



EMBARGO: 24 February 1998, 0900 GMT
(release no. 7/9)

For information only -- not an official document

REPORT POINTS TO DRUG CONTROL SHORTCOMINGS IN WESTERN EUROPE

Board Concerned over Tendencies in Drug Control Policies

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) in its 1997 Report calls on the Governments and other influential elements of society in western Europe to adhere more rigorously to the provisions of the international drug control treaties on which there is worldwide agreement and to which almost all European countries are parties. In reviewing the international drug situation, the Board found shortcomings in a number of western European countries in the field of drug control. What further alarmed the Board were certain tendencies in overall drug policies, in the form of continued lobbying on the part of influential members of society in western European countries to legalize the non-medical use of drugs. Following are some of the findings -- as contained in the 1997 Report -- that have prompted the special concern of the Board:

“Despite changing trends and successful law enforcement interventions, Europe remains a major illicit market for drugs. Indoor and outdoor cultivation of highly potent cannabis is spreading and amphetamine and “ecstasy”-type amphetamine derivatives are manufactured in a number of clandestine laboratories, for trafficking within Europe and elsewhere”.

“Among member States of the European Union, differences between national drug control policies as well as the ongoing promotion of the liberalization or legalization of the non-medical use of drugs, are increasingly threatening the consensus needed for meaningful measures against drug abuse and trafficking, especially in the area of demand reduction”.

“In the opinion of the Board, the continuous debate about the legalization and depenalization of cannabis abuse and the aggressive publicity in favour of its legalization are major factors contributing to the attitude of many young people towards cannabis abuse”.

“Election campaigns have been conducted with candidates standing for parliament on a drug legalization platform.”

Some of the candidates for the European Parliament stood on such a platform and were successful”.

“Areas in which cannabis varieties with a low THC content are licitly cultivated, with subsidies from the European Commission, are increasing by 40 per cent annually in the member States of the European Union. The Board, in its reports for 1994 and 1996, drew the attention of Governments to the necessity of adequate regulation and monitoring of such cultivation. But the Board is concerned that controls may no longer be feasible if licit cultivation spreads. It calls on European Governments and the institutions of the European Union, when determining their policies, to take into account not only environmental, industrial and economic aspects, but also drug control aspects”.

“Since 1996, cannabis has also been increasingly used in food and beverages, and some products containing cannabis are advertised mostly by underlining its virtues. The Board has doubts that such practices are in line with the spirit of the 1961 Convention and the national legislation of the countries concerned. The Board calls on Governments and the industries concerned to counteract such practices, which appear to be, in some cases, aimed at legalizing the non-medical use of cannabis”.

As regards controls over psychotropic substances, Governments in several parts of the world informed the Board of the detection of consignments of mainly various benzodiazepines, that had been exported without the import authorizations required under their national legislation. Such exports have mainly been effected from countries in Europe that have not yet started to control their international trade in all psychotropic substances by using the system of import and export authorizations.

As regards controls over chemicals used in the clandestine manufacture of drugs, the Board, expressed its concern that the number of seizures of chemicals reported by Governments of western Europe is not commensurate with the suspected extent of illicit drug manufacture and diversion of amphetamine-type stimulants. They are widely abused and a large part of the world's illicit manufacture of those drugs occurs in western Europe.

The Board also regrets that some major manufacturing and exporting countries, in particular in the European Union and, consequently, the European Commission on behalf of the member States of the European Union, are still not in a position to provide information on licit trade in chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs in accordance with a resolution adopted in 1995 by the Economic and Social Council.

The Board appreciates the actions in precursor control of several developing countries and trusts that industrialized countries that have not already done so, and in particular Member States of the European Union, will take similar, or otherwise, alternative actions that are equally effective in preventing diversion of controlled chemicals into illicit trafficking.