

PRESS RELEASE

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Council and Parliament agree on new mechanism to better protect Europeans from new psychoactive substances

On 29 May, the Council and the Parliament reached a political agreement on a package reforming the legislation on new psychoactive substances (NPS) used as alternatives to illicit drugs.

The new mechanism will allow for a more effective and efficient EU response to new psychoactive substances, which are appearing on the EU market at an unprecedented pace, posing a risk to public health and safety.

Carmelo Abela, minister for home affairs and national security of Malta said: "Legal highs are a growing problem for public health in Europe and it is young people who are most at risk. With these new rules, the EU will provide a faster and more effective response. We will be able to drastically reduce the time needed to assess and possibly decide on an EU wide ban of new psychoactive substances".

The package will streamline the procedure at EU level for assessing the potential negative effects of a new psychoactive substance and decide on a possible ban. This procedure will now be nearly twice as quick as before. Also, the new rules will further reduce from 12 to 6 months the time for member states to implement the EU decision at the national level. The package also aims at improving the information exchange, early warning system and risk assessment procedure at EU level.

The package is composed of an amendment to the founding regulation of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) regarding information exchange, early warning system and risk assessment procedure on psychoactive substances and a directive amending the Council framework decision from 2004 on the minimum provision on the constituent elements of criminal acts and penalties in the field of illicit drug trafficking.

Next steps

Based on the political agreement reached between the two institutions, the texts will be formally adopted by both institutions in the coming months.

Background

New psychoactive substances are natural or synthetic substances that affect the central nervous system and induce an effect, similar to that of illicit drugs, such as cocaine, heroin or cannabis. They can cause hallucinations, alterations in thinking, behaviour, perception, awareness or mood and other undesired effects. In fact, they are often marketed as legal alternatives to illicit drugs, hence the name of so-called 'legal highs'.

The need for an amendment to the legislation on psychoactive substance was the result of the rapid and massive expansion of new psychoactive substances (NPS), at global level and in Europe. 98 new psychoactive substances were reported for the first time to the EU Early Warning System (EWS) in 2015 and 66 in 2016, bringing the total number of new substances monitored to more than 600 - with more than 460 (over 75%) of these detected in the last six years alone.

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