



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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**CORDROGUE 49
USA 16**

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

of: Meeting of the Horizontal Working Party on Drugs and the USA

on: 15 May 2013

Subject: Summary of discussions

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda set out in document CM 2793/13 was approved with the addition of the following information points under AOB:

- Plans of the incoming Lithuanian Presidency
- Likely impact of transition in Afghanistan in 2014 on counter narcotic efforts

2. Relevant developments in the drugs situation and policies in the EU and in the US

The Presidency and the representative of the Commission gave an overview of the progress achieved with the new EU Action Plan on Drugs, legislative measures foreseen to tackle new psychoactive substances and drug precursors and other drug-related initiatives. The representatives of the EMCDDA presented the latest trends in the EU drugs situation.

The US delegation gave an overview of the US drug situation and policy developments, noting that according to several estimates, every dollar invested in addiction treatment programmes yielded a return of between \$4 and \$7 in reduced drug-related crime, criminal justice costs, and theft; and if savings related to healthcare were included in the calculation, total savings could reach \$12. The speaker expected that the health system reform would have a major impact for drug treatment by increasing access to paid treatment and the number of people eligible for treatment. Prescription drug abuse was still an enormous problem with approximately 22,000 cases out of more than 38,000 drug overdose deaths in 2010 involving prescription drugs. However, people became more conscious that this constituted a problem. The delegate also noted a huge increase in the flow and seizures of methamphetamine on the southern border, while it was believed that significant eradication efforts in Colombia contributed to less cocaine reaching the US.

3. Thematic focus: Discussion on responses to the misuse of prescribed and “over the counter” opioids and other psychoactive medicines including efforts to prevent overdose deaths in the EU and US

The US delegation gave a detailed overview of the history, scope and trends of the prescription drug abuse and measures taken to tackle the problem, noting that this problem was not new but was the fastest growing drug-related problem in the US. He explained that the advertisement of pharmaceutical companies on TV was popular, allowing people to ask for specific medication. Furthermore health insurance covers prescription drugs and information about their abuse could be found on several Internet sites. Looking at the situation from economic terms, in 2007 the costs of such abuse accounted for \$55.7 billion and emergency room visits between 2004 and 2010 for such cases had increased by 115 %. Also, it was stressed that many more people were dying from overdose of prescription drugs than from firearms.

The speaker named the most often abused prescription drugs, noting a tendency for teenagers to turn from the abuse of some of them to the abuse of heroin. He also explained that there were different ways to get prescription drugs, including doctor shopping and visits to pain clinics, leading to an explosions of such clinics and criminals being involved in establishing them. According to the medical experts, most clinics did not require sufficient medical history and tests for proper prescribing of Schedule II substances.

To respond to this situation Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Plan was adopted, focusing on education, prescription drug monitoring programs, proper medication disposal and enforcement. As there continued to be a huge education gap, efforts were put to train pharmacist to recognise potential prescription drug abusers and to encourage the use of prescription drug monitoring programmes (with some states making them obligatory) as well as to explain distributors their obligations under the law. Measures were introduced allowing people to remove expired, unwanted, or unused medicines from the home, such as national take back days. Among many measures taken in the field of enforcement, the speaker named providing technical assistance to states on model regulations/laws for pain clinics, closing pain clinics, checking the licenses of specialists and revoking them if necessary.

The representative of the Commission noted that the misuse of prescription drugs was also a concern in the EU, but not on the same scale as in the US. Although there was no clear evidence explaining the difference, different advertisement of medication, attitude of physicians to prescribing drugs or even the emergence of new psychoactive substances which is a huge concern for the EU might contribute to this difference. The speaker also explained that the EU legislation for medical products had been recently revised to increase the safety with any advert reactions on drugs having to be reported through a specially designed system. The representative noted that the EU was also putting efforts to tackle the opposite side of this issue - the lack of access to medicines, as one third of countries worldwide lacked access to medicines.

The representative of the EMCDDA noted that the misuse of prescription drugs could possibly rise in the forthcoming years, however, for the moment too little data was available to conduct a reliable analysis on the prescription drug abuse situation in Europe. Moreover, no system existed to monitor the misuse by non-drug users population. The speaker described the abuse of various analgesics opioids, especially of Fentanyl, and explained ways used to obtain them, including taking waste from the hospitals, robberies of pharmacies and doctor shopping. Out of 6500 reported overdose deaths in 2011, opioids were the main reason, however, poly-drug use was widespread, including other illicit drugs, alcohol, benzodiazepines, methadone and fentanyl. He stressed that well-regulated and supervised opioid substitution treatment could help to prevent use/misuse of "substitution drugs" and avoid deaths.

4. Update on activities in West Africa

The US delegation gave an overview of their activities concerning West Africa, mentioning the recent opening of the regional training centre in Ghana where trainings including on criminal investigations, organised crime, tackling corruption for police officers, judges and other officials were held. He also reported on a meeting of West Africa experts held in January, where the recommendations for ECOWAS on the Praia action plan were discussed among other issues. In response to the US wish to learn about the EU planning in this respect, the UK delegation noted that they had an ambitious agenda for the next meeting on West Africa in London.

The representative of the EEAS touched upon especially difficult situations in certain countries of the region and possible synergies between drug traffickers and terrorists. The speaker reminded of the EU input into the Praia action plan stressing the necessity to implement it rather than revise. She also emphasised the importance of tackling drugs in West Africa with a comprehensive approach, including also elements of development and good governance.

5. Coordination on multiple upcoming high level discussions on drugs

- *Information by the US delegation, including the Report on the Drug Policies in the Americas and the OAS General Assembly, 4-6 June 2013*

The US delegation shared information on the OAS study on the effectiveness of drug policies in Americas, noting that the drugs policy should stay in the boundaries of the UN Conventions. The speaker also noted the existing division in Latin America on the way forward, and that some states were very vocal in this debate, but not necessarily followed by other states in the region or having the support of their whole population.

Preparation for the forthcoming high level discussions on drugs in 2014 at CND and in 2016 at UNGASS was examined. The US delegation believed that better implementation of the UN conventions should be discussed during these meetings.

- *Progress and expectations on EU-CELAC meetings*

The Presidency informed the US delegation about the forthcoming High Level meeting of the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs, the annual COPOLAD conference and the meeting on precursors.

6. Any other business

- *Plans of the incoming Lithuanian Presidency*

The incoming Lithuanian Presidency suggested to continue the discussion on prescription drugs during the next meeting with the US.

- *Likely impact of transition in Afghanistan in 2014 on counter narcotic efforts*

The US delegation informed the meeting about their plans for the future cooperation with Afghanistan.
