

From :
The Civil Society Forum on Drugs
Represented by its Chair :
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To :
European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker
European Commission First Vice-President, Frans Timmermans
Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources, Gunter Oettinger
Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs, Ruete Mathias
Commissioner for Health, Consumers and Food Safety, Vytenis Andriukaitis

Brussels, 21 February 2018

Subject: Recommendations to strengthen the role of coordination of the European Commission in the field of drugs and to ensure adequate and specific funds for cross-border demand and harm reduction issues in the next European Union Multiannual Financial Framework

Sirs,

The Civil Society Forum on Drugs (CSFD) is a diverse group of 45 civil society organisations representing various geographical regions, professional competencies and representing a range of approaches and perspectives on drug policy across the European Union. Our role is to participate in policy development and implementation, consistent with Objective 9 of the EU Action Plan on Drugs (2013-16).

The CSFD is addressing you with two important requests.

First, we are convinced of the need to strengthen drug coordination in the administrative structure of the European Commission, by providing adequate funding and staff to this issue.

We wish to acknowledge the support and dedication of the drugs unit's staff at DG Home (D3), which coordinates works in this area, and supports the work of the CSFD. The staff is both able and committed, and is an important added-value to the Directorate. However, the unit has been put under pressure in recent times, and is dealing with both a broader remit - which now encompasses organised crime - and a real reduction in staffing capacity due to leave and staff turnover. In our view, the Organised Crime and Drugs Policy Unit (OCDPU) has capable officials, but is now seriously understaffed and underfunded.

We feel that this is a significant obstacle to the strengthening of coordination efforts in the implementation of the European Union Drug Strategy and the newly adopted Action Plan for 2017-2020, an example of pragmatism, humanism, and evidence-based policies unique in the world. This is particularly concerning at a time when overdose deaths are increasing across the region (with fears that these might reach epidemic levels as is currently happening in North America), and also at a moment when governments worldwide are about to decide on the global drug policy for the next decade, at a CND ministerial meeting in 2019.

Second, we urge you to prioritise social and public health interventions to reduce drug demand and drug-related harms in the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), being prepared by the European Commission.

Drug policy is a multidisciplinary field that has strong connections to security, public health and social policies. It requires special knowledge and competencies, a comprehensive perspective that enables various stakeholders to take coordinated actions. In the field of drug prevention, treatment, social reintegration and risk and harm reduction, most services are provided by civil society organisations. The support of the European Commission Drugs Prevention and Information Program, and later the EC Justice drug policy grants have been paramount for international cooperation and networking among these civil society organisations - as well as for supporting the effective implementation of the EU Action Plan 2013-2016.

These EU-funded projects empower professionals and peers to give evidence-based and balanced responses to common European threats and challenges related to drugs. The benefits from this approach are real and evaluated, and we believe that it is critical that the unit tasked with drug policy issues have adequate resources to continue this work, including access to a dedicated budget for transnational projects in the area. Therefore we strongly recommend to keep adequately and specifically funded drug policy grants in the future, without subduing them into any general budget.

As evidence-informed public health interventions are invaluable part of effective drug policies, we also recommend that health be kept as a priority funding area in the MFF. Evidence shows that the funding and support given by the European Commission for public health programs has given an invaluable contribution to safeguarding the right to health of European citizens. High prevalence of HIV and hepatitis infections, as well as opioid overdoses among people who use drugs are a major public health threat but have declined in the EU in recent years. Effective responses need more innovation and cross-border cooperation, most often not covered by national and local funding resources. We need strong leadership from the European Commission here.

We appreciate that the Commission has to handle many competing priorities at a time when the financial situation remains difficult. However, it is both as experts in the field and as concerned citizens of the European Union, that we are asking you to ensure that the OCDPU is adequately resourced to manage its administrative workload, and that health and social interventions in the field of demand and harm reduction are both specifically and adequately provided for, in the post 2020 landscape.

We look forward to hearing from you and remain at your disposal should you wish to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely yours,

The Civil Society Forum on Drugs
Laurene Collard, Chair

