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Subject:	EU Statement on the occasion of the first intersessional meeting of the 66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (Vienna, 23-25 October 2023) - Thematic session 5: Challenge: "The criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities is increasing"

Delegations will find in the Annex the above-mentioned statement as expressed on behalf of the EU and its Member States at the first intersessional meeting of the 66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) (Vienna, 23-25 October 2023).



European Union Statement

Thematic Session 5: Challenge: “The criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities is increasing”¹

First intersessional meeting

66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Vienna, 23-25 October 2023

Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the last time we discussed the increasing criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities, this trend has unfortunately continued. As noted in the UNODC World Drug Report 2023, increased digitalisation has brought **innovations in supply chains**. The trend of the increasingly digitally enabled drug market has in particular **accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic**, as social media applications and encrypted services became more commonly used to facilitate drug purchases.

According to the latest World Drug Report, end users seem to be buying their drugs not so much on the dark web but on the surface web, and **increasingly on social media**, especially at the retail level. Almost everyone can now order drugs online and have them delivered directly to their doorstep, thereby cutting out intermediaries, reducing costs and shortening supply chains. It is therefore important that we identify new practices and enhance our engagement with the private sector in order to address these developments as early as possible.

¹ Alignment: North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Norway, Armenia, and San Marino.

To address these challenges, the EU and its Member States are implementing strategic priorities and actions foreseen in the **EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025**. One of them is tackling the exploitation of digital channels for medium- and small-volume illicit drug distribution in close cooperation with the private sector. In this regard, the EU - in cooperation with Internet companies - is preparing a **knowledge package** to be able to better identify and tackle drug sales online.

There is also a need to address the **encrypted digital communication** used for criminal purposes, including for facilitating drug trafficking. In this respect the investigating authorities of some Member States of the EU, with the support of the European agencies Europol and Eurojust, have succeeded in dismantling several encrypted communication tools, such as Sky ECC and EncroChat, taking down the criminal distribution networks and seizing the criminal assets of the criminals involved in drug trafficking.

Another priority area is to address the delivery of drugs bought online, targeting drug trafficking via **postal and express services**. It is important to promote the monitoring of suspicious postal items. New digital tools, including artificial intelligence, could be considered to improve such monitoring. In this area, cooperation with the private sector is also crucial and should be improved.

Clearly, all such activities must be framed within sound **safeguards**, ensuring the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular in relation to the right to privacy and data protection.

The increasingly widespread use of information and communication tools could also be better and more effectively used for **demand reduction interventions and to promote harm reduction services**. Digital communication channels, including social media, can be used to reach out to young people, to promote preventive messages addressed to various vulnerable groups as well as to increase the digital health offer, such as counselling, treatment, and risk and harm reduction services. Internet-based interventions have the potential to extend the reach and geographical coverage of treatment programmes to people who may not otherwise access specialised drug services, and this should be promoted.

Thank you, Mr Chair.