

EUROPEAN CITIES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKING

On 29 October, the Congress's Chamber of Local Authorities opened a wide-ranging debate on drug trafficking and its consequences for European societies. Elected officials, experts and youth delegates focused on a clear common goal: to move beyond the alarming findings and explore integrated local strategies to tackle a danger that now stalks medium-sized towns, rural areas and vulnerable neighbourhoods in big cities. The room resonated with the sound of participants telling their stories and sharing practical examples and ground-breaking proposals, illustrating the complexity and cross-cutting nature of the issue.

Jean-Paul Vermot, Mayor of Morlaix (France), whose experience has been widely reported in the European and international press, described neighbourhoods where drug trafficking has become a lurking but omnipresent danger. Teenagers, often school dropouts or from vulnerable families, become both consumers and potential recruits. For Vermot, law enforcement alone is not enough: it is also necessary to rebuild the social fabric, mobilise residents, support prevention in schools and provide help to users through concerted local policies. The example of Morlaix shows that citizen involvement — families, pensioners, shopkeepers — is vital for detecting and reducing drug trafficking.

This perspective was echoed in the speech by **Christian Lamouline**, Mayor of Berchem-Sainte-Agathe (Belgium) and president of the Association of the City and Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region, who placed the issue in its transnational context. Referring to the consequences of the shift in trafficking routes to Antwerp following the tightening of controls at the port of Rotterdam, he pointed out that criminal networks now operate on a European, if not global, scale. Brussels is feeling the direct effects of this, with shootings, organised trafficking and increased pressure on public services. In Lamouline's view, the ability to take local action is hampered by chronic underfunding of law enforcement, the justice system and customs, placing municipalities "on the front line" of a fight that far exceeds their remit.

Lucien Colliander, who represents Switzerland in the Council of Europe's **Pompidou Group**, broadened the discussion to include governance and international co-operation. Drawing on the **Quartiers Programme** in Switzerland, which combines targeted police action, social monitoring and citizen engagement, he showed that success depends on continuity of public policies and data sharing between different levels of government. He emphasised the need for a co-ordinated approach, with local authorities working together with European and international structures to prevent fragmentation of efforts.

The youth delegates provided valuable insight into the human and social dimensions of the problem. **Sarah Mackel**, a delegate from Luxembourg who is studying medicine, emphasised the psychosocial risks to which young people are exposed, as consumers, potential recruits and victims of the social effects of trafficking. She highlighted the need for complementarity between prevention, medical care and social support, aspects that are too often neglected in law enforcement policies. For his part, **Christos Parmakkis**, a youth delegate from Cyprus, called for a more comprehensive approach that integrates education, the arts and sport as levers for prevention. For him, giving young people a sense of purpose, opportunities for expression and

autonomy is essential to divert them from criminal networks and substance use. **Tijana Ristovska** (North Macedonia) spoke of the close connection between drug trafficking and economic crime networks – fraud, money laundering and corruption – showing that drugs are not just about those on the fringes of society, but also an indicator of broader structural imbalances.

The debate as a whole revealed a consensus on several priorities: the creation of support centres outside the criminal justice system, specific support for women drug users who are victims of violence, enhanced training for social workers and law enforcement agencies, and above all, **close co-operation between local authorities, schools, health services and civil society**. These measures, tried and tested at the local level, demonstrate the considerable potential for innovation in European cities.

Municipalities are now seen as genuine **testbeds for governance**. They are experimenting with rapid response mechanisms, co-ordinating networks of actors and inventing new forms of territorial solidarity. But this inventiveness has its limits: local elected officials are calling on central governments to provide them with financial, judicial and human resources commensurate with the scale of the challenge. The fight against drug trafficking is not just a matter of managing a public health problem — it is part of a broader fight against organised crime and the social destabilisation it causes.

In conclusion, **Bernd Vöhringer (Germany)**, President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, highlighted the need to capitalise on these experiences and use them as a catalyst for collective action. An in-depth Congress report will shortly identify best practices and seek to improve local authorities' resilience to this ever-evolving threat in the digital age, when drugs can be bought at the click of a button. The message is clear: the fight against drug trafficking is a **European challenge**, but solutions often start on the ground, close to the people.