



South East Europe HIV Ministerial Meeting



Drug Policy co-operation between Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and national authorities in South East Europe



Regional Conference at
Thessaloniki, 8 – 9 June, 2018



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South East Europe HIV Ministerial Meeting

The Prime Minister and Minister of Health of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia hosted a South-Eastern European Ministerial Meeting on Sustainable Responses to HIV and TB in Skopje on 7 May 2018. Civil society representatives had an opportunity to join the high level representatives from all SEE countries, donors and global development partners and exchange about progress made and what remains to be done to meet the goal of ending the AIDS and tuberculosis epidemics in the region as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The ministers recognized increasing ownership of the national responses to the diseases, as external financial support including from the Global Fund is transitioning to support countries with the highest global burdens of disease and least economic capacity. The ministers expressed commitment to allocating domestic funding for and ensuring access to HIV and tuberculosis treatment for all, guided by governance structures that involve civil society and affected communities along with health professionals and technical partners. Still, a few comments from the civil organizations warned that the situation is far from satisfying and that "behind numbers are people about whom we need to care" - as underlined by the DPNSEE Board member Denis Dedajić.

The Board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, at its 39th Board meeting, highlighted the importance of strengthening sustainability and supporting successful transition to domestic financing to build long-term solutions and achieve greater health security.

DPNSEE representatives Vlatko Dekov, Chairman of the Board, Denis Dedajić, Secretary of the Board and Milutin Milošević, Executive Director, met with several Global Fund Board members, country representatives, donors and civil society colleagues. An important meeting was the one with Ekaterina Lukicheva from the Open Society Foundations International Harm Reduction Development Program and Raminta Štuikyte, consultant about the budget advocacy and implementation project and other ideas for future cooperation.

Regional Conference at Thessaloniki, 8 – 9 June, 2018



The Annual Regional Conference in South East Europe was organized by "Diogenis Drug Policy Dialogue" in Thessaloniki from 8-9 June 2018, at Capsis Hotel.

The conference brought together representatives of NGOs, Policy makers and researchers from 9 countries, active in the drugs field in the region, in order to discuss drug policy developments and trends, in view of socio-political developments and the implementation of the recommendations of the UNGASS outcome Document 2016.

Issues that were discussed at the conference:

1. Youth culture, summer festivals, drug use and harm reduction in South East Europe: Policy implications for the competent authorities, the organizers of the festivals and harm reduction services.

2. Refugees and migrants in the countries of South East Europe and the drugs issue. An exploration of the state of affairs, the contribution of the NGOs and the National authorities.
3. The evaluation of the Political Declaration 2009-2019 in relation to the UNGASS outcome document. The South East Europe perspective.
4. Evaluation and follow up of the Harm reduction project in SEE.
5. Current topics of importance: a. The regulation of cannabis for medical purposes, b. the current regional project, "Strengthening NGO capacity and promoting public health and human rights oriented drug policy in South East Europe", and the way forward, c. other topics.

Long list of activities in the Support. Don't Punish campaign in South East Europe

On the occasion of the 26 June, The United Nations' International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, the Global Day of Action of the Support. Don't Punish Campaign was organized in more than 150 cities in the world. The Drug Policy Network South East Europe this year again coordinated activities of the campaign in South East Europe, where 10 of our member organizations were pushing actions in 9 countries and 11 cities.

DPNSEE organized the "Kick-off event" to mark the start of the campaign in South East Europe. The event was held in the European Union Info Centre in Belgrade on 21 June.

Executive director of the Network Milutin Milošević opened the event presenting the aims of the campaign. He also briefly presented the current situation in the countries of South East Europe in the context of human rights and public health approach to drug policy. Milutin presented the baseline research on "Documenting Drug Related Cases of Discrimination".

Danilo Ćurčić, lawyer from the A11 - Economic and Social Rights addressed the need for actual space for civil society organizations and the lack of dialogue between the state and organizations addressing the issue. He specially emphasized adoption of laws through urgent procedures and without public hearings and poor implementation of laws that have been passed.

Dr Hajrija Mujović, vice president of the Association of Lawyers for Medical and Health Law of Serbia SUPRAM, presented the international and domestic laws and documents which are basis for fighting discrimination and safeguarding human right, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the Joint United Nations statement on ending discrimination in health care settings issued in 2017.

Irena Molnar, in front of Youth Action Organization for Drug Action - YODA, presented the document, result of the 7 day workshop in Belgrade "Protecting the rights of young people in areas related to drug policy". She also stressed that it is recognizable that there is a lot of policy action taken in "our name" (in the name of 'protecting the youth') but without input of young people or regard for our safety. Most policies which are related to young people and drugs are regressive and damaging and causing more harm, however, they continue to be enforced.

A short discussion followed highlighting the need to decriminalize drug use and possession. An overview of activities is available following news at the DPNSEE website <http://www.dpnsee.org/category/news/>.

Drug Policy co-operation between Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and national authorities in South East Europe



On May 10th a meeting took place in Belgrade, Serbia between representatives of Non-Governmental organizations active in the field of drugs and National drug coordinators from the Countries in South East Europe. The meeting was organized by Diogenis, drug policy dialogue, in co-operation with the Drug Policy Network South East Europe (DPNSEE) and the office for combating drugs of Serbia. At the meeting participated drug policy coordinators and NGOs from respectively 9 and 10 countries of South East Europe. The meeting was an opportunity to exchange information and experiences of good practices and to reflect on possibilities of future cooperation on the national and regional level.

After an introduction of the participants the current situation of cooperation between National Authorities and NGOs was discussed. There is a variety of co-operations structures in the countries of South East Europe. Some countries have a formal structure of co-operation with regular consultation, participation in decision making bodies concerning drug policy and financial support of activities of NGOs. Other countries are on the way to create co-operation structures and are discussing about embedding rules for cooperation between NGOs and competent authorities in national law. All countries recognize the importance of the work that NGOs do, but much more needs to be done for full cooperation. An extensive discussion took place on quality standards, requirements that NGOs must fulfil for the implementation of government-funded projects and training opportunities for capacity building. A session has been devoted to drug policy issues related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the recommendations of the UNGASS outcome document 2016. It is agreed to repeat such meetings at the regional level. A report of the meeting will be published soon.

Documenting drug related cases of discrimination in South East Europe

The basic human rights of marginalised groups in South East Europe are violated and they are marginalised and discriminated. Stigmatisation in the society is strong and incorporated in cultural patterns. DPNSEE, with the support of its member organisations, is launching a survey to document cases of discrimination of drug users and connected vulnerable and marginalised groups and produce an analysis of the findings. The survey shall indicate different forms of discrimination and will serve as basis for additional actions on safeguarding human rights of affected groups.

The most frequent cases of discrimination are related to stigmatization in various respects, the relationship between the police and the judicial system (including the right to information in criminal proceedings), the protection of personal data, basic and specific health care, social protection, right to education, employment and many other areas of life which should be available to every person.

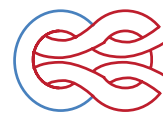
The questionnaire is not intended to be filled by beneficiaries, but by organisation's activists, preferably those who already have established relation with persons from key populations.



DPNSEE would very much appreciate if organisations would join this effort and help us to document the case of discrimination. Please, use the tool which is available for downloading following this link <http://www.dpnsee.org/cms/files/2018/05/DPNSEE-Documenting-drug-related-cases-of-discrimination.pdf>

June DPNSEE Board meeting

The DPNSEE Board held a regular June meeting by Skype. The meeting was scheduled for 12 June, when the Board went through the half of the agenda. The meeting continued on 22 June. More information about the meeting is available at <http://www.dpnsee.org/june-dpnsee-board-meeting/>



DRUG POLICY
NETWORK SEE

Support Don't Punish campaign, Greece

More than 80 people participated in the event organized by the NGO Platform for Psychoactive Substances in the Kypseli Municipal Market, Athens on 26/6 to support the international campaign "Support. Don't Punish". Representatives from the drug users community, official bodies, civil society and common people, honored with their presence the 3 thematic debates and the musical evening that followed. The Network of Peer-to-Peer Drug Users was supported by the Platform for Psychoactive Substances and was actively supported by all organizations participating in the Platform, as part of World Action Day actions, in cooperation with DPNSEE (South East Europe Coordinator) and IDPC.



You can see photos from the event, here: https://www.facebook.com/pg/supportdontpunishGreece/photos/?tab=album&album_id=2144054005806759

CENTRE FOR LIFE

GREECE

The Centre for Life informed 65.000 High School students about HIV and AIDS in Greece

1 out of 3 senior high school students across the country now knows. The "HIV Prevention Program for Senior High School Students" reached to over 600 schools (36% of all High Schools) in Greece during the school year 2017 -2018. More than 65.000 high school students across the country were informed by the Centre for Life about HIV and AIDS through 1.274 lectures organized by teams of specially trained and experienced speakers.

The need for information on the issue of HIV and AIDS has been highlighted by the majority of the education teaching staff, who considers that it is now more than ever necessary to integrate sex education topics into the school curriculum.

The student audience also showed the same elevated interest in the topic of HIV / AIDS and safe sexual behavior, while it was remarkable that the Centre for Life's speakers were called upon to answer multiple questions. In many cases a remarkable lack of knowledge was made apparent, even in relation to fundamental issues of sexual health and precaution; this knowledge gap was addressed during the seminars.

The Centre for Life gave emphasis on implementing the program in high schools located outside large urban centers, such as in remote areas of the mainland and islands.

It is worth mentioning that the respective results of the program will be presented by the Centre for Life at the 22nd International AIDS Conference, which will be held in Amsterdam from 23-27 July 2018. It is the first time that a respective Greek program is being presented in such an important circumstance, a fact that demonstrates the international interest for relative educational practices.

The Centre for Life, driven by 27-years of experience and ethical principles cultivated over the years, leveraging from the long training of the staff and the excellent cooperation with other relevant bodies, seeks to continue the conduction of the interactive informative sessions in the 13 regional units in Greece, in order to make knowledge the means of protection and elimination of stigma towards people living with HIV / AIDS.

We can find more about the program's results here. (link to: <https://www.kentrozois.gr/en/our-news/press-releases/centre-for-life-informed-65-000-high-school-students-about-hiv-aids-in-greece/>)



DIOGENIS

GREECE

The New Civil Society Forum of Drugs of the EU is established

The newly established Civil Society Forum on Drugs, an expert group to the European Union, held its inaugural meeting on 3-4 July 2018 in Brussels. The meeting focused on the elections of the Chair, Co-Chair and the establishment of the new working Groups for the coming years. The CSFD established four (4) working Groups that will work on the on the following issues: a. The EU action plan on Drugs 2017-2020 (input in EU drug strategy and action plan) b. Institutional relations with the EU and international structures, c. civil society engagement in national drug policies and d. Quality Standards on drugs demand reduction. The new Civil Society Forum will co-operate closely with a project funded by the European commission. At the meeting the working groups discussed their relationship with the project and made arrangements about the activities during 2018. We summarize here some of the issues that have been presented at the meeting.

The EMCDDA evaluation: The organizations have been asked to fill in the questionnaire that is available at the EMCDDA website and can be submitted up to the 10th of August 2018. It is important that the voice of civil society be heard in the evaluation of this very important institution of the EU. –The EU is working on the modernization of the EU budget. The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is discussed and changes will take place also for the funding of civil society organizations. The developments will be closely followed by the CSFD. The UN High Level Ministerial Meeting in 2019 will be an important event for the drug policy in the coming years. The CSFD will contribute to the discussion in the EU about the EU position at the High Level Ministerial Meeting in Vienna.

The European parliament is discussing an initiative for regulation of Medical cannabis. It is expected that the parliament will come end of this year with a standpoint.

Beginning of November (5-7 November) a Conference will be held in Brussels organized by the project Civil Society involvement in Drug Policy, a common meeting between the CSF on drugs and CSF on HIV will take place as well as the second meeting of the CSF on drugs.

The Civil Society Forum on Drugs as well as the European Commission were very positive about the work done in the two days of the meeting as well as their co-operation.



“Diogenis” at the Special Subcommittee of the Greek Parliament



The Special Subcommittee of the Greek Parliament on studying and addressing the Drug Problem met on Tuesday, 15 May with representatives of organizations specialized on drug issues to exchange and formulate views on a policy on drugs. Among the organizations invited to participate was also “Diogenis Drug Policy Dialogue” who was represented by the Director Mr. Thanasis Apostolou and the advocacy officer Mrs. Sophia Galinaki.

In Diogenis’ presentation, Thanasis Apostolou thanked the Commission for the invitation, referred to the organization’s history, goals and actions, and in to some views of the organization regarding the policy on drugs. He emphasized that the objective of the current drug control system to eliminate drugs is not realistic. Drugs have always existed and will exist. The law enforcement authorities should give priority to the security of citizens and the fight against organized crime, not to prosecution and punishment of the users. Drug use and treatment of its harmful effects is primarily a medical issue and should be addressed as a public health problem. The law 4139 of 2013 contains positive points in that direction, but it has not been implemented so far. NGOs have repeatedly complained about the lack of strategy and planning, and they propose that civil society should also be involved in the National Drug Coordination and Planning Committee. We hope that the initiative of the Parliamentary Committee will contribute to make the National Strategy and the Action Plan a reality.

Letter to the Minister of Health concerning the regulation of medical cannabis

"DIOGENIS" welcomes the initiative to set up a special office for cannabis, as it has repeatedly stressed and proposed in the past the establishment of such a government agency, which is explicitly provided for in Articles 23 and 28 of the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs as amended with the 1972 Protocol signed by our country.

"Diogenis" in a letter to the Minister of Health expresses satisfaction with the progress the Ministry of Health seems to make regarding the regulation of the necessary framework for law enforcement.



Supports the Ministry of Health's efforts for a guaranteed and easy regulation of the production and distribution of cannabis for medical purposes and considers the distinction between cannabis use for medical and recreational purposes a prerequisite for a consistent and responsible regulation.

Along with the letter, Diogenis sent his informative material, which was presented to the Hellenic Cannabis Forum in November 2016 in Athens.

"Diogenis" hopes that competent bodies will work effectively to implement the above commitments, which are prerequisites for the immediate, unhindered and legal access of patients in need of cannabis products for medical use.

Series of National Open Dialogues by "Diogenis"

In the framework of the "New Approaches to Harm Reduction Policies and Practices" (NAHRPP) program, in which "Diogenis" participates as a partner, "Diogenis Drug Policy Dialogue" organized open dialogue meetings in Bulgaria, Romania and Cyprus with the topic "Drug policy and harm reduction in the context of the economic crisis". The aim of the meetings is to provide updated information of the current state of drug policy and harm reduction in S and SE Europe through the experience of all stakeholders, and also to identify possible proposals to address current barriers and challenges.



PROMETHEUS

GREECE

ARISTOTLE HCV & HIV: A holistic prevention program for people who use drugs

In recent years, intravenous drug use has been the main route of transmission of hepatitis C (HCV). People Who Use Drugs (PWUD) are the main risk group in Greece, due to the sharing of paraphernalia. It is estimated that in Athens there are 8,800 PWUD, a population with a disproportionate burden of HIV infection and hepatitis C, worldwide.

Hellenic Scientific Society for the Study of AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (EEMAA), the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and Hellenic Liver Patients Association "Prometheus", in response to this serious public health problem, proceeded with the implementation of a new program titled "ARISTOTLE HCV & HIV".

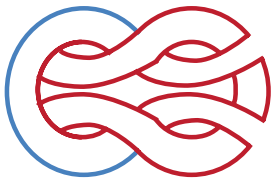
This program, follows the awarded program titled ARISTOTLE, which was implemented by EEMAA, in collaboration with OKANA in Athens, in response to the HIV epidemic among PWUD in 2012-2013. The program aims to reduce the transmission of hepatitis C and HIV, as well as to increase diagnosis and linkage to care - treatment for PWUD in Athens.

In a specially designed structure in the center of Athens, the programs' beneficiaries, have the opportunity to do all the necessary screening, in order to begin treatment. The screening includes liver elastography (fibroscan).

At the same time, particular emphasis is placed on individual counseling, while a network of collaborating doctors of the NHS has been created, to which patients are referred directly.

"ARISTOTLE HCV & HIV", offers a reference point for our target group where, in a friendly environment, barriers to accessing treatment are removed, prevention is promoted and patients' lives are being facilitated.





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 Drug Policy Dialogue, Fokionos 8, 10563 Athens, Greece

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