



European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



Commissioner Johansson's speech at the launch of the EU Drugs Agency

Lisbon, 3 July 2024

This is great day. A big day.

A big day for Europe.

And a big day for all of you.

In January 2022 I proposed a new and stronger mandate for you.

And today, two years later, I am proud to be here in Lisbon to launch the new mandate for the European Drugs Agency.

You can be very proud as well, Alexis and your team.

This new mandate is the sign of the great trust we all have in you.

And can I also use this opportunity, Alexis, to thank you.

These five years of being the Commissioner for Home Affairs it's been a pleasure to work closely with you and to have this agency under your leadership.

And this stronger mandate will allow you to do an even better job than you do today.

Warning Europe of the dangers of drugs.

Since your establishment nearly thirty years ago.

You have become a centre of excellence on drugs.

Your information is factual, objective, reliable.

And essential for civil society, for academics and for government.

Your monitoring detects emerging risks and new developments.

Your Early Warning System is key to alert Member States. So they can respond to new dangers.

And for me personally your work has always been essential.

When preparing my policies and initiatives against crime and drugs.

Also on the global stage.

When you speak, I listen.

Europe listens

And the world listens.

And we must listen because you have something important to say.

You show drugs are increasingly available, increasingly potent, increasingly dangerous.

In your most recent Drugs Report

You warn of synthetic opioids.

Last year especially Nitazines.

Highly potent and extremely deadly.

You also show:

More than half a million people injected drugs in the European Union.

And more than 6000 people died of an overdose in just one year.

And you show also that people in Europe are mixing drugs more and more.

Taking potentially deadly cocktails of different kinds of drugs.

You are doing an excellent job.

And I want to say today: you're not alone.

You are here in Lisbon, in Portugal.

And maybe sometimes you feel a bit far away from Brussels at the Western most point of Europe.

But you are at the heart of Europe.

You are part of a great European effort against crime and to counter the flow of drugs and the harm they cause.

Organised crime, drugs crime is one of the biggest threats we face today.

Criminals undermine our societies with violence and corruption.

Europol did a recent mapping of the most threatening criminal groups in the European Union.

They mapped 821 most threatening criminal groups.

More than half of them are specialised in drug trafficking.

70 per cent of them use corruption.

They use the money from the drug trafficking, to buy politicians, to buy officials to buy access to ports, for example.

70 per cent of them use also violence, we can see that they are killing and threatening, also politicians, lawyers, journalists.

Almost 90 per cent of them are involved in the legal economy.

Running ordinary businesses or infiltrating ordinary businesses.

This is a huge threat towards our society.

I should say that this threat is as big as the terrorist threat.

For nearly five years as Home Affairs Commissioner it has been my mission to significantly step up our fight against organised criminal groups.

By improving police cooperation and information exchange.

With asset recovery rules to take away criminal profits and to be able to follow the money.

And in January this year I launched the European Ports Alliance.

To stop criminal infiltration of our harbours.

The Ports Alliance is now becoming operational. We had 14 points when we started and now we have 31.

I also was the first ever European Home Affairs Commissioner to travel to Latin America.

Isn't that strange that had not happened before?

I did that of course because we need to work across the Atlantic to fight these criminal groups.

We saw in this mapping of the most threatening criminal group that they contain 112 nationalities.

So almost all groups are cross border and they are working also across the Atlantic.

It is important that we build our transatlantic relations because it takes a network to find the network.

And following my visit to Colombia and Ecuador.

We are conducting a security assessment of the Port of Guayaquil.

And the EU is now negotiating agreements for Europol with five additional Latin American Countries. Ecuador being one of those.

This is important to allow police and law enforcement to access personal data and to do joint investigations.

And today, I will be here to witness the signing of a working arrangement between the Drugs Agency and Ecuador – and we have the ambassador here.

A working arrangement to collect data, monitor cocaine markets and improve observation.

To set up early warning systems, exchange hanging strategies on prevention, health and social response

To ensure the health and safety of citizens on both sides of the Atlantic, in Ecuador and the European Union.

More working arrangements are in the making. We need more partners in this fight.

And the ability to work better together internationally is also possible thanks to your new mandate.

Before signing the agreement with Ecuador we will officially launch the new EU Drugs agency.

Which will give you new powers and possibilities.

You'll be able to examine the danger of drug mixing – polysubstance use. And how we can counter it.

You will have a stronger analytical capacity, thanks to a network of laboratories.

You will be able to work more internationally. With key partners like Ecuador but also Colombia, Peru, Chile.

You'll be able to issue early warnings with a new European Drug Alert system.

You'll have the capacity to make health and security threat assessments.

Alexis, to you and your team:

Thank you for all you have done.

Analysing and monitoring drugs.

Warning of the danger for nearly 30 years.

And thank you for preparing the transformation into the Drugs Agency in such a short time.

I want you all to be very proud.

You're doing an excellent and important job.

You protect people's health and safety in Europe.

And with the new mandate you will be able to do an even better job.

Many congratulations and lots of success!