

International advocacy for progressive drug policy

Report on the activities of the community of people who use drugs to change drug policies in EECA and Baltic countries together with the Eurasian Network of People who Use Drugs and the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association with the partnership support of members of the International Harm Reduction Consortium and financial and technical support from the Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund.



Movement #Narconomics: from street to government

Supported by Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund

Report September 2017- November 2018



WHO WE ARE

Communities of people who use drugs from Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Moldova together with regional networks the Eurasian Network of People Who Use Drugs (ENPUD) and the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA) have united efforts to create and strengthen the regional movement #Narconomics: from street to government, by focusing on issues of the influence of current drug policies to wellbeing and safety of people who use drugs in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region. The aim of the movement - to reform drug policies in the countries, based on the values of each person's life, human rights and evidence-based practices.



ТВОЙ ШАНС
Республиканское социальное
Общественное объединение

Movement is also a part of the Harm Reduction Consortium, which is comprised of seven leading international and regional harm reduction, drug policy organizations and drug user networks – the [International Drug Policy Consortium \(IDPC\)](#), [Harm Reduction International \(HRI\)](#), [Youth RISE](#), the [Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association](#) (MENAHR), the [Eurasian Harm Reduction Association](#) (EHRA), the [European Network of People who Use Drugs](#) (EuroNPUD), and the [Eurasian Network of People who Use Drugs](#) (ENPUD).

IDPC is the lead of the Consortium. IDPC helps communities of people who use drugs from EECA to understand how international drug policy works, through various trainings and mentoring programs (UNGASS2016, CND 2017-2018, preparations to the HLM2019) and creates useful brief papers, disseminates key resources on drug policy, builds communities' advocacy capacity and offers expert advices. HRI has involved Georgia civil society and government in Harm Reduction Champions Campaign and helps the community to communicate with high-level officials during the international meetings. Youth RISE has involved the community into the participation in the rally and other youth movement campaigns, inspires and creates the conditions for discussions and reflections. EuroNPUD helps the

community with study tours and other activities organization which provides the community with new knowledge about drug policy and community mobilization in EU countries and application of EU experience in EECA countries.

International advocacy

HIV and Law

June, 2018. [EHRA together with partners made a decision](#) to use such a resource as **The Global Commission on HIV and the Law to interrogate the linkage between legal responses, human rights and HIV** and have filed five complaints showing the problems in EECA region to the whole world, describing what had already been done by the expert communities to change the situation and what steps should be undertaken in the future.

EECA communities complaints essence:

Belarus. **Sergey Kryzhevich**, the leader of “Tvoy Shans” (“Your Chance”), the national organization of the substitution therapy program patients, has [filed a complaint based on evidence that OST clients are vulnerable because of the bureaucratic system of medical care in the country](#). The evidence is based on the strategic litigation case, a community-led field study and the results of advocacy actions of OST patients community and their partners in the Republic of Belarus.

Kazakhstan. **EHRA spoke on its own behalf about the threat of closure of the OST program in the country.** The appeal is based on [well-documented facts of rights violation of current and former patients of OST programs](#) by the police officers who wanted to “find out” the information that would support the negative attitude of the police to maintaining OST programs in Kazakhstan.



The Kyrgyz Republic. **Activist Sergey Bessonov and EHRA have [attracted the attention of the international community](#)** to the risks associated with introducing new Misdemeanor and Criminal Codes in Kyrgyzstan in 2019, that would raise the fines for possession of small amount of drugs, which consequently means possible incarceration for 5 years, if a person fails to pay a fine of 4,800 Euro for possession of up to 3.1 grams of cannabis within one month.

Lithuania. “Jauna banga” (“The Young Wave”) [spoke about the alarming situation with new HIV cases and medical care in prisons](#). Possession of minimum amounts of drugs without intent of further sale has been criminalized again since 2017. The organization also presented an individual case, showing the impact of criminalization on lives of people who use drugs.

Estonia. The Estonian Association of People who Use Psychoactive Substances (LUNEST) [spoke about the human rights violations of women who use drugs](#). Two female representatives of the community filed individual appeals with the description of their stories.



UN processes in Vienna

Commission on Narcotic Drugs

National level: community representatives tried to identify Georgia, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan government delegations composition participating in 61st CND Session. Community members tried to become members of official delegations (especially in Georgia), but failed. That's why the decision was made to invest money into the capacity building for more effective communications with decision-makers during the debate on drug policy changes.

CND 61st Session 12-16 March 2018,



EHRA, EuroNPUD, ENPUD as part of International Harm Reduction Consortium team #Narconomics: from street to government, came together to discuss strategies for engaging in CND. Jamie Bridge, IDPC, briefed participants on the way CND works and opportunities and systems to support advocacy. Judy Chang and Mat Southwell, INPUD attracted participants attention to consideration of historical approaches in advocacy efforts and to review of the CND agenda.



✚ Every morning all community team gathered together to check the tasks, coordinate the plan for the day and give support to each other.

✚ During CND the team shared with Russian speaking audience the course of events at CND with highlighting the positions on EECA countries [through live-streaming of CND sessions](#) : [Russian government delegation side-event](#), [Kyrgyzstan government delegation side-event](#), [IDPC and Consortium members side-events](#).

✚ Thanks to Harm Reduction Consortium and David Subeliani, White Noise Movement, Georgia was invited to

Harm Reduction Champions Breakfast, on 13 March, 2018, as a part of [Campaign "10 by 20"](#). **Marina Darakhvelidze, Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, presented the situation in the country and took part in discussion about progressive drug policy. According to the Ministry representative, Georgia is succeeding by improving access to harm reduction services. Over 6,500 people have access to OST in Georgia (up from 1,800 in 2013). 19,000 have access to Hepatitis C treatment with support from Gilead and WHO, with a 98% cure rate. HIV treatment is free and Georgia is scaling up HIV testing.**

- Community leaders met with Pavel Bém, Former Mayor of Prague and former member of the Parliament, Czech Republic, the commissioner of the Global commission on Drug Policy. The discussion was focused on better involvement of The Global Commission in advocacy process in EECA countries. [Commissioners Michel Kazatchkine and Pavel Bém visited Tbilisi](#), Georgia, later after CND to meet with high-level government officials in anticipation of the



Parliamentary vote of new amendments to laws regarding drug policy in Georgia. The package of amendments to laws includes revisiting of sanctions, drug amounts, developing drug demand reduction programs including prevention.

- Olga Belyaeva, EHRA, had a speech during UNODC session about Strategic Framework for 2017-2020, the Strategic Partnership and Programmatic Actions in Eastern Europe (SPPA¹), which provides a joint cooperation mechanism to [the Republic of Belarus \(Belarus\)](#), the Republic of Moldova (Moldova) and Ukraine. The document defines the strategic framework of cooperation of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime with Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine in the following priority areas: combating transnational organized crime; a comprehensive and balanced approach in the fight against drugs; countermeasures to corruption; assistance to the development of legal systems. The total budget of the events envisaged in the document makes up to \$9 million. This UNODC Program and the action plan that was launched during 61st CND session, didn't satisfy community representatives, because this action plan was not agreed and discussed with communities representatives. It was agreed with law enforcement bodies and after it presented to NGOs, so the community didn't have possibility to be meaningfully involved into the development and implementation process of the Action plan.



¹ [Current situation](#) in regard to regional and subregional cooperation in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, page 11/13 point 68

The speech's key points:

- what works in countries where governments help citizens to facilitate the issue with psychoactive substances through decriminalization, HIV, HepC reduction, increase in well-being;
- positive changes happen, when drug control system makes a decision to fight against big narcocartels and not people who use drugs, or who possess not big amounts of substances for personal use - that's the basic strategy for governments who want to implement effective and sustainable harm reduction programs;
- evidence and human-rights based models include implementation of effective models of alternatives to coercive sanctions such as drug checking to reduce risk of use of the unknown substances; help people to manage their health, social or emotional problems, substitution treatment and other services of harm reduction;
- these models will allow to avoid arrests and imprisonment for drug use and refer people in need to social and health services;
- EHRA as a drug policy HUB for EECA region, encourages UNODC to develop such models in the region, through sharing best international experience and practices.

From the blog *"Our lives – our rules: that's why I'm on CND"*:

"...Vienna, 2018, [Sergey Bessonov from Kyrgyzstan](#), [Sergey Kryzhevich from Belarus](#) and me, Olga Belyaeva from EHRA are standing in the hall of the [61st Commission on Narcotic Substances](#) and discussing our tasks for the next meetings. We came to see how officials behave during such meetings and listen to what they say about the situation in our countries at the international level. The session prepared by the government of Kyrgyzstan should take place tomorrow morning. A representative of Kyrgyzstan delegation approached us while we were standing there, greeted us, showing his surprise at our presence at their "party". He gave Sergey an invitation to the session for the next day and told us what they were planning to speak about there. Sergey listened carefully, raised his hand holding the same invitation and said: "Yes, I know about the session of the government of Kyrgyzstan. That's why I'm here, to listen to your reports." It was clear for everyone watching that scene and judging from the representative's reaction that we were at the right place and that it was us who should ask questions and listen to the reports. Because the war on drugs has brought more negative consequences than any other substance, and the work of law enforcement agencies is recognized as unsatisfactory not only by politicians and [the Global Commission on Drug Policy](#), but also by the UN system itself. Ten years ago, [2008 UN Drug Report](#), as every subsequent report after that, spelled out the negative consequences of the war on drugs: huge illegal black market; organized crime as a threat to security. Criminal organizations have the right to destabilize society and governments. The illicit drug business costs billions of dollars a year, and some part of that money is used to corrupt government officials and poison the economy¹..."



61st session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Despite the lack of invitations for community representatives to official country delegations, the community team from EECA was supported by partners to get security passes and secure resources for participation and making speeches. The team submitted 3 requests for speech from Belarus (two applications), Kazakhstan and EHRA, Regional level, and was granted the time for video about saving OST in Kazakhstan, and the floor to speak about drug policy from regional perspective. The team is thankful to [IDPC](#) and [Civil Society Task Force on Drugs](#) for mentorship and spirit support.

Third intersessional meetings, 25-28 September, 2018, [Oksana Ibragimova, Kazakhstan, talked in her statement](#) about the influence of drug control on attempts to shut down OST sites in Kazakhstan. The data on OST effectiveness is currently being collected again in Kazakhstan in October and November 2018, so community organizations invest their time and resources to prove already scientifically proven facts and explain to the officials the value of this program.



Fourth intersessional meeting, 22-25 October, 2018, the thematic discussions in preparations for the ministerial segment of the 62nd session of the Commission of Narcotic Drugs (CND), panelist Olga Belyaeva, EHRA, [presented](#) the Positive developments and lessons learnt from national processes in CEECA countries.

From Olga's blog "Our lives – our rules": ["Do you use drugs yourself?"](#) – a representative of China teasingly asked Olga at the meeting of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs. This drug control officer who is convinced of the "effectiveness" of the death penalty for the use and storage of substances..." More in blog on self-reflection, position and check list for the next six months for anyone who wants to change drug policy in their country.

Robert Carr Fund for civil society networks acknowledged to provide the Harm Reduction Consortium \$ 2,720,000 to continue to change drug policy in EECA for the next three years 2019-2021.