



News release

CAPTAGON TRAFFICKING AND THE ROLE OF EUROPE

New report shows Europe as key transshipment area for captagon bound for Arabian Peninsula

(13.09.2023 — **EMBARGO 11:30 CEST | 10.30 WEST/Lisbon**) Europe is a key transshipment point for captagon arriving from the **Middle East** and bound for the **Arabian Peninsula**. This is the main finding of a new report published today by the **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)** and the German Federal Criminal Police Office, the **Bundeskriminalamt (BKA)** ⁽¹⁾.

Captagon is mainly produced in the **Middle East**, especially in **Syria** and **Lebanon**. The report states that recent large shipments of captagon seized in the EU were 'destined to be rerouted towards countries of the **Arabian Peninsula** ⁽²⁾ — particularly **Saudi Arabia** — where the main captagon consumer markets are concentrated.' The illicit drug found in captagon tablets seized and analysed in the EU is, almost exclusively, amphetamine.

Trafficking may consist of the direct rerouting of a consignment, or sending a delivery on after it has been unloaded and repacked in the EU. **Syrian** and **Lebanese** nationals (by nationality or birth) are frequently involved, some being resident in EU countries. Armed groups linked to the Syrian regime in **Lebanon** and **Syria** are seen to play a role in the captagon trade. The report also presents evidence indicating that the Assad regime financially benefits from the captagon trade.

The **EMCDDA** and **BKA** worked together to produce the report under the **European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT)** ⁽³⁾. This security initiative, driven by EU Member States, prevents, detects and reacts to threats to the EU posed by organised and serious international crime.

The report is based on information provided by seven countries: **Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands** and **Romania**. Further contributions were provided by countries at an **EMCDDA** expert meeting in October 2022.

Despite the large consignments arriving in the EU, no significant use of captagon was reported by **EU Member States**. However, in countries with diasporas from the **Arabian Peninsula**, some pockets of use may exist. Although amphetamine is consumed in Europe, it is usually taken in powder or paste form and rarely as captagon tablets.

Captagon tablet production in the EU

In addition to captagon tablets being produced outside, and trafficked through, the EU, the analysis also found evidence of the production of captagon tablets inside Europe. This takes place mainly in the **Netherlands**, where the majority of the amphetamine for the European market is made. According to the Dutch police, large production sites, where captagon tablets are produced from amphetamine powder, have been found in the Netherlands at the rate of one or two per year. It is believed that captagon tablet production is not a typical activity of synthetic drug producers in the country, but rather an opportunistic way to make money. Besides this 'on demand' production of captagon in the Netherlands, drug-related criminal networks in the EU do not appear to be involved in the captagon trade.

Seizures on the rise

Increasing numbers of captagon tablets have been seized in the EU since 2018 in transit to the **Arabian Peninsula**. The total amount reported individually by **EU Member States** during the data collection for this report was 127 million tablets and 1 773 kilograms (see Annex 1). The largest seizure of 84 million tablets was in Salerno (Italy) in 2020. The report suggests that the EU seems to have replaced **Turkey** as a key transshipment point.

Large quantities of amphetamine and captagon tablets have been seized every year in, and near, the **Arabian Peninsula** in the past decade, and seizures continue to increase. For instance, **Saudi Arabia** reported seizing 73 tonnes of amphetamine in 2021 (compared with 18 tonnes in 2016). There have also been several seizures in the **Arabian Peninsula** where the circumstances indicate shipping from Europe. The case studies presented in the report describe innovative concealment methods, with tablets being found in shipments of furniture, marble, paper and industrial equipment. Forensic analysis of captagon tablets seized in the EU suggests that they typically contain around 32 milligrams of amphetamine sulfate. This means that around 32 kilograms of pure amphetamine sulfate are needed to make 1 million tablets.

Need for a coordinated EU security response

The report underlines the need for coordinated EU action, focusing on two distinct areas:

- Tackling the production of captagon tablets within the EU, with a focus on precursors, production of amphetamine and tableting operations.
- Preventing the EU being used as a transshipment zone for captagon produced in Syria and Lebanon for markets in and around the Arabian Peninsula.

The report concludes that: 'The exceptional scale of captagon shipments and the geopolitically important nature of the trade in this drug provide a compelling argument for a coordinated EU security response and EMPACT provides an appropriate mechanism to achieve this'.

This report supports the joint EMCDDA-Europol [EU Drug Markets: In-depth analysis on amphetamine to be published in October 2023](#).

Historical background: Captagon® was originally the brand name of a pharmaceutical product manufactured in the 1960s as a treatment for attention deficit disorder and narcolepsy. Its two main markets were Europe and the Middle East. Following global controls on one of its ingredients (fenetylline) in 1986, the drug ceased to be produced for medical purposes. As stocks of the medicine became exhausted and controls intensified, tablets sold as captagon ('fake captagon') containing other substances, mainly amphetamine, appeared on the illicit drug market. Information suggests that tablets seized on illicit drug markets in recent years are not diverted Captagon® tablets containing fenetylline, but clandestinely manufactured tablets containing amphetamine. These are embossed with a similar logo to the original medicine bearing two half-moons.

(1) This report is the result of an EMPACT action to improve and analyse the criminal intelligence picture on the production and trafficking of captagon tablets and the role of Europe. The action was led by Germany (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA) and the EMCDDA.

(2) The countries of the Arabian Peninsula are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Yemen.

(3) For more on EMPACT, see https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/activities/empact-keeping-eu-safe_en

