

Costs and Benefits of Cannabis Regulation Models in Europe

Expert seminar 31st of October and the 1st of November 2013

The Drugs and Democracy Programme of the Transnational Institute (TNI) will be organizing an expert seminar in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

The objective of this seminar is to identify and map existing and possible future cannabis regulation models in Europe, looking at the local, provincial and national levels and the potential impact of such models on the illicit cannabis market. The costs and benefits of different existing or proposed regulation models – such as the coffeeshop model in the Netherlands, proposed hash shops in Denmark (Copenhagen), cannabis social clubs in Spain (notably the regulation of these clubs in Catalonia and the Basque country), initiatives for cannabis regulation in the French parliament, etc. – will be explored and compared.

The seminar will be guided by the Chatham House rule and aims to be an open-minded exchange of opinions and experiences of policy officials and non-governmental experts in the field.

Venue: [Kapitein Zeppos](#), Gebed Zonder End 5, 1012 HS Amsterdam

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Agenda

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Thursday, 31 October 2013

12.30-13.30 Introduction lunch

Aims of the seminar and introduction of participants over lunch

13.30-15.00 Overview of developments in cannabis regulation

The legal regulation of the cannabis market in Uruguay and the successful referenda in the US States of Washington and Colorado, have accelerated cannabis policy developments worldwide. What kind of regulatory models are under consideration in Uruguay and the US? So far in Europe policy trends have focused on various forms of cannabis decriminalization, the introduction of medical marihuana, the Dutch coffeeshop model and the more recent

innovative cannabis social club model in Spain. Is there a chance that some countries in Europe will any time soon follow the breakthrough in the Americas and move towards cannabis regulation as well?

Designated participants give short overviews of latest developments per country (5 minutes per speaker), followed by Q&A. Issues to address: recent legislative initiatives (national and local) and their prospects; municipal and grassroots initiatives (cannabis clubs, coffeeshop-type models); upcoming political opportunities.

Inputs:

- Short global overview based on the forthcoming book 'How to regulate cannabis: A practical guide' (Lisa Sanchez, Transform)
- Overviews per country

15.00-15.15 Coffee/tea break

15.15-16.45 Costs and benefits of cannabis regulation

An important element in the debate about cannabis regulation is the financial cost and benefits. What are the difficulties in calculating the costs and benefits, and what is the real contribution of these assessments in the national and local debates on regulation? The session will give short overviews of existing financial cost and benefits assessments and their strengths and weaknesses. Followed by a discussion on whether it would be useful to devise a practical tool kit for comparable assessments Europe wide, taking into account the different regulation models. Which elements need to be included in the tool kit and how to quantify social and health benefits?

Inputs:

- Summary of the recent report Licensing and regulation of the cannabis market in England and Wales: Towards a cost benefit analysis by the Beckley Foundation/Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex (Amanda Feilding, Beckley Foundation)
- Cost and benefit assessments in Washington State (US): how useful have they been in the debate (Alison Holcomb, ACLU)
- Cost and benefit assessments of cannabis social clubs in Spain (Martin Barriuso, FAC)
- Overview of cost and benefit assessments in the Netherlands (Tom Blickman, TNI)

16.45-17.00 Coffee/tea break

17.00-18.00 Main conclusions of the day and recommendations for follow up

20.00 Dinner at Brasserie Harkema, Nes 67, Amsterdam and visit to a coffeeshop

Friday, 1 November 2013

09.00-09.30 Coffee/tea

09.30-11.00 Cannabis regulation and the UN drug control conventions

Decriminalization, including schemes in which possession, purchase and cultivation for personal use are no longer punishable offences, operates reasonably comfortable inside the confines of the UN drug control conventions. Although the treaties permit softening the criminal sanction requirements, authorities cannot create a legally regulated market for cannabis. Proscriptions laid out in the conventions clearly do not authorize the supply, production, manufacture or sale of controlled drugs, for non-medical and non-scientific purposes, which is to say recreational use. What exactly are the limits of latitude in the conventions? What are the prospects for changing or amending the conventions and what can countries do if they consider the conventions to be an obstacle for democratically decided policy reform? Would it be possible to delete cannabis completely from the 1961 Single Convention, or move it to a lighter control schedule from its current classification on lists I and IV? Will cannabis policy developments appear at all on the agenda of the [High-Level Segment of the 57th session of Commission on Narcotic Drugs \(CND\)](#) in March 2014 and what are the prospects for cannabis reform at the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the drug problem in 2016? What outcomes can be expected from the regional debate in the Americas and the impact of [the reports](#) of the Organisation of American States (OAS). Is there any chance that countries with a long history of traditional cannabis uses, such as Morocco or India, would join the chorus of policy reform? Is there a possibility to create a group of like-minded countries to initiate a cannabis reform agenda at the international level?

Inputs:

- Limits of latitude in the UN drug control conventions (Martin Jelsma - TNI)
- Revision of the UN Drug Control Conventions and like-minded groups (Dave Bewley-Taylor, Swansea University)
- OAS report and its prospects for cannabis policy reform (John Walsh)
- WHO cannabis review (Elizabeth Mathai, WHO)

11.00-11.15 Coffee/tea break

11.15-12.45 Prospects for initiatives at the European level

Cannabis regulation policy shifts in Europe are mainly taking place bottom up at the municipal and regional level and are initiated either by municipalities and/or grassroots initiatives. National governments tend to be an obstacle often actively discouraging cannabis policy reform. How to unravel this stalemate and what is the role of European institutions (Commission & Parliament)? What can be done to strengthen and coordinate the different local and grassroots initiatives?

Lambert Schmidt (EC Drugs Unit), Maurice Galla (European drug policy), Anna Sofia Santos (Portugal and HDG member), Mario Lap (Cannabistros)

12.45-13.00 Coffee/tea break and sandwiches

13.00-14.00 Main conclusions of the seminar and recommendations for follow up

Recommended reading:

- Licensing and regulation of the cannabis market in England and Wales: Towards a cost-benefit analysis, Mark Bryan, Emilia Del Bono & Stephen Putney, Beckley Foundation / Institute for Social and Economic Research (University of Essex) at <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/d/153>
- Models for the legal supply of cannabis: recent developments, EMCDDA, May 2013; at <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/topics/pods/legal-supply-of-cannabis>
- Cannabis production and markets in Europe, EMCDDA, June 2012; at http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att_166248_EN_web_INSIGHTS_CANNABIS.pdf
- Highs and lows in cannabis policy reform: Recent developments in cannabis regulation, a series of blogs on the issue at <http://www.undrugcontrol.info/en/home/item/3497-highs-and-lows-in-cannabis-policy-reform>
- [Towards revision of the UN drug control conventions](#): The logic and dilemmas of Like-Minded Groups, Dave Bewley-Taylor, TNI-IDPC Series on Legislative Reform of Drug Policies nr. 19, March 2012
- [The Limits of Latitude](#): The UN drug control conventions, Dave Bewley-Taylor & Martin Jelsma, TNI-IDPC Series on Legislative Reform of Drug Policies Nr. 18, March 2012
- Majority of the Dutch favour cannabis legalisation- Restrictive government cannabis policies are defied by local initiatives and court rulings, blog by Tom Blickman, <http://druglawreform.info/en/weblog/item/4960-majority-of-the-dutch-favour-cannabis-legalisation>

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