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The EMCDDA's Scientific Committee's position paper on the Green Paper for the Common Strategic Framework for Research and Innovation in the European Union

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction¹ (EMCDDA) is an EU decentralised agency which provides the Union and its Member States with a factual overview of European drug problems and a solid evidence base to support the drugs debate. It offers policymakers the data they need for drawing up informed drug laws and strategies. It also helps professionals and practitioners working in the field pinpoint best practice and new areas of research. The EMCDDA's Scientific Committee advises and assists the Centre on scientific aspects of its activities. It consists of 16 well-known scientists², including an observer from Norway, appointed by the Management Board in view of their scientific excellence and their independence, following a call for expressions of interest in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

The EMCDDA, advised by its Scientific Committee, supports the European Commission in the preparation of the Council's Annual dialogues on drug-related research³, which take place within the framework of the Horizontal Drugs Group and aim at 1) strengthening the links between policy and research; 2) creating an understanding of the research priorities necessary to support the implementation of the EU drugs action plan 2009–2012 and beyond, as well as 3) providing input for the annual work schedules of the relevant Commission funding programmes.

This position paper was approved at the 34th meeting of EMCDDA's Scientific Committee, which took place in Lisbon, on the 16th and 17th of May 2011. It aims at contributing to the public consultation on the *Green Paper for the Common Strategic Framework for Research and Innovation*, both with general remarks on a future research framework and with more particular contributions on the specific area of drug-related research. It uses, as a basis, some of the questions (highlighted in bold characters) suggested by the Commission in the aforementioned Green Paper.

The EMCDDA's Scientific Committee welcomes the opportunity to provide input to this public consultation and congratulates the European Commission on the transparency of the process.

The EMCDDA's Scientific Committee also welcomes the focus given to societal challenges and to the need of aligning research with support to policy-making in addressing EU citizens' concerns and improving the overall quality of life. This focus has the potential to promote cross-cutting coordination and coherence in funding for multidisciplinary topics, such as drug-related research, which cover different knowledge areas, for instance health, social issues and security. The solving of societal problems such as addiction is the basis for economic and sustainable growth.

¹ Regulation (EC) No 1920/2006 of 12 December 2006 on the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (recast)

² List of members available at <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/html.cfm/index52156EN.html>

³ Council of the European Union, 'Council conclusions on strengthening EU research capacity on illicit drugs', *CORDROGUE 78*, 17177/09, Brussels, 7 December 2009.

Finally, the EMCDDA's Scientific Committee welcomes the willingness to address the knowledge triangle in a coherent and consistent way, by promoting continuous flows among research, education/training and innovation.

1. EU research and innovation funding that maximises the benefits of acting at the EU level is vital, particularly in cross-border research on societal challenges, such as drug-related research. There is a need for well-coordinated research across the EU, where common research questions are answered. The use of appropriate methods, designs and instruments, both qualitative and quantitative, facilitates the generation of more statistically powerful samples and allows for robust comparisons.

- The full implementation and development of the European Research Area is vital for **Member States to build up research excellence**. ERA-NETs bring national and regional level research priorities in-line, though fully respecting each Member State's specific research priorities.
- More funding should be available for bottom-up networking around research priorities, setting the political agenda and preparing projects. Existing networks, such as the Reitox network in the field of drugs, should be used to their full extent. This would help to pool Member States' resources into EU research and innovation funding, and promote capacity building and knowledge transfer within the EU and between EU and third countries.
- Results and findings from research projects should be made available more quickly, more proactively and should be better targeted and accessible to different audiences. They should be published in peer-reviewed journals and also in other formats to **better support policy-making and forward-looking activities** at EU and national level. Where possible, data and protocols should be archived and made accessible.

2. The Common Strategic Framework can only make EU research and innovation funding more attractive and easy to access for participants if the whole process is made more transparent and easier to follow up on, even by inexperienced EC funding applicants.

- Researchers still lack clear, updated and centralised information on how framework decisions are taken, how to voice needs and gaps, how and when to participate in the process of selecting priorities, drafting documents and sending feedback. In the experience of the EMCDDA's Scientific Committee members, accessibility to this type of information at national level still varies considerably from one Member State to another.
- While noting the continuous improvement of the CORDIS website, the EMCDDA's Scientific Committee registered that outdated links as well as duplication of (not always consistent) information from CORDIS, the Directorates-General, and the Executive Agencies, is still to be found in the europa.eu domain. It is very difficult to understand which information is updated or reliable.

3. EU funding needs to improve in terms of how best to cover the full innovation cycle, by analysing and strategically prioritising the research topics and gaps in each area and coordinating research calls in a complementary way, especially for cross-cutting areas.

- By making full use of the appropriate stakeholders at national but also at EU level, such as, of the EU agencies and their national partners' and networks' expertise, in order to facilitate the identification of priorities, gaps and the appropriate partners for the different phases of the cycle.
- By timely and proactively disseminating reports and results from previously EC funded research, and promoting the cumulative aspect of knowledge, for example by setting as a selection criterion for new research projects that the results of the previous projects on the same topic are taken into account. In this respect, systematic reviews of evidence are recommended and should be promoted.
- By better coordinating research activities in cross-cutting areas, such as research on drug problems, which are currently covered by different programmes within FP7 and neither consistently nor coherently addressed or linked.
- By better linking research RTD-funded (currently FP7) programmes and Directorates-General specific funding programmes which have a stronger focus on implementation aspects.
- By acknowledging that, though some research has universal application, local approaches to the implementation of research findings need to be developed through the **greater involvement of local authorities, citizens and civil society**.
- By acknowledging that one of the most important areas of innovation research is in better understanding how to implement existing research knowledge into improved practice and understanding and overcoming the obstacles in this process.
- By better linking early academic training with innovative research priorities, e.g., through exchange programmes for masters, MD and PhD students and more flexible funding of summer schools on specific innovation-related topics.
- By developing more flexible mechanisms at EU level to share best practice between early innovators in EU Member States and non-EU countries.

4. Greater priority needs to be given to researcher-initiated projects. Currently, no drug-related research project is funded under the Ideas programme.

- Further coordination needs to be promoted on research topics and findings between the bottom-up research projects, currently funded under the European Research Council, and the top-down ones, currently funded under the cooperation programmes, so that the advantages of both approaches can be optimised and **world class excellence** in research is achieved.

5. Indicators for monitoring EU research and innovation funding should continue to focus on scientific quality but also on dissemination of findings, capacity building and knowledge transfer. Some examples could be:

- Number and dissemination of articles published in peer-reviewed journals; citations in connection with other EC funded projects/sources

- Number of abstracts made available in more than one EU language
- Number of reports/executive summaries/wider public information made available
- Availability of easy-to-access website with updated information on ongoing and concluded projects
- Number of new partners involved with capacity to translate findings into practise, and concrete examples of research implementation
- Making full use of different media to **attract greater interest and involvement of citizens and civil society** and devolving EC level knowledge to the local level.
- Although acknowledging that **striking the right balance between competitiveness aspects and the need for access to and dissemination of scientific results** is challenging, the EMCDDA's Scientific Committee suggests that projects could also be evaluated on the basis of the time gap between the conclusion of the project and the publication of scientific or/and decision-making support findings, depending on their specific objectives.

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