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THE COUNCIL**

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NOTE

from: Presidency

to : Horizontal Working Party on Drugs

Subject: Point of departure and Work Programme of the Horizontal Working Party on Drugs (HDG) for the first half of 1999 under the German Presidency

I. The drugs problem

The scourge of drug abuse, addiction, dependence, illegal drug trafficking and the many forms of drug-related crime poses a serious threat to humanity as it nears the end of the 20th century. Like many of the world's other regions, the EU Member States are particularly seriously affected. On the basis of current evidence, there are no significant differences between the Member States as far as the proportion of drug dependence and the extent of illegal drug trafficking are concerned. This is clear from the annual reports published in 1998 by the Europol Drugs Unit and the European Drugs Monitoring Centre (EDMC). Both reports also point out that drugs have become no less of a problem in the European Community over the past few years taken as a whole, although most of the EU Member States would appear to have seen no significant increase in the illegal supply and abuse of heroin and cannabis. However, the illegal supply of cocaine and amphetamins has risen sharply as has demand. As far as the Ecstasy problem is concerned, the consumers' approach seems to be one of cautious restraint.

II. The Community's response

Member States have cooperated closely for decades, both with each other and in the international community to combat drug abuse and illegal drug trafficking. They have drawn up national plans to combat drugs on the basis of the international Conventions on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1961, 1971 and 1988 together with other international agreements (inter alia United Nations Global Programme of Action of 23 February 1990). The action taken under these programmes is constantly being developed at international, regional and national level (see inter alia, the political declaration and action plans adopted by UNGASS on 10 June 1998).

The process of economic and political union in Europe has been accompanied by increased cooperation among Member States in combating drugs. They have developed community-wide plans to combat drugs, most recently in the 1995-1999 action plan. The European Parliament and the European Commission have declared the fight against drugs one of the main priorities of their work programmes. Together with the European Council and the Councils of Ministers they are contributing through their resolutions and decisions to the achievement of a common coherent European drugs policy which is both visible and effective.

As far as the Community is concerned, the drugs problem will only be tackled successfully by cooperating closely with the international community to develop a combat strategy (global approach) and bringing in all of the important sectors and areas of society (multidisciplinary approach). The Community is pursuing a balanced approach to reducing illegal drug supply and demand (balanced approach) and acknowledges the principle of shared responsibility among all States affected by the drugs problem. These four principles of the drugs policy mean that in the EU the drugs problem forms an integral part of the work of all three political pillars of the European Union initially described in the Maastricht Treaty. The Council has accordingly set up a number of specific working parties, which deal primarily with the drugs problems affecting the respective pillars, inter alia:

- The Council Working Party on Health Questions is in charge of drug prevention.
- The Council CODRO Working Party deals with the foreign-policy aspects of the drug problem within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU.
- Measures to prevent the diversion of specific substances for the illicit production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are discussed in the Council Working Party on Economic Questions (Customs Union).
- Various aspects of the drug problem are dealt with by the Working Parties on Customs, Generalised System of Preferences and Police Cooperation and by the Multidisciplinary Group (MDG).
- The EDMC in Lisbon mentioned above and the European police authority EUROPOL in The Hague play an important role in the efforts to curb the drug problem.

III. The Horizontal Working Party on Drugs (HDG)

Given the multiplicity of anti-drugs activities in all areas of Community policy, the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) felt that the Horizontal Working Party on Drugs should be instructed to coordinate and supervise the implementation and further development of the Community drugs policy across all three pillars and if necessary take action itself. The carrying out of this mandate so far, most recently under the United Kingdom and Austrian Presidencies in 1998, has given the Community drugs policy a high profile. The EU has become a partner of some importance in the international community where taking action to combat drugs is concerned, making a significant contribution to determining international drugs policy. And in future, the Horizontal Working Party's main task will be to maintain and consolidate the Community's position in the field of drugs. The EU bears special responsibility here for the future applicant countries and the other neighbouring countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

IV. The work programme of the HDG during the first half of 1999

Given the initial situation outlined and continuing the creditable work done by the previous presidencies, the following tasks in particular fall to the HDG under the German Presidency during the first half of 1999 (They are not in order of priority):

1. Further coordination of implementation of the EU drug control strategy, on the basis of the EU action plan to combat drugs (1995-1999), the Community's Action Programme on the Prevention of Drug Dependence within the framework of action in the field of public health (1996-2000) and of the decisions of the European Councils of Madrid, Cardiff and Vienna in particular.
2. Evaluation of the implementation of the 1995-1999 action plan and of the drugs-related decisions of the European Council (progress and weaknesses).
3. Continued verification of the main components of an EU post-1999 strategy on the basis of the preliminary work done under the United Kingdom and Austrian Presidencies and of a Commission proposal expected in early 1999 together with further proposals by the Member States, with reference to the political declaration, action plans and resolutions of UNGASS in 1998. Participation of the specialised Council Working Parties, the EDMC and Europol (see II above).
4. Cooperation with the Working Party on Health Questions in the area of prevention and demand reduction.
5. Harmonisation of the practices of law enforcement and control bodies in combating drugs crime, particularly through
 - (a) approximation of data-collection characteristics and procedures to improve pan-european comparability of police statistics on drugs,
 - (b) development of an external border handbook on narcotic drugs.

6. Coordination of the examination begun under the Austrian Presidency of efficient follow-up measures after UNGASS 1998.
 7. Coordination of cooperation in the field of drugs with the CCEEs.
 8. Adoption of the EU Action Plan for Latin America.
 9. Continuation of work on an EU initiative for Central Asia.
 10. Cooperation with other international partners, e.g. UNDCP, Commission on Narcotic Drugs, WHO, Dublin Group, Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe, in collaboration with the specialised working groups.
 11. Interim report to the Cologne European Council on the drug-related activities of the EU in the first half of 1999.
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