

Green Paper on the role of civil society in drugs policy in the EU

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The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted the own initiative report by Giusto CATANIA (GUE/NGL, IT) on the Green Paper on the role of civil society in drugs policy in the European Union, indicating that civil society has an essential role to play in promoting the emergence, definition, implementation, assessment and monitoring of drug policies. With its experience gained at grass-roots level, its innovative capacity and its potential in terms of the exchange of information and sound practices, civil society can bring significant added value to planned measures. However, in order to do so, civil society must be recognised and supported in both its internal and external dimensions.

- Civil society ? the internal dimension: MEPs stress the importance of action by civil society in the achievement of the objectives set out in the EU's drugs strategy as regards prevention, the provision of information and the management of problems associated with drugs dependencies. They call upon all parties involved at both EU and Member-State level to better recognise the role of civil society in terms of damage-reduction, rehabilitation and social-reintegration policies. At the same time, MEPs call on the Commission and Member States to promote civil society initiatives, particularly those aiming to: i) reinforce the prevention of and information on the risks associated with drug use; ii) treat drug addicts in prison; iii) establish special preventive procedures in ?at-risk? metropolitan areas; iv) organise, with the cooperation of parents?, students? and teachers? organisations, awareness and prevention campaigns on drugs and their harmful effects on health; v) implement damage-reduction policies through direct contact with people in the street and in neighbourhoods; vi) establish reintegration projects for street children and disadvantaged families.
- Civil Society ? the external dimension: MEPs call for a strengthening of the external dimension of the EU's drug strategy in order to have a sustainable impact on drug-producing countries. The experience of European NGOs that are active in this area should also be taken into account in order to help the countries in question to switch local cultivation to therapeutic and medical uses. In particular, they call on the Commission and Member States to explore forms of cooperation with civil society organisations involved in the promotion of legal substances derived from coca leaves. Other initiatives have also been proposed such as those set out in the European Parliament and Council Recommendation of 25 October 2007 on the production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan (see [INI/2007/2125](#)) or through the possibility of combating illegal poppy plantations by means of spraying, which is not harmful to humans, animals or the environment. Cooperation with the science industry is also highly recommended as well as with international networks of associations active in the area of combating drugs (for example, the Vienna NGOs Committee on Narcotic Drugs or the ?Beyond 2008? initiative which aims to promote the role of civil society within the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGASS) regarding drugs).

Role of the media: given the vital role of the media, and particularly digital media, in raising awareness among citizens, especially young people at risk of becoming drug addicts, MEPs call for these to become privileged partners in the fight against drugs by establishing awareness measures specifically aimed at female drug addicts. In this respect, MEPs call for targeted campaigns on the damaging effects of drugs to the physical and mental health of young girls, pregnant or breastfeeding women and on maternal health and the transmission of drugs between mother and foetus. Information campaigns should also be targeted at young consumers, in other words children and minors.

MEPs also highlight the importance of the Civil Society Drugs Forum, which represents the first step towards more concrete and constructive involvement of European civil society associations in the dynamics of the EU in terms of the prevention of and fight against drug use. While regretting the selection process for participants in the Forum, MEPs recall that its aim is to establish direct contact with associations that are on the front line in the fight against drugs. They regret the low level of participation in the Forum of organisations that are representative of the new Member States as well as the non participation of networks of women's associations, or those for mothers and young girls. More generally, MEPs believe that the Forum should have a clear mandate so that dialogue with civil society can have a real influence on the European decision-making process. Measures have therefore been proposed to formalise the participation in the Forum.

More financial means: MEPs request that, subject to budgetary control, the EU becomes involved at a financial level in supporting civil society activities. They call on Member States to cover as far as possible, through public financing, the services proposed by professional civil organisations and request that financial measures be set out in order to assist voluntary organisations and parents' associations that take action in the fight against drugs. While they welcome the launch of the 2007-2013 ?Specific Programme on Drugs Prevention and Information?, they regret the delay in the implementation of the funding made available in connection with that Programme.