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Speech • Discours

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Title of speech • Titre du discours European Drug Report 2014

Occasion Launch of the European Drug Report 2014

Ladies and gentlemen...

It is my great pleasure to present to you the EMCDDA's new analysis of the drug situation in Europe.

The 2014 European Drug Report package offers an interlinked set of products, with the *Trends and developments report* at its centre. This graphic-rich report includes a policy-relevant summary and is grounded in hard data.

Our analysis is based on a comprehensive review of both European and national statistics. These can be accessed online in our Data and statistics tool and in the Country overviews, which are also launched today.

In addition, we focus in more depth on a number of topical issues. The online *Perspectives on drugs* (PODs) provide insights into important areas including:

- Injection of synthetic cathinones
- Wastewater analysis and drugs
- New developments in Europe's cannabis market, and
- Internet-based drug treatment

Whatever your interests in the European drug situation, we are confident that our new reporting package will allow you easy access to high-quality information and analysis in a form appropriate to your specific needs.

In a few minutes, my colleague, Paul Griffiths, will present this year's key results. But before he does so, I would like to say a few words, from my perspective, on the drug situation in 2014.

In a nutshell, the main findings in the EMCDDA's new analysis of the European drug problem indicate an overall stable situation, with positive signs in some areas, but with a range of new challenges continuing to emerge and that raise concerns for public health. In particular, we see that heroin now plays a lesser part than in the past, and stimulants, synthetic drugs, cannabis and medicinal products are all becoming more important.

If we look at the 'big picture', we see progress has been made on a number of the major public health policy objectives of the past. However, a European-level perspective can obscure important national differences. We see this in the data on overdose deaths and drug-related HIV infections; two of the most serious consequences of drug use. Here, an overall positive EU trend sits in sharp contrast to worrying developments in some countries.

Europe's drug phenomenon is dynamic and constantly evolving, leaving us no room for complacency. New threats emerge to accompany long-established problems. As the Commissioner has already mentioned, the drugs that we see today are, in many ways, different from those we knew in the past.

We see this in the established drugs, a notable example being cannabis, where new production techniques are impacting on the potency of both resin and herbal products. We see this also in synthetic drug production, with a plethora of new substances appearing.

A serious concern is that, recently, we have witnessed the emergence of both new synthetic opioids and hallucinogenic substances that are so highly pharmacologically active that even tiny quantities can be used to produce multiple doses.

We are only beginning to grasp the future implications of these developments for both public health and drug control, but they do appear to have the potential to transform the nature of the problems we face.

The area of new psychoactive substances (NPS) continues to pose many challenges. New drugs are very often sourced legally, as powders mostly from China and India, and imported into Europe. Once here, they are processed, packaged and retailed as 'legal highs' or 'research chemicals' as well as sold directly on the illicit drug market.

We report that the Internet continues to play a key role in shaping the NPS market. In 2013, the EMCDDA identified some 650 websites selling these substances to Europeans. In addition, a new challenge for law enforcement is the sale of both new and 'old' drugs via 'darknets' — the underground, online networks which permit anonymous communication.

It is clear that producers of these new substances are now targeting the main segments of the established drug market.

In April 2014, the EMCDDA Scientific Committee risk-assessed four potent and harmful new substances which are being sold as replacements for, and could even be more harmful than, the drugs they aim to mimic:

- 25I-NBOMe > LSD (hallucinogen),
- AH-7921 > morphine (opiate),
- MDPV > cocaine (stimulant) and
- methoxetamine > ketamine (a medicine with analgesic and anaesthetic properties).

Risk-assessment reports on these four substances have been submitted to the European Commission and the Council of the EU, on the basis of which decisions for EU-wide control measures may be taken.

Over 15 years ago, great vision was shown by the EU institutions and Member States in investing in an EU Early Warning System on new psychoactive substances — a system that is now recognised as a model of best practice globally.

The EWS has repeatedly demonstrated its value for rapidly responding to threats — and it needs to be strengthened further. I am deeply concerned, however, that this mechanism is under increasing strain and may be at risk because it is inadequately resourced at national and EMCDDA levels.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the press
(Members of the MB, colleagues ...)

I take pride in the comprehensive analysis provided by our 2014 EDR package and I am glad that our work provides a scientific base for informing European policies and responses.

That is why we will continue to focus on delivering a timely, objective and balanced analysis of an ever more complex and changing drug problem. Sound information is at the heart of Europe's response to drug problems and our interventions are all the more effective because of this.

[Presentation by Scientific Director and then Director resumes]

Ladies and gentlemen...

I hope Paul's 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.

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.

Thank you for your attention.