

COM-5/018

Brussels, 26 November 1999

OPINION

of the Committee of the Regions

of 18 November 1999

on the

Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

on

A European Union Action Plan to Combat Drugs (2000-2004)

(COM(1999) 239 final)

The Committee of the Regions

HAVING REGARD TO the Commission Communication on a European Union Action Plan to Combat Drugs (COM(1999) 239 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the Bureau's decision of 15 September in accordance with the 5 paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community to issue an opinion on this matter and to instruct Commission 5 (Social Policy, Public Health, Consumer Protection, Research and Tourism) to prepare this opinion;

HAVING REGARD TO the draft opinion (CdR 292/99 rev. 1) adopted by Commission 5 on 6 September 1999 (rapporteur: **Mr Battye**, UK/PES);

adopted this opinion at its plenary session on 17/18 November 1999 (meeting of 18 November 1999).

1. Introduction

1. The Committee welcomes the European Commission proposal for a second European Action Plan. The Committee recognizes the continuing overall threat that drug addiction and drug trafficking bring to the citizens of Europe and agrees that this threat

demands a response at all levels from local to Union.

2. The Committee particularly emphasizes the need for the involvement of local and regional authorities in any strategy that is to address this problem within local communities. The Committee calls on the European Commission to recognise the lack of effective mechanisms to ensure that experience and practice is exchanged between local and regional authorities in Europe. It believes that the problems of drug abuse can be tackled more effectively by a combination of efforts to reduce both the demand for, and the supply of, illicit drugs and commends the approach set out in the European Commission's proposal. The Committee welcomes the increased priority accorded to the reduction of demand for drugs than has been the case in the past.
3. The Committee recognises the need for cooperation at the level of the Union but, as in its opinion on the previous Action Plan, encourages the Union to assist its members in creating partnerships within and between individual member countries. Local and regional authorities, representing local communities, will play a substantial part in making any such strategy work.
4. The Committee welcomes the introduction by the Treaty of Amsterdam of the objective of providing citizens with a high level of safety within "an area of freedom, security and justice" and recognises the opportunities to progress strategies that confront the misuse of drugs within this context.

2. Trends in illicit drug use

1. The Committee agrees with the analysis of the trends in drug use but is particularly concerned at the development of a new generation of heroin users. The increasing use of amphetamines is also a concern, particularly the "designer" nature of some derivatives.
2. EU action to cut back illegal-drug demand and consumption have to date paid too little attention to neighbourhood services and social schemes in the regions. The Committee therefore considers that the EU and the member countries should provide more funds for selective measures, with due regard for regional requirements and special features. A major reason for this is the realisation that social living conditions in the regions have a crucial influence on the appearance, nature and intensification of drug addiction.

3. Action to combat Illicit trafficking

1. Despite strenuous efforts the resources devoted to combating illicit trafficking have not prevented drugs reaching into the streets and communities. Availability is no longer just in cities and urban communities, but also in small towns, villages and rural communities.
2. It is a matter for Member States acting alone and in partnership to confront this issue, and despite the difficulties, given the capacity of organised crime networks, to back up attempts to reduce supply by specific measures to reduce demand we realise there are obstacles to significant success. We believe that whilst combating the drugs problem by means of a series of specific measures should continue, both the Union and the Member States should make more funds available for local services and social measures to reduce drugs consumption.
3. The Committee considers that more progress can be made in the area of money

laundering and putting in place financial and legal measures to identify profits from drug-related activity and power to freeze and seize assets acquired from the profits of illegal drug trading.

4. **The European Union approach: a global, multi-disciplinary and integrated strategy to fight illicit drugs**

1. The Committee recognizes and supports the need for the Union to consolidate that which has already been achieved through Union participation in the broader international fight against drugs and the use of dedicated Union instruments to that effect.
2. The Committee welcomes the development of a consensus view between the developing world and the developed world and the recognition that the drug problem is being viewed from a broader set of welfare issues addressing the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development in both producing and consuming countries.

5. **Evaluation**

1. The Committee understands the difficulty in developing mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of policies. Much can be learned from Member States who have developed national strategies with performance indicators set to measure outcomes. It will be important to develop a set of robust measurements for the impact of this programme. It will be important to develop a set of robust measurements for the impact of this programme and to ensure that these are available to local and regional initiatives.
2. The Committee encourages the Monitoring Centre (EMCDDA) to further develop its role not only as a dissemination point for best practice, but to develop advice and guidance on evaluation and also support the validation of evaluation instruments. They should make full use of the Reitox network and ensure that experience gained at local and regional levels are taken fully into account. Contacts between representatives of local and regional government in the European Union should continue to be strengthened so that they can learn from one another.

The Committee notes that the Monitoring Centre (EMCDDA) does not yet cover alcohol and tobacco. The Commission are asked to review this omission.

6. **New challenges**

1. The Committee notes the new challenges that have been identified and welcomes the opportunities for pre-accession members to become members of certain Agencies. The development of a single **European Local and Regional Government Network on Drugs** would be of assistance to these countries, as would the experience of local government officials, using the Phare Multi-Beneficiary Programme.
2. The Committee believes that attention should be given to the increasing evidence of the connections between acquisitive crime and drug misuse.

7. **The Treaty of Amsterdam**

1. The Committee welcomes the new legal framework provided by the Treaty. In

particular it welcomes the proposals being set in the context of freedom, security and social justice. Local and regional authorities have a primary responsibility for the safety of their communities and would expect to play a leading role in the delivery of these objectives.

2. The Committee welcomes the further step forward in the field of public health and law enforcement. The part that a good standard of public health can play is central to a policy of harm reduction. Also critical to communities is the close co-operation between police, customs and other judicial authorities.

8. Main aims and objectives

1. The Committee agrees that drugs must remain a major priority and that supply and demand reduction policies should continue as mutually reinforcing elements. It particularly notes that the successful implementation of the plan will require new resources to be available to local and regional government. The statement of major new strategies and challenges should include those facing local and regional government. There needs to be a strong partnership between public health and public order.

9. Specific targets

1. **Information:** the Committee recognises the key role to be played by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and REITOX national focal points in collecting, analysing and comparing data on the drugs phenomenon. It will be important for both to establish dialogue with local and regional authorities.
2. **Action on demand-reduction:** Whilst the targets set out in the proposal are reasonable the Committee is concerned to find no reference to the role of local and regional authorities. To set targets for the reduction in illicit drug use amongst young people without clarity as to how this can be best delivered is unlikely to be effective. For many Member States the development of actions on demand reduction are a local and regional authority function. The Committee wishes to draw attention to the central importance of social exclusion and the importance of the different age groups and different risk levels in the various population groups. The Committee wishes to emphasise that the circulation of the various types of drug is a social problem which involves all territorial levels and spans a variety of social groups. The primary route for the delivery of demand-reduction messages are schools, almost always provided by local and regional government, and which are the front line community forum in which the authorities must also cooperate with parents and other social players.
3. The Committee is pleased that strategies on drugs will be considered alongside those on alcohol and tobacco.
4. The Committee accepts the objectives set out for education, it particularly encourages the problem being addressed within a whole school and community approach. Schools should also be encouraged to develop policies on dealing with drug related incidents.
5. The Committee welcomes the decision of the Commission to pay special attention to doping in sport. However, it considers that this may involve a small group of sportsmen and women and not large sections of the population. Action should therefore be taken within the framework of the existing legislation and by national and international sport associations (comprehensive vetting and if necessary disciplinary measures). The proposals to address the problems of doping in sport, whilst considering the problem not to be as widespread as suggested.

10. Conclusions

1. The Committee of the Regions believes that the full potential of local and regional authorities to contribute to the previous Action Plan was not achieved. The principal reasons were:

- i. **lack of understanding of the services provided by local authorities to meet the problem of illicit drug use;**
- ii. **lack of a comprehensive network linking local authorities that can facilitate the exchange of experience and opportunities to meet;**
- iii. **acknowledgement by the Commission that drugs is not only a city phenomenon but also affects rural areas;**
- iv. **assumptions by the Commission that demand reduction/prevention is delivered within a health agenda, when a significant proportion is provided by local and regional authorities through schools, and crime and disorder programmes.**

2. Given the European Commission's commitment to giving a high priority to prevention the Committee would welcome further discussions as to how the resources of local and regional authorities can be mobilised to fulfil the objectives of this Action Plan. It is suggested that:

- i. **The European Commission convene a meeting to discuss how local and regional government can establish a network to link all levels of local and regional government on preventive measures and issues relating to illicit drugs (see point 6.1);**
- ii. **The Commission and the COR identify the key services provided by local and regional authorities that contribute to the objectives set out in the European Action Plan 2000-4, and develop a programme of activities to ensure that these services meet these objectives.**

The COR encourages the Commission to maintain the Committee for the Prevention of Drug Addiction as a support to the Directorate for Health and Consumer Protection.

Brussels, 18th November 1999.

The President

of the

Committee of the Regions

Manfred Dammeyer

The Acting Secretary-General

of the

Committee of the Regions

Vincenzo Falcone

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