

1 December 2008

By: Tudor Vieru, Science Editor



Medicinal diamorphine (heroin) ampoules, used under prescription in the US
Wikipedia Commons

Heroin Sold Under Prescription in Switzerland

Swiss citizens voted the initiative on Sunday

Heroin (diamorphine) can from now on be obtained in drug stores in Switzerland, the people voted on Sunday. Patients with severe dependency will be able to buy both their doses and their needles from the pharmacies, in a move that the Social-Democrat party says will drop crime rates in the country. The Swiss People's Party (SVP) argued that the measure would increase the number of addicts and would also encourage them not to quit whatever drug they are on.

Although SVP called for this new referendum, 68 percent of all voters approved of the government-backed proposal, which argued that addicts would be much less inclined to resort to crime in order to get the money they need for their daily fix, if medical prescriptions were to be readily available. The ruling party, which was backed by the Green Party as well, also said that the move would lower the mortality rate among this segment of the population.

"The people have confirmed that the conditions of the 90s, with open drug scenes in all towns, must belong to the past," the Social-Democrats announced after the results were made public. "The new legal framework will favor the drug mafia and will lead to new, open drug scenes and make the jobs of the police and justice departments even more difficult," SVP responded in a statement.

The opposing party's main critic is that the new legislation, which was already approved by the parliament, will encourage thousands of heroin addicts throughout the country to dwell in their habits, as health plans and social aids help them even more than they do the rest of the population. They also argue that the strain on the budget will be too high.

Surprisingly, the same referendum showed that the population was against the decriminalization of cannabis, which was proposed by the Social-Democrats and the Greens. Some 63 percent of voters rejected the proposal, saying that the level of addiction cannabis creates was too low to threaten users' health.