



European Union

Intervention at the Intergovernmental expert group on the international challenge posed by the non-medical use of synthetic opioids (3 and 4 December 2018, Vienna)

Excellencies, Ambassadors, distinguished representatives,

- The 2018 edition of the European Drugs Report included a lot of information about recent trends on Drugs, with positive as well as worrying signals on the evolution of the drugs phenomenon in Europe.
- The drug problems remain an important threat to the health and the security of citizens.
- New challenges and threats include the criminal use of the Internet - including the darknet - for drug trafficking, the emergence of new and more potent substances, including fentanils.
- Such a longstanding threat can only be tackled if we all work together – across Europe and with our international partners.

On New Psychoactive Substances (NPS):

- Data shows that there are around 350 different new psychoactive substances available in the market each year in our Member States.
- Although the available data suggests that Europe is not currently facing an opioid problem of the same scale to those seen in the US and Canada, we are well aware of the substances becoming more and more potent and dangerous.
- Therefore, we have adopted a new legislation on new psychoactive substances (NPS) which became fully effective on 23 November this year. It allows a faster and more efficient reaction to threats posed by such new substances due to shorter deadlines and quicker procedures. It provides a speedier and more effective tool to prohibit these new drugs in all Member States and to prosecute those who trade these substances which cause serious harm in Europe, and in particular to young people.
- This is crucial for all of us in view of the ever-increasing number of NPS which are available on the European market. The Early Warning System of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), which is working 24/7, is monitoring more than 670 NPS of which more than 350 were detected on the market in 2017. There were also 51 new NPS discovered in 2017.

- In the past 12 months we have subjected 5 new substances to control measures, in addition to those which have been controlled at international level by CND Decisions of March 2018.
- The speed of scheduling has increased over the last years and, unfortunately, this might continue as the substances detected in Europe are also becoming more and more dangerous.

On the diversion of and illicit trafficking in precursors:

- I want to underline the EU' commitment to implementing a strong and effective drug precursor control and monitoring system at global and EU level. This is a cornerstone of any successful drug supply reduction policy.
- However, it is widely acknowledged that the current global drug precursor control and monitoring system is facing unprecedented challenges such as the increased use of non-scheduled drug precursors in particular pre-precursors and 'designer' precursors, the globalisation of the chemical industry and the Internet as a tool for dissemination of illegal production techniques among criminals and for sourcing drug precursors across the globe.
- And although the use of non-scheduled substances in illegal drug manufacture is not new – indeed - this has been going on for years - we see that the variety and pace with which they are introduced is increasing every year.
- Therefore, the EU is of the view that new approaches and instruments will be needed. I would like to recall that some of these approaches have been discussed at a dedicated side-event in the margins of the 61st session of the CND last March.
- The EU is currently carrying out a thorough evaluation of its drug precursor policy and we expect this to be ready by the end of 2019. If needed, this may be the basis for a revision of our legislation on drug precursors. And in the meantime, we continue to strengthen our customs risk management techniques, our detection capacities, and many other aspects for which no change of the legislation are needed.
- The EU reiterates the importance of further strengthening existing international cooperation mechanisms for the control of precursors, including through the participation of Member States in international operations such as Project Prism and Project Cohesion, and via the meetings of the Precursor Task Force of the International Narcotic Control Board (INCB). In this context, the EU strongly supports the International Narcotics Control Board to maintain and continue to improve the Precursors Incident Communication System and Pre-Export Notification Online. Both tools are indispensable for fostering international cooperation on drug precursor.
- Strengthen voluntary partnerships with industry, in particular the chemical and pharmaceutical industries, is another approach where we are convinced significant gains can be made. The EU therefore continue to invest in this and are ready to exchange experiences and discuss “best practices” with other countries and regions to further promote cooperation with industry at global level.
- I would now like to briefly come back to consider new approaches to counter the proliferation of “designer” precursors and other non-scheduled precursors at global

level. This matter is of great interest to the EU, as we are particularly affected by this problem. At EU level we have tried to address this with the introduction in our legislation in 2013 of a so-called "*catch-all*"-provision. This enacts that the competent authorities of the EU Member States shall prohibit the introduction of consignments of non-scheduled substances into the customs territory of the EU or their departure from it where there is sufficient evidence that those substances are intended for the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances.

Additionally, at the end of 2017 we have added a new category to our EU Voluntary Monitoring List for "designer precursors". These are substances with no known legal use and trade beyond limited research and laboratory analytical purposes, but which are specifically produced to evade monitoring and for use in illegal drug manufacture. Both these measures allow us to more effectively address the problems we face with non-scheduled substances. But the ongoing evaluation will teach us whether additional action is needed.

- I would like to call upon all countries to consider similar approaches. For instance, one possible avenue could be that for "designer precursors" we explore how we can start to establish a common legal basis which would enable authorities worldwide to disrupt the supply of such substances without creating undue burden for authorities and legitimate industry.

The EU is ready to start a discussion on these and other innovative and flexible approaches in the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.