



## International symposium on cannabis



On March 7, 2003, The Swedish National Drug Policy Co-ordinator arranged an International Symposium on Cannabis. Parliamentarians and decision makers from many European countries were invited to join the scientific debate on cannabis (hash and marijuana).

In his speech at the Symposium Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, said that this Symposium is especially important as it gives the opportunity to hear views which will be useful in the preparation of the Ministerial Meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) scheduled in mid-April.

"I would remind you, Costa said, that the forthcoming Ministerial CND session represents the mid-term review (2003) of the decade-long effort by United Nations Member States to significantly reduce illicit drug production, trafficking and abuse by 2008: a commitment made during the 20th Special Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGASS) in 1998."

UNODC has estimated that during the 1990s, 147 million people world-wide

smoked cannabis at least periodically. That makes 3.4 per cent of the population over 15 years of age.

There is an increasing scientific evidence that warns of risks connected to cannabis use. Even though many pieces are still missing in the puzzle about all the effects of cannabis (including as medicine/pain-relieving), an alarming picture is appearing. In pursuit of pleasure and perversion of consciousness drug users take big risks.

As an example of these risks there were named such acute effects as anxiety, depression and discontent, panic and paranoia, cognitive impairment, especially with respect to attention and memory, increased risk of accidents and danger to traffic. "The influence of marijuana has many aspects, including such factors as age of onset, time of use, frequency of use and dose, emphasised Dr Lindqvist, University hospital, Lund, Sweden. "All of these factors are important contributors to a person's negative reactions to using marijuana."

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## Russia: reforms in power structures

Russian President Vladimir Putin believes that the fight against terrorism and illegal drug trafficking is a government priority.

At a meeting with government members in the Kremlin he indicated that "we can't consider that government efforts are consistent and co-ordinated in this sphere". "A decision was made to set up an independent federal body, a state committee on drugs and psychotropic substances trafficking control," the president said.

The Federal Tax Service will be cancelled with the new body assuming control over its material and technical basis and personnel. The interior ministry will be charged with identification and prevention of tax offences. Russia's Federal Frontier Service will be placed under the control of the Federal Security Service. There is also a plan to abolish the Federal Agency of Government Communication and Information, with its powers being distributed between the FSB and the Defence Ministry. A state committee for state defence order will be established under the Defence Ministry. It will be

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responsible for state order for conventional arms.

"We discussed it both in the Government and the Security Council taking into account the pros and cons of it and winning the support of all law-enforcement agencies," the President said.

The President signed the relevant decrees in the beginning of March, which will call for amendments to legislative acts.

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*By Gazeta.ru/March, 2003*

## Greek EU Presidency High Level Conference on Drugs – A Failure

HNN reporting from Greece: If this is the way EU drug policy is planned, then governments world-wide should be aware of what happened at the so-called 'High Level Conference on Drugs' in Athens, March 6-8.

The Greek EU Presidency wanted to pave the way to open up a political debate on the UN Conventions on drugs and push for a possible review of the Conventions. The aim of the well-staged conference in Athens was,

- To reach a point where conference delegates would be prepared to **adopt a common EU position on drugs**. On November 25, 2002, the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, George A Papandreou, wrote in Eleftherotypia about aims and priorities of the Greek Presidency and that they proposed to undertake "a thorough evaluation of the international drug treaties. We must verify their effectiveness, shortcomings must be brought into the open, and proposals must be tabled to find new ways for formulating and applying drug policies."

- To **adopt a declaration**, supported by EU Member States and EU applicant states, that would then be distributed to the European Council, the United Nations, the EU Commission and national parliaments – all according to the Chair of the conference. However, the plan failed. To the dismay of the organisers, there was no adopted common position, no declaration. The Greek EU Presidency did whatever they could to use the Presidency for the purposes, initiated by Trace & Co, some NGOs and individual EP parliamentarians.

The purpose of the conference, the contents of the programme, and the agenda were all too obvious to the government delegations that were expected to buy the 'package'. Instead it created anger and irritation among several of the delegates, not least since the issues had not been discussed in the national parliaments in advance, because no draft declaration had been distributed to national parliaments and, consequently, discussions had not taken place in the national parliaments.

As for the speakers at the conference, including sacked EU Commissioner Emma Bonino, Ambros Uchtenhagen, Martin Jelsma, Brice De Ruyver, a majority of them evidently were positive to a more liberal drug policy, including a revision of the UN Conventions on drugs. There was a complete lack of balance, no light was shed on all aspects of the issues at hand, and the information was one-sided. The jaunty and one-sided summaries by the chair of the so-called discussions resulted in the fact that views that did not coincide with the purpose of the conference were left out.

Handouts and booklets at the conference were primarily provided by drug liberal NGOs and EMCDDA. Several government delegates reacted to this and found it provoking and offensive.

Several delegates were also provoked by the fact that the official dinner on March 6<sup>th</sup> was hosted by the Network of European Foundations (NEF), which has been actively involved in supporting a change in European drug policy. The obvious mixture between the Greek EU Presidency and NEF, as well as other pro-drug organisations, was a cause for concern by many.

At 5 p.m. on the final day of the conference, there was a confused discussion about adopting a declaration from the conference. Mr Thanasis Apostolou, Special Advisor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs (Papandreou), and conference co-ordinator, rapidly read a text,

in which the main points were **the need for a common EU position** at the upcoming CND meeting in Vienna in April, **acknowledgement of so-called harm reduction measures** by EU Member States, and **a need for an open-minded review of the three UN Conventions on drugs**.

Government delegations and other delegates were not provided with a written draft, but were expected to accept an oral proposal. Government delegations were opposed to this outrageous attempt at pushing through a declaration.

The French delegation reacted strongly to the proposal and was of the opinion that there was no way it could be called the 'Athens Declaration', but should rather be called Mr Apostolou's Declaration! The French delegation made it very clear that it wouldn't be bound by NGOs and 'experts' picked by the Greek Presidency. A Greek Member of the European Parliament, Ms Malliori, thought mentioning of individuals or organisations should be avoided. Austria presented a written reservation to the oral proposal and encouraged Member States to implement the UN Conventions. Spain, France and Austria maintained that it was personal views that had been put forward and that this fact should be evident in the report. Sweden suggested that a document from the conference should be called a Presidency report.

The French delegation was very clear in its demands that names should be mentioned to make sure there was no doubt what individual had said what, in order to avoid the idea that individual statements would be regarded as representative of all delegations present. France did not want a change to the UN Conventions and did not subscribe to the idea that the drug problems are solely a health issue.

### COMMENTARY

The Greek Minister of Health and Welfare, Mr Stefanis Costas stated that the Greek Presidency has to present the EU views [on drugs] in Vienna, (which per se is not true). He suggested that a document should be circulated later in order to make it possible for delegates to contribute with their views.

After the final discussions, it was agreed that the minutes from the conference would be called 'A Presidency Report'. Furthermore it should be clear, by providing names, who said what at the conference. Finally, there was no need to circulate the report to the various governments as the report does **NOT** constitute a declaration that delegates agree with.

The conference did not result in a useful document even if several delegates after the conference have expressed worries that the 'Presidency Report' will be promoted as a report embraced by everybody attending the conference. However, it is important to keep in mind that this is not the case. Furthermore it is important for governments attending the Vienna CND and the ministerial segment that the Greek Presidency High Level Conference was not representative of the existing diversity on drug-related issues.

Mr Papandreou announced that there will be another conference on May 21, hosted by EMCDDA.

### Municipal Consultative Centre for Risk Prevention

On June 26, 1997, the municipality of Bourgas, Bulgaria joined the ECAD family. Since then many initiatives in anti-drug prevention fieldwork have successfully been carried out. We are grateful for the support we get through the contacts within the organisation!

We consider the establishment of the Municipal Consultative Centre for Risk Prevention as one of the most important steps in succeeding with our anti-drug program. This Centre was launched in June, 2001, in response to the growing need for co-ordinating the fight against drugs. The Centre's main directions of activities include,

- Dependence prevention aimed at students, their parents and teachers
- Co-ordination of activities along with development of methods for schools
- Sociological research, maintenance of data base
- Co-ordination of interaction between the municipality and other authorities with regard to health, security, education and spare time activities for youth
- Assessment in developing of drug prevention programs
- Carrying out different forms of educational activities for youth
- Stimulating young people's engagement in fight against illicit drugs and drug dependency

Most of young people of Bourgas are involved in one or the other program arranged by the Centre. Many participate in its pro-

grams through training organised according to the schema "peers to peers". This training is a joint project between Municipal Council of Narcotic Substances and several NGOs.



Also, our city offers a widening range of free time activities for youth to enjoy. All of that is based on respect to young people's will and interests.

"The right to choose" is our slogan!

The Municipal Consultative Centre for Risk Prevention is the only centre of this kind in Bulgaria. Many experts and people working with drug prevention throughout the country show a growing interest to its work.

Our ambition is to develop into the ECAD Balkan Centre. This Centre can play a key role in spreading the ECAD ideals in the region and uniting those who struggle against the scourge of illicit drugs!

*Municipality of Bourgas*

### International Symposium...

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Professor in epidemiology James Anthony, USA, estimated that about 10 per cent of those who taste cannabis develop a cannabis dependence syndrome:

"For example, by age 25, a majority of young people in America has had a chance to try cannabis, and once the first cannabis exposure opportunity occurs, the transition to first use mainly occurs within 1-3 years. Thereafter, a small minority of users begins to experience clinical features of a cannabis dependence syndrome within the first 1-2 years after the first use of this drug (this is perhaps 2%-3% of all users). Within 10 years of first cannabis use, about one in 10 cannabis users has developed a cannabis dependence syndrome, which essentially means that the user has an inability to abstain from or to control his/her cannabis use."

The reason why a significantly bigger number of cannabis users in Australia than in the U.S. (whose anti-drug policy he considers as a failure) develop dependence syndrome Prof Anthony did not want to speculate about.

Henk Rigter, researcher from the Netherlands, picked up the subject and informed that although the drug policy of his country has always been hardly criticised (the coffee-shop system in particular), less people become dependent there. "Unfortunately my son is one of those who developed dependency", he said as quite contradictory.



In an interview to Drugnews, a Belgian Parliamentarian Quickenborne said commenting the conference, "a rather interesting conference but focused too much on science and biology and too little on policy issues". According to Drugnews, he has signed an appeal for liberalisation of the UN Conventions on drugs. He thinks - even though he has listened to the researchers' warnings all day long - that risks connected to cannabis use are exaggerated. "Help those who got a problem with drugs and give youth prevention. But adults who smoke marijuana every now and then should be able to do it without being chased by police. I myself smoke it sometimes, it stimulates sexuality, I think, said Quickenborne and giggled.

### Lithuanian Parliament passes resolution against legalisation of drugs



On March 18 the Lithuanian Parliament passed a resolution in support of the worldwide campaign against legalisation of drugs.

The resolution denounces "attempts to

legalise drugs and the policy that promotes spread of drug addiction." The document also expressed The Lithuanian Parliament's support of The 2003 Vienna Declaration and urged the public to support the declaration.

HNN, the initiator of the campaign to support the UN Conventions, commends the members of the Lithuanian Parliament for their strong stance against efforts to undermine the UN Conventions on drugs and efforts to legalise drugs, and recommends other parliaments to follow the Lithuanian example.

## Strong results from tobacco prevention program

Washington State's survey of youth tobacco use released on March 6 is said to be providing new evidence that aggressive public health measures, including comprehensive tobacco prevention programs and cigarette tax increases, are working to reduce youth tobacco use.

The survey found that Washington, which implemented its tobacco prevention program in 2000, reduced smoking by 40 percent among 10th graders and by 36 percent among 12th graders between 1999 and 2002. Between 1998 and 2002, the state reduced smoking by 53 percent among 6th graders and by 39 percent among 8th graders.

Washington claims its success to be the result of its decision to invest in a compre-

hensive tobacco prevention program as recommended by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the Surgeon General of the United States.

In 1999 the state committed \$100 million of its tobacco settlement money in a multi-year effort to launch its tobacco prevention program. Then in 2001, Washington voters overwhelmingly approved Initiative 773, which increased the state's cigarette tax by 60 cents per pack and use a portion of the revenue to increase funding for the state's Tobacco Prevention and Control Program.

Washington's figures are reported to be among the largest declines in youth smoking rates of any state in the nation.

## Clubs against drugs



In Sweden a number of clubs have cooperated in arranging a tour of popular music groups and DJs against drugs across the country.

The initiative, which calls itself Sweden United, says clubbing is for dancing and love, not for drugs. The nationwide tour will take a clear stand against the use of illegal drugs. The program kicked off on Wednesday February 26 in one of the most popular dance clubs in Stockholm, Sturecompagniet. Popular DJs and bands from Sweden and abroad will take part in the tour which will perform in nine of the largest Swedish cities.

## Sweden's syringes

Swedish drug czar Björn Fries on March 4 recommended that drug users throughout Sweden be offered free syringes by the national health care system.

In a nation well known for its zero tolerance approach to drugs, Fries admits, "The syringe exchange program has been controversial since it started."

Two cities in the south of Sweden, Malmö and Lund, have each held a syringe exchange pilot program for around 17 years, offering free syringes in exchange for used ones as well as counselling, HIV tests and vaccinations for hepatitis.

Fries claimed that the pilot schemes had potential for reducing the spread of diseases like HIV and thus maintaining a supposed level of health among the drug using population.

As a result he has made a recommenda-

tion to the government for the exchange program to be implemented nationwide. The government will now consider the recommendation and its implications including its financing.

*HNN comment:* Sweden has done well to date to hold off temptations of moving down the slippery road to alleged harm minimisation. We hope that this proposal to bring free syringes to the drug using population will not be the start of that slippery ride. The recommendation appears to be made in collaboration with a growing acceptance of drug use in society. We cannot accept drug use as a way of life, or make moves to support programs that endorse it as such. Such an attitude will lead to far more deaths from drugs and related diseases than any needle exchange could ever hope to prevent.

## Snake oil quackery becomes legal in Holland

Under new legislation, effective March 17, Dutch 'patients' will now be able to obtain prescriptions for marijuana.

According to spokesman Bas Kuik of the Dutch government's Office of Medicinal Cannabis, the first contract with what the Dutch prefer to call 'medical marijuana' growers is expected to be signed "somewhere near the end of March," with the first crop reaching pharmacies in September. This is yet another indication of how out-of-step the Netherlands is regarding the dangers of using marijuana.

*Our European societies have experimented and evaluated both tolerance and intolerance to illicit drug use and drug abuse. It is our reflection upon this which guides us towards non-use. This in regard to our **society's** well being.*



**ECAD** is Europe's leading organisation promoting a drug free Europe and representing millions of European citizens. Drug dealing and drug abuse cause enormous problems in Europe. Nations and their citizens are affected by the consequences of drug abuse. ECAD member cities work to develop initiatives and efforts against drug abuse supporting the United Nations Conventions which oppose legalisation and promote policies to eradicate drug abuse worldwide. Has your city joined ECAD?

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