European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE EMCDDA — RESULTS RELEASED TODAY

EU drugs agency 'performing well', say evaluators

(30.1.2008) 'How effective is the EMCDDA?', 'Is it achieving its tasks and goals?', 'What benefits is it providing for the EU and its Member States?' and 'Are its activities coherent with those launched by the EU institutions in the drugs field?'. These were among the questions addressed in an independent evaluation of the agency, undertaken at the initiative of the European Commission in 2007. The results of the year-long exercise, carried out by the UK-based Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services (CSES), were presented to the EMCDDA Management Board in December 2007 and are released today on the agency's website ([1]).

The overall purpose of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the agency and examine ways of enhancing its operations. The exercise covered the period of two EMCDDA three-year work programmes (2001–2003 and 2004–2006).

According to the evaluators, the EMCDDA is 'performing well' in its core mission to provide 'factual, objective, reliable and comparable information at European level concerning drugs and drug addiction' — information that is needed as an evidence-base by policy-makers at both national and European level. The agency's priority-setting was also found to be 'closely aligned with wider EU policy aims', such as those set by EU drugs strategies and action plans. And the EMCDDA was found to be 'almost certainly providing a more cost-effective way of monitoring the drugs situation in Europe than could be undertaken by the Commission itself'.

'The EMCDDA's work has also had a direct impact on EU Member States' drugs policies and practices', found the research, by 'encouraging a higher degree of coordination between them and the adoption of comparable structures'. The development across the Member States of harmonised data-collection mechanisms 'would not have taken place, at least in the same timeframe, without the EMCDDA', says the report. And this played out against the challenging backdrop of two EU enlargements and the resultant demands from new EU countries for capacity-building support.

'External evaluations of this kind are among a variety of routine controls carried out on the EU agencies to ensure optimal transparency, efficiency and accountability', says **EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz**. 'Exercised by the European Parliament, Commission and Court of Auditors, as well as by Member States through statutory bodies, these controls keep an independent check on the content of work programmes and budgetary and decision-making processes. The results and proposals of this second evaluation of the EMCDDA are now being taken on board by staff with the aim of heightening the agency's overall performance.'

Surveys conducted during the evaluation revealed that the EMCDDA's publications and other outputs are 'generally well regarded'. In particular, the European perspective provided by the *Annual report* and other scientific products was widely considered as important for understanding national drug situations and actual or potential trends.

Feedback from surveys also showed that the agency's current organisational set-up is 'working well', with a strong focus on communicating with target audiences and an integrated approach to scientific activities. Around 79% of survey respondents considered the agency either 'very effective' or 'quite effective' in communicating

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with target audiences (policy-makers, practitioners, researchers), although it appears to be targeting these groups better at European than national level. While the report found that, to date, the agency has had sufficient analytical capacity to cope with its work programme objectives, additional human resources/scientific capacity may be needed in future to fulfil upcoming tasks and goals.

But plaudits apart, the report also points to various ways in which the agency's performance as information-provider on the European drug situation could be enhanced. For example the quality of key indicator data ([2]) on the drugs situation is dependent on the quality of the national data gathered, and there is still much variation in this area. At present the agency's data-collection system is only implemented to around 60–70% at Member State level.

Notes:

([1]) For a copy of the evaluation report in English, see http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/about/evaluation. This was the second evaluation carried out on the EMCDDA. The first, by Deloitte and Touche in 1999, made specific recommendations to improve the working methods, organisation and outputs of the agency and led to a series of reforms (http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/?nnodeID=1651). The recast EMCDDA regulation which entered into force in January 2007, stipulates that the Commission should initiate an external evaluation of the agency every six years on completion of two triennial work programmes.

([2]) Key indicators at http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/?nnodeID=1310