The Greek parliament adopted the law on medicinal cannabis

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On March 1st 2018, the Greek Parliament adopted the bill "Provisions for the Production of end products of medicinal cannabis". The Standing Committee on Social Affairs discussed the draft law at two meetings of the committee and organized a hearing in the Greek Parliament with participation of patient organizations, drug service providers, representatives of the scientific community, agricultural trade unions and civil society organizations. An extensive debate took place in Parliament's plenary, which ended with the adoption of the bill. The majority of the Parliament voted in favor of the bill.

It was characteristic that initially almost all political parties in the Parliament were in favor of legalizing medicinal cannabis, but in the end the majority of the parties of the opposition voted against. The ruling parties, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) and Independent Greeks (ANEL) voted in favor of the bill pointing out the beneficial properties of cannabis and the need for patients to have access to preparations of herbal cannabis. The opposition party Democratic Alignment (Dimokratiki Symparataxi) and the River Party (Potami) voted also in favor of this bill despite their critical remarks that the government presented a draft law with many shortcomings, failed to put openly the bill in public consultation and proposed to regulate essential provisions by ministerial decisions instead of incorporating them into the law. The positive vote, said these opposition parties, was because the bill is a good step in the right direction to regulate medicinal cannabis because it has beneficial health effects and in order to meet the needs of patients. The opposition parties, New Democracy, (Nea Dimokratia), Golden Dawn (Chrysi Avgi), the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Centrist Union (Enosi Kentroon), voted against. Their arguments were of procedural and legislative nature. They highlighted, like all the opposition parties, that the bill has shortcomings, is improvised, is not clear and has many gaps than have to be settled by joint ministerial decisions. In addition, despite the government’s clear stance that the bill on medical cannabis use has to be discussed in its restricted context, the opposition parties New Democracy, the Communist party of Greece and Golden Dawn considered the bill the portal for the legalization of the cannabis for recreational purposes.

The Ministers for Health and Rural Development and Food stressed that the bill was a first step for regulation of medicinal cannabis. Is made after consultations with experts, took into consideration the recommendations of the working group, which was set up by the Minister of Health, where qualified scientists and the responsible authorities participated. The bill is not perfect, but it regulates basic issues concerning the access of patients to herbal cannabis preparations, and gives "strictly the possibility to natural and legal persons to produce cannabis for the sole purpose of producing final cannabis products, for supplying the state monopoly and dispensing them to patients or exporting them for medical purposes".

The debate in the parliament was not limited to the issue of cannabis for medical purposes. Almost all parties saw the bill was an opportunity to express also their views on cannabis use for recreational purposes. The New Democracy party, the Golden Dawn and the Communist party expressed their strong opposition to such a development. The opposition party “To Potami” supported the legalization of Cannabis for recreational purposes, and suggested that the government has to table a draft law for this purpose after one year. The former Prime Minister of Greece, George Papandreou expressed also his views during the hearing in the Committee on Social Affairs.
Affairs proposing the legalization of Cannabis also for recreational purposes. The majority of the organizations and individuals that took part at the hearing, like Patient organizations, non-governmental organizations and service providers to drug users supported the bill in their interventions. NGO Diogenis submitted its comments in writing to the Committee on Social Affairs. See the website of Diogenis. [www.diogenis.info](http://www.diogenis.info)

In the plenary session of the Parliament, the Ministers of Health and Agricultural Development and Food expressed their disappointment about the attitude of the parties that were against the bill. The ministers committed themselves to proceed with the regulations necessary for the implementation of the law. Although the optimism of civil society organizations, especially the patients, is moderate, we hope that the Minister of Health will proceed immediately to establish a coordination body in order to make possible the access of patients to medicinal cannabis. The minister of health committed himself in his final intervention at the debate in the parliament that in cooperation between the ministry of health and the National Organization for Medicines (EOF) a structure will be created to support the implementation of the law. There is no justification, after the adoption of the law, to further delay the possibilities to order herbal and other preparations of medicinal cannabis.

See bellow part of the text of the Explanatory Memorandum of the law on the measures proposed for the production and availability of medicinal cannabis. (this is not an authorized translation)

“The proposed legislation includes the possibility:

a) to country’s patients, to get access to final medicinal cannabis products, given the therapeutic properties of cannabis in specific cases. The access of patients to final products of medicinal cannabis will be done in a clearly defined manner (as is the case for other substances of table B), controlled - to the extent that cannabis remains a narcotic drug and the most widespread illegal substance- in compliance with the specificities of cannabis and the production process of final products of medicinal cannabis,

b) to private and legal persons to cultivate varieties of cannabis for processing of raw materials and those substances in general, with the sole purpose of producing final medicinal cannabis products in Greece, investing in securing space and setting up cultivation and processing facilities

c) to create new jobs that will contribute to the development of the economy, in a leading sector that makes full use of the comparative, productive advantages of the country,

d) to obtain economic benefits for the state from exports of final products of medicinal cannabis and the taxation of the economic activities of the sector, given that the global market for the cultivation and processing of medicinal cannabis is in the early stages of development and therefore the supply lags significantly behind global demand.”