



Drug Policy Reform

Parliamentary Seminar

Perspectives from Latin America, West Africa & Europe

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT

UK Houses of Parliament, 28th – 30th October 2013

The first session was called “Setting the Scene” and it introduced the issues around drug policy, mainly from factual point of view. It gave an overview of recent trends and patterns in the production, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs and the political movement around them. The panellists shared their expertise on recent research, policy and legislation relating to the overall production, smuggling and consumption of drugs. The panellists were Ruth Dreifuss, former president of Switzerland and Member of the Global Commission on Drug Policy; Sandeep Chawla, Deputy Executive Director and Director Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs, United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC); Paul Griffiths, Scientific Director of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and Hon. Robert Del Picchia, Member of French Senate and Chair of Inter-Parliamentary Union 12+ Group. The session was chaired by Baroness Meacher who said the growing problem of legal highs and the fact that transit is a problem in Europe as well as in West Africa and Latin America meant that parliamentarians had a lot to learn from each other’s continents.

The second session was called “Comparison of the Scenarios in the OAS Report on the Drug Problem in the Americas “. This plenary reflected each one of the policy scenarios presented in the Organisation of American States report on the Drug Problem in the Americas discussed at the OAS general assembly in Guatemala in June 2013. The panellists presented case studies on different approaches to drug policy and discussed their points of view on what comprises best practice and achieves best results in combating the effects of drug production, trafficking and abuse. The panellists were Luis Fernando Carrera, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guatemala; Hon. Mauricio Quintella, Member of the Chamber of Deputies, Brazil; Ann Fordham, Executive Director, International Drug Policy Consortium and Hon. Larba Atsoh Apoudjak, Member of Parliament of ECOWAS and Member of the National Assembly, Togo. The chair reflected on the great differences between the countries of Latin America, and the need for flexibility for countries to do what is right for their populations. She said that it is more helpful to read the scenarios in the OAS report as a set of policies from which a country might pick and choose the parts that make sense for it, rather than as a set of fixed alternative policies.

The third session was called “Money Laundering and Online Trends in Drug Trafficking “ and focused on international efforts to fight money laundering and tackling empty shell companies of drug cartels. The panellists presented on how anti-money laundering legislation and bank executives work in practice to address the complexity and constant innovation by criminals, the growing role of online-markets as the internet provides a rapid and secure means of communication for consumers and criminals. The panellists were Rowan Bosworth-Davies, Chair of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition UK; Tom Bergin, Special Correspondent, Reuters; Richard Lowe, Economic Crime Command Manager, UK National Crime Agency; and Hon. Papa Owusu-Ankomah, Member of Parliament, Ghana. The panel was chaired by John Mann MP, who said there was a major worldwide problem, crossing different banking and political cultures, noting the banks in the UK were just as susceptible to the risks as others.

The fourth session was called “Drug Supply Regulation Policies” and discussed the economic and social impact of regulating the supply of drugs at the production and trafficking level. The panellists shared their views on government policy and legislation that criminalizes the production, smuggling and consumption of drugs. The



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panellists were George Soros, Chair of the Open Society Foundations; Maria Lucia Karam, Retired Judge, Law Enforcement Against Prohibition; General Lord Ramsbotham, Former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons; and Hon. Harald Terpe, Member of the German Bundestag and its Committee on Health and Spokesman on drug policies. The panel was chaired by Baroness Stern and spoke of her experience of prisons and penitentiaries, and described prisons as an example of that collateral damage. The panel discussed penal reform and the impact of prohibition, reducing demand directly by treating drug addiction as a public health problem, and effective rehabilitation programmes for imprisoned drug traffickers. There was a broad agreement to the proposition of Mr Soros that the so-called “war on drugs” had failed and, in some cases, exacerbated the problem.

The fifth session was called “Drug Demand Regulation Policies” and exposed a variety of approaches to regulating the demand for illicit drugs in consumer countries. The panellists shared case studies and their views on what comprises best practice and achieves effective results in reducing the detrimental socio-economic and health impact of high demand for illegal drugs. The panellists were Professor Alex Stevens, School of Social Policy, University of Kent; Jindřich Vobořil, National Anti-Drug Coordinator of the Czech Republic; Roger Howard, Former CEO of the UK Drug Policy Commission; and Hon. Pernille Skipper, Member of the Danish Parliament. The panel was chaired by Paul Flynn MP. It discussed expertise and recent comparative research on policy and legislation relating to regulating drug markets in consumer countries, the strengths and weaknesses of both decriminalisation versus the legalisation of illicit drugs and the case study of the autonomous neighbourhood of Christania in Denmark.

The sixth session was called “the effect of drug policy changes” and discussed how parliamentarians can manage the politics, public resonance and voter attitudes about drug policy reform and the effect of drug policy changes on regional security and counter-narcotics policies. The panellists presented different approaches to swing voter motivation and messaging on regulation in the light of the Washington state initiative to legalize marijuana, and recent developments in Uruguay drug policy. The panel was chaired by Natalie Bennet, Leader of the Green Party and was formed by Alison Holcomb, Criminal Justice Director American Civil Liberties Union; Benoît Gomis, International Security Programme, Chatham House; Hon. Sebastian Sabini, Member of the House of Representatives, Uruguay and President of the Select Committee on Drugs and Addictions; and Hon. Julio Mario Trobo, Member of the House of Representatives, Uruguay.

The seventh plenary session was a report back session from two break out groups which had discussed issues relating to “A health-based approach to drug policy”. The first breakout group moderated by Prof Susanne Macgregor from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, introduced delegates to recent research, policy and legislation relating to addiction policies and comparing best practices in different countries. The second breakout group was co-moderated by the Dr Andrew Ball, Senior Advisor of Strategy, Policy and Equity in the World Health Organization’s Department of HIV/AIDS, and Rick Lines, Executive Director at Harm Reduction International. The latter group focused on harm-reduction drug policy, mainly from factual point of view, including the link between drug use and HIV & Aids. The report back session was chaired by Dr Andrew Ball, and both Hon. Janja Napast, Member of the National Assembly, Slovenia and Hon. Papa Owusu-Ankomah, Member of Parliament, Ghana, summarised discussion points that came their respective breakout sessions. The moderators concluded that it is important to avoid a polarised discussion and to seek a balanced approach which will involve proportionate responses to problems. Harm reduction was agreed to be more than just a list of techniques and having that principle at the root of all policy is essential to prevent harm and alleviate suffering. Building capacity, institutions, a network of practitioners and learning



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from the experience of different countries, is important as the situation is constantly changing. The need for decisions to be informed and influenced by evidence and for there to be coherence between national narcotic drug control bodies and public health ministries were concluded to be the basis for good practice.

The eighth session was called “The Role of Drugs in Creating Violence” and the panellists, chaired by Lord Dholakia, displayed a range of case studies from different geographical regions highlighting the role drug production, trafficking and abuse in creating cycles of violence and the effectiveness of countries’ policies to tackle violence. The panellists included Hon Iris Vianey Mendoza, Senator, Mexico; Hon. Chernor Maju Bah, Member and Deputy Speaker, Sierra Leone Parliament; Hon. Robert Cutajar, Member of Parliament, Malta; and Hon Guilherme Mussi, Member of Congress, Brazil. The presentations were followed by a discussion on the different security aspects to the global fight against drugs. The chair said that he wanted delegates to leave the session with some clear ideas of where to go from there and to focus on making training available to people tackling such issues—the police, social services, teachers and others.

The final session was called “Challenges Ahead” in which Dr Sandeep Chawla from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) described the process leading up to the special UN General Assembly session of 2016, and how international co-operation on drugs was structured around the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Economic and Social Council and the UN Conventions. He said there was almost universal agreement on taking a balanced approach to drug policy in which health-oriented drug policies and conventions could supply that neglected dimension. He promoted a human-rights based approach to drug users also and that there is wide agreement of the need not only to eradicate drug crops but to provide balancing development. Baroness Meacher, Chair of the Drug Policy Reform All-Party Parliamentary Group concluded with a number of propositions emerging from the seminar:

1. To leave behind the one simple objective of a drug-free world, which could never be achieved and was not helpful, and replace it with several objectives
2. To base drug legislation on evidence
3. To not waste efforts in trying to change the UN conventions as there would be countries who would veto it, regardless. A more pragmatic use of energy would be to lobby for an amendment
4. To understand that greater freedom is needed for countries to decide what policies to carry out to benefit their populations. This could be either by allowing countries to reform their drug policy by withdrawing from the conventions, developing a reservation and re-acceding (like Bolivia did), or by using article 3 of the 1988 convention, which permits a country to establish criminal drug laws subject to “its constitutional principles and the basic concepts of its legal system” (like Uruguay did).
5. For major institutions to a) prioritise the prevention of drug addiction among young people through information, education and generous welfare provision, b) to encourage every state to provide effective treatment for addiction immediately after it has been identified and not to criminalise and imprison people before they can access treatment, and c) to not criminalise young people in general, but treat them by taking the “health approach”.

Baroness Meacher concluded by stressing the difference between drug “legalisation” and “decriminalisation”. She said that the word “legalisation” is misleading, meaning a regulated system where drugs were very tightly controlled, not sold in supermarkets. She said that decriminalisation is completely different from legalisation. It would not get rid of dealers but would ensure that young people do not get criminal records. She said that evidence and research show that both legalisation and decriminalisation have benefits, so should be promoted, but it should be made clear that they are different policies with different benefits.