



REPÚBLICA
PORTUGUESA

MINISTRO DA SAÚDE

**18th Ministerial Conference of the Pompidou Group "Human Rights at
the heart of drug and addictions policies".**

13-14 December 2022

(Altis Grand Hotel, Europa room, level-1)

Mr Bjorn Berge, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Your Excellency the President of Permanent Correspondents and Director General of SICAD, João Goulão

Vice-President of Permanent Correspondents, Mr Janusz Sieroslowski;

Mr Denis Hubert, Executive Secretary of the Pompidou Group Ministers and Secretaries of State, Participants,

It is with particular enthusiasm that the Portuguese Government welcomes in Lisbon the 18th Ministerial Conference of the Council of Europe's Cooperation Group on Drugs and Addictions, an event which marks the closing of the Portuguese Presidency of the Pompidou Group.

Let me first of all warmly welcome the high-level representation present, expressed in the significant number of participating countries, representatives of international organisations and civil society organisations, in a very diverse panel that reflects the breadth of the Pompidou Group.

I would like to express our satisfaction with the presence of countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Spain (confirm if you are present only on the 14th), former members of the Pompidou Group and other invited guests such as Canada and the Holy See, who accepted the invitation to participate and discuss the perspectives for the future.

I would also like to highlight the participation of numerous international organisations and representatives of civil society, which enrich the debates promoted by the Pompidou Group.

Portugal assumed the Presidency of the Permanent Correspondents in December 2018, at the 17th Ministerial Conference in Stavanger, with the mandate to implement the

work programme "Sustainable drugs policies, respecting human rights".

Over these 4 years, the Presidency has sought to develop and consolidate a humanistic and multidisciplinary approach that prioritises the dignity of individuals, together with measures to promote public health, combat discrimination and stigma against people who use drugs and prevent organised crime and the diversion of precursors.

The ambitious work programme adopted in Stavanger set several objectives:

- Better insight and understanding of drug policy approaches;
- New knowledge from research and practice on psychoactive substance use and abuse, including co-morbidities;
- Contribute to cost-effectiveness and identification of positive and negative consequences of related policies

with drugs, providing tools, guidelines and models of tried and tested practice;

- To support Member States in developing, implementing and evaluating policies that respect human rights;
- International visibility and recognition for successful national policies and interventions;
- Flexible responses to address emerging issues in a timely manner; and finally
- Improved policy responses through access to specialised networks of professionals and cooperation platforms.

It is fair to say that, thanks to the cooperation of all members, we were able to successfully implement the ambitious work programme adopted in Stavanger. The record of implementation of that work programme is clearly positive, the fruit of shared experiences and excellent cooperation from all Member States.

I will not go into excessive detail, since the next sitting is devoted to taking stock of the results achieved over the last four years. Let me, however, highlight just a few of the highlights of the Portuguese Presidency.

First of all, the adoption in June 2021 of the new statute of the Pompidou Group, which reaffirms the need for a multidisciplinary approach, the centrality of the promotion of human rights, the promotion of synergies with partners within and outside the Council of Europe, including civil society organisations. An important substantive element of the new statute is the extension of the Group's mandate to include addictive behaviours related to licit substances (such as alcohol and tobacco) and new forms of addiction (such as gambling and online gambling).

This extension of the mandate is something we greatly value, as at the national level since 2013 we have had an integrated and comprehensive national policy for all addictions and addictive behaviours.

Portugal also welcomes the new opportunities offered by the revised statute and the European Union Action Plan on Drugs, 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. I would like to take this opportunity to greet Ambassador Sofia Moreira de Sousa, Head of the European Commission Representation in Lisbon (confirm that she will be present on the 13th).

To better reflect its identity, both as part of the Council of Europe, and its expanded mandate, the Group has also changed its official name from "Cooperation Group to Combat Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking" to "Council of Europe International Cooperation Group on Drugs and Addictions".

This new statute opens up new perspectives for the Group and provides it with an ambitious political and legal framework for strengthening future action.

Let me thank the President of the Permanent Correspondents, Dr João Goulão, for his leadership role in the process of adopting the new statute and the Executive Secretary of the Pompidou Group, Mr Denis Huber, for his contribution to this historic milestone.

Alongside the adoption of the revised statute, the Pompidou Group's 50th anniversary celebration included a series of events throughout 2021 under the slogan 'Human rights at the heart of drug policies'. A major celebration event took place on 28 October at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, with the participation of the Hungarian President of the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, at which five decades of drug policy developments and the achievements of the Group were presented, while recent developments and future activities to promote a human rights and public health-based approach to drug and addiction policies were discussed.

A seminar on "Cannabis policy developments: experiences and lessons learned", marked the closing of the celebrations and brought together in Lisbon a group of experts who shared experiences related to the policies implemented in various countries regarding the use of cannabis.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a huge challenge to health systems and a threat to our societies, in particular to people who use drugs, and forced everyone, including international organisations, to adapt their functioning and working methods with the common goal of saving and protecting people.

I cannot fail to mention the pioneering work conducted by the Pompidou Group during the pandemic crisis to create an online platform giving voice to people who use drugs and other marginalised communities, as well as professionals, which enabled the sharing of experiences for the best possible delivery of healthcare in challenging conditions. The Save Lives-Protect People online platform and publication

"Covid-19 and people who use drugs" played a relevant role in containing the spread of COVID-19 and preventing harm to people who use drugs and those in contact with them.

The year 2021 was also marked by the Ukrainian government's decision to join the Pompidou Group, after ten years of successful cooperation. This decision followed similar decisions taken by the Armenian and Georgian authorities, who joined the Group the previous year. Thus, on 1 January 2022, the Group's membership increased to a record number of 42 member states.

Only a few weeks later, its membership shrank again to 41, following the decision (on 16 March) of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers to exclude the Russian Federation from the Organisation, following its aggression against Ukraine. This was a historic decision: it was the first time (in the 73-year history of the Council of Europe) that Article 8 of the statute, which provides for the possibility of excluding a member state

that violates the values that the Organisation upholds, has been implemented. As a consequence, the Russian Federation also ceased to be a member of the Pompidou Group (on 23 March this year).

On this occasion, on behalf of the Pompidou Group and the Portuguese Government, I wish to express our absolute solidarity with Ukraine.

Portugal joined the Pompidou Group in January 1980 and since then has been a committed participant in its activities, holding the Presidency for the first time from 1997 to 2000. In 2000, when Portugal organised the Ministerial Conference, a new national approach to the drug phenomenon was implemented following the adoption of the First National Drug Strategy, a milestone in national drug policy which included the proposal to decriminalise the use and possession for personal use of all drugs, below defined quantities.

Decriminalisation is the most well-known component of our policy, but I must stress that it is only one element of a comprehensive and integrated approach that includes prevention, treatment, harm reduction and social reintegration. At the same time, we reaffirm the commitment to supply reduction and related measures, including law enforcement, anti-money laundering and judicial cooperation.

Over the last 22 years, Portugal has been implementing a policy founded on the principles of humanism and pragmatism. As Presidency, our aim has been to promote the exchange of lessons learned and knowledge sharing on this approach centred on public health, fully in line with the respect for human rights so highly valued by the Council of Europe and the Pompidou Group.

Our societies face many challenges, which the Pompidou Group can help to address. This afternoon, in session 2, we will have the opportunity to see examples of the impact of the Pompidou Group's work shared with you.

Pompidou at national level and we will also devote two sessions to addressing key issues: the alignment of our drugs and addictions policies with human rights obligations under the Council of Europe and UN treaties; and new forms of addiction, especially those resulting from problematic internet use.

Tomorrow, we will adopt the work programme for the next 3 years (2023-2025), which will put into practice the perspectives created by the adoption of the new statute and operationalise actions, activities and products around 4 priority axes: the centrality of the promotion of human rights in drug and addiction policies; addressing new forms of addiction; protecting the rights of vulnerable and at risk groups and reducing illicit drug trafficking and precursor diversion.

We will also adopt the Lisbon Declaration, which reaffirms our commitment to the values and principles of the Council of Europe, identifies the challenges to be met and sets out the actions that

we will undertake, promoting synergies, with the aim of creating a significant impact on society.

But before that, in a few minutes, we will elect a new Presidency and Vice-Presidency for the Pompidou Group. I thank Italy and Switzerland for their candidacies, and I am confident that they will be effective successors to Portugal and Poland in leading the Group over the next three years.

To conclude, I would like to assure you that Portugal will remain strongly committed to contributing to the implementation of the future Work Programme, pursuing the Pompidou Group's mission and reinforcing its visibility and relevance.

I am sure that we will have a very fruitful Conference and I hope that during your stay in Lisbon you will have some free time to enjoy the city. I take this opportunity to reiterate the invitation to have dinner tonight at the Red Cross Palace and enjoy some more relaxed moments.

Thank you for your attention.

I would like to thank the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe for being present in Lisbon and I shall now give him the floor.