

## DRUG POLICY NETWORK SOUTH EAST EUROPE



**UNGASS Regional Consultation Meeting  
Eastern Europe and Central Asia**



**Research on  
Harm Reduction in SEE**

**News from the organizations  
of the Network**



**"Drug Strategy and Drug legislation"  
Meeting in Albania  
Meeting in Serbia**

**NGO "4LIFE": Opening of the 1st  
rehabilitation center for female addicts**

**NGO "Aksion Plus": Continuing  
cooperation with the Probation  
Services**

**Association "Margina": Drop-in Centers  
officially accredited by AKAZ**

**NGO "Juventas": Montenegrin Harm  
Reduction Network – Link Association is  
now officially registered**

**NGO "HOPS": Local Self-Government for  
Universal Values Campaign**

**Association "Prevent": 20 years of  
preventing drug addiction in Novi Sad**

**"Centre for Life": Awareness Campaign  
about stigma on HIV/AIDS**

**"Positive Voice": Events and Actions  
on World AIDS Day & European HIV-  
Hepatitis Testing Week**



**Re-interpreting the Conventions on Drugs  
Translation of the UNODC document "Drug policy  
provisions from the international drug control  
Conventions"**

## UNGASS Regional Consultation Meeting Eastern Europe and Central Asia



**W**orldwide Non - Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are actively involved in the preparations of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs. The two international committees at the UN level: Vienna NGO committee on drugs (VNGOC) and New York NGO Committee on Drugs (NYNGOC) joined forces to launch the Civil Society Task Force (CSTF) for the UNGASS 2016. The CSTF is established to secure civil society engagement and co-ordination in order to effectively include NGO voices in the UNGASS. Regional consultations in different parts of the world are organised in order to contribute to the discussions on the topics that have been designated as the main agenda on the UN Special Assembly in April 2016. For Eastern Europe and Central Asia a Regional consultation meeting has been organised in Istanbul from 26-27 November, with support of the Vienna and the New York NGO Committees, by the Turkish Green Crescent that is member of the Civil Society Task Force (CSTF).

**R**epresentatives from civil organisations from South East Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia participated at the meeting and during the second day discussed in 5 discussion groups about the following thematic areas: 'Drugs and Health', 'Drugs and Crime', 'Drugs and Human rights', 'Youth, Women, Children and Communities', 'New Challenges and Alternative Development'. "Diogenis" was represented at the meeting and took part at the discussion group about 'New challenges'. The results of the discussions were presented in the plenary by reporters from each discussion group. "Diogenis" has referred to the regional dialogue on the UNGASS that took place in Belgrade at the beginning of October 2015 and mentioned several points that were included in the statement: "The UNGASS 2016 and its significance for SEE". The meeting provided the opportunity for all participants to express their diverse views with respect and understanding for differences, but also their common positions in most of the items discussed. There is a growing awareness regarding the value of diverse approaches and the importance of questioning each other about the consequences of the proposed or implemented choices.

## NGO 4LIFE

MONTENEGRO

**Opening of the 1st rehabilitation center for female addicts**

On December 17th 2015, the first rehabilitation center for female addicts in the region opened under the project "Rehabilitation and resocialization of psychoactive substances". The project is funded by the EU Delegation. The main applicant is the Center for rehabilitation and reintegration of addicts - Podgorica, and the partners are the Union of Municipalities, the Capital City, the Municipality of Tivat and Niksic and NGO "4 LIFE". The center is made to the highest standards and by the end of the year the first women will be welcomed in the rehabilitation program.

**Research-studies**

Within the same project, the expert team of the NGO "4 LIFE" has developed the two following studies: (1) "Analysis of the status-position of addicts in Montenegro" and (2) "Perspectives of development of addiction diseases treatment of women in Montenegro". Studies include two primary researches, conducted with the staff of institutions and organizations that deals with the problem of addiction, as well as a survey conducted among the citizens of Montenegro and four focus groups with male and female addicts and their families. Documents, including recommendations regarding the improvement of the current state in Montenegro, will be available on the websites of the project partners and other relevant institutions and organizations.

**Survey on addicts serving prison sentences**

Within the project "Strengthening NGO capacity and promoting public health and human rights oriented drug policy in South Eastern Europe", NGO "4 LIFE" is conducting a survey on the status of addicts serving prison sentences. The results and the recommendations of the study will be published on the websites of NGO "4 LIFE", the project partners and other relevant organizations and institutions.



Image of the project documentation for the construction of the rehabilitation center for female addicts

## Aksion Plus

ALBANIA

**Continuing cooperation with the Probation Services**

On November 25, NGO "Aksion Plus" held a joint meeting with the Probation Services' (PS) staff and other students involved with supervised cases referred by the PS. During this meeting the main findings from the research study "The effectiveness of alternative sanctions in Albania", conducted by "Aksion Plus" were also introduced. Valuable information about the penal reform, especially the reform in the field of the execution of the penal sentences, the collaboration and the importance of the implementation of alternative measures to imprisonment for personal drug use were shared.



“Aksion Plus” is closely working with General Probation Office and in 2010 a Partnership Agreement has been signed between them. Since then, nearly 90 cases from Tirana and other cities have been supervised. Moreover, “Aksion Plus” staff provided useful information concerning human rights, harm reduction, international approaches on how to provide humane services to those on probation, as well as those who are sentenced in prison. The rest of the meeting focused on ways to improve collaboration and other technical issues. It was an especially productive session for the students of ‘Social Work University’, as they are involved in the process of psycho-social support and counseling of offenders under the Probation Service.

During the last three months, A+ leadership is engaged in advocacy and lobbying with the central and the local government, as well as with the members of the Parliament (MP), in order to closely follow up changes and amendments that are foreseen in the Penal Code. There is a big concern about those laws, which affect drug users and their conviction even for small doses of cannabis. Parents and other siblings are advised accordingly. Efforts to approach MPs, who are in favor of better and more friendly laws for personal drug use, are being made. Given the political situation, these attempts are often not successful and take a lot of time and energy in order to achieve significant results.

## ASSOCIATION MARGINA

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

### Drop-in Centers officially accredited by AKAZ

On November 24th 2015, the Management Board of AKAZ (Agency for Quality and Accreditation in Health in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) issued the Decision on unconditional accreditations and certifications of 3 Drop-in Centres of Association “Margina” in Zenica, Tuzla and Mostar. Obtaining official status of accredited drop-in centres is a result of a process which lasted for more than a year. During this process, the staff of these centres received training and worked hard on the preparation of policies, rules and procedures, and improving the quality of service provision. Also, in accordance with the regulations of AKAZ, two self-assessment and a final external evaluation were carried out. Association Margina can proudly say that its Drop-in Centres in Zenica, Tuzla and Mostar are the first centres of this type, officially accredited by the high-ranking government agency in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region.

### European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week

During the 'European HIV and Hepatitis Testing Week', Drop-in Centres of the Association “Margina” in Zenica, Tuzla and Mostar, together with health professionals from VCCT centers, representatives of the organization Partnership in Health, organized free testing for HIV and hepatitis, both for their beneficiaries and for the general population.



### December 1st: World AIDS Day

On the occasion of this year's marking of December 1st, World AIDS Day, Association "Margina" organized events in restaurants, universities, student dormitories and other public places, where the staff of the association informed and educated the general public about HIV/AIDS, ways of transmission and prevention. The staff also distributed educational and promotional materials, with the aim of raising public awareness about HIV/AIDS, strengthening solidarity, reducing stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV/AIDS, and also drawing attention to the dangers of risky behaviors.

## NGO JUVENTAS

MONTENEGRO

### Montenegrin Harm Reduction Network – Link Association is now officially registered

On October 12th, with support of NGO "Juventas" (harm reduction service provider), "Montenegrin Harm Reduction Network- Link" was officially registered as non-government association of people who use drugs, professionals and other interested citizens, with its main goal the reduction of drug related health and social harm, as well as other drug-related risky behaviours, in the field of prevention, education, treatment, rehabilitation and re-socialization. Specific goals of the Association are the contribution to: social equality and improvement of social care system; improvement of attitudes towards health and improvement of health care system; reduction of criminal recidivism; respect and promotion of human rights; reduction of stigma and discrimination towards people who use or have been using drugs, current or former sex workers and people who are or have been in conflict with law, especially incarcerated ones. European Harm Reduction Network supported Link's project "Harm reduction works. Fund it in Montenegro!" through Network Small Grants Program, with the financial support of Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund.

### Montenegro: 2015 Report –EU Enlargement Strategy by European Commission

On November 10th 2015, the European Commission published Montenegro's 2015 report related to European Enlargement Strategy. The report contained concrete suggestions regarding HIV prevention service provision and drug abuse prevention: "Montenegro needs to provide sustainable financing for services dealing with HIV/AIDS and to improve capacity for and provision of psychosocial support and help to patients with chronic diseases. Montenegro needs to do more to implement its national drug abuse prevention strategy, especially among young people, and civil society needs to be actively involved in the National Council for the prevention of drug abuse". Juventas' staff, recognized as partners and active participants in the process of developing this report, are very satisfied that their efforts are recognized by EC, as well as these recommendations are going to support their advocacy activities in the field of securing sustainability for HIV prevention services provision among people who inject drugs.

## Advocating for sustainable provision of Harm Reduction services

On December 1st, representatives of National AIDS Commission presented the current situation in Montenegro regarding the end of community-based HIV prevention service provision. On that occasion, representatives of NGO "Juventas" advocated for Harm Reduction services provision sustainability, by issuing a media statement and participating in the work of the Board for labour, health and social wellbeing in Parliament of Montenegro. This was just one of the events initiated and meetings organized as a part of National Campaign for community based HIV prevention services for most-at-risk-populations continuation, which Juventas launched on June 30th 2015. Until this moment we organized numerous meetings and made contacts with both international and national decision makers.

## NGO HOPS

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

### Local Self-Government for Universal Values Campaign

Despite the advocacy efforts of civil society organizations that work on harm reduction, HIV prevention and human rights of marginalized communities in R. Macedonia, there is lack of awareness concerning the relevant problems, lack of concrete measures taken by the state and lack of support for the CSOs working with marginalized communities.

Therefore on December 1, the NGO HOPS "Healthy Options Project Skopje" (Macedonia) in cooperation with the Labyrinth (Kosovo) and their local partners launched a regional campaign under the motto "Local Self-Government for Universal Values" - Call for Local Conscious Action for strategic support of sustainable mechanisms and programs for prevention of HIV and drug use. The campaign has been launched within the EU supported project within the IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Program and aims to encourage development of supportive policies for marginalized communities on local level and strategic sustainable financing of CSOs in Republic of Macedonia. As a part of the project and in cooperation with 8 municipalities in Macedonia and Kosovo, local strategies and action plans will be developed to tackle problems with HIV and drug use.

This is especially important since most of the harm reduction programs in the country, together with other programs offering HIV prevention services for marginalized communities are financed by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (worth € 10,506,8251). However, only a small part of the civil society organizations have different sources of funding, and most of the organizations that implement HIV services are financed solely by the Global Fund. In the next one and a half year, the country needs to make an exit strategy for the sustainability of these services and programs, after the withdrawal of the Global Fund at the end of 2016. Therefore, it is of crucial importance that the local self-governments take a leading role in providing support for their communities and tackle important public health issues such as HIV prevention and drug use.



## ASSOCIATION PREVENT

SERVIA

**Novi Sad fighting against drug addiction for 20 years**

This November, the city of Novi Sad marked 20 years of preventing drug addiction with an event which gathered together all the eminent participants in this area. Association Prevent was invited to present its most significant projects and results. On behalf of the Association, Dr. Nebojsa Barackov talked about the implementation of prevention programs targeting marginalized populations and a creative drug-addiction preventive approach through a social game, which was awarded with certificate of recognition for innovative approach by Pompidou Group in 2014.

In recent years, the cooperation between government and civil society has improved and the city of Novi Sad every year supports approximately seven or eight projects that Prevent implements in the field of drug prevention. Results has shown that the number of newly registered drug users has dropped from 408 in 2006 to 72 in 2014 and the region of Vojvodina and the city of Novi Sad have the lowest rates of HIV infection among IDUs. "We are pleased that we contributed so that statistics looks like this", the President of the Association "Prevent", Mr. Nebojsa Djurasovic, said.

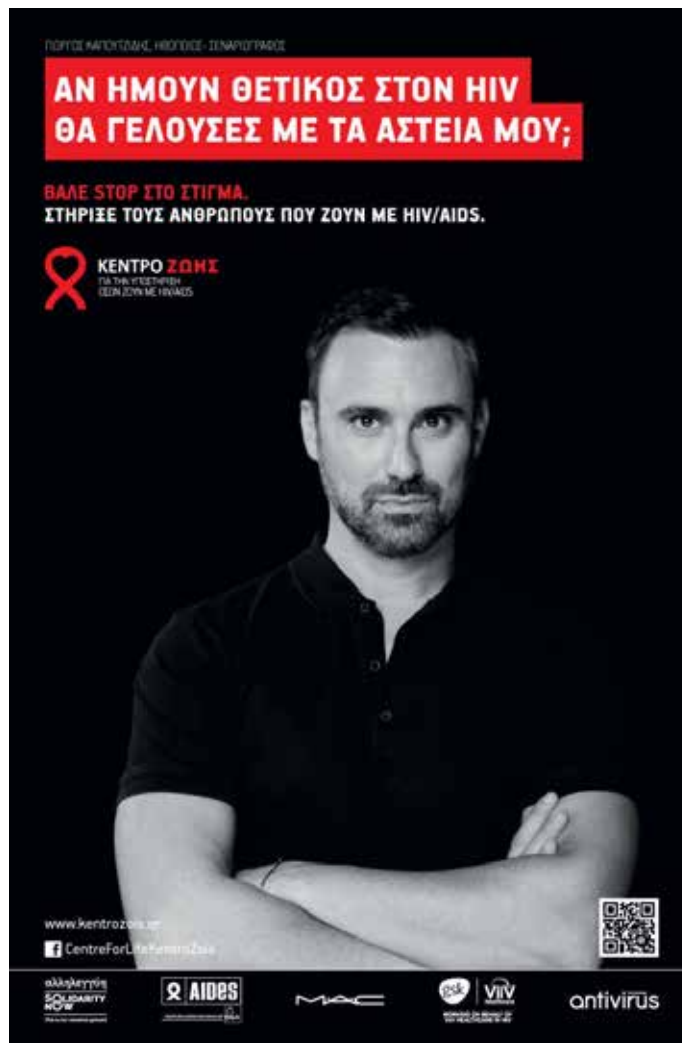


## CENTER FOR LIFE

GREECE

**"Awareness Campaign about stigma on HIV / AIDS"**

Within the informative initiatives of the NGO "CENTRE FOR LIFE" it's progressing in implementing a campaign entitled "IF I WAS HIV POSITIVE". Its aim is to sensitize the general population about HIV/AIDS and in particular the social stigma associated with it. The awareness campaign (an adaptation of the corresponding campaign by the French organization AIDES, which since 1984 supports HIV positive people) seeks to responsibly inform the public through a different, more experiential approach. Its messages refer to simple and everyday life habits that form sociability and a wide web of human relationships. The campaign does not seek to stand "against" but "next" to both the negative stereotype and the positive unprejudiced truth of the message. It will try to answer to a series of simple questions, to the doubt and the reservations that each and every one of us can develop towards people living with HIV or AIDS.



Fotis Sergouloupoulos, Maria Bakodimou, George Kapoutzidis, the National Men's Polo Team, Vicky Arvaniti, Anna Kouroupou, Thanasis Tsaltampasis, Argiro Barbarigou, Vicky Kaya, Dimitris Lignadis, Michael Mouroutsos, Kaiti Garbi and Paul Mamalos are asking passengers taking the public transportation in Athens from Sunday, November 29 and for 2 months, what their response would be to the question being asked by each of these well-known participants of the campaign. With the participation of familiar persons, Centre for Life invites the recipient of the message to essentially think and question whether an HIV-positive person can be an active and productive member of society, without discrimination, without labels, without fear. Together we form a group that symbolically attempts to intervene in a dynamic manner in the public opinion supporting the triptych: information - prevention - education.

Can I kiss you? Can I bring a healthy child to the world? Can I have friends who are not afraid of me?

## POSITIVE VOICE

GREECE

### Events and Actions on World AIDS Day & European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week

On the occasion of December 1st - World AIDS Day, "Positive Voice", the Association of HIV-positive Greek, organized events and activities in Athens, Thessaloniki and in the region and joined her voice with 28 cities and 20 organizations, in order to communicate a message in support of prevention, regular testing and against the stigma experienced by people living with HIV/AIDS. In collaboration with the Hellenic Radio and Television (ERT) and with the support of the Hellenic Ministry of Education, "Positive Voice" organized an amateur video contest on HIV/AIDS.



Following recent meetings of the Association of HIV-positive Greek with the Health Minister, Mr. Xanthos and the MP and President of the Social Affairs Committee of the Hellenic Parliament Mr. Manios, a constant demand of "Positive Voice" became reality. On Thursday, December 3, the main issues related to HIV/AIDS in Greece, nowadays, were discussed at a special meeting of the Commission with the participation of stakeholders and legislators from all parties.

### European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week

On the occasion of the 'European HIV and Hepatitis Testing Week', the Mobile Unit "Checkpoint" was located daily, from 23-27 of November at Omonia and Syntagma, while at the same time relevant actions were implemented in Kerameikos, Pagrati, Glyfada, Halandri, Peristeri and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.



## Re-interpreting the Conventions on Drugs

On March 2014, as part of the preparations for the high-level review on the implementation by Member States of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem, UNODC prepared the document "Drug Policy Provisions from the International Drug Control Conventions". This document is discussing the implications of the three Conventions for drug policy.

Realizing the utmost importance of this document, especially during this preparatory period in view of the upcoming United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs in April 2016, "Diogenis" took the initiative of translating the aforementioned document in Greek and Serbian languages. The objective behind this initiative is to enhance a dialogue both at local and regional level, in order to bring about substantial changes in the way conventions are interpreted and implemented by governments. Although the UNODC document speaks about re-interpretation of the drug conventions and not of change of their content, the description of dilemma's and often the rejection of many practices of the current drug control system can help the discussion to re-examine the content of the three international drug conventions, provide support for the approach that drug policies should focus more on health than crime and to underline that international conventions need in the end to be revisited and amended.

Briefly, the main points of re-interpretation as presented and analysed in the specific document are:

- Do the Conventions commit governments to implement a prohibitionist regime?
- Do the Conventions hinder the availability of controlled drugs for medical purpose?
- Do the Conventions treat drug users as criminals who require punishment?
- Do the Conventions support unqualified interventions for prevention of drug use and treatment of drug dependence?
- Do the Conventions support compulsory treatment?
- Are the Conventions against harm reduction strategies?
- Are the Conventions against the use of controlled narcotic drugs in the treatment of drug dependence?
- Are the Conventions against human rights?
- Do the Conventions support the death penalty for drug related crimes?

The translated documents will be available on Diogenis' website in January 2016. Translation in Greek language was made by Galinaki Sofia – Advocacy Officer at “Diogenis”. Translation in Serbian language was made by Irena Molnar – Program Officer at “Re Generation”. Diogenis would support initiatives to translate the document in more languages of the countries in South East Europe and broader.

## “Drug Strategy and Drug legislation” Meeting in Albania Meeting in Serbia

### “Drug Strategy and Drug legislation” meeting in Albania

On Thursday 17th December, “Diogenis” in cooperation with the NGO “Aksion Plus” organized a meeting on “Drug Strategy and Drug Legislation” in Albania. Invited in this meeting were representatives from the Parliament, UNODC, Addictology and Toxicology department in the State Hospital and other institutions active in the field of drugs.

The meeting aimed to inform the participants about the project “Strengthening NGOs capacity and promotion of Public Health and Human Rights orientated by drug policies in SEE”. The objectives and actions planned by the umbrella organisation “Drug policy Network South East Europe” (DPNSEE) have been presented and the latest developments regarding drug policies and legislation in Albania, as well as the activities of the NGO Aksion Plus in the field of drug policy, have been discussed.

Even though some of the representatives from the parliament could not be present at the discussion due to Parliamentary sessions, there was a very interesting discussion among Addictology and Toxicology department representatives and Aksion Plus representatives.

The main issue of the discussion was the co-operation agreements between state institutions and NGOs in the field of drugs and their implementation in everyday practice.

It is reaffirmed that reform of drug legislation is a recurring issue in parliamentary discussions, but there is no consistent progress in the implementation of proposals concerning changes of the criminal law and the law on drugs. Discussions about cannabis legislation are going on but there are no concrete signs in which direction, solutions will be proposed.

### “Drug Strategy and Drug Legislation in Serbia” meeting in Belgrade

On December 10th 2015, a meeting about recent developments on “Drug strategy and Drug Legislation in Serbia” was held at the Institute of Public Health in Belgrade. The meeting was organised by Diogenis, as part of the project “Strengthening NGO capacity and promoting public health and human rights oriented drug policy in South Eastern Europe”, which is supported by the European Commission’s Regional Program of the DG Enlargement and the Open Society Foundations. This was the second meeting on drug law reform in the region following the meeting in Sarajevo in May 2015.



At the meeting were represented: the Ministry of Health, the Institute of Public Health (BATUT), the IHP of Serbia, (the department of HIV, STI, Hepatitis and Tuberculosis), the Special Hospital on addictions, the Association of Lawyers for Medical and Health law of Serbia (SUPRAM), the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband NDS, the NGOs "Prevent", "Regeneration" and "Diogenis".

After an introduction on the new established Umbrella organisation "Drug Policy Network SEE" (DPNSEE), the meeting focused on the latest developments in drug policy and drug legislation in Serbia. Presentations were made about the developments after the project "Implementing the National Strategy Against Drug Abuse" (INSADA 2009-2011), the Twinning project which worked on the base of the INSADA project and eventually achieved to finalise the National Drug Strategy in Serbia and a presentation of the most recent developments in drug legislation.

There has been progress as far as the Serbian National Drug Strategy is concerned, the legislation on drugs and recently the National drug Co-ordination. The most serious problem is the budget cuttings imposed upon the institutions working in the field of health and in the field of drug Harm reduction. The closing of harm reduction services is a very negative development and there are no encouraging signs that there will be a change in the near future. This issue must be prominent on next year's agenda.

A report of the meeting will be published on Diogenis' website.

## Research on **HARM REDUCTION** SEE

**A**s part of our network's action "Strengthening NGO capacity and promoting public health and human rights oriented drug policy in South Eastern Europe", NGO "Diogenis" has undertaken to conduct a research study on Harm Reduction among the countries of South East Europe. The main objectives of this research are: 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 Network.

Despite the recognition of their importance and necessity, in the majority of SE Europe countries, Harm Reduction services –usually run by NGOs – are threatened to close down due to lack of funding. The economic crisis resulted in setting harm reduction as a low priority issue on the political agenda. During 2015, this matter has been discussed in several meetings of the Drug Policy Network members and it has been decided to use an inventory, based on a research questionnaire made by “Diogenis”, for action towards alternatives to secure services in the field of Harm Reduction, intensify advocacy work towards governments and political actors and mobilize stakeholders and services’ beneficiaries to push for solid solutions.

Data collected will provide us important information, towards a joint action with the DPNSEE, concerning among others: harm reduction interventions’ coverage in every participating country, legal framework, quality guidelines, funding, main barriers and plans for future initiatives. The questionnaire will be distributed during the first quarter of 2016 and a report will be ready during autumn 2016.

## National Meeting to establish a national Early Warning System in Serbia

On December 17th 2015, a one-day meeting on establishing a national Early Warning System in Serbia was held in Belgrade. The seminar was organized by the Health Ministry of Serbia, in cooperation with the EMCDDA, and financed from IPA 5 project "Preparation of the beneficiaries of IPA funds for the participation in the activities of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction". The aim of this meeting was to introduce EU legislation in this area, examples of good practice in the region and the establishment of a network of institutions in Serbia, which will participate in the Early Warning System on new psychoactive substances.

The meeting was attended by representatives of all the relevant institutions in Serbia: the Ministry of Health (assistant Dragan Vujcic, Zoran Mihailovic), Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Environmental Protection, Customs Administration, Military Medical Academy, Institute for Forensic Medicine, health care institutions that provide treatment for drug addicts, services for emergency medical assistance, NGOs and other experts who deal with the drug abuse issue. All participants presented how they see their role in the early warning system. This occasion was valuable not only regarding the knowledge shared concerning new psychoactive substances and relevant issues, but also it was a good chance for all the key agencies working in the field of psychoactive substances in Serbia to unite and collaborate.





ALIAT – Alliance for the Fight Against Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, Romania

Romanian Harm Reduction Network (RHRN), Romania

Aksion Plus, Albania

Healthy Options Project Skopje (HOPS), Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Juventas, Montenegro

The “South Eastern European and Adriatic Addiction Network”, SEEAN, Slovenia

NGO Viktorija, Banja Luka, Bosnia Herzegovina

Association Margina, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Association Prevent, Novi Sad, Serbia

Association DIOGENIS, Drug Policy Dialogue in SEE, Greece

Centre for life, Greece

Positive Voice, Greece

NGO 4life, Montenegro

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 Association 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.

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