

## CZECH REPUBLIC AND EVIDENCE BASED APPROACH IN DRUG POLICY

Dear colleagues and friends, I am honoured to give a warm welcome to the conference, here in Prague, regarding drug policy on the level of the greatest cities of the EU. The appealing reputation of our capital has lately attracted several important world congresses including the recent World Congress of Psychiatry organized by the WPA. This year is special, because in September we incidentally host two major events – aside from the conference Urban Drug Policies in the Globalised World (UDPGW) there is also the annual conference for the International Society of Addiction Journal Editors (ISAJE) on almost exact dates. However, we managed to synchronize the program of both events so that all the participants will be able to meet on an informal level, and we are holding a formal meeting of both parties on Friday night.

It is a pleasing sight to watch a gradually increasing number of activities concerning drug policy and drug addiction in general. Drug policy is a quite frequently discussed matter here in the Czech Republic. Just as with other European countries we move on a virtual sinusoidal line, when a success is followed by a failure. In the last 10 years, however, it is possible to find a positive trend in this seemingly random pattern. When the Czech Republic took the first baby steps in drug policy research in 1998-1999 it was the moment that determined its future development in a very essential way. Out of the body of reputable personalities in the field several of our colleagues stood distinctively out with their clear interest in drug policy and, most importantly, they pushed aside their disputes and animosities on behalf of the work in the common field. Pavel Bém who played an important role in the initiation of the project The Analysis of the Impact of the New Drug Legislature in the Czech Republic (Zábranský et al. 2001)<sup>1</sup>, could not have known that he is starting several parallel processes on the level of the national drug policy, and on the level of the field itself. The project manager Tomáš Zábranský hadn't known for a long time that he combined what was un-combinable in his team. It was this project team which later transformed into two independent centres which have supported

each other and through cooperation have achieved a couple of key successes. Hardly anyone would foretell this at the time of the founding of The National Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. Nevertheless when the Centre for Addictology was established in 2004-2005 it was quite clear that the whole process was not simply about one research project and not about only Pavel Bém and Tomáš Zábranský. Now we know what nobody during the 20 years after the Velvet had really noticed – that we managed to keep and transform the best from the times of Jaroslav Skála and Luděk Kubička. That in the hectic 90's we had personalities among us who were able to bridge the gap of the changes in the political system, and create conditions for new non-profit organizations and the transformation of state organizations, and in a relatively short time build a solid system of preventive and treatment care. The system does have many imperfections but it is a functional network. It is a network providing a background for research, education, and serves as a token that we are not living a pipe dream.

The process of building and stabilizing the preventive and treatment care network did not lead only to the birth of the addictology field but also to successful affection of the new Czech penal law, and many other positive changes in our drug policy. I must say that we don't approach the system as "Švejks", we don't clown around with the system, on the other hand I can't deny we see humour even in serious matters. Yes, after the political letdown of the last year's EU presidency humour was a very important drug. We invested huge amounts of effort in the preparations and expert work for the presidency in the field of drug policy and learned a lot. At the same time we lost many illusions as for the application of drug policy on the international level. But it may have been an important moment to see and learn that the mantra: "evidence-based approach" is just that – a mantra, and that its actual application is as difficult on the national level as on the international level, and that there is real hard work still before us. For us it was important to clarify our priorities, and to confirm our decision – to create a new individual field and develop it at all the levels of university education – it was the right one. That it was correct to prioritize the education of a young generation

1/ Zábranský, T., Miovský, M. & Mravčík, V., Gajdošíková, H. (2001). *Impact Analysis Project of New Drugs Legislation*. Summary Final Report. National Drug Commission Czech Republic, Prague, Tisnov, SCAN. ISBN 80-86620-01-6. Stran 52.

both for field work and for science and research. It was a lucky coincidence of course, that our field of study obtained such a good position at one of the oldest faculties of the Prague's Charles University, and we gained the support of the university board. At the same time we tried from the beginning to look for common ground and did not look for the simplest way. The current faculty dean professor Tomáš Zima, an expert in the biochemistry of alcohol, was a key figure helping to find ways to approximate our field to other medical fields, and to decrease the image of "weird science", and to build up the image of the field as an integrative platform for the knowledge of other scientific disciplines. Lately it has been very important for us to know that next steps in the development will require lot of patience and openness to new concepts and experiences, and that these two attributes will be the key for the whole field. This conference might be one of the tiny pieces for our common mosaic, and I believe we can put it together while still keeping the critical distance, and making primarily right and wholesome decisions.

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