



**European Union Statement on UNGASS 2016
at the 59th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
Vienna, 14 March 2016**

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson,

Executive Director, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to stand here, today, at such an important moment in the lead up to UNGASS and to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The following countries align themselves with this statement: Turkey[§], the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia^{*}, Montenegro^{*}, Iceland[‡], Serbia^{*}, Albania^{*}, Bosnia and Herzegovina^{*}, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Andorra and San Marino.

The EU and its Member States consider UNGASS 2016 as a key opportunity for the international community to take stock of the achievements of the international drug control system to date. UNGASS, and the coming days here in Vienna, provide us with a unique possibility to elaborate on the immense challenges that remain in the global, national and local responses to the world drug problem. UNGASS is a moment to look ahead and to set the agenda towards 2019 and to undertake concrete actions that are needed to contribute to the achievement of the targets of the 2030 Agenda and its sustainable development goals, in particular SDG 3 and 16. In this regard, the EU and its Member States welcome the contribution of all stakeholders to the open discussions so far in the preparatory process and we appreciate the structured way this is facilitated by the UNGASS Board.

An essential principle for the EU and its Member States is the respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, solidarity, the rule of law and the right to health. The EU is opposed to

[§] Candidate Country

^{*} Candidate Countries Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania as well as potential Candidate Country Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

[‡] Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

the use of measures of any kind that are not respectful of the human being. In this regard, we oppose the death penalty in all circumstances and without exception, and we are consistently calling for its universal abolition and will continue to do so in all UN *fora*. We call upon States that still maintain the death penalty to establish a moratorium on executions, as a first step towards the abolition of the death penalty.

We appreciate the inclusion of several of our proposals in the Outcome document. We strongly welcome that the need to improve access to controlled medicines and the recognition of the different needs for men, women and children when addressing the drug problem in an effective manner, have found their way in the draft. We recognise that the proliferation of new psychoactive substances poses a significant risk to public health. We value the work of international and regional organisations such as the UNODC, WHO, INCB and European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) in supporting Member States in meeting the challenge these substances present. We encourage all Member States to work together in developing a balanced, evidence-based response to this emerging threat.

During recent years global drug policy showed a steady transition towards a more balanced approach that includes aspects of public health based policies, and that acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, while Member States also continue to pursue their efforts to counter transnational organized crime and drug trafficking. We welcome this development which allows us to better address current and future challenges in drug policy.

We welcome that the international community recognizes that a public health approach focusing on the rights and needs of drug users has undeniable benefits. By developing evidence based prevention programs, we can act at the earliest opportunity to prevent people from starting to use drugs and from developing substance use disorders; by developing new treatment programmes and increasing their coverage, we are better capable of treating addiction; and by providing risk and harm reduction interventions we are better able to prevent the spread of HIV/Aids and other blood-borne infectious diseases among drug users, and we also protect the general population.

There is a vast amount of evidence from many countries across the world showing the effectiveness of risk and harm reduction measures in protecting public health and reducing direct and indirect drug related deaths and we strongly recommend that States ensure their implementation.

The EU and its Member States would like to stress the participatory role of civil society and academia in all aspects of drug policy, in particular on public health

issues. Their important contribution to the elaboration and implementation of drug policies at the local, national and international levels, should be recognized, fully acknowledged and encouraged. In that regard also the experience of drug users, clients of drug-related services, their organizations and families should be taken into account.

Member States should also ensure that sanctions under national law for all drug-related offences take into consideration both mitigating and aggravating factors and are proportionate to the severity of the offence. We should take into account the facts and circumstances of each case, giving full consideration to relevant international standards and norms on crime prevention and criminal justice. For persons who have committed minor, non violent drug related offences, alternatives to conviction and imprisonment should be considered.

Finally, I would like to underline the position of the EU and its Member States that the three UN Drug Control Conventions and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights are the framework of the global response to the world drug problem. We are convinced that there is sufficient scope and flexibility within the provisions of the UN Conventions to accommodate a wide range of approaches to drug policy in accordance with national and regional specificities.

At UNGASS the international community should focus on how best to combine the different evidence based approaches: an effective law enforcement policy towards the illicit production, manufacturing and trafficking of drugs and a sound public health approach toward the prevention of drug abuse, the protection of drug users and of the general population.

Thank you Chair.