Public health: Community action programme 1996-2000 on the prevention of drug dependence

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The ESC welcomed the Commission proposal for a Community strategy for action in the field of drug dependency, an increasing and complex phenomenon with huge social and economic costs to society. Competency for this lay within Article 129 of the Treaty. There was a need for coordinating action and rationalisation of existing instruments. As drug dependency was a complex phenomenon, the ESC accepted that its prevention needed efforts at local, national and global level involving multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional responses: - activities to target high-risk groups and critical age groups; - education and training for all involved; - the setting-up of an advisory body on drug dependency with representation from each Member State and with national committees as the central point of reference for all the many agencies involved, including non-governmental organisations. The ESC recommended that a broader approach be taken to encourage the promotion of healthier lifestyles rather than the narrow, negative approach epitomised by the ‘say no to drugs’ campaign in the USA. The ESC was broadly in favour of the Commission’s recommendation in all three areas of activity: 1) improving public awareness, in particular by means of coordinated transnational activities; 2) capitalising on the opportunities in other Community policies, programmes and instruments to prevent and combat drug dependency; 3) initiatives and actions relating to young people of school-going age in relevant environments and promotion of best practices in this regard. The ESC recommended that extra funding should be given to those border towns where the prevalence of drug addiction was particularly high. In conclusion, it endorsed the Commission’s initiative in this area, recognising the urgent need to support: 1) the evaluation of current research and practices; 2) the promotion and evaluation of innovative programmes, particularly in education; 3) the exchange of information and experience.