



# Speech

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## 1. Recent trends and developments

The drugs situation has become more serious in recent years and can be characterised as follows:

- Significant increases in the **availability** of all substances: record high seizures of **cocaine** in Europe (following an increase in cocaine production in Colombia); recent significant seizures of **heroin** in Europe; over 1 million seizures of **illicit drugs** are reported annually. In 2018, 55 **new psychoactive substances** (NPS) were detected in the EU for the first time, bringing the total number monitored by the agency to more than 730. We are also witnessing an evolving market where **synthetic drugs** and drug production within Europe are growing in importance.
- In parallel, we have observed an increase in the **purity** and **potency** of substances being used in the EU, with an average concentration of THC of 10% in **herbal cannabis** and 18% in **cannabis resin**; 125 milligrams of MDMA as an average in **ecstasy** pills; the availability of highly potent new psychoactive substances (NPS); **cocaine** being available at the highest levels of purity observed in the last decade, while the price remains stable.
- Around **96 million adults** in the EU (15–64 years) have tried an illicit drug in their lifetime and an estimated 1.2 million people receive treatment each year for problems related to illicit drug use (EU-28).
- There is evidence that the use of **social media**, **darknet** marketplaces and encryption techniques are playing an increasing role in enabling individuals and smaller criminal groups to engage in drug dealing.
- In the last five years we have also observed in some EU Member States an increase in **drug-related deaths**. Over 8 200 deaths, involving one or more illicit drugs, were reported in 2017 in the EU. This estimate exceeds 9 400 deaths when Norway and Turkey are included. While **opioids** remain the main driver of fatal overdoses in Europe, often **heroin**, opioids used in substitution treatment or medications, such as oxycodone and tramadol, are also reported. Deaths associated with **fentanyl** and its analogues are probably underestimated, and outbreaks of deaths related to these substances have been reported. **Stimulants** — including **cocaine** and other substances such as **benzodiazepines** — are also involved in many deaths.

Although the Western Balkans have been frequently described as a region with a low-moderate problem associated to drug availability and drug use, there are indications that the situation is changing. Those changes are observed for all dimensions of the phenomenon in the region concerning drug production, drug trafficking and drug use. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive overhaul of the priorities for cooperation with the EU.

## 2. Cooperation between the EMCDDA and the Western Balkans

The EMCDDA's mission is twofold:

- To inform the EU and the Member States on drug-related cross-border health and security threats, covering, not only the EU, but also candidate countries and potential candidates, and neighbouring countries.
- To support the Enlargement Strategy of the EU and to provide technical support to candidate countries and potential candidates for their approximation to the EU *acquis* and for the implementation of their respective action plans in the area of Justice and Home Affairs.

Successes:

- We have managed to establish some good cooperation at scientific and technical level.
- Through our technical cooperation project financed by CARDS and then IPA, we have the possibility to provide direct support to capacity building and data collection.
- As a result, a first regional report on the drugs situation was published five years ago.
- Each country has had at least one general population survey (GPS) since 2014, following EU standards.
- Almost all countries have conducted two waves of ESPAD school surveys: in 2019 ESPAD took place in Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia; the survey was cancelled in Albania despite the availability of financial support from EMCDDA.
- Those surveys also allow the partner countries to provide more, or better, data to the UN as part of the Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ).
- National experts participate in key scientific meetings organised by the EMCDDA.
- Today the EMCDDA has a Working Arrangement for cooperation with Albania, and is expected to sign one with Serbia by the end of 2019 or at the beginning of 2020.
- After assessment and consultation with the partner countries, the EMCDDA published in 2015 a roadmap for each country: they are updated on a yearly basis and feed the drafting of the progress report.
- A check-list and guidelines exist for the establishment of national early warning systems (NEWS) on new psychoactive substances (NPS) that are used both for training and for the assessment and validation of the existing ones. So far, only the Serbian NEWS has reached an acceptable level of development that will allow for formal technical exchanges with the EMCDDA.

Challenges:

- In many countries there is legislation or a national strategy or an action plan on drugs that foresees the establishment of a national focal point and of a national early warning system on new psychoactive substances (NPS), but the NFP is only a reality in Serbia.
- In some countries, there has been a first mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the national strategy with the support of the EMCDDA and/or TAIEX, but the conclusions and recommendations have not yet been implemented.
- In almost all countries, there is insufficient support for building the national capacity for cooperating and for reporting, and this includes a lack of human resources.
- Lack of institutional support leads to IPA project budgets and key activities being cancelled.
- All countries are confronted with a situation of increased drug production, trafficking and consumption that has a negative impact at national and international level.
- Some data collection is well-developed thanks to the support of the Global Fund (GF), but there is no, or poor, sustainability since the withdrawal of the GF from the region.

- The rise of the activities of organised crime groups in a broad set of criminal activities, including drug trafficking, does not receive adequate levels of priority and of funding from national authorities.
- There is a lack of supply indicator data. After several trainings and an in-depth assessment of available data and recommendations for improving their quality, the EMCDDA has received a first submission of data on seizures; however, they are not yet in line with the EMCDDA protocol.

### 3. Perspectives

The new IPA 7 project that started on 1 July 2019, with specific funding from the IPA programme of the European Commission, provides the basis and the resources to boost the cooperation between the Centre and the Western Balkans countries, along with the mission and mandate of the EMCDDA.

#### 1. Identifying and collecting more broadly any relevant source of information on the drugs situation at regional, national or at local level

There are many sources of information in the region that may be useful and relevant for the EMCDDA to fulfil its role of detection and assessment of drug-related health and security threats. While those sources come from different sectors and providers with a variable quality and coverage, and with a variable institutional setting (State, cities, universities, international donors, NGOs), they are all potentially useful and represent frequently the only information available. What matters here is the sound scientific assessment of these data and their integration into a holistic model for strategic analysis, which is where lies the expertise of the EMCDDA.

In the new IPA 7 project, a comprehensive screening and assessment of available information will be conducted and will serve as a basis to complement and to update the work done some years ago for the production of the first report on the drugs situation in the Western Balkans.

#### 2. Preparing the next EU Drug Markets Report 2022

The reinforced investment in data collection and analysis along with a strengthened cooperation with the partner countries will help in the preparation of the next *EU Drug Markets Report 2022*.

#### 3. Support to drug policies, scientific evidence, reliable data and systematic monitoring of the drugs situation

The approach developed over the last 25 years introduced a sequence of key steps which have become an intrinsic part of the EU decision-making process: to understand the situation, to analyse the needs, to design interventions and to evaluate their results and their impact. On that basis, the EMCDDA has published a 7-step guide that will be made available to the Western Balkans countries, as has already been done for Montenegro and Serbia.

#### 4. A regular reporting/exchange to/with the JHA Ministerial Forum

As one of the main weaknesses identified so far is the lack of strong and sustained institutional support, regular reporting to, and dialogue with, all partners and international agencies would allow for increased awareness of decision-makers and would provide a unique space for inter-agency dialogue on new and emerging trends.

#### 5. A balanced approach between demand and supply reduction

The drugs policy in the EU is also guided and inspired by the provisions of the Treaties and in particular by the Charter on Fundamental Rights, which has legal force and is applicable to all persons living in the

EU, including persons who use drugs. This common reference is partly reflected in the way most of the EU Member States address the situation of persons using drugs or being found in possession of small quantities for personal use.

In this context, the EU and its Member States have progressively developed a portfolio of evaluated and well-documented interventions, based on the scientific evidence available and presented with criteria for good practice, which compose a common 'European Toolbox' of interventions in demand reduction. The EMCDDA is in charge of gathering and analysing the evidence and the best practice criteria that compose this toolbox, with a priority to support the implementation of those best practices at national or at local level.

Another important pillar in the work of the agency is the work in the area of 'Risks to public safety and security', and the development of a full set of supply indicators. The EMCDDA is also one of the key contributors to EMPACT. All those activities in the area of Justice and Home Affairs would benefit from strong support from national authorities — this support is key to better detect, understand and anticipate new emerging trends in drug use and drug trafficking.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Working Arrangements, such as those signed or to be signed with Albania and Serbia, are an important sign that cooperation is being upgraded and that it is gaining traction for the benefit of the countries themselves, of the EU agencies and of the EU.

The EMCDDA, through its new IPA 7 project, is more than ever in a position to provide hands-on technical support and scientific advice, and remains at the entire disposal of the national delegations at the JHA Ministerial Forum to discuss specific national needs and situations.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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Director