



EU Civil Society Forum on Drug Issues

Report to the Drug Policy Action Group

From: Niamh Randall

Date of Meeting: 13th and 14th December 2007

Location: Brussels

Introduction

The first meeting of the EU Civil Society Forum was held in Brussels on the 13th and the 14th of December 2007. Of the 26 networks from EU member states selected to participate in the Forum there were two Irish networks¹ the Drug Policy Action Group and Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign. Participation is for a two year period, at the end of which there will once again be an open call for participants.

Some may argue that the process and the selection of networks to participate in this process was questionable however the fact that a Civil Society Forum on Drug Issues was actually happening was a 'win' in itself, that the EU accepts that drug issues warrant discussion and that much of the expertise lies in the community (Civil Society) is a real shift. However, the EU does recognise it's limited powers on these matters, exceptions being border control and policing matters, thus questions must be asked about how much of an impact the EU Drug Strategy can have within individual member states in reality.

The Meeting

The meeting had three main themes

- The Drugs Prevention and Information Programme
- Drugs and Prisons
- Progress Review of the EU Action Plan on Drugs

Initially the group meet as a plenary for introductions, a 'tour de table' receipt of documentation and presentations. The presentations related to the three themes outlined above; the *Drug Prevention and Information Programme* is an agreed programme therefore this was included for information purposes only, the two other presentations set the scene for two parallel Working Groups which comprised the afternoon of day one and the morning of day two. Finally, the group reconvened at the end of day two to hear feedback and recommendations from both of the Working Groups. A summary report, including feedback and recommendations, is awaited from the Commission. It is anticipated that this report will reflect the broad spectrum of views and the diversity of ideologies amongst participants. As there were two representatives from Ireland, albeit from different networks, they decided to each attend a different Working Group. Anna Quigley attended the *Working Group on Drugs and Prisons (Working Group 1)*. Niamh Randall attended the *Working Group on the Action Plan on Drugs (Working Group 2)*.

It is important to note that participants in both Working Groups expressed concern about their inability to adequately prepare for these discussions as they were unaware of the issues up for discussions and received documentation only upon arrival at the

¹ EURAD are also members of the forum however although the groups headquarters are in Ireland it is in fact a European Network



meeting. There were also questions raised about the representativeness and quality of feedback as participants had not had time to consult with their members. In addition, participants queried the appropriateness of having parallel Working Groups as many were interested in both issues yet there was only one member² present from most networks.

The Drugs Prevention and Information Programme (2007-2012)

The following programme was presented to participants as a potential funding opportunity, as it had already been agreed there was no opportunity to influence its composition. It was adopted on the 25th of September 2007 with a planned duration of seven years 2007-2012. The total budget will be in the region of €21.35 million.

The aims of the programme are as follows;

- To prevent and reduce drug use, dependence and drug related harms.
- To contribute to improvement of information on drug use.
- To support the implementation of the EU Drugs Strategy.
- To promote trans-national actions.
- To involve civil society in the implementation and development of the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plans.
- To monitor, implement and evaluate the implementation of specific actions under the Action Plans on Drugs 2005-2008 and 2009-2012.

This action was delayed; therefore the 2007 work programme will actually be rolled out in 2008, in addition to the 2008 programme. As part of this work programme there will be a call for proposals for grant funding from organisations in all EU member states in early 2008. The thematic priorities for this work programme are as follows

- Projects aimed at the creation of multidisciplinary networks, the expansion of the knowledge base, raising awareness of the social and health problems caused by drug use, and the prevention of drug use.
- Projects aimed at preventing drug use, including the reduction of drug related harm and treatment methods.
- Projects aimed at the involvement of civil society in the implementation and development of the European Union's Drug Strategy and Action Plans.
- Projects aimed at the monitoring, implementation and evaluation of specific actions under the Action Plans on Drugs 2005-2008 and 2009-2012.

There are specific priorities under each of the thematic priorities. Projects may consist of but are not limited to; programmes, studies, research, exchanges of best practice, training, study visits, staff exchanges, seminars, meetings and conferences.

Application forms and guidance will be available on the following websites in mid February 2008 http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/intro/funding_rights_en.htm.

http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/drugs/funding_drugs_en.htm

For further information email JLS-DRUGS-PROGRAMME@ec.europa.eu

² A second member of each network could have attended the meeting but at the network/organisations own cost



Drugs and Prisons

EU work to date in relation to this matter was presented to participants. An external contractor was employed in 2006 to look at these issues, and asked specifically to report on the status of prevention, treatment and harm reduction services for people in prison, reintegration service for people upon release and current approaches to monitor and analyse drug use among prisoners, as one determinant of prisoners service needs.

This report which will be finalised towards the end of 2007 will encourage member states to;

- Actively prevent drug use occurring in prisons
- Facilitate access to treatment within prison.
- Increase access to harm reduction services in prisons
- Improve access to reintegration services for prisoners.
- Promote monitoring and analysis of drug use in prison.

The *Working Group on Drugs and Prisons* were asked to ‘discuss and report on common views for the preparation of the future proposal for a Council recommendation on drugs and prison’ bearing in mind the presentation they had just heard and their own experiences. Some of the issues raised³ included; equivalency of care issues, access to and the structure of treatment in prison, discharge plans and civil/human rights violations of prisoners in general, but especially drug using prisoners.

EU Action Plan on Drugs

The EU Drugs Strategy runs from 2005-2012. The goal of the strategy is

To protect and improve the well-being of society and of the individual, to protect public health, to offer a high level of security for the general public and to take a balanced, integrated approach to the drug problem.

However during the life of this strategy there will be two Action Plans; the first running from 2005 until 2008 and the second running from 2009 until 2012. The overall aim of the 2005-2008 Action Plan on Drugs is that by 2008, the Action Plan should significantly reduce the prevalence of drug use among the population and reduce the social and health damage caused by the use and trade in illicit drugs.

There was a presentation on developments to date and a review of the Action Plan during 2007. *Working Group 2* had the following objective;

To provide insights from Civil Society relevant;

- to the evaluation of the Action Plan on Drugs 2005-2008, and crucially
- to the development of the Action Plan on Drugs 2009-2012.

Some of the issues raised⁴ include; polydrug use and the need for a wide range of treatment interventions, the needs of mobile drug users and those under 18 years of age, and the necessity of a glossary of terms and definitions to accompany documents on drug issues from the EU as some of the terms are very subjective and open to interpretation in different contexts and countries.

³ Summary report awaited from the Commission

⁴ As above



Civil Society can contribute to this process on an ongoing basis by participation at Forum meetings, these meetings are only open to Forum members, members of the EU Commission and observers selected by the Commission. In addition, it was highlighted that all members of Civil Society can contribute to this process by sending written submissions on the above points to the Commission (email address as above). The EU Drugs Strategy 2005-2012 is the framework for the Action Plans thus there will not be any major policy shifts beyond this, in addition the necessity for submissions to be 'realistic' and 'to the point' was emphasised. Critically, the Commission will make the decision on 'how' and 'when' contributions will be used.

Reflections

- The details in relation to meeting location, timing, travel etc were communicated to participants very late in the process resulting in
 - A number of networks being unable to attend the event at such short notice e.g. Drugscope UK and the International Harm Reduction Association (IHRA). This limited the scope, and indeed quality, of debate and feedback.
 - Documentation (including agenda) not being received in advance of the event meant participants were unaware of what issues to prepare for and unable to consult with their membership.
 - Related to the above was the fact that participants were presented with a large folder of documents upon arrival and asked to respond however, there was little time to read and thus respond comprehensively to such documents and, again, no opportunity to consult members.

This all runs contrary to the spirit of Civil Society engagement.

- The Commission exerts a very strong veto in relation to the utilisation of contributions and submissions.
- Participants were asked to leave ideologies 'outside the room' this proved very difficult for some participants and made some discussions difficult.

Next Steps

The proposed date for the next Forum meeting was June 2008 however participants felt this was too late in the process due to the problems outlined above and the fact that the EU Action Plan 2009-2012 will be developed during March/April 2008 thus a meeting in Spring was suggested to allow participants time to consult with their members and provide valuable feedback and recommendations.

The Commission did acknowledge and apologise for the manner in which the event was organised and the delay in sending documentation, promising to do better in the future. They agreed to send a full list of Forum participants and a summary report to all who attended; in addition they agreed to explore the possibility of having a meeting in Spring 2008 as yet there is no feedback on these matters.

However despite difficulties outlined there is still value in engaging in this process for the following reasons

- It provides an opportunity to influence the new Action Plan on Drugs 2009-2012



- Although the EU Drug Strategy and Action Plans have no legislative basis there is the power of influence, and recommendations made in such documents can be used as leverage in negotiations and can guide best practice.
- It is an opportunity to network, to learn and to influence other Forum members and the Commission specifically the Drug Coordination Unit.

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