

“The UNGASS 2016 and its significance for SEE”

Statement of NGO's in South East Europe



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From October 1-3, 2015 a Regional meeting of NGOs, policy makers and scientists/researchers from the countries of Southeast Europe, was organized by Diogenis Association in Belgrade, to discuss about the UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS, April 2016) and its significance for South East Europe. The meeting closed with the formulation of some conclusions relevant for the situation in the SEE countries.

**Statement of the meeting on
“The UNGASS 2016 and its significance for SEE”
Belgrade, 1-3 October 2015**

The participants express their appreciation for the initiative of the UN Member States, the international organizations, civil society and in particular, the NGOs to discuss and openly debate key issues concerning the drugs phenomenon. It is important that the UNGASS includes, besides the review of progress in the implementation of the political declaration 2009, the “assessment of the achievements and challenges in countering the world drug problem, within the framework of the three international drug control conventions and other relevant United Nations instruments.” The outcomes of the UNGASS should give a new impetus to the renewal of drug policies and practices in the world.

The political, economic and social situation in SEE countries makes it difficult to develop a coherent, comprehensive and workable drug policy. Drugs do not get the required priority on the political agenda of the countries in the region. The treatment of users, despite efforts in recent years to shift the focus from a punitive approach to an approach towards public health and respect for human rights, remains a responsibility of criminal justice with all the consequences of marginalization, stigma and social exclusion. In the countries of South East Europe, a large percentage of people who use drugs is imprisoned with no prospect of social integration. While scientific research and practical experience show that the inclusion of drug users and drug dependent people in harm reduction and treatment programs, is more effective and cheaper, governments do not adequately support these alternatives. On the contrary, in most countries, the providers of harm reduction services become less and in many cases, services are closing due to lack of funding. Organised crime and corruption related to drug trafficking is a huge problem in countries of the region located on trafficking routes for drugs, weapons and human beings. Cooperation with the international community to counter these problems is necessary.

Participants propose that the Special Session on Drugs provides guidelines and commits the Member States to implement the following issues:

1. UN Member States commit themselves to put into practice the constantly repeated principle of a balanced approach between demand and supply reduction. For the countries in Southeast Europe this means that priority must be given to resource allocation for harm reduction programs and strengthening prevention, treatment and social integration
2. The criminalization of drug users has proved to be counterproductive and harmful to society and individuals and should be repealed. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime mentions in the document "Drug policy provisions from the international drug control" that "International Conventions do not necessarily require the punishment for possession, purchase or cultivation of drugs for personal use." The Special Session should take a clear position and define the framework within which the member countries can address the decriminalization of drug users
3. Harm reduction programs are recognized in strategic documents on drugs in most countries of Southeast Europe, but this recognition is not transposed in state legislation. Integration of harm reduction (including distribution and exchange of syringes and supervised consumption rooms) into national legislation is needed
4. The use of new psychoactive substances by young people is a priority and has to be addressed effectively. Training and education, along with the promotion of a healthy life style has to be supported
5. Cannabis is the main substance used by young people. Cannabis as a prohibited substance is a matter of controversy. More and more countries make a distinction between cannabis and other psychotropic substances. Some countries have introduced legislation on cannabis. The Special Session on Drugs of 2016 cannot ignore these developments and should provide guidelines to address it. South East European countries face illicit production and trafficking of cannabis which have to be solved
6. The meeting in Belgrade identified the lack of treatment programs for minors who use drugs. It is an issue that needs immediate intervention especially for certain population groups in the countries of SE Europe

At the forthcoming Special Session of the UN General Assembly on drugs in 2016, the international community has the opportunity to propose a framework of principles which will enable Member States and civil society to conduct meaningful dialogue on drugs accompanied by the application of methods and programs that have proven to be effective. The new social conditions and challenges require policies and legislation that are consistent with scientific knowledge, promotion of a healthy life styles and respect for fundamental human rights.



Participating NGOs

Aktion Plus (Albania)

Margina (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Viktorija (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

PROI (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

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

Diogenis (Greece)

Positive Voice (Greece)

Center for Life (Greece)

NGO 4life (Montenegro)

Juventas (Montenegro)

CAZAS (Montenegro)

RHRN (Romania)

ALIAT (Romania)

Prevent (Serbia)

NGO REGENERATION (Serbia)

SEEA.NET (Slovenia)