



THE ENCOD BULLETIN ON DRUG POLICY IN EUROPE

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A COMMON EFFORT

As long as the candle of reason burns, we haven't entered the dark age of ignorance yet. There remains hope for logic and common sense to become part of drug policy as long as people keep on talking about the benefits this could have for world peace, safety, public health and sustainable development. But we need to remain alert for every opportunity to demonstrate these benefits, since we may not get as many as we would like. And we need to keep our heads cool so that those opportunities are not wasted.

Those who would extinguish the candle's light are never far away. In early July, authorities in Coventry, United Kingdom, prohibited the organisation of the 4th UK Hemp Expo. This annual exhibition of cannabis cultivation and consumption drew 12.000 visitors in London last year. Not surprisingly, the official channels that would have required clear and fair motives for the decision were ignored by the Coventry authorities.

The existence of the hemp fairs is crucial for drug policy reform, since they are an excellent way to show people what happens in an environment where cannabis is consumed. Many citizens who are sceptical towards the world of drug use have the opportunity to see with their own eyes what happens when a group of people use cannabis in a social setting. They also have the opportunity to hear to arguments against the prohibition of drugs and in favour of the regulation of cannabis. So these are important political events as well.

One's worst enemy is often him/herself: internal divisions are threatening the survival of the hemp fairs in Europe. Earlier in Germany and the United Kingdom, competition between two rivalling enterprises involved in the organisation of these fairs led to serious damage. The next case seems to be Spain, where the next editions of both the Expocannabis in Madrid and the Highlife Fair of Barcelona are planned to take place in the same weekend, from 19 to 21 January 2007.

ENCOD has asked both organisers to smoke the peacepipe and coordinate their agendas. It must be possible to divide the cake and share. Of course commercial strategies are different from political strategies. But the need for making a common front is clear and urgent - this is no time to loose ourselves in internal divisions.

Fairs are places where we can show the world funny, mostly peaceful, and inspiring images. There is also the commercial side of it which attracts people. So it is a growing business. It must be possible to organise many more fairs in Europe, if there is good co-operation and respect between the different players.

Likewise, in the coming weeks, we need to present a refined edition of our position towards the Dialogue with Civil Society on Drug Policy which the European Commission announced through the release of its Green Paper at the end of June. Our proposals will have to be constructive: both in terms of how to organise this dialogue and what to discuss in it. This position will be sent to the European Commission before September 30, the deadline for comments on the Green paper. See our website for more information.

The fundraising issue remains another priority. The bulk of this work is on the shoulders of the co-ordination, but without the involvement of ENCOD Members it will not be successful. Every constructive proposal or idea about ways to contact possible donors and new members is welcome. Any ENCOD member who recruits a new member is offered 10 % of the new membership contribution.

On the 6th and 7th of November we will organise the conference in the European Parliament in Brussels that was originally planned for March this year, in co-operation with two political factions of the EP. It will then be almost exactly 30 years since the law reform in the Netherlands took place that made the tolerant policy on cannabis possible, and the EU could be an instrument to finally stabilise this policy. Other interesting issues of European drug policy will be the situation in European Union prisons and the proposal of Bolivian coca farmers who have in the mean time become national authorities.

The conference aims to bring together from all around Europe those parliamentarians, local decision makers and affected citizens who support an advance in the debate on drug policy in the sense of establishing minimal standards of tolerance for the personal use of drugs by adult citizens. In september, the registration of participants will start.

We may consider a joint effort to make these days European Action Days for the Freedom to Farm, with the publication of the proposal of one possible just and effective drug policy model in different languages. This model will relate to cannabis and be elaborated in the coming weeks by a group of ENCOD activists from different countries. Even if we fail to obtain adequate publicity, it will be a useful learning experience for future initiatives, whether or not ENCOD is involved.

Finally, we will continue to support local initiatives. A new political party that is aiming at the legalisation of cannabis has been set up by an ENCOD Member in the Netherlands and is aiming at participating in the general elections that, after the sudden fall of the Dutch government in the end of June, will be held in November 2006. In Belgium, the association Trekt Uw Plant (Draw Up Your Plant) will challenge the authorities by setting up a legal cannabis plantation just before local elections will be held on 8 October 2006.

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