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Forging New Alliances

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“HANGE”, the mantra of President-elect Clinton, is revitalizing the field of psychedelic research. The

first flickerings of renewed research began a few years ago in Switzerland (see page 21), in Russia (see page 24), and in the US. These pioneering projects, approved after years of struggle with regulatory authorities, successfully demonstrated that scientific progress could be made without exacerbating drug abuse or catalyzing cultural turmoil. To the contrary, intriguing hints were found suggesting that the appropriate use of psychedelics could help in the treatment of substance abuse and could heal some of the cultural wounds associated with the War on Drugs. ■ In July, FDA's Drug Abuse Advisory Committee recommended the resumption of psychedelic research, subject to the condition that the standards of methodology and proof that the FDA uses to critique claims about other drugs must also be applied to psychedelics. Over the summer, the Massachusetts Department of Corrections approved access to its files so that a follow-up study could be conducted to Dr. Leary's 1962 inquiry into the use of psilocybin to reduce recidivism in prisoners (see page 4). In October, the FDA approved the first human study of MDMA (see page 2-3 and 36). The FDA may soon approve marijuana research in the treatment of HIV-related wasting syndrome (see page 6) and ibogaine to treat substance abuse. Also, NIDA will probably fund DMT and psilocybin research (see page 8). ■ Researchers in Switzerland are using PET scans to study ketamine and psilocybin (see page 18). In Brazil, the religious use of the plant mixture, ayahuasca, has been accepted as legal (see page 29). Dennis McKenna's proposal for a biomedical investigation of ayahuasca, reported in the last MAPS newsletter, has been funded and will begin shortly. In Russia, approval is likely for a study of MDMA's potential to treat alcoholics. In Germany, psychiatrists will soon publish data about MDE research and may obtain approval to research MDMA. ■ For MAPS, the renewal of psychedelic research carries its own imperative for change. Facilitating communication between researchers and regulators is more essential, delicate, time-consuming, and expensive than ever before. This newsletter is our lengthiest ever printed and is being sent to a record 375 MAPS members and 300 interested others. MAPS has demonstrated success by gaining approval for MDMA research after a seven-year struggle. Though I continue to donate my time, responding to the challenge of MAPS' new opportunities requires my full-time attention and has encouraged me to take a leave of absence from a Ph.D. program in Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. To be viable in the long run, MAPS needs additional funds both to pay for research and to support a full-time president. Future progress depends upon the extent to which we conduct scientifically proficient and culturally sensitive research, and upon your generosity in donating funds to support MAPS' work. ■ *Rick Doblin, MAPS President*