

NEWS

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Canadian Pleads Guilty to Scheme to Transport Cocaine to Europe Inside a Stolen Yacht

(More)

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CAMDEN – A Canadian man pleaded guilty today in connection with his scheme to pay to have a yacht stolen, loaded with cocaine and then shipped to Europe, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Rossen Ivanov, 32, a citizen of Canada and native of Bulgaria residing in Toronto and Miami, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Joseph H. Rodriguez to an Information, which charges one count of attempt to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute cocaine. Judge Rodriguez continued the defendant's detention and scheduled sentencing for Oct. 27.

Ivanov was arrested on April 20, 2007, as a result of an investigation by Special Agents of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Immigration and Customs Enforcement into information that the defendant was interested in purchasing a large quantity of cocaine and then having it transported to Europe by having the cocaine hidden inside a yacht that would be shipped across the Atlantic Ocean.

At his plea hearing, Ivanov admitted that in November 2006 he met with two men and discussed the possibility of buying cars and shipping them to Europe for resale. Subsequently, Ivanov engaged in various business transactions with these men. Shortly thereafter, Ivanov admitted, he had a discussion with the men about the possibility of buying a stolen yacht and shipping it to Europe to sell. Ivanov admitted that he later discussed with the men the possibility of hiding cocaine on board this stolen yacht, so that the cocaine could be transported to Europe as well.

On Jan. 19, 2007, one of the two men introduced Ivanov to another man named "Dave Melendez," who, unbeknownst to Ivanov at the time, was an undercover law enforcement officer ("UC"). At that time, Ivanov admitted, he discussed some of the arrangements for shipping the stolen yacht, along with cocaine, to Europe with the UC.

Ivanov admitted that on April 13, 2007, he met the UC, at which time the UC showed him the yacht that supposedly would be stolen and used to ship the cocaine to Europe. According to a criminal Complaint, unsealed as a result of Ivanov's arrest, this meeting took place at a boatyard in Burlington County.

Later that day, Ivanov again met with the UC for the purpose of giving the undercover officer \$500,000 in cash as a down payment towards the purchase of the yacht to be stolen and the cocaine, he admitted. During this meeting, Ivanov gave the undercover officer a duffel bag that contained approximately \$360,000 in U.S. currency.

During a meeting with the UC on April 20, 2007, Ivanov gave him an additional \$60,000 in cash and reaffirmed the plans to go forward. Ivanov was arrested at the conclusion of the meeting.

The charge of attempt to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute cocaine carries a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment and a fine of \$1 million.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Rodriguez will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of the DEA's Camden Resident Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gerard P. McAleer in Newark, and ICE, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Kyle Hutchins in Newark, with the investigation leading to the guilty plea.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Howard Wiener of the Criminal Division in Camden.

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