



THE ENCOD BULLETIN ON DRUG POLICY IN EUROPE

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STRATEGY FOR A DRUG WAR-FREE EUROPE

"Drug control is working, and the world drug problem is being contained," the executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Antonio Maria Costa, told reporters on 26 June, the International Day Against Drug Abuse. Costa will repeat these words for the next 2 years, hoping to cover up the failure of the strategy to reduce significantly the supply and demand for drugs before 2008, which was agreed upon in 1998 at the UNGASS in New York. What can we, as a European network of citizens for just and effective drug policies, do to avoid this scenario?

The answer to this question was the main point on the agenda of the General Assembly of ENCOD, held from 23 to 25 June in Antwerpen. Apart from the fact that the working conditions of ENCOD are still far from satisfactory, the 29 participants (from 13 countries) to the Assembly concluded that there is no reason to despair. In the coming years, we will have several concrete opportunities to push the drug debate toward the goal of more trustworthy, just and effective drug policies, at least in Europe. Now let's grab these opportunities with both hands.

Firstly, the European Commission is expecting comments on its "Green Paper on the role of Civil Society in Drug Policy in the European Union". The Paper is a reflection on how the EU authorities should take into account the voices of citizens in the decision-making process on drug policies. It is the follow up of the Conference on this issue that was organised in January this year (see Bulletin nr. 14), after many efforts were made by ENCOD and others to establish the dialogue. Deadline for comments is 30 September. As a platform we are preparing to issue a Green pepper before this date, which will contain our views on how a genuine consultation of EU citizens should take place.

Secondly, the General Assembly decided to install a working group of ENCOD members who will elaborate in the coming months several proposals to regulate the market of drugs. The first proposal is meant to be a set of guidelines for starting collectives of cannabis consumers who would organise their own cultivation. Depending on the legislation of each country, members could propose authorities to allow a closed circuit of cannabis cultivation and consumption for the adult members of these clubs, without any commercial trade of cannabis taking place.

These initiatives are most easy to carry out in countries where cultivation for personal use is tolerated. In Spain, several of these "cannabis social clubs" are already operating with the consent of local authorities.

In Belgium and Switzerland, similar initiatives are gathering strength. However, also in countries where cultivation is still prohibited, it may be possible to find local authorities willing to co-operate with this effort to provide cannabis consumers a way to avoid the illegal market.

The second proposal would include global guidelines for policy-makers on how to establish a regulation system for all drugs in a post-prohibition scenario. It is based on the 4 pillars that have been used by Swiss authorities since 1994: harm reduction, prevention, health care and repression. This proposal, based on the experiences and expertise of as many ENCOD members as possible, could become a crucial element in our strategy towards the UN meeting in Vienna in 2008, where the UNGASS strategy will have to be evaluated. A first version will be ready before March 2007.

A third opportunity to build a critical mass to challenge drug prohibition is the Conference on European Alternatives in Drug Policy that ENCOD plans to organise in co-operation with two fractions in the European Parliament in Brussels, on 6 and 7 November 2006. Here we will be able to bring together local authorities, citizens associations and Members of (European) Parliament, to analyse how international conventions remain the main obstacle to effective policies that reduce harms and increase benefits.

For the meeting in Vienna in 2008, we are aware of the fact that ENCOD alone will not be able to organise the entire programme of activities that should contribute to this meeting. During the coming year, we will look for partners, European and non-European organisations who are willing to join us in organising an entertaining alternative programme that will attract drug policy reformers from around Europe. The programme could include conferences, but also a hemp fair and a street parade. And we plan to have a delegation inside the UN building as well.

And last but not least, the General Assembly dedicated a brainstorming session to the question if ENCOD should enter the political arena, possibly by participating in the European Parliament elections in 2009. It happens that many ENCOD members have past and current experiences with running for elections, either as a one-issue party on cannabis, or as a member of a traditional party. We decided that depending on what happens in 2008, we may consider at least a co-ordination between local initiatives, as long as this seems to be an advantage for them and no disadvantage for other allied actors whose position we might damage by taking this step.

To carry out this strategy, ENCOD definitively needs more members and supporters. The amount that is still needed today to lay a solid base for ENCODs work is significant, but not unattainable. On the short term, we hope to solve this issue by an urgent fundraising campaign. Every ENCOD member who finds a new member is promised a reward of 10% of the new membership. Members are also asked to think of ENCOD when contacting VIPs or organising benefit events or activities for their own association. And in the long run, we might be able to fund our activities by imposing a tax of 10 euro for every kilo produced by the Cannabis Social Clubs that may surge in Europe in the near future.

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