



Lange Lozanastraat 14, 2018 Antwerpen, Belgium  
Telephone: +32 (0) 3 237 7436  
Telefax: +32 (0) 3 237 0225  
e-mail: [encod@glo.be](mailto:encod@glo.be) / [www.encod.org](http://www.encod.org)

***EUROPEAN COALITION FOR JUST AND EFFECTIVE DRUG  
POLICIES – ENCOD vzw***

**ENCOD STATEMENT FOR THE CONFERENCE  
“CIVIL SOCIETY AND DRUGS”  
ORGANISED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
BRUSSELS, 26 / 27 January 2006**

In the past, several official statements have been made on the issue of civil society involvement in EU drug policies. This issue was included as a matter of priority in the former EU Strategy on Drugs (2000 - 2004), the Mid-term evaluation on this Strategy that was published in 2002, the draft version of the new EU Strategy on Drugs (2005-2012), released by the, then Dutch held, Presidency in July 2004, and in verbal and written communications made by the European Commission in the process of developing the final EU Action Plan.

In spite of these engagements and statements, according to ENCOD, the EU authorities have yet to formally commit themselves to a mechanism to strengthen cooperation with civil society in this field. The efforts of the Commission to organise a public consultation in the preparation of the EU Strategy (2005-2012) as well as the EU Action Plan (2005-2009) (including the preparation of this Conference) do not meet current criteria and best practise for a transparent and fully participative approach.

Neither the current EU Drugs Strategy nor the Action Plan draw any significant conclusions from the official evaluation of the previous EU Action Plan published by the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction in October 2004. This evaluation clearly indicated that the Plan had made no significant progress towards, let alone, achieved any of the 6 targets established at the start of this strategy in 2000 (pages 91-102 of the EMCDDA Evaluation report, “Discussions on overall implications of snapshot data”)

Moreover they take into account neither the recommendations of the European Parliament (formulated in the Catania report of 15 December 2004) nor those of experts, civil society organisations and local authorities from all over Europe, all of which point to the need to apply innovative approaches.

This way, drug policy continues to be designed in a vacuum, ignoring signals from both the European public as well as the European Parliament that something is going wrong.

Not only do the current EU and national drug plans fail to meet their objectives. The current drug regime actually produces collateral damage, notable examples being:

- The exclusion and criminalisation of large portions of the population (drug consumers, producers and retailers)
- The consumption of drugs in unsafe conditions, in irresponsible ways, involving chaotic lifestyles, generating significant harm to public health and safety.
- The illegal drug industry generates huge profits that are used for other criminal activities, including terrorism. According to UN figures, the illicit drug market could amount to 400 billion euros/year (12.500 euro/second)
- A considerable expenditure (estimated at 6,5 billion euros/year across the EU) on the legal and policing infrastructure needed to maintain drug policies, which seems to have no impact whatsoever on the capacity of drug trafficking organisations to achieve their goals.

What must be avoided is the repetition by future EU Drug Policy of the mistakes of the past. We should not continue to uphold policies that are proven failures. We should not talk about evaluation if we lack common instruments to evaluate or if we ignore the results of evaluation in our future strategies.

There are positive things to say about European drug policy, but therefore we need to look at the local level. In many cities in Europe, legal, medical and political authorities have started to listen to people who are in daily contact with reality on the streets, who are aware of the impact of policies on the lives of common citizens.

From reading the annual reports that are published by the EMCDDA, it becomes obvious that measures such as needle exchange, maintenance based therapies, user rooms and the controlled distribution of heroin are the real reason for the few success stories that can be told on current drug policy in the European Union.

The attempt to apply a single global approach to drug policy has clearly failed. For this reason, Europe should not go for a uniform strategy. It should adopt a co-ordinated approach, with room for national experiments and interpretations of international agreements. Also, due regard should be paid to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

The participation of civil society is crucial in designing the framework of this co-ordinated approach, as it will lead to the elaboration of evidence based policies on a local and national level and help to find at least the minimum standards of a common approach to unite these policies in a European context.

We believe this Conference to be a vital opportunity that we cannot afford to lose.

We strongly believe that this Conference will only be a success if it ends with a solid plan for a sincere and constructive dialogue between EU authorities and EU Civil Society Organisations on the design and implementation of drug policies on both national and European level. This plan should have a concrete budget attached to it, so the process can start before the summer of 2006.

We propose that a new, independent body be created to supervise this dialogue process, with equal representation of Civil Society Organisations and European authorities (Commission, Horizontal Drug Group, EMCDDA).

The dialogue process should touch 4 levels.

1. A political level: the development of models for drug policy, within and outside the margins of current legislation, aiming at creating less harm for users and non-users.
2. A practical/technical level: co-ordination between citizens initiatives for harm reduction in Europe.
3. A research level: to improve and share knowledge about the long term efficacy of prevention/treatment in reducing / avoiding problems related to drug use.

4. An information level: to set up a permanent consultation procedure between authorities and civil society organisations on the drug issue in Europe.

This Conference can make a difference. We are convinced that civil participation is an element that will contribute to the success of drug policies in the EU. It is a crucial tool to make these policies more transparent and more accepted among EU citizens.

We should avoid that this Conference becomes yet another addition to a long litany of failures. Therefore, it should be followed up by a genuinely interactive dialogue, facilitating the participation of all legitimate representatives of European civil society organisations involved with drug issues (regardless of whether or not they were able to send representatives to the conference itself) .

On behalf of ENCOD (European Coalition for Just and Effective Drug Policies),

Farid Ghehioueche, Marina Impallomeni, Christine Klüge, Virginia Montañes, Joep Oomen, Artur Radosz and Jan van der Tas

Steering Committee

ENCOD consists of 124 member organisations and individual citizens from 24 European countries, among them consumers of cannabis and other illicit drugs, relatives of consumers, health workers, academic researchers and policy experts, cannabis entrepreneurs, development NGOs, grassroot activists etc.