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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
On: 4 September 2015
To: Delegations
Subject: Outcome of the EU-Western Balkans expert meeting on drugs

1. Adoption of the agenda

The meeting approved the agenda as set out in doc. CM 3504/15.

2. Developments of drug policy and drug situation, including on new psychoactive substances and misuse of prescribed medicines

The representatives of the Presidency and the Commission informed the meeting about the draft legislation aimed at tackling new psychoactive substances more efficiently, addressing the issue of misuse of and dependence from prescribed medicines and work done in the field of developing drug supply indicators and minimum quality standards in drug demand reduction. The representative of the EMCDDA shared the major findings of the European Drug Report 2015, noting that overall the drug situation was complex and dynamic.

Serbia informed the meeting that a regulation had been adopted on establishment of the office for combating drugs – a governmental coordinating body tasked, among other duties, to draft strategic documents, monitor implementation of projects and conduct international cooperation. Montenegro noted that the evaluation of the national drug strategy would be conducted next year and they were working with other countries of the region on the regional Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment report. Bosnia and Herzegovina announced that recently a working group had been established to draft a national drugs strategy and action plan and that on 1 January 2015 the country joined the Pompidou group.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia explained that the drugs strategy for 2014-2020 was being implemented and new psychoactive substances were not a major issue, as marihuana and heroin remained the most consumed drugs. Kosovo* informed the meeting that they were drafting a new drugs law which would also include provisions on new psychoactive substances and misuse of prescribed medicines. Albania stressed that drug-related crimes continued to be a serious problem, but in the last year the number of drug seizures increased dramatically, and the fight against drugs remained one of the priorities of the government. The speaker also noted that the quantity of marihuana seized last year exceeded the total quantity of marihuana seized in the preceding 9 years.

3. Overview of the cooperation between the EU and Western Balkans

The Presidency recalled that the validity of the EU-Western Balkans Action Plan on Drugs had been prolonged and a stock-taking exercise was completed last year. The representative of the Commission elaborated on the ongoing projects implemented under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The speaker also mentioned that a project to deal with purchasing illegal substances on internet was upcoming. He explained that there was an idea to make a public list of all projects funded by the IPA, which would contain information on the authors of the projects, their results and contact persons, as this would allow to build on completed projects while planning and implementing the new ones.

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The representative of the EMCDDA explained that the goal of the cooperation with Western Balkans was to prepare them for participation in the EMCDDA and that this included, among other measures, support for building national early warning systems, invitations to the annual REITOX week and drafting national drug reports.

The representative of Europol gave an overview of the cooperation with the region, including on the state of play as regards the cooperation agreements with Europol. He explained that the agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina was nearly finalised. The speaker also noted that thanks to the agreements in place, there was an increase of exchange of intelligence on an annual basis, but the level of exchange should be further increased.

Montenegro noted the further increase in regional cooperation and reported on their cooperation with Europol. The speaker also informed the meeting that in 2015 two significant police actions were conducted in the country. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia said that cooperation with all neighbouring countries and Europol was excellent and elaborated on the past and future joint operations. Kosovo* mentioned that they signed agreements with Albania and several EU Member States on fighting against international crime, and were finalising similar agreements with some other countries. The speaker also explained that Kosovo* started cooperation with UNODC. Serbia noted that they were implementing the national drug strategy for 2014-2020 and some of the EU recommendations, including the Council Recommendation of 30 March 2004 regarding guidelines for taking samples of seized drugs. Albania also noted that they were intensively cooperating with other countries in addressing drug trafficking.

4. Drug demand reduction policies – overview of the current situation

The representative of the Commission informed the Western Balkans delegations about the adoption of EU minimum quality standards in prevention, risk and harm reduction, treatment, social integration and rehabilitation.

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The representative of the EMCDDA observed that during the last years the access to treatment and investments for treatment had been increasing significantly and that the EU Drugs Strategy 2013-2020 was the only regional strategy comprising risk and harm reduction measures, allowing to decrease drug use and related infections. The speaker stressed the importance of making evidence-based decisions and adopting best practices in this field, and noted that evidence played an increasingly important role in the EU drugs policy.

Kosovo* informed the meeting that the drugs strategy provided for free substitution treatment and various risk and harm reduction measures, implemented through NGOs and that a specialised website dedicated to drug issues was created.

5. Drug supply reduction policies – overview of the current situation

The representative of the Commission elaborated on the development of drug supply indicators, noting that this would allow the EU to get more reliable and more complete data to better measure the successes and failures of different policy measures taken to address the drug phenomenon. The representative of Europol gave an overview of the implementation of the drug-related priorities within the EU policy cycle and invited the Western Balkans Countries to consider next year their role in cooperating as regards implementing these priorities through the action plans. The speaker also elaborated on IT tools available within Europol to collect data on different kind of drugs and new psychoactive substances.

Kosovo* informed the meeting that EU funding allowed to receive some equipment to tackle drug supply. Serbia presented the drug trafficking situation in the country, noting that organised crime groups from South America and Balkans were present on the scene and that the trend of bigger seizures of cocaine remained, while marihuana was still the most present drug. The speaker gave an overview of different drug seizure operations completed and explained that a flexible mechanism allowing to quickly update the list of scheduled substances was in place in Serbia.

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Montenegro described the drug trafficking situation within the country and measures taken. The speaker observed that the trafficking of cannabis became a regional security problem, while there was a downward trend in heroin trafficking. At the same time the number of heroin consumers was growing. The speaker also noted that synthetic drugs did not play an important role in the drug market in Montenegro.

6. Exchange of views on UNGASS 2016

The Presidency gave an overview of the EU position as regards UNGASS 2016 on drugs and presented the EU contribution for the UNGASS outcome document. The Presidency also invited Western Balkans to align with this position.

7. AOB

No items were discussed under this agenda point.
