



## NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

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### EMCDDA AND EUROPOL LAUNCH IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF AMPHETAMINE MARKET

#### Latest analysis highlights changing trends in illicit production of amphetamine in Europe

(15.12.2011, LISBON) Increased capacity and sophistication in the illicit amphetamine market are among developments reviewed in the **EMCDDA–Europol** analysis *Amphetamine: a European Union perspective in the global context* <sup>(1)</sup>. Published today, the report describes how patterns and trends are changing in the production and trafficking of this widely used synthetic stimulant and the chemicals used in its manufacture. It also looks at the people and organisations involved, and the scale of the problem in a global context.

According to the report, amphetamine can be termed a ‘European drug’, with data suggesting Europe to be world’s number one producer of the substance and a major consumer market. While, globally, methamphetamine is more widely used, amphetamine has stabilised as the most widely consumed stimulant drug in Europe today after cocaine. And in many countries, especially in the north and east of Europe, it is the second most widely used illicit drug after cannabis <sup>(2)</sup>. Yet, say the agencies, while the drug attracts much less attention in the media and policy circles than cannabis, cocaine or heroin, it should not be treated as a ‘secondary issue’.

Around 12.5 million Europeans have used amphetamines in their lifetime, some 2 million having used it in the last year <sup>(3)</sup>. European amphetamine markets are therefore ‘highly profitable business opportunities’ for organised crime, states the report. Although some amphetamine is manufactured in small ‘kitchen’ laboratories, the vast majority is produced in middle to large or ‘industrial size’ facilities run by criminals operating across Europe and beyond.

Distinct production and trafficking areas are outlined in the report <sup>(4)</sup>. Large-scale production and organised crime involvement are found mainly in northern Europe, notably in the ‘north-west criminal hub’ (centered on the **Netherlands** and to a lesser extent **Belgium**), where there are signs of increased yield and professionalism (e.g. use of custom-made industrial equipment). Significant production and trafficking of the drug also occurs in the ‘north-east hub’, notably in **Poland** where production is reported to be on the rise, although in **Lithuania**, traffickers have reportedly shifted to producing methamphetamine for key Scandinavian markets. Smaller scale production predominates in central Europe, particularly **Germany**. Meanwhile the south-east hub (**Bulgaria, Turkey**) is thought to be the main source of ‘captagon’ <sup>(5)</sup>, although there are signs that manufacturing could be relocating closer to established markets in the **Near and Middle East**.

In the ‘north-west hub’, use of industrial equipment may increase the production capacity and subsequent yield from around 5–8 kg of amphetamine per production batch to up to 30–40 kg. In **Poland**, the capacity of clandestine manufacturing facilities is reported to have risen from around 3 kg per production batch to between 4 and 8 kg.

Commenting on the report, **EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz** said: ‘Amphetamine is a drug warranting careful attention, despite the fact that its use has remained relatively stable in most European countries over the past decade. I am particularly concerned by our latest analysis identifying the growing scale and sophistication of some producers. With this publication we hope to enhance the understanding of an often overlooked, but nevertheless key, component on the European scene for stimulant drugs’.

Amphetamine can be produced at relatively low cost, close to consumer markets. More problematic for the illicit producer however is obtaining the precursor chemicals required to manufacture the drug (e.g. BMK also known as P-2-P). The report notes how increasingly effective international efforts to control the trade in precursors have

prompted some illicit manufacturers to bypass regulations by synthesising, rather than purchasing, precursors from so-called 'pre-precursors', or by masking them as other non-controlled chemicals before importation. Seizures of the pre-precursor phenylacetic acid (a precursor of BMK), rose sharply in 2009, with a total of almost 42 tonnes confiscated worldwide, compared with some 160 kg in 2008. This prompted the United Nations in January 2011 to place it under the same type of international control as BMK. Despite an increasing trend in Europe for 'self-production' of BMK, it continues to be smuggled into the region, often from **China** and **Russia**, by organised criminals.

Amphetamine users in Europe fall into two distinct groups: socially relatively integrated occasional users (which make up the vast majority) and marginalised problem users. While amphetamine is often seen as a 'poor man's cocaine', being the cheaper of the two drugs, the lower price in times of recession could increase its appeal for potential users. In countries such as **Finland** and **Sweden**, use of amphetamine makes up an important part of the drug problem, and accounts for a substantial proportion of those seeking treatment.

**Europol Director, Rob Wainwright** said: 'The widespread use and production of amphetamine is a big problem in society but Europol is cooperating with its law-enforcement partners in Europe to tackle the challenges involved. We provide on-the-spot assistance to their investigations, dismantle illicit synthetic drug production sites and provide operational analysis. We combat the trade in amphetamine by using intelligence from our partners to detect links between different cases and identify those involved in the production, processing and trafficking of amphetamine and its precursors'.

In 2009 in Europe, over 34,000 seizures resulted in the interception of an estimated 8 tonnes of amphetamine powder and 3 million amphetamine tablets. In the 2005–09 period, the largest number of seizures was reported by the **UK**, followed by **Germany** and **Sweden**, while the country reporting the largest quantity of the drug seized was **Turkey**, followed by the **UK** and the **Netherlands** <sup>(6)</sup>.

'This joint report comes as a strong reminder of the growing threat posed by synthetic drugs. Sadly, nowadays amphetamine can be referred to as a European drug. It is the second most widely used stimulant drug in Europe after cocaine. Most of the attention has been traditionally focused on heroin, cocaine or cannabis. A better understanding of the amphetamines market — production, trafficking and use — seems crucial for a more effective and intelligent policy response', commented **Cecilia Malmström, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs**.

## Notes

<sup>(1)</sup> The report is available in English at: [www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/joint-publications](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/joint-publications) and [www.europol.europa.eu](http://www.europol.europa.eu). It is the third title in an EMCDDA–Europol joint publication series covering key aspects of European drug markets [www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att\\_78482\\_EN\\_Europol\\_brochure\\_WebOptimisedversion.pdf](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att_78482_EN_Europol_brochure_WebOptimisedversion.pdf)

Amphetamine is a substance belonging to the family often referred to as amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), which covers two main groups of substances: the 'amphetamines' (amphetamine, methamphetamine and related substances) and the 'ecstasy-type' drugs (including methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDMA) and its close relatives methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDA) and methylenedioxyethylamphetamine (MDEA)).

<sup>(2)</sup> See Figure 1, page 20.

<sup>(3)</sup> Amphetamine, methamphetamine and related substances. See EMCDDA *Annual report 2011: the state of the drugs problem in Europe* [www.emcdda.europa.eu/online/annual-report/2011/amphetamines/3](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/online/annual-report/2011/amphetamines/3)

<sup>(4)</sup> See graphic, page 28 'EU criminal hubs'.

<sup>(5)</sup> The composition of captagon tablets remains unclear; laboratory analyses, however show that it no longer contains phenethylamine (as contained in legitimately marketed Captagon® tablets), but amphetamine combined with caffeine and other substances.

<sup>(6)</sup> See Figure 4, page 26.