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**NOTE**

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| From: | General Secretariat of the Council |
| To: | Delegations |
| Subject: | EU Statement on the occasion of the 64th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (Vienna, 12-16 April 2021)<br>- Agenda item 5 (b): Challenges and future work of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) in the review of substances for possible scheduling recommendations |

Delegations will find in the Annex the above-mentioned statement as expressed on behalf of the EU and its Member States at the 64th CND Session (12-16 April 2021).

**ANNEX**

**European Union**

**Statement on the occasion of**
**the 64th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs**
**Vienna, 12-16 April 2021**

Agenda item 5 (b): Challenges and future work of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) in the review of substances for possible scheduling recommendations

Madam Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is an honour to be here today with you and to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States regarding the ongoing challenges of identifying and detecting new psychoactive substances (NPS). The following countries align themselves with this statement: Turkey[§], the Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Serbia*, Albania*, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Iceland+, Norway+, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and San Marino.

2. As confirmed by the World Drug Report 2020, new psychoactive substances continue to represent a serious threat, in particular if we consider the number of potent opioids, synthetic cannabinoids and benzodiazepines appearing on the market. The number of new synthetic opioids is increasing in a worrying way. In addition, the use of NPS may become entrenched among people in vulnerable situations, including homeless people and prison populations, because of their relatively low cost, easy availability and high potency.

§ 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.

3. The efforts made by the international community in recent years have had some success, as evidenced by a decline in the number of NPS identified and reported for the first time to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The Commission on Narcotic Drugs has acted swiftly to schedule the most harmful new psychoactive substances, and the UNODC early warning advisory has helped to keep the international community abreast of developments.

4. Some of the policies aimed at reducing the availability of NPS seem to have been successful, especially those aimed at reducing open trade in the EU, as well as measures taken in source countries. The frequency with which NPS appear on European markets has slowed down in recent years. The legal framework put in place in the EU, coupled with the EU Early Warning System, is designed to rapidly detect, assess, and respond to threats caused by NPS.

5. In Europe, as in other parts of the world, however, the availability of NPS remains a concern. This is one of the priority issues that the EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025 aims to address. The EU and its Member States will make further efforts to tackle the availability of NPS, including by targeting high-risk organised criminal networks. In particular, the production, trafficking and distribution of synthetic drugs is a highly dynamic crime area, subject to rapid change and innovation in terms of substances, production methods and suspects involved. This is reflected in the increasing sophistication of business models, the innovation in the use of different precursors, pre-precursors and essential chemicals, and synthesis routes in response to the scheduling of specific substances and national regulations to curb their production.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. I would now like to briefly turn our attention to drug precursors. In past statements the European Union already spoke about the unprecedented challenges that drug precursor control is currently facing due to the rapid proliferation of the use of designer-precursors in illicit drug manufacture, in particular synthetic drug manufacture. Designer-precursors are close chemical relatives of scheduled precursor and purpose-made to circumvent controls and they usually do not have any known legitimate use.

7. At the end of last year the European Commission concluded an in-depth evaluation[1] of its drug precursor policy and, as expected, the main conclusion was that "additional action with regard to non-scheduled substances, in particular designer-precursors, is necessary". We therefore also like to take this opportunity to repeat our full support for the Board's call to all Parties to the 1988 UN Convention to start reflecting on how we can establish a legal basis which would enable authorities worldwide to disrupt the supply of such substances more effectively without creating undue burden for authorities and legitimate industry.

8. To encourage such a reflection process the European Union, together with the Board and the United States of America, are organizing a dedicated side-event on this matter in the margins of this 64th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

To conclude, Madam Chair,

9. The EU and its Member States believe that we should all strengthen our national, regional and international action in order to address the challenges of new psychoactive substances, including their adverse health consequences. We should continue to develop appropriate measures and prevention and treatment models. And lastly, we should support scientific evidence-based review, and continue scheduling the most prevalent, persistent and harmful substances.

Thank you for your attention.

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[1] REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on the Evaluation of the EU drug precursors regulations (Brussels, 30.11.2020, COM(2020) 768 final).