



PRESS RELEASE

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

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Presidents Chirac and Sampaio to visit the EMCDDA

On 4 February 1999, at the start of a two-day State visit to Portugal, President Jacques Chirac of France will join President of the Portuguese Republic Jorge Sampaio on a visit to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), Lisbon. Both Presidents demonstrate particular sensitivity to the drugs problem and delivered remarkable statements on the subject at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs in New York in June 1998.

During the visit, the two Heads of State will meet with Chairman of the EMCDDA Management Board Franz-J. Bindert and Director of the EMCDDA Georges Estievenart. Also present will be high-level representatives from Portugal and France, including: José Sócrates, Portuguese Deputy Prime Minister responsible for Drugs; Alexandre Rosa, Portuguese National Drugs Co-ordinator; Hubert Vedrine, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France; Christian Sauter, French Secretary of State for Budgets; Hervé Mécheri, delegate to the French Inter-ministerial Mission for the Fight against Drugs; and Paul Lafargue, national drugs expert, secretariat general of the Prime Minister.

The Director of the EMCDDA will present the work of the agency in the context of its second Three-year Work Programme (1998–2000), particularly the achievements outlined in its *General Report of Activities 1998* to be published this spring. This visit is of particular relevance to the EMCDDA in the run-up to the French and Portuguese presidencies of the Council of the European Union in 2000.

France has played a leading role in the history of the European fight against drugs and was at the forefront of the establishment of the EMCDDA. In October 1989, when drugs did not yet fall under Community competence, former French President François Mitterrand called for the creation of a European drug-monitoring body and an instrument of political co-ordination centred around the Member States and the European Community. Earlier, former President Georges Pompidou had paved the way for the creation of the Council of Europe's Pompidou Group in 1971.

As the EMCDDA's host country, Portugal has played a significant part in the Centre's development. Particularly gratifying have been the excellent relations with the Portuguese authorities enjoyed by the Centre as well as the close links with the Presidency of the Republic, forged through joint events such as the Euro-Ibero American Seminar on 'Co-operation in Drugs and Drug Addiction Policies' organised in Oporto in October 1998.

The EMCDDA is one of 11 independent European Community agencies focusing on specific topics ranging from improving working conditions and the environment to combating racism and drugs. The Centre's mission is to provide Europe's citizens, drug practitioners and politicians with the information they need to take appropriate action on drugs and related problems. The EMCDDA's main tasks are: collecting and analysing existing information on drugs; improving data-comparison methods; disseminating this information; and co-operating with European and international bodies and organisations and with non-EU countries.

The session at the EMCDDA (17.20–17.50) will be closed to the press. There will be no official press conference. A photo opportunity for the press will take place at the EMCDDA at 17.20. A brief informal session will be held after the proceedings at 17.50 where there will be possibilities for photographs and questions. Members of the press are invited to arrive at the EMCDDA at 16.50 for registration. For security reasons, a limit of 30 members of the press will be admitted following their confirmation by telephone to: Kathy Robertson or Natércia Martins, EMCDDA. Tel: (351 1) 811 3000. Fax: (351 1) 813 1711. Rua da Cruz de Santa Apolónia, 23–25, PT-1149-045 Lisbon.

