

For all whom it may concern

4 September 2017

Dear Colleagues,

With this letter, the members of the Steering Committee (SC) of the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN) and staff of the secretariat want to share information about their resignation from EHRN effective as of 4 September 2017. This resignation comes in response to aggressive and destructive approach of the Organization's shareholders, Ingrida Sulciene and Linas Merkelis, and the new Executive Director, Vitautas Sulcas, towards the governance of the organization, which, in our opinion, is based purely on their financial interest in EHRN at the expense of the programmatic activities of the organization.

For 16 years, the Secretariat of EHRN, under the guidance of the Steering Committee, has been implementing activities in accordance with the mission and the strategy of the network in a transparent manner and was accountable to the members of the network. During this period, the organization was strengthened to successfully advocate the values of harm reduction in the CEECA region and beyond and to become a reliable partner for communities of people who use drugs. In less than one month, the new management has demolished what has been built over those years and managed to destroy one of the strongest regional networks with over 600 members working in 29 countries.

The fact that these events took place in Lithuania, a country with a very supportive environment for work of non-profit organizations, is unfortunate and frustrating. The reputation and authority of the organization was well known beyond Lithuania and the organization pays national taxes on hundreds of thousands of euros each year. Nevertheless, unfortunately, members of Steering Committee and staff of the Secretariat can no longer ensure the continuation of programmatic activities of the network in line with work-plans and in adherence to financial and administrative procedures within the organization. From now the responsibility for any further actions of the organization and fulfillment of obligations towards donors and partners lies with the new director and shareholders of the organization.

The actions of the new management towards the staff of the Secretariat that have resulted in the resignation of the whole staff and SC include:

- An attempted hostile takeover of the Secretariat office<sup>1</sup>, during which the staff was forcefully retained in the office by private security forces, hired by the shareholders;
- Unlawful confiscation of computers of some employees;

---

<sup>1</sup> О событиях в офисе ЕССВ 17 августа 2017 года, Вильнюс, Швитригайлос 11В - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWPSOWsfNJg&t=5s>

- Dismissal of Anna Dovbakh from the position of Acting Executive Director and unlawful appointment of Vitautas Sulcas on this position, who is the husband of one of the shareholders, Ingrida Sulciene. This appointment took place without consultation with Steering Committee.;
- Attempts to threaten the staff through undocumented blame for unclear financial transactions, in order to justify those aggressive actions.

This showed that the new management does not plan to work towards the achievement of the mission and implementation of the strategy of EHRN, as approved by the Steering Committee, and that they may attempt to use the image of the organization and its resources for their personal objectives contradicting the interests of the members, partners, and donors of EHRN. Therefore, we immediately had to inform EHRN's donors about the developments and currently, most of the donors have recalled their funds and all program activities of the organization has been suspended. Currently, the organization does not even have sufficient funds to pay the salaries to its employees.

The staff of the EHRN Secretariat and members of Steering Committee do not see any way to continue working and supporting the organization, as its legal status does not fit its function and decision-making power lies solely with its two shareholders. Members of the network, as represented by the democratically elected Steering Committee should have the power to define the mission and the strategy of the organization and serve as members with full legal power.

We want to express our deepest gratitude for years of cooperation and we hope that we will be able to maintain those achievements as individuals, or as part of other organizations, especially the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association – a new regional harm reduction network, the establishment of which we are working on. We hope for the continuation of our firm partnership and collaboration to advocate for quality of harm reduction services, meeting the needs of communities in Lithuania, as well in CEECA region as a whole.

Steering Committee of EHRN  
Staff of EHRN Secretariat