

Strasbourg, 16 January 2012

Dear Mrs May,

I write to you regarding the issue of *khat* in the UK - the leaves and shoots of the bush *Catha edulis*, chewed by many people as a "social drug".

My home town Malmö at the Swedish side of the Öresund Bridge is the main entrance point for khat into Sweden. According to Swedish law, khat is an illegal narcotic. The social and human costs of khat abuse in Sweden are high and rising. Every year, increasing amounts of the drug are smuggled across our border, in spite of increased commitment by police and customs personnel. There are suspicions of a connection between the illegal khat trade and financing of networks such as the Al-Shabaab in Somalia. I view this matter most seriously for all these reasons.

Most of the khat that reaches Sweden can do so because there is still a legal entrance route to Europe via the Netherlands and the UK, the only two EU countries where khat is not banned. Khat is both very bulky and a highly perishable substance which must be consumed quickly after harvest. Keeping the legal flight route open is crucial for the traders of khat.

Last week, the Dutch government requested the Parliament in the Hague to add khat to the list of illegal narcotic substances, taking the first step towards a Dutch khat ban.

This initiative by the Dutch government also brings the issue of the UK stand to the forefront. Will the UK be the only EU country allowing an inflow of this amphetamine-like drug? Is there any debate on the legality of khat in the UK today? Do you see any possibility of a British ban in the near future?

Finally, may I invite you for a joint study visit in Malmö, to learn more about the Swedish situation and experiences?

Please feel free to contact me at any time if you would like to discuss this matter further. I look much forward to hearing from you.

With kind regards,

Olle Schmidt
Member of the European Parliament
ALDE/Swedish Liberal Party