

Symposium on Recreational Drug Use in Luxembourg and across Europe, 30.09.2015 - Allocution de bienvenue de M. Xavier Poos, Conseiller de direction adjoint au Ministère de la Santé, Luxembourg

Dear organizers, dear participants,

Let me express a warm welcome to all of you to this symposium and to this venue called '*Melusina*'. The place chosen for this event could not be more convenient since the Melusina might be considered as one of the long-standing, generation-crossing hotspots of nightlife in Luxembourg.

But first of all, I would like to excuse the Minister of Health and the National Drug Coordinator, who both unfortunately had other obligations today. The current Luxembourgish Presidency of the EU does obviously not make agendas easier to manage.

Talking about the Luxembourg Presidency and the topic of today's symposium, it may be useful to know, and somehow meaningful, that until yesterday there was a meeting of the EU Drug Coordinators in Luxembourg and that one of the topics that were addressed was precisely drug use in recreative and festive settings. You will surely hear more about that in the course of this afternoon.

So, why addressing the issue of recreational drug use?

The answer to that question is manifold. We know that for obvious reasons a lot has been said and written about the so-called '**problem drug use**', sometimes addressed also in terms '**high risk drug use**'. Much less passion and efforts have been dedicated to presumably less invasive forms of drug use, eventually called: '**recreational drug use**'.

As most of drug-related linguistic concepts, *recreational drug use* is also open to various meanings and subject to limitations and critics.

A possible definition of recreational drugs use is: 'The use of legal, regulated or illicit substances with the primary intention to alter the state of consciousness and create or enhance pleasurable emotions and feelings'.

Often recreational drug use is more likely to be associated to a kind of socially determined behavior than a disorder or a genuine medical condition. To put it in a simple way, one might say that *recreational drug use* is a consume pattern that is mostly contextual and seeks to experience the individually defined enjoyable aspects of drugs without the possible negative

consequences and outcomes. The switch from recreational drug use to problem or dependent use is difficult to observe and to describe and often occurs without further warning.

Another important issue that will be addressed today is the type of drugs that may be used in the context of recreational drug use.

The answer to that question is more straightforward as every single mind and conscious altering substance can do the job. This said, some drugs are used more often than others in recreational consume patterns. Alcohol seems to be a very serious candidate in this context. It may seem obvious, but according to recent national survey data, 90% of partygoers reported recent alcohol use, followed by tobacco (50%) and cannabis (32%). You will probably be provided with more detailed data on this issue and other drugs used in recreational settings during the day.

The topic you will address today is relevant and ambitious! Issues addressed by speakers range from monitoring recreational drug use to possible response strategies aiming at preventing or reducing harm related to it.

The monitoring of recreational drug use is closely linked to the identification of drugs used and consume patterns in this particular setting. We do know that besides well-known licit and illicit substances, an increasing number of new psychoactive substances and products have become widely available.

This diversification as well as the varying legal statuses of NPS and the lack of data on their short-term and long-term harmful effects do not make their monitoring easier, nor does it facilitate the implementation of fast and overarching prevention and harm reduction measures.

Harm prevention in the context of recreational drug use is indeed a major issue of today's symposium.

How can we prevent and which strategies do we need to prevent harm related to recreational drug use for the users themselves and the members of the community?

In order to answer these questions it is helpful to have a reliable overview of the national situation but also to better understand the relation between various user groups, use contexts and the type of psychoactive substance or products consumed. This relation goes far beyond the mere availability of given substances. Pleasure seeking, performance enhancing and consciousness altering are some of the reasons young and less younger people are attracted by recreational drug use.

Moreover, a wide range of factors may influence recreational drug use as well as specific use patterns and the choice of specific substances at a given time. Media, lifestyle icons, movies, TV series and music for instance have a tangible impact of consumers choices and substances' preferences and need to be taken into account in order to understand the '*big picture*'.

We all know that it is a difficult exercise to balance pleasure and harm possibly resulting from it. Recreational drug is precisely about all these questions and this fragile equation which is certainly not less complex than the mechanisms we observe in so called '*problem drug use*'.

Dear participants, today you will share your valuable professional experience in a truly dynamic aspect of drug use and in the name of the Ministry of Health, I would like to thank you all for your commitment in times it has become more and more difficult for people to resist the offers of a remarkably growing recreational drug market.

I wish you a fruitful symposium and enlightening exchanges this afternoon.

Thank you.