

Main topics and media events 4 – 17 February 2019

Confirming that a credible enlargement policy is a geostrategic investment in peace, stability, security and economic growth in the whole of Europe, the Commission today adopted its annual assessment of the implementation of reforms in the Western Balkan partners and Turkey, together with recommendations on the next steps for those countries.

Prevention technologies – European prevention conference opens today

What do we know about how research evidence is used in the ‘real world’ of prevention? How can we take advantage of technology to promote the use of evidence in policy and practice? What are some of the biggest implementation challenges in prevention and how do we address these? These are among the questions being addressed this week at the 9th annual conference of the [European Society for Prevention Research \(EUSPR\)](#) (24–26 October). The event, ‘Prevention technologies – improving the use of evidence in prevention practice’, is co-organised in Lisbon by the EUSPR and the EMCDDA.

In many areas of public health, and particularly in the field of prevention, there is frequently a gap between research evidence and the services and interventions delivered in daily practice. This may mean that public resources are wasted or that target groups and communities are unable to receive the interventions or other support that might benefit them most.

At the conference, keynote speakers will explore some of the major issues in implementation and translational science as well as highlight strategies that have been successful in bringing together prevention research, practice and policymaking (¹). Looking at the use of new technologies in this process, speakers will address how these might offer fresh opportunities for delivering evidence-based interventions and programmes and provide a platform for better engagement across different sectors.

In addition to looking at what works in prevention, the conference will also pay attention to what does not, via a special session devoted to ‘Embracing failure in prevention science’. This will underline the importance of publishing trial results that show ‘no effects’ or ‘harmful effects’ in order to avoid ‘research waste’ and optimise performance.

The conference will map the obstacles that hinder the uptake and roll-out of effective interventions and local policies in preventing unhealthy

behaviours. It will also increase dialogue between practitioners and researchers on how best to overcome them. In order to boost this dialogue, one of the pre-conference events will be a joint exchange activity sponsored by, and held at, the Lisbon City Hall. This will bring together early-career researchers and prevention professionals to discuss common goals and to air views on how evidence should be best presented and used.

The EMCDDA strives to support evidence-based prevention and to promote greater use of interventions which are proven to be effective. However, simply publishing evidence is not enough. This is why the agency proactively promotes training in prevention science and practice. Here, the agency is engaging in the further implementation in Europe of training curricula – such as the European Universal Prevention Curriculum (EUPC) – and is aware that good collaboration with networks of scientists and practitioners, such as the EUSPR, is important to achieve this goal.

In the margins of the meeting, the EMCDDA and the EUSPR will discuss [Xchange](#), the agency's online registry of evidence-based prevention programmes launched last October in its [Best Practice Portal](#). Through this registry, interested visitors can access empirically proven effective programmes, along with experiences of their adaptation across different countries. The EUSPR is supporting the EMCDDA in expanding this registry to include programmes targeting other risky behaviours such as delinquency and violence.

[Update: Report and concluding remarks by President Donald Tusk to the European Parliament on October European Council meetings](#)

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Introductory remarks

I will start my report from the European Council with Brexit.

Last Wednesday evening, leaders listened to Prime Minister May's views on the negotiations. Afterwards, the EU27 met in the Article 50 format, with our

chief negotiator Michel Barnier, to discuss the state of play. It was made clear by the UK that more time is needed to find a precise solution. Therefore, there is no other way but to continue the talks. Leaders expressed their full trust and support for Michel Barnier.

Since Prime Minister May mentioned the idea of extending the transition period, let me repeat that if the UK decided that such an extension would be helpful to reach a deal, I am sure that the leaders would be ready to consider it positively.

President Juncker also touched upon preparations for a no-deal scenario, an outcome which we hope never to see. And, of course, I stand ready to convene a European Council, if and when the Union negotiator reports that decisive progress has been made. The Brexit talks continue with the aim of reaching a deal.

Turning to migration. In the course of our regular discussions, on Thursday morning we had an exchange on our migration policy in all its aspects. The EU leaders want to strengthen external border control and deepen cooperation with third countries to stop illegal arrivals. The focus last week was also on increasing cooperation with countries in North Africa, and a tougher approach to people-smuggling networks. Leaders noted the Union's achievement in stemming mass arrivals of irregular migrants over the past three years, even if more remains to be done. We thanked the Austrian presidency for its efforts to reform the Common European Asylum System, and agreed that work should continue with a view to finding an agreement as soon as possible.

The European Council also adopted a number of decisions on internal security. Some of them should be seen in the context of increased concerns and risks of hybrid, cyber, as well as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats. One element of particular interest, was the leaders' call to create a capacity to respond to, and deter, cyber-attacks through EU sanctions. Of course, this is especially important in light of the European elections next year, and the active threat posed by malicious, outside interference in our democracies.

During the Euro Summit, the Eurogroup chair Mario Centeno gave an update on the finance ministers' work on the ESM reform and the Banking Union while the European Central Bank President Mario Draghi informed leaders on the economic outlook. The objective of the meeting was to keep up the pressure for concrete results in December. EU finance ministers should speed up their work, if we are to achieve our goal, which is strengthening the ESM and the banking union further.

Leaders also held a short debate on external relations, including on the fight against climate change ahead of COP 24 in Katowice. We adopted conclusions on taking our relations with Africa to a new level – an issue of great importance – and in this context agreed to organize a summit with the League of Arab States on the 24-25 February next year.

For many of the issues discussed at the European Council – from migration to security – as well as the need to scale up the Union's presence as a global

actor in many fields, the EU's budget is key. At technical level, there have been detailed discussions on the next Multiannual Financial Framework. But, in general terms, we are far from reaching any sort of consensus. That is why I will propose a political discussion at the December European Council. I welcome the intention that the consolidated position of the European Parliament is to be known by then.

Let me close with a word on the shocking killing of Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi, in Turkey earlier this month. This was such a horrible crime, that even the slightest trace of hypocrisy would bring shame on us. It is not my role to state who wants to protect whose interests here. But I know one thing: the only European interest is to reveal all the details of this case, regardless of who is behind it. Knowing your sensitivity and determination, I believe that you will not allow for Europe, the Member States or the institutions, to become involved in any ambiguous game. Thank you.

Closing remarks

On migration:

Almost all of you have expressed your disappointment with the lack of decisions on migration policy that you are expecting from the European Council. I understand your dissatisfaction because I know that the will of the majority in this house was to establish mandatory quotas. In spite of what you are saying the European Council is building the common European solution for migration policy but in the centre of this approach is the strengthening of cooperation with third countries, a fight against human smugglers, external border protection and not mandatory quotas. The real progress in the European Council is that today almost everybody understands that our priority should be stopping the inflow of irregular migrants and not their distribution.

On Brexit:

We want to avoid a hard border in Ireland but there is no guarantee that we can do it. And do you know why Mr Farage? Because Brexit is de facto a political decision to re-establish the border between the Union and the UK. Brexit is a project to separate the UK from the EU. I don't know what is going to be the result of the negotiations but I know that it is the Brexiteers who are one hundred per cent responsible for bringing back the problem of the Irish border.

Finally, I would like to share with you one remark. Listening to the debate here I get the impression that some of you would like to see a Europe where there are no member states and no governments. Please do not be surprised that I am not on the same line.

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2019 EU budget: Council cannot accept EP amendments

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The Council today informed the European Parliament that it cannot accept all the amendments for the 2019 EU budget adopted by the Parliament.

This triggers a three-week conciliation period starting on 30 October. The two institutions will have until 19 November to find an agreement on next year's budget.

The presidency stands ready to engage constructively with the Parliament to reconcile our differences and agree on a budget that is both ambitious and realistic.

Hartwig Löger, Austrian Federal Minister for Finance

The Council and the Parliament share the same priorities for the 2019 EU budget. These include growth, employment and innovation, fighting climate change, tackling security and migration, and a focus on young people.

At the same time, the Council is concerned by the increases proposed by the European Parliament, which exceed the level of funding proposed by the Commission in its draft budget, as well as the ceilings of the multiannual financial framework. It insists on taking into account the actual needs and absorption capacities under the different programmes to ensure adequate levels of funding and good value for EU taxpayers' money.

Background

In its draft budget for 2019 the Commission proposed setting the total level of commitments at €165.6 billion and payments at €148.7 billion.

The Council's position, adopted on 4 September, sets total commitments at €164.1 billion and total payments at €148.2 billion.

The Parliament is asking for total commitments to be increased to

€166.3 billion and total payments to €149.3 billion. This is €1.1 billion in commitments above the ceilings set by the EU's multiannual financial framework for 2014-2020.

Next steps

The conciliation committee will meet on 7 November and 16 November. On 16 November, an Ecofin/Budget Council will meet to provide the presidency guidance in its talks with the Parliament. If no deal is found by the end of the conciliation period the Commission has to present a new draft budget for 2019.

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[New EMCDDA Paper explores the illicit captagon market](#)

What is captagon? Where is it used and produced? Can it be linked to terrorist attacks in Europe? These are some of the questions explored in the latest edition in the EMCDDA Papers series launched today [Captagon: understanding today's illicit market](#). The report provides an overview of what is currently known about the captagon phenomenon in order to assist those working in the illicit drugs field who may need to respond to the issue.

Captagon® was originally the brand name for a medicinal product containing fenetylline produced since the 1960s and serving licit markets in Europe and the Middle East. Sold in tablet form, with a characteristic logo comprising two half-moons, it was prescribed as a treatment for conditions such as attention deficit disorder and narcolepsy. Today, it is no longer produced or used for therapeutic purposes.

After fenetylline was placed under international control in 1986, traffickers sometimes based in eastern Europe started producing tablets containing other substances, especially amphetamine, which were then sold as 'captagon' on markets for stimulants in the Middle East.

Captagon use as we know it today

The report reviews what is known about current use, production and supply of captagon. It describes how recent reports of captagon use no longer refer to the diverted medicinal product Captagon® but to clandestinely produced tablets commonly containing amphetamine and often caffeine (but which still bear a logo similar to original Captagon® tablets).

Where is captagon used?

Captagon is reported to be a commonly used stimulant in the Middle East. While little information is available on the captagon consumer markets in these countries, anecdotal and expert reports, as well as insights from supply-side information, suggest that, in many countries, the use of captagon may be significant.

Interviews with law enforcement officers suggest that, since 2014, captagon seizures have been increasing in a number of Middle East countries (particularly Israel, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates). Tens of millions of tablets, most of which carried the captagon logo, were also seized between 2010 and 2014 in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. These countries were usually assumed to be transit or production territories for captagon, and not large consumer markets, but recent data suggest that use in this area may be also on the rise (particularly in Syria).

Where is captagon produced?

While illicit captagon was originally sourced mainly from eastern Europe, production appears to have shifted into the Middle East, the drug's main consumer market. Production methods used there show many similarities with those used in Europe, suggesting that European organised crime groups may be involved in Middle East amphetamine production. The report also describes how amphetamine produced in Europe may be shipped to the Middle East in bulk or in the form of captagon tablets.

Can captagon be linked to terrorist attacks in Europe?

Some media reports have linked captagon use to the perpetrators of terrorist acts in Europe or terrorist groups based in areas of conflict in the Middle East. Forensic pathology findings did not detect the use of 'illicit drugs or alcohol' by the terrorists involved in the attack in the Bataclan venue (Paris) on 13 November 2015. Nor has captagon use been directly implicated in attacks in other European countries.

The report concludes that the suggested links between terrorism and captagon use featuring in media reports appear to have been overstated. As is the case for other types of drug, some terrorist groups may exploit the captagon market to finance their activities and some terrorists may at times use drugs, but the evidence available does not indicate any particular association between captagon and terrorism within the EU.

This report is based on a report in French [Captagon: déconstruction d'un mythe](#), published in July 2017 by the *Observatoire français des drogues et des toxicomanies* (the French national focal point in the Reitox network) and the EMCDDA.