Control of new synthetic drugs, designer drugs

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The Committee has adopted a report by Hubert PIRKER (EPP, A) on the control of new synthetic - or designer - drugs, such as ecstasy, LSD and amphetamines. Some of the votes were extremely close. The report was drawn up as part of the consultation of Parliament on a Commission paper on this subject. The committee on the whole endorsed its rapporteur's approach, which chiefly advocates repressive measures. However, it draws attention to the differences between the Member States with regard to penalties for traffic in and possession and consumption of synthetic drugs and believes harmonization of the relevant criminal laws in the Member States to be desirable. The report also claims that the threat of penalties for the consumption of synthetic drugs can have a deterrent, and thus preventive, effect on potential consumers. According to the committee, once the Amsterdam Treaty has been ratified the Member States should develop operational cooperation between the competent authorities, including the police, on the prevention, detection and investigation of criminal offences, as well as arrangements for the prosecution of organized criminal groups dealing in synthetic drugs. The committee held a wide-ranging debate on this issue at a public hearing on 27th November 1997. Mr Pirker has taken on board most of the conclusions of the hearing, in which it was claimed that consumption of designer drugs has grown considerably in the EU and that the main consumers are young adults, who use them for recreational purposes. Consumers of designer drugs are to be clearly distinguished from consumers of opium derivates in terms of their social situation and consumption habits, since they usually only consume their drugs at weekends. The effects on health of consuming designer drugs are as yet unclear, particularly as they are often consumed in special circumstances, involving strenuous physical effort (dancing), dehydration and overheated, poorly ventilated premises. In connection with this politically sensitive issue, it is useful to recall that a report by Hedy d'ANCONA on so-called "classic" drugs (cannabis, cocaine and heroin) was adopted by the Committee on 3rd November 1997 but referred back to committee by Parliament's plenary on 15th January. It will be debated anew by the committee in the near future.