



Correlation comment regarding civil society dialogue and the green paper of the European Commission

The emancipation of citizens, consumers, service users and peer groups is an ongoing process in many countries in the European Union. This process often takes place beside the traditional streams of political parties or interest groups. In the field of drug policy, Ngo's, peer groups and service users have a growing interest to make their voices heard in the debate. On local level one can observe the establishment of user organisations, client councils at service and treatment centres, round table dialogue with local authorities etc. Service providers on their part, form alliances to influence national policies regarding financial, legal and political aspects of their work.

Health and drug policy is a clear task of national governments, consequently, one can find a great variety of drug policies within the European Union member states. However, in the last decade – with a few exceptions – there was a clear shift from simple repression to a more pragmatic approach, including harm reduction methodologies and decriminalisation of own use. Still, there is a lot to do and the situation is unsatisfying on many levels, but from our point of view the glass is half full and not half empty.

European authorities don't have the mandate to prescribe a particular drug policy, although many bodies in the Union are involved in common agreements, approaches and strategies. The Horizontal Group, the Pompidou Group and the European Commission formulate targets and the framework of drug policy and undertake actions with added European value on the supply and demand side. That appears e.g. in the drug strategy and the drug action plans, delivered by the Commission regularly. Up to now, the development of these plans lacked transparency for civil society, only those who had contacts to the national EU delegates might have a small chance to communicate their experiences and ideas, hoping that this advice would be taken into consideration. This led, from our point of view, often to ineffective and unrealistic measures (e.g. to aim for the decrease of a concrete number of users in a particular period). Furthermore, there was a great lack of evaluation, to find out if postulated targets were reached and if not, why not.

The recently issued green paper of the European Commission summarizes the conditions and the framework for the Commission and civil society stakeholders,. Even if the expectations shouldn't rise too high – European decision making will remain complex and bureaucratic, civil society speaks with many voices and has different interests - this might be a 'window of opportunity' to improve the situation and to install a rational dialogue on that issue.

Correlation welcomes the proposal to install a forum for the civil society dialogue as well as the thematic linking of existing networks. The forum should have an open character, a discussion platform for bottom up ideas and suggestions and to establish a permanent

and compulsory dialogue with the Commission and European authorities. The competence of existing European networks in the field of drug policy should be used to facilitate this process, to organise particular events and tasks and to link national with European initiatives.

Related to the activities of Correlation, we want to draw the attention to some issues, that should - from our point of view - come structurally under consideration in the framework of the dialogue:

- We think that speaking about a dialogue on drug policy cannot be taken seriously if those who are effected are not integrated and involved in the developments.
- Drug use is a phenomenon of main stream society, but has a wide range of effects under particular groups of marginalized people: youth, homeless people, migrants, illegal persons, sex workers, ethnic minorities like Roma. A forum has to represent the views of these groups as well.
- A lot of research has been done on the effects of drug use, drug policy and methodology issues, a lot of research will be done in the future. However, most of this evidence disappears in the desks of decision makers and is not used to establish new approaches. A forum on dialogue with civil society should put a lot of energy into improving the link between research, decision makers and practitioners in the field within Europe.
- There are a lot of activities and collaboration on the transnational level in the Union – supported by the European Commission and independent bodies. However, there is not enough transparency and dissemination of results and models of good practice in order to reach a greater public.

Correlation supports and joins the International Consortium on Drug Policy (ICDP) and the Alliance of European Networks on Drug Policy and Practice (EADPP) to contribute to a better exchange of information, to share experiences and to create added value for European stakeholders and is open to contribute and to support the process of civil society involvement.

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