

*Stockholm, 9 December 2014*



Open letter to the Government and the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania

Nordic Alcohol and Drug Policy Network (NordAN) – an international umbrella organization for NGOs in the Baltic and Nordic states, involved in reducing harm from alcohol and drugs to society would like to support our Lithuanian member organisations in their worries regarding current plans to weaken the control of psychoactive substances, by restructuring the Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department.

As you know, in all the countries in the Baltic-Nordic region alcohol use causes serious health and social problems. Lithuania is certainly no exception. Lithuania carries a staggering cost of 741 million litas per year due to alcohol related morbidity and other problems, and ranks third in per capita consumption of alcohol in the world. Lithuania also ranks among the ten European countries with the highest death rate among drug addicts, according to a report published by the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction in 2013.

These problems require a long-term, consistent and evidence based alcohol control policy. Such a policy is currently implemented by the Department. These efforts are well known to and appreciated by NordAN member organizations. The Department is especially valued for its unrelenting cooperation with NGOs and systematic approach to control of psychoactive substances (alcohol, tobacco and other drugs).

NordAN finds the restructuring plans surprising, since the Department was founded in 2011 and has proven to be a valuable asset for the alcohol, drug and tobacco policy work in Lithuania. The planned changes to move control functions – that are now concentrated in the Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department - to other ministries and institutions that are not focused on public health, raise concern that the Lithuanian Government does not give priority to the public health needs of the population. The Lithuanian health indicators are quite worrying, compared to those of other states in the European Union, and a weakening of the government Department now responsible for alcohol, drug and tobacco control could certainly undermine the reputation of Lithuania in the area of public health.

Modern public health policies require an integrated approach towards substance abuse: addressing poly-drug use, legal and control aspects as well as a firm policy concerning the industry of psychoactive substances. Alcohol is combined with most substances of abuse, tobacco is frequently a gateway to the world of illegal drugs. Therefore it is important to continue having combined expertise in one institution.

NordAN appeals to every member of the Government and Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania - we strongly urge that you listen to the plea from the public health community in Lithuania and the Baltic-Nordic region, and review the plans that would weaken the Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department.

Yours sincerely,

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president, NordAN

Lauri Beekmann  
Secretary General, NordAN

*NordAN was established in September 2000 as a network of non governmental, voluntary organizations who all worked to reduce the consumption of alcohol and other drugs and who supported a restrictive alcohol and drug policy and who did not receive contributions from the commercial alcohol industry. Acting on these principles NordAN today have grown to have 90 non-governmental, voluntary member organisations in all the eight Nordic and Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden), all active in the alcohol and drug field.*