

Opinion on the proposal for a Council Regulation (EEC) on the establishment of a European Drugs Monitoring Centre and a European Information Network on Drugs and Drug Addiction (Reitox) ⁽¹⁾

(92/C 223/09)

On 11 February 1992 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Protection of the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Affairs, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 5 May 1992. The Rapporteur was Mr Gomez Martinez.

At its 297th Plenary Session (meeting of 26 May 1992), the Economic and Social Committee unanimously adopted the following Opinion.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Rome European Council of 13-14 December 1990 approved the proposal by the European Committee to Combat Drugs (CELAD) for a European plan to combat drugs. The idea of setting up a European Drugs Monitoring Centre was already mentioned in the plan.

1.2. The purpose of the monitoring centre is to provide objective, reliable and comparable information at European level, so that the requisite measures can be taken to reduce the illegal consumption, production and trafficking of drugs.

1.3. Priority is to be given to the following areas of activity:

- a) reduction of demand for drugs;
- b) national and Community strategies and policies;
- c) international cooperation and geopolitics of supply;
- d) drug trafficking;
- e) the drugs economy.

1.4. The Committee endorses the proposal to set up a European Drugs Monitoring Centre and Information Network on Drugs and Drug Addiction. The new system should provide a wider approach to the problem than is possible at national level, while linking measures to reduce demand with those to curb drug trafficking.

1.4.1. The Committee hopes that the final agreements will take account of the following general and specific comments.

2. General Comments

2.1. Drug dependency in its various forms is a matter for the utmost concern. The situation is aggravated by the fact that it can in some cases contribute to the spread of such dangerous diseases as AIDS and hepatitis, and can even lead to loss of life, particularly among young people.

2.1.1. We are not dealing simply with a health problem: there are also serious social and economic consequences, both for the addict's family and for society in general.

2.2. Coordination of measures to reduce the illegal production, supply and demand for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances at both EC and international level, as part of an overall approach to the problem of drugs and drug addiction, can enhance the effectiveness of efforts in the individual Member States.

2.3. In earlier Opinions ⁽²⁾, the Committee fully endorsed the stepping-up of moves to stamp out serious crime linked to drug trafficking, given the damage which drugs inflict on the physical and mental health and dignity of drug-users, many of whom are very young.

2.4. On the demand side, the need is for prevention by:

- a) giving inner-city areas a more human face;
- b) involving schools and universities in a health education and information programme;
- c) a leisure policy targeted at young people;
- d) economic and social measures to create jobs;

⁽¹⁾ OJ No C 43, 18. 2. 1992, p. 2.

⁽²⁾ OJ No C 159, 17. 6. 1991 and OJ No C 332, 31. 12. 1990.

- e) an effective rehabilitation policy to combat discrimination against former drug addicts and to provide support for people working with young drug victims.

2.5. Among the topics which the European Drugs Monitoring Centre could consider, with a view to garnering useful information, are the respective merits of the repressive and the permissive approach. The Committee feels it is necessary to listen to all points of view if effective guidelines are to be devised for tackling drug addiction and related problems.

2.5.1. The various policies pursued hitherto in the Member States could form a further useful starting point for consideration.

2.5.2. The Centre will also provide a forum for swapping information on the various treatment methods used in different countries and regions.

2.6. The fight against drug trafficking should not stand in the way of the commitment to create an area without frontiers, although it has to be recognized that ports, airports and even open beaches are where some Member States find it easiest to track illegal drug shipments. To this end, cooperation between customs services and police forces should be improved, both at national level and between Member States.

2.6.1. The sending of police and customs officers to work with their opposite numbers in other Member States could also be explored. This is another matter which the European Drugs Monitoring Centre could consider.

2.6.2. The removal of the Community's internal frontiers will lead to the redeployment of customs officials. The Committee suggests that the case be considered for drawing on the experience and skills of these officials in other areas of the fight against drugs.

3. Specific Comments

3.1. Although the Commission proposal faithfully follows the Council guidelines it appears contradictory

on the question of efficiency, since it gives priority to reducing demand rather than supply.

3.1.1. The first recital states that 'the brief of (the) centre would cover not only the social and health aspects, but also other drugs-related aspects, including trafficking and repression'.

3.1.2. The ninth recital speaks of 'information which will enable the Community and the Member States to take the requisite measures to fight against consumption, production and trafficking of drugs'.

3.1.3. The eleventh recital conflicts with the above, in stating that 'information on the social and health aspects must be given top priority in the Centre's work'.

3.2. Article 3—Priority areas of activity

In line with the above comments, the words 'in descending order of importance' should be deleted.

3.3. Article 7—Management board

3.3.1. Pursuing the same line of reasoning, it would be better if each Member State had two representatives, to accommodate the two Ministries with responsibilities in this field: Health, and Justice/Internal Affairs (UK Home Office).

3.3.2. Since the drugs problem has social and employment repercussions, the Committee would like to be associated in an appropriate manner in the board's work.

3.3.3. For the same reasons, the annual general report on the centre's activities should also be forwarded to the Committee.

Done at Brussels, 26 May 1992.

*The Chairman
of the Economic and Social Committee*

Michael GEUENICH