



Government - civil society dialogue on drugs

South East Europe 2020



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Following the success of the [first dialogue between national authorities and civil society organisations](#) held in 2018, the Office for Combating Drugs of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and Drug Policy Network South East Europe organised the second **South East Europe government - civil society dialogue on drugs** on 21 February 2020. The meeting was held in Belgrade, in the Palace of Serbia.

The **aim of the meeting** is to discuss about issues of importance for drug policy and reflect on the cooperation between authorities and civil society organisations at the national and regional level and perspectives of future cooperation.

The key topics for this meeting were:

1. Decriminalisation of drug consumption and possession for personal use - challenges and experiences
2. Role of civil society in drug policy

38 participants from all 11 countries of the region and 3 guest countries participated in the Dialogue.

The Dialogue was an excellent opportunity to hear various experiences from the region and wider and exchange ideas and comments.



Milan Pekić, Director of the Office for Combating Drugs of the Government of the Republic of Serbia opened the Dialogue and greeted the present participants. He stressed the importance of the improved cooperation between government and civil society.

Nebojša Djurasović, DPNSSE President, welcomed all participants and briefly presented the agenda of the meeting.

Decriminalization of drug consumption and possession for personal use - challenges and experiences

Milutin Milošević, DPNSSE Executive Director, presented the international framework for drug consumption and possession for personal use. He also informed the participants that in early 2019 Serbia was in the process of amending the Criminal Law and that one of the proposed changes was to harshen the punishment for the distribution of drugs especially to minors. During that process DPNSSE sent the proposal to the Working group to use this opportunity to decriminalize drug consumption and possession for personal use and to formally introduce harm reduction which in Serbia is part of national strategy for combating drugs but not the part of legislation. Unfortunately, there were no reply or any move in these directions.

He pointed out the importance of terminology in the process of decriminalization and stressed that European monitoring centre for drugs and drugs addictions (EMCDDA) uses three levels:

- 1) **Depenalization**, when drug consumption is still criminal offence, but judges, prosecutors and police are not practicing their authority to the full extent and show some flexibility especially in the cases of young people, where they do not use the harsh punishment but rather the principle of opportunity of prosecution or and/or alternative sanctions against people who use drugs.
- 2) **Decriminalization** means changing classification of drug consumption from criminal to non-criminal behaviour. It is still not legal to use drugs, but the punishment is mainly alternative and it is not the criminal act when people are caught while using drugs.
- 3) **Legalization** is last step in this process and means legalizing some drugs which are on the list of illicit substances.

Milošević pointed out that depenalization is mainly the practice in most countries in the region and that decriminalization is the next step to discuss.

Further in his speech he listed the reasons for and against the decriminalization.

Milošević presented the international legal framework which authorises decriminalization of drug consumption and possession for personal use, such as *UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances* from 1988 and *European Convention on Human Rights*.

He informed the participants that the UN Chief Executive Board held in November 2018 adopted policy to promote alternatives to conviction and punishment in appropriate cases including the decriminalization of drug policy for personal use and to promote the principle of proportionality.

He further informed the participant about the details of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction report regarding court decisions in three countries - Georgia, South Africa and Mexico, on growing and using cannabis in private and also informed them about details of the report of Global Commission on Drug Policy from 2016 *Advancing Drug Policy Reform: a new approach to decriminalization*.

Her Excellency, Ambassador of Portugal, **Maria Virgínia Mendes da Silva Pina** who shared with the participants details of Portugal drug policy and their experiences with the process of decriminalization of drug consumption and possession for personal use.

Portugal introduced radical changes regarding personal drug consumption and possession of any illicit substance in their criminal legislation 20 years ago. Those changes enter into force on 1st July 2001. The consumption, acquisition and possession for their own use of narcotics is no longer considered as a crime, but it constitute an administrative offence, in the cases when the amount of narcotics does not excide the quantity required for the average use during the period of the 10 days. Drug use in Portugal remained illegal, but penal sanctions are no longer applied. Administrative sanctions, such as fines or suspension of driving license are now applied. It is still considered a crime to grow drugs for a personal use. In Portugal drug addiction is considered a disease and drug addicts are treated as patients and not as criminals. A punishment regime is established with the aim to convince the drug addicts to accept treatment.

Pina pointed out that decriminalization alone is not the solution of the problem. Police in Portugal continued to suppress trafficking and in the area of harm reduction availability of treatments were extended. Intense work was carried out in prevention area, in schools and among specific groups.

Main gains identified after 20 years are:

- Decrease in drug use among adolescents and a small increase in life time drug use among adults, which still remains below European average;
- Significant reduction of number of problematic users
- Considerable reduction in the prevalence of injecting drug use
- Strong reduction of overdose numbers and infectious diseases
- Reduction in stigmatization of drug users
- Reduce burden of drug offenders in criminal justice system
- Increase in the amount of drugs ceased by the police and customs.

At the end of her speech, Pina pointed out that Portugal decriminalized all drugs, but did not legalize them and that in Portugal drug policy objection changed from punishment for breaking the law to the assistance to overcome a potential health, social and existential problems.

Thanking Her Excellency, Djurasović stressed out that we can learn from Portugal how to work in the field of drug prevention and how to reduce health risks (hepatitis and HIV). He introduced Mr Daan van der Gouwe as a next speaker and invited him to share Dutch experience with the participants of the meeting.

Daan van den Gouwe works at the Trimbos Institute in Netherland as a sociologist and drug researcher in a drug policy monitoring program. He is also the national coordinator of the Dutch Harm Reduction Network. Presenting the Dutch drug policy, he stressed that its objectives and principles date back to 1976 when heroin enter the Dutch drug market and started replacing opium. Main objective was to reduce both drug demand and drug related harm and drug supply. Dutch drug policy is evidence based (measuring is knowing). Before setting up policies, one have to know what is happening in the country. Drug problem is primarily seen as a public health issue and drug users are not considered criminals. He presented the principal stakeholders in the drug policy implementation on both national and local level. Furthermore, he presented the main law dealing with the drug issue - the Opium Act from 1976, where legislator choose to differentiate the approach to so call “hard and soft” drugs (mainly cannabis). Use of drugs was not seen as a criminal offence, but possession was the criminal offence and this was done to allow for seizing the drugs. With the recent adaptations of the Opium Act all kind of new substances were classified as hard or soft drugs. He further explained the use of expediency principle in The Netherlands. Public prosecutor has the discretionary power to refrain from prosecution of criminal offences if that is judged to be in the public interest. That allows them to focus on large scale dealers, and focusing on dealers rather than on users. Opium act has 3 levels of priorities:

- The highest priority is given to reduction of large scale dealing and production of hard drugs
- Low priority is given to possession of small quantities of drug for personal use (less than 0.5 grams of hard drugs and less than 5 grams of cannabis)
- No priority is given to the produces sold in coffee shops.

He further gave an overview of the fines that can be sentenced for a possession of different types and quantities of drugs and also for the use of soft and hard drugs at the public places where it is not allowed.

As for the coffee shops, he explained what is so called *AHOJ-GI criteria* which regulates the work of local coffee shops. He also explained what are the local competences of municipal authorities regulating the operation of the coffee shops (such as deciding on permission and number of coffee shops and defining minimum distance between coffee shops and secondary schools), and pointed out that over the time the rules for the operation of coffee shops are tightening. The number of coffee shops is going down. There were almost 720 coffee shops in Netherlands in 2006 and now there are 570 operational. He also presented the map of Netherlands showing the distribution of the existing coffee shops to the participants, which among other things shows that almost 70 % of municipalities do not allow coffee shops any more.

He also presented statistics on drug use in The Netherlands which shows that cannabis is most used drug. Use of cannabis among young Dutch (aged 15 to 16) is almost twice the European average. Heroin use continues to decline but ecstasy use is higher. He stressed out that if main goal in drug policy is reduction of use, then Dutch had failed there. They are number one users of the ecstasy and amphetamines in Europe, and also very high in the list as users of cocaine and cannabis. However number of opioid users is very low. Also number of deaths from drug overdose in Netherlands is very low compared to the European average.

Health situation of drug users in The Netherlands is really positive. Mortality rate and infectious diseases have gone down. As for the infectious diseases, those numbers are also very low. In 2015 number of injecting drug users was less than 1000. HIV among people who use drugs is virtually 0%.

When evaluating the success of drug policy in Netherlands, it is important to stress that public health targets are reasonably well realized, but the drug policy has been less effective in the area of supply reduction. Dutch are number one producers of ecstasy and amphetamines in the world - so there drug policy has completely failed. Hard and soft drugs are successfully separated, and most people who want to use drugs will turn to cannabis.

He stressed the importance of „housing first“ projects, where they realized that if some drug user will always use the drugs they should be able to rent the room in the places supervised by drug treatment service. So, in their own room they are able to use drugs. That removed drug problems off the streets.

At the end of his presentation he mention the new challenges in the implementation of drug policy (such as changing markets and emergence of new drugs) and stressed out importance of monitoring and evaluation of national strategies.

The next speaker was **Lorenzo Mineo** from the organization Science for Democracy from Italy. His presentation was mainly focused on decriminalization policies in Italy regarding „light drugs“. He presented legal framework on drug policies in Italy, where possession of any drugs, cultivation of cannabis only and social supply of cannabis only are considered as decriminalized activities. However, threshold separating personal use from drug trade is not determined by the law. Possession of drugs is still considered as offence and is sanctioned with administrative sanction (such as confiscation of drugs, fines, suspension of driving license, etc.). To estimate if the drug is for personal use or for drug trade, proportion between percentage of active substance in the drug and quantity of the drug must be determined. If the drug is considered more harmful and dangerous smaller quantities are needed to determine that drug is intended for the drug trade and not for personal use.

In 1990 Italy adopted one of the most prohibitionist drug laws in Europe at that time, known as „Jervolino-Vassali“ (named after the Minister of Internal Affairs) in which the sentence for personal possession could have range from 7 to 20 years in prison. In 1993, following the referendum, personal drug use was in large scale decriminalized and that lasted until 2006 when even harsher law called Fini-Giovanardi was adopted. At that moment penalties were increased and cannabis was placed in the hard drugs section. In 2014 Fini-Giovanardi was struck down by the Constitutional Court and, in order to fill the void, the Parliament made some decisions and de facto decriminalized personal drug use.

Further in his presentation Mineo focused on three key issues of Italian legislation regarding decriminalization. First issue relates to production and use of industrial hemp, which was regulated in December 2016 in Italy. Mineo pointed out to the fact that in Italy, only the percentage of allowed THC is defined (0,5 % is tolerated), but the legal use of the final product is not clearly defined which creates the grey area.

Second important topic is medical cannabis, regulated in 2014. Italy produces medical cannabis only in military pharmaceutical hospital in Florence. That structure cannot meet the demand of all the country, which is the reason why Italy is importing THC and THC/CBD medical cannabis from Netherland. Mineo considers that following the pilot products where medical cannabis would be produced in state owned and operated enterprises, public/private partnership should be established to meet a demand for production of medical cannabis. Third important question is penalty proportionality and that question is raised by the sentences of both Constitutional and Cassation Court. Over the years in many sentences Courts clarified that possession of small quantities of drugs or cultivation of very limited number of cannabis plants should not be penalized. Mineo considers that Italy should not only relay of these court decisions but that the movement for lessening penalties for crimes without a victim should be formed.

He concluded his presentation with proposition to use European Citizens Initiative (if citizens collect one million signatures or more they can ask European Commission to reform some of the EU policies) to reshape some of the cannabis policies.

Djurasović invited **Nevenka Mardešić** from the Croatian harm reduction association Help to present Croatian experience. He pointed out that Croatia is the only country from the region that has undergone the process of decriminalization of drug use.

Mardešić presented the process of decriminalization of drug use in Croatia which started with the legislative changes of the Criminal Code in 2013. Since then, drug possession for personal use was not considered as a crime anymore but as an administrative offence. However Mardešić pointed out that legislation did not precisely determined the threshold that should be considered as a drug for personal use, which in her opinion opened door for speculations and created a grey zone. The intention of the legislator was to prevent drug dealers from speculations by carrying with them precisely the quantity below the threshold, but that left a space where drug dealers could influence the police and court decisions. Croatia have chosen to overtake Portuguese model where state repression is focused towards the drug dealers and not towards the drug users. When it comes to cannabis, growing of even only one plant is still considered to be a crime. Before this change, drug possession for the personal use was a crime and person could have been sentenced to prison up to six months. Now that is considered an administrative offence and money penalty ranges from 5.000 to 20.000 kuna. Besides that, measure of obligatory medical treatment could be imposed. In 2015 purchasing of cannabis for medical use was legalized, and with the latest changes even the production of medical cannabis is allowed.

Further in her presentation Mardešić indicated what is seen as negative and positive results of these changes. Usage of cannabis increased in Croatia and young persons are more likely to use drugs now when the usage is just an offence and not a crime. On positive side, courts are dealing with the lesser number of cases and police and courts can focus on drug dealers; process in the administrative court is more simple and less stigmatizing for the drug user; punitive system is less strained and funds can be focused on other things (like medical treatment of drug users) and an increase in the number of young persons who are included in some kind of treatments is observed (instead of going to prison, drug user can be included in medical treatment, or can be sent to social welfare centres).

At the end of her presentation Mardešić pointed out at some challenges in Croatian system. Croatia had National Strategy for Combating Drugs for the period of 2012 to 2017. Since the expiration of that Strategy, new one has not been adopted. Also institutional changes had lessen the importance of combating drugs. Croatian Drug Office used to be independent office and now it is the part of Institute for Public Health. Mardešić sees this change as a mistake and considers that the office dealing with the process of combating drugs should be independent and not just the department of other institution.

Following the presentation of Mardešić, Djurasović opened the floor for questions and discussions.

Nicoleta Dascalu from the Romanian Association against AIDS (ARAS) asked representatives from The Netherlands and Italy what they see as three main things to improve in drug policies in their countries. In his answer Mr van den Gouwe expressed that he considers that Dutch failed to reduce demand in drugs, and that they have significant rise in the numbers of recreational drug users. So, there is a need to address increased consumption of stimulants drugs. He stressed out that when it comes to heroin use, mortality rates and HIV reduction Dutch are quite successful. However, issues of supply and production of drugs has been neglected by law enforcement. Concerning the cannabis and coffee shops, Van den Gouwe sees lack of quality control as the main issue. There are no state approved growers that deliver cannabis to coffee shops, so basically everyone can offer their products to coffee shops. Mineo pointed out that his organization is advocating for legalization of light drugs. He noted that there is a very high percentage of people in prison for drug related crimes. He sees reduce of imprisonment for drug related crimes as a good policy. Van den Gouwe added that in The Netherlands lot of people are not sent to prisons for crimes that involve smaller quantities of drugs, but instead they are doing community service or have some fines. Number of prisons have gone down in the country and some prisons are left empty. So, there are even requests from Norway and Belgium to rent out the prisons and to send the prisoners from their countries to Dutch prisons.

Mariochristos Atzemis from Greek organization Centre for Life, as a member of the community of people living with HIV, spoke about stigmatization of drug users and HIV patients. He stressed out that every policy that exclude people who are directly affected with the drug policy is condemned to fail. He pointed out that usually when people say they are against drugs, that means they are against drug users, and that war on drugs is war against drug users. He stressed out that putting people in jail for drug possession should stop, and that the Portuguese system is actually working. When drug use is considered as a disease that approach is trying to stop the punitive process. However, drug use is not just a disease, but there are more factors contributing to people becoming drug users, such as social, cultural, economic etc. He further stressed that system in The Netherlands is human centred and very devoted to people. It is very important for people like him to be included and visible, because they are often marginalized.

Van den Gouwe pointed out that user involvement is really important and that in the eighties drug users started to get involved. Interest groups were formed and people were invited to the conferences and meetings. If you do not account user perspective, your drug policy will fail. He again stressed that Dutch drug policy is very effective when it comes to treatment and health issues, but that they failed when it comes to reduction and supply issue.

Djurasović said that DPNSEE is proud to have Mariochrisos as one of their board members. He further asked Van den Gouwe to give some information about Trimbos Institute. In his reply Van den Gouwe stressed out that Trimbos Institute is a leading national institute when it comes to monitoring drugs and mental health issues. It is non-governmental, independent scientific institute that do a lot of drug policy work.

Jože Hren from Slovenian Ministry of Health thanked the organizers for the opportunity to be present on this meeting. He spoke about the amount of money that EU countries are investing in their drug policy implementation. Some countries have financial problems when they speak about drug consumption rooms. When it comes to Slovenia, there are financial means, but there are always aspirations and expectations for more. He then posed two questions: first about the influence of US and UN institutions to the drug policy in Italy, specifically INCB; and second if The Netherlands received any involvement of INCB regarding the possibility that some municipalities will start with growing cannabis for use in the coffee shops on their territories. Mr Mineo pointed out that at this moment there is an ongoing discussion in Italian Parliament about legalization of light drugs. It is based a lot on US examples. He is not aware if there is any reference in ongoing debate regarding international standards on the UN level. Mr van den Gouwe said that they are in regular contact with INCB and that INCB is fully aware of the experiment in The Netherlands, but don't favour it. He stressed out the importance of transparency and involvement of all stakeholders that Trimbos Institute is trying to achieve.

Saša Djordjević from Belgrade Center for Security Policy posted two questions. First question was about public places in big cities where it is allowed without almost no restriction to sell drugs - if such places exist and what is the perception of citizens and law enforcement authorities towards those places. Second question was about most successful initiative of the civil society organization in drug policies in The Netherlands and Italy. Regarding the first question Van den Gouwe answered that such places existed but now they are getting out of site of the public due to the housing projects that are being implemented in The Netherlands. Drug consumption is being removed off the streets. As for the second question Van den Gouwe promised to address it in the second part of the meeting. Mineo answered that there are lot of places where people openly sell drugs in Italy and that the issue of legal regulation is important. As for the most successful initiative he mentioned law proposal for cannabis legalization, popular initiative done 2 years ago but not yet discussed in Parliament.

Ognjen Zekić, Head of the Department for the Suppression of the Abuse of Narcotic Drugs in the Ministry of Security of Bosnia Herzegovina, had a question for Mardešić regarding the transformation of the Office for Combating Drugs in Croatia. He noted that his Department, as a part of Ministry, had excellent cooperation with Croatian Office for Combating Drugs, which is now not working in his full capacity as it used to. He also noted that Serbia still has independent Office for Combating Drugs.

Mardešić answered that in her opinion it is not good that Office for Combating Drugs is now a part of Institute for Public Health, because that undermines the importance of that issue. Drug policy is not limited only to health issues, and when it comes to Institute for Public Health, drug policy is only one small part of their scope of work. She also talked about the example of Split where because of very serious situation regarding the drug users, Section for Combating Drug Dependence was established in 2005. It was an independent section until 2015, when it became a part of Section for Social Help and Health Protection. That situation reflected to some issues, including the reduction of budget for combating drugs in Split. At the end, she stressed that in her opinion, Office for Combating Drugs should be independent.



Role of civil society in drug policy

The second section on the meeting with the topic Role of civil society in drug policy was devoted to cooperation of civil society organisations and national drug agencies in the process of formulating and implementing drug policies. Djurasović pointed out that there is a good cooperation in Serbia between NGO sector and Office for Combating Drugs of the Republic of Serbia established in 2014. He invited **Milan Pekić**, Director of the Office for Combating Drugs to present experiences of this cooperation.

Pekić informed the participants that at the beginning of the work of the Office, analysis were done in order to determine what should be its main actions. One of the conclusions was that the whole society, all stakeholders, without the division on governmental and nongovernmental sector should be included in the formulation and implementation of drug policy.

In order to have proper legal framework for the cooperation with the NGO sector, in January 2018, Office for Combating Drugs signed Cooperation Agreement with 15 organizations of the civil society. As one of good examples of cooperation, the first dialogue with the civil society organizations was jointly organized in 2018, the same as this one today. Good practices from the region were shared which gave an opportunity to the Office for Combating Drugs to formulate proper drug policy in Serbia, without using copy-paste system. For Serbian authorities it is important to create a system that can be applied in Serbia, which means that some good things from drug policies of other states applicable in Serbia could be implemented in our system.

For the first time, when Action Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy for the period of 2018 to 2021 was drafted, Office for Combating Drugs decided to include the civil society organizations in the drafting of the Action Plan. At this moment Office is working on the creation of the team that would draft new National Strategy. For sure, help will be requested from some of the participants of this meeting that are representing civil society in order to properly draft contemporary and realistic strategy.

He further informed the participants that the Office cooperated with the civil society organizations in the process of collecting data from the territory of whole Serbia. Analysis of obtained data will help in creation of realistic National Strategy. He also pointed out that Office is working on legislative forms that would allow better usage of the financial means obtained with the application of the Principle of Opportunity, perhaps on some tenders where civil society organizations could apply with their ideas.

He considers cooperation with the civil society organizations to be excellent, and efforts will be made to make that cooperation even better.

Pekić briefly commented on the first topic of the meeting by pointing out that concepts of decriminalization and legalization are often being mixed up. Decriminalization cannot be the same in each country. All examples and experiences should be valued and taken into account. But, in Serbia issue of decriminalization should be seen from all aspects and if decision is made to proceed with that process, decriminalization should be adequate to our needs and our customs.

Pekić expressed his concern that decriminalization would be followed with the increase in the number of drug users.

Djurasović informed the participant that General Assembly of DPNSEE was held yesterday and asked his colleague Board member **Sanja Šišović** to present an overview of the discussion and situation in the member countries.

Šišović pointed out that yesterday on the General Assembly participant in the Network had an opportunity to present the situation in their countries, problems that all of them are facing, challenges regarding sustainability of harm reduction programs, etc. She pointed out that Croatia and Romania stand as good examples to the organizations in the Network. Situation in Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia is good, although there are many challenges including delays in supporting harm reduction services; many gaps in drug policies; decriminalization is far away from happening; huge challenges regarding response to new drugs and early warning system and many challenges regarding meaningful participation of civil society. Bulgaria and Albania are facing serious challenges. One of the organizations in Bulgaria will shut down. That shows that even EU countries are closing their services due to lack of money. Greece is also facing huge problems with sustainability, but also regarding outbreak of HIV among people who inject drugs.

She also pointed out that 2020 is so called “strategic year”. Most national and international strategic policies are expiring in this year, so the process of monitoring what has been achieved should happen and plans for coming 2, 4 or 5 years should be drafted. It is a good opportunity to try to involve civil society organizations in the process of planning. Network could be a good partner in the process of shaping new policies. She once again stressed the importance of inclusion of civil society and people who are effected with drug use in the policy shaping process.

She informed the participant about possibility, practiced in Montenegro, to legally prescribe importance of including civil society organization in policy shaping. In Montenegro, according to the law, whatever document is drafted (strategy, action plan, etc.) every working group should have one representative of the respective civil society organization.

Following the presentation of Šišović, Djurasović reminded that representatives of the Network members are present at the meeting and invited the participants to take part in the discussion.

Tomaz Koren from Slovenia informed participants about developments in Slovenia since 2004, when independent Office for Combating Drugs was incorporated in the Ministry of Health. Until that moment the number of NGOs active in the field of drugs was increasing and they had good cooperation with the independent Office. When the Office was incorporated in the Ministry of Health problems started to occur. Although the Ministry was understaffed, they tried to maintain good cooperation with NGOs. The relations stayed good, but there were problems in implementation of agreed steps due to lack of staff. He also pointed out to the fact that in Slovenia, government often change (in average every two years). It is extremely difficult to implement actions while you are waiting for the appointment of the new Minister of Health. He suggested to the representatives of Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina to keep their independent Offices for Combating Drugs and concluded that Slovenia should again establish independent Office.

Hren from Slovenia, agreed with previous point from Van den Gouwe that every drug policy should be modest and honest in delivering every activity and that should also involve all people including experts and drug users. He expressed his hope that Slovenia as a part of EU is doing its best to deliver good policies, services and activities.

Mardešić from Croatia, pointed to the fact that members of the former independent Office for Combating Drugs, who are now incorporated in the Institute for Public Health, actually do not want to be independent again, due to the significantly higher salaries in the Institute.

Pekić spoke as a Director of Serbian Office for Combating Drugs and stressed out the fact that he, as a Director is responsible directly to the Prime minister which helps in reduction of lengthily administrative processes.

Denis Dedajić from organization Margina from Bosnia Herzegovina talked about specificity of system established in Bosnia Herzegovina on the basis of ethnicity that created a lot of problems in construction of effective drug policy. He expressed his regrets because after 25 years of work in the civil sector he feels as a prisoner of political will. He pointed to the fact that he and other members of civil sector in Bosnia Herzegovina have great relations with the representatives of the Ministry of Security which include joint work on strategies and legislative framework, but that in reality things are not improving due to the political will. He also expressed his opinion that even in the EU institutions situation is not that good. Strategic documents in drug policy are expiring and there is no clear direction how things should develop. Problems in this field are being placed on the margin in the countries of the region, as well as in the EU countries. He concluded his discussion with the propositions how to improve the cooperation between governmental sector and civil society in the field of drugs, by including younger people in the work of the NGO sector and creating new generation of leaders.

Marija Mijović from organization Juventas from Montenegro pointed to the fact that beside the pure existence of institution their efficient work is necessary. In Montenegro, independent Office for Combating Drugs and even Commission for Drugs exist, but that Commission was not operational since 2016, when it was established. She expressed her opinion that cooperation between governmental and civil sector in the field of drugs in Montenegro is not on satisfactory level.

Djurasović informed the participants that representatives of governmental sector in Montenegro were informed about and invited to today's meeting but that they are not present.

Šišović informed the participants that organisations she comes from Cazas conducted the analysis on the role of NGOs in the public health sector in Montenegro, with the aim to assure sustainability for harm reduction services. The important question that popped up was: if NGOs would not implement harm reduction services, who would do that? Šišović is not aware of any country in Europe where these programs are implemented by any organization rather than civil society organization. So, if the governments have harm reduction as part of their programs, they must cooperate with civil sector organizations that are the only one providing these services. That should be a partnership of governmental and civil sector. She shared her feeling of shame because the government of Montenegro does not have its representatives on this meeting.

Djurasović noted that most organization from the Network work in the area of harm reduction, mostly with people injecting heroin, but some of the organizations also works with new drugs. There is a need to redefine harm reduction to include new drugs and drug testing. He invited Van den Gouwe to share the Dutch experience in this field with the participants.

Van den Gouwe pointed out that before any effective drug checking, there should be legal framework in place. Potential user of drugs should feel free to enter the premises of the organization conducting drug checking. Those organizations should be respected and in good relations with the government. In The Netherland, Ministry of Health have been supporting the organizations in the process of drug checking for almost 30 years. Role of NGOs is important in this process, as well as respecting human rights of the users. Those submitting drug samples for checking are respected as human beings. Those that are submitting samples are often referred to medical help by the professionals receiving the samples. In the eighties and nighties structural dialogue existed between the government, mainly Ministry of Health, and several NGOs working in the field of drugs, which stopped at the beginning of 21 century. There is a need for a new dialogue with NGOs in The Netherlands. He shared with the participants their intentions of organizing meeting in the spring between governmental ministries and NGOs.

Djurasović pointed out that some of NGOs in Europe (Spain, France, Austria, Netherlands, Slovenia, etc.) are discovering new drugs in the process of drug testing and that is an important factor in the early warning system. He invited Koren from Slovenia to share their experience in this process.

Koren presented how the early warning system is organized in Slovenia. There are several places in Slovenia where users can bring their drug to conduct drug testing. The testing is being done in cooperation with Ministry of Health. This early warning system is a kind of harm reduction because users are becoming aware of the possible consequences of their particular drug. Results of the testing are being updated on the Facebook page in order to be accessible to large number of people. Due to successful work of this system, deaths because of overdose are reduced.

He pointed out that lately main problem are medicaments that are being used as drug, either independently or in combination with classical drugs. Medicaments are being purchased via internet (dark web, etc.) or imported from the other countries. We need to have a help from pharmaceutical experts in order to properly estimate what substances are part of these new “mixes”.

Information exchange between the countries is needed to properly address this problem. Younger generations are using these “mixes” all over the region, and people are not buying drugs on the street anymore, but they are using computers and internet.

Van den Gouwe added few points about the system of drug checking in The Netherlands. They ask each person where they have bought the substance and as what the substance was sold. They noticed that more and more people are using the internet for drug purchasing. Sometimes, sample contains totally different substance then the user expected, often much more dangerous. In those situations, they try to contact the vendor from the internet to warn him and to suggest to either stop selling or to inform the users about the content of the offered drug. In The Netherlands, from time to time they issue “red alert” warnings, in the case when the sample

contain something that is very dangerous. They use all kind of channels to put the message across to the users to avoid that specific substance.

Djurasović noted that early warning system in Serbia exist, but mainly for the usage of law enforcement agencies (police, custom officers, etc.) in order to effectively recognize new types of drugs and to stop their importing in Serbia. He expressed his opinion that EWS should also serve for the benefit of drug users.

Silvana Naumova, from organization HOPS from North Macedonia, presented main problems with children drug users in Macedonia. Children, in some cases already from 8 years of age, start using glue and later use heroin or misuse methadone. In Macedonia main centre for treatment with methadone is Psychiatric hospital, where only older than 18 years can be admitted for treatment. Last year Program for treatment of children drug users have been created and should be adopted soon and implemented by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare. That would make harm reduction services available to children too.

Irena Molnar, from the NGO Re Generacija from Serbia, reflected on drug checking process in Serbia. Since 2015/2016 there have been talk in Serbia about this, when Ministry of Health visited "Check it" organization in Vienna, to see how they are doing drug checking. Since then, early warning system has been developed, but it is not really working because information is not shared among the stakeholders. As NGO they participated in developing an application that offers information on pills tested in European laboratories. App has been developed in January this year by the Youth organization for drug action in Europe, "Help not harm" and "Unit" organizations, and we can see that people are using it and are going online to obtain information. They as organization have translated the information into 17 languages. Re Generacija is advising people from high life settings to check information on pills they are using. Research on new psychoactive substances is in progress. Molnar is a consultant for Euroasian Harm Reduction Association. That research should be finished until May. Hopefully, that could be the base for actual drug checking. She also informed the participant that Ministry of Health approached their NGO for the advice how to implement drug checking services in the framework of the Exit festival.

Djordjević pointed out that organization he works for does not provide actual services, such as harm reduction services or treatments, but is focused on how police and prosecution is dealing with organized crime. They encounter similar problems as most NGOs in the region - sustainability and cooperation with governmental institutions. He informed the participants that there is a similar regional network for the organizations from the Western Balkan dealing with security issues. That they are trying to create the civil society roster - on line data base of all civil society organizations in the region dealing with preventive and repressive side of drug policy or other organized crime issues. Unfortunately, at this moment Slovenia and Croatia are not part of the network. On a national level, their organization is focused on issues of usage of public funds and corruption in the police and prosecution. Once again he stressed out the importance of useful cooperation between government and civil society.

Djurasović pointed out that EU accession process is a good opportunity to push some topics on the national agenda, like creation of early warning system, which was a topic discussed on working group on health. At this moment network is part of a process of preparing rulebook for psychotic substances treatment including harm reduction.

Koren talked about introduction of medication “Naloxone”, as a part of harm reduction services in Slovenia, targeting the reduction of overdose deaths. **Hren** explained that Naloxone is an antidote for opiate intoxication, and that the topic of possibility to prescribe this medication was discussed few years ago at the governmental Commission on Drugs. Two NGO associations have their representatives in this Commission. On the recent meeting of the Commission consensus was reached that programs of using Naloxone should start as soon as possible.

Djurasović concluded that successful cooperation was established in the field of redefining harm reduction services, sharing information from early warning system and pushing procedures on legalization of Naloxone.

Djurasović invited Milošević to summarize conclusions of the meeting.

Milošević started with the statement that the idea of organizers was not to oblige anyone to do something what was successfully done somewhere else, but to start the dialogue and to provide the option to hear the experience of others, to hear what they are doing and to take whatever is possible to be used. He pointed out that the role of civil society in this field is specific. They have a good contact with the drug users, who are in some cases reluctant to talk even to doctors. Civil society is perceived as a friend approaching them in open way and trying to help them. There is a lot of very experience and expert people working in civil society. Also, members of civil society are very well connected and much more flexible then governmental structures. Governments should use them as messengers. Key conclusion of the meeting is that we cannot do things alone. Neither as civil society or government, nor as one country independent from another. This dialogue is an answer to that need to meet and to communicate. The message of this meeting is a call for continuation and improvement of cooperation that we have at this moment, for the benefit of people who we both serve.

At the end of the meeting, **Djurasović** thanked all the speakers, representatives of governmental institution, all other participants and technical staff, He expressed special gratitude to Milošević as Executive Director of the Network and Pekić as Director of Office for Combating Drugs for organization of this conference.



Participant list

	Name	Organisation/institution	Country
1	Besnik Hoxha	Aksion plus	Albania
2	Denis Dedajić	Margina	Bosnia Herzegovina
3	Ognjen Zekić	Ministry of Interior	Bosnia Herzegovina
4	Samir Ibišević	PROI	Bosnia Herzegovina
5	Anna Lyubenova	Initiative for Health Foundation	Bulgaria
6	Nevenka Mardešić	Help	Croatia
7	Arijana Lučev	Udruga Terra	Croatia
8	Ilijana Grgić	Udruga Terra	Croatia
9	Lana Glad	Udruga Terra	Croatia
10	Mariochristos Atzemis	Positive Voice	Greece
11	Lorenzo Mineo	Science for democracy	Italy
12	Safet Blakai	Labyrinth	Kosovo*
13	Sanja Šišović	CAZAS	Montenegro
14	Mišo Pejković	CAZAS	Montenegro
15	Marija Mijović	Juventas	Montenegro
16	Daan van der Gouwe	Trimbos Institute	The Netherlands
17	Manja Veličkovska	Coalition Margini	North Macedonia
18	Silvana Naumova	HOPS	North Macedonia
19	Gracia Costa Macedo	Embassy of Portugal	Portugal
20	Maria Virgínia Mendes da Silva Pina	Embassy of Portugal	Portugal
21	Liliana Viorica Dorobăţ	National Anti-drug Agency	Romania
22	Nicoleta Dascalu	ARAS	Romania
23	Saša Đorđević	Belgrade Center for Security Policy	Serbia
24	Nenad Maletin	DPNSEE	Serbia

	Name	Organisation/institution	Country
25	Snežana Šundić Vardić	DPNSEE	Serbia
26	Milutin Milošević	DPNSEE	Serbia
27	Olivera Mijušković Kortas	DPNSEE	Serbia
28	Milica Bulajić	Office for Combating Drugs	Serbia
29	Milan Pekić	Office for Combating Drugs	Serbia
30	Darija Kotvinović	Ministry of Justice	Serbia
31	Milica Živković	Ministry of Interior	Serbia
32	Danijela Nikolić	Ministry of Health	Serbia
33	Nebojša Đurasović	Prevent	Serbia
34	Irena Molnar	Re Generation	Serbia
35	Marija Knežević	Sole Translation	Serbia
36	Gordana Vekarić	Sole Translation	Serbia
37	Goran Radisavljević	Timočki omladinski centar	Serbia
38	Jože Hren	Ministry of health	Slovenia
39	Andrej Kastelic	SEEAnet	Slovenia
40	Tomaž Koren	Alliance of Non Governmental Organisations for Drugs and Addictions	Slovenia

Dialogue



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