PRESIDENZA DEL CONSIGLIO DEI MINISTRI
Dipartimento Politiche Antidroga

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ITALIAN POSITION ABOUT THE GLOBAL COMMISSION ON DRUG POLICY DECLARATION ON LEGALIZATION OF NARCOTIC DRUGS.

In response to the declarations regarding the proposals of legalizing drug use – launched by the "Global Commission on Drug Policy", composed by well-known intellectuals, actors, singers, former United Nations officials and former State Presidents – declarations openly in opposition with the current antidrug policies delivered by the United Nations – the Department for Antidrug Policies states:

1. The proposal of legalizing drugs trade and use (starting from cannabis), as a primary solution to limit the spread of drug use worldwide, cannot be accepted at all.
2. The official position of our Government about antidrug policies, well expressed in the National Action Plan - approved by the Council of Ministers in October 2010 - recognizes first of all that drug addiction is a preventable, treatable and recoverable disease. Therefore, all strategies and policies are laid out to acknowledge that this condition constitutes, besides a social and security problem, also a serious public health issue concerning not only drug dependent users' health, but also third parties that can be damaged by drug users' risk behaviors, like driving vehicles or carrying out work at risk. Drug consumption cannot be regarded as an individual right as such behavior could seriously hinder the exercise of other people rights.

3. At the same time, illegal actions such as production, trading and pushing of illicit drugs constitute a relevant issue of public security to which it is necessary to give concrete and permanent answers in terms of prevention and fight without criminalizing drug addicts because of their use of drugs (as already specifically provided for by the Italian legislation on the subject).
4. Drug addicts as such are not and must not be considered as criminals but as patients needing care to whom the Italian State and the Regions provide - free of charge – a wide range of therapeutic services both out and inside prisons, in case those people had committed an offence (drug use is not considered an offence, in our country). The Italian legislation affirms that drug addicts in prison can and must be treated (on a voluntary basis) in those settings and can also be cured in social-health structures out of prison, as an alternative to the penalty.
5. The Department also believes that the continuum of care should be highly oriented to the full recovery of individuals and that it should be always associated to the prevention of drug-related diseases as HIV infection, hepatitis, Tuberculosis (TBC) and overdoses. These actions must be considered as due deeds by healthcare systems for the protection of health of the entire community. The "harm reduction" policy, if applied in isolation and out of a medical context oriented to treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration of drug addicts, will results disastrous in a long term perspective and with low preventive effects, besides making drug addiction a chronic state.
6. It needs to be highlighted that the measures which resulted more effective for the reduction of the infections' (HIV, Hepatitis, TBC, etc…) and overdose risk, on a medium and long-term, are treatments for the drug dependence and for HIV infections that, therefore, must be provided as early as possible.
7. On the basis of increasing scientific evidences in the field of neuroscience, use of drugs, especially among young people, must be considered, from the public health point of view, as a high-risk behavior for health and therefore must be avoided through prevention campaigns and interventions in support of families and schools. At the same time, it is necessary a social, legal and cultural antidrug movement in order to realize and maintain a high degree of social disapproval of such consumptionThis important factor is actually able to produce a reduction in the consumption, particularly of marijuana (often a "gateway" drug to the use of other drugs such as cocaine and heroin), among adolescents and vulnerable people, as scientifically proved by studies realized over thirty years.

8. The legalization of some kind of drugs would lead to an easier access to all kind of drugs, especially for younger generations, linked to the development and maintenance of the idea that the use of these substances is still tolerated, by the society as well as by the State. This would provoke, therefore, a reduction of the "disapproval" factor able to influence drug use by young people.
9. There is neither study nor scientific evidence which demonstrates that legalization would be able to effectively reduce the proceeds of criminal organizations. Therefore, at the moment, this solution remains only a utopian one. It is well-known that these criminal organizations traffic and trade in various types of drugs and that legalizing one of these products, such as marijuana, would not produce commercial damages able to jeopardize these organizations, as some U.S. studies prove.
10. Over and above that, it is not conceivable to make available and legal all the substances to the general population without any control or regulation because of the serious consequences on physical, mental and social health – as proved by scientific evidence. It has to be reminded that illicit drugs are always highly toxic substances. The increase of drug use among the population would lead to a strong increase of physical and psychiatric diseases among drug consumers (as largely demonstrated by scientific evidence), but also to an increase of damage for third parties.
11. A further and unsolvable issue related to the legalization of these substances comes out from the fact that all people that could legally use them would be unable to access work tasks entailing risks for third parties (air pilots, bus drivers, train drivers, trucks drivers, doctors, etc..) and to get driving licenses, weapons license and a series of professional qualifications, unless it is recognized that drug users can easily perform these tasks and have a driving license or a weapons license.
12. There is also strong evidence that the increased number of people using substances because of legalization could considerably arise healthcare costs, over time, with ~~a~~ completely negative consequences on State's budget in terms of both financial and human resources loss, besides the suffering for those people's families.
13. Therefore, the drug policy must necessarily envisage a balance between prevention, care and rehabilitation actions, on one side, and repression and fight, on the other side, with a general system based on health rights of individuals, particularly if underage or vulnerable, and rights to be protected against drug supply, to be early treated, when addicted, with fully social

rehabilitation and reintegration-oriented approach. Hence, it is a State's duty to constantly prosecute, with permanent counter actions, the criminal organizations offences (in production, traffic and pushing phases).

14. In this balanced context of actions, the repression policies of criminal organizations, including farmers, couriers and pushers, are a due deed and they do not preclude nor limit the public health measures for drug addiction and HIV infections.
15. In the last 10 years, thanks to the joint efforts of the central, regional and local Administrations and the non governmental organizations, which shared this setting of balanced actions, the consumption of illicit drugs in our country has decreased, the overdoses have strongly decreased and they are in constant decrement, new HIV infections among drug addicts have considerably reduced as well as the spread of HIV infection among drug addicts is under control. Also the incidence of new infections like hepatitis B and C have decreased and nobody has been arrested simply for using illicit drugs, but always and only in relation to violations of laws punishing trafficking, smuggling, illegal cultivation, etc. of illicit substances.
16. The utopian and superficial proposal of legalizing drugs in order to solve the problem related to the large profits of criminal organizations - resulting from the sale of drugs - has always fascinated many people, but the very complex and articulated reality of this phenomenon deserves a reflection of great responsibility from central and regional competent administration authorities.