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Speech • Discours

Speaker • Orateur Wolfgang Götz, EMCDDA Director

Title of speech • Titre du discours *European Drug Report 2013*

Occasion Launch of the *European Drug Report 2013*

Ladies and gentlemen...

It is my great pleasure to present to you the EMCDDA's analysis of the drug situation in Europe in 2013. We bring you this analysis six months earlier than before — a development which we believe is necessary to keep pace with the rapidly shifting drug phenomenon and the growing needs and changing expectations of our target audiences. We have designed an integrated reporting package that enables you to drill down to the level of information required.

The *Trends and developments* report is central to the package. It provides a top-level overview of changes occurring in the European drug situation and Europe's responses to these developments. Drawing on the adage that a picture is worth a thousand words, we have provided a graphic-rich report and a policy-relevant summary. But it is a summary grounded in hard data, which can be found in our online *Statistical bulletin* and in the *Country overviews*, where national-level data and analysis are showcased. We have also produced an interactive version of this trends report for iOS and Android tablets.

Each year we need to look more intensively at some issues of topical relevance. The *Perspectives on drugs* (PODs) provide deeper insights into important issues, which this year include topics as diverse as:

- new treatment approaches for hepatitis C (Europe's 'hidden epidemic');
- high-risk cannabis use;
- synthetic drug production; and
- control of the increasingly available new psychoactive substances.



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We have decided to present the key results in a short graphics-based presentation. But before doing that, I would like to say a few words, from my perspective, on the drug situation in 2013.

Standing back and taking a broad look at the EU drug landscape, we see that, for many of the drugs that have defined the drugs problem over the last couple of decades, the situation is stable or even declining. Heroin, the drug that has for so long been central to Europe's drug problem, appears to be losing ground.

Use of both cannabis and cocaine shows signs of having peaked. This has taken place against a dramatic increase in drug treatment, an increased investment in prevention and harm reduction services and increased efforts in supply reduction.

Although important policy issues such as controlling drug-related HIV infection remain with us — they are not as daunting as they once seemed, as we now see the benefits that have been brought about through concerted action and medical advances. So, in many respects, we can be optimistic that Europe's policy of balancing rigorous and comprehensive demand reduction measures with robust supply reduction actions is bearing fruit. However, I have to temper this optimism with the realism that although much has been achieved, many problems remain with us and new issues are emerging that leave no room for complacency — particularly at this difficult economic time for many EU countries.

If we look across Europe in terms of both drug problems and responses, there is considerable variation among countries. Some of the countries currently facing the greatest challenges are also those where effective responses are least developed.

In addition, the drug problem is changing — it is more dynamic, more complex, and, in many ways more challenging. A defining characteristic of drug use today — both intensive and regular use [problem use] as well as recreational drug use — is polydrug use.

The mixing of both licit and illicit substances has become the norm for many users. We see this particularly in the stimulants area where users have become more flexible in their drug choices, willing to switch between substances based on their availability, price and perceived quality.

Moreover, although data suggest that some types of experimental drug use may be falling, there remains a core of entrenched users — of opioids, stimulants and even cannabis — who experience the greatest problems, and they must remain the focus for our intervention efforts.



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Developments in the modern world are changing the kind of drug problem we face in Europe. We are also releasing today the annual update from the EMCDDA and Europol on the work of Europe's early warning system on new psychoactive substances.

New substances continue to emerge, sometimes appearing on the illicit drug market and sometimes as supposed 'legal' alternatives to controlled drugs. These substances are sold and consumed despite the fact that we know very little about their safety profile. Over the past eight months, we have held formal risk assessments on two substances: 4-MA, a drug sold on the illicit market as amphetamine, which is now recommended for control in Europe; and 5-IT a complex chemical, sold as a so-called 'legal-high' product where a decision is pending. Both substances appeared rapidly, were not widely used, but nevertheless resulted in a number of fatalities. Around 40 to 50 deaths of young Europeans have been associated with these two substances alone. This highlights for me the public health problems we face in this area, where young people have become the unknowing 'guinea pigs' for testing the safety of obscure and unknown chemicals that are appearing in Europe at an ever growing pace.

Let me just explain that in providing a European-level analysis we must, by necessity, paint in broad strokes. Our report therefore focuses on top-level trends and developments. At the same, we recognise that the European situation is a heterogeneous one, which can be seen clearly in the national data presented online and in the interactive graphics. And it is at national — and often local — level that the responses to the problems we describe must be addressed.

I believe that today's report demonstrates the value that cooperation and coordination across Europe can bring. I believe our analysis shows clearly how in Europe we share very much a common problem — that to be effective we can, and must, learn from each other. And, just as drug trends and those who market and traffic in illicit drugs do not respect national borders, so too only a robust and united response will be sufficient to address the challenges we face in this area.

[Presentation by Scientific Director and then Director resumes]

Ladies and gentlemen...

I hope this presentation has helped to focus the issues that we cover in this year's analysis. We are a reporting agency — but we report for a purpose — and that purpose is to facilitate a more informed and productive debate on drug issues leading to more informed and better decision-making.



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In this context, I must also underline the important framework provided by the new EU drugs strategy. The strategy, as already presented by João Goulão, will have to address a new policy landscape, many dimensions of which are elaborated in this report — including the necessary improvement to service provision for drug users in prison and the growing importance of synthetic drugs.

This new strategy will be implemented during a period of economic uncertainty and considerable global developmental and social change. Globalisation and technological innovation have an impact on all areas of modern life; not surprisingly, they also affect the drug problems we face.

In a moment, we will open the floor for your questions. Today I have invited a few of our scientific staff to support me here so that you can delve deeper into the scientific complexity of some of the issues we have covered.

Thank you for your attention.

I would like to end by saying that although we provide an annual assessment of the drug situation in the form of this *European Drug Report* package, we publish our findings throughout the year — and will continue to provide you with an update on important new developments on our website. And obviously, we will always reply to your questions and requests for information.