



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 16 April 2021
(OR. en)

7908/21

CORDROGUE 14
SAN 222

NOTE

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)

- Agenda Item 5 (d): International cooperation to ensure the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion

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).



European Union

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

Agenda Item 5 (d): International cooperation to ensure the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion

Distinguished Chair,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The following countries align themselves with this statement: the Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Serbia*, Albania*, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Iceland+, Norway+, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Andorra.
2. The EU and its Member States reiterate the importance of the access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, whilst also acknowledging the potential for the diversion and misuse of these substances.
3. The Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs as amended by the 1972 Protocol, and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, both recognise the medical use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and their indispensable role in pain relief. It is of utmost importance that countries ensure the availability of these substances and their adequate supply for medical and scientific purposes.

* 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.

4. The UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) Outcome Document of 2016 reaffirmed the importance of making internationally controlled substances available and accessible for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion.
5. In 2019, the Ministerial Declaration reiterated our resolve to ensure access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and suffering. It reiterated the need to address existing barriers in this regard, including affordability.
6. Furthermore, ensuring the availability and accessibility of controlled substances was again recently called for in the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) statement on access to internationally controlled medicines during the COVID-19 pandemic and is also present in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolutions, INCB reports and UNODC technical guidance.
7. Let me emphasise that the EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025, which was approved by the EU in December 2020, stresses the importance of increasing access to and the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The European Union and its Member States are willing to make their contribution to this.
8. In this regard, the resolution proposed by the European Union, ‘Promoting quality, affordable, scientific evidence-based and comprehensive drug prevention and treatment services’, urges the Member States to ensure access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the treatment of drug use disorders.

Distinguished Chair,

9. Despite the efforts made, including through the work of the UN System Coordination Task Team, the progress made in this area is not sufficient. The document circulated in March 2019 by the UN Task Team, entitled *'What we have learned over the last ten years: A summary of knowledge acquired and produced by the UN system on drug-related matters'*, found that one barrier to the accessibility of controlled medicines was the limited capacity of healthcare professionals due to a lack of university curricula on the use of pain medications that are evidence-based. Countries therefore need to develop the necessary university curricula, with adequate resources made available for their implementation.
10. The case of opioid analgesics is particularly troublesome: the use of internationally controlled substances, such as methadone and buprenorphine, is still limited and even prohibited in some countries, which creates huge barriers in accessing opioid agonist therapy for people dependent on opioids. Furthermore, there is considerable disparity between countries in the availability of and access to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes.
11. On the other hand, diversion of those substances should be prevented. To this end, and in the spirit of the international drug control conventions, regulatory frameworks and clinical guidelines based on rational prescription practices can increase accessibility to controlled substances, including pharmaceutical opioids, while reducing the risk of their diversion.
12. In line with our evidence-based drugs policy, the EU considers that the removal of cannabis from Schedule IV of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs will allow more research on the medical use of cannabis and cannabis resin. At the same time, this measure does not allow any trivialisation of the non-medical use of cannabis, which represents a health risk.

Lastly, Distinguished Chair,

13. The EU and its Member States believe that efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to effectively address the world drug situation are complementary and mutually reinforcing. SDG 3.8 includes achieving access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all. We would like to urge Member States to further develop national drug control policies which ensure such access.

Thank you very much, Distinguished Chair.
