



Drug Policy Dialogue in South East Europe



# Report

Cannabis Policy, Albania  
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# Drug Policy Developments in SEE

## Seminar Cannabis Policy-Albania

### CONTENTS

Cannabis trafficking routes and Cultivation in South Eastern Europe	pag. 6
Albanian Legislation on Cannabis, illegal production, trafficking and sanctions for possession and use.	pag. 10
Cannabis /Toxicological aspects	pag. 14
Substance abuse disorders and treatment in urgency	pag. 16
Education, awareness and reduction of demand for drugs and other dangerous substances	pag. 17
Recent International developments in Cannabis Policy	pag. 19



# Seminar

## Cannabis Policy in Albania

On Friday September 20, 2013 a workshop on Cannabis policy and practice in Albania has been organized by Diogenis Association, Drug Policy Dialogue in South East Europe and the Organization Aksion Plus. The purpose of the workshop was to:

- bring together policy makers, experts and representatives of non-governmental organisations and institutions in order to exchange information about the current state of play concerning national legislation in Albania, cannabis use and prevention policy, law enforcement and its impact on production and trafficking,
- discuss problematic issues that arise in the everyday practice and make recommendations for improvement,
- examine possibilities of cooperation between authorities, civil society organisations and international agencies on policy issues.

Diogenis Association and Aksion Plus are members of the Drug Policy Network in South East Europe and cooperate since 2010. A regional drug policy meeting is annually organized by Diogenis with participation of policy makers, NGO participants of the organizations of the Network and experts in the field of drugs from the countries in the region of South East Europe. This is the first bilateral workshop organized by Diogenis and Aksion Plus in Albania. The regional office of UNODC in Tirana, has been supportive by the organization of this work-shop and participated actively in the discussions. 32 persons from several service providing organizations, health and educational institutions and the police participated at the discussions. The workshop started with a presentation on Cannabis Trafficking and Cultivation in South Eastern Europe with special focus on Albania followed by a presentation of the Albanian legislation on Cannabis. Thereafter Interventions have been made by representatives of the health services, law enforcement, and

prevention programmes. Finally a presentation has been made on international developments on Cannabis policy and the workshop ended with conclusions and recommendations.

The director of Aksion Plus, Genci Muçollari opened the workshop and welcomed the participants. He informed the meeting about the work of Aksion Plus and referred to some data regarding the situation of drugs in Albania. Drug use and dependence is increasing in Albania since beginning of the '90s. The estimated number of drug users is about 40.000. Law enforcement and health institutions are confronted with major challenges to control the problem. Several discussions have taken place in the past years on how to shape a drug policy that will face in a consistent way the developments in drug supply and demand. The New Drug Strategy of Albania is a positive step to formulate a integral answer to the problem. There is also discussion about changing the legislation on some crucial points like the sanctions on drug possession of small quantities for personal use and the rights of users. A parliamentary has discussed possible changes in the penal law. There are, however, no concrete steps yet for a drug law reform. The Methadone substitution treatment is uncertain after 2014, when The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria will withdraw and the national Government has to take over the financial support for this program. Prevention programs are implemented in the country in good collaboration among the different institutions. Prof. Dr. Zihni Sulaj pointed out there are at the moment several proposals and initiatives on the issue of cannabis. He is of the opinion that there is a need for a serious discussion of the issue in Albania. In this respect he welcomes the initiative of this meeting. After these introductory remarks Ms Fiona Lalaj, moderator of the meeting presented the program of the meeting and gave the floor to Ms Ela Banaj.

## Cannabis trafficking routes and Cultivation in South Eastern Europe

Ms Ela Banaj of the UNODC office in Tirana presented the UNODC paper "Situation Analysis: Cannabis Trafficking and Cultivation in South Eastern Europe" (Sept. 2013). The current situation in South Eastern Europe suggests a predominance of cannabis herb

cultivation and trafficking. While other illicit drugs, such as heroin cocaine or ATS may command more attention, cannabis derivatives<sup>1</sup> are the most trafficked (in terms of volume) and consumed drug within the region. Cannabis is fuelling organised crime particularly in the western Balkans with Albania being most vulnerable to the trafficking and cultivation of cannabis.

## Cannabis herb

Every country within South Eastern Europe reports some level of cannabis herb cultivation taking place within their border. This can vary from small scale cultivation in greenhouses of a few hundred plants, to large scale industrialized outdoor cultivation (see below). Most indoor cultivation produces Cannabis with higher concentrations of THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol). Countries such as Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia report that a growing trade is occurring of seedlings being shipped to these countries for cultivation. This cultivation is almost exclusively aimed at local markets.

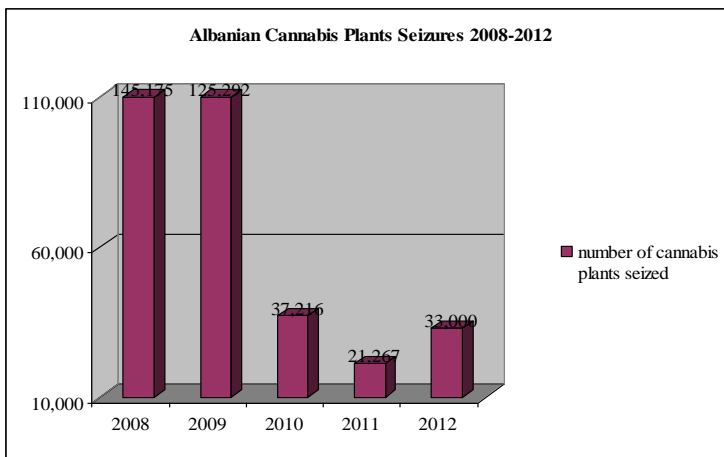
Current evidence suggest that large scale cultivation for export<sup>2</sup> occurs primarily in Albania with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia reporting some recent trends in large scale cultivation. Particular areas of known cultivation within Albania are the southern region Gjirokaster bordering Greece, Skoder and the North Albanian Alps, bordering Kosovo and Montenegro, as well as the countryside east of the port Vlore. The largest area under cultivation is most likely found in Gjirokaster particularly in the village of Lazarat.

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<sup>1</sup> Clear distinction here should be made between cannabis herb and cannabis resin. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably which can lead to confusion and misreporting within the region. Here cannabis resin is the purified form of the buds from female cannabis plants usually resulting in a higher THC content than that of cannabis herb. average THC reported by Albania in 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Cultivation of large outdoor plantations; THC content of this cannabis is usually quite low as indicated by the 4% average THC reported by Albania in 2012.

However, seizures of cannabis plants within Albania have generally declined in recent years going from 125,000 cannabis plants seized in 2009 to 21,000 plants in 2011 (see table below). However, a small increase has been noted in 2012 to 33,000 but still less than a quarter of seizures made in 2009.



The picture is markedly different for trafficking. Looking at the table below cannabis herb seizures tripled in Albania and almost doubled in the neighbouring country of Greece. This may suggest that trafficking from Albania into Greece, among other destinations, is on the increase

Figure 2 Cannabis herb seizures 2011-2012

Country	2011	2012
Albania	7696	21138
Greece	13400	22383
Bosnia and Herzegovina	446	2200
Bulgaria	461	1991
Croatia	396	1020
Kosovo/Serbia	97	1200
Macedonia (TFYR)	140	733
Montenegro	804	1000
Romania	252	369
Serbia	1000	2200
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>24691</b>	<b>48362</b>



From Albania cannabis herb, has multiple trajectories. According to seizures the strongest trajectories are those leaving the ports of Vlore and Durres for the Italian Adriatic coast, namely the ports of Bari, Brindisi and Lecce. This cannabis herb is primarily destined for the Italian market although recent information suggest that cannabis herb is trafficked further into France, Switzerland and the Netherlands. While attempts have been made to restrict this trafficking in the form of a moratorium on fast boats between Italy and Albania (2008) traffickers have responded by using ferries and large trucks to smuggle shipments in excess of one ton across to Italy.

An equally strong route is that of cannabis herb crossing south into Greece. According to Albanian law enforcement much of the cannabis herb destined for Greece is then trafficked onwards particularly to the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Netherlands. This is primarily done through container shipments and direct shipping from Greece, particularly from the ports of Piraeus, Igoumenitsa (also used to traffic to Italy) and Athens.



**Cannabis routes**

The green route (state land border) consists of cannabis being trafficked north through Albania into the Western Balkans. Trucks carrying up to 900 Kg of cannabis herb leave Albania and head to Montenegro, Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia before entering destination markets in western Europe. With the construction of a new motorway between Pristina, Kosovo and Tirana, Albania, this trajectory may be even more attractive to cannabis herb traffickers.

A prime example of this trajectory is the seizure of almost 300 kg in Slovenia in 2011, the drugs had followed the route from Albania into Serbia and then Croatia, with a destination of the Netherlands. Though a fairly large seizure, this is a lot smaller than the multi-ton seizures reported by Italian law enforcement of cannabis transported along the southern trajectory. As indicated by figure 2 above this trajectory may be of growing importance. For example Serbia reported a doubling of seizures in 2012, and even more recently an individual seizure of 900 Kg of cannabis herb in April 2013 on the border with Croatia.

Interestingly there is little indication of cannabis herb sourced in Albania being trafficked into Bulgaria or Romania. Bulgaria seized only 300 Kg of cannabis herb in 2012 and Romania 369 Kg. Neither country reported that their seizures were related to Albanian sourced cannabis.

Despite a recent individual seizure in the Italian port of Bari in July 2012 of cannabis herb, that had transited the Montenegrin port of Bar, there is little indication to suggest that the ports of Croatia, Montenegro, and Slovenia are used for trafficking of Albanian sourced cannabis herb into Western Europe.

## Cannabis Resin

In recent years trafficking of cannabis resin has been negligible with the largest seizure occurring in Greece of 122 Kg in 2011<sup>3</sup>. This picture changed in July, 2012 with the large seizure of 16 tons of cannabis resin in Bulgaria. This cannabis resin had been imported into Bulgaria from Morocco via the port of Varna and

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<sup>3</sup> This was sourced in Lebanon

was to make its way through Romania and central Europe and into Belgium. This was actually two seizures with the first four tons being discovered in a lorry on the Romanian/Bulgarian border leading to the additional seizure of the remaining 12 tons in a warehouse in a village near Sofia. Due to the scale of the seizure plus the warehousing it is possible that such large trafficking had been occurring for some time. While historically seizures of cannabis resin sourced from Morocco have occurred within the region in the past (Romania, 2009) this is the largest such single seizure. In contrast to the cannabis herb seizures there is little indication of any cannabis resin trafficking occurring in the Western Balkans.

### Albanian Legislation on Cannabis, illegal production, trafficking and sanctions for possession and use.

Mr. Sokol Selfollari, Chief of the Anti Narcotics Sector of the General Directory of State Police presented the aspects of the Albanian law on narcotic and psychotropic drugs, concerning cannabis cultivation, trafficking, possession and use, and the law enforcement activities concerning destruction of cannabis plants, trafficking routes and cannabis seizures. In his power point presentation he showed several pictures of cultivation areas and actions of the police.

The Law Nr 7975, of July 21<sup>st</sup> 1995 “On Narcotic and Psychotropic Drugs” (Official Journal of the Republic of Albania, Nr 20, August 25<sup>th</sup> 1995, f. 853), has been amended by the Law Nr 9271 of September 9, 2004, and the law Nr 9559 of July 8, 2006.

Article 284 of the criminal code defines the rules of production, import, export, maintenance and trade of psychotropic and narcotic substances. A List of controlled substances is part of this law. The law foresees severe penal sanctions against trafficking, manufacture, preparation, distribution, maintenance and sale of drugs and psychotropic substances. Cultivation of plants which serve or are known to serve the production and extraction of narcotic and psychotropic substances, without permit and authorization according to the law is punished by 3 to 7 years of imprisonment. The same offence, if committed in collaboration with others or repeatedly, is punished by 5-10 years of imprison-

ment. Organizing, managing or financing this activity is punishable by 7-15 years of imprisonment. Article 283 foresees that selling offering to sell, providing or receiving in any form, distributing, transporting, sending, deli-vering, as well as carrying, *except in case of personal use and in small quantities*, narcotic and psychotropic substances as well as seeds of narcotic plants, in violation of the law or in excess of its content, is punished by 5 to 10 years of imprisonment.

## Areas of production

The cultivation of Cannabis in Albania started beginning of the 90s. Immigration to neighbouring countries, especially Greece and Italy, the possibilities to travel abroad and the know-how that Albanian immigrants have brought back to their home country, has stimulated production and export. During 1993–2000 cultivation was spread throughout the country; more recently the cultivation has been concentrated in a limited number of areas with a more intensive production. The main areas of production -as indicated also by UNODC- are in the north nearby the city of Shkodra and in the south in the area of the city of Gjirokaster. (see map below)



The main areas of cultivation of cannabis in Albania



**The cultivation takes place in remote, hardly accessible areas, although the police can identify them by the use of modern technology**

The police undertakes several attempts to eradicate herbal cannabis. In 2005 332.186 cannabis plants have been destroyed. That number decreased in 2006 to 74.052 and increased again to 177.074 in 2007. In the years 2008-2011 there has been a steady reduction of destroyed plants from 145.175 plants to 1.267, while in 2012 the number increased again to 33.000



**eradication of Cannabis plants**

The cases of Marihuana cultivation and the prosecuted perpetrators have been increased in the period 2005 from 117 cases and 171 perpetrators in 2005 to 822 cases and 1053 perpetrators.

<b>Prices</b>	
5 grams of marijuana	(street price level) 4-8
Euro1 cigarette	(street level price) 1.5
Euro1 kg	(wholesale price)
300-350 Euros	
Cleanliness:(according to I.P.SH.)	
Marijuana: - THC reaches 4-8% but last year also increased to 13%	

The prices of marijuana at street level did not change in the last 5 years. The price of 5 grams of marijuana ranged from EUR 4 to EUR 8 in 2009. The percentage of THC in marijuana at street level is estimated to be around 4 % in 2009 but in 2012 increased up to 13%.

Concluding his presentation Mr. Selfollari expressed some ideas concerning possible changes in the Albanian penal law regarding drugs. He pointed out that the provisions of article 283 about carrying narcotic and psychotropic substances for personal use and in small quantities could be better and more effectively implemented if

- Consumption and possession of certain amount of drugs (daily dose) should be considered an administrative offense.
- Possession of narcotic drugs of a daily dose up to a certain amount determined by the legislator and considered to be small, must be punished by a lower penalty than possessing a larger quantity.
- The concept of internal trafficking of drugs must be introduced in the law
- these provisions may lead to more flexible and proportionate sanctions based on the seriousness of the offenses.

## Cannabis /Toxicological aspects

Dr. Zana Bruçy, legal expert toxicologist at the Institute of Legal Medicine, Ministry of Justice in Tirana, presented the results of a study on the content of cannabinoids of the plant Cannabis Sativa and Cannabis Indica cultivated in Albania. The name Cannabis Sativa was given to the Indian hemp plant by Linnaeus in 1753. The term Cannabis derives from cannabinoids ( THC Tetrahydrocannabinol) , Canabidiol CBD , CBN - Canabinol ) which are the active substance contained in the plant and which cause the psychoactive effect. As a result of their consumption by a user the effects are : change of behaviour , perception , consciousness, etc . Dr. Bruçy referred to the different types of cannabis:

a. The biological type to which belong the industrial cannabis used for the production of fiber, hemp clothes, paper etc. with a very low concentration of the psychoactive substance THC (under 0.5 g %); the intermediate cannabis containing an average percentage of THC(about 5g %) and the type called Marijuana, which means a mixture of leaves and flowering tops containing about 5g % THC .

b. The botanical cannabis to which belong the Cannabis Sativa, Cannabis Indica, Cannabis ruderalis.

The Chemical composition of the active substances that give to the plant the ability to be used as drug, are tetrahidrokanabinoli THC , CBN - cannabinol , CBD - cannabidiol. The most important is Tetrahidrokanabinoli . Illegal cannabis products are classified into three major groups , which are : herbal cannabis , cannabis resin (hashish) and cannabis oil. These have different physical characteristics .

## Cannabis plants cultivated in Albania.

Based on the purpose of the scientific study and for a period of three years , samples of cannabis cultivated in several areas in Albania were taken and were analyzed according to the methods recommended in the manuals published by the narcotics scientific section of UNODC in Vienna .The results show that :

1.The content of cannabinoids ( THC ) in different parts of the plant Cannabis sativa indica range in values from 8-9 % in the flowering tops, to 0.4 - 5 % in leaves. The other parts, like roots , stalks, seeds do not contain cannabinoids. 2.The content of THC in cannabis plants gender reaches considerable values at the end of July.

### Suggestions/recommendations

Dr. Bruci closed with the following suggestions/ recommendations that will make the work of the toxicological research more practical and effective.

1.  
By the seizure of cannabis plants, the material selected to be sent for analysis should be a part of the plant with rich content of THC (the peak of flowering or upper leaves of the plant ).
2.  
Plant seeds, stalks, branches with leaves of the lower part, roots of the plant which are quite poor in the active substance ,must not be sent for analysis.
3.  
From plants in vegetation samples can be sent taken in June , July , August , September .
4.  
To implement these practices the Albanian legislation should be amended. In order to separate the industrial variety from the drug variety the THC level of 0.1 % should be raised to 0.3 % just as other neighbouring countries Italy and Greece have done.
5.  
Regarding the daily dose for users of cannabis it is recommended to stabilize the daily dose of consumer value in the Albanian legislation, in order to avoid lengthy procedures of analysis determining the value of THC of each sample plant that is seized from users.



6.

Regarding stopping people who consume cannabis is enough doing sample analysis to detect urinary metabolic of cannabinoids products in biological fluids ( urine ) .

## Substance abuse disorders and treatment in urgency

Prof. Dr. Zihni Sulaj of the Tirana University Hospital Center, Service of Addictology and Toxicology presented a retrospective study, on incidence of descriptive clinical cases associated with disorders of abuse of illegal drugs extended in the years 2009-2011, based on written documentation and appropriate medical records. 299 cases have been identified ratio M / F 277:22. The purpose of the study was to highlight, through a synthesis of epidemiological and clinical data, different relations of the individual, the substance and the circumstances that have led to the emergency filing for the period 2009-2011.

In these three years there were 299 cases , 277 Males and 22 Females (1:12.6). The average age 25.23 years of acute intoxication and non-fatal dosing. 87.2% of the cases involved people from the town of Tirana, followed by Fier and Durres with 2.3%. The drugs used were: THC in 126 cases (41.15%) ; Heroin in 108 cases (36.1%); Cocaine in 53 cases (17.7%); Methadone in 2 cases (0.6%); there was no information in 10 cases (3,3%) .

Prof. Silaj presented subsequently numbers of patients with non-fatal intoxications in several Albanian cities, the type of used drugs in non-fatal overdose and numbers of Acute intoxications and overdosing.

Arrival in hospital with reference occurred in 46 cases, the rest took place by the patient himself, friends, family and Police (12 cases). The Types of used Drugs in non-fatal overdose were, THC, Heroine, Cocaine, Methadone and unidentified drugs. In 2009 the majority involved was heroin users and in 2011 dominated THC users. The group of patients was for more than 70% in the age between 15-34 years old.

Fatal cases in drug overdosing in the Year 2009 were 2 Male, (Methamphetamine) and 1 Female, (Multi-substance). In 2010 3 Male (Heroine/Multisubstance), in 2011 1 Male.

The main factors of deaths from Overdosing:

The factors that caused fatal cases were associated with drugs, - Alcohol combined with drugs, Sedating Hypnotic medication, the poly-drugs use with cumulative effects and injection of drugs. The presentation referred further to preventing measures against fatal overdosing, the development of intervention protocols about intoxication, the education for recognition of other forms of overdosing, especially with cocaine and Amphetamine beside opioids, and the need to invest in the field of treatment, information and monitoring for drug problems. Closing reference was made to the new psychoactive substances.

## Education, awareness and reduction of demand for drugs and other dangerous substances

Mr Arben Nasufi Chief Commissioner of the Albanian Police for the Directory of the Tirana Municipality who is also the Coordinator of the program presented the drug prevention project "Education, awareness and reduction of demand for drugs and other dangerous substances" that is Currently implemented in the elementary schools of Albania. This program is made possible in 12 districts of Albania, through the design and implementation of a Joint Action Plan and with the support of the International Criminal Investigation and Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), the National Guard of New Jersey, Office of Defence Cooperation (ODC) , the U.S. Embassy in Tirana and the Ministry of Education and Science. This program started in 2010 after evaluating the situation for drug users in Albania. The program aims at the preparation and formation of children of ages 12-13 years, to be able to say: "No to drugs and other dangerous substances." when they confronted with the negative phenomena of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, etc. In November 2011 the U.S. Ambassador in Tirana, during a ceremony with the Albanian State Police, evaluated positively the work done by the cooperating actors for the successful realization of this Project - program, and suggested its extension in all elementary schools of Albania, suggestion which was welcomed by the Minister of Interior and Minister of Education. In April 2012, the Cooperation Agreement was approved by the Ministry of Education (signed by the General Secretary) and the Ministry of Interior (signed by the Director General of State Police of the Republic of

Albania), for the implementation of the program. In June 2012, an exhibition was held in front of the Gallery of Arts with a broad participation of students, the public and the media, presenting drawings of benefited students for Drugs awareness program during the academic year 2011-2012. In September, 2012, in the Ministry of Education and Science a meeting was held with the Coordinators of the Police and Education in Regions to determine the steps to be taken to expand the Awareness program during the 2012-2013 academic year in all counties of the Republic of Albania. The Media have been a fruitful collaborative actor for the Awareness Program. For the implementation of this program are selected police officers very able to communicate and convey messages understandable for children, who are also good listeners and with high professional ethics.

State Police – Albania and other collaborative actors evaluate the realization of this project that is being implemented for the first time in the country. As a quite positive product that serves the protection of the children, families, school and the society from the negative phenomena of smoking, alcohol, marijuana etc. and as a direct philosophy of Policing and Security in the Community.

The program is "owned" by the Albanian State. The program has a logged vehicle, gift from the American Embassy in Tirana; uses police vehicles, which are placed in the school yard; The extension of the program in Regions Summer Campuses is financially supported by the ICITAP program; The State Police has not provided any financial fund for the development of this program. Public awareness is achieved through the collaboration with the Media and via police representatives in the regions. Teachers and police officers in the region have been selected, and there will be trainings for those who are young. Teaching groups are created (two policemen and one teacher). The program will increase the number of schools in all districts of Albania, and will increase quality.

## Recent International developments in Cannabis Policy

Thanasis Apostolou, director of the Diogenis Association presented recent developments on Cannabis policy worldwide. Canna-

bis is the most used illegal substance in the world. According to estimations of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Drug Report 2011, there were about 125-203 million people (of estimated total of 250-270 million drug users) in the age of 15-64 who had used cannabis at least once in the past year. Approximately 8-10% of users are from North America, followed by the African countries, Australia, New Zealand, and Western Europe countries. Compared to the other regions, the cannabis use in Europe is decreasing. The most used type of cannabis is herbal cannabis; in North Africa, hashish is more popular. Around 25% of cannabis is produced in Morocco, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania, and 23% of cannabis is produced in North and South America. Currently, Afghanistan is emerging as production country of cannabis resin and produces more cannabis than Morocco. The indoor production is usual all over the world and especially in Europe. In the United States and Mexico, nearly 70% of seized drug presents cannabis. In Africa, the seizures are very low (10-11%). In the South East European region, all countries are producing cannabis (Greece, Bulgaria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Slovenia) but most of the production and the export is from Albania.

Cannabis has been a controversial issue throughout history. In 1961, the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs scheduled cannabis as a substance whose use for other than medical and scientific purposes had be eliminated as soon as possible but in any case within twenty-five years from the coming into force of the 1961 single convention"(Article 49,2,J. We are now 52 years further and this provision of the 1961 convention is not realized. On the contrary the use of Cannabis has increased and several countries in the world have a rather lenient policy on Cannabis. There are even countries that have already decided or are planning to decide to bring the production under state control.

Scheduling of Cannabis in the 1961 convention has been from the beginning disputable. Many countries have questioned whether it was right to schedule this substance and started practices which were not in line with the convention. In Europe there were countries like the Netherlands which already in the seventies have decided to make a distinction between Cannabis and the other prohibited drugs (soft and hard drugs). Under the influence of the youth culture in that period (flower power) a

considerable number of young people used cannabis. The Dutch government was of the opinion that cannabis was less harmful than hard drugs (as Heroin and cocaine) and tried to regulate cannabis in order to protect the youth from the criminal market of the hard drugs. The model that is functioning at the moment was that of the coffee-shops. The coffee-shops function as shops that sell cannabis to users older than 18 years of age under very strict conditions. The coffee shops are required to comply with a set of conditions known as the 'AHOJ-G' criteria, that means: (A) no advertising, (H) no sales of hard drugs, (O) no nuisance (J), no admission to coffee shops for minors (under 18), and (G) no sales of large quantities (more than 5 grams) per transaction. The maximum trading stock is 500 grams, but municipalities can set a lower maximum if they wish. The main aims of the cannabis policy in the Netherlands are: the separation of the markets of soft and hard drugs, the fight against criminalisation and marginalisation of the cannabis user and the minimisation of the chance that the user would start experimenting with hard drugs and become addicted. The last evaluation of this policy has been presented to parliament in 2009. The results were positive as far as the protection of the youth to experiment with hard drugs. Use of hard drugs like heroin is limited compared to other countries, the use of cannabis has been reduced in the period after 2003 and the Netherlands does not belong to the highest prevalence countries of the European Union. On the basis of the evaluation the Dutch government pointed out that the main priority concerning cannabis use must be given to the young people in the age of 13-16 years old. This policy aims to avoid the development of problematic behaviour and social marginalisation of the youth.

The weak point in the Dutch system is that the production of cannabis and the supply to Coffee shops is illegal. That is the so-called "back-door" problem. That means that the front door (selling) is allowed but the "back-door" (supply) is closed (not allowed). This inconsistency has made the Dutch model difficult to be accepted by other countries and has in the course of time caused serious problems with drug-tourism and nuisance in the big cities. At the same time the criminality has not been reduced, on the contrary criminal groups from inside and outside the country became more and more active. The discussion about the "back-door" goes on, but the government sees no possibilities to

allow production and supply because of its commitment to the international conventions, although the Dutch parliament and the municipalities in the Netherlands are in favour of regulation of the production and supply.

The strong point of the Dutch model has been the decriminalisation of the use and possession of cannabis for personal use. . Since the 70's the user is not approached as a criminal, but as somebody who may create a health problem for himself and his/her social well being. This aspect of the Dutch policy has been followed by more countries which have decriminalised the use and made also a distinction in their drug legislation between cannabis and hard drugs.

Other countries like Switzerland, Canada, Denmark, Portugal and several states in the USA, have introduced decriminalisation and depenalisation as a policy principle. In some countries, penal provisions for cultivation of a limited amount of plants for personal use were abolished or softened. In 1996, California adopted the regulation on medical cannabis, making a big step towards different thinking about cannabis. Recently there have been successful initiatives in two states of the USA (Colorado and Washington) who regulated by law production, supply and use of cannabis for medical, industrial and recreational purposes. Uruguay is the first country in the world, party of the 1961 convention that decided to regulate cannabis by law. Uruguay allows production for producers who obtain a license for cultivation. The cannabis they produce is sold in licensed pharmacies. It is also allowed to cultivate cannabis for recreational purposes in clubs of 45 members who collectively produce cannabis for personal use. It is not allowed to sell to minors, to drive under influence of cannabis and to advertise cannabis. For the production and sale there is taxation as for other products. The government will invest in health, education, prevention and treatment of problematic use and dependence.

It is uncertain what will be the effect of this move of Uruguay and the states of Colorado and Washington in USA. It is expected that other countries will follow.

Apostolou closed his presentation by pointing out that countries have the possibility to regulate cannabis for industrial and

medical purposes. The conventions allow this production under certain conditions. Many countries do not allow industrial and medicinal cannabis while this can be a good alternative for producers who are cultivating cannabis illegally.

### Closing

The participants at the workshop expressed their appreciation for the meeting. It was a good experience that can be repeated for other issues related to drug policy. They thanked the organisers for the invitation. The organisers expressed their thanks for the participation and announced that will make a report of the proceedings.

Thanasis Apostolou  
November, 2013

## **Drug Policy Dialogue in South East Europe**

The programme *Drug Policy Dialogue in South East Europe* aims to promote drug policies based on respect for human rights, scientific evidence and best practices which would provide a framework for a more balanced approach and will result in a more effective policy and practice. A major concern of our activities is to encourage open debate on drug policy reform and raise public awareness regarding aspects of the current drug policies, that are ineffective and often have adverse consequences for individuals and society.

The activities of Diogenis Association are also aiming to connect initiatives and developments in the SEE region with the European Union's Drug Strategy and Action Plan as well as with global developments on Drug Policy. After several decades of implementation of the current international drug control system, there is worldwide a sense of urgency to adjust the system, correct the aspects that cause adverse consequences and make it more effective. Open dialogue with the relevant authorities responsible for Drug Policy is essential in the search for more humane and effective drug policies and practice. The voices of civil society organisations such as the NGO are a contribution to the Drug Policy debate. Our cooperation with research institutes and universities is growing and there is mutual appreciation of our activities. The combination of the NGOs practical experience in the field and the scientific insights of researchers is a valuable contribution to the drug policy debate. It is up to the policy makers and governments to make use of proposals and recommendations and incorporate suggestions in their strategic choices and in legislation