

REPORT ACTIVITIES
DIOGENIS DRUG POLICY DIALOGUE
2016

Summary

The year 2016 was the beginning of the independent functioning of the umbrella organisation “Drug Policy Network in South East Europe (DPNSEE). Diogenis remained the lead organisation of the project “Strengthening NGO capacity and promoting public health and human rights oriented drug policy in South Eastern Europe”. Some tasks of the project have been transferred in 2016 to the DPNSEE.

In January and February preparations of the meeting of the project partners and the DPNSEE board took place. The meeting took place in Belgrade on the 15-16 of February. The project partners and the DPNSEE board reviewed the developments concerning the application and the action plan 2016. The action plan and the budget has been discussed point by point and decisions have been made about the implementation. The budget as it has been submitted in the application focusses mainly on activities that will be implemented by Diogenis and DPNSEE. At this first meeting in 2016 a selection committee for the recruitment of the DPNSEE staff has been appointed. Diogenis has supported and coordinated the activities for the start of the office. The call of candidates for the position of the executive director, the financial manager and the secretariat is announced in websites of several organisations and the TACSO website. The staff members of DPNSEE were appointed on April 1st 2016. The office of DPNSEE in Belgrade is hired by April 1st; a bank account has been opened, arrangements with tax office etc. have been made and the executive director has been mandated to execute certain tasks for the proper functioning of the office. The new address of DPNSEE required the amendment of the statutes which took place end of April. The office functions satisfactorily for the staff and the member Organizations. The next meeting of the project partners and the DPNSEE board took place on June 2, 2016 in Thessaloniki. The implementation of the activities to improve contacts and drug policy dialogue with State institutions and policy makers was a main issue of discussion. The visits to the capitals of the Western Balkans have been fixed with precise data and the composition of the delegations was decided.

Two main activities took place in the framework of co-operation with the new umbrella Drug Policy Network in South East Europe (DPNSEE). The visit to the countries of the Western Balkans to discuss with the authorities, present the DPNSEE and exchange information about drug policy developments and the drug law reform meetings. The first meeting on drug law reform took place in Kosovo. Two more drug law reform meetings will take place in Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia end of November and beginning of December 2016.

Diogenis organized the regional conference on the UNGASS outcomes which has been held in Thessaloniki from 2-4 June 2016. (See below the report on the UNGASS conference)

The activity on harm reduction, carried out by Diogenis, completed its 1st phase. A questionnaire was answered by several organizations. As a result we have data from 14 organizations from 6 countries of the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Greece). (See also below the report on Harm Reduction).

The newsletters have of the Drug Policy Network been published by Diogenis until October 2016 and the last one will be published in December. The quarterly Newsletter was widely spread and published in several websites.

The UNGASS was a priority in this period. Diogenis commented on several draft proposals during the preparations of the UNGASS document, followed the discussions at the CND session in March, and organized on April 7th a meeting in Athens to inform interested institutions and NGO organizations about the UNGASS outcome document as prepared by the CND. This meeting has decided to send a statement to the Greek authorities expressing some key ideas which the Greek delegation could present at the UNGASS in New York. The Thessaloniki meeting in June discussed the relevance of the UNGASS document for the South East European region and proposed a plan of action to be implemented on the national level. Diogenis published a briefing paper in four languages (English, Greek, Albanian and Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian).

Diogenis published the book "Sentencing of drug offenders, the legislator's Policy and the Practice of the Courts in South Eastern Europe." and organized a public presentation on September 27th with a panel discussion about the situation in of drug offenders in Greece.

Diogenis collaborated with other organizations by delivering presentations on the UNGASS at the Greek National Conference of AIDS and Hepatitis, by taking part at round table discussions of the organization Iliosporoi about regulation of Cannabis in Greece and in particular the medicinal cannabis. Diogenis participated at the Global addiction Conference in Venice and made a presentation about the UNGASS and the way forward.

The UNGASS 2016

Preparations in SEE and Greece

The UNGASS was a priority during the period of this report. Diogenis commented on several draft proposals via the VNGOC during the preparations of the UNGASS document. On behalf of the organizations of the Drug Policy Network in SEE a statement has been published about "the UNGASS and its significance for South East Europe". The discussions at the CND session in March have been followed and on April 7th a meeting has been organized in Athens to inform interested institutions and NGO organizations about the UNGASS outcome document as prepared by the CND. At this meeting it was decided to send a statement to the Greek authorities expressing some key ideas which the Greek delegation could present at the UNGASS in New York. Diogenis published a briefing paper "*The UNGASS: background, aims and expectations*". *An opportunity for an honest and sincere assessment and an open transparent and forward-looking dialogue* in four languages (English, Greek, Albanian and Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian).

The Regional Conference: Outcomes of the UNGASS 2016 and EU action plan on drugs 2016-2020

From 2-4 June 2016, Diogenis, Drug policy Dialogue, organized the regional Conference on "Drug policy after the UNGASS 2016" in Thessaloniki, Greece. The conference was aiming to inform NGOs, policy makers and researchers in the region of South East Europe, working in the field of drugs, about the outcomes of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) which took place on 19-21 April 2016 in New York (USA). The main issue of discussion was the adopted document by the UNGASS: "Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem". Four main items of the outcome document, which are relevant for the work that has to be done the following two years in our region have been discussed. At the conference participated representatives of Civil Society Organisations, scientists from several universities, practitioners working in institutions that provide services to drug users and representatives from users' organizations. The programme contained presentations of experts on the issues:

- reflections on the UNGASS process, the outcome and the way forward with a speaker from UNODC (Mr. Jean-Luc Lemahieu, Director Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs (DPA) UNODC)

- The future of harm reduction and treatment in South East Europe. How can the call of the UNGASS be realized in the countries of the region? Input for the discussion: With speakers from the university of Athens, (Mrs Meni Malliori, Professor of Psychiatry at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens), the Centre for Therapy of Dependent Individuals (KETHEA), (Phaedon Kaloterakis, Assistant Director of KETHEA), Harm Reduction International, (John Peter Kools, President Harm Reduction International).

- The challenge of the new psychoactive substances. Existing legislation in countries in the region and exchange of good practices. With speakers from Civil Society organisations from the organisations ALIAT, Romania (Bogdan Glodeanu, director) and PRAKSIS, Greece (Marianella Kloka, Advocacy officer)
- The availability of internationally controlled substances/ opioid medicines, for medical and scientific purposes. What has to be done in order to secure adequate availability? With speaker from the Hellenic Society of Pain Management and Palliative Care (PARI.SY.A), Greece (Mrs A. Vadalouka, Assistant Professor of Anaesthesiology, University of Athens, President of the Organisation PARI.SY.A (Hellenic Society of Pain Management and Palliative Care)
- Cannabis policy and practice in the region of South East Europe. Exchange information about developments, models introduced and reactions of the public, the authorities and the political parties. With a speaker from Bedrocan. *Cannabis for medical purposes*, The Netherlands. (Mr. Jacob Erkelens, Project Manager of Bedrocan)
- The participants have been divided in four working groups to discuss about how to work on the national/local level with the positive outcomes of the UNGASS? Suggestions for the agenda of the upcoming 3 years.

The Conference met the expectations of the organisers and the participants. The presentations were informative and the discussions in the working groups resulted in a series of practical recommendations which can be used on the national and regional level.

Harm Reduction services research, capacity building and advocacy

The main objectives of this research are to examine Harm Reduction coverage, to do a stock-taking of the most recent developments in the field of Harm Reduction, to identify the most challenging issues, to suggest a work plan for the upcoming years and to create an advocacy tool for the Drug Policy Network in South East Europe (DPNSEE). Target countries/regions are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/99), Montenegro, Serbia, Greece, and South East European Region.

The research is being implemented in two phases: During the reporting period the 1st phase, has been realized. The 1st phase was a pilot. The research questionnaire (created and edited by Diogenis) was sent to all the member-organizations of DPNSEE and other organizations actively interested in the work of our network. At this 1st phase, member organizations were requested a) to complete the research questionnaire and b) to send a list with contact details for every relevant agency, institution or organization (governmental or not) working in the field of harm reduction within their country. The latter was requested in order to build and organize a strong and comprehensive 'pool' of organizations that will constitute our research sample in the 2nd phase with strong representative results for the SEE region. The deadline for this first phase was set on the 20/5/2016, but it was extended until September due to the fact that there was no immediate response from the member organizations.

The questionnaire was sent to 18 organizations. DPNSEE and Diogenis also completed the questionnaire (see Figure 1). More specifically:

- DPNSEE member organizations: Aksion Plus (Albania), Margina (Bosnia & Herzegovina), Viktorija (Bosnia & Herzegovina), Healthy Options Project Skopje (FYROM), Positive Voice (Greece), Centre for life (Greece), 4Life (Montenegro), Juventas (Montenegro), ALIAT (Romania), RHRN (Romania), Prevent (Serbia), SEANet (Slovenia).
- Other organizations: PROI (Bosnia & Herzegovina), Initiative for health foundation (Bulgaria), Association Terra (Croatia), EKTEPN-Greek Reitox Focal Point (Greece), CAZAS (Montenegro) and ARAS (Romania).

From those organizations we received the questionnaire back and completed by 12 organizations (Aliat, Margina, Viktorija, Hops, 4Life, Prevent, Aksion Plus, Juventas, Aras, Proi, Cazas and Ektepn). As a result we have data from 14 organizations from 7 countries of the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia). Despite that the deadline for the first phase is over we are still in communication with the remaining organizations in order to complete the questionnaire and help build a stronger picture for the situation in the SEE region.

Diogenis' advocacy officer, responsible for the research project, currently working on a first report describing the first results from the currently available data. Moreover the advocacy officer organizes skype interviews (based on the research questionnaire), with some of the research participants in order to obtain more detailed and qualitative information on the provided data needed for the progress of the research during the 2nd phase.

So far, the most interesting result from the 1st phase of the research is that the vast majority of SEE countries have to address a series of challenges regarding funding barriers, the absence of legal framework and/or quality guidelines for the provided services aiming at minimizing the harm for people who use drugs. Moreover, it is noted that within the same countries different organizations report different data, clearly illustrating reduced knowledge on the actual situation and the coverage in their countries. Cooperation and coordination between various organizations working in the same field is in most cases absent resulting in an overlap of the provided services.

Advocacy Activities in Greece

With the opening of the office in Athens and the appointment of three staff members with a work contract, the change of structure of the organisation and the very positive co-operation with the members of the Board and the advisory committee, Diogenis undertook several initiatives in the Greek public debate on drugs.

-The UNGASS has been a central issue. Diogenis was the only organisation that informed the broad public about the event in New York. There has been a rather broad Publicity in the press, TV and radio by several occasions. Presentations on the UNGASS have been held in National Events like the Panhellenic Conference of AIDS and Hepatitis in Athens and the global Conference on addictions in Venice.

The website and Facebook have improved. For some months a weekly radio broadcast of one hour has been used to inform a broader public.

In Co-operation with the NGOs that are members of the Platform on Psychoactive Substances, Diogenis is active in advocacy work on drugs. In July three letters have been sent to respectively the prime minister of Greece, the minister of Health and the Minister of justice advocating for the adoption of a National Drug strategy, the decriminalisation of drug possession for personal use and the inclusion of Harm reduction in the Greek law on drugs. Diogenis is the secretariat and the co-ordination of the Platform on Psychoactive substances. The advocacy officer of Diogenis is supporting the Platform. At the moment there are 6 organisations active in the Platform and more organisations are willing to become member.

The issue of Cannabis is subject of intensive public discussion in Greece. Diogenis is closely following the developments. On 5 and 6 November 2016 a nationwide conference on Cannabis policy took place in Athens. Diogenis is co-operating with the initiators of this meeting and took active part in the panel on Medical Cannabis, presenting the Dutch model. The coming period the discussion will be intensified. Diogenis will further co-operate with other NGOs and support the initiatives.

Involvement in policy developments at national, regional and international level.

a. Commission on Narcotic drugs (CND)

The meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs took place on 14-18 March. Three persons participated at the CND (2 from Diogenis (the director and the advocacy officer) and one from Association Viktorija (the financial officer). A report of the meeting is published in the Newsletter of the Network and the website of Diogenis Association.

b. The Civil Society Forum (CSF) of the EU had established for 2016 several working groups. Diogenis has been member of the working Group "civil society engagement in national drug policies". The aim of this working group is:

- To provide an analysis of the current state of play with regard to civil society engagement in national policy structures,
- To highlight models of what can work in the area of civil society engagement, such that civil society organisations can identify models which may suit them,

- To describe linkages between national and EU structures in a way that is useful for civil society organisations and
- To make concrete recommendations to the European Commission regarding effective CS engagement at a national level.

The report of the working group was on the agenda of the annual meeting of the Civil Society Forum on 7 and 8 November 2016

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.

Outcomes

The results of the work programme are positive.

- a. The umbrella organisation ***Drug policy Network South East Europe (DPNSEE)*** functions as regional legal entity.
- b. The activity of the country visits was of great importance. The country visits improved the relationship between NGOs and the authorities and stimulated the co-operation between the local organisations and the regional umbrella organisation.
- c. The intention expressed in the first year of the project that the new umbrella organisation has to co-ordinate efforts for a more consistent approach of the relevant national authorities in co-operation with the local partners, is becoming reality.
- d. The visits in Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia in respectively July, August and beginning of September as well as the visits to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania in October 2016 have been successful and have been appreciated by the authorities, the local and the regional organisations.
- e. The regional conference on the outcome of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) was not only informative but also stimulating a common discussion and planning of activities on the regional level.
- f. The project on Harm Reduction stresses also the regional component of the issue and is a good contribution to common understanding and action.
- g. The website and the newsletter are supportive to the regional character of the project.
- h. The location of the office in Athens creates more possibilities for presentation of the organisation, increasing of contacts and advocacy activities.
- b. Diogenis participated at the CND session 2015
- i. Diogenis participated at the meetings of the Civil Society Forum and its working group on the UNGASS

Evaluation

The transfer of certain responsibilities to the newly established Drug Policy Network started in 2016. The relationship between the Umbrella organisation and the members at the national/local level is an issue of continuous discussion. It must be seen how things are going to develop in the coming years. The better functioning of the Umbrella organisation will mean that Diogenis will not continue activities of co-ordination and support to the members of DPNSEE. The cooperation will be more in field of activities on policy issues, drug policy trends and developments in Europe and internationally (UN and NGO initiatives).

Diogenis will develop more activities on the national level. The advocacy function will be strengthened.

Sustainability

In 2016 we have explored possibilities for more financial stability. The project of the EU Enlargement Unit will continue in 2017. Diogenis remains the lead organisation of the project which may continue in 2018. Diogenis has submitted several proposals for financial support which will be answered until the end of this year and the first months of 2017.

Besides the EU DG Enlargement, which mainly is directed towards the countries in accession, Diogenis will implement in 2017, as partner, the project “New Approaches in Harm Reduction Policies and Practices” (NAHRPP) which is led by TNI. The project starts in 2017 and is for 18 months.

A proposal is submitted to the Latsis Foundation for the organisation of drug policy dialogues in regions and prefectures in Greece. The project can be implemented in 2017.

A proposal for a small grant has also been submitted to the program LADDER (Local Authorities as Drivers for development Education and Raising Awareness). 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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