



NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

EUROPEAN CONFERENCE TO DEBATE YOUNG PEOPLE AND DRUGS

Policy-makers and information-providers join forces to address young people's drug use

(28.10.2003 LISBON) The pressing topic of **drug use and young people** will be the focus of a European conference to be held in **Malaga** from 30–31 October.

The event is being organised by the **European Parliament** in collaboration with the Lisbon-based **EU** drugs agency, the **EMCDDA**, the **Spanish Government Delegation for the National Plan on Drugs**, the **Regional Government of Andalusia** and the **Malaga Town Council**.

This will be the first time that a European Parliamentary delegation meets with information-providers and experts in the drugs field to help identify information needs and priorities for formulating and assessing drug policies targeting young people at European level. The conference aims to encourage an open discussion and exchange of expertise among some 130 policy-makers, scientists and experts in the drugs field from across Europe.

Speakers addressing the introductory session will include: **Viviane Reding**, European Commissioner for Education, Culture and Youth; **Jorge Salvador Hernández Mollar**, Chairman of the Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs (European Parliament); **Gonzalo Robles**, Government Delegate to the Spanish National Plan on Drugs; and **Marcel Reimen**, Chairman of the EMCDDA Management Board. Other dignitaries addressing the event are: **Carel Edwards**, DG Justice and Home Affairs (European Commission); **Georges Estievenart**, Executive Director of the EMCDDA; **Andrés Estrada Moreno**, Drug Commissioner of the Regional Government of Andalusia and **Francisco de la Torre Prados**, Mayor of Malaga. Eight members of the EP's Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs will be among the distinguished guests.

Commenting on the event **Mr Hernández Mollar** said: 'The European Union is still a long way from reaching the objectives set by its action plan on drugs to reduce drug use among the under 18s significantly by 2004. We have our work cut out for us, especially in preventing drug use among those who are most at risk and in settings where drug use is at its highest'.

Mr Reimen stated: 'The problem of young people and drugs – in both the existing EU and the acceding and candidate countries – is of immense concern to the public and policy-makers alike. It has to be tackled from a position of knowledge and consensus. And, by bringing together so many experts in the field, the Malaga conference is designed to create new insights to enable positive progress in the field.'

The conference will analyse the extent and patterns of drug and alcohol use among young people in Europe and the interrelation between the use of these substances. In particular, it will explore risk factors that may explain why some groups of young people are more vulnerable to drug use and drug-related problems than others – and present examples of interventions targeted at these groups. Attention will also be paid to the

evaluation of policies and intervention strategies addressing young people. The conference is designed to attract a broad representation of key European players in the drugs field.

Launching the **2003 EMCDDA Annual reports** in Strasbourg last week, **Agency chief Georges Estievenart**, commented on the issue: 'Drug use among young people has risen steadily in the 15 EU Member States over the last decade. Despite some signs of stabilisation among mainstream young people in some western European countries, there is no evidence of a significant overall reduction, especially among those most at risk. One answer is to invest more in prevention among those we know are vulnerable and where drug and alcohol use is most intensive'.

Commenting on the conference, he added: 'In organising this conference, our intention was to provide a forum for bringing together and promoting dialogue between science and policy, knowledge and decision-making and reflection and action. We firmly believe that this event will help us to establish more solid bases for future decision-making, whether strategic or operational'.

Coinciding with the conference will be the publication of 'Drug use amongst vulnerable young people – Prevention strategies needed to target young people most at risk', the latest edition in the **EMCDDA's Drugs in focus** policy briefing series.

As the conference itself, the briefing is intended to focus the attention of **EU** policy-makers on the issues involved in this sensitive area (*see separate news release No 15*).

Notes to editors

For more on drugs and young people see **2003 EMCDDA Annual reports**:

<http://annualreport.emcdda.eu.int>
<http://candidates.emcdda.eu.int>

See also **news release** No 13:
<http://www.emcdda.eu.int/data/docs/55en.pdf>

For further details on the **conference** and programme see: <http://www.emcdda.eu.int>

The policy briefing **Drugs in focus** can be downloaded in 12 languages from:

<http://www.emcdda.eu.int/infopoint/publications/focus.shtml>