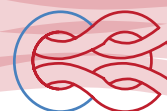


NEWSLETTER



DRUG POLICY NETWORK SEE

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2017



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We are growing - three new DPNSEE member organizations!

Country visit to Slovenia



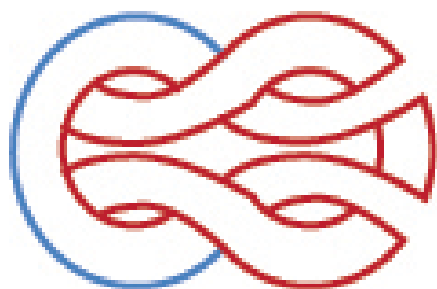
Within the frame of the project “Strengthening NGO capacity and promoting public health and human rights oriented drug policy in South Eastern Europe”, funded by EU and OSF, a visit to Slovenia took place on 26 – 28 of September.

On behalf of the project partners (and members of DPNSEE), Mr. Sasa Mijovic (NVO4Life), Mr. Erlind Plaku (AksionPlus) and Mr. Nikos Stergiou (Diogenis Drug Policy Dialogue), were the delegates who participated in this activity. The meetings were concluded in an excellent climate and there was great exchange of experiences and good practices on drug policy in Slovenia and in the area of SE Europe.

The visit was part of the efforts for the enlargement of the Network as an essential prerequisite for making it a strong and reliable partner. The main aims of the visit were to: (a) present DPNSEE to the Slovenian society, (b) build strong relationships, enhance contacts and improve drug policy dialogue with the relevant authorities, state institutions, policy makers and NGOs, (c) explore opportunities for partnerships and collaboration and (d) discuss possible applications of local civil society organizations for membership in DPNSEE. More specifically, the delegation had meetings with Mr. Jose Hren (Senior Adviser I, Directorate for Public Health, Ministry of Health) and also with representatives from the NGOs “Stigma” (Mr. Borut Bah), “DrogArt” (Mrs. Simona Sabic) and “Association of NGOs working on the fields of drugs and addictions” (Mrs. Zanin Copi), all based in Ljubljana.

You can read more at: <http://www.diogenis.info/cms/files/2017/10/Short-report-Slovenia-eng-1.pdf>

We are growing - three new DPNSEE member organizations!



DRUG POLICY NETWORK SEE

During the country visits to FYRO Macedonia (December 2016), Croatia (March 2017) and Bulgaria (2017), DPNSEE membership was promoted as the potential for exchange, partnerships and joint work. Following that, new organisations applied for membership:

- Coalition 'Sexual and Health Rights of Marginalized Communities', Skopje, FYRO Macedonia. (LINK TO <http://coalition.org.mk/?lang=en>) promotes protection and respect of the fundamental human rights of marginalized communities, with focus on LGBTI persons, drug users, people living with HIV, sex workers and marginalized women.
- Terra, Rijeka, Croatia. (LINK TO <http://www.udrugaterra.hr/>) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in 1998, on the initiative of a group of experts involved in work of several local institutions and foreign organizations. The launched program was an answer to the growing epidemic of addiction and a real threat of spreading HIV/AIDS among the addicts, that comes as a result of sharing used needles and cookers, and accordingly, by sexual intercourse, on wider population.
- Initiative for Health Foundation, Sofia, Bulgaria. (LINK TO www.initiativeforhealth.org) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, with the mission to improve public health by supporting people in health and social risk to be better informed, responsible and independent. Their goal is to prevent the spread of HIV through the development of evidence-based social and health services as a stable and recognizable organization with a highly competent team.

The DPNSEE Board supported the applications and called the Extraordinary Electronic General Assembly of the Network to vote on the applications. 12 out of 19 member organisations participated in the extraordinary General Assembly, all voting in favour of the proposals. The Network now has 22 member organisations in 11 countries.

Drug problem and its influence on children and youth



Representatives of the Drug Policy Network South East Europe, including Nebojša Đurasović, member of the DPNSEE Board, Irena Molnar, DPNSEE Communication officer and office manager and Milutin Milošević, Executive director, met with Ms Vesna Dejanović, Project Officer Child Protection at the UNICEF Belgrade Office.

The motive for this meeting came upon the decision of the Novi Sad authorities to supply free drug tests to parents in local schools (last two classes of elementary and all secondary schools) as from the start of the new school year. DPNSEE addressed a letter to the UNICEF Representative in the Republic of Serbia stating that this action jeopardizes children rights and is very problematic for several reasons, including:

Drug testing in schools is not needed and effective; it is even forbidden in some EU countries. Whatever the results of the test should be, confirmed drug use or parents' mistaken assumptions, the trust between children and parents will be broken.

Drug tests are already available in pharmacies. This action can only raise paranoia among parents and have unanticipated and unintended consequences.

The tests can recognise only "traditional" psychoactive substances - and for each of them a separate test is needed. For a full evidence of drug use, a complete set of several tests is needed!

The tests are not functioning with the new psychoactive substances, which are even more dangerous than the traditional ones. Use of new substances, which may cause more harm than what we have today.

DPNSEE believes that society needs to invest more into serious and comprehensive prevention and not to repressive measures. That has to be part of a systematic approach to the drug use phenomenon, especially for children and young people, ranging from school based programs to community interventions.

Long way to make good changes in the Law

Ministry of Health of Serbia proposed changes to the Law on psychoactive controlled substances at the end of 2016. Limited proposals and public debate, organised during 4 weeks of festive days, caused serious concern among civil society organisations in Serbia. DPNSEE with two member organisations Prevent and ReGeneration, along with three other partner organisations, made large number of comments and proposals to improve the proposed draft.

Unfortunately, there was no related reply from the Ministry for more than 9 months. Finally, with the support of the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, a meeting was organised on October 4 to discuss DPNSEE's contribution. Representatives from the Ministry of Health, Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, Office for combating drugs and Ministry of Interior met with the aim to present civil society organisations' comments and proposals and exchange about which of them should be incorporated into the next version of the draft.

Although we were prepared for qualified discussion about our proposals, it turned out that the Working group in the Ministry of Health already prepared the next draft and that some of our proposals were accepted. Despite the requests to specify which proposals were accepted and which not and why, the representatives of the Ministry remained on the position that it will be possible only when this new version will be sent for the next round of consultations.

The meeting had limited success, because we presented comprehensive and qualified approach to dealing with legislation and stayed on our positions regarding very important issues related to drugs: need to ensure involvement of civil society organisations in all issues related to drug use, wider set of services of the early warning system that is to be established (including field work and consulting), right to bring samples of substances for checking, wider distribution of naloxone around the country, use of language that will not stigmatise people who use drugs, respecting the right to information and protection of sensitive information, better coordination of all the stakeholders, especially reporting about drugs, etc. The proposed amendments to the Law still have to pass a few levels to come to the Parliament and we are ready to keep advocating for a better Law.

DIOGENIS

GREECE

Letter of NGOs to the Greek Minister of Health, on the issue of medical use of cannabis.



Last July, “Diogenis – Drug Policy Dialogue” together with five other organizations - participating in the initiative for the establishment and coordination of the “Greek Observatory for the Medical Use of Cannabis” - addressed a letter to the Greek Minister of Health, Mr. Xanthos.

With this letter, the organizations requested formal information regarding the developments and next steps of the Ministry of Health on the issue and highlighted the need for an integrated and effective model for the medical use of cannabis. Moreover, specific recommendations that should be taken in serious consideration by the competent authorities were proposed: (a) the personalized needs and human rights of each patient according to the European Human Rights’ Charter for Patients; (b) the need to develop a plan able to boost domestic production while avoiding the inherent risks of a market dominated by large multinational corporations and international investment funds and (c) the need for responsible information and training of health professionals and the certification of physicians for the prescription right.

The letter closed with an announcement by the collaborating organizations concerning their initiative to set up and coordinate the “Greek Observatory on Medical Use of Cannabis”. The aim of this partnership is to facilitate and strengthen partnerships and consultation with the relevant Ministries, while offering voice and strength to involved groups of patients, scientists and other stakeholders. A fruitful and productive cooperation with the Ministry of Health as well as all the competent authorities in this field is of utmost importance. All procedures should be carried out on the basis of one important factor: the direct, unhindered and legitimate access of patients to high-quality cannabis for medical use.

Research implementation: Treatment and Harm Reduction Services in the context of the economic crisis, developments and challenges



Organization 'Diogenis' Drug Policy Dialogue, as partner of a broader project entitled "New approaches in Harm Reduction and Practices" has undertaken the implementation of activities on the issue of "Treatment and Harm Reduction Services in the context of the economic crisis, developments and challenges". This project is financially supported by the European Commission.

This part of the project aims to provide knowledge about the developments and challenges concerning treatment and harm reduction services in the context of the economic crisis and to examine possibilities, which can guarantee the continuity and further development of services. In this context, organization 'Diogenis' carried out a research, with the aim to collect views of policy makers, practitioners, drug users and NGOs about the consequences of the economic crisis on health and social services as well as the measures needed to tackle existing and future problems. For this purpose, 'Diogenis' cooperated with researchers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Romania. Different countries, who were responsible to conduct interviews based on a research questionnaire and summarize the outcomes of these interviews in a related short report. Interviews were conducted with policy makers, practitioners, drug users and NGOs.

The research questionnaire included the following questions:

- A. Looking back to the period of the economic crisis since 2008, how would you –from your point of view– summarize the main shortcomings of the competent authorities and the responsible service providers related to drug users? Which of their decisions in terms of austerity measures could be different? Where there alternatives that have been ignored? Can you refer to possible options that were ignored?
- B. Which actions of the competent authorities and service providers affected most the health and wellbeing of drug users?
- C. Did NGOs play a role in the search of solutions for the austerity measures? Which actions have been undertaken to maintain the continuity of services and support of drug users?
- D. Which would be your proposals towards the competent authorities and the service providers for a good and effective response to the adverse consequences of drug use? What can be the contribution of drugs users in this respect?

Research outcomes were presented at the Mediterranean/Southeast European conference that took place on 19-21 October in Nicosia, Cyprus. More information and news regarding the conference and the results of this research will be announced at the next DPNSEE newsletter.

CENTER FOR LIFE

GREECE

HIV Awareness Program for Senior High School Students

HIV Prevention Program

for Senior High School Students



Scientifically approved by



Lead Donor



With the kind support

Beiersdorf

MAC AIDS FUND



The Centre for Life is implementing a national awareness program in order to inform high school students about HIV and AIDS.

The Centre for Life will be conducting informative speeches on the subject of HIV and AIDS to high school students in the thirteen (13) districts of Greece during the whole current academic year (2017-2018). The Organization aims to cover an ongoing existing and crucial gap, for individual and public health.

Centre for Life's initiative for educating the youth population has the nationwide permit from the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and is implemented from especially trained and experienced staff of the Organization. The scientific editing of the printed and the digital educational material that will be used during the informative speeches has been approved by the National School of Public Health, while the pedagogical suitability has been approved by the Institute of Educational Policy.

Considering that a significant part of the population, especially the student and youth population, has no knowledge about why and how they should protect themselves during sexual activities and while stigmatization and social exclusion of people living with HIV/AIDS continues to exist, it seems necessary to conduct educational speeches for the youth in relation to HIV and AIDS.

The "HIV Prevention Program for Senior High School Students" aims at:

- providing valid information, adapted to the modern scientific data, in relation to the HIV infection and AIDS
- informing and raising awareness for the necessity and the ways of protection from the HIV virus
- eliminating the stereotypes and fighting stigma that is related to HIV/AIDS

POSITIVE VOICE

GREECE

Training seminar to Security Forces.

As part of the effort to educate and inform law enforcement forces on sexually transmitted diseases, use of substances and the appropriate behavior of security staff towards the vulnerable group of users of psychoactive substances, we held an information/training seminar on Tuesday, 3-10-2017 on the Ministry of Commercial Shipping and particularly on the headquarters of Navy Patrol. Among those who attended were also men of the Drug Squad. The themes were "HIV/AIDS and psychoactive drug users" and "Discrimination and Stereotypes". This action is taking place in the wake of the seminars we launched last year for Police officers in regard that the users will have a more humane treatment." This quarter we also continued to distribute sterilized injecting equipment to the drug street markets of downtown Athens throughout our streetwork and also we have held once again educational/informative seminars for our volunteers"

PROMETHEUS

GREECE

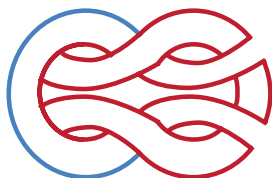
I Deserve to Know

Hellenic Liver Patient Association “Prometheus”, since March 2016, is implementing a nationwide project entitled “I Deserve to Know”. The purpose of this action is the continuous provision of liver elastography screening (Fibroscan) to beneficiaries that have been diagnosed with liver diseases across Greece through collaboration with hepatology clinics, doctors of public hospitals and rehabilitation or substitution units. This project was thoroughly planned after taking into consideration the urgent need of people who live with liver diseases for unobstructed access to diagnostic testing. Focusing on the socially vulnerable group of People Who Inject Drugs (PWID), a population with high prevalence of hepatitis C, the certified personnel of “Prometheus” from July until September 2017 implemented 13 visits, in substitution centres of Greek Organization Against Drugs “OKANA”, in the cities of Athens, Chania, Rethumno and Kavala. During these visits, 406 beneficiaries with liver diseases became aware of their stage of liver fibrosis.

One day meeting: "Elimination of Hepatitis C in specific populations in the light of new developments" (20/07)



Hellenic Liver Patient Association “Prometheus” in collaboration with Dept. of Hygiene, Epidemiology and Medical Statistics School of Medicine, University of Athens, and Ms V. Sypsa, with the support of Hepatitis B and C Public Policy Association (HBCPPA), organized a one day meeting entitled “Elimination of Hepatitis C in Specific Populations in the light of new developments” on 20/07/2017 in Athens Greece. The purpose of the one day meeting was the holistic approach of Viral Hepatitis C in the light of specific population groups, including PWID, and in the context of recent developments in Greece. This purpose was achieved by the implementation of 5 round tables and presentations from our guest speakers.



DRUG POLICY NETWORK SEE

4Life, Podgorica, Montenegro

Aksion Plus, Tirana, Albania

Aliat, Bucharest, Romania

ARAS, Bucharest, Romania

Cazas, Podgorica, Montenegro

Centre for Life, Athens, Greece

Coalition 'Sexual and Health Rights of Marginalized Communities', Skopje, FYRO Macedonia

Diogenis, Athens, Greece

HOPS, Skopje, FYRO Macedonia

Initiative for Health Foundation, Sofia, Bulgaria

Juventas, Podgorica, Montenegro

Labyrinth, Kosovo

Margina, Tuzla, Bosnia Herzegovina

Positive Voice, Athens, Greece

Prevent, Novi Sad, Serbia

Proi, Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina

Re Generacija, Belgrade, Serbia

RHRN, Bucharest, Romania

SEEAN, Ljubljana Slovenia

Terra, Rijeka, Croatia

Viktorija, Banja Luka, Bosnia Herzegovina

Romanian Harm Reduction Network (RHRN), Romania

Prometheus, Greece

The newsletter is aiming to inform and keep updated organisations, institutions and individuals on drug policy developments along with news in the website and social media of the network. Our plan is to actively involve member organisations to report about their activities and about developments in their countries.

The Newsletter is prepared and published by the Diogenis, Drug Policy Dialogue.

Members of the drug policy network feed into the Newsletter following on topics related to criminal justice, social and Health programmes, human rights and events of interest.

Reactions can be sent to: Diogenis Association, Fokionos 8, 10 563 Athens, Greece

E-mail: info@diogenis.info



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