

**EG on Alcohol and Substance Abuse (ASA EG)
Eighteen working meeting
Copenhagen, Denmark
15-16 October 2019**

Title	Minutes of the 19 th working meeting of the ASA EG
Submitted by	ITA in Coordination with the Chair
Summary / Note	This document outlines the main discussion points and decisions made during the 19th working meeting of the ASA EG

1. Opening of the meeting and welcome

Dr. Carina Ferreira-Borges, Programme Manager, Alcohol and illicit drugs, Prison Health (WHO NCD office in Moscow), opened the meeting and welcomed the meeting participants.

Mr. Bernt Bull (Chairman, Norway) has introduced a new member of the ASA EG, Ms. Eleonor Saften, from the Public Health Agency (Sweden). He also informed that the members from Poland and Estonia, and the NCM were not able to participate in the meeting. However, the NCM has sent its presentation with the information on the current activities of the organization. He also thanked the WHO office for the organizing of this meeting

2. Adoption of the Agenda

Mr. Bernt Bull (Chairman, Norway) presented the draft meeting agenda. The Director of the NDPHS, Ms. Ulla-Karin Nurm, was unable to attend the second day of the meeting and asked to move her presentations. Since the NCM representative was not participating at the meeting, the chairman proposed to take the NDPHS presentation instead. The meeting adopted the Provisional Agenda (submitted as Document ASA 19/2/1).

3. NDPHS new strategy and possible action plan

Ms. Ulla-Karin Nurm (NDPHS) briefly presented the ongoing activities. The NDPHS is at the end of its strategy and is preparing now the development of the new one. As the prerequisite of this process, the evaluation of the NDPHS was carried on in 2019. The timeline for the new strategy is to adopt it in 2021 during the Partnership Annual Conference (PAC). The seven areas of the current strategy remain in the new strategy too. One of the proposed new Horizontal field – ageing introduced, with the idea that all Expert Groups bring their inputs to the topic. The final decision about the Horizontal fields will be made at the PAC meeting in Riga, in November 2019. The vision is that the strategy is working towards the SDGs. The EGs asked to start the discussions concerning the development of the specific goal and objectives, and they would like to achieve during the implementation of the new strategy. Ms. Nurm also informed that the EU external action services offered the financial support for the EG activities and strengthening of the NDPHS Secretariat capacity the strategic work and communication. The PAC is going to take place on November 28, in Riga, where the chairmanship of the Partnership will be handed to Poland with Lithuania becoming a Co-Chair country.

Dr. Carina Ferreira-Borges (WHO) asked if the experts presented at the EG were reporting back to the Ministries.

Mr. Bernt Bull (Chairperson, Norway) answered that it varies between the countries how closely linked the appointed experts are to the ministries, but even those experts that are not formally affiliated to a ministry are in regular contact with their respective Ministries. Such contact will take place through the agency or academic institution they belong to, or directly with the alcohol and substance use department of the ministry.

Ms. Nina Karlsson (EHYT) asked about the vision of the NDPHS to work closer with the NGOs and bringing them to the NDPHS network

Ms. Nurm (NDPHS) responded that engaging the civil society in the NDPHS activities is part of the future work of the NDPHS.

The meeting took note of the presented information.

4. Outcomes of the Regional consultation on the Global Alcohol Strategy and Regional action plan (WHO NCD office, Moscow)

Dr. Carina Ferreira-Borges (WHO, NCD office) presented the current developments in the WHO Euro Region. She mentioned that from 2020, unfortunately, there will be no financial support from the EU, to the WHO activities related to the alcohol, including the health information system. The European region is still having the highest level of alcohol consumption in the world, despite the fact of decreasing the consumption level in recent years. This trend mainly happened in Eastern European countries. The new data will be collected, and the WHO will publish the report in 2022. Alcohol continues to affect all SDGs targets and also has economic consequences. WHO has recently evaluated the level of the implementation of ten action areas in the countries, suggested by the WHO alcohol action plan. Some of the areas, like pricing and marketing, appeared to have a low implementation level in most of the countries. The barriers to the implementation identified, and they were mainly related to inadequate cross-sectoral cooperation. The meeting was organized in Sweden, January, to discuss with the countries and NGOs the findings of the evaluation and to identify the next steps for the European action plan. The zero draft of the report was discussed in the second round of the consultations, in Prague, in October. Besides, the road map, for the continuation of the European action plan, was also discussed at this meeting. By the request of the member states, one additional priority area added to the possible action plan, and that is the component of the Health systems strengthening. The discussion paper will be later presented at the WHO World Health Assembly.

Ms. Ulla-Karin Nurm (NDPHS) raised the question of how the work on the Global alcohol strategy and the European action plan were aligned.

Dr. Carina Ferreira-Borges (WHO) responded that two documents are well aligned. The European action plan is more supporting the country focused on implementation. While at the Global level, the global strategy goes beyond the country focused implementation but tackles the global mechanisms that also have an impact on the local implementation. The European road map (framework for the action) will be presented at the next Regional committee. While there is no EU Alcohol action plan, this framework gains importance.

Mr. Bernt Bull (Chairperson, Norway) mentioned that while the discussions around the Global Alcohol strategy can be continued next year, it is essential to underline that the European region is not postponing the discussions around the European action plan.

Dr. Carina Ferreira-Borges (WHO) also informed that the last week, WHO has published an alcohol policy case study, the analyses of the impact of the Alcohol policy implementation on all-cause mortality rate. The case study was carried on in the Russian Federation. The study shows that after the

implementation of the policies country registered, a considerable drop in alcohol consumption, and an increase in the life expectancy.

The full presentation (in English) is available on the webpage of the meeting in the post-meeting documentation at https://www.ndphs.org/?mtgs,asa_19_copenhagen

The meeting took note of the presented information.

5. Developments in European Cannabis markets (WHO)

Dr. Carina Ferreira-Borges (WHO, NCD Office) presented current discussions and scientific evidence around the cannabis issues. WHO has published in 2015 a report on “Health and Social effects of the non-medical cannabis use.” EMCDDA has also launched several reports in this field. There is now a tendency to increase in the potency of the primary substance of the Cannabis – THC, producing higher effects on the health. Still, there are significant knowledge gaps, as there is, for example, no standard measures on the quantity of cannabis used by the users, no information available on the THC contents in most of the countries, and also about the situation outside of the area covered by the EMCDDA. There are now four areas where cannabis used for medical purposes. However, the effects of that use still not well studied and documented.

Basically, WHO is preparing reports, which are going to the Commission on Narcotics and Drugs (CND), CND, then decides which are the substance to be kept under the treaties on illegal substances and which one to remove from that list. The request in terms of the cannabis was to analyze and revise the different components of the substance, which are inside of the cannabis (in total 121 substances). The main substances revised were THC and CBD, and the question was if the CBD can be removed from the illicit drug substance list. The report shows that there was no health harm using pure CBD. WHO has recommended for the consideration at the CND, that preparations containing CBD with not more than 0,2% concentration should be taken out from the illegal substance list. At the same time, it was recommended that THC would stay on the list. However, CND decided not to take out the CBD and to continue the discussions around this topic.

Mr. Bernt Bull (Chairperson, Norway) stated that one of the reasons for the lack of evidence on the effects of the cannabis was the structure of the convention on illicit drugs, causing the difficulties in running the necessary researches on this field.

Dr. Zaza Tsereteli (ITA) mentioned that recently, the study on the changes in the composition of cannabis published in Denmark. Study showed that the THC concentration increased 3-fold from 2000 (mean: 8.3%) to 2017 (mean: 25.3%). Significant increases occurred in all areas of Denmark. Furthermore, the THC: CBD concentration ratio increased significantly from 1.4 in 2008 to 4.4 in 2017.

Ms. Nina Karlsson (EHYT) presented some data from the current study in the USA, showing that despite the legalization of cannabis use, up to 70% of the cannabis still was sold through the black market, due to the oversupply.

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The meeting took note of the presented information.

6. Country reports on recent developments in the field of Alcohol and Substance abuse policy developments.

Mr. Espen Andressen (Norway) presented the recent developments in Norway. New national tobacco control strategy 2019–2021 launched spring 2019 (as part of a White paper on Public Health). The reform in the Drug policy is proposed to ensure better services and moving the responsibilities from the justice sector to the health and care services. In the meantime, it was underlined that this reform would not lead to the legalization. The special committee has been created to prepare the implementation of the Government's Drug policy reform. It is foreseen the delivery of the report by the end of 2019.

Mr. Bernt Bull (Chairperson, Norway) added information concerning the developments in the Alcohol policy field. The Alcohol Policy remains unchanged, and the only change proposed by the Government is the increase for one hour the working hours of the wine monopoly shops on Saturday. There are discussions on giving the wine monopoly to take over the sale of alcohol at the duty-free shops in the airports based on a request from the parliament to study such possibilities. The government are also considering addressing some additional measures strategically to reduce the harmful use of alcohol, mainly related to information programmes etc.

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Mr. Tomas Karlsson (Finland) presented recent developments in Finland. In the Tobacco field, the critical developments related to the Snus. Snus use has increased among boys and young men in recent years. Snus use is the most common tobacco product used among boys. Also some increase among girls

In the field of the gambling New amendments to the Lotteries Act under discussion. Among the changes proposed is the blocking of illegal websites and money transfers, mandatory identification for all gambling, and permanent self-exclusion from all gambling possible.

The results from the 2018 drug survey show that the increasing use of the cannabis and the opinions on illicit drugs (especially on cannabis) has relaxed. The alcohol policy debate in Finland dominated by the alcohol tax reductions planned and carried out in Estonia and Latvia in July. The latest figures on travelers' alcohol imports published just recently show the increase in the import of beer, cider, and ready to drink categories. Institute is now working more actively with the communication people to bring this information to the general population without any wrong interpretation.

Ms. Pi Hoegberg (Sweden) questioned why, even though the most significant difference in prices between Finland and Estonia, is in liqueurs, the import has not increased in the same way as for the beer or cider.

Mr. Thomas Karlsson (Finland) responded that the possible explanation of the phenomena can be the fact that the import of the spirits was always quite high, and now when taxes changed, the price difference for beer is more evident than for spirits resulting in more increase in the beer import.

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Ms. Eleonor Säfsten (Sweden) presented the developments in Sweden. The new legislation on Alcohol Policy was introduced in July, which was directed towards the – alcoholic products which from a consumption perspective essentially can be equated with alcoholic beverages. Besides, the trial with home delivery was introduced as part of Systembolaget (wine monopoly) regular activities. The

commission is appointed of inquiry to consider farm sales of alcohol. In the field of drug policy, the Government launched an action plan for the prevention of narcotics and related crime, mainly directed to strengthening the control of illegal trade.

In the field of Tobacco control, new measures in the tobacco act have been introduced from July 2019, including among other things the Extension of smoke-free environments to outdoor places. The Government announced that there would be a new strategy for the areas of ANDT (alcohol, narcotics, doping, tobacco) for the period of 2021-2026.

A financial report is covering the policy for alcohol and tobacco launched in March 2019. The report has criticized the cost-effectiveness of the current system of the wine monopoly. However, specialists are saying that the report, unfortunately, is ignoring the essential public health perspectives. Since, there have been some suggestions from opposition parties for example to increase the opening hours (i.e. open on Sundays).

Mr. Bernt Bull (Norway) asked if a private company did this study

Ms. Pi Hoegberg (Sweden) responded that the study was carried out by the research department of the Ministry of Finance. The report is arguing that the prices, not the monopoly, are influencing the decision to buy the alcohol and therefore influence the consumption level. Therefore the high prices are more important than the monopoly and accessibility itself.

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Ms. Una Martinsone (Latvia) presented the situation in Latvia. Changes to the national tobacco, e-cigarette, and herbal smoking product law adopted at the beginning of 2019, as a significant increase in e-cigarette use since 2011, especially among boys registered in Latvia. Among the changes proposed are the measures ensuring that all products for sale are not visible from the outside. The rapid increase in Alcohol consumption registered since 2017 due to over the border sales along the Latvian-Estonian border. The decrease in excise duty rates on spirits announced at the beginning of August, following the same measures introduced by Estonia. This decrease was adopted only for the six month period, and if nothing happens from March 2020, the excise duty will be increased by 30%. Alcohol policy plan for 2020-2022 was developed, proposing several measures to reduce availability and heavy drinking and to strengthen the prevention and treatment activities. It was expected that the adoption of the new plan would start shortly, but already now there are proposed some changes to this plan, so yet not clear when the plan will be adopted. In the field of the drug policy National Program for the Control of Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances and the Prevalence 2019-2020 was adopted in July. It is decided that from 2021, the Ministry of Health will be responsible for the development and monitoring of national drug policy, taking over from the Ministry of the Interior.

Mr. Thomas Karlsson (Finland) asked if there were any estimations about the quantity of alcohol purchased by the Finnish citizens in Latvia. According to the THL estimations, 6-8% of Finnish export of alcohol was from Latvia, and no significant increase, due to the excise duty reduction, was recorded.

Ms. Una Martinsone (Latvia) responded that, unfortunately, there was no data available on this question.

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Ms. Jelena Talackiene (Lithuania) presented the current developments in Lithuania. According to the Survey on Alcohol attributable economic burden in Lithuania (performed by the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences), the total alcohol-attributable economic burden in Lithuania assessing direct and indirect consequences in 2015-2016 reached about € 320 mln. Annually. It is decided that since 01/01/2020 introduction of the ban of sales of alcoholic beverages on beaches, in non-stationary caterers (more than 40 meters from the main caterer), in retail outlets licensed by the municipality

during the resort season and in pavilions, which resulted in a strong pressure from the industry. There was also 4 draft amendments to Alcohol Control Law registered in the Parliament to do this, but fortunately all drafts were rejected in the Parliament. A significant increase in the excise duty on alcohol introduced since 2017, excise duty for strong alcoholic beverages increased by an extra 10% in 2019. Revenues from excise duty on alcohol collected to state budget increased, sales of alcoholic beverages – decreased. Consequently due to the complex measures taken by the Ministry of Health, the alcohol-related morbidity due to disease directly linked to alcohol consumption decreased among both men and women, mortality rates due to alcohol consumption has also decreasing trend.

Several draft amendments to the Tobacco Control Law already registered in the Parliament and will be under the Parliamentary reading: on introduction of a display ban for tobacco products, ban on flavors for e-cigarettes and ban of advertising, and sponsorship of devices to consume tobacco. The country is now facing a problem with the emerging nicotine product, so-called Killapods, described as Snus without tobacco. They are available on all three Baltic sea country markets, and accessible for the on-line sale. One of the possible solutions to overcome this problem is the possibility of an official appeal by all three countries to the EC on recommendations for regulation of such products.

Mr. Bernt Bull (Chairperson, Norway) mentioned that according to the Norwegian legislation, the company is now allowed to sell the product with the same brand as the alcohol beverage. As a result, companies cannot even advertise the non-alcoholic beer, with the same logo as alcohol one. Producers took the case to the supreme court and won by the Ministry of Health and Care Services. Chairperson underlined that this example was brought as a suggestion to the Lithuanian colleagues that they can consult with the NDPHS partner countries, to use their experience, when the industry brings the court cases in Lithuania.

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Prof. Eugenia Koshkina (Russia, Co-Chair) presented the current developments in the Russian Federation. The report on the effects of alcohol control measures on mortality and life expectancy in the Russian Federation, developed by the WHO, was presented recently in RF. According to the study, between 2003 and 2018, all-cause mortality dropped by 39% in men and by 36% in women. The prevalence of harmful use of alcohol dropped by 54%, and life expectancy both for men and women has increased by several years. In July, the State Duma introduced a bill on the sale of alcohol to persons over 21 years old. The bill banning the sale of alcohol in cafes and bars located in apartment buildings in rooms of less than 20 square meters, is also supported by the Government.

In the field of drug policy, the amendments were introduced to the Law of the Russian Federation "On Mass Media," making sites offering new psychoactive substances illegal. In August, amendments to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation entered into force, lifting the ban on the cultivation of drug-containing plants for their use in medicines. This change will allow the substitution of imported painkillers. It is foreseen that by the end of the 2019 recommendations will be developed, determining the territories where it is advisable to cultivate narcotic plants for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances used for medical purposes and in veterinary medicine.

Dr. Carina Ferreira-Borges (WHO, NCD Office) asked if the cultivation of drug-containing plants also included cannabis plants to sell it, for example, outside of the country.

Prof. Eugenia Koshkina (Co-Chair, Russia) responded that cannabis was prohibited and not included in this list. The whole idea of the new legislation was that plants would be used for the production of the local medicines. Russia is not producing any medicine with the cannabis substance; therefore the cultivation of cannabis is not foreseen

Mr. Bernt Bull (Norway) stressed the importance of the case study on alcohol control measures produced by the WHO office in Moscow. The report clearly showed the effectiveness of the so-called best buys in Alcohol Policy.

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The meeting took note of the presented information.

7. Possible joint Project of the NDPHS EGs (NDPHS Secretariat)

Ms. Ulla-Karin Nurm (NDPHS) briefly updated the ASA EG on the current status of the development of the NDPHS flagship project on the elderly population. The project application (ageFLAG) to the Swedish institute Seed funding was successful, and NDPHS will start soon to implement the project. It consists of three packages. The first one is gap analyses on the country level (Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Finland, Sweden), based on the national workshops in those countries. The National reports will be elaborated, and later one report with common recommendations for the region will be developed. Based on the report, the strategic framework for the actions will be formed. The second package is the establishment of the Steering Committee (SC) with the advisers from the EGs. Currently, Dr. Tsereteli and Dr. Arsalo (HIV EG) are nominated as an adviser to the SC.

In the end, the SC transformation into the Task Force (TF) of the NDPHS on ageing, is expected. The mandate for the functioning of the TF will be requested from the CSR. The third package is the elaborating of the model policy brief — the alcohol among the elderly selected as a topic for this purpose. The THL takes the lead in the development of this brief. The web page for the project is now available, and all information accessible at <https://ageflag.org>

Dr. Zaza Tsereteli (ITA) underlined that while the NDPHS is in the process of the development of the new strategy, the work on the flagship project can be seen as a sound basis for the new strategy. As for the Policy brief on alcohol among the elderly, the preliminary meeting to discuss the presiders and the format of the document will be useful to organize.

Ms. Ulla-Karin Nurm (NDPHS) also informed that the NDPHS got funding from the EUSBSR (As the Policy area coordinator) for the capacity building on communication. One of the proposals is to use the part of the funding for the training for the EG members. The question is if that can be of interest to the EGs.

Mr. Bernt Bull (Chairperson, Norway) informed that recently, the WHO department on mental health and substance abuse had changed its name to the mental health and substance use. Therefore it will be useful to consider this within the NDPHS too.

In the end, of her intervention, Ms. Nurm briefly updated on the NDPHS evaluation. The first draft of the final report is ready. The Evaluation Steering Group (ESG) will also prepare its report, screening through the full evaluation, and then present it to the CSR.

The meeting took note of the presented information.

8. EHYT - Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention

Ms. Nina Karlsson (EHYT) briefly presented the activities of the organization in the field of alcohol, tobacco, and drug prevention. This organization is the only national NGO working in this field,

founded after the merger of three organizations, seven years ago. It is both the NGO and also an expert organization. There are three departments in the organization: Adults, Youth, and Regional Cooperation and Member Organizations. EHYT is also coordinating the Network of Preventive Organizations, acting as Secretary for that Network. Some topical issues related to the EHYT activities were presented, including the participation in the debates on the Snus issue and promoting the Icelandic prevention model in Finland. The government allocated some finances for the introduction of the program in Finland in 2019. Most planned actions are focused on leisure time activities, and this approach questioned by EHYT, seen as narrowing the model down to a single activity. The organization has applied for funding for a comprehensive model of community action to reduce substance-related harm among youth and so support the introduction of an Icelandic model.

EHYT is now expanding its international cooperation and the advocacy work and therefore is interested in establishing a collaboration with the ASA EG. The cooperation can be used for the exchange of information or participation in projects or other activities.

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Mr. Bernt Bull (Chairman, Norway) mentioned that while ASA EG will be involved in the development of the next strategy of the NDPHS, the role of the NGOs in the implementation of the activities can be taken into account and studied further. At the same time, the balance needs to be found when setting the framework of cooperation between the Governmental organizations and the NGOs.

Dr. Carina Ferreira-Borges (WHO, NCD Office) stated that it is essential to keep the platform for the NGO collaboration. One of the issues that WHO would like to address is the alcohol consumption at the university level, and while EHYT is closely working with this age group, collaboration in this field can be considered.

Ms. Pi Högberg (Sweden) commented that NGOs are more action-oriented than formal structures, and therefore, possible cooperation can be established for project implementation purposes. At the same time, some criteria need to be set by the NDPHS for choosing the NGOs for participation in the NDPHS work.

Dr. Zaza Tsereteli (ITA) stressed the importance of the NGO activities and underlined that the NGO flexibility compared to the state institution is beneficial as it makes them more productive while working on Alcohol Policy issues. He proposed to bring the issue of cooperation with the NGOs to the attention of the CSR. Cooperation with the NGOs can also be considered as a topic for one of the next meetings of the ASA EG, where some other NGOs and NorDAN representatives can be invited, to discuss this issue in more details.

The meeting took note of the presented information.

9. ASA EG projects (Somatic project)

Prof. Eugenia Koshkina (Russia, Co-Chair) presented the implementation of the joint Norway-Russia Project on surveillance of alcohol and drug use among hospitalized somatic patients. The survey participants completed questionnaires, including AUDIT-4, and the blood PEth level was analyzed (PEth was used as a variable, where its concentration > 0.3 µM was considered positive, indicating excessive alcohol consumption). Besides, the Russian side has included a module examining the prevalence of tobacco use among somatic patients. The study has demonstrated that harmful alcohol use was highly prevalent among acutely medical ill patients both in Russia and in Norway. The high prevalence of harmful alcohol use at both study-sites suggests that e.g., information on alcohol impact on health might be offered to patients in general hospitals. AUDIT - 4 has proven to be a useful

screening tool for identifying alcohol abusers among somatic hospital patients. However, the probability of obtaining a false negative result when using AUDIT-4 is higher among older people (61-70 years old) and economically non-active people. Several scientific articles were produced, and the first one published in October, in the International Journal on addiction. The results of the project presented at several International Conferences. The new proposal for the continuation of the project submitted to the Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services. □

Mr. Bernt Bull (Norway, Chairman) stated that the study in Norway shows that Alcohol consumption reported by AUDIT was higher when, in reality, detected by the biomarkers used in the study. Therefore the validation of AUDIT questions based on the laboratory investigation is significant.

Prof. Eugenia Koshkina (Russia, Co-Chair) pointed out that the results of the project were used by the WHO office in Moscow while validating the AUDIT test for the Russian Federation. As a result, a single standard test will be introduced for the whole of Russia.

Dr. Zaza Tsereteli (ITA) commented that several countries of the NDPHS were interested in the results of the project to consider the implementation of a similar one. Now, when the first article is published, it will be shared with the CSR members.

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The meeting took note of the presented information.

10. ASA EG Thematic report

Dr. Zaza Tsereteli (ITA, Norway) informed that the thematic report was finished and shared with the ASA EG members. It is planned to submit the report during the upcoming CSR meeting in Riga. Therefore, EG members were asked to make final comments or suggestions to the presented document.

Mr. Bernt Bull (Chairperson, Norway) commented that in many questionnaires, similar to the one developed by invited researchers, questions related to the governmental activities are problematic to answer. In many countries, the programs are decentralized and carried on a local level. As a result, the answer to the question may create a false assumption of the non-existence of the state programs. This phenomenon needs explanation in the reports.

Ms. Pi Hoegberg (Sweden) mentioned that it would be preferable to have a shorter or condensed report. It is, at this moment, too detailed. The proposal is to try to make a short version of the report for the CSR members. The two-page document, fact sheet, with the summing up and some conclusions/recommendations for the countries.

Prof. Eugenia Koshkina (Co-Chair, Russia) suggested checking some of the references and sources presented at the report. She supported the report in the way it was developed now.

Ms. Una Martinsone (Latvia) stated that one of the tables related to the action plan in Latvia needed to be updated.

The meeting decided that: 1) ITA contacts the researchers and asks them to develop a two page document for each of the chapter, with main findings and recommendations 2) Russia sends the request to the researcher, to check and update the references 3) Latvia sends the updated version of the action plan, to be included into the report.

11. NDPHS new strategy and possible action plan

Dr. Zaza Tsereteli (ITA, Norway) reminded the EG members that the NDPHS would soon start the development of the new strategy and the action plan. He invited the EG members to start the discussions about the possible priorities for the work of the EG.

Ms.Nina Karlsson (EHYT, Finland) mentioned that tobacco policy could be one of the topics, as new developments are seen in this field, with the introduction of the new nicotine products. To monitor this process would be essential to carry on.

Prof. Eugenia Koshkina (Co-Chair, Russia) noted that the role of the Primary Health care in the prevention of the Alcohol and Substance use is essential and it will be interesting to have this as a topic for the ASA EG

Ms.Pi Högberg (Sweden) underlined the importance of keeping alcohol as the main priority area for the work of the ASA, EG. The FTCT and Narcotic conventions are helping with the prevention work on tobacco and narcotics. In the absence of a similar powerful instrument for alcohol, it is advisable to keep focusing more on this topic.

Mr.Bernt Bull (Chairperson, Norway) stated that the issues like cross-border trade, new products that are not covered by the conventions or the legalization of cannabis, are essential to keep in the loop of the future work of the ASA EG. It would also be advisable to bring issues related to the treatment of dependence. Follow up on the Somatic project can be included in the next action plan.

Ms.Una Martinsone (Latvia) said that the EG needs to continue to work around all three topics. The priorities for Latvia are the cross-border trade of alcohol products, the gaps in the FTCT (due to the new nicotine products), and the legalization issues in the narcotic field. The experience of the other countries in the validation of the AUDIT instrument is also in the interest of the country.

Mr.Thomas Karlsson (Finland) supported the suggestion from Sweden to keep the alcohol as the main topic of the work of the ASA EG. In the long run, it is the drug that has the most damaging impact on the health and at the same time, with the weakest supporting instruments to overcome the problems.

Ms. Jelena Talackiene (Lithuania) mentioned that after it was known that Estonian and Latvia decided to reduce excise duty for alcohol, it was a big reaction in Lithuania and big pressure as well. Despite aggressive pressure both Lithuanian Government and Parliament were of strong position in not-changing the direction taken in increasing alcohol excise duty. This situation showed very well that for Baltic countries it would be very useful to have balanced alcohol excise duty policy. In this case, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania would "not fight this alcohol excise war", but could use excise duty as one mean of fighting for a healthier society in Baltic countries. Therefore Lithuanian will strongly support the NDPHS ASA EG prevention project on affordability and cross-border trade of alcohol in the Baltic Sea Region

12. Next ASA EG meeting

The ASA EG members were asked to consult with their Ministries about the possibility of the host the next meeting and to come with suggestions. The possible date of the spring meeting can be

13. Any other business

Dr. Zaza Tsereteli (ITA) informed about the meeting with the leadership of the NCD EG. During the meeting two issues were discussed: 1) Possibility of the joint meeting of the NCD and ASA EGs 2) Development of the joint thematic report.

The ASA, EG members agreed that those ideas were good and decided to follow up on both issues with the leadership of the NCD EG.

14. Adoption of the meeting minutes

The ASA EG Chair proposed that it would send out draft ASA EG 19th Working Meeting minutes to the participants on November 18 and that comments on the draft would be due, at the latest, on November 28, 2019. The revised minutes would be distributed on December 4, 2019, to be adopted per capsulam if no further comments submitted within one week.

17. Closing of the meeting

The Chair thanked the participants and the WHO (NCD office in Moscow) for organizing the meeting.

The meeting closed on October 16, 2019, at 13:30.