



THE ENCOD BULLETIN ON DRUG POLICY IN EUROPE

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CANNABIS SOCIAL CLUBS

History was written when in the beginning of August, a regional court in Bilbao, Spain, gave its green light to the organisation of a closed circuit of cannabis cultivation, distribution and consumption by the Association Pannagh, which had been subject to a police intervention in October 2005. Pannagh facilitates the cultivation of cannabis for the sole use of its 70 adult members (a large part of them medical users), without any commercial ambition. This concept has now been officially accepted by judicial authorities in Europe.

In addition to Spain, where several associations operate in a similar way as Pannagh, other countries where these initiatives could start already are Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands. In those countries, cultivation of cannabis for personal consumption is not prosecuted, although the exact legislation remains unclear. In the Netherlands, elements of this model could be used as a definitive solution to the 'backdoor' dilemma of the coffeeshops. But also in other countries, people could elaborate their own version. With the help of good lawyers and/or local authorities, this could become a way to undermine the prohibition of cannabis, and, in the long term, of other drugs as well.

Promoting the general idea of Cannabis Social Clubs will be one of ENCOD's priorities in the coming months. A group of members is currently preparing a detailed proposal on how these clubs could function, on the website that has been created for this purpose (www.cannabis-clubs.eu). The proposal will be presented at the Conference that ENCOD will co-organise in the European Parliament in Brussels on 6 and 7 November. In Belgium, Draw Up Your Plant, a local association of cannabis consumers, will start its collective plantation in the beginning of October.

Cannabis is the weakest link in international drug policies. It has become part of day to day reality – and the remaining problems that are related to it can only be solved after prohibition is removed. More and more people, including many outside the drug world, draw this conclusion, even if they are not always in favour of it themselves. In the German magazine "Der Spiegel" of 17 August, Karl Heinz Florenz (a Member of European Parliament for the German Christian Democrats) blamed the Dutch government for the fact that the large scale cultivation of cannabis for the coffeeshops is now also organised from Germany. And indeed it has been precisely the repressive operations of the Dutch police against growers in the Netherlands that have created the expansion of the phenomenon to Germany and Belgium.

Of course opium and coca are weak links as well. On August 16, it was reported that Afghanistan's opium production will increase by another 40 % this year, a "record year" according to a US government official in Kabul. Drug lords in Afghanistan have reportedly joined with Taliban rebels to fight Western soldiers and Afghan government forces trying to eradicate the opium crop. Reportedly, the previous Taliban government had virtually wiped out opium cultivation in 2001, in order to gain respect from Western countries..

On the other hand, it was reported in August that the Aerial Spraying Program of Plan Colombia has failed to meet the goal of eliminating 50 percent of illicit crops in Colombia. In the past 6 years, this program has seen an investment of nearly US\$1.2 billion and has led to the spraying of more than four times the area that was initially planned. Nevertheless, in 2005, both the United Nations and the U.S. government actually reported an increase in the area covered by illicit coca crops in Colombia.

Also in these countries, the question whether the depenalisation of cultivation would not be a better alternative to the current approach is becoming more frequently and legitimately heard. This would reduce the value of the crops to a level where this value could no longer be misused by corrupt officials or armed groups to take the population as their hostage. It would improve the chances of obtaining sustainable peace and economic development in these countries, based on realistic future perspectives.

While the United States maintains the control on what is happening in Afghanistan and Colombia, the solution to cannabis and hemp is in Europe's hands. Europeans should be able to recognise the positive effects that the depenalisation of this plant could have, among others an increasing independence of the oil industry, and therefore, of its strategies to rule the world.

In spite of uncertain future perspectives, ENCODs efforts to ensure the call for a different drug policy is heard are not losing strength. A first version of the Green Pepper, the answer of ENCOD to the European Commission's green paper on the dialogue with civil society on drug policies in the EU, is now being discussed by ENCOD Members. Please let us know if you wish to receive a copy.

In our comments we raise questions concerning the transparency of the new dialogue, most of all related to the participation of citizens, and especially citizens who use drugs. We also present our own proposal (which will be improved still) on how to organise this dialogue. If a genuine civil society forum on EU drug policy will be established, it is important to ensure it has an open and inclusive decision-making process which will lead to clear recommendations based on the broadest consensus possible.

Finally, we continue to be involved in efforts to negotiate between the two organisers of the Spanish hemp fairs planned on the same weekend in January 2007. We have formulated options in order to reach an agreement, which are currently being considered by the parties.

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