



## **PRESS-RELEASE**

### **Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA) established and working**

02.10.2017.

The Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA) is glad to announce the launch of its work in the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA) region.

EHRA is a non-profit non-governmental membership-based organization established by a group of activists and professionals working in the field of harm reduction in the CEECA region, registered in Vilnius (Lithuania) in 2017. Our task is to promote progressive human rights-based drug policy in the region, as well as advocate for the sustainable financing of harm reduction services in line with the needs of the community of people who use drugs (PUD).

Establishment of this new regional organization was initiated by the staff of the Secretariat and the members of the Steering Committee of the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN), an organization that for 20 years has championed community interests and harm reduction programs in the region. This decision was motivated by the escalation of critical situation in EHRN, which in September this year has led to the resignation of all staff and members of the Steering Committee, withdrawal of dozens of individual and organizational members of the network, termination of funding by the donors and cessation of all EHRN's program activities. EHRN was registered as a non-governmental organization and had founders who legally owned the organization and, among other things, had the right to approve and amend its charter, hire and dismiss executive director, and, as it turned out, sell their shares of the organization. At the same time, according to the Charter of the organization, the EHRN Steering Committee - a legitimate management body of the organization elected among the members of the network to make key strategic decisions - had only an advisory function, and members of the network had no legal rights at all. This organizational form allowed one of the founders to attempt to sell the shares; this led to protracted trials and the change of one of the owners in August 2017. Immediately after the change in the composition of the owners and the appointment of a new Executive Director, which was done without notifying the Steering Committee, the new management of the organization took a number of steps<sup>1</sup> that led to a halt in the implementation of almost all the program activities of the organization and jeopardized the fulfilment of obligations to partners and donors.

In order to overcome this unclear situation and harmonize the legal form of the network with structure and content of its activity, a new organization was established. It has a democratic and more consistent legal form, which gives more rights and powers to its members. According to the statute of the EHRA, the main decision-making body of the organization is an assembly of its members. As on the beginning of September 2017, the organization has 78 members (both organizations and individuals) from CEECA countries, many of whom joined after the meeting of the EHRN members during the regional conference "Harm Reduction in the New Environment", which took place in April 2017 in Vilnius. During this meeting, the members of the network were informed about establishment of the association and reasons behind this decision. Furthermore, the invitation to re-register as members of the association was sent to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWPSOWsfNjg&feature=youtu.be>

the network's organizational members in May this year (invitations to the individual members for a number of technical reasons were sent only in September).

The key governance structure of the new organization is a Steering Committee (SC), which will consist of 13 individuals to be elected from among the members of the organization on a regional basis. At the moment, the EHRA SC consists of 3 members, who initially acted as the founders of the organization: Leonid Vlasenko (Ukraine) - Chairman of the SC, Agita Seja (Latvia), Lyudmila Trukhan (Belarus). The Steering Committee appoints an executive director of the organization, who is responsible to manage activities of the Secretariat. In August 2017, Anna Dovbakh, a well-known professional and public health activist in the region, was appointed to this position. Current activities of the association are implemented by a team of employees, who previously formed the core of the EHRN Secretariat and who are currently working as volunteers to the organization.

*"Support for the development of harm reduction in the region can no longer be a hostage to failed organizational and legal decisions. Democratic procedures for electing governing bodies of the network are the only guarantee to prevent similar situations in the future", - says Leonid Vlasenko, chairman of EHRA Steering Committee.*

We hope that the legal form of a membership-based association will ensure the sustainability of the organization, will enhance the role of the Steering Committee and the members in the management of the organization, which, in its turn, will contribute to the fruitful working process towards achievement of the Association's strategic goals. There is still much to do in the nearest future to position EHRA as a key partner in advocacy for access to the essential medical and social services for PUDs and in safeguarding their interests and rights in the region. Plans for the near future include: increasing membership base of the organization and organizing assembly meeting of the EHRA members; conduct strategic planning of the organization's activities for the next three years; refine the organization's charter; conduct elections of additional EHRA SC members; organize the work of the EHRA Secretariat's office and much more.

*"The situation in the region with the availability of funding for harm reduction services, as well as with legislation in the field of drug policy, continues to deteriorate. Therefore, the establishment of a strong regional organization that could ensure a necessary response from civil society to those emerging problems is a priority for our team!", - says Anna Dovbakh, Executive Director of EHRA.*

As the organization is at a nascent stage of its development, we look forward to the support of donor organizations, technical partners and professional community working in the field of HIV and TB prevention and control, as well as in advocacy for humane drug policy in the CEECA region and beyond. And of course, we are counting on the support of representatives of the community of people who use drugs, as those for whom and with whom we plan to work.

You can contact us and get more information about our current and planned activities by subscribing to our [Twitter account](#), our [Facebook page](#), and by visiting our website [www.HarmReductionEurasia.org](http://www.HarmReductionEurasia.org).

We encourage organizations and individuals from the region of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia to become members of the EHRA. You can apply for membership on our website using the following link: [harmreductioneurasia.org/community/](http://harmreductioneurasia.org/community/)

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