



European Union Statement
on the occasion of the 3rd Intersessional Meeting
of the 63rd Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs,
Vienna, 19-21 October 2020

Thematic session 2: The adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The following countries align themselves with this statement: Turkey[§], the Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Serbia*, Albania*, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Ukraine, Iceland+, Norway+, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. The European Union and its Member States wish to thank you for organizing this intersessional meeting. Today's discussion should help us accelerate the implementation of our joint commitments, as outlined notably in the 2016 UNGASS Outcome Document.

2. *We would also like to thank the Secretariat for the background material provided for this meeting, which is helpful to ensure evidence-based discussions.*

3. According to UNODC's World Drug Report 2020, roughly 500 new psychoactive substances (NPS) are found on the national markets of UN Member States each year. While the overall number of NPS has stabilised, their types have changed. An increasing number of NPS are opioids, including many fentanyl analogues, but some also from diverse and new groups. These synthetic

[§] Candidate Country

* Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania as well as potential Candidate Country Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland and Norway are members of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area

opioids have proved both potent and harmful, fuelling overdose deaths in some regions of the world. In addition, other groups of NPS pose serious threats to public health. For example, various synthetic stimulants, synthetic cannabinoids, benzodiazepines, to name but a few.

4. While many NPS tend to be transient on the drug markets, patterns of NPS use have been observed among marginalised and vulnerable groups - in particular the use of synthetic cannabinoids. This is true also for Europe. In a 2016 study of the EMCDDA, the EU's Drugs Agency, over two thirds of countries reported that their use by high-risk drug users resulted in health concerns. In particular, the use of synthetic cathinones ('bath salts') by people who use and inject opioids and stimulants has been linked to severe health and social problems. In addition, the smoking of synthetic cannabinoids in marginalised populations, including homeless people and prisoners, has been identified as a problem in a number of European countries.

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. According to the European Drug Report 2020, new psychoactive substances (NPS) have become a more persistent problem. Over the past three years, NPS have been detected for the first time in Europe at the rate of around one per week. 53 substances were detected for the first time in 2019. The EU's early warning system is monitoring around 800 new psychoactive substances, of which more than half are available on the European drug market in any given year.

6. The first detections decreased from a peak of close to 100 a year reported in 2014-15. This may reflect the results of sustained efforts to control new psychoactive substances in Europe, as well as legal changes in source countries to restrict production, including generic drug controls that cover chemical classes.

7. The international community has reacted in a timely manner to assess the harms caused by NPS and to schedule those that warrant international control. The EU early warning system and the UNODC early warning advisory help to keep the international community abreast of developments. Both, the European Union and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, have acted swiftly in recent years to schedule the most harmful new psychoactive substances. The European Union adopted new legislation in 2017 to speed up the process to ban NPS. All this helped reducing the growth in new psychoactive substances.

8. The overall consumption levels of new psychoactive substances are still relatively low in Europe and few people currently enter treatment in Europe for problems associated with the use of new psychoactive substances.

9. Nevertheless, NPS continue to represent a serious threat to health and security due to the number of potent opioids, synthetic cannabinoids and benzodiazepines appearing on the market and the associated health emergencies and deaths. It is our responsibility to continue to address these problems, while paying special attention to young consumer groups as well as vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups, including the homeless and prison populations.

Mr Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. We are convinced that our full attention needs to focus on further strengthening national, regional and international actions in order to address the challenges of new psychoactive substances, including their adverse health consequences. We need to develop appropriate measures, including early warning mechanisms and appropriate prevention and treatment models. And we have to support the scientific evidence-based review and scheduling of the most prevalent, persistent and harmful substances.

11. The EU's 3-step-approach of early warning, risk assessment and control measures is part of the EU's evidence-based, integrated, balanced and multidisciplinary approach to drugs policy, aiming to protect public health.

12. We reaffirm our commitment to promoting and protecting health, including access to treatment, safety and the well-being of all humanity.

Thank you for your attention.
