**Council of the
European Union**

**Brussels, 16 April 2019
(OR. en)**

8535/19

**CORDROGUE 23
SAN 212
ENFOPOL 178
CYBER 129
COPEN 158**

NOTE

From:	Austrian delegation
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Drug demand reduction and prevention and health-related interventions on the internet/darknet
	– Austrian Presidency summary of the thematic discussions held at the National Drug Coordinators meeting and in the Horizontal Working Party on Drugs in the second semester of 2018

Delegations will find in Annex the Summary by the former Austrian Presidency of the thematic discussions held at the National Drug Coordinators meeting in Vienna on 8 October 2018, and in the HDG on 28 November 2018.

Drug demand reduction and prevention and health-related interventions on the internet/darknet – challenges and possibilities: Presidency summary of the thematic discussion held at the HDG and NDC meeting

On 28 November 2018, the Austrian Presidency organised a thematic discussion on the challenges of drug demand reduction and prevention and health-related interventions on the internet/darknet, as well as possible solutions to these challenges, at the Horizontal Working Party on Drugs (HDG).

During its Presidency, Bulgaria introduced the topic of online drug markets in the HDG by presenting a discussion paper on the challenges involved in tackling internet-related drug crime and possible solutions, followed by a Presidency summary, thus focusing on the law enforcement perspective and initiating an interesting thematic discussion. Aware that the challenges posed by online drug trafficking need a balanced approach between law enforcement and health-related interventions, the Austrian Presidency continued the discussion at the EU National Drug Coordinators meeting, which took place on 8 October 2018 in Vienna, as well as on 28 November 2018 at the HDG meeting, emphasising the (public) health perspective.

Delegations actively participated in the discussions. It was acknowledged that a balanced approach incorporating law enforcement, prevention and health-related interventions was crucial in order to meet the challenges posed by online markets.

During the discussions, Member States agreed that users of online drug markets are hard to reach through traditional approaches to drug prevention, drug advice and harm reduction. They also agreed that people do purchase drugs online, due to the wider range of available substances (including those not locally available), the perceived better quality, the lower prices and the greater convenience offered by online markets compared to offline ones.

There was also a general agreement that innovative – but feasible – approaches were needed to interventions designed to reduce health-related harm and increase risk awareness among these users.

A number of measures have already been taken in the different Member States – most of them regarding the internet but not the darknet.

Recommendations

The following non-exhaustive list of recommendations – drawn up based on the discussions at the HDG and NDC meetings – could serve as a basis for concrete future actions to be taken:

1. reconsider traditional approaches to drug prevention, drug advice and harm reduction in order to adapt them to the online environment;
2. monitor drug users' profiles, drug scenes and patterns of use on online drug markets on both the internet and the darknet; use open science tools and methods to address and understand the complex dynamics of darknet drug purchases;
3. integrate the use of software tools to monitor new drugs in online fora (e.g. www.i-trend.eu); search for technical solutions to monitor darknet structures; include the expertise of law enforcement in this field to gain added value;
4. develop technical solutions, e.g. block content, etc.;
5. use online peer-led structures (especially on the darknet) as a gateway to targeted prevention activities and professional health-related information sharing within online markets;
6. apply low-threshold online fora interventions aiming at health and risk awareness;
7. use smartphone apps, social media and online fora on the internet and the darknet to share professional and target-group-specific information about drugs and give warnings about dangerous substances;
8. share results from drug checking/chemical testing with online market customers (not vendors) via apps, online fora (on the internet and the darknet) to help improve health awareness; adapt traditional on-site drug-checking approaches to meet the demands of darknet drug markets;
9. widen access to online health-related interventions and use digital (computer-based) technologies for health (e-health) as well as mobile digital technologies to support health practice (m-health) approaches. The global accessibility, perceived anonymity and patient-centred approach of such interventions make it easier to reach these new user groups that buy online[1]. Quality assurance of these digital interventions should be considered;
10. work together with website operators, both on the internet and on the darknet, to share or correct information;
11. address not only (potential) drug users, but also parents, friends and relatives.

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[1] Blankers, J. and Mujcic, A., 'E-health and m-health: using new technologies to respond to drug problems. Background paper commissioned by the EMCDDA for Health and social responses to drug problems: a European guide', European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2017, p. 3

Delegations agreed on the important role of EU bodies in supporting Member States by providing their expertise on the darknet drugs phenomenon.

In this context, the EMCDDA in particular could provide:

- reliable information on new psychoactive substances (NPS) identified through the EU Early Warning System on new psychoactive substances and their health effects, especially with regard to new synthetic opioids (e.g. fentanils) and synthetic cannabinoids;
- timely communication of potential health and social threats, and
- research on online drug markets and, resources dependent, on drug users' profiles and patterns of use;

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