

## Thierry Charlois

European Drug Policies Consulting

[me@thierry-charlois.eu](mailto:me@thierry-charlois.eu)

[Http://www.thierry-charlois.eu](http://www.thierry-charlois.eu)

Note for **Democracy, Cities & Drugs**

## The EU Civil Society Forum on Drugs

In order to tackle the issue of drugs, the EU has in recent years developed a European approach. This approach tends to be comprehensive and multidisciplinary, focusing simultaneously on demand reduction, supply reduction, the fight against trafficking, and international action. It combines action at a number of levels:

- within the framework of European Community competence (public health, precursor control, money laundering, development aid);
- close cooperation between Member States (foreign policy, justice and home affairs);
- partnerships with international organisations.

The European model is reflected in the [EU Drugs Strategy](#), which covers a period of eight years (2005-2012). Each Strategy is translated into actions in two 4-years EU Drugs Action Plans (2005-2008 and 2009-2012).

*To prepare the best possible EU action plans on drugs, the European Commission needs to tap the wealth and diversity of knowledge and experience held by organisations of professionals acting in the drug fields as well as groups and associations supporting or otherwise representing drug users or their families, and many other stakeholders who, while not working directly or primarily with drug policy, still have valuable insight.*

On January 2006, in order to respond this need, the European Commission organized in Brussels a conference on "[Civil Society and Drugs in Europe](#)" to strengthen the involvement of civil society in EU drugs policy development and evaluation. Some of the European networks involved in the "[Democracy, Cities & Drugs](#)" (DC&D) project took part in this event to promote their role in a future consultative process.

In July 2006, the European Commission published a [Green Paper on the role of Civil Society in Drugs Policy in the European Union](#) based on the results of the conference. The civil society was invited to comment the Green Paper before September, 30th 2006. The DC&D member networks wrote a common comment to the European Commission in order to contribute to the process.

In June 2007, the European Commission published its [report](#) on the Green Paper and its decision to set up a forum of 30 organisation/network members representing the European civil society. The interested organisations had to apply for membership by using an online application form. The DC&D member networks applied to integrate the forum. **The European Forum for Urban Safety has been selected by the European Commission to be one of the civil society representatives as well as Euro-TC, Irefree, ITACA-Europe and ERIT (Anitea) which are partner networks of DC&D I or II.**

Created in 2007, the [EU Civil Society Forum on Drugs](#) meets at least once a year and serves as a platform for informal exchanges of views and information between the Commission and civil society

organisations. Membership is for a period of two years and at present 26 organisations are members of the Civil Society Forum. The overall objective of the forum is to feed specific grass-roots experience into future Commission proposals, but also into the work to monitor the EU action plan on drugs (2005-08) and prepare the new action plan (2009-12).

The first meeting of the Civil Society Forum on Drugs was organised on December 13th-14th, 2007. At this occasion, the Forum's members were invited to apply to the [Drug Prevention and Information Programme](#), a granting programme supporting the process of the Forum. They were also requested to give inputs to the 2007 Progress Review of the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Drugs 2005-2008 as well as to the EC Recommendation on Drugs and Prisons.

During the second meeting organized in May 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>, 2008, the Forum members contribute to the drafting of the Action Plan 2009-2012 and the 2009 Annual Work Programme.

At the time of the third meeting in March 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the Forum members debated on how to improve the Forum management and on a Commission project called the European Alliance on Drugs.

It is not sure if a meeting will be held by the end of 2009 before the next call for membership.

Some comments can be done regarding the Civil Society Forum on Drugs:

- The members are issued from many different backgrounds: Anti-prohibitionist organisations, organisations for a drug free world, networks of professionals working in prevention and harm reduction fields, drug users organisations, parents or women organisations, city network, think tank, European, national and local organisations... So it is very difficult to get a consensus within the Forum and the debates are often monopolised by the most radical organisations.
- The main problem is that to be effective, the members should develop a strong consultation process among their own networks before the Forum meetings. In order to achieve these consultations, they need to know a long time in advance the next meeting agenda (which is not the case), to have time to organize these consultation processes and a two-year mandate is too short for that, but especially to have the resources to carry out these consultations. To financially support the members, the Commission created the Drug Prevention and Information Programme. Some members applied to it but not always with success. The EFUS got in 2008 an operating grant from this programme.

If you want to use this opportunity of contributing the European drug policy, we invite you to get in contact with the Forum members involved in the DC&D projects.