

Statement of
António Lacerda Sales, Deputy Minister for Health of Portugal, on
the Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Pompidou Group

Opening Session
28 October 2020, Paris

Distinguished Secretary General of the Council of Europe
Distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary and Chairman of
the Committee of Ministers
Distinguished President of the Interministerial Mission for Combating
Drugs and Addictive Behaviours
Distinguished President of the Pompidou Centre, thank you for
welcoming us

Distinguished speakers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Unfortunately, due to the process of discussion of the State Budget
for 2022, I cannot be in person at the ceremony.

However, it is my great honour to participate virtually in this event
celebrating the anniversary of the Pompidou Group and to express
my congratulations for the 50 years of achievements in the
international action addressing global drugs-related threats. It is now,
I believe, the right moment to applaud the many accomplishments,
while considering the challenges we still have ahead of us.

Created in 1971, on the initiative of the then French President Georges Pompidou, as an European cooperation framework to fight against drug abuse and drug trafficking, the Pompidou Group has developed into a key international player which promotes a multidisciplinary, evidence-based and humanistic approach of drug policies, in line with the values of the Council of Europe.

It has been instrumental in creating a platform for debate, exchange of knowledge and cooperation between countries, civil society and academia in order to protect health and promote human rights. By linking policy, research and innovation, it provided for a common ground to professionals, experts, researchers and policy decision makers, to develop improved and more humane drug policies.

In this line, one of the events marking the 50th Anniversary was the symposium “Low-risk drug consumption rooms in Europe: maintaining the momentum in the face of the major challenges of the 21st-century”, organised last July in Strasbourg. It was a momentum to discuss the benefits of supervised drug consumption facilities namely their contribution to reduce the harm that drug use causes to the health, social wellbeing and security of individuals, communities and societies. In Portugal we have been promoting the opening of supervised drug consumption facilities as an integrated component of low-threshold services offered within drug treatment systems.

Ladies and gentlemen,



An important step towards the future was the adoption of the revised statute by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, on 16 June 2021. This new approach meets the required by the "Stavanger Declaration", adopted in November 2018, which instructed the Permanent Correspondents to launch the process of revision of the Group mandate, operation and working methods, in order to bring the statutory documents in line with the developments of the drugs phenomenon.

Outcome of a two years participative and inclusive process of consultations among the 41 members of the Group, international organizations, experts and civil society organizations, an important substantive realignment of the new statute is the extension of the Group's mandate to include addictive behaviours related to licit substances (such as alcohol or tobacco) and new forms of addictions (such as internet, gambling and gaming). The revised statute would also strengthen the focus on the respect and promotion of human rights, while reaffirming the need for a multidisciplinary approach and the effective link of policy, practice and science.

Portugal also welcomes the new opportunities offered by the revised statute and by the EU Drugs Action Plan, adopted in June 2021 under the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, to strengthen cooperation between the Pompidou Group and the European Union.

Allow me to thank the Chair of the Permanent Correspondents, Dr. João Goulão, for his leading role of the process towards the adoption of the new statute and the Executive Secretary of the Pompidou

Group, Mr. Denis Huber, for his crucial contribution to this landmark achievement.

As Presidency, we have been concentrating our efforts in the implementation of the 2019-2022 Work Programme under the title “Sustainable drug policies respectful of human rights”. During the last three years, the Pompidou Group successfully continued implementing its permanent and ad-hoc activities contributing to the priorities of the current Work Programme. Apart from the adoption of the revised statute, I would like to highlight the elaboration of an important Human Rights Self-Assessment Tool, which continues the Group’s ground-breaking work on drug policies and human rights in Europe.

Launched in 2020 at the initiative of the Portuguese Presidency, with this new self-assessment tool the Pompidou Group seeks to address the challenge of practically assessing human rights in drug policy. By linking key topics to human rights standards and more specific probing questions, its aim is to provide a practical framework to investigate and assess the human rights implications of drug laws, policies and practices. It is an honour for Portugal to chair the expert group entrusted with the elaboration of the tool, due to conclude its mandate in December 2022.

At this stage I would like to highlight some of the achievements of the current Work Programme:

- The launch of the International Drug Policy Academy last year, which is an important milestone consolidating the capacity building activities of the Pompidou Group

- The setting up a 'Support Network for Professionals' within the activity 'Responding to Drug Related Challenges for Refugees, Migrants and IDPS'
- The elaboration of the European Handbook on General Aviation
- The publication on 'Human Rights and people who use drugs in 17 MedNET countries
- The signature of the supplementary arrangement to the existing Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and Organisation of American States which reinforced the collaboration with the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, our partner institution within the Organisation of American States.

Of course, there is so much more to say and highlight. But it is not yet time of making stock of the results achieved. The current work programme is still underway, we have one more year to go. It is with great honour that we will present the results of our four years of Presidency during next year Ministerial Conference.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Portugal joined the Pompidou Group in January 1980 and since then has participated actively on its activities, holding the Presidency for the first time from 1997 to 2000. In 2000, when Portugal organized the Ministerial Conference, a new national approach to drugs phenomenon was in place following the adoption of the First National Drugs Strategy, a landmark in the national drug policy which included the proposal of decriminalisation of the use and possession for personal use of all drugs, below defined quantities.



Decriminalisation is the most known component of our policy, but I must stress that it's only one of the elements of a comprehensive and integrated approach that includes prevention, treatment, harm reduction and social reintegration. At the same time, we reaffirmed the commitment on supply reduction and related measures, including law enforcement, money laundering and judicial cooperation and resources were directed from the prosecution of drug users to criminal networks which promote drugs trafficking.

Over the past 20 years, Portugal has been implementing an integrated and comprehensive drug policy, grounded in the principles of humanism and pragmatism. As Presidency, we aimed at promoting the exchange of lessons learned and knowledge of this public health centred approach, entirely in line with respect for human rights so valued by the Council of Europe and the Pompidou group.

Last but not least, it is my great pleasure to invite you all to attend the 18th Ministerial Conference, to take place in December 2022 in Lisbon.

Thank you for your attention and I wish all the success for today's event.