

## European Commission - Press release

### European Commission seeks stronger EU response to fight dangerous new synthetic drugs

Strasbourg, 25 October 2011 – The European Commission has today given a fresh impetus to anti-drugs policy by announcing an overhaul of the EU rules to fight illicit drugs, particularly new psychoactive substances, which imitate the effects of dangerous drugs like ecstasy or cocaine and are a growing problem. The EU indentified a record number of 41 such substances in 2010, up from 24 the previous year. These drugs are increasingly available over the internet and have rapidly spread in many Member States, which face difficulties in preventing their sale. More new drugs are entering the market. Over the past two years, one new substance has emerged every week. Member States cannot stop the spread of drugs alone: clampdowns at national level may simply force criminals to move drug production to neighbouring countries or to shift trafficking routes. With the Lisbon Treaty now in place, the EU has new tools to address the drugs scourge. Over the coming months, the Commission will develop clearer and stronger rules on tackling dangerous new drugs and trafficking – both of illicit drugs and chemicals used to make them.

“New synthetic drugs are becoming widely available at an unprecedented pace in Europe. In addition, drug trafficking has become one of the most important crimes committed cross-border in the European Union,” said EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding. “Europe’s response to drugs needs to be strong and decisive. That’s why we need concerted action at the EU level to disrupt the supply of drugs and reduce demand, including by means of deterrent criminal sanctions. Effective rules without loopholes are needed so that young people in particular do not fall into the trap of using dangerous drugs, which are a major threat to their health and well-being.”

According to a recent Eurobarometer survey, new synthetic drugs, which can be just as dangerous as banned substances, are increasingly popular with 5% of young Europeans saying they have used them. The figures are the highest in Ireland (16%), followed by Poland (9%), Latvia (9%), the UK (8%) and Luxembourg (7%). The survey reveals that across all 27 EU Member States, a large majority of 15 to 24-year-olds are in favour of banning these substances.

To tackle this increasing threat, the Commission has put forward a new approach for a stronger European response, including:

-

Stronger EU legislation on new psychoactive substances so that the EU can provide a faster response, including the possibility of temporary bans, as well as tackling their sale over the internet;

- 

New EU legislation to target cross-border trafficking in drugs by means of criminal law: the Commission will improve the definition of offences and sanctions and introduce stronger reporting obligations for Member States;

- 

New EU laws to strengthen control over chemicals used for drugs production;

- 

More effective rules to deprive drug traffickers of their financial gains: in the coming weeks, the Commission will propose rules on the confiscation and recovery of assets involved in serious crime, including drug trafficking;

- 

More cooperation at international level, especially with transit and producing countries outside the EU, as well as with countries considered as major entry points for drugs in Europe.

## Background

EU legal instruments in anti-drugs policy, notably on drug trafficking and the control of chemicals used to make drugs, as well as the emergence of new psychoactive substances, date from 2004 and 2005 (Council Decisions 2004/757/JHA and 2005/387/JHA). These rules now need to be updated because of recent changes in how drugs are trafficked and the emergence of new drugs.

With the Lisbon Treaty now in place, the European response to drugs can be stronger and more decisive. The Treaty defines drug trafficking as one of the "particularly serious crimes with a cross-border dimension" allowing the adoption of directives that establish minimum rules on the definition of criminal offences and sanctions (Article 83(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). New legislation involving the European Parliament, and implemented by the Member States, will be subject to the scrutiny by the Commission and ultimately the EU's Court of Justice.

Tackling illicit drugs trafficking and abuse requires an integrated and coherent approach, which joins together public health, social and education policies as well as cooperation between law enforcement authorities and international cooperation.

At least 75.5 million Europeans said they have used cannabis at least once in their lifetime, while cocaine and amphetamines have been tried by 14 million and 12 million people respectively. A recent Eurobarometer survey of young people's attitudes to drugs shows confirms that one in three young men (32%) admit having used cannabis at least once in their lifetime compared to one in five young women (20%). 57% of respondents believed they could easily obtain cannabis within 24 hours, while 22% said the same for ecstasy or cocaine.

Various means are in place across Europe to reduce the demand for drugs and the consequences of drug abuse. However, major differences still exist among Member States. The Commission will respond to the need to extend and enhance drug-related services by developing new tools to improve quality standards of drug prevention, treatment and harm reduction treatments.

Continuous dialogue with third countries is key to achieving concrete results in reducing the use of illicit drugs and combating drug trafficking. The EU will consolidate its external assistance and cooperation activities with crucial regions of the world (such as Latin American, Caribbean and African countries, the US, and the Russian Federation).

For more information

European Commission – anti-drugs policy:

[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/anti-drugs/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/anti-drugs/index_en.htm)

Homepage of Vice-President Viviane Reding, EU Justice Commissioner:

<http://ec.europa.eu/reding>

## ANNEX

### Stronger EU action to tackle Europe's drug problem

In the next two years, the Commission will present:

1.  
a drugs legislative package, proposing the revision of the Framework Decision on drug trafficking and of the Council Decision on new psychoactive substances;
2.  
legislative proposals on drug precursors;
- 3.

legislative proposals on fighting organised crime, including drug trafficking, through confiscation and asset recovery, and new measures against money laundering;

4.  
indicators to monitor drug supply, drug-related crime and drug-supply reduction to help improve the effectiveness of supply-reduction interventions;

5.  
minimum quality standards to improve drug prevention, treatment and harm-reduction services.

Contacts:

Matthew Newman (+32 2 296 24 06)

Mina Andreeva (+32 2 299 13 82)