



European Union
EU Statement on
Agenda item 1(c)

1st intersessional meeting
64th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Vienna, 19 – 21 October 2021

Agenda item 1(c): The criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities is increasing.

Madam Chair, Distinguished Colleagues,

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 and San Marino.

We wish to thank you for organising this intersessional meeting in which we can exchange information on drug supply reduction and related measures.

The European Union and its Member States emphasise the fact that drugs policies based on an integrated, balanced, evidence-based, and multidisciplinary approach prove to be the most effective for addressing the world drug situation. This approach is reaffirmed in the new EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025.

Globally, the drugs market is complex, highly adaptable and innovative. The use of the internet and the effect of information technology on all sections of society have led to new opportunities for organised crime in a number of essential areas, including logistics, criminal cooperation and financial flows. The use of encryption, a subset of the impact of the internet, makes it easier for organised crime groups to engage in illicit behaviour. This is a trend that is exacerbated by the cross-border nature of internet activities and the challenge of enforcing constraints on online behaviour. Drug suppliers have capitalised on the pool of potential buyers and the technological opportunities available. This is evident especially in the area of darknet markets in which sellers and buyers can transact online with a high level of anonymity.

* 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.

Online drug trafficking has continued to grow over recent years and has the potential to expand further. However, the supply of drugs via online platforms remains limited compared to traditional offline supply. The use of darknet platforms to distribute drugs has increased, despite some significant law enforcement successes such as the takedown of some of the busiest platforms. In addition to darknet marketplaces and single vendor shops, online orders are also commonly placed on the surface web, in internet fora, and via social media platforms or messaging services. The physical distribution of drugs relies on post and parcel services, direct contact or dead drops.

The possibility that the current pandemic will have a profound impact on future drug purchasing behaviour is significant and will require appropriate follow-up.

Systematic monitoring of and research into drug-related activity on darknet markets provides an opportunity to understand the changing scope and nature of the wider drugs phenomenon. A number of research groups across the EU and beyond collect and analyse data from these platforms. Darknet market analysis and findings reported by the EMCDDA, the European Drugs Agency, focus on the EU, thereby complementing individual or national research efforts. Data are collected from major darknet markets and currently include buyers' feedback reports as a proxy for sales activity, quantity and price. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted an opportunity for more joint research activities in this area by EU agencies, national authorities and academia. Clearly, these activities must be framed within sound safeguards, ensuring the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular in relation to the right to privacy and data protection. We will also continue to use the existing international framework, which provides all the required tools to counter the criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities.

One of the main strategic priorities highlighted in the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025 is to tackle the exploitation of logistical and digital channels for medium-and small-volume illicit drug distribution and increase seizures of controlled substances smuggled through these channels in close cooperation with the private sector.

Madam Chair, cooperation through effective multilateralism remains the best way to tackle today's and tomorrow's global challenges. In this respect, the EU supports the UN System Common Position. The EU is also strongly supportive of efforts to promote coordination between relevant UN entities and regional and international organisations.

To conclude, I would like to emphasise that the EU and its Member States will continue to contribute to our collective efforts at national, regional and international levels to accelerate the implementation of our joint commitments to address the world drug situation, thus embracing an effective and sustainable drug policy towards 2030.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.