European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction EMCDDA: drugs in the Union. Annual report 1997

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SUBJECT: presentation of the annual report by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) on the state of the drug problem in the European Union (1997). SUBSTANCE: the 1997 report by the EMCDDA assesses the dimensions of the drugs problem and the measures taken by the Member States to eliminate it. Its objective is to provide decision makers and others involved with a basic set of comparable data regarding the effectiveness of the policy and practices adopted. The 1997 report is concerned with 6 particular aspects: (1) consumption: in many countries, the consumption of 'new' drugs such as ecstasy, together with crack, cocaine, cannabis and amphetamines is constantly increasing. In general, only a small minority of people who have tried the drug have become habitual users. Health problems arise mainly from the use of heroin, for example, the demand for treatment, HIV infection and drugs related deaths. Combinations of drugs including medicines and alcohol is also on the increase. (2) demand reduction: measures seeking to reduce demand generally take five forms: prevention, outreach, treatment, rehabilitation and risk reduction. Prevention is the most effective particularly when organized close to its targets (neighbourhoods, schools, local associations). (3) synthetic drugs: the use of this type of drugs (LSD, amphetamines and ecstasy) has reached unprecedented proportions in recent years with the advent of phenomena such as 'raves' and 'house parties'. Most of the consumers are young, employed or students and relatively affluent. They are not concentrated among the marginalized or deprived. While the impact of these drugs in public health terms is limited, it should not be underestimated, given the constantly increasing use of these drugs. (4) national strategies: most Member States are seeking to achieve a balanced reduction in supply and demand for drugs and achieve coordination with a view to eliminating the problem. Differences in national legislation relate mainly to the severity of punishments, the implementation of legal provisions and enforcement practices. While there is no common policy in this field, the Union is seeking to analyse drug policy divergences and convergences between Member States. The appropriations earmarked for combating drugs also vary from country to country. (5) action taken by the European Union: Union action in this area really developed in the 1990s and in 1996. It was recognized as a common problem following a number of measures taken in the field of justice and internal affairs. In addition to measures to combat money laundering, a Community programme with a budget of ECU 27 m over 5 years has been launched, together with actions in third countries. (6) international environment: It is mainly at UN level that international action in this area is situated, involving a binding legal framework including three conventions which have been ratified or signed by all the Member States.