

**15th Ministerial Conference of the Pompidou Group
"Towards a coherent policy on psychoactive substances"
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**Statement by
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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful to have this opportunity to address this important Ministerial Conference of the Pompidou Group with the apt theme "towards a coherent policy on psychoactive substances". The mission of the Pompidou Group, in contributing to the development of effective and evidence-based drug policy in the member states of the Council of Europe is valuable. It complements the work of the International Narcotics Control Board, which is mandated to promote Government compliance with the three United Nations conventions on drug control.

When one talks of "drugs", the image is often negative. However, in 2009 for example, the amount of opioids consumed for licit purposes was around one-and-a-half times the amount consumed for illicit purposes. The international drug control conventions can be thought of as having two aspects: preventing illicit drug abuse and promoting licit and medically appropriate drug use. In the first case, drug control is essential in maintaining healthy and safe societies and in preventing the suffering and harm caused to individuals and society by drug abuse and drug trafficking. In the second case, drug control is critical in ensuring legitimate access to drugs for medical and scientific purposes.

Coherent drug policy must incorporate both of these aspects. Drug control cannot be considered fully successful if illicit drug production, trafficking and abuse is countered at the cost of adequate availability of drugs for medical purposes, for the treatment of severe pain, for example. Conversely, adequate consumption of licit drugs for medical and scientific purposes should not be achieved at the cost of increased drug

abuse and drug trafficking. Coherent drug policy must also incorporate both demand and supply measures.

The drug control situation in Europe

In Europe, availability of drugs for medical and scientific purposes is adequate, with Europe consuming 28 % of global morphine consumption, and similar access and availability to other controlled substances. The implementation of the international drug control treaties (and relevant resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly) has contributed to stopping, almost completely, the diversion of licitly manufactured drugs to the illicit market at the international level. However, the diversion of licit drugs to the illicit market at national level still poses a significant risk and prescription drug abuse has become a significant problem in some countries. For this reason, drug control systems must be strengthened and maintained in order to ensure that licit drugs reach their intended licit destination.

Europe faces significant challenges in drug control, in particular with regard to trafficking of drugs, drug abuse, and illicit manufacture of amphetamine type stimulants. The Internet poses two challenges to drug control in Europe - in the marketing of illicit drugs and counterfeit drugs and in enabling, through the provision of technical information, the illicit drug market to adapt quickly to changes in the legal status of psychoactive substances.

An increasing variety of illicit drugs are available in Europe, with a growing range of mainly uncontrolled substances, the so-called "designer drugs". When benzylpiperazine (BZP) was recently banned in European Union member states, online drug retailers quickly responded by promoting new products such as recreational drug tablets or smoking products that contained legal alternatives to BZP.

There is increasing evidence of polydrug abuse in Europe – drugs being abused in combination with other drugs or alcohol, which has unpredictable effects. Cocaine abuse is becoming more widely prevalent in Europe – instead of being concentrated in a few countries in Western Europe, as was the case, abuse of cocaine is diffusing

into other countries in the region. In some European countries¹, amphetamine and "ecstasy" are being replaced by cocaine as drug of abuse, demonstrated in various countries by increases in cocaine abuse and decreases in amphetamine abuse. There has been increasing detection of commercial size cannabis plantations, indicating possible increasing "professionalization" of cannabis plant cultivation in Europe.

To adequately address the drug problems facing the region, strengthened coordination and cooperation at national, regional and international levels is essential. States need to take significant action, as required by the drug control conventions. However, in some countries, there are sometimes contradictions between local or provincial policy and state policy.

Measures to prevent negative consequences of drug abuse, such as HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B and C and other blood-borne infections, are an important element of public health programmes. However, such measures should not unwittingly promote nor enable drug abuse which might lead to other types of negative consequences.

Regulation: the key to effective drug control

Effective regulatory control is essential in ensuring access to safe and licit drugs for medical and scientific purposes and also to prevent the illicit manufacture, trafficking and abuse of drugs. National drug regulatory authorities must assess the efficacy, safety and quality of drugs before permitting their import, manufacture or distribution. The main criteria for effectively regulating the drug market are: political will, relevant legislation, organizational capacity, trained professionals, dedicated financial resources, functioning drug inspectorate service and international cooperation. Codes of conduct and ethical guidelines should address the issue of incorrect handling of drugs. The procurement, storage, distribution and dispensing of medicines must be controlled according to specific standards, with inspection and licensing by the national drug regulatory authority. The requirements for internationally controlled drugs are more stringent in order to reduce the risk of diversion.

¹ UK, Denmark and Spain (EMCDDA Annual Report 2009)

Governments need to systematically and periodically assess their requirements for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances to ensure that supplies can meet demand. Records of manufacture, import, export and distribution must be verified to identify discrepancies. The issue must be addressed in national drug control policies and legislation and the human and financial resources of drug regulatory authorities must be guaranteed. Regional bodies, such as the Pompidou Group and EMCDDA, can facilitate the sharing of policy, information and experience in regulatory control of drugs.

Preventing the diversion of precursor chemicals

The substances used in the illicit manufacture of drugs – precursor chemicals – must also be controlled strictly. With access to the chemical “ingredients”, illicit drugs can be manufactured virtually anywhere. The maintenance of effective regulatory control and law enforcement is essential to prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals in Europe.

International initiatives, such as Project Prism and Project Cohesion, have over recent years successfully reduced the availability of the key precursors used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants, cocaine and heroin. The Board’s pre-export notifications online system (PEN Online) is being used by 115 Governments for the rapid sharing of information on shipments of precursors. The system has become the key tool of international precursor control, and has contributed significantly to preventing the diversion of precursors into illicit channels.

Conclusion

While the achievements of Europe in drug control are commendable, we cannot rest on our laurels. Effective drug control systems require vigilance, maintenance and continual investment of human and financial resources. Any emerging weaknesses in regulatory drug control must be immediately rectified. Illicit drug producers and traffickers have vast financial and technological resources and can adapt swiftly to changes or weaknesses in law enforcement or regulatory control. Regional and international cooperation is an essential component of drug policy, together with supply and demand reduction measures. Coherent drug policy must not only address illicit control, but also licit control, in order to ensure that licit drugs for

medical and scientific purposes are neither compromised nor diverted to illicit uses. The International Narcotics Control Board stands ready to support you in your efforts to ensure coherent drug policies and implement the international drug control treaties. At this juncture, I would like us to recall that the international drug control conventions are concerned with the health and welfare of mankind and are aimed at ensuring access to licit drugs for the relief of pain and suffering while preventing the danger posed to individuals and society by drug abuse.

Europe has historically been at the forefront of international drug regulation and control, and countries in Europe continue to play an important role, not only regionally but also internationally at the bilateral and multilateral levels, on all aspects of supply and demand strategies. Let us build on Europe's achievements in drug regulation and control in working towards the universal implementation of the international drug control treaties for the benefit of all.

Thank you.

