

## “White Noise Movement”, Sakartvelo/Georgia

**Within the Consortium the role of White Noise Movement is to mentor how to mobilize up to 10 000 people.** The role of EHRA is to connect WNM leaders with international allies for supporting the drug policy change in Sakartvelo/Georgia. Here is the History of White Noise Movement.

### Drug policy situation in Georgia

Georgia is known of its harsh drug policies and like many post-Soviet countries, focuses on the prosecution and punishments of people who use drugs. Mass incarceration of people who use drugs, massive street testing practices, serious deterioration of health and social conditions of the community of drug users is the reality in Georgia. One third of the country’s prison population are incarcerated for drug-related offences, mostly for the possession of illicit drugs for personal use.

According to the criminal laws, possession of drugs without intent to distribute or supply in the amount of more than small is a criminal violation, punishable with 0.5 – 6 to 8 – 20 years or lifetime imprisonment, depending on the amount involved. Possession of small amount is an administrative offence if it is the first case within last 12 months, punishable with a fine. For Marijuana, different treatment is provided – fine is applied for so called medium size of seized Cannabis too, even though possession of only small amount is decriminalized.

In period between 2016-2018 civil society was actively pushing government to adopt alternative law, which would include: administrative liability instead of the criminal for the possession of small quantities for personal use; set the quantities of the substances for the personal use over a one-day period; changes of the norms on mandatory drug testing (grounds for testing should be stipulated before a test is administered). Unfortunately, none of these changes were adopted and Georgia continues to apply harsh laws on people who use drugs. Also, the proposed reform entailed set-up of primary prevention system together with the Ministry of Education, as well as deployment of 11 psycho-rehabilitation centers across the country, service that is fully absent.

**Sakartvelo/Georgia drug policy:** There are 4 legislative bills in parliamentary pipeline in December 2018: Decriminalization Bill, Rights Law, Cannabis consumption regulation and Regulation of Cannabis cultivation and production for medical and industrial use. 01.10.2018 *Police detained a person with a syringe containing 0.002 grams of narcotic drugs (meth). He faces 6 years in a jail.* **Decriminalization bill – stuck on** first iteration with committees. **Cannabis consumption regulation**, if accepted and made as a law, will come in **contradiction with [the last Constitutional court decision](#)** legalizing Cannabis consumption.



## WNM response and impact:

- May 2, 2017 National Gathering for Humane Drug Policy (held annually by WNM), bringing all stakeholders into one place where workshops on various drug policy issues were delivered by WNM and partner organizations, promoting harm reduction practices over the punitive measures employed by the state. The gathering ended with a few-hundred attendee session where Parliament members, as well as GNDDP representatives made a presentation of the entire reform package.
- June 10, 2017 - What Else Should Happen - massive rally of +10k people in front of the Parliament building to support two young hip hop artists after police planted on them MDMA in extremely big amounts, threatening with 8 to 20 years or lifetime incarceration. The rally went with Prime Minister statement urging Parliament to hurry up with the discussion on drug policy reform and make a decision on the draft law submitted by GNDDP.
- June 17, 2017 - Levan Abzianidze was killed by the State - a rally held in Kutaisi in memory of Levan Abzianidze who died after police forced him to take diuretic pills in order to be able to provide urine sample for drug testing in 2016.
- July 13, 2017 - All for Bakhala - rally to protest an arrest of a young artist - Bakhala who refused to cooperate with authorities and as a punishment got drugs planted in extremely large amount, sending him to jail for 8 years.
- July 13, 2017 - Possession of Desomorphine (up to 0.00009 grams) cannot lead to imprisonment. Another constitutional appeal prepared and pushed by WNM was won.
- July 14, 2017 - Cultivation of Cannabis plant (up to 153 grams of the plant) no more subject of imprisonment, thanks to Constitutional Court [decision](#); the same decision ruled on the need to review the penalties for cultivation of cannabis plant (153 to 240 grams of the plant); Appeal was prepared by WNM.
- September, 2017 Start of the campaign "Let It End". Series of [10 episodes](#) based on real stories, highlighting various aspects of ineffective and draconian policy exercised by the state were released. The videos also showed the leaders of the campaign (activists, experts, academics) speaking about how the given issue is going to be addressed in the proposed reform.
- November 30, 2017 - the use of Marijuana decriminalized with the decision of Constitutional Court. Appeal was prepared by political party Girchi and White Noise Movement; in a previous judgement in 2015, the court removed prison sanctions for the possession of anything less than 70 grams of cannabis for personal use.
- December 10th, 2017 - WNM held massive [Noise for Victory](#) in the center of Tbilisi on International Human Rights Day.
- January 11th, 2018 – WNM co-organized a rally in front of the central government office, as a reaction on an incident, which took place during the special operation in Pankisi Gorge on December 26th, when special squad members wounded 19-year-old Temirlan Machalikhvili in his own bedroom.

- January 25th, 2018 – WNM organized rally ALL FOR ONE as a follow up of old case related to young artist Bakhala. This was a second rally in support of Bakhala (the first was in July, 2017). The ruling came out on January 23rd. This quick reaction from WNM was supported by record high number of other organisations who joined the rally and demands of organizers. Those were Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC), Wave, 2 June Movement, political party Girchi, Georgian Women's Movement, Equality Movement, Sapari, ISFED, Women's Gaze, Money Waste Detector, Guerrilla Gardening Tbilisi, Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI), Media Development Fund (MDF, Auditorium #115, Alternative Georgia, BEMONI, Medical Center Uranti. After the court ruling, on 23rd, WNM leader Beka Tsikarishvili was arrested as he expressed

## The struggle for humane drug policy in Georgia

MARTA ARDASHELIA 27 March 2018

Decriminalising drugs has become a central demand of Georgian political parties, but the fight for decriminalisation has divided Georgian society.

RU



January 26. protest action "All for one"

"Are you kidding?!" this is how Irakli 25 struggles to process my confession

dissatisfaction on court decision and threw a construction brick against the court building and broke one of its windows. WNM, along the demands <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/marta-ardashelia/the-struggle-for-humane-drug-policy-in-georgia>.

- Related to Bakhala, requested immediate release of Beka Tsikarishvili too. Four to five thousand people gathered at the rally.
- April 20th, 2018 – one of WNM leaders, Naja Orashvili, who is also co-owner of night club Bassiani made a written alert to the Ministry of Internal Affairs that 'strange' new drug appeared on the market which killed 4 transgender girls at the club. No reaction was made from the Ministry.
- May 7th, 2018 – WNM receives confidential information that raid on clubs is being planned with the staged and fake drug selling involved. WNM discussed the matter with all night clubs and clubs made a preventive statement about the possible threats.
- May 12th, 2018 – Police raided night clubs in Tbilisi with Special Forces at around 1 am, beat up peaceful demonstrators that came out on streets with WNM leadership, arrested Bassiani club owners and WNM leaders. Over 60 people were arrested and all of them were released next day. According to an official version of the government, they were aiming to arrest drug dealers, but it was a false accusation as no single dealer was captured during the operation. Little clashes with police continued whole night and ended, in the morning at the parliament building were around 300 demonstrators who moved from Bassiani in the morning.
- May 12th, 2018 – WNM announced big rally, For Our Freedom. Demonstrators started to gather in front of the Parliament building at 15:00. The statement said: "We, the citizens of Georgia, are uncompromisingly entering the openly declared war against the most important values to us, for defending freedom and our future!". The rally was supported by almost entire civil society and night industry representatives. Among those were Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), Decoder, Mtkvarze, Transparency International Georgia, Equality Movement, Georgian Young Greens, Electronauts, Khidi, ISFED, Temida, EMC, Georgian Women's Movement,

Bassiani, Women’s Gaze, Sapari, Horoom Nights, Reflector. Up to **15,000** people took part in this massive gathering where resignation of Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs was demanded, among other things related to quick reforms in law enforcement, judiciary, drug policy, etc. The rally ended up with German techno label Giggling artists playing their sets in front of the parliament building and thousands of demonstrators dancing for hours and this way demanding changes. In parallel, smaller rallies were held in at least 5 cities in support of the protest wave in Tbilisi.

- May 13th, 2018 - the rally continued on 13th too, however at around 17:00 situation started to deteriorate as neo-fascist groups started surrounded the entire demonstration area, not allowing anyone to join the rally or leave it. In some episodes people were beaten up. Police made corridors between the groups. Later in the evening, special government meeting was held followed by Prime Minister televised statement, giving no resolution to the case. Shortly after, Minister of Internal Affairs came on the site of demonstration, offered the organizers to meet in the Parliament building. Six people from WNM, Bassiani and other organizers met with the Minister. During the meeting, their phones were taken away and the Minister was pushing them to finish the rally as he would not be able to protect demonstrators any more unless more violent ways were sought, in which case there could have been casualties and the entire responsibility would be on WNM and civil society. The rally was called off soon thereafter, and political momentum was cleared away for long time.
- June 26th, 2018 – WNM co-organized a rally Support Don’t Punish along with partner organizations. From WNM David Subeliani made a speech on the rally.
- August 19th, 2018 – WNM organized a small rally in Batumi, city in west Georgia. Up to 50 people came together to raise their voice against draconian laws and policies related to drug use.
- December 7th, 2018 – WNM makes an alert that there is a contaminated MDMA on the market, probably cut with Fentanyl. WNM also made it clear that there was a shortage of Naloxon in the country. Few fatalities and intoxications were registered in following days.

**EHRA input:**

- Small grant was provided for the creation of educational [video](#) stories;
- During the alarming situations, EHRA connected WNM leaders with international society and helped in the promotion of messages on the repressive policies in Georgia;
- Study visit organization to Czech Republic to share best practices of drug policy in Czech Republic, to meet decision makers, doctors, local activists;
- The group of leaders of WNM was invited by Harm Reduction International to involve Georgia as part of International [10 by 20 campaign](#).



*EHRA and WNM activities have been implemented thanks to supportive leadership and friendly mentorship of the [International Drug Policy Consortium](#) team, partnership support of members of [the International Harm Reduction Consortium](#) and thanks to financial resources for community needs and approach for reflecting (MEL) by [the Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund](#).*

*The EHRA [report about international activities](#) within the Consortium is here.*

