

Legislation relating to cannabis use and possession: definitions and overview of the situation in Europe



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The laws governing cannabis use, tolerated in some countries yet totally banned in others, vary significantly from one European Union country to another. However, the terms used in the debate are often not fully understood. Despite being regularly employed in public forums, the concepts of liberalisation, legalisation, depenalisation, decriminalisation and classification as a petty offence do not always have a commonly accepted definition.

Developed drawing on the references cited in the bibliography and with the help of legal experts and researchers specialising in penal matters, this note firstly presents a lexicon assembling a few proposals for the definition of the main terms used in the recurrent debates relative to the legal status of cannabis. This is followed by an overview of current legislation concerning cannabis use and possession in France and Europe, along with a comparison of the most significant legislative changes outside Europe.

Author : *Ivana Obradovic*

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