Control of new synthetic drugs, designer drugs

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This document presents the report from the Commission to the Council called for by the Joint Action on New Synthetic Drugs (97/396/JAI) concerning Ketamine. The Joint Action provides that the Commission should present a new initiative to the Council with a view to submitting ketamine to control measures, in particular those new sythetic drugs which are not currently listed in any of the Schedules to the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances. Ketamine is used as an anaesthetic and analgesic and it has a unique therapeutic value in veterinary practice and value also in human medicine. Ketamine is used as a medecine in nearly all Member States and is subject to the medecine legislation. It can legally be sold only to authorised people (eg. Pharmacists). Ketamine is also used in recreational settings. In illicit use, an important factor of health risk is the lack of reliable indication of dose and the mixture with other substances accompanying sales of ketamine at street level. In some Member States, ketamine tablets are sold as ecstasy. The main effects of ketamine are anxiety, agitation, changes in perception and the analgesic effects. In such condition, the user may be at risk of injury. Ketamine is contraindicated in patients with significant ischaemic heart disease and is to be avoided in those with a history of high blood pressure or cerebrovascular disorders. At present, there is no evidence that ketamine causes an abstinence syndrome in human beings. Basing itself solely on the risk assessment report on ketamine and the principle of proportionality, the Commission concludes that it is not appropriate to present an initiative to the Council to propose that Ketamine be submitted to control measures at EU level. However, the Commission will suggest that possible improvements in the control of diversion be discussed with the chemical and pharmaceutical industry, bearing in mind the importance of ensuring the continued availability of ketamine for medical and veterinary use. On the other hand, the Commission will encourage the EMCDDA and Europol to continue monitoring the trends in recreational ketamine use as part of the early warning system provided for by the Joint Action. The Commission should take into account the outcome of the risk assessment of ketamine when it organises the assessment of the Joint Action on New Synthetic Drugs called for in the EU Acton Plan on Drugs (2000-2004).