Speech

Speaker	Wolfgang Götz, EMCDDA Director

Title of speech	20 years of monitoring and communicating evidence on drugs

Occasion	EMCDDA technical conference: 20 years of monitoring and communicating evidence on drugs
Understanding the nature, dynamics and scale of drug use in Europe

Date	21.09.2015

<Opening session>

Dear Chairman of the EMCDDA Management Board and Portuguese Drugs Coordinator, Dr João Goulão,
Dear Heads of the EMCDDA national focal points,
Dear Members of the EMCDDA Scientific Committee,
Dear Representative of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Home Affairs, Elsa Maia,
Dear colleagues and participants,

<introduction>

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all here today to the EMCDDA’s technical conference marking 20 years of monitoring and communicating evidence on drugs in Europe.

This event brings together over 180 experts from across the globe, including representatives of: the Reitox focal points, the five key indicator expert networks; the EMCDDA Scientific Committee; scientific and technical domains and international organisations.

Our meeting today and tomorrow will celebrate our achievements thus far — it will inspire our ongoing efforts in cross-discipline and multi-indicator analyses of the drugs problem… and it will stimulate the sharing of perspectives from different technical areas.

<context>

With two EMCDDA and Reitox decades now behind us, when we look back it becomes very clear that the landscape we faced 20 years ago was quite different to our monitoring environment today.

In 1995, when we started — at the time working with just 15 EU Member States — European drug policy was being driven by a heroin epidemic. The need to tackle heroin problems and reduce HIV transmission and AIDS-related and overdose deaths was paramount. Although these problems persist today, the responses needed are largely in place and other emerging issues now demand our attention. The policy drivers have diversified and the complexity of the drugs problem has increased.
Here I would just like to mention two examples:

- First, **cannabis**, where new production techniques are impacting on the potency of both resin and herbal products ... and where the involvement of organised crime in production and trafficking has become a major challenge;

- And second, **new psychoactive substances (NPS)**, where the appearance of a wide variety of hundreds of new substances at Member State and EMCDDA level coincides with decreasing resources at both levels.

Over the next two days, we will reflect on the achievements of our first 20 years and also on the deeper and broader understanding we have today of Europe’s drug situation and the responses to it. Today, the EMCDDA can talk with confidence on drug problems evolving across the Union and beyond and we can competently inform policy discussions on effective responses at national, regional and local level.

**<Successes>**

Over the years, the EMCDDA has helped Member States establish national surveillance systems and we were the driving force behind developments at European level. We have carried out regular and sustained monitoring of developments in the field, where all our achievements have been dependent on close collaboration with our European, national and international partners, in particular with the EU institutions and our Reitox network. Fundamentally, it is the investment made by Member States in developing robust national drug information systems that makes European-level monitoring possible and successful.

Efforts to harmonise and improve the comparability of drug information across Europe have always been at the heart of our work — it is a never-ending task... And a task that has always involved hard work to devise and develop standards, methods and tools. Here I would like to stress the agency’s five key epidemiological indicators, which allow EU countries to describe in a ‘common language’ the extent and effects of drug use and its consequences — these indicators serve as a basis for developing better interventions and policies.

In order to deepen insight and increase the timeliness of information, we are now broadening our repertoire of monitoring methods: Internet monitoring, wastewater analysis and the trendspotter methodology now feature among the tools we use to assess new trends and patterns of use.

**<Future challenges>**

The tough economic climate of recent years has placed us in a situation where we must now strive to achieve more, but with fewer resources. Facing this head on has made the EMCDDA stronger and more efficient, ready to embrace the future.

For the last 20 years, the EMCDDA has demonstrated its ability to act as a catalyst for data collection and strategic analysis. We have done this in a complex policy area that cuts across health, crime and security issues, both in Europe and worldwide. I am proud that the agency is now seen as an internationally recognised centre of excellence.

As the EMCDDA looks to the future, we will build on the considerable progress made so far. We now have a regional information system that is unique in the world. However, we must continue to gain a better understanding of the global dimension of the drugs problem we face in Europe, whilst developing quicker responses to emerging challenges through early-warning and threat-assessment activities.
The rigour of our work, a core element of our added value, will ensure that the EMCDDA is ready to meet its upcoming challenges. Making full use of the new communication channels we have available will be key to creating better engagement with our audiences and maintaining the high standards set by the agency throughout its 20-year history.

During 10 of these 20 EMCDDA years I have had the privilege of being Director of this agency. I still have three months to go... However, I would already like to take this opportunity to thank you for your commitment and excellent cooperation over the years and I am sure that together with the new Director your cooperation with the EMCDDA will continue to bear fruit.

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