



BECKLEY FOUNDATION

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“The ‘War on Drugs’ and law enforcement have not been very successful so far, and present policies have had very destructive effects. This meeting’s aim is ... to arrive at workable, understandable, and convincing approaches towards solving a very large problem.”

Summary: Paul Volcker gave an overview of the global dynamics of the ‘War on Drugs,’ with a focus on the United States – a country that provides examples of both failed policies and potential ways forward.

REPORT FROM THE GLOBAL COMMISSION ON DRUG POLICY

The ‘War on Drugs’ has caused not only tremendous economic problems, but also social and moral ones. This is a very sensitive political issue, but one that nevertheless needs to be examined. This meeting’s aim is not to complain about the unsuccessful and destructive War on Drugs, but to arrive at workable, understandable, and convincing approaches towards solving the problem.

The current situation can in some ways be likened to the prohibition of alcohol in the USA in the 1920s and 1930s. Not only did it not work very well, but it gave rise to criminality and corruption, as well as a sense of disrespect for the law. Prohibition was repealed in 1933, and although alcohol consumption rose to some degree, the general environment became much more manageable: less crime, better control over consumption, and a reduction in health problems since the industry was controlled and had to meet certain standards.

Several remarks on drug policy in the USA warrant mention. The US is at the epicentre of drug use, but lacks effective policies; moreover, their high degree of consumption and influence have extended beyond their own borders and have translated into serious problems for Latin American countries.

At the same time, it is a welcome change that political parties now seem keen to discuss a change in drug policy – although not many politicians want to be associated with this issue themselves, even if they accept that it has to be on the agenda. Secondly, any change in drug policy has to consider ways to minimise the financial incentives of producing and distributing drugs illicitly. And finally, there needs to be a call for change regarding criminalisation, given the alarming number of people in prison for drug use and possession.