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Son of Italy's last king in prison

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Victor Emmanuel, son of Italy's last king, was sent to a prison in southern Italy today after his arrest as part of an investigation into prostitution and corruption.

Victor Emmanuel, 69, was picked up Friday on charges of criminal association. He is accused of recruiting prostitutes to be sent to clients in a gambling casino in Campione D'Italia, an Italian enclave in Switzerland, and of corruption in connection with trafficking of video games and slot machines for the casino.

Victor Emmanuel's family has denied the allegations.

"It's folly," his wife, Marina Doria, was quoted as saying in Corriere della Sera newspaper. "Victor is a clean man."

Victor Emmanuel's son, Emmanuel Filiberto, has said he was "stunned" and threatened to chain himself in front of the prison as a sign of protest, La Repubblica reported.

"Italy, after many decades of exile, is making us suffer again," he was quoted as saying.

Victor Emmanuel and his family returned to Italy in 2002 after a half-century of exile imposed on the former royal family because of its support for fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.

The police operation targeted 13 people, including the spokesman of the former Italian foreign minister and the mayor of Campione D'Italia. Seven of the suspects have been put behind bars, the others were held in house arrest, reports said.

Victor Emmanuel, who uses the title Prince although the monarchy was abolished decades ago, was arrested Friday in Varenna, on the shores of Lake Como. He was transferred to Potenza overnight, the prosecutor's office in the southern Italian town said. Potenza is the city where prosecutors investigating the ring are based.

"The measure I have adopted was issued after a long and complex investigation," said Alberto Iannuzzi, the magistrate who issued the arrest warrant for Victor Emmanuel. "Very grave evidence has emerged relating to extremely alarming facts."

Placed under house arrest were Salvatore Sottile, a spokesman for former Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini, who is not touched by the investigation; and Campione D'Italia Mayor Roberto Salmoiraghi.

The arrest was the latest legal woe for Victor Emmanuel.

In 1978, he was accused of firing a shotgun blast from his yacht that killed a 19-year-old German on a nearby yacht. He claimed he fired in the air and legal proceedings eventually cleared him.

In 1997, he stirred outrage when he said Fascism's anti-Semitic laws - approved by the Savoy royal house - "weren't so terrible". He later retracted the statement.

Victor Emmanuel's father, Umberto II, became Italy's king in 1946. But Umberto lasted only a month before a referendum in which Italians voted to get rid of the monarchy and make the country a republic. Two years later, the new constitution barred Umberto and his male descendants from Italy.

Victor Emmanuel was nine when he left his homeland. His son was born and reared in Switzerland. The family spent most of the years of banishment in Geneva.

The family returned to their homeland after a law approved in 2002 overturned the constitutional provision banning male Savoys from setting foot in Italy.

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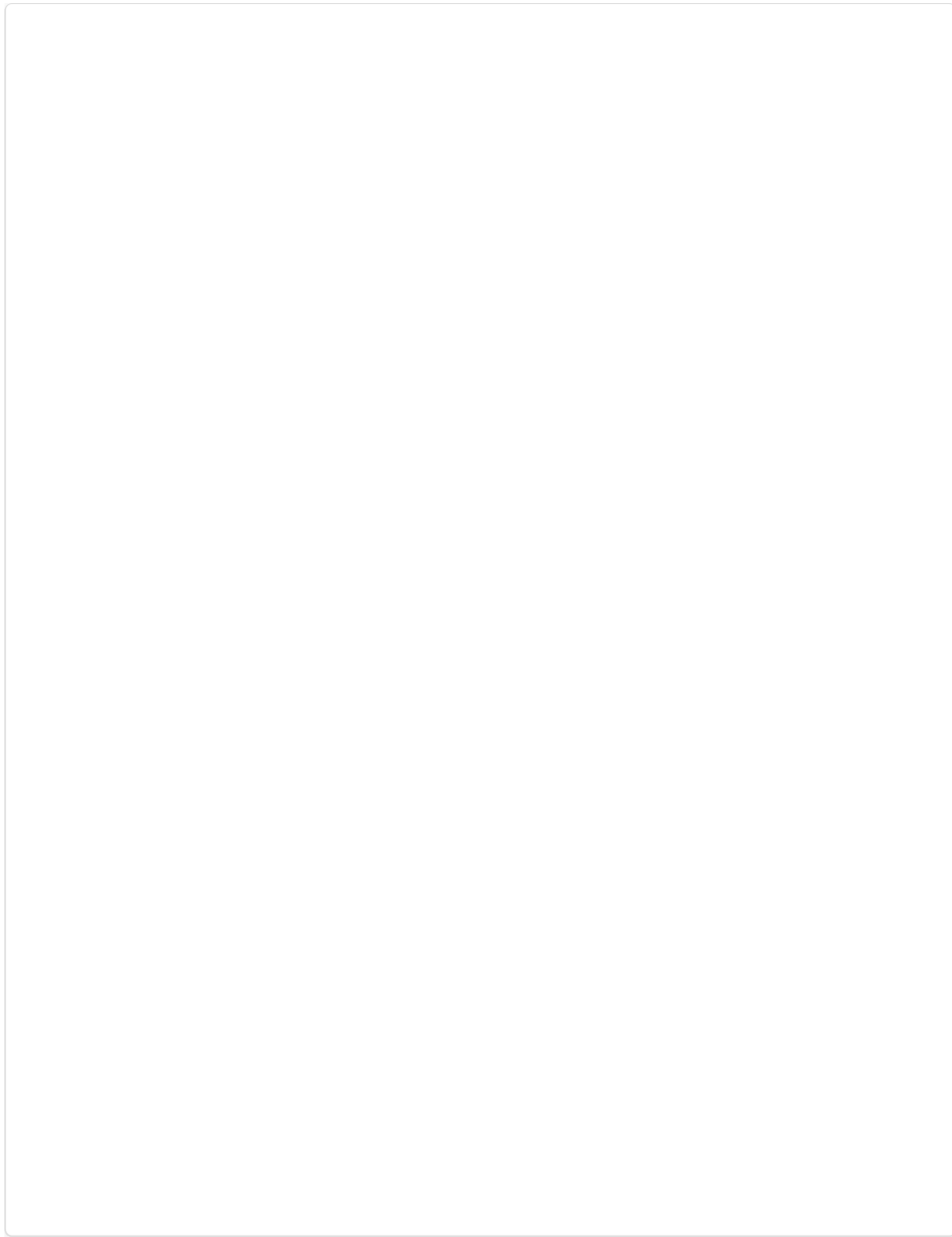
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