

NEWSLETTER

APRIL - JULY 2015

DRUG POLICY NETWORK SOUTH EAST EUROPE



Meeting of the Drug Policy Network in SEE in Novi-Sad 6-8 July 2015



Conference: Hepatitis C and drug use in Greece, Athens, June 17, 2015



News from the partners in SEE



«Montenegro: Withdraw of global fund, Harm reduction services close down»



26 June, International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

Update preparations of the UNGASS 2016

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 08/09.08.2015 Aktion Plus, Young people for Drug Action meeting, Tirana
- 31.08.2015/02.09.2015 Association Diogenis, Meeting of the Drug Policy Network SEE, Belgrade
- 01/03.10.2015 Association Diogenis, Regional Conference on UNGASS, Sarajevo
- 05/06.10.2015 Meeting of the EU Civil Society Forum, Brussels

Meeting of the Drug Policy Network in SEE in Novi-Sad 6-8 July 2015



From 6 to 8 July, representatives of the organizations, that are members of the informal Drug Policy Network in South East Europe met in Novi Sad (Serbia) to discuss about establishing an umbrella organization with a legal status, building on the informally established Drug Policy Network.

The meeting started with a presentation by Iлина Nesik, representative of the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) informing the meeting about the experience of the BCSDN in its development since 2001. The Balkan Civil Society Development network is a regional sectoral network consisting of 15 member organizations, from 10 different countries of the Balkan region. It started, in the first phase, as a 3-year pilot programme (2001-2003) functioned in the second phase (2003-2008) as an informal Network and became a formalized network in the third phase (2008-2011). Iлина Nesik referred to the vision and mission of the organization, the strategic goals, the membership (eligibility criteria and the procedure to become a member) as well as the initiatives/activities of the organization. Special reference was made to the monitoring Matrix, a unique tool for monitoring the enabling environment for civil society development. During the discussion that followed the presentation, several questions have been raised about the membership especially concerning the distinction between consultative and member status, the governance, management and organization structure and the independent status of the organization.

This presentation has been followed by an introduction by Thanasis Apostolou, who outlined the development of Drug Policy Network in South East Europe and presented the project to create the umbrella organization with a legal status. Consequently, the meeting decided about the name of the new organization, which remained Drug Policy Network in South East Europe. The meeting decided to establish an independent organization, not linked to one of the existing Network's organizations. The location of the umbrella organization will be the city of Skopje. The meeting decided to meet again on 31 of August to 3 September in Belgrade. Every organization of the Network will be represented in Belgrade by one person. The Belgrade meeting will be the constituent assembly of the new umbrella organization.

Civil Society Forum on Drugs

Three organisations from the South East European region have been selected to participate at the European Civil Society Forum on Drugs.

- Association Diogenis, Drug Policy Dialogue in South Eastern Europe
 - Healthy Options project Skopje (HOPS) and
 - Romanian Harm Reduction Network (RHRN)
- The Civil Society Forum has 45 Members.

Association Diogenis

GREECE



14|05 Public Meeting on Drug Strategy and Drug Legislation in Sarajevo
[Read full report here](#)



18|05 & 22|06 National NGO platform meeting in Association Diogenis' Offices
 Participants: Association Diogenis, Praksis, Positive Voice, Center for Life, Prometheus, Mediciens du Monde and the Greek Drug & Substitute Users Union



17|06 Conference : Hepatitis C and drug use in Greece
 Association Diogenis's Director talked about Drug Policy and Harm Reduction
[More details on page 8](#)



26|06 Global Day of Action
 Support Don't Punish campaign
 Video in cooperation with the NGOs Praksis and the Greek Drug & Substitute Users Union
[Press release of the National NGO Platform](#)
[More details on page 9](#)

Positive Voice

GREECE

During May 2015 Positive Voice has implemented the following harm reduction interventions:



Positive Voice participated in OKANA's (Greek Organization Against Drugs) event in Thessaloniki in order to present, suggest and promote best practises as they have been introduced abroad.



Outreach (streetwork) : distribution of 4.442 condoms to general population, IDUs, MSM and sex workers with simultaneous distribution of information on HIV, Hepatitis B and C.



Due to the increase in the number of impoverished members living with HIV (regardless of if they have a history of substance abuse), "Positive Voice" set a priority in providing linkage with psychiatric services at the Social Clinic of Acharnon-Patision. There, beneficiaries can receive free psychiatric support by Mrs. Katerina Matsa and access to free pharmaceutical treatment.



Positive Voice broadcasted a Radio Show @ Metadeftero.gr under the title "Mapping Harm Reduction Programs"



Given the increased number of newly released prisoners and aiming to cover their basic needs, "Positive Voice" created a group which seeks to connect, support and link the members with the Day use Centers of KETHEA and OKANA, in order to obtain their services and support.

Association Margina

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Drug Policy Interventions:

In February 2015 Association Margina, together with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Displaced persons of Tuzla Canton, organized a series of meetings in Tuzla in an effort to initiate the dialogue about designing a new Prevention Strategy on drugs and other addictive substances abuse in Tuzla Canton. Several Ministries participated in the dialogue, such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Displaced persons, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports and the Ministry of Justice and Administration. The data provided by Association Margina demonstrate an increasing trend in the number of IDUs, especially in rural areas, early drug use initiation and emerging new trends of drug use such as the misuse of opioid substitution therapy. Furthermore, a working group will be formed in order to produce the final Prevention Strategy by September 2015. More importantly, the civil society is asking for a new public health institution that will deal with addiction problems complementing the work of the only institution that deals with addiction so far, the neuropsychiatry clinic of the University Clinic.



Accreditation of the Association Margina

Since last year Association Margina, in cooperation with AKAZ, the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Public Health in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is in the process of accreditation of the services provided at the 3 drop-in centres that Margina currently runs. The process is expected to end in September 2015 and Association Margina will be the first accredited NGO in the region.

Throughout the process Association Margina developed two key documents, "Drug Use Harm Reduction Policy" and "Standards for Accreditation of Drop-in centers" and indicators to assess and audit standards. Moreover, an internal audit has already been completed. The main goal of the entire accreditation process is to constantly improve the quality of services provided, in order to best meet the needs of clients.

Association Margina is presently in the second phase of the activities under the general title "Accreditation of Drop-in centers in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina" which are part of a project implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, supported by the Global Fund of the United Nations (GFATM project).

NGO 4 Life

MONTENEGRO

Harm Reduction Interventions:

NGO 4 Life in the context of the program "Strengthening NGO capacity and promoting public health and human rights oriented drug policy in South Eastern Europe" has undertaken a research project on health, drug use and availability of treatment in Montenegro's prisons. The project is being led by Dr. Tatjana Vujovic, social pathologist and long time associate of the NGO 4 Life as well as addiction expert. So far, an analysis of the legal framework and strategic documents in the case study areas have been conducted as well as a review analysis of the policy and legislative framework in the region. Furthermore, the instruments for the research have been identified and the analysis of the data obtained through questionnaires, interviews and focus groups is on the way. In addition, in May, in-depth interviews with decision makers took place and recommendations for the identified problems have been formulated.

Advocacy:

The costs of treatment rehabilitation and social reintegration of drug addicts has been reduced. Price per month was 333 euros, and now is 230 euros. NGO 4 Life for three years is calling the competent institutions that treatment be free. We have repeatedly urged the public and held a number of meetings to achieve this goal, and we believe that this is a step in that direction. The last time we invited the competent institutions on the occasion of June 26, 2015, the International Day against Drug Abuse, after which the Board of Directors of the Public Institution for accommodation, rehabilitation and resocialization of drug addicts - Podgorica, made the decision to reduce the price of treatment.

Co-operation:

Campaign "Together Against Drugs": cooperation between the Public Institution for accommodation, rehabilitation and resocialization of the drug addicted- Podgorica, the Police Directorate - International Police Association, the Ministry of Education and the NGO "4 LIFE"



Association ALIAT

ROMANIA

Harm Reduction Interventions:

In the first half of 2015, ALIAT has opened seven treatment centres throughout Romania for people that use drugs and alcohol. These centres are organised as social enterprises within an ESF program and provide services to those suffering multiple addiction. The treatment centres are part of ALIAT's long term strategy concerning sustainability, as people will in general have to pay for the use of services, both in- and out-patient. Nevertheless, a number of services will be provided for free. All the earnings will be redirected to fund ALIAT's harm reduction services as well as prevention and psycho-social services such as family care and counselling, child psychotherapy, etc. and are intended to cover the funds local authorities are failing to provide.

Co-operation:

Treat Now is a new harm reduction program that will run from the 1st of July in Bucharest, Romania. ALIAT in co-operation with the NGOs ARAS and PARADA are running the program which will provide IDUs with syringes, condoms, TB screening, Hepatitis B vaccination, HIV and HBV testing, medical care and counselling. Treat Now is funded by The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and it will be active for two and a half years. ALIAT's contribution will include a mobile unit and staff of 4 people, one medical doctor and 3 social workers. The mobile unit will cruise around the open drug scenes of the city three/four nights per week providing services and linkage to care for the TB at risk or infected population.

Romanian Harm Reduction Network

ROMANIA

Harm Reduction Interventions:

- On the 26th of June the Romanian Harm Reduction Network organized a "Support Don't Punish!" event in partnership with Carusel (one of the member organizations).
- Mr. Thomas Zosel, representative of the Frankfurt police, was invited to present the "Frankfurt way" of dealing with drug-related matters. The meeting will include two sessions: one at the National Antidrug Agency for the Romanian Police representatives and one in for guests and media followed by a theatre play based on the death of a drug user in police custody last year in Bucharest. The guests of at the event will receive also a brief comic book with information on drug use and the war on drugs (created by the graphic artist Sorina Vazelina, available in Romanian here: <http://rhrn.ro/public/uploads/file/276/interzis-sorina-vazelina-2014.pdf>), and on EDPI's European-scale initiative "Room for
- RHRN is a member of the European Civil Society Forum on Drugs 2015-2017.



Co-operation:

- One of the most notable initiatives of the organizations in our network is Carusel's project for opening drug consumption rooms for IDUs in Romania (in Romanian at <http://www.ccd.org.ro/>).
- Fundatia FOC ("Family and Child Care") in partnership with the National Antidrug Agency has a new project for creating a new day centre with social, psychological and educational services directed to people with a drug use history, and for disseminating information in schools on drug use.

Update preparations of the UNGASS 2016

Following the annual session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in March 2015 intensive work has started to develop proposals and recommendations of the UN member states which should be discussed and approved by the Special General Assembly on Drugs. The Special Session of the General Assembly will take place in New York from 19 to 21 April 2016 (UNGASS 2016). Already some countries expressed initial thoughts on the content of conclusions and recommendations they expect from the UN Special Session of General Assembly. Non-governmental organizations wish to actively engage in the debate and have prepared draft texts that will be submitted to the competent national authorities, regional organizations and the United Nations. The Vienna NGO Committee on drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the New York NGO Committee on drugs (NYNGOC) and the Civil Society Task Force (CSTF) are coordinating the contributions of civil society organizations.

The European Union will discuss in September/October 2015 a first draft of conclusions and recommendations at a meeting of the Horizontal Drugs Group. The member states of the European Union have been invited to submit proposals to the EU Presidency, for the first draft discussion paper. The aim is to develop a "short, substantial, concise and action oriented outcome document".

The expectation of NGOs is to have a substantial and open dialogue on all issues without limitations and prejudices in order to promote realistic and effective policies tailored to the needs of society and the wellbeing of citizens directly affected by drugs. The organizations of the Drug Policy Network in Southeast Europe will express their views in all actors concerned. This Newsletter will report regularly about all initiatives concerning the UNGASS in the Balkan region.



Conference:

Hepatitis C and drug use in
Greece, Athens, June 17, 2015

On initiative of the Hellenic Liver Patients Association and the Department of health, epidemiology and medical statistics of the Athens University organized on June 17th a conference on Hepatitis C and the use of drugs in Greece. Co-organisers were the Hellenic Society for the Study of the Liver, The Union of drug users, The European liver Patients Association, Correlation, Praksis, the World Hepatitis Alliance, Diogenis Association, PositiveVoice and the Hepatitis B and C Public Policy Association. Speakers at the conference provided information about the current situation of Hepatitis C in relation to intravenous drug users (IDUs), the situation in prisons, the policy to address drug use and infectious diseases among injecting drug users, Hepatitis C virus treatment as prevention among people who inject drugs, barriers to providing therapy among IDUs, the European experience on harm reduction and prevention for IDUs.

**Drug policy and Harm reduction**

Diogenis Association participated at the round table discussion about Harm reduction and intravenous drug Users. Reference has been made to the negative attitude of the UN Commission of Narcotic Drugs (CND) towards the use of harm reduction services and the refusal to use the term harm reduction in the official documents of the commission. However, in the last 25 years an intense debate is taking place about the issue and more and more countries implement harm reduction programmes. Recently a non-paper has been published by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) entitled "Drug policy provisions from the international drug control Conventions". The paper points out that "the Conventions are not against harm reduction strategies when harm reduction is not carried out in isolation or as an alternative to demand reduction. At the time the Conventions were drafted, measures to prevent the health and social consequences of drug use and dependence were not as developed as in more recent decades. In 2009, Member States unanimously supported the view that protecting the health of drug users and offering first line social assistance, especially when the "patient" is not motivated to participate in treatment interventions or has relapsed to drugs after treatment, is an essential commitment for each Member State". These are positive developments that encourage states to adopt legislation that recognizes and supports the implementation of harm reduction programmes.



26 June, International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking



On the occasion of the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking the Association Diogenis, the NGO Praxis and the Greek Drug & Substitute Users Union participated in the global campaign "Support. Don't Punish." The three organisations produced a short video in Greek. In the Press Release the civil society organizations, Association Diogenis – Positive Voice – Center for Life – Praxis – Prometheus and the Greek Drug & Substitute Users Union, highlight the need for change in drug policy and practise in order to ensure the protection of health and human rights.

The press release is pointing out that, the Greek government has not yet approved a National Strategy (2014 -2020) and Action Plan (2014-2016) on Drugs. Main decisions that will guide the drug policy in the forthcoming years are not yet finalised. At the same time, the waiting lists for OST programs keep growing while the therapeutic programs are being underfunded. The new psychoactive substances are becoming more popular, causing immeasurable health damage to the people who use them, while the early warning mechanisms are trying to keep up with the phenomenon.

You can watch the video [here](#) and read the press release [here](#).

«Montenegro: Withdraw of global fund, Harm reduction services close down»

Unfortunately, on June 30th 2015 harm reduction service provision came to an end due to lack of funding. Montenegro is no longer entitled for further funding by Global Fund for Tuberculosis, AIDS and Malaria as it is now classified as an upper-middle income country. With participation of various governmental organizations, National AIDS Strategy was implemented throughout a project named "Support to NAS implementation", supported by the GFTAM and UNDP, CO Podgorica. Within this project preventive services for most at risk populations, were provided in community based NGOs. Tijana Žegura, Director of Harm Reduction Program of the NGO "Juventas", a partner organization of the Drug Policy Network SEE, provided us with important data illustrating the great need for such services. More specifically, during 2012 Juventas provided services for the 46% of PWID in Podgorica. In 2014, through 5 191 contacts with PWID and 1 686 with SWs 22.355 needles, 15.663 syringes and 16.330 condoms were distributed. Also, 1123 counselling sessions for 293 prisoners were provided during the same period. Despite the utmost importance of these services and their proven effectiveness, the Government has failed to ensure ongoing sustainability of the provided harm reduction services in community. As a result, most services were closed down, and the only Centre still open for Harm Reduction service provision is expected to stop functioning in October.



Organisations of the SEE Drug Policy Network

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

NGO Veza, Serbia

Romanian Harm Reduction Network (RHRN), Romania

Aksion Plus, Albania

Initiative for Health Foundation (IHF), Bulgaria

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

Juventas, Montenegro

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

Udruga Terra Association, Croatia

NGO Victorija, 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 in South East Europe.

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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