



**Cooperation Programme between Latin American, the Caribbean Countries and the European Union on Drugs Policies (COPOLAD): An integrated, balanced and evidence-based approach at the heart of the EU-CELAC cooperation**

*by Jolita Butkeviciene\**

Confronting the world drug problem is a common challenge for all of us; it is increasingly complex with new challenges emerging that raise concerns on many aspects. That's why the European Union and its Member States have developed together, over the past two decades, a European approach to addressing drugs sustainably. This approach is enshrined in the EU Drugs Strategy 2013-2020 and its Action plan. The objectives of the EU Strategy: that is contributing to the reduction of the drug demand and drug supply, as well as the health and social risks and harms caused by drugs, are achieved through an integrated, balanced and evidence-based approach, and forms the basis and political framework for the EU external cooperation in this field.

It is this integral and comprehensive approach, which has been adopted within the Cooperation Programme between Latin American and Caribbean countries and the European Union on drugs Policies (COPOLAD).

Drugs are an important chapter of the EU-CELAC relations and the EU has developed a comprehensive set of political, operational and technical exchanges and cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean on this issue. The traditional framework of cooperation between the EU and CELAC, ranges from alternative development (where the EU has been a pioneer), law enforcement, public health, in bilateral (e.g. Peru, Bolivia), regional (COPOLAD) or trans-regional cooperation programmes like the Cocaine Route Programme ([www.cocaineroute.eu](http://www.cocaineroute.eu)).

Started in 2011, COPOLAD was conceived as a programme which aims to strengthen information exchange and coordination and cooperation between the national agencies and other actors responsible for Drugs policies in both regions, aiming to improving the coherence, balance and impact of drugs policies in Latin America covering both drug demand and supply reduction efforts, as well as the policy dialogue in the framework of the EU-CELAC coordination and cooperation mechanism on Drugs.

As regards Drugs policies, COPOLAD has borne concrete results and promoted a real impact in developmental terms, showing that drugs policies are clearly linked to promoting Human Rights and inclusive socio-economic development and to the security-development nexus. According to Latin America national Drugs agencies, COPOLAD has helped to enhance changes in the way drugs policies are perceived, it has helped to change paradigms, and it has helped to emphasize the need for: A balanced approach between drug demand reduction and drug supply reduction;



evidence based-policies; policies based on Human Rights and Public Health principles; planning and accreditation of health services; consider Gender issues; introduced acceptability for Harm Reduction approaches, which were massively rejected before; Alternative development; Intelligence exchange for fighting criminal organisations, development of high quality information systems, useful for both, drug supply and drug demand reduction, etc.

After the end of the first phase in June 2015, we are now restarting with COPOLAD II. Building on its success, COPOLAD II will pursue the same approach as the first phase. The programme, with a budget of 10 million EUR, will continue supporting the comprehensive, balanced, evidence-based approach to drugs issues.

The programme keeps its four components: 1/ Consolidation of the national drugs observatories; 2/ Capacity-building in the reduction of drug demand; 3/ Capacity-building in the reduction of drug supply and 4/ Policy support and consolidation of the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs.

As regards Precursors activities, the EU has a fruitful and regular dialogue with a number of Latin American countries to control licit trade in drug precursors with a view to preventing their diversion into illicit markets. That's why these activities on Precursors will play a more dominant role in COPOLAD II, under which the EU will concentrate its support to fight against the diversion of precursors.

Furthermore, I would like to highlight that in order to complement and support COPOLAD from the Citizen Security point of view, my service is also preparing a new regional cooperation programme on Rule of Law and Citizen Security (Police, Justice and Prisons) in order to cover the whole criminal chain of the Justice system.

As you know, in April 2016 the United Nation's General Assembly will hold a Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs that will look at ways to improve global drugs policies while strengthening public health and human rights aspects as part of the UN Conventions on drugs. The EU and its Member States stand for an integrated, balanced and evidence-based approach to the World drug problem.

We look forward to continue working closely with our Latin American and Caribbean partners within COPOLAD so as to contribute to elaborating this integrated, balanced and evidence-based approach to drugs policies, supported by reliable and objective monitoring systems and evaluation, that are instrumental to more effective health and social care, and supporting crime prevention, with full respect of Human Rights.

UNGASS 2016 on drugs should become a milestone event towards the implementation of such balanced drug policies worldwide!



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