



HIV epidemic threatens new EU countries



EU expansion, photo: Audiovisual Library European Commission

The expansion of the EU next year to include 10 new countries could "fan the flames of an already complex EU drugs problem" the European Union's drug monitoring agency said in a new report launched October 22.

There is a public concern that the accession of the 10 mainly Central and East European countries will raise the prospect of increased drug trafficking and spread of infectious diseases. "But enlargement also offers countries a unique opportunity to benefit from close collaboration," agency director Georges Estievenart said.

Most of the acceding and candidate countries have toughened their drug laws over the last decade. Nine countries - Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Turkey - currently treat possession of a small amount of drugs for personal use as a criminal offence, while three - Czech Republic, Estonia and Latvia - consider this to be an administrative offence.

Three countries consider drug use as such to be a criminal offence - Cyprus, Malta and Turkey (although in Malta the offence applies exclusively to the use of prepared

opium). Some new EU countries are "threatened by the most rapidly developing HIV epidemic in the world", warned the EMCDDA in its report. Infection is widely spread among injecting drug users in future EU members Estonia and Latvia. Figures from 2001 show a 41% local prevalence rate among IDUs in the Estonian capital Tallinn. And data from the same year point to a 282% rise in newly diagnosed HIV infections among IDUs in Estonia and a 67% rise in Latvia. EMCDDA consider these rises to be due to the increased availability of heroin in the region in the late 1990s, combined with low risk-awareness among users and high-risk injecting behaviour.

In most other Central and East European countries the figures are below 1%, which is lower than in the EU, where the prevalence ranges from around 1% in Finland to 34% in Spain. In the third Baltic State, Lithuania, HIV prevalence remains below 5%.

EMCDDA suggests that public-health measures must be strengthened in order to prevent spreading HIV epidemic to the general population.

The drug situation in the EU and Norway has not dramatically changed since the last year's report. The indicators suggest that the drug-use trend remains upward. EMCDDA expressed a special concern about continued rising of "problem drug use". The Agency estimates that there are about 1-1.5 million "problematic drug users" in the region. Even if estimating is difficult, the Agency point out eight countries - Germany, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, Finland and Sweden - where "problem drug use" is on the rise.

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Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003

The Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003, conducted by the United Nations *Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC), for the first time jointly with the Afghanistan Government, confirms the country's place as the leading producer of opium, responsible for about three-quarters of the world's output.

Afghanistan became the world's largest source of illicit opium under the Taliban rule in the late 1990s. A short-lived Taliban ban on opium cultivation in 2001 brought the production to a record low of 185 metric tonnes that year, compared to 3,276 metric tonnes in 2000. It also caused a 10-times price increase, from an average of US\$30 in 2000 to US\$300 in 2001 per kilo, with a peak at close to \$700, prompting massive resumption of cultivation in 2002.

★ ECAD NEWS

This year, the area under opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has increased by eight per cent, from 74,000 hectares in 2002 to 80,000 now. Opium production has increased by six per cent, from 3,400 to 3,600 tonnes.

"The country is clearly at a crossroads: either major surgical drug-control measures are taken now, or the drug cancer in Afghanistan will keep spreading and metastasise into corruption, violence and terrorism," said Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of UNODC while announcing the survey findings in a press briefing in Moscow hosted by Mr. Igor Ivanov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation.

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Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003

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Mr. Costa praised the Afghan administration's counter-narcotic efforts. He saluted President Karzai's ban on opium cultivation and trafficking; the establishment of the national Counter-Narcotic Directorate; the adoption of the ten-year National Drug Control Strategy, as well as the new drug control law.

"Traffickers make huge sums of money; it is imperative to confront them with the penalty associated with breaking the law," Mr. Costa said. "Terrorists also take a cut from the opium trade; the drug power game poses a threat to peace and security within Afghanistan and beyond its borders."

The number of provinces with opium cultivation has increased steadily from 18 in 1999 to a staggering 28 provinces in 2003 (out of a total of 32).

The survey also shows a *decline* in opium cultivation in southern provinces. A large decline was recorded in the provinces of Hilmand (-49 per cent) and Kandahar (-23 per cent), caused by planting restraint and government eradication measures. Because

of these shifts, Nangharar has now become the top opium producing province. In the North East, close to the border with Tajikistan, Badhakshan recorded yet another major increase (+55 per cent).

Notably, opium poppy in 2003 was cultivated for the first time in 31 districts.

The prices of fresh opium have declined by 19 per cent, from US\$350 per kilo last year to US\$283 per kilo in 2003. As a consequence, the value of the opium harvest declined from US\$1.2 billion in 2002 to US\$1.02 billion. This represents an equivalent to 23 per cent of the country's US\$4.4 billion Gross Domestic Product (GDP). These estimates do not include the profits subsequently made by traffickers who collect the fresh opium from farms and local bazaars, processing it into heroin and then transferring the lot to border areas for export. In a recent UNODC study (*The Opium Economy in Afghanistan*, published in spring 2003) the 2002 income accruing to traffickers in Afghanistan was estimated at US\$1.3 billion. Therefore, the total income from opium-related activities, farming plus

trafficking in 2003 may have amounted to about half of the country's GDP.

"The Afghanistan opium economy is fuelled by low risk and high profit," Mr. Costa said. "This may give birth to narco-cartels and other forms of organized crime, that undermine Karzai's effort to promote democracy and rule of law."

The domestic income distribution is also affected. The 2003 harvest represents, on an average, an annual income of about US\$3,900 per opium-growing family. This average masks regional disparities, ranging from US\$1,700 in the North to US\$6,800 in the South. The potential opium income per capita for the 1.7 million people involved in opium cultivation ranges from US\$259 in the North to more than US\$1,000 in the South. In comparison, on the basis of a population estimated at 24 million and a GDP estimated at US\$4.4 billion, Afghanistan had a GDP per capita of about US\$184 in 2002.

By UNODC

80% of drugs for Europe, US pass through Bulgaria



A woman examining a bottle of wine during the traditional wine fair "Vinaria" in Plovdiv.

EPA PHOTO / Vassil Donev

"Bulgaria is a transit country and some 80 percent of the heroin meant for Europe and US are transported through its territory", Deputy Chief of the National Service for Organised Crime Combat Colonel Venelin Velikov said on a briefing in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, October 21.

He explained that the intense produce of synthetic drugs in Bulgaria over the last two years is due to its strong demand on the market. Colonel Venelin Velikov also said that synthetic drugs have already replaced the heroin, as their production is cheaper.

Bulgarian experts warn of a drug epidemic in Bulgaria as drugs become more cheaply and easily available. Drug abuse in Bulgaria has reached an unprecedented scale, Emil Grashnov, senior assistant from the Bulgarian National Center for Addictions, said.

In a survey, conducted by the Center among youngsters in the Bulgarian capital city Sofia, nearly two-thirds of the young people claimed they could get drugs "without problems" if they would want.

By The Bulgarian news.com

HIV epidemic threatens...

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Cannabis remains most widely used illicit drug in Europe though the differences are big between countries. Estimates of previous year cannabis use are one in five young people between 15 and 34 years in the UK and France but only 1 in a hundred in Sweden. Evidence indicates that the average potency of cannabis in the EU (the amount of psychoactive ingredient THC it contains) has risen and now ranges from about 5-10% for both hashish and marijuana, and in some samples up to 30%. This raises public health concerns, said EMCDDA. Cannabis is now the most frequently reported substance after heroin in specialised drug-treatment services.

The agency warned of a rise in "binge" drinking -- five or more drinks in a row -- and intensive drug use among a small but important number of vulnerable young people. Surveys showed that between 36 percent (Portugal) and 89 percent (Denmark) of 15 and 16-year-olds had been drunk at least once in their lives, while more and more said they had had "binges" within the previous 30 days.

Widening of the EU boundaries poses new challenges

ECAD Sweden conference



Ystad's harbour; photo: www.ystad.se

The third conference for the Swedish members of ECAD took place in Ystad, Sweden, in the beginning of October. The ECAD network in Sweden embraces now 50 municipalities throughout the country.

The main theme for this year discussions was illicit drugs trafficking in the Baltic sea region. The communications officer of the Swedish police in Warsaw, Kent Widing, and the director for intelligence services at the Swedish Customs, Claes Kraft, were invited as speakers to the ECAD conference. Concerns included the opening up of borders within Europe in 2004 which might give new opportunities for organised criminality, including drug trafficking. This was a topic which was stressed by the invited speakers. Kent Widing and Claes Kraft described these threats to the security and well-being in Scandinavia as being directly posed from organised crime in Poland and

other Baltic countries.

According to the information from the Swedish criminal investigation department, there are about 500 local criminal groups active in Poland along with 85 larger criminal organisations acting on the international level. (they know how many they have and they are not in JAIL!!!) About 3,000 policemen work similarly to an FBI model, side by side with approximate 100,000 ordinary police officers and 4,000 border guards. Complexity of the situation is underlined by the fact that since 1994 as many as 98 policemen have been killed in skirmishes between police and criminals.

Co-operation programs between Swedish and Polish police in the anti-drug field are aimed at seizures of illicit drugs and sharing of knowledge in regard to the spread of synthetic drugs in Poland. Counteracting big scale drug smuggling has been a priority for the Swedish custom service for some time.

Swedish Customs has also directed its attention towards Turkey and the Balkans which are the main routes for the heroin which is smuggled into Scandinavia.

The widening of the EU boundaries in 2004 demands increased competence of customs and border guards against organised criminal groups from the three Baltic countries, Poland, Russia and the Balkans.

Stricter drug laws get support in Denmark

The Danish government's new plan for a drug free Denmark is likely to get support from a majority in the parliament, the newspaper Politiken reports.

The plan, "Fight against Narcotics", was presented on 20 October by the Public Health Minister, Lars Lökke Rasmussen, and the Justice Minister, Brian Mikkelsen. The program includes longer prison terms for serious drug offences and fines for possession of even very small amounts of drugs, including hashish.

The Christian Democratic Party's spokesperson in health matters, Pia Kristensen, said she felt the government's proposals were wise. She had however hoped that there would be more funding to seek out addicts in order to help them, and to support people

exiting from rehabilitation.

The Social Democrats are critical of the fining for the possession of small amounts of drugs. Instead they would like to see the police concentrate their resources in tracking down drug barons, biker gangs and foreign narcotics trafficking organisations.

Today, hashish is illegal in Denmark, but people who are caught for the first time in possession of a small amount of the drug are only cautioned.

According to statistics from the Danish Institute of Public Health some 200,000 people in Denmark, aged 16 and over, smoke hashish at least once a year and an increasing number of youths are admitted into rehab every year because of cannabis abuse.

Number of coffee shops declines

The number of coffee shops in the Netherlands continues to decline, with new figures indicating there were 782 legal establishments last year, 3 percent less than 2001. The Netherlands had almost 1,200 cannabis coffee shops in 1997, but that number has steadily declined since 1998, due in part to stricter regulations.

Research bureau Intraval – which conducts the studies on assignment from the Justice Ministry – said that only 3 percent of the nation's 496 municipalities do not have a coffee shop. About 50 percent of coffee shops are located at least 250m from schools, the report said. Along the German border, one out of every 13 municipalities with one or more official coffee shop maintains a minimum distance requirement.

By Expatica News



Record ecstasy seizure at Schiphol

Military police have seized 30 kg of ecstasy made up of 107,500 individual pills of the party drug in a record haul at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, Expatica News reported.

Two Malaysian women aged 42 and 52 were arrested. They were en route to Malaysia when authorities detained them. The women were thought to be behaving strangely and upon investigation, the pills were allegedly found stashed in their suitcases.

The seizure is the largest to have occurred on passenger routes from Schiphol. The pills had an estimated street value in the Netherlands of EUR 322,500, but would have fetched about EUR 3 million in Malaysia.

The Netherlands is one of the world's largest producers of the party drug.

The Dutch government is keen to demonstrate it is tough on drugs and set up in the summer the National Criminal Investigation Department – incorporating its Synthetic Drugs Unit and the XTC Team – to combat organised crime and the drugs trade, namely ecstasy. Police also make regular ecstasy busts and arrests.

By Expatica News

Vancouver needle exchange failure

New Vancouver epidemiology report: HIV and Hepatitis C have reached "near saturation" among injection drug users

While needle exchange advocates claim that such programs effectively prevent the spread of blood borne diseases such as HIV and hepatitis, the latest report from Vancouver, which boasts the largest needle exchange program (NEP) in North America, suggest otherwise. In fact, this report's "smoking gun" is its finding that both HIV and Hepatitis C have reached "saturation" among the injection drug using population, meaning few if any of who are not already infected are left to become newly infected.

Here are some of the reports specific findings:

In 2002, nearly 3 million needles were distributed by NEPs in the City. Injection drug use was the main mode of HIV transmission in British Columbia from 1994 to 2000. Today injection drug use and men having sex with men tie as the top risk factors for new HIV cases.

Vancouver began its NEP in 1988, and the number of new HIV infections among injection drug users (IDUs) increased every year thereafter until peaking in 1996. A 1997 study of more than 1,400 Vancouver IDUs revealed an annual HIV infection rate of 18 percent-- the highest level anywhere in the developed world and one of the highest incidence rates reported anywhere worldwide. The number of new positive tests began to increase again in 2002 and estimates for 2002 anticipate a further increase. This report notes that many infected injection drug users have not been tested, so these rates are likely to be higher. The current HIV prevalence among Vancouver IDUs is 35 percent. The report attributes the HIV incidence peak in 1996 not to the success of nee-

dle exchange, but rather to "the near saturation" of HIV infection among IDUs, meaning after 1996 there were few drug addicts left to become newly infected.

Needle exchange not only failed to prevent HIV from reaching a saturation point among Vancouver IDUs, but also had the same lack of effectiveness in preventing the spread of hepatitis C (HCV). This report notes that like HIV, HCV has also reached a saturation point among Vancouver IDUs with over 80 percent infected with the incurable and deadly blood borne disease. Nearly two-thirds of Vancouver HCV cases are attributable to injection drug use with Vancouver's HCV rate being nearly four-times higher than the rate for Canada as a whole.

★ ECAD DISCUSSION

In 1997, the reported rate of newly identified hepatitis B infections-- another blood borne disease often spread by needle sharing-- in Vancouver was eight times the rate for the rest of British Columbia and the highest rate in Canada.

The leading cause of death of Vancouver drug addicts is overdose, accounting for 25 percent of deaths among those who are HIV-positive and 42 percent among those who are HIV-negative.

Although the overall British Columbia crime rate has decreased over the past decade, drug offences have increased by 63 percent. A study by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse estimated that half of gainful crimes such as theft, break and enter, and robberies were attributed to substance abuse.

The report can be accessed at www.ccsa.ca/ccendu/pdf/report_vancouver_2003.pdf

ECAD Bookshelf

Timed to the ECAD 10th Anniversary, ECAD Regional office in Russia has published a book on topical questions of anti-drug policies in Europe and Russia. The book is made in co-operation with the Russian Academy for Solution of Security Problems and St. Petersburg State University.

The book has received positive reviews. The presentation of the analysis of different policy models and experiences in the field of anti-drug work is of big interest for Russian readers.

The authors emphasised that the fight against drugs should not be limited to the activities of law enforcement agencies and courts, but "it should be waged as the fight for the minds and hearts of the younger generations".

The book is available at the ECAD Regional office in St. Petersburg (*If you don't read Russian, good luck!*)

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*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 **countries'** 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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