PRESS RELEASE

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

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Declaration from the EMCDDA on the occasion of the UN International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking - 26 June 1997

EMCDDA to play key role against new synthetic drugs, announces Director

The EMCDDA has been assigned a key role in the detection and assessment of new synthetic drugs in the European Union under the terms of a *Joint Action** formally adopted in Brussels on 16 June by the Council of the European Union.

The *Joint Action* aims to establish an early-warning system which identifies new synthetic drugs, provides a mechanism for assessing the risks of these drugs and furnishes a decision-making process through which these products may be placed under control in the EU Member States. The initiative relates to new synthetic drugs which are not currently listed in the *Schedules to the UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances* (Vienna, 1971) and which pose a threat to public health.

The mechanism foreseen by the *Joint Action* operates in three phases:

Phase 1: Detailed information on the production, traffic and use of new synthetic drugs will be sent by the EU Member States to the *Europol Drugs Unit* (EDU) in The Hague and to the EMCDDA in Lisbon (via the Europol National Units and the REITOX National Monitoring Centres respectively). Once received, this information will be exchanged between the two bodies, the European Commission and the London-based European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMEA) providing the elements required for *Phase 2* of the process. Among others, the information will include a chemical and physical description of the drug, including the name under which it is known; details on the frequency, circumstances and/or quantities in which a new synthetic drug is encountered; and a first indication of the possible risks involved, including health and social. As far as possible, information will also be provided on chemical precursors, the mode and scope of established or expected use of the drug as a psychotropic substance as well as other uses of the drug.

Phase 2: Under the auspices of its Scientific Committee, the EMCDDA will convene a meeting which will be extended to EDU scientists, the European Commission, national experts, and the EMEA. This group will assess the possible risks of any newly-identified synthetic drug and draw up a report on its findings.

Phase 3: If a drug is assessed as being harmful, the Council - within a month of the establishment of the risk assessment report - will be invited to adopt, by unanimity, a decision defining the synthetic drug which is to be placed under the necessary control measures and criminal sanctions at national level.

This *Joint Action* meets the need to provide the European Union with a more flexible and rapid mechanism for tackling synthetic drugs. However, it does not prevent any Member State from maintaining or introducing on its territory any national control measure it deems appropriate once a new synthetic drug has been identified by a Member State.

* *Joint Action* - An action adopted unanimously by the EU Member States within the framework of the third pillar of the Treaty on European Union.