

Research report

Forum: UNODC – Drugs and Crime

Issue: “Starting the conversation of the legalization of soft drugs”

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Introduction

In our current society, drug crimes are the most common form of criminal activity there is. As recreational use of soft drugs as well as hard drugs is becoming more prevailing, the trading of the usually illegal substances has been on a rise too. This often goes paired with violence and creates unsafe areas and living situations for those having nothing to do with the business. Because of this, it's important to start the conversation of the legalization of soft drugs. Measures taken regarding the issue would drastically impact the use of the light narcotics and the stigma it has, as well as the criminal activity caused by the production and trade. This report looks into how the legalization of soft drugs could impact our world, what actions has been taken so far regarding the issue, as well as possible future plans.

Definition of key terms

Drug

“Any natural or artificially made chemical that is used as a medicine, any natural or artificially made chemical that is taken for pleasure, to improve someone’s performance of an activity or because a person cannot stop using it.”

Soft drugs

“A drug that is believed to be nonaddictive and less damaging to the health than a hard drug.” Generally spoken, soft drugs are cannabis products, sleeping pills and lighter sedatives.

Legalization of soft drugs

The complete legalization of soft drugs in which case all activity surrounding the trade and use of soft drugs is legal. Age or area restrictions can still be in order. The sale of the substances will be included in the national economy.

Decriminalization

In case of the decriminalization of soft drugs, soft drugs are in fact still illegal but are not seen as an offense against the law. Certain actions relating to soft drugs, usually the possession and recreational use of the substances, are no longer seen as crimes and therefore do not have a criminal penalty attached to them. Both drug decriminalization and drug legalization are processes in the category of drug liberalization.

Background information

The legalization of soft drugs has been a topic which has been discussed tons but making decisions on international level has been difficult. There would be a lot of consequences, and opinions differ on the fact if these are more negative or positive. Not only does this have to do with a personal view and experience someone has with drugs, but situations in different

countries make for a very different outcome with the same measurements taken. Whereas in some places the legalization would cause problems, it could make for a better functioning society in others.

It is important to remember is that there are nations in which soft drugs have not been legalized but are in fact decriminalized. This completely or partly takes away the criminality of acts surrounding soft drugs but does not solve issues or take away consequences regarding the use and trade of the substances.

The legalization of specific types of drugs boosts the economy, exceeding great revenues which will now be administrated in the national balances of nations. Besides the trade itself, the whole process of production and exchange will be of benefit to other industries like tourism, banking, real estate, construction and transportation. It can also increase the tax revenues for national governments. Economics point out that drugs like marijuana are granted to be traded commercially, the taxes on these items can be increased, the same way this has been done for cigarettes and alcohol. Manufacturers and distributors will have to pay billions of dollars extra, all money going straight to the national balances. For countries going into or through a financial crisis, this might look like an attractive last resort to earn money. Not only would it increase the governments income, but it might also decrease the expenses. Enforcing the law of drug prohibition will no longer be necessary and court proceedings will drop. As taking soft drugs recreationally is no longer illegal, there will be less inmates being imprisoned for these crimes and prisons will be less crowded. There will be space for those having committed heavier crimes than possessing soft drugs, and no new prisons will need to be built, leaving money for other investments, for example healthcare and education.

Those against the legalization of soft drugs could say this creates far more costs for society and taxpayers than what is added to the tax revenue. The amount of emergency visits caused by the use of marijuana of light sedatives might increase and so might addiction treatments. Dependence on the drug might increase with legalization, and help might not be offered soon enough seeing its now once own responsibility. When the process of starting to use marijuana is made easier, the chance of people getting addicted does in fact increase. Overall accidents happening when the victims are drugged are more likely to happen, for instance when driving under the influence or when assaulted and drugged.

On the positive side, besides a possibly increased budget for overall healthcare, the allowance for the use of marijuana in medicines might lead to the ability to help many people suffering from medical conditions which can easily be treated with cannabis products. Also, the legalization of soft drugs could mean a big drop in the recreational use of these substances as people would be less interested in using it seeing the illegal feeling around it would be gone. It wouldn't be associated with "cool" anymore, especially making soft drugs less appealing to teens. Research by the Washington University School of Medicine has shown big drops in

marijuana use amongst youngsters, even though the states in which data had been collected had legalized the adult use of the substance. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health agrees with this. This way, next to healing, the legalization of soft drugs will cause a decrease in accidents caused by the use as the overall consumption decreases. Ronnie Cohen claims that in the US, traffic deaths dropped with eleven percent in states where medical marijuana had been legalized.

This way it might look like the legalization of soft drugs has only perks, but the black market is given a lot of freedom when this process is truly taken seriously. Law enforcement won't be able to take action as much and big cartels will be able to undercut the state-licensed sellers greatly. Organized crime in some areas might decrease but is this way also able to grow. Not only will this be about soft drugs, but the step to the legalization of hard drugs will now be smaller too. This might fuel the use of hard drugs altogether when people do not see the use of soft drugs as something special anymore.

Timeline of key events

October 1913	Marijuana prohibition begins in the US
October 1928	Britain declares marijuana prohibition
October 1956	The US pass the Narcotics Control Act, placing cannabis in the same drug class as heroine
1961	UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs
1971	UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances
1988	UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances
2013	Uruguay is the first country to legalize cannabis

Major parties involved

Commission on Narcotic Drugs

The CND reviews and analyzes the global drug situation, considering supply and demand reduction. It takes action through resolutions and decisions.

World Health Organization

WHO's primary role is to direct international health within the United Nation's system and to lead partners in global health responses. They have a Triple Billion targets outlining an ambitious plan for worldwide health and healthcare. Research on drugs and statistics are part of their program.

Uruguay

Uruguay is a very important country during this issue, as it was the first nation to truly legalize cannabis. Before this, the cannabis laws were never that strict, but in 2013 the country passed a law saying, to a certain extent, citizens could now buy, grow and smoke it. The passing of the law mainly had to do with the war on drugs which was going on and the large amounts of money circling in the criminal circuit. The legal framework was passed in 2017 making the law ready for use.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

UNODC launches campaigns to raise awareness of drugs and crime problems. On 26 June every year, UNODC marks the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. In 2016, the campaign theme is "Listen First". The aim is to increase support for prevention of drug use that is based on science and is thus an effective investment in the well-being of children and youth, their families, and their communities.

In December 2012, Member States of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs adopted a revised Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ). The questionnaire monitors, amongst other things, the reporting to the Commission mandated by the three international drug control conventions.

Possible solutions

The legislation of drugs could worsen drug abuse as the substances will be more accessible and no legal consequences will be in order. On the other hand, it might stabilize the amount of drug wars and trade in illegal goods. Removing soft drugs from the criminal world would mean the end of a great deal of criminal circuits all around the world, but what consequences would this have for the amount of international criminal activity as a whole? Criminal might find another way to illegally make money and there's no say to what extent this will harm society. It is difficult to determine how things will work out when measurements are taken.

In order to promote the legislation of soft drugs, practical solutions should be adopted to create the right environment in which such dialogue can take place. A correct representation of soft drugs should be present, presenting the risks as well as the perks of the use of said substances. In coming up with resolutions, a difference could be made between different drug classes dividing the soft drugs, and the instances in which the substances are used. Opinions will differ on the instances in which drugs use is a good idea, meaning medically and recreationally.

To summarize, member states should be urged to discuss the legislation of soft drugs as this is, with its consequences, a larger topic than one might think at first. The legality and with this, accessibility and abuse, of soft drugs influences the economic field as well as complete societies and the well-being of humanity.

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