

ACTIVITIES REPORT
ADIOGENIS DRUG POLICY DIALOGUE
2017

Summary

Diogenis has developed activities with the co-financing of the Open Society Foundation in two projects supported by the European commission. **a.** The project in the Western Balkans "Strengthening the capacity of NGOs and promoting public health and human rights drug policy" and **b.** The project "New approaches to harm reduction policies and practices". The activities on advocacy in Greece could take place due to the grant of the Open Society Foundations. Besides these programmes Diogenis implemented a small project on "Drugs and Sustainable Development Goals: Development and Harm Reduction Policies" sponsored by Ladder (Local Authorities as Drivers for Development Education and Raising awareness).

The following actions have been carried out.

1. Enhancement of South East Europe NGO Network Cooperation. (DPNSEE). Visits to three countries Croatia, Bulgaria and Slovenia were held under Diogenes' responsibility resulting in the membership of three new NGOs. DPNSEE has currently 22 member organizations. **2.** Diogenis was responsible for the publication and dissemination of the Quarterly Newsletter of the Network of NGOs in SEE. **3.** Staff members of Diogenis participated at the 60th annual session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in Vienna. **4.** A public meeting has been organised in Athens on 28th of March to inform Service providers, NGOs and policy makers about results of the 60th CND **5.** The Regional drug policy Conference in SEE organised by Diogenis has been held in Thessaloniki in June 2017. **6.** The Harm Reduction Program in South East Europe continued. The research survey is finalised and the findings have been published in a report. **7.** A research has been held in the framework of the NAHRPP project in: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, the FYR of Macedonia and Romania about the views of policy makers, professionals in the field, drug users and NGOs concerning the economic crisis and its impact on drug policy. **8.** A drug policy conference has been held in Nicosia, Cyprus from 19-21 October 2017. The findings of the research on the impact of the economic crisis have been subject of discussion. **9.** Advocacy activities in Greece focussed on the regulation of cannabis for medical purposes, the re-opening of the supervised drug consumption facility in Athens and the harm reduction services in prisons settings.

Narrative report

a. Enhancement of South East Europe NGO Network. (DPNSEE).

Visits to three countries Croatia, Bulgaria and Slovenia were organised by Diogenis (preparation, contacts and report about the meetings in the three countries). The visits resulted in the membership of three NGOs from the respective countries. DPNSEE has currently 22 member organizations

b. The Quarterly Newsletter.

Under the responsibility of Diogenis 4 numbers of the Quarterly Newsletter of the Drug Policy Network in South East Europe have been published and disseminated. News about activities of the different DPNSEE members, regional

conferences, contacts with the national authorities and information about developments in drug policies at the national, European and Global level is the main content of the Newsletter. We would wish that the involvement of the member organisations would be more active. The Newsletter is appreciated but the commitment of the members must increase.

c. The annual session of the CND and public meeting in Athens about the 60th CND

The 60th CND session was this year very important as it was the first time after the UNGASS 2016 that the international community discussed issues about the future drug policy and the way that the UNGASS outcome document would be implemented. The decision to incorporate the evaluation of the political declaration of 2009 in the further deliberations was a positive sign that the UNGASS 2016 document will remain the most important consensus document that will be used for the progress of the discussion and the implementation of the recommendations by the member states.

Diogenis organised 10 days after the CND, a one day meeting in Athens with participation of all stakeholders (the drug co-ordination office, the responsible organisations for the implementation of the Drug Policy in the country, experts and NGOs) to inform them about the outcomes of the CND and discuss several relevant issues related to drug policy issues in Greece. A report of the meeting has been broadly disseminated.

d. The Annual Regional Drug Policy Conference in South East Europe

The Regional Drug Policy Conference of 2017 was the 7th in a series of regional conferences organised by Diogenis. It has been held in Thessaloniki, Greece from 8-10 June 2017. This regional conference has focussed on the issues: Sustainable Development Goals and Drug Policy, Women and drugs, Drugs and Internet, the Harm reduction project in South East Europe and the changing culture especially by the youth about drug use including new psychoactive substances. A session was devoted to initiatives in the countries of South East Europe related to the outcomes of the UNGASS and the role of NGO's, The Drug Policy Network in South East Europe (DPNSEE) made a presentation of the organisation, the involvement of drug users in policy issues has been discussed and participants reported about the developments on the cannabis policy in the region.

More than 40 participants from 11 countries attended the meeting and exchanged experiences and good practices on the issues of the programme. Representatives from UNODC, drug co-ordinators from Serbia, Croatia, Romania, scientists from several countries of the region, practitioners, NGO representatives and drug users participated at the conference.

Participants took actively part at the discussions and expressed appreciation about the programme and the valuable contacts between policy makers, scientists and practitioners. Diogenis Association will continue with the organisation of this annual meeting. It is a good opportunity to discuss developments in drug policy in the region and exchange experiences and best practices.

e. The harm reduction project in South East Europe

Under the leadership of the advocacy officer of Diogenis a research has taken place involving all countries in South East Europe. The Final report is now available. At the Regional conference in Thessaloniki in June 2017 Diogenis made a presentation referring to the procedure and the content of the answers to the questionnaire on the basis of which data have been collected. The report makes recommendations for future developments and actions. The data collected revealed important implications including common barriers and challenges in the region. The report summarizes them as follows: - Funding (inadequate, not available or available only through international sources), - Absence of political will, -absence of relevant legal framework, by-laws and guidelines for HR implementation, - lack of human resources (staff) due to economic crisis,

- Lack of knowledge and inadequate training in line with all the latest developments in the field of HR (staff, stakeholders, decision-makers), -Strong stigma and discrimination of healthcare professionals towards People Who Use Drugs (PWUD),
- Difficult access to accurate information and data, -inadequate coordination and cooperation among competent authorities and organization.

To address these barriers and challenges, several recommendations have been made by the participants of the research. In the work plan of 2018 the conclusions of the research will be worked out and actions will be undertaken in close co-operation with the NGOs in each state.

f. Research impact of the economic crisis on drug policy in South and SE Europe

In the framework of the project New Approaches in Harm Reduction policies and Practices (NAHRPP) a survey has been made on the impact of the economic crisis on drug policies. Policy makers, service providers in treatment and harm reduction, Drug users and representatives of NGOs have been asked to react on four questions of this survey. Researchers in 8 South and South East European countries conducted interviews with the above mentioned categories and made a report of their findings. The countries involved were: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Greece, Italy and Portugal.

g. Mediterranean and South East European Drug Policy Conference

From 19-21 October 2017 the conference on "Treatment and Harm reduction services in the context of the economic crisis, developments and challenges" has been held with participants from Portugal, Spain, Italy, Albania, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Cyprus. Among the issues discussed was the report about the impact of the economic crisis on drug policy, the developments of cannabis regulation in the participating countries, the legislation on decriminalisation of drug possession for personal use, the harm reduction services in prisons settings, the policy developments in the European Union and the new action plan 2017-2020 of the European Union.

h. Advocacy activities in Greece

1. The NGO platform for psychoactive substances/ advocacy on drug issues

The Co-operation with the NGOs that are members of the Platform on Psychoactive Substances has continued. Diogenis has the secretariat of the platform, prepares the meetings, the agenda and executes the decisions made. The advocacy officer of Diogenis is supporting the Platform. There are contacts with the drug users' organisation in Thessaloniki to join the platform, but there is not yet a formal membership. The presence of the NGOs in the drug policy debate in Greece is very visible. There is interest of journalists who often publish about the advocacy work on drugs. The contacts with the authorities is –for Greek standards- satisfactory. NGOs have met several times with the Minister of Health and are invited in hearings of the standing Committee of health and social affairs of the Greek Parliament. The NGO platform wrote a letter to the Ministers of Justice and Health about the need for immediate legislative intervention for re-opening the "Supervised drug consumption facility in Athens". (20/04/2107) and a letter to the Prime Minister on the occasion of the UNODC invitation to participate in the at the 60th Session of the Drugs Committee (CND) and address the plenary (10/03/2017). The NGOs reminded the Prime Minister that Greece does not have yet official Drug Strategy and that he must pay attention in his intervention for the harm reduction activities in the country. The prime minister –in the end- has not participated at the 60th CND in Vienna. In all our public activities, we have raised the issue that the government has to adopt a National Drug Strategy and submit it to the parliament. Up to now, there is no response to this request.

2. Regulation of Cannabis for medical use

The issue of Cannabis is continuing to be subject of intensive public discussion in Greece.

Diogenis is actively participating in the public debate on Cannabis for medical use in co-operation with three other Greek organisations namely Iliosporoi (Network for social and political ecology) Elef.syn.a (Libertarian Union for Rehabilitation) and Mama.ka (Mothers for Cannabis). Diogenis has regular meetings with these partners to discuss developments and initiatives. Diogenis does most of the secretarial work. A letter to Minister of Health on 07/02/2017 resulted in public making of the report of the ministerial commission on cannabis for medical use, which gave an impulse to the public debate with broad attention in the mass media. The minister made consequently, known -in a meeting with the standing committee of the health and social affairs Committee of the Greek parliament-his decision to proceed in a regulation that makes possible the availability of cannabis preparations for medical purposes. This regulation is now a fact, but the conditions to implement it are not in place. The medical community has to be informed about the prescription of these substances and the ministry must create the mechanisms to make cannabis available in practice. Diogenis and the cooperating organisations wrote to the minister of health on 29/06/2017 to further work on the implementation and announced the initiative of the organisations to establish and coordinate a scientific commission for the Medical Use of Cannabis" (29/06/2017). In the website of Diogenis all developments around cannabis for medical use are published as contribution to public information. (Recent developments on cannabis use 10/07/2017 and reaction of the ministry to questions of members of the Parliament (October 2017)

3. Media, publications, website, newsletter

The website of Diogenis is improved. There have been several technical shortcomings which almost all of them have been solved. There is –compared to previous years much more publicity about the activities of Diogenis in the press and social media. We are thinking to develop more the audio-visual communication.

g. Outcomes.

The results of the work programme are positive.

a. The activity of the country visits in Croatia, Bulgaria and Slovenia improved the relationship between NGOs and the authorities in these countries and resulted in three new members of the Drug Policy Network in South East Europe.

b. The new board of the Umbrella organisation has exercised their tasks independently. It is to be seen how the further development of the umbrella organisation will be. The establishment of the umbrella organisation was one of the main aims of the project. That Diogenis focussed more on the co-ordination of the project and let the umbrella organisation grow as an independent body is considered as a positive step.

c. The regional conference "Drug policy challenges and implementation in South East Europe" was a success both in terms of the program as well as the participation of policy makers, scientists, NGOs and users organisations. The presence of several drug coordinators from countries in the region was of importance. It is a way to reinforce the cooperation between the authorities and Civil Society.

d. Diogenis has more and more a leading role in undertaking initiatives for public debates about issues on drug policy. Also the advocacy role is increasing. The issue of Cannabis for medical use is on the political agenda partly due to interventions of Diogenis and its efforts to bring together important actors, promote co-operation and undertake joint actions.

e. The contacts with media and press are increasing, but it must be improved. The socio-political situation in the country is, however, not favourable for stable contacts with the media and the press. Priorities are continuously changing and focus predominantly on issues related to the negative impact of the economy on social issues.

i. Evaluation

As already pointed out, the new board of the Drug policy Network in SEE was a new step towards a more independent functioning of the umbrella organisation. Diogenis reduced its activities of co-ordination and support to the members of DPNSEE. The cooperation between Diogenis and the organisations in South East Europe focusses more on activities related to policy issues, drug policy trends and developments in Europe and internationally (UN and NGO initiatives) and advocacy at the national level.

The advocacy function will be reinforced through co-operation with other civil society actors (NGOs, organisations of affected populations in particular associations of drug users and the scientific community).

j. Sustainability

The activities of Diogenis and its profile in Greece is a development that will reinforce its presence in the country. The co-operation with other civil society organisations and initiatives is growing and new activities are undertaken.

As far as the financial sustainability is concerned Diogenis is trying to secure funding for activities. For the year 2018 the project in the Western Balkans will continue as well as the NAHRPP project. It is not known whether Diogenis would be considered by the EC eligible for projects in the EU candidate countries. In case that this is possible we would like to remain active in the region of South East Europe in particular in drug policy issues. Diogenis did not yet succeed to get funds of Greek donors, it remains a challenge and we are working on this.

The program LADDER (Local Authorities as Drivers for development Education and Raising Awareness) sponsored a small project to organise two seminars. The general objective of this project is to raise awareness regarding the strong relationship between SDGs and drug policy reform. Local authorities' staff, NGO members, academic community (teachers, professors, etc.) will be informed on the latest developments and new, well-documented and evidence-based approaches in the field of drug policy and harm reduction and their close connection and essential role in achieving a sustainable development.

Diogenis has submitted as lead organisation to the DG Justice of the European Commission the transnational project "New Challenges in Drug Policy and Civil Society involvement". Partners in this project are the organisations ALIAT (Romania), Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) Bulgaria, APDES (Portugal) and Correlation (Netherlands) If this project will be awarded it will start mid of 2017.

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