

# Memorandum of Understanding

Between

## Nordic Alcohol and Drug Policy Network & Baltic NGO Network against Drugs

St. Petersburg 25<sup>th</sup> June 2009

### **The two organizations share the view that:**

Drugs destroy lives and communities, undermine sustainable human development and generate crime. The use of illicit drugs constitute a cross border epidemic with a negative impact on society, individual and economic performance. The wider implications are not only at individual, community and national level but regional. Considering the regional aspects of drug related problems such as communicable diseases, cross border crime and social problems.

Drugs affect all sectors of society in all countries; in particular, drug abuse affects the freedom and development of young people, the world's most valuable asset. Drugs are a grave threat to the health and well-being of the structure of all societies, and the dignity and hope of millions of people and their families.

NordAN and the Baltic Network both recognize the leading role of the United Nations and the UNODC in the tackling of the world drug problem. We both recognize with satisfaction the consensus reached in the recent "Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem". This will become the agenda for the UN drug policy for next 10 year and we also would like to make it ours.

We are concerned about the increase in trafficking of heroin from Afghanistan through Russia and towards the Northern region of Europe, and are united in our call upon the UN, European Member States and other international authorities such as the EU to increase their efforts to counter this development.

Tackling the adverse consequences of drug abuse and halting the epidemic of blood-borne diseases caused by drug abuse requires a three part strategy:

1. **Preventing drug abuse**, which is the most effective strategy for protecting the general population as well as vulnerable groups
2. **Facilitating entry into drug dependence treatment**, where the option of drug-free oriented treatment, or at least the possibility to reduce illicit drug use, as well as retention in treatment with continuous contacts with health care providers, have proved effective in reducing drug related problems.
3. **Establishing effective measures to reduce adverse health and social consequences of drug abuse**. These strategies need to target the sub-groups of the population that are not sensitive to prevention programs, drug dependent individuals who are not motivated to attend treatment facilities, non-responders to treatment who continue to abuse illicit drugs, and those patients who easily relapse into substance abuse.

**The drug situation is often perceived as hopeless.**

Conflicts and discord are common. One reason for this – as well as the result of this - may be the lack of a common understanding and approach. This situation is reflected both at governmental, academic and volunteer level as well as in the media. At the centre of many of the discussions is the tension between preventing drug use by reducing supply, demand and offering treatment on the one hand and reducing harm done when drugs are used on the other. This is in our assessment a largely constructed and unhelpful dichotomy. This notion of conflict and discord is in itself perhaps the greatest obstacle for advances in today's drug policy nationally and internationally.

We think that there is a potential for greater cohesion in the drug debate, and that much of the differences may be resolved by a structured dialogue. This, we argue may not only contribute significantly to regional collaboration in the area but also stimulate better policies.

We have a shared interest in bridging the polarization that exists and which often is centered round controversies in the field of harm reduction, and to seek broader understanding in support for common future priorities.

**We therefore hereby state our common interest in exploring ways to work more actively together in the future.**

**NGOs have** an important role to play in tackling the drug problem such as disseminating information about drugs, prevention in schools, working with families, establishing alternative activities, working with vulnerable populations and providing treatment.

**NGOs should** represent the target groups it works with and should speak in their interest. Thus NGOs also work with governments and represent the views of civil society in consultations with appropriate authorities.

**NGOs around the Baltic Sea** have a shared interest in preventing the drug epidemic from spreading. This means to share their experience and best practice in drug abuse prevention work and in the efforts done in providing social and psychological treatment services. Besides supporting each other in our national efforts we also have a shared interest in formulating the regional perspectives on drugs and even in a wider European and international contexts.

**We will** contribute to the implementation of national and regional drug policies – by countering fragmentation and polarisation nationally and regionally, and to promote a balanced and comprehensive public health discourse on drugs.

**We will** seek to create a deeper engagement among NGOs in the countries covered by the two networks on drug policy issues, and to increase the interest in drug problems among groups who had not previously been engaged in this area.

### **Concrete ideas to be developed:**

#### **THE MARKET PLACE:**

Several working groups could be established. The working groups could function as a market place for the exchange of good practice, for instance on good practice on prevention, on young people, on parents, on treatment, on promoting comprehensive and sustainable drug policy ,on implementation of such policies in the region and on cooperation with other policy areas.

#### **THE NETWORK CORPORATION:**

A broad corporation of networks could be established as a tangible outcome; with the objective to provide a forum for dialogue with the national and regional governments; on international aspects concerning the EU/UN/WHO, and on follow up of project themes. This corporation should aim to include also NGOs outside the Nordic and Baltic countries covered by the two networks.

**THE WEB SITE PORTAL:** This corporation will establish contacts / web site with activities and outcomes of the working together; a portal for networking and resources.

#### **THE JOINT CHARTER:**

A joint charter on “comprehensiveness, cohesion and sustainability”, approved by general consensus of relevant NGOs in the region. The charter should address region specific issues, make recommendations on priorities and actions and aim at strengthening the influence of the region in the drug policies of the EU and UN.