Control of new synthetic drugs, designer drugs

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OBJECTIVE: to present an action plan to combat the production and sale of synthetic drugs (amphetamines, ecstasy, LSD etc.) at European level. CONTENT: the fight against drugs was at the top of the agenda of the Irish presidency and both the Council and the European Parliament expressed the wish for priority action to be implemented in this sector. This communication is the contribution by the European Commission to these recommendations. Given the scale of the problem, the fact that these drugs are easy to produce from readily- available substances and the relatively poor national response to the growth of this phenomenon, the Commission has proposed a series of actions at Community level with a view to curbing the production and sale of drugs. A list of drugs which are banned in the Community has already been drawn up under the 1971 United Nations Convention on psychotropic substances. It lists 22 substances covered by Council directive 92/109/EEC, in application of the Convention, which it is prohibited to sell. Although amended on several occasions, the directive only bans 8 substances which relate specifically to synthetic drugs (such as methaqualone and LSD) and therefore needs to be strengthened. In addition, the products on these "black" lists have a chemical structure which is very easy to reproduce in order to obtain authorized finished products with the same psychoactive effect. This is why the Commission has proposed a three-pronged response: 1) action on chemical precursors (basic ingredients of synthetic drugs): what is needed is a new list of precursors which will be monitored using an efficient system for updating the lists. In addition, new monitoring methods will need to be introduced. The Commission proposes to do this by strengthening existing legislation on the production and sale of sensitive chemical substances in the European Union and to review the regulation on the international trade in these substances; 2) the introduction of an early warning system for synthetic drugs, so that the drugs themselves (final products) can be tackled as soon as they appear on the market. Thus, as soon as a new drug is discovered in a Member State, the other countries will be warned. The information required will come from national sources (police, health services, social services). The European Drugs Monitoring Centre and the EUROPOL drugs unit may be asked to help. The Commission considers that a technical committee would be the best place for an efficient evaluation of the risks of new drugs identified on the market. The committee would be made up of representatives from the Member States, the EUROPOL drug unit, the European Drugs Monitoring Centre and the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products; 3) increased cooperation between Member States, which will undertake to criminalize the production of and traffic in new synthetic drugs which have been declared dangerous. What is needed are "flexible and rapid" measures to be taken by common agreement. Provision will also be made for an international approach within the framework of this strategy, since the drug problem goes well beyond Community frontiers. The communication points out in this respect that a special session of the United Nations has been planned on this problem in 1998. The Commission trusts that the Union will speak with one voice at this conference and will coordinate its policy with its American, Canadian and Japanese partners. At the same time, the fifteen have already concluded agreements on precursors with the Andean countries, Mexico and the USA. Other agreements with MERCOSUR, Chile and ASEAN should follow. The Commission also emphasizes the need for the countries of central and eastern Europe and the Baltic countries to cooperate with the European Union in order to control the production and effectively combat the traffic in synthetic drugs.