above); see the next section. ↩
3. Nau.ch (above) (19 December 2019). ↩
4. Nau.ch (above), timeline entry of 6 December 2019 (article of 21 July 2020). ↩
5. "La Lombardia vista come 'capitale italiana della 'ndrangheta'", laRegione, 2 October 2022, <https://www.laregione.ch/estero/confine/1610748/servizi> (on the DIA's semi-annual report). ↩

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