

Report of Aksion Plus on Study visit in Estonia

The National Network of community Services for Alternative sentences in Albania organized a study visit in Estonia, with a focus on the Probation Service of Estonia and the implementation of the alternative sentences within the framework of the project "Network of Community Services for Alternative Sentence" supported by the European Union from 11 to 15 February 2012. The participants of this visit included:

- Arben Sefgjini - General Director of Probation Service
- Abdyl Spahiu - Director of Tirana (capital city) Regional office
- Spartak Mitrushi - Director of Fier (one of the biggest cities in Albania) Regional office
- Florian Arapi - Director of Elbasan (one of the biggest cities in Albania) Regional office
- Marinela Sota - Refraction Association Director, Lector of Social Work in Justice System / Tirana University
- Enkelejda Ngjelina - Aksion Plus Association, Assistant manager

The visit started on 13 February with the meeting at the Ministry of Justice with different advisers who coordinate the probation services and the prisons social work. The first contact was with Mrs. Anne Kruusement, Advisor of Social Rehabilitation Division Prison Department, Ministry of Justice, who made a presentation on the history of probation services in Estonia. Estonia is a small country with 1.4 million residents. In 1991, the government initiated a penal reform and developed in 1993 the first vision about probation services and in 1998 started the work of probation services, firstly with 110 officers and 2000 offenders. In 2009, the number of offenders reached 8000. She informed us about the electronic monitoring system in Estonia. After her presentation, Mrs. Marin Kulper provided information about the social program as one of the activities of the sentence time. For reducing criminogenic tendencies they used different social programs such as anger management, social skills training, sex-offenders programs, rehabilitation programs for dependent people, one-to-one rehabilitation programs, etc. There was also a presentation for each program from different advisors.

The visit continued with meetings in two different places in Convictus Estonia, a non-governmental organization. Convictus Estonia offers psychosocial help and consultations for HIV-positive and/or drug dependent people. Convictus have a good cooperation partner for probation and prison. We visited their site work where they distribute needles and syringes.

The Albanian group also visited the Kristiine Social Center – a governmental organization that is the cooperation partner for probation. Kristiine Social Center functions as a day center and they offer a variety of social and health promotion and culture events and activities. From 2003 to 2005 Kristiine Social Center developed a program in which the elderly and people with subsistence difficulties were offered welfare services (laundry, shower, food and other supporting services) based on a set price list. They also offered different uplifting and involving activities and services for people of all ages. After the presentation of the probation services, we had a last visit in Tallinn prison. We met Mr. Rait Kuuse, director of Tallinn prison, Erik Rüütel, manager of Social work and Probation, and Asta Vaks, Leader of

Social work Division. The main topic of this meeting was to get an overview of the Tallinn Prison, an overview of the social work and social programs offered to people in probation and in prison.

Hearing session at the special Parliamentary Committee on Law

On 15 February, Aksion Plus Association was invited by the Parliamentary Committee in the framework of Criminal Code reform according to the drug use law. This initiative has been possible as a result of a widespread understanding on the decriminalization politics, rehabilitation issues, the elimination of recidivism, negative health consequences and the avoidance of prison financial cost. In this session, the main approach propounded was minimal sentences for less serious crimes. In the first place, Aksion Plus asked for a reassessment and reclassification of narcotic substances taking in consideration that the last classification had been made in 1971. On the other hand, Aksion Plus proposed the individualization of sentences referring the specific quantity possession of narcotic substances. Regarding drugs such as cannabis, the subjects should receive immediate medical treatment avoiding the legal procedures. Finally, Aksion Plus asked an expert assessment on heroin's effect in mental health and criminal responsibility.

In the framework of the Network Community Services for the Offenders Project has been published several newsletters. In the eighth number were included these issues, The National Conference of Probation Service that was attended by the main actors that works in this field and was made possible the presentation of the achievements and future challenges regarding Alternative Sentence Surveillance in the community. The last activity was the Conference held by Aksion Plus in Kristal University where Professors and Students participated actively in the drug abuse, drug policy and legislative issues.

