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EARLY-WARNING SYSTEM

New synthetic drugs

The EMCDDA has been assigned a key role in the detection and assessment of new synthetic drugs in the European Union under the terms of a *Joint Action** formally adopted in Brussels on 16 June by the Council of the European Union.

The *Joint Action* aims to establish an early-warning system which identifies new synthetic drugs, provides a mechanism for assessing the risks of these drugs and furnishes a decision-making process through which these products may be placed under control in the EU Member States. The initiative relates to new synthetic drugs which are not currently listed in the *Schedules to the UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances* (Vienna, 1971)** and which pose a threat to public health.

The mechanism foreseen by the *Joint Action* operates in three phases:

Phase 1: Detailed information on the production, traffic and use of new synthetic drugs will be sent by the EU Member States to the Europol Drugs Unit (EDU) in The Hague and to the EMCDDA in Lisbon (via the Europol National Units and the REITOX National Focal Points respectively). Once received, this information will be exchanged between the two bodies, the European Commission and the London-

based European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMA) in preparation of Phase 2 of the process. Among others, the information will include a chemical and physical description of the drug, including the



"House" parties and "raves" - familiar surroundings for the use of new synthetic drugs.

name under which it is known; details on the frequency, circumstances and/or quantities in which a new synthetic drug is encountered; and a first indication of the possible risks involved, including health and social.

As far as possible, information will also be provided on chemical precursors, the mode and scope of established or expected use of the drug as a psychotropic substance, as well as other uses of the drug.

Phase 2: Under the auspices of its Scientific Committee, the EMCDDA will convene a meeting which will be extended to EDU scientists, the European Commission, national experts and the EMA. This group will assess the possible risks of any newly-identified synthetic drug and draw up a report on its findings.

Phase 3: If a drug is assessed as being harmful, the Council - within a month of the establishment of the risk assessment report - will be invited to adopt, by unanimity, a decision defining the synthetic drug which is to be placed under the necessary control measures and criminal sanctions at national level.

This *Joint Action* meets the need to provide the European Union with a more

flexible and rapid mechanism for tackling synthetic drugs. However, it does not prevent any Member State from maintaining or introducing on its territory any national control measure it deems appropriate once a new synthetic drug has been identified by a Member State.

* *Joint Action* - An action adopted unanimously by the EU Member States within the framework of the third pillar of the Treaty on European Union.

** A UN Convention covering hallucinogens, amphetamines, barbiturates, non-barbiturates, sedatives and tranquillisers.

Synthetic Drugs: Centre concludes studies

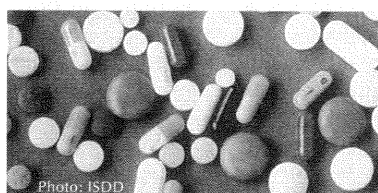


Photo: ISDD

Against a backdrop of increasing public and political concern regarding new trends in drug use - particularly the use of "synthetic drugs" in contexts related to dance, music and fashion - the EMCDDA commissioned two studies in 1996

covering *New Trends in Synthetic Drugs in the European Union*.

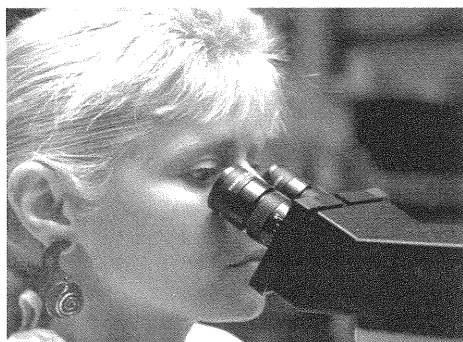
The studies, exploring the epidemiology of synthetic drug use and related demand reduction activities across Europe, have recently been finalised and the results will be published in abridged form by the Centre in September 1997.

Monitoring Illicit Drugs and Health

Representatives of the EMCDDA joined over 70 experts in Amsterdam from 22-23 May at an invitational Conference on Monitoring Illicit Drugs and Health organised by the Trimbos Instituut on behalf of the Dutch Presidency of the European Union. The purpose of the Conference, which provided a forum for the exchange of information and ideas, was to stimulate the development of compatible monitoring systems that, in the longer term, will give rise to comparable and relevant information on the use of illicit drugs and associated health problems.

Following a welcome address by the Minister of Health, Welfare and Sports of the Netherlands, Dr. E. Borst-Eilers, the Conference, chaired by Director of the Trimbos Instituut, Professor H. Rigter, opened with a presentation by the Director of the EMCDDA, Mr. Georges Estievenart.

Five themes were covered at the Conference, each introduced by a Dutch



Conference calls for comparable drug monitoring systems.

expert, and further developed by a specialist from another country. The topics included: the *Prevalence of illicit drug use in the general and school populations as measured by different methods* (M. Langemeijer and B. Olsson, Sweden); *Monitoring of relatively inaccessible high risk groups with respect to illicit drugs and health* (I. Van de Goor and R. Hartnoll, EMCDDA); *Monitoring the supply side of illicit drugs and its importance for public health* (I. Spruit and M. Rinfret, USA); *Monitoring treatment and care for clients of addiction services* (G. van de Wijngaart and A. Kokkevi, Greece); and *Cannabis and monitoring, a case study for health and health policy* (P. Cohen and S. Quensel, Germany). The final session was devoted to a presentation and discussion of the National Drug Monitor (B. Keizer of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports of the Netherlands).

The conference highlighted the pitfalls in obtaining reliable and comparable data, and the shortcomings of existing information sources. Yet it was concluded that promising developments could be observed in many EU countries in the improvement of their national drug monitoring systems. Countries are striving for a more complete and reliable picture of the drugs situation at national level, and an increasing awareness of the need to meet international standards for data collection can also be noted.

Richard Hartnoll

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drugs, a significant step was taken at the EU-US Summit in May when an agreement was signed on precursor control between the two parties. Efforts are now being made by the EU to conclude precursor agreements with the ASEAN and Mercosur countries as well as with Canada and Chile. Finally, a high-level EU group met with the ANDEAN countries in June 1997 to explore possibilities of co-operation in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. A similar meeting with the Rio Group will be planned under the Luxembourg Presidency later this year. In the framework of the Caribbean Drugs Plan of Action, studies were conducted on treatment and rehabilitation needs, law enforcement training, the develop-

ment of forensic capacity, intelligence communications network, maritime co-operation and rehabilitation.

Improvement of the practical co-operation on combating drug addiction and prevention and combating drug trafficking was an important issue under the Dutch Presidency. The work was based on the results of the previous Presidency and will be continued in the next six-month term.

* EU Horizontal Drugs Group - A cross-pillar working group mandated by COREPER to facilitate co-ordination of the work on drug-related matters in the three pillars of the EU/EC namely: public health; common foreign and security policy and co-operation in the fields of justice and home affairs.

** Naples II Convention - A Convention aiming to intensify mutual assistance and co-operation in the enforcement of customs regulations by the customs services of the EU Member States.

Minister urges Member States to step up monitoring

Dr. E. Borst-Eilers, Dutch Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport, speaking at the Conference on Monitoring Illicit Drugs and Health.

The debate on the role of the European Union in drug policy has been going for many years. One of the most tangible and pleasing results of this debate has been the establishment of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (...). I should simply like to note that considerable effort is needed to gather and analyse objective, reliable and comparable data. And this is, after all, the primary aim of the Centre. Although the Netherlands does not cut such a bad figure in international terms, it also does not comply with the applicable standards entirely. We are working hard to improve our performance (...).

I hope, and indeed expect, that all other Member States will intensify their monitoring activities so that at least the most basic data are available and comparable at the level of the European Union. Because, without clear data to reflect national efforts and international co-operation, major problems will arise. Without substantive data on the drug situation in the European Member States - and thus within the area of the Union - there will be no basis for the further effective development of European policy. And if European policy is proposed that is not properly thought out and based on hard data, the Netherlands will not be able to support it.

This is why it is up to us - the Member States of the European Union - to fill the gaps at this juncture and then to work together on a careful preparation of further common policy, including the appropriate monitoring (...).

Much energy is now being expended on a special monitoring system to identify new synthetic drugs at a European level at the earliest possible moment. This initiative of the European Presidency is an elaboration of the Conclusions of the Dublin Summit and the Joint Action which was adopted at the end of last year. All kinds of aims are currently being discussed, as are different ways of giving permanent shape to the system. On this subject too, the EMCDDA is a useful interlocutor".

DRUG DEMAND REDUCTION IN THE WORKPLACE

In 1996, the EMCDDA commissioned a study on innovative drug demand reduction activities in the workplace aimed at feeding its electronic *Information System* and promoting discussion on prevention activities in this setting.



The workplace: an important setting for drug prevention activities.

A first overview of the project has recently been completed by the two contractors* which, based on literature, a questionnaire and other information gathered, aims to conceptualise a specific approach to drug problems in the workplace. A final report, to appear this Summer, along with results of a panel study and the findings of an expert workshop, will form a wider basis for further development of the topic.

The most classical and common responses to drug problems in the workplace, as identified in the overview,

are «testing» and so-called «Employee Assistance Programmes» (EAPs). Many firms currently perceive testing as the most effective method for drug prevention in their organisation: by pre-testing, the problem does not enter the firm at all, and by regular drug-screening procedures, sanctions may be placed on workers identified as drug users.

The overview concludes, however, that a broader understanding of the links between health problems (including drug problems) and the workplace may be achieved via the «health promotion» approach. This approach would break with the traditional view of health matters as being bio-medical and treated by specialists alone and would advocate the workplace as an important setting for health promotion activities (in this case, drug demand reduction).

If this approach is adopted, working conditions themselves would be subject to change, their psycho-social parameters being extended so as to improve the worker's well-being and health situation thereby decreasing the «need» to use drugs to cope with everyday tasks. The EMCDDA project will focus on this type of health promotion-oriented prevention.

Gregor Burkhardt

* The contracted agencies are the Jellinek Consultancy and the ALCON Foundation (The Netherlands).

BOOKSHELF

L'Économie de la Drogue (The Drugs Economy)

"L'Économie de la Drogue" provides a comprehensive and accessible introduction to the economic aspects of the drugs phenomenon, a topic which remains relatively unexplored.

By applying traditional methods of economic analysis to the field of drugs, the author studies the patterns and levels of drug consumption in different countries as well as price variations and the flexibility of demand.

While underlining the difficulties in estimating the social costs of drugs, the book examines methods used in calculating the cost-efficiency of anti-drug policies in different countries and the motives behind public choices. Finally, the book offers a new response to the question it poses in its conclusion: how dialogue between applied researchers and decision-makers can be developed and strengthened in the area of drugs and drug addiction.

Published by: Éditions La Découverte (Collection Guides Repères). **Author:** Pierre Kopp, Professor of Economic Sciences, University of Reims. **Date:** 1997. **Language:** French. **Price:** 50F. **ISBN** 2-7071-2670-5. Please contact: Éditions La Découverte, 9 bis, rue Abel-Hovelacque, 75013 Paris. Tel: ++ 33 1 44 08 84 00.

The EMCDDA is responsible for the selection of materials for the Bookshelf and for the text presented. However, the content of these books, and the opinions expressed therein, lie with the authors themselves.

Portugal organises drugs seminar

"Drugs: The Situation and New Strategies" was the title of a seminar organised in Lisbon on 20 June under the patronage of the Portuguese President, Jorge Sampaio.

Over 200 participants attended the event from several countries in Europe, among them medical doctors, lawyers, political figures and national experts. The seminar allowed them to debate topical themes, in particular therapeutic, juridical and community approaches to drugs, which provided the focus of three roundtables.

Addressing the opening session of the seminar, President Sampaio underlined

that any new strategies against drugs (be they medical or social) should above all be realistic: "We cannot end the drug problem in the short term but we should do all we can to reduce the dramatic effects drugs have on the individual and society". More specifically, the Portuguese Head of State declared that "primary prevention is, and will be, one of the key points of a strategy to reduce drug consumption" and called for information on drugs to be introduced into the curricula of primary education. These remarks were echoed by participants at the meeting who declared that, in the coming years, prevention would be key in the reduction of drug consumption.

The Portuguese President called for co-operation to be strengthened in the fight against drugs at all levels of society. He also underlined the role of Portugal in

international organisations dealing with drugs, noting its current presidency of the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe and its involvement in preparations for the 1998 UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs.

Among others, the seminar focused on the role of penal law in the fight against drugs and the criticism of its use with regard to drug addicts. It also evaluated the results of risk reduction policies and experiments, particularly controlled distribution of methadone and heroin in Amsterdam and Geneva.

The event contributed to the on-going debate at European level to analyse new ways to counter the drugs phenomenon. The EMCDDA attended the seminar as observer.

Daniilo Ballotta

A Day in the Life of a National Focal Point

GREECE

In March 1994, the Greek Ministry of Health assigned to the University Mental Health Research Institute (UMHRI) the task of establishing the Greek REITOX Focal Point. A consultation committee consisting of experts in the field of drugs and drug addiction was also established to facilitate co-ordination between the various Ministries and other relevant partners which provide the national centre with drug-related data.

During its first three years of operation, the Greek National Focal Point (NFP) was set the challenge of co-ordinating the collection and dissemination of high-quality information on drugs in Greece. This entailed identifying data on demand reduction, pinpointing users' needs, co-ordinating information sources in a national network and promoting methodologies and common action plans at European level.

In the context of the EMCDDA's first three-year work programme and the need to assess the extent of the drug problem in Greece, the NFP focused its activities on four areas, namely: *Statistics and Epidemiology*, aimed at collecting and analysing data from direct and indirect indicators of the drug problem; *Demand Reduction*, with the purpose of collecting data on the development of programmes and activities in the areas of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation; *Documentation*, with the aim of collecting Greek scientific literature in the field of drugs and esta-

blishing a National Documentation Centre; and *Technical Infrastructure* to develop the appropriate information network to link the NFP to the EMCDDA and to key institutions and organisations working on drugs in Greece.

The above tasks required the creation of a national network for the collection and exchange of information, composed of governmental and non-governmental organisations and services such as relevant administration units in Ministries, universities, specialised drug treatment centres, prevention centres and elsewhere. Its aim is to provide policy-makers and professionals with a global picture of the development of the drug problem.

At European level, the Greek NFP co-operates with other national centres of the REITOX network. This co-operation also focuses on four areas: the improvement of the comparability of epidemiological indicators among the EU Member States; the standardisation of information included in National Reports to the EMCDDA; the contribution to the compilation of the EMCDDA's *Annual Report*; and the reduction of differences in information reporting by Member States to international organisations.

The Greek NFP is hosted on the premises of the UMHRI and receives substantial support from the Greek Organisation for Combating Drugs (O.K.A.NA.), the main co-ordinating body on drugs and drug abuse in Greece.

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Management Board elects new Chairman

A new chairman of the EMCDDA was elected at the agency's 10th Management Board meeting in Lisbon on 19 and 20 June. Mr. Franz-Josef Bindert of the Ministry of Health, Germany, was elected for a three-year term, replacing Portugal's Vítor Feytor Pinto at the organisation's helm. Mr. Bindert, formerly vice-chairman of the Board, will take up his position on 22 November 1997, when Father Pinto's term draws to a close. Father Pinto, who was elected on 22 July 1994, did not stand again as chairman. Mr. Marcel Reimen of the Ministry of Health, Luxembourg, was elected to the position of vice-chairman.

The election of the chairman was followed by a discussion on the next three-year work programme of the Centre (1998-2000). Although the members of the Board agreed in general on the main body of the text, they requested that the proposed activities be substantiated and prioritised and that the foreseen objectives and output be clarified further. A revised work programme will be presented to the Management Board for adoption at its next meeting.

The Director of the EMCDDA presented the Board with a progress report on the production of the second *Annual Report* which, to be published in September 1997, will offer data collected during 1996 by the REITOX National Focal Points (NFPs). During discussions, the importance of the quality and comparability of data was underlined and the vital role of the NFPs in this exercise stressed. As a result, terms of reference concerning this role were discussed at the meeting.

Finally, the Board was informed on budgetary issues and discussed institutional questions such as the composition of the Scientific Committee and the Bureau. If no extraordinary meeting is called during the second half of this year, the next meeting of the Management Board will be convened on 8 and 9 January 1998.

Kathleen Hernalsteen

The 1995 *Annual Report on the State of the Drugs Problem in the European Union* was presented by the Director of the EMCDDA, Mr. Georges Estievenart, to the Greek Minister of Health and other Ministers in Athens on 25 June. On 26 June, International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking, the Director visited the Greek National Focal Point.

EMCDDA Calendar

30 June - 1 July - Meeting of the heads of the REITOX National Focal Points. Lisbon.
1 July - Project Steering Group Committee IDA-REITOX Project. Lisbon.
2-4 July - Seminar on qualitative research, methodology, practice and policy. Bologna.
3-4 July - Participation in the meeting "EC concerted action - multinational scenario analysis concerning epidemiological, social and economic impacts of HIV/AIDS on society". Bilthoven, the Netherlands.
7-8 July - EMCDDA-Cost A6 Workshop. Lisbon.
7-9 July - UN First informal open-ended inter-sessional meeting of the Commission

on Narcotic Drugs. Vienna.
8 July - Demand Reduction in the Workplace seminar. Lisbon.
14 July - EMCDDA visit to Europol on new synthetic drugs. The Hague.
17 July - Meeting for REITOX task on the improvement of the quality and comparability of data related to hepatitis B/C and Delta virus infection in drug users. Paris.

Selected EU Meetings

16 July - Horizontal Drugs Group within the Council of the European Union, Brussels.

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