



news release

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

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On the eve of UN international drugs day...

AN AMBITIOUS NEW EU DRUGS PLAN FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

On the eve of the UN day against drugs (Monday 26 June), the EU now has in place an ambitious plan to tackle the challenge of illegal drugs.

The European Summit in Feira, Portugal, this week endorsed the EU Action Plan on Drugs (2000–2004). This confers a key role on the Lisbon-based drugs agency (EMCDDA).

Commenting on the plan at the end of the Portuguese Presidency, Georges Estievenart, Executive Director of the EMCDDA, says its endorsement, particularly the role it gives the EMCDDA, is a 'turning point' in facing the global drugs challenge.

An EU 'first'

For the first time, Member States will have to achieve measurable objectives in tackling drugs, and will be in a position to judge the success of their policies. Information and evaluation are cited as pre-conditions for effective implementation, follow-up and assessment of EU and Member States' drugs strategies.

In the Summit's conclusions, Member States, in co-operation with the EMCDDA, are 'urged to enhance their efforts to provide reliable and comparable information on key epidemiological indicators in order to better evaluate the impact of drug-related issues'.

Estievenart says: 'Now that information and evaluation have been recognised in the plan as a key to success, the EMCDDA faces the challenge of providing policy-makers with instruments to measure the impact of action on the drug phenomenon as well as a solid knowledge-base for informed drug policy planning.'

The Action Plan paves the way for EU Member States to adopt and implement each of the EMCDDA's five key epidemiological indicators. These are a set of standards allowing countries to measure, for the first time, the extent and effects of drug use and its consequences in the EU in a harmonised way. Other indicators should also be developed by the EMCDDA in co-operation with the EU institutions, Europol and other drugs bodies.

These latest developments put the EU and the EMCDDA in line with the new UN approach to drugs (UNGASS, 1998) in that they launch specific objectives and targets to assess the effectiveness of measures against drugs.

Key objectives

The Action Plan is designed to implement the latest EU Drugs Strategy (2000–2004) endorsed at the Helsinki European Council in December 1999.

The Strategy's objectives are:

- To reduce significantly, within five years, the prevalence of drug use especially among the young. [*Drug note: Recent surveys suggest that over 40 million people EU-wide have tried cannabis – on average, one in five 15-to-16-year-olds and at least one in four 15-to-34-year-olds.*]
- To reduce significantly, within five years, the negative impact of drug use on health (HIV, hepatitis B and C). [*Drug note: Studies indicate that opiate injectors are at 20–30 times a higher risk of death from a variety of causes than non-drug users of the same age.*]
- To achieve a substantial increase in the number of addicts treated successfully. [*Drug note: Substitution treatment for opiate dependency is expanding rapidly, with family doctors often involved. Some 300,000 people EU-wide are thought to be receiving substitution therapy, mainly with methadone.*]
- To achieve a substantial reduction in the availability of illegal drugs. [*Drug note: After peaking in 1991, quantities of heroin seized have fluctuated within a range of five to six tonnes a year. Quantities of cocaine seized seem to have peaked at 38 tonnes in 1997.*]
- To achieve a substantial reduction in drug-related crime. [*Drug note: Number of drug-related arrests EU-wide has been rising steadily since the mid-1980s. Cannabis is the main drug involved.*]
- To achieve a substantial reduction in money-laundering and illegal trafficking in drug precursors. [*Drug note: Estievenart believes the single market has had a clear impact on drug trafficking and he expects the same of EU enlargement – 'If you open the windows, the wind will come in.' The Action Plan specifically addresses such concerns, with measures to involve candidate countries in the Strategy.*]

Some of the main elements of the Action Plan are:

- To ensure the drugs issue is kept as a major EU priority.
- To continue the EU strategy of treating supply and demand reduction as mutually reinforcing, as underlined by the UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS).
- To encourage Member States to share information on national strategies etc, using the EMCDDA.
- To ensure anti-drugs action is evaluated.
- To give greater priority to drug prevention and demand reduction, particularly targeting 'new recruits' to the drug scene.
- To tackle drug-linked crime, notably juvenile and urban delinquency.
- To reinforce the fight against organised crime and illicit drug trafficking.
- To promote international co-operation and to support the UN.

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