

The fight against illicit drugs continues

Commission proposes to ban seven new substances

*Article written by Duncan Barry – Media and Information Executive, MEUSAC
Published on The Malta Independent – 30.12.17*

The European Commission has proposed to ban seven new psychoactive substances (NPS) across the European Union, in addition to nine others banned earlier in 2017, also known as 'legal highs'. The drugs are not yet controlled internationally and pose a danger to public safety in Europe.

The EU is once again responding to challenges in the drugs market in a bid to continue its fight against illicit drugs as the rapid increase in the number of new psychoactive substances becoming available on the market as well as diversification in drug trafficking routes and methods of transport, continues.

The seven new psychoactive substances, including those commonly known as "spice", "herbal incense" and "legal weed", belong to two categories: four of them are synthetic cannabinoids, with effects similar to cannabis but much more toxic, while the other three substances are synthetic opioids closely related to fentanyl, a substance controlled at international level.

According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), these toxic substances are associated with over 170 deaths across the EU and a number of acute intoxications. So it comes as no surprise that these toxic substances can cause severe harm to health and can even lead to death, and pose a growing threat to public health in Europe.

Currently, these seven new psychoactive substances are not covered by international drug controls and remain a serious challenge.

The EU and its Member States have, over the past two decades, developed a European approach to addressing such challenges. This approach is enshrined in the [EU Drugs Strategy for 2013-2020](#) and two consecutive four-year Action Plans on Drugs.

In 2016, 66 new psychoactive substances were detected via the EU Early Warning System (EWS) – a rate of over one per week. Although this number is on the decrease – 98 substances were detected in 2015 – the overall number of substances available remains relatively high.

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos, said: "New psychoactive substances pose an increasingly serious threat to public health.

"In Europe, we work to make sure that we stay one step ahead of this fast-moving and dangerous business.

"More needs to be done to keep European citizens safe, especially the younger generations.

"We need to ensure not only that these new drugs cannot be bought, but also that they don't appear on the market in the first place. I now call for the Council to take a swift decision in order to speedily remove those new drugs from the market."

The Commission, therefore, considers that there are grounds for subjecting all seven substances to control measures across the EU. The Commission's proposal will now be discussed in the Council, which, in consultation with the European Parliament, will decide on the adoption of the measures.

The objective of the Commission proposal is to call on the Member States to subject the seven substances to control measures and criminal penalties according to their domestic legislation, thus fulfilling their obligations under the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances or the under the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs as amended by the 1972 Protocol, respectively. New rules could be introduced by November 2018.