Public health: Union strategy on drugs 2000-2004, prevention and reduction of risks of drug dependence

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The committee adopted the report by Minerva MALLIORI (PES, GR) which, while broadly approving the Commission's proposals under the consultation procedure, nevertheless proposed a number of amendments to the recommendations to Member States. It said that the aim must not be confined to preventing drug dependence but must include the reduction of demand for drugs, an actual reduction in drug use and the number of addicts and support for research and studies aimed at reducing the damage to health caused by drugs. It also stressed that a better balance must be struck between prevention and risk reduction, through the networking of national drug information structures, ensuring the interoperability of information and data exchange networks and the exchange of best practices between the Member States and the candidate countries. Cooperation with the candidate countries should be stepped up in general, with the EU providing financial and technical support where necessary. The committee urged Member States to take practical action, based on pooling experience at national, regional and local level, in response to new drug use patterns, e.g. recreational use of drugs in night-time entertainment venues, multiple dependence and driving under the influence of drugs. It also said that standard rules should be drawn up to ensure safety inside and outside night-time entertainment venues, including the setting aside of 'chill out" areas. MEPs stressed the key role of local communities, arguing that local authority healthcare staff, police and social workers should be encouraged to take active measures to help drug users. One amendment called for mobile units to be set up to provide information, counselling and basic health care services to drug users where most needed. Governments should pay more attention to high-risk environments such as prisons, while questions of drug abuse, drug-related illness and treating for overdoses should be included in all types of medical training. Moreover, efforts to reduce the incidence of drug-related health damage should also focus on mental health problems (such as depression and psychosis) and physical disorders other than infectious diseases. Lastly, the Commission was urged to incorporate the anti-drug strategy into other Community policies and strategies.