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Why legalising cannabis is a win for all

To this day, the EU is blocking the legalisation of marijuana despite wide societal acceptance and many arguments in favour of allowing it

As a joint, in a bong, in a vaporizer, in cookies, brownies or gummy bears - there are many ways to consume cannabis. But they have only one thing in common: they are banned in the European Union. Although Germany is now joining the ranks of EU countries seeking partial legalisation, the stumbling block of EU law that stands in its way persists. Previously, countries such as the Netherlands and Malta have tried to legalise the use of cannabis. But time and again, the EU blocked these steps. To achieve at least partial permission, countries have to build loopholes, but these again limit the benefits of legalisation. The supply of Dutch coffeeshops thus continues to happen on the black market — a missed opportunity.

European drug law is based on a UN convention that is already more than 60 years old. While other laws have been adapted again and again as society has changed, drug law has stood still in time. But given the changes in society, EU-wide legalisation should now be considered. Already financially, it would pay off for the EU. The current turnover of the cannabis market in the European Union is estimated at a total of 15 to 35 bn euros. Money that currently runs into the black market and thus does not generate a single cent in taxes. If cannabis could be sold legally, however, the black market would be deprived of its livelihood and state revenues would increase. A win-win situation.

Busting common myths about cannabis

Legalisation across the EU would also be possible. Although laws such as the Schengen Implementing Convention and criminal law would have to be adapted, this is easily achievable with the consent of the member states. Nor is the UN Convention referred to above likely to be an obstacle. The EU could simply withdraw from this convention and re-enter it with a restriction on cannabis. Here, Switzerland could serve as a model, where this has already happened.

If you discuss legalisation with opponents, you usually get the same old arguments. Legalisation would cause the number of cannabis users to explode, pose a huge danger, cause an epidemic of drug addicts as a gateway drug and also endanger children and young people. Arguments that stoke fear but do not depict the actual situation.

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There seems to be a general belief that legalisation would lead to a sharp increase in users. However, if one looks at the EU comparison, adult use in the Netherlands - where cannabis can be bought since the 1970s - has not been on the rise. The proportion of French people who have already used cannabis is almost 50 per cent, more than 20 percentage points higher than in the Netherlands. In the United States, too, no clear connection between legalisation and increased consumption can be found.

Furthermore, cannabis is considered by many opponents to be a dangerous drug, which many even equate to chemical intoxicants. Of course, cannabis is not a vegetable. Damage to the health of the lungs and - especially when consumed by young people - the brain should not be underestimated. But these dangers should also be seen in the context of other, legal drugs. It should be kept in mind that alcohol and nicotine kill several million people each year, whereas no deaths from cannabis are known. To reach a lethal overdose, a person would have to smoke about 680 kilograms of cannabis within 15 minutes - that is about the weight of a full-grown cow. The probability of addiction to cannabis is also lower than that of nicotine or alcohol. So, one has to ask whether a substance that is less harmful to one's health than legal drugs should not fall under the same personal responsibility as the latter.

Regulation and its benefits

However, the danger posed by the illegal sale of cannabis should not be underestimated. This danger can be made particularly clear with a small thought experiment. Imagine that alcohol were to be banned from one day to the next. Consumption would not simply stop, but instead of a state-regulated market, a black market would emerge. If people then bought illegally distilled alcohol, they would have no way of knowing how strong it was and whether anything had been added to it. This is precisely the problem with the sale of cannabis. For instance, there are more and more cases of synthetic cannabis being added, which is many times more dangerous than its organic neighbour and can even lead to

death. Consumers have no chance to recognise this or to check the quality of their product. This is a risk that could be eliminated through legalisation.

Legalisation could even reduce the number of people who use hard drugs.

Another persistent prejudice is that cannabis is a gateway drug. The argument is based on the fact that most people who use hard drugs have already used cannabis. An argument that does not even work if you squint both eyes. After all, you don't assume that people drink schnapps because they've had a Radler before. Instead, legalisation could actually reduce the number of people who take hard drugs. Because access to hard drugs in the EU often happens through contact with drug dealers for cannabis. If you ask people who use cannabis in Sweden whether they could also obtain other drugs from their cannabis source, a full 52 per cent answered yes, while in the Netherlands only 14 per cent did. So, if the goal is to protect against turning to hard drugs, this would be possible by crowding out the black market.

The EU remains stubborn. Following the motto of the former German Federal Drug Commissioner Marlene Mortler: Cannabis remains forbidden because it is illegal.

A completely understandable aversion to the legalisation of cannabis arises from the fear that there might suddenly be a higher proportion of minors using cannabis. A fear, however, that is unfounded. In an EU comparison, cannabis use by schoolchildren in the Netherlands is lower than the EU average. In the United States, too, it has been confirmed that legalisation does not lead to an increase in youth consumption, but rather to a decrease. So allowing cannabis actually leads to more youth protection, because it makes it massively difficult for the black market. And let's be honest - which black market dealer asks for an ID card?

But despite these arguments, which have been known for a long time, the EU remains stubborn. Following the motto of the former German Federal Drug Commissioner Marlene Mortler: Cannabis remains forbidden because it is illegal. It is high time to rethink this attitude. Because cannabis has long since arrived in society, even if some would prefer to close their eyes to this reality of life. Legalisation will not force a hash brownie into the hands of a toddler or a joint onto the unwilling. Instead, existing consumers will be protected. And money is flushed into the tax coffers. What could be so wrong with that?



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