



European Union

Statement on the occasion of the

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Commission on Narcotic Drugs 61st session

Vienna, 23 October 2018

Chapter 5: Operational recommendations on cross-cutting issues in addressing and countering the world drug problem: evolving reality, trends and existing circumstances, emerging and persistent challenges and threats, including new psychoactive substances, in conformity with the three international drug control conventions and other relevant international instruments.

Madam Chair,

The European Union and its Member States wish to thank you for organising this intersessional meeting in which we can share our best practices as regards cross-cutting issues in addressing the world drug problem. We recognize the need to effectively respond to the evolving reality, trends and existing circumstances through integrated, evidence-based and balanced drug control policies.

Nowadays, we are more concerned with the emergence and spread of new psychoactive substances as ever before. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) currently monitors more than 670 new substances, of which about 400 substances are available on the market in any given year.

Although new drugs were reported to the EU Early Warning System at a rate of one per week in 2017, the overall number of first detections decreased again for the 2nd consecutive year, to 51 detections in 2017. This may be a positive sign at first sight, but if we look at the substances which have been detected in 2017, we see that the substances get more and more potent and more and more dangerous.

There are a number of reasons that may explain why the pace of new substances appearing on the market may be slowing. Some European countries have introduced the so called blanket bans, generic and analogue based legislation and other measures to target the producers and retailers of new psychoactive substances. In addition, control measures and law enforcement operations in China targeting laboratories producing new substances may be an influencing factor.

We are worried about the appearance of new potent opioids, mainly fentanyl derivatives, on the market. Lately there have been several outbreaks of overdose related deaths in vulnerable populations and among users who are injecting new psychoactive substances. Overall, 38 new opioids have been detected on Europe's drug market since 2009 and are monitored by the EMCDDA. This includes 28 fentanils. Currently, the problem affects only a few Member States, and new fentanils are still playing a relatively small role in Europe's drug market in general. However, trends show that their market share is increasing. Member States confronted with the problem are reporting high rates of overdose related deaths and extensive health consequences. From 2016 to 2018, the EMCDDA and Europol launched special investigations into 7 fentanils, after signals were detected through the EU Early Warning System. More than 250 overdose deaths were reported, many of which were attributed directly to these substances. In addition, the EMCDDA also issued six alerts to its network across Europe related to these and other new fentanils. Remaining threats are also new psychoactive synthetic cathinones and synthetic cannabinoids, which are often much stronger than regular stimulants and cannabis on the market.

The EU and its Member States have taken several measures to address the challenges posed by new psychoactive substances. Since 1997, the EU has developed the capacity to detect, identify and assess the risks associated in order to respond rapidly and effectively to the emergence of new psychoactive substances by applying, if necessary, control measures. As of 23 November 2018, new legislation on new psychoactive substances will apply in the EU, cutting by half the time needed to control new psychoactive substances compared with the current EU procedure. The work of the national authorities, including through the REITOX National Focal Points, led by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, allows a quick and useful work of the EU Early Warning System. The active cooperation of forensic laboratories, customs authorities, law enforcement and public health services, along with Europol, the EU's law enforcement agency, and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction will create a dynamic process of exchange of information and knowledge that enables us to respond more effectively to this threat.

From lessons learnt in the past, we know that the successful management of the situation of new psychoactive substances requires not only measures of control and supply reduction but also demand and harm reduction measures. The prevention of and the response to the adverse health consequences and risks associated with the use of new psychoactive substances is a priority for the EU and its Member States. We emphasise the need for further research into and development of scientific evidence-based health responses and training to help those providing prevention, healthcare and social services to prevent and address the adverse health consequences associated with new psychoactive substances. Prevention and education on the risks of new psychoactive substances should be integral part of our efforts to face these challenges.

Illicit trade on darknet markets is one manifestation of the increasingly complex nature of transnational organised crime. Drugs are estimated to account for around two thirds of darknet market activity. Almost any type of drug is accessible to buyers with basic technical understanding within a few clicks, including new psychoactive substances, as well described in the report published in November 2017 jointly by our Agencies - EMCDDA and EUROPOL - *“Drugs and the darknet - Perspectives for enforcement, research and policy”*. This report and the new *“2018 Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA)”*, published recently by EUROPOL, leads us to the conclusion that Europe needs greater investment and continuous innovation, if we are to keep pace with the challenges we face in this area. Law enforcement authorities across the EU have noted a significant increase in the number of cases involving the illicit trade in drugs on Darknet markets over the last four years. However, the proportion of illicit online traded drugs remains small compared with the proportion traded through traditional distribution and trafficking networks. It remains to be seen whether this comparatively new channel of supply will supplement or otherwise affect drug demand. This development poses a significant threat to the health and security of citizens across the EU and worldwide, demonstrating the continuing need for greater cooperation and collaboration within law enforcement community.

The rising number of illicit trafficking on the Internet also creates environment for demand reduction interventions. Finding ways to prevent and reduce drug use, and offer counselling, treatment and risk and harm reduction services in these settings seem to be a possible future path to take. Internet-based interventions have the potential to extend the reach and geographical coverage of treatment programmes to people experiencing drug use problems who may not otherwise access specialist drug services. In the EU and its Member States, a wide range of drug treatment interventions, including brief interventions for cannabis users, are provided online.

Madam Chair, dear panellists,

The EU and its Member States believe that through our joint efforts we can effectively tackle the new challenges.

Thank you!