



# news release

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

No 13/99 – 29 November 1999

## ‘HOW TO MAKE YOUNG EUROPEANS HEALTHIER...SAVE MONEY ON DRUG TREATMENT...CUT DRUG CRIME...’

**This week’s 2<sup>nd</sup> European Conference on the Evaluation of Drug Prevention will urge a ‘culture change’ in drugs prevention**

**News conference: 10:00 (CET) Thursday 2 December**

**European Parliament, Louise Weiss Building, Strasbourg**

On the eve of a major **EU** drugs conference, Georges Estievenart, Director of the **Lisbon-based EU drugs agency, the EMCDDA**, is calling for ‘a shift in ideology towards greater evaluation of drug prevention initiatives’ which, he says, ‘could make young Europeans healthier, save money on drug treatment and cut drug-related crime’.

He declares: ‘It’s vital to know what works and what doesn’t work in keeping people off drugs. If all drug-prevention programmes were routinely evaluated, the **EU** would reap big rewards in the global campaign against drugs.’

The 2<sup>nd</sup> European Conference on the Evaluation of Drug Prevention opens in Strasbourg this **Thursday, 2 December**. It is organised jointly by the **European Commission** and the **EMCDDA** and is attracting some 120 professionals involved in evaluating drug prevention in the **EU** and **Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs)**. They are expected to urge policy-makers and funders in the drugs field to embrace an ‘evaluation culture’.

‘We’re looking for no less than a shift in ideology’, says Estievenart. He adds: ‘Only if drug programmes are routinely evaluated can we ensure that money spent on tackling the challenge of drugs – on prevention and on public health – is achieving the maximum social benefit.’

### ‘Vital that policy-makers listen’

The scale of the **EU** drugs challenge is highlighted in the **EMCDDA’s 1999 Annual Report**, published last week. This shows that three to five million people in the **EU** could have tried heroin at least once. And it adds that recent surveys suggest that over 40 million people **EU-wide** have experimented with cannabis – on average, one in five 15-to-16-year-olds and at least one in four 15-to-34-year-olds.

*Newsweek* wrote recently that ‘for a whole generation in Europe drug use is normal’. And President Chirac said on visiting the **EMCDDA** that ‘Europe must become aware of the [drugs] drama with which it is confronted and be equipped with a coherent means to tackle [it]’. The agency sees evaluation of preventive methods as a crucial part of this equipment – and at the heart of its work. Against such a background, Estievenart believes that it is vital that policy-makers and funders listen to the message emerging from this week’s conference.

Estievenart says that evaluating drug-prevention initiatives is the key to knowing *what* works and *how* and *why* – with the ultimate aim of boosting their impact. As well as a key **EMCDDA** goal, evaluation is a central objective of the **European Commission’s** draft **European Action Plan to Combat Drugs 2000–2004** – up for adoption at the Helsinki European Summit on 10 December.

One fear he hopes the conference will allay is that evaluation could lead to funding being restricted only to programmes shown to be successful: ‘It’s just as important to have information

about projects experiencing difficulties or obstacles in order to show us what doesn't work in addressing the drugs problem', he asserts.

The costs involved and the lack of know-how in implementing evaluation are also raised by those hesitant about the concept. But this conference and the **EMCDDA's** wider efforts in developing evaluation tools are designed to increase know-how. And, as to the costs...Estievenart stresses that more spent on evaluation now should lead to less spent in the long run as preventive measures become better targeted.

The conference, entitled 'Evaluation: a key tool for improving drug prevention' follows on from the first European Conference on the topic organised by the EMCDDA in Lisbon in March 1997.

**NEWS CONFERENCE: 10:00 (CET) THURSDAY 2 DECEMBER**  
**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, LOUISE WEISS BUILDING, STRASBOURG**

- A news conference will be held at **10:00 (CET) this Thursday 2 December in Room N1.3 at the Louise Weiss Building, Strasbourg**. Interviews with EMCDDA staff members can be arranged on request after the news conference.
- The main conference, which lasts three days, is also open to the news media. Journalists are invited to register after the news conference.
- Arrangements can be made at the news conference for individual journalists to receive the final conference recommendations by e-mail on **Saturday 4 December**. **EMCDDA** staff members will also be available for interviews on that day. Contact the conference secretariat at Tel: ++ 33 3 88 37 04 45 (Room N1.1).
- Copies of **EMCDDA** publications in the drug prevention field are available on request from the EMCDDA at E-mail: **info@emcdda.org**
- Further details and recent **EMCDDA** news releases, including those on its recently-launched *1999 Annual Report on the State of the Drugs Problem in the European Union*, are available on the **EMCDDA** web-site. If you are not already on the **EMCDDA's** news release distribution list and would like to be added, please contact Kathy Robertson (contact details below).

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