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*Strengthening community-mobilisation on HIV and AIDS  
in Central and Eastern Europe*

# **HIV/AIDS in Hungary**

A non-governmental overview

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**Lead author and editor: Zoltan LACZO, president of PLUS Hungary**

Proofreading and Editing: Sandie SEMPE and Arnaud WASSON-SIMON, AIDES

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## Executive Summary:

*Based on missions in Hungary by AIDES representatives from France, in partnership with PLUSS*



In Hungary today, drug users share needles and gay men have unsafe sex... but the reported number of HIV/AIDS cases is still very low. It seems that Hungary has simply been, so far, "geographically" protected from the HIV epidemic while it has been spreading across Europe. On European maps which show HIV prevalence, Hungary with its very low rate stands very uncomfortably close to both Switzerland or Italy on the West, or Ukraine on the East, which are all among the countries of Europe most affected by HIV/AIDS. **Hungary, clearly, should do all it can now to keep its low prevalence low, yet this would hardly seem to be the case.**

### Confidentiality and HIV testing

The Hungarian government started to respond very early to HIV/AIDS (in 1985, even before the first case was reported), but its strategies have been hugely and very inadequately inspired by the methods designed to combat syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases. Up until the very recent reform of these practices, it was still almost impossible to get an anonymous HIV test in Hungary: if your result is positive, you had to report your full name and address to the health authorities and you must give the names of all of your former sexual partners (who will, in turn, be obliged to undergo HIV testing).

Specifically, starting 1997, the government had streamlined a "two-step" process for HIV testing: if the first test (Elisa) was positive, the person is obliged to disclose his or her full identity in order to have access to the confirmation test (Western Blot). This controversial and highly unusual practice should stop as it is very likely that people would rather not undergo testing in such conditions. We hope of courses that the recent legal reforms on this key-issue will durably change the practices of clinicians and health practitioners with regards to the respect of the fundamental privacy and confidentiality of medical data.

### About medical care

Medical care for all people with HIV/AIDS in Hungary is centralized in the Saint Lazlo Hospital in Budapest. On one side, the medical practitioners there take great care in remaining updated about the rapidly evolving international standards regarding AIDS treatments, and are able to provide HAART\* and monitoring to the 300 patients they follow-up.

One remark nevertheless: some of the new anti-HIV drugs that have been approved by the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMA) as well as Resistance Testing (which is now widely used in western Europe) were still not available in Hungary as of 2003.

This centralization of all AIDS medical services has many downsides. Medical practitioners across Hungary remain little knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS : common AIDS related opportunistic infections are often not properly diagnosed. Many dentists still refuse to take care of people living with HIV (a specific dental care unit had to be set up at the Saint Lazlo Hospital). Instead of integrating HIV/AIDS into standard medical practice, the quality of AIDS care and treatment in Hungary rely exclusively upon the willingness and the commitment of the handful of medical practitioners who work for the AIDS unit of this hospital.

### About the lack of local funding for NGOs...

When the National AIDS Committee was dissolved by the former government, in 2000, almost all governmental funding attributed to NGOs to fight HIV/AIDS was stopped. PLUSS, the Hungarian association of People Living with HIV/AIDS, for instance, can only remain active thanks to the direct logistical support it receives from the Saint Lazlo Hospital.

Overall, only NGOs which could secure some funding from international sources have been able to maintain their activities: The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union thus received grants from the Ford Foundation for their comprehensive and forceful work on HIV and Human Rights, the NGO HATTER set up prevention projects for gay men in partnership with an American university, and AATSZ, which provides Anonymous AIDS Counselling services is facing enormous difficulties to carry out its essential mission... If now the National AIDS Committee has been re-established, there remain major problems: , a new budget line of 107 000 Euros set up to fund prevention and support work done by Hungarian HIV/AIDS NGOs in 2003 was never spent due to technical administrative issues (this budget may eventually be attributed in 2004, we hope). Hungarian HIV/AIDS NGOs found themselves in 2003 completing several tedious applications in the hope of receiving a part of these funds, so far in vain.

### **On prevention and emerging risks:**

Thanks notably to a well established peer support program which targets teenagers in school, young people in Hungary are on the whole rather well aware of issues and risks relate to drug use and sexuality, including HIV/AIDS. No adequate information and support projects however reaches out towards other vulnerable groups such as intravenous drug users, male and female prostitutes, gay men, or immigrants originating from countries with a high prevalence of HIV. When such programs exist, their scope is clearly insufficient (only 200 intravenous drug users were receiving methadone treatment as of late 2002). The rising incidence of Hepatitis C among drug users, or of sexually transmitted diseases among prostitutes (Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea) reveal however that the risk to see the HIV epidemic increase rapidly is very real.

### **Perspectives:**

As Hungary is now very close to integrating the European Union, this newly-reestablished AIDS committee will have a crucial role to play to improve the standards of HIV/AIDS care and prevention, as well as to strengthen the respect of the rights of People living with HIV/AIDS. It is urgent that prevention strategies in Hungary become able to reach the people who need it the most. There are numerous local NGOs in Hungary which are fully capable of setting up community-based outreach projects. However, to do so, they need to receive some support from the government – and also hopefully get the chance to benefit from lessons learned abroad through European exchanges programs.

Finally, following the recent laws voted, the Hungarian health authorities should urgently allow the implementation of truly anonymous testing centers. The urgency is to foster trust in the health care system: all individuals who have taken a risk regarding HIV should feel safe when getting an HIV test. To compile nominative lists of people living with HIV/AIDS should be forever prohibited as these have strictly no public health value.

Likewise, mandatory testing and tracing of former sexual partners also have to become a thing of the past. If the incidence of HIV is to remain low in Hungary, some specific groups will need to change their behaviors: gay men and prostitutes will need to become much better able to adopt and sustain safer sex practices, drug users will need to have a much easier access to disposable injection equipments and to appropriate health services such as substitution treatments. Such changes in behavior will happen only if the people are empowered and given the means to do so. These changes will not happen in a system which does not respect human rights.

\*HAART: highly active anti-retroviral treatment

## EPIDEMIOLOGY

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In Hungary monitoring HIV/AIDS patients and reporting on people infected has been conducted since the second half of the year 1985. The monitoring of blood donors and of each blood sample has been continuously performed since July 1986.

The first cases of HIV were diagnosed in 1985 in Hungary, and since then the number of registered HIV cases rose up to 1073.

Between 1985 and the end of June 2003, all in all, 1073 HIV infected people were reported, out of which 817 were males, 146 were females and 110 people were tested anonymously.

### Number and gender distribution of registered HIV cases by year of detection

Year	Man	Woman	Anonym	Total
1985	14	2	0	16
1986	65	4	0	69
1987	50	4	0	54
1988	24	5	0	29
1989	30	2	4	36
1990	39	0	1	40
1991+	43	6	6	55
1992+	44	4	14	62
1993+	35	7	13	56
1994+	38	4	23	65
1995+	53	4	24	81
1996+	38	11	13	62
1997+	49	11	12	72
1998+	58	16	0	74
1999+	51	11	0	62
2000+	38	10	0	48
2001	55	27	0	82
2002	65	13	0	78
30 June 2003.	27	5	0	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>817</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>1073</b>

+ Corrected data

The main route of transmission is through men who have sex with men, but in the past years there has been an increase in the number of heterosexual transmissions.

## Distribution of HIV infections by risk groups

Year	Risk groups									Total
	Homo/bisex.	Hetero sex.	Haemophilic	Transfusion	I.v. drug users	Nosocomial	Maternal	Un-known	Ano-nym	
1985	4	1	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	16
1986	48	3	17	1	-	-	-	-	-	69
1987	41	1	2	2	-	-	-	8	-	54
1988	14	6		2	-	-	-	7	-	29
1989	24	2	1	2	1	-	-	2	4	36
1990	32	-	-	5	-	-	-	2	1	40
1991	30	8	-	1	2	2	-	6	6	55
1992	30	7	-	2	-	2	1	6	14	62
1993	28	8	-	1	-	3	-	3	13	56
1994	24	6	-	1	-	1	-	10	23	65
1995	39	11	-	-	2	-	-	5	24	81
1996	28	11	1	1	-	1	1	14	13	62
1997	22	22	-	-	-	1	1	14	12	72
1998	36	22	-	1	1	-	-	14	-	74
1999	28	11	-	1	-	2	-	20	-	62
2000	17	16	-	-	1	-	-	14	-	48
2001	35	20	-	2	3	-	-	22	-	82
2002	35	26	-	-	1	-	-	16	-	78
30 June 2003.	14	9	-	-	1	-	-	8	-	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>529</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>1073</b>

In newly diagnosed infected people the number of non-Hungarian citizens has been steadily increasing year by year. Among them, Rumanian citizens have outnumbered all others.

The estimated number of infections is between 2000 and 3000.

The first AIDS case was diagnosed in 1986, and since then the number of AIDS cases rose to 436.

## The distribution of AIDS cases by year and gender

Year*	Man	Woman	Total
1986	1	0	1
1987	6	1	7
1988	9	0	9
1989	15	0	15
1990	17	2	19
1991+	29	1	30
1992	31	2	33
1993+	28	4	32
1994	22	1	23
1995	28	3	31
1996+	41	5	46
1997	25	6	31
1998+	32	4	36
1999	35	2	37
2000	25	2	27
2001+	17	3	20
2002+	19	7	26
30 June 2003.	10	3	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>436</b>

Year\* = being diagnosed in AIDS

+ Corrected data

A breakdown by risk groups is recorded only in AIDS patients, according to which 70% of them are homo- or bisexual, 15% of them are heterosexual, 4,6% of them are hemophiliacs, 2,8% of them are transfusion recipients, 6% of them have an unknown history. The less than 1% of HIV/AIDS patients who are or were intravenous drug users are not Hungarian citizens and did not get infected in Hungary.

Altogether 253 people died of AIDS related illnesses [EPINFO, 2003]

## AIDS deaths by year and gender

Year*	Man	Woman	Total
1987	2	1	3
1988	8	0	8
1989	10	0	10
1990	6	1	7
1991	16	2	18
1992	16	0	16
1993	23	1	24
1994	34	0	34
1995	12	1	13
1996*	23	2	25
1997	22	3	25
1998*	20	0	20
1999	11	0	11
2000	10	5	15
2001*	5	3	8
2002	8	2	10
2003. II. n.év	5	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>253</b>

Year\* = decease in AIDS

\* Corrected data

In the past few years there has been an upsurge in prostitution. Besides the “traditional” forms of prostitution in hotels and areas like Rákóczi tér (at Budapest), there are now newer forms, including: roadside, truck stop, and massage parlor prostitution. At the same time, there has been an upsurge in male to male prostitution. The Hungarian and non-Hungarian prostitutes who used to work in Western Europe or a more infected area, and who work now in Hungary after they have been deported, compose an important group among the people living with HIV/AIDS. There has been an increase in the number of foreigners in Hungary as well. The number of border crossings is over 100 million per year. For economic reasons, there has been an increase in the number of refugees living in Hungary. New HIV infections among heterosexual women in Hungary were now often related to unprotected sex with migrant men who come from the countries with the highest HIV/AIDS epidemic (such as African countries).

Specific prevention programs should be created and implemented rapidly in order to avoid a further increase of new infections among migrants and their sexual partners.

Hungarian authorities should also bear in mind the 1997 decision of the European Court for Human Rights. Indeed, the ECHR judged that to deport a person with a severe illness to a country where access to adequate care could not be guaranteed was equivalent to torture, and should therefore be banned according to Article 3 of the Convention (Decision D. vs. United Kingdom of May 2, 1997). To tackle an anticipated increase of the HIV epidemic in Hungary, it is crucial that migrants have a free and anonymous access to testing centers and HIV/AIDS treatments.

## TREATMENT

*Report of Dr. Dénes BÀNHEGYI, Head of the Department of Internal Diseases #5 (Immunology) Budapest City St Laszlo Hospital (on the year 2001)*



Dr. Dénes BÀNHEGYI

Over the 90s, the number of HIV positive people and the number of AIDS patients got stable, with 55–80 cases in the former group and 30–45 cases in the latter group annually. In accordance with the European trends since 1997, the number of AIDS diagnoses and deaths caused by HIV/AIDS has been decreasing, which unambiguously can be put down the efficacy of antiretroviral treatments. This favorable image is spoiled by the fact that 72% of AIDS cases to have been reported in the past two years, were newly diagnosed HIV infections in a progressive state. In Hungary, people with symptomatic HIV infection and AIDS are treated exclusively at the Department of Infectious Diseases #5 at Budapest Szent László Hospital. (This has been criticized in the recent past. From the point of view of democratic freedom of choice the critic makes sense, but there is an economic contradiction due to the small number of people living with HIV/AIDS). Apart from necessary hospitalization the Department of Infectious Diseases also carries out day care and home care treatments. Antiretroviral treatments for HIV/AIDS patients are conducted under the Professional Protocol (now in the 3rd edition) in the surgery of the Department. HIV/AIDS patients are regarded as outpatients. They combined antiretroviral medicines free of charge.

The scope of the surgery is to cater for the needs of HIV/AIDS outpatients who come from different parts of the country, thanks to specialist medical examinations, taking blood samples, simple examinations by diagnostic equipment, or psychological counseling). Moreover, in compliance with international practice, late clinical day care has been widely adopted. Along with the higher number of patients with HIV/AIDS, there has been an increase in the number of those who attend the outpatient surgery for daily infusion (some antivirals, cytostatic drugs etc.) To cope with all these jobs and pass on knowledge, the Department put regularly on the agenda specific trainings, extension courses, case discussions, and social workers' training.

### Efficient treatment

With antiretroviral drugs, the virus count growth can successfully be slowed down. As a result, the progress of the disease slows down, too. Unfortunately today we do not have any medicines that may have efficient results on its own. To fight HIV and the opportunistic diseases that are related to it, it is necessary to administrate simultaneously two, or three, or four different drugs. This is the only way to make the number of deaths drop and increase the life expectancy of people living with HIV/AIDS. Multi-therapies have improved the life of AIDS patients. Complications related to AIDS have also diminished in number. The number of days in hospital and admissions has dropped.

Last year, 85 patients have been involved in combined antiretroviral treatment as outpatients, which means an increase of 22 %. 69 new antiretroviral treatments have been initiated, out of which 10 patients had undergone a completed clinical examination, 6 patients from two new clinical examinations were admitted to medication, 10 patients were lost over the year and 3 patients have left our regimen (they gave up medication and left the country). That year in Hungary, 123 patients saw adjustments in their therapy (e.i. 43,5 % of the patients under treatment, which complies with the international average) partly because of failure in viral response (development of resistance), partly because of high reaction of hypersensitivity, and/or metabolic side effects. With new patients, there has been no waiting list. Treatment was instantly initiated provided that the patient was meeting the requirements specified by the Professional Protocol.

When a new patient is offered a threefold antiretroviral treatment, apart from meeting the highly strict professional standards (Highly Active Antiretroviral Treatment (HAART), a combination of three or four drugs), optimal costs were also considered. At the moment, three quarters of the

nearly 300 patients live in Budapest and its agglomeration. The patients living in the rest of the country show an almost even dispersion. To follow up treatment efficacy, apart from general medical and laboratorial tests, specific immunological and viral examinations are also necessary. These examinations in general take place every two or three months.

International experiences have verified that the quality of life of the patients treated, their chances to survive, the efficacy of treatment largely depend on the professional skills of the medical staff. At this point, from a professional point of view, offering medical care to a small number of patients in newly established centres in Hungary cannot be justified.

### Characteristic features of the year 2001

The number of new patients involved in treatment increased at a slightly higher rate than expected, and that of treatment combinations (changing from combination of two to three, from cost optimal first combination to a more expensive combination of three or four called "emergency combination" done because of failure in the first one) met the estimates. As a result, the special extra fund of HUF 370 million applied for and granted by the National Health Fund was sufficient to cover the costs of the antiretroviral treatments for the HIV/AIDS patients with symptoms. The efficacy of treatments regarding both the quality of life and life expectancy matches the one of the international standards. Several medicines, such as Rescriptor, Didanosine EC, Stocrin, Indinavir, Combivir, Atazanavir, Lopinavir/r, and GW433908/r<sup>1</sup> were used in our Department of Immunology in the courses of multicentred phase 3 and extended clinical examinations. [Since 2002/03 official medications are Didanosin EC, Stocrin 600 mg, Atazanavir, Kaletra, Fuzeon (= T20) and Tenofovir (=Viread) – the editor.<sup>2</sup>]

### Our achievements in the light of figures

Three more units complemented the activity of HIV/AIDS surgery:

- 1) a cell surface marker lab which checked the cyto-immune state of patients,
- 2) a dental surgery which provided dental care for patients with HIV,
- 3) and as a new unit, a lab of molecular biology which measured the HIV-RNS count and examined the nucleoside analogous resistance of HIV by point mutation testing.

### Changes in combined antiretroviral treatments in the year 2001 contrasted to the ones in 2000

Treatment	2000	2001	Changes (%)
Combination of two (2NRTI)	79	60	- 31
Combination of three(PI+2NRTI)	67	31	- 46
Combination of three( NNRTI+2 NRTI)	47	106	+ 125
Mini ritonavir (mr)* (PI+mr+2NRTI)	27	31	+ 46
Emergency combination (2NRTI+NNRTI+PI)	12	46	+ 270
Clinical tests	14	6	- 57
Total:	234	285	+ 22



Prescription of ARV at St Laszlo Hospital

Abbreviations: *NRTI*: nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor

*PI*: protease inhibitor,

"mini" *Ritonavir*: 2x100 mg ritonavir

(pharmacokinetic enhancer) + smaller dose of PI + 2 NRTI,

<sup>1</sup> DCI for the medicines cited, by order: Delavirdine, Didanosine EC, Efavirenz, Indinavir, Zidovudine + Lamivudine, Atazanavir, Lopinavir, Fosamprenavir boosted.

<sup>2</sup> DCI for the medicines cited, by order: Didanosin EC, Efavirenz, Atazanavir, Lopinavir/ritonavir, Enfuvirtine, Tenofovir,

*NNRTI*: non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor

A decrease in the number of combinations of only two drugs was primarily due to a rise in the virus count, the appearance of virus resistance and the fact that the majority of new patients were starting treatments combining three drugs. A decrease in the number of treatments combining three drugs PI + 2NRTI, was justified partly by the application of the so called “mini” ritonavir combination (diminished PI+mini ritonavir+2NRTI) with simpler dosage scheme (twice daily), and partly by optimised costs of treatment (less expensive than traditional PI+2NRTI). An increase in the number of emergency combinations can be explained by the fact that modern treatments are often for more than six years, and newer combinations are necessary at a higher rate.

Costs of combined antiretroviral therapy:

Combination of two medicines:	HUF 0,8 – 1,1 million/year(-30 %)
Cost optimal combination of three medicines:	HUF 1,5 – 1,7million/year
Combination of three medicines because of virus resistance:	HUF 2,2 – 2,4 million/year (+47 %)
“Emergency combination” of four medicines:	HUF 3,0 – 3,4 million/year (+100 %)

A continually re-emerging question is “when to start antiretroviral therapy?” (Joep Lange). This question implies and reveals the basic principle to make an antiretroviral therapy a success; meaning that success can only be achieved with the full cooperation of the patient. Nevertheless, in the five past years, the chosen moment to start a therapy has considerably changed. In terms of figures it means that 5 years ago the beginning of a therapy (CD4+ cell count > 500 / $\mu$ l) could be postponed almost up to the status of AIDS (CD4+ ~ 200 / $\mu$ l). It was seen as a possibility of “saving” years of treatment to the patients.

Now a special emphasis is given to the patient’s cooperation over the therapy, along with methods to help patients taking medicines properly, such as treatment calendars, reminder signals from watches and mobile phones. Simpler medication schemes, dosing twice or three times a day have become common. Some pharmaceutical companies have already taken into consideration some medicine variants with improved pharmaco-kinetic properties.

## PREVENTION

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Since the first AIDS case, AIDS prevention has been a large part of the anti-AIDS health policy. AIDS prevention became organized when the National AIDS Committee (NAC) was founded in 1992 as part of the Ministry of Health. The importance of fighting AIDS and prevention activities is showing in government funding. The table below shows the amount of money in HUF that the NAC had as its budget for supporting activities that are not strictly prevention, but are part of the fight against AIDS.

Year	Budget - NAC	Supporting prevention	Prevention in %
1995	145.000 eft	60.250 eft	42%
1996	135.000 eft	47.516 eft	35 %
1997	141.000 eft	52.500 eft	37 %
1998	143.000 eft	32.000 eft	22 %
1999	69.000 eft	19.260 eft	28 %
2000	80.000 eft	10.200 eft	12 %
2001*	40.000 eft		00%
2002**	30.000 eft		00%
2003***	NA	69.000 eft	00%

\* April 2001– the NAC was suspended, and its budget was given to ANTSZ. The Parliament accepted the „Johan Béla" Healthy Decade Program

\*\* December 2002. – the NAB resumes

\*\*\* 28 million HUF was allocated to school prevention in May and other requests for proposals were in September

### • Areas of activity and topics

Brochures, handouts, posters, film production, videos, information programs on the radio.

Support for civil organizations: Anonymous AIDS testing site, street testing on December 1, outreach program, MSM project, hot line program, prostitute program, youth at risk program, orphanage program, prison program, young recruits program, peer education program, school programs, support for HIV infected, national AIDS conference, AIDS Day, needle exchange.

At the beginning, ten to twelve programs were supported, then due to a lack of funding, less programs were funded.

There was a dramatic change when the NAC was suspended in April 2001, which was ordered by the health minister of the previous (FIDESZ) government without giving any reason. Three months later the spokesperson of the minister made a speech at the AIDS meeting of the UN emphasizing the importance of the fight against AIDS and claiming that Hungary did everything it could. After 5 months, on the World AIDS Day 2001 a declaration was transmitted by the state TV, saying that Hungary had finished the fight against AIDS, because the number of infected people was decreased almost entirely. That is why the problem is not alive any more in Hungary. It was not taken into consideration. No money was stood for the availability of HIV tests. If the testing was discontinued, the test results have shown nothing.

For about a year and a half, AIDS related affairs were not assigned to any forum. In May 2002, a new government was elected through democratic elections. As part of the re-organizational problems of the new health administration, it was not expected that the issue of AIDS would be addressed. Still, on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002, for the World AIDS Day, it was announced that the NAC will resume its activities. Thus the new NAC was born. It has been neither organized nor operational. The civil organizations expected to have contacts with the government through the NAC. This never happened in 2003. The budget that was assigned to fight AIDS by the government as a grant support was available through grant applications, but the money has been available in 2004 only. Annual accounts are due at the end of July 2004. Civil organizations were left to carry out actions without any financial support in 2003. The issue of prevention is still not addressed.

## THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL ORGANISATIONS

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### P L U S S

- **THE HUNGARIAN SELF-HELP ORGANIZATION OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV AND AIDS**

PLUSS Organisation was established on 18 August 1989, 15 years ago, by a core of HIV-positive patients treated in Saint László Hospital in Budapest who discovered that some of their arrangements related to their positive status could hardly be sorted out without revealing it. This was obviously worsening their situation. It also appeared evident that the medical aspects of being HIV positive were only a certain fraction of their emerging problems. After some time of social concerns and shattered social relationships, a multitude of legal problems caused psychological distress. The Organisation was purposefully set up to alleviate these and make institutional arrangements. The Organisation aims at solving all the above-mentioned issues, supporting the needy, and keeping the anonymity of the members. Among the aims, it is emphatic that everything possible has to be done institutionally to slow down the spread of the disease by raising awareness thanks to effective communication campaigns. Because of people bad health status, there is an increasing number of poor people, that generate specific requirements. These requirements and the experiences gained daily have led the organization to adopt a new organisational framework and create a scope of suitable activities.

People with medical proof of positive status, treated by the Department of Immunology at Saint László Hospital are provided with information on PLUSS Organisation. It is up to them to formally join it. It has been experienced for long years that those who suffer from *personality crisis*, fearing isolation because of their positive status, are likely to be relieved from stress when they can talk about their concerns in discussion groups with their fellow sufferers either privately or on the formal and the informal meetings set up by the Organisation twice a month. The meetings take place in the flat of the Organisation that is also the scene for *organisation life*. A person tested positive, being in need of social care, may get *social and psychosocial support* without holding membership in the organisation.

To provide psychosocial support the PLUSS has worked out, among other things, a *home-care* system. Organised home-care was launched early in 1995 step by step and has been operated in response to necessity, ever since. Optional psychosomatic care has been given through courses on relaxation (autogen trainings), which can be launched any time requested. The annual 2- to 3-day recreational weekend activities in the country combined with education bears psychosocial, self-supporting and relationship supporting functions. The improvement of people's general condition along with community development plays a decisive role in stabilizing the immune condition. Medical indications offering new knowledge and those on prevention serve as practical tools.

Being a *non-profit* organization, PLUSS answer the calls for proposition issued by the institutions that may grant financial support. Main supporters and sources of aid have been the support fund of the National Assembly to the budget of social organizations, with ever decreasing amounts (while in 1998 giving HUF 500 thousand, by 2002 giving as little as HUF 170 thousand) and the

National AIDS Committee (abolished by the minister on 9 April 2001!). Donations are given by individuals and the Hungarian representatives of some major pharmaceutical companies.



Connections with organizations, institutions whose objectives coincide in some extent with the ones of PLUSS Organization are regarded as vital. Among them the Anonym AIDS Consultancy (in Budapest and Pécs), the magazine 'Mások', Budapest Lambda, a Háttér Társaság a Melegekért (*Background Society for Gays*), Habeas Corpus Jogsegély Szolgálat (*Habeas Corpus Legal Support Service*), a Társaság a Szabadságjogokért civil iroda (*Society for the Right to Liberty civilian bureau*), Magyar Vöröskereszt AIDS Alapítványa (*AIDS Foundation of the Hungarian Red Cross*), PLUSS, a HIV-Pozitívokat és AIDS-betegeket Segélyező Alapítvány (*Charity Foundation for AIDS and HIV Positive People*) are the organizations which maintain dialogue with PLUSS. Regarding our partner organizations from abroad, the prominent ones are as follows: the American AIDS Medicine & Miracle and the Vancouver based twin organization that send their periodicals every two months, the European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG), recently the European Coalition of Positive People (London), furthermore, contacts with Germany (Connect Plus) and Italy are being built. We accessed the European Integration Project run by the French NGO "AIDES" in 2002. The above mentioned bodies regularly forward us publications and monthly magazines such as *Body Positive* from London and *EATG News*. We furthermore have, though rather vague, contacts to EuroCASO as well as UNAIDS.

In 2001 the organization was accredited by the secretariat of the UN, enabling PLUSS Hungary to participate in the special assembly of the UN in New York from 25 to 28 June, dedicated to AIDS, for the first time ever in the history of this world organization.

The 14-year old PLUSS *Year Book*, has been published annually since 1990. *PLUSS magazine* that has been published 2-3-4 times a year since 1993, and the website created in December 2000 are regarded as valuable vehicles of information.

The organization is open to all individuals or entities that are ready to adopt the objectives of PLUSS and are prepared to provide real support either to the Organization, or individuals in need.

Information on any of the above issues is available either by mail, phone or fax.

## ● THE ACTIVITY OF PLUSS HUNGARY AT PRESENT

PLUSS, the organization helping people living with AIDS in Hungary drew attention to the need of AIDS prevention with a concert in 2002. In 2003 such an event was financially impossible. However, PLUSS invited other civil organizations to a press conference in 2003 just before the the World AIDS Day, where they expressed their views and concerns. This was the beginning of a collaboration between civil organizations, which gave birth to an umbrella organization, called Civil AIDS Forum (CAF). As a result of these activities, the representatives of the Ministry and the NAC started communicating with the civil organizations. This did not prevent civil organizations from expressing more requests.

## **WORLD AIDS DAY 2003: INTER- NGO STANDPOINT ON HIV/AIDS IN HUNGARY**

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(Translated from a text originally in Hungarian)

In our Central and Eastern European region, HIV is spreading at even a faster rate than in Africa. In the eastern neighbor country of the Ukraine, the number of HIV infected people used to be low, similarly to the one in Hungary. But recently, one in 100 people of the population has become a HIV positive and the epidemic keeps spreading.

The tools and policies to help Hungary to avoid a similar situation are well known. The proposals on behalf of the UN, the World Health Organisation and The Council of Europe have provided clear guidance in this respect. In the autumn of 2002 the acting government commit to adopt modern epidemic principles and tools over the debate on legislating anonymous testing which are based on the respect to human rights and cooperation with the affected persons, such as the infected and the endangered people. Nevertheless, in the past one and a half years nothing has been done.

AIDS conditions are disastrous in Hungary:

Prevention programs have not existed for years, and the population does not have access to authentic information on HIV infection, AIDS disease and on the various ways the virus spreads, meanwhile more and more young people get infected year by year;

Because of misbeliefs, HIV positive people have become victims of serious discriminations regarding access to health care, education to employment;

Free and anonymous HIV testing and counseling are threatened to be stopped: the only centre of such a kind in Hungary is being run by medical staff from their own resources, but due to a lack of support, the Anonymous Counselling Service is likely to close down soon;

NGOs that have participated efficiently in prevention work, have been seriously suffering from shortages of financial resources, for years;

Hungary has not adopted a comprehensive strategy on AIDS which is accountable. Tracing back the part of the budget spent on AIDS prevention and testing is still impossible;

No sufficient attention has been paid by the state to the specific requirements of the high-risk groups: gay men, young people, women, sex workers.

The endorsement of the Ministry of Social Welfare (Szociális és Családügyi Minisztérium, the ESZCSM) promised around the 1<sup>st</sup> December has proved to be mere rhetoric: the tenders promised either fail to be published, or even if published, evaluation and payment see months of delays;

The National Committee for AIDS (NAB) re-established on the 1<sup>st</sup> December last year, whose task is to coordinate fight against AIDS in Hungary, has not made any considerable achievements in this respect;

The content of the civilian strategy proclaimed by the Government last spring, has thoroughly been ignored by the Ministry of Social Welfare (ESZCSM) and the National Committee for AIDS (NAB), and agreements or cooperation with NGOs have only taken place occasionally in an effort to avoid awkward situations, scandals, whereas state shows none of the signs of willing to perform its duties more efficiently in the fight against HIV/ AIDS.

It seems like achievements have been made as a result of civilian democratic methods.

### The Future

The 2003 World AIDS Day was officially commemorated by the Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs. As part of the events, there was the presentation of the National AIDS Strategy. Parts of this strategy give us hope that the National AIDS Committee will revive from its passivity and become active again and allow civil organizations to be active in venues without which the National AIDS Strategy cannot be realized.

## HIV/AIDS and Human Rights in Hungary

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Judit FRIDL of the  
**Hungarian Civil Liberties  
Union**, a NGO very active  
in promoting anonymous  
HIV testing

### Current Effective Rules

In compliance with the Constitutional Court's decision, Parliament adopted Act LVIII./2002, which modified the Health Care Act and was designed to regulate HIV screening at the level of laws.

The most important of these achievements was the promotion of voluntary screening to the status of main rule. Voluntary screening may be done under the person's name or anonymously, and if a person opts for anonymous screening, he/she is not under an obligation to reveal personal identifiers either at the first or at the second examination. Thus the provisions give persons (other than those included in classes specifically listed as under a duty to submit to screening) the option of availing themselves, if they express this wish, of reliable screening results under conditions of anonymity.

### Compulsory Screening

The most profound difference between the old and the new regulations is the express provision included in the new ones which enunciates that authoritative directions for HIV screening may be issued only with the knowledge and consent of the person concerned, unless he/she belongs to one of the classes of persons, listed item by item, falling in the purview of compulsory screening. In other words, the new regulations elevate voluntary screening to the status of main rule, and the person presenting for screening is entitled to refuse to provide personal identifiers, in other words, the screening is anonymous.

The old regulations and the presently valid ones concur on the prescription that that blood as a raw material for pharmaceutical processing and blood stored for transfusion are to be tested for HIV, and persons donating tissue, organ and spermatozoa for artificial insemination are to be tested for HIV.

Under the new rules it is no longer compulsory to screen the sexual partners of HIV positive persons.

The rules on HIV screening in the new Act and Decree leave open the range of vocations which may give rise to a practical need for HIV examination. At present there is no rule, guideline or recommendation which could be regarded as being conducive to a unified practice concerning the class of occupations which fall under compulsory screening, such as to forestall problems arising from diverging interpretations of the law.

### Compulsory Care and Compulsory Treatment

The first case of HIV infection was diagnosed in Hungary in 1985. Until December 31, 2002 rules on HIV screening and the referral of HIV positive persons to care were enunciated in a decree issued in 1988. The regulations which became effective on **January 1, 2003** put an end to previous discrimination in terms of manner of infection.

Hungary has witnessed the emergence of a strongly centralised system as a result, partly, of the predominance of the traditional epidemiological attitudes and partly of the relatively low number of HIV cases. This system, in effect, draws together in one single place the HIV infected, the physicians who treat them and the equipment and medicaments available. Information about the HIV infection and the AIDS disease receives no emphasis in the curricula of medical universities, which in effect makes it difficult for qualified physicians to diagnose HIV, for physicians without appropriate training in identifying HIV will be prone to identify HIV at a time later than physicians with such training. Another question relates to the extent to which this system would be capable of coping with a much greater number of HIV cases than there are actually at present. The presently valid epidemiological rules seriously restrict the system's capacity for reacting to new challenges. It is therefore time, especially in view of the special nature of HIV/AIDS, the relevant legal rules were tailored to the and practical needs expectations that are well known by now.

### **Health Care Services Available to Foreigners**

All foreigners including those without any health insurance are generally entitled to life saving treatment. The expenses of such life saving intervention are to be borne by the central budget. The foreigner in need of emergency treatment is to be provided for without delay and in exactly the same way as a Hungarian citizen would be.

At the same time only Hungarian citizens and foreigners with a domiciliation permit or recognized as refugees are entitled to receive certain kinds of medical treatment, especially expensive ones, at the expenses of the National Health Insurance Fund (Országos Egészségügyi Pénztár) and the central budget (unless specially extended to other foreigners by inter-national agreements). These include therapeutic procedures conducted as part of medical biological research (a cure for AIDS still being also a research objective) and blood preparations provided free of charge (the foreigner's ability to pay is to be examined after the emergency treatment).

As part of Hungary's preparation for its accession to the European Union the rules on aliens' immigration and residence were enlarged by a new chapter on citizens of the European Economic Area and their family members. Despite the undeniably more favourable conditions for permission a citizen of the European Economic Region cannot be granted a residence permit if "prior to the first issuance of the residence permit he/she had a disease which was hazardous to public health". In other words, the regulations to come into effect following Hungary's accession to the European Union continue to uphold the protection of public health interests through screening.

### **The issue of Intravenous Drug Use**

There are altogether three intravenous drug users among the persons officially registered as HIV positive in Hungary. This may not reflect the real proportions, however: the therapeutic network comes in contact with as little as 5-10% of all Hungarian drug users. Since January 1, 2003, intravenous drug users have been outside the classes of persons subject to compulsory screening, but it continues to be obligatory to offer them the opportunity of HIV testing.

### **The Present State of Harm Reduction Programs in Hungary**

The importance of harm reduction programs is mentioned in the National Drug Strategy, which was adopted in 2000. Present legislation, although it does not encourage their introduction, does not rule them out.

There are six methadone programs running in this country at the moment, two in Budapest and four in the country.

Between April 2001 and May 2002 70-124 drug patients participated in maintenance programs run in Budapest, Pécs and Veszprém while 17-34 persons were registered as participants in detoxification therapies. Persons presently in methadone treatment make up a mere 2-2,3% of all opiate addicts, which is a very low index in international comparison. Further programs are going to be launched in the near future.

There are six needle exchange programs running in this country at the moment, two in the capital and four in the country.

Although there is no "shooting gallery" in Hungary as yet, legal rules do not exclude the possibility of running this kind of service. In fact, plans entertained by the Ministry of the Child, Youth and Sports include the idea of supporting facilities of a similar kind. Advances are likely to be made in this area also in the foreseeable future.

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In Hungary in 1998 a decree by the Ministry of Health and Public Welfare abolished access to anonymous AIDS monitoring.

A ruling by the constitutional court invalidated the so-called SZEM decree of 5/1988 and all its amendments made later. On 1 January 2003 the new decree (18/2002 (28 12)ESZCSM) ("On necessary measures and the process of monitoring in order to prevent the spread of infection causing Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome") came into power, which restored anonymous

access to testing again. In Hungary from 1989 to 1997, 110 HIV positive people were monitored under the anonymous system in Hungary.

## **ON INTRAVEINOUS DRUG-USE IN HUNGARY**

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If Hungarian drug-users in Hungary have been up-to very little affected by HIV, it is most worrisome that we see in recent studies that the incidence of Hepatitis C (HCV) is on the increase: clearly unsafe practices such as sharing needles are taking place – drugs users in Hungary need to have access to harm reduction programmes (including information and self support, access to clean injecting equipment, and access to substitution treatments such as methadone).

The Blue point center is one of the major actors of Harm Reduction for Drug Users in Hungary.

### **3 questions to Dr Joseph Raczn director of the BLUE POINT Counseling center**

(translated from an original text in Hungarian – interview carried out by PLUSS in November 2003).

#### **1. What are the main activities of the Blue Point Center ?**

The Blue point Center was founded in 1996 : our mission is to diminish the damages and risks caused by drug-use both in the interest of the individual and of society. Our services include psychological and psychiatric support, social work with drug users and their peers and families. We reach this vulnerable group both through our work in the streets and in parties. We have a mobile needle exchange unit. We also do prevention in schools.

#### **2. Why has there been so few drug user contaminated by HIV in Hungary ? Is this situation likely to last ?**

As far as I know, there is a cumulative total of 11 cases of HIV among intravenous drug users. In 2002, out of 76 drug users who came to see us for services, we found 1 case of HIV following a saliva test. Out of 121 drug users we have reached in the street, 3 told us they knew they were HIV positive.

The reasons for this low prevalence is that syringes and condoms are very easily available, without restriction. We can talk about sexuality very freely and it has been the case since the 70's (contrary to Russia for instance). Also, the Hungarian population does not move much – we have few immigrants originating from high-prevalence countries.

Further, public health in Hungary did not come apart after the end of communism (as it happened in Russia). Part of it is also sheer luck !

I would expect however that the incidence of HIV will increase, following the increase of Hepatitis C we are now observing (now 30% of drug users are positive to HCV).

#### **3. How many people benefit from your services ?**

##### **Needle exchange :**

Budapest (site 1) = 200 new clients (700 registered)

Budapest (site 2): 30 clients,

Budapest (site 3) just started its operations.

Szeged: 500 clients

Pécs: 4-5 clients

Miskolc: 28 clients

Veszprém: 7 clients

**Methadone centers:** 2 sites in Budapest, also available in Veszprém, Pécs, Gyula, Szeged, and Miskolc. About 200-250 clients are on methadone treatment.

## THE ONGOING DIFFICULTIES FACED BY ANONYMOUS AIDS COUNSELLING SERVICE IN HUNGARY

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Testing for HIV conducted uninterruptedly by AATSZ (Anonymous AIDS Counselling Service) for 15 years is in danger!

The National Health Department ignores the importance of preventing AIDS spread. Dr. István Mikola, former minister of health and public welfare stopped the activity of the National AIDS Committee (NAB), by which he virtually failed to support the field and made Anonymous AIDS Counselling Service (AATSZ) having functioned as an NGO for 15 years, and HIV prevention as a whole, unlawful.

His successor Judit Csehák newly restored the corps in December 2002 which for a whole year did nothing but put down the program. Despite the passing of the Act on HIV-AIDS, anonymous testing, the chance for HIV testing has got in danger for the cobwebs of bureaucracy by now.

In 2003 no money has been spent on this domain by the health department!

Anonymous AIDS Counselling Service (AATSZ) is the only prime organisation promoting public interest to conduct HIV testing anonymously, along with counseling on telephone and Internet. The organisation is at the verge of existence after a 15-year's work. The operation costs of the organisation are covered by physicians on their own who consider the issue vital. Blood sampling and basic material necessary to the tests can hardly be covered by it.

The majority of HIV-positives are spotted by chance!

One in six HIV positive patients are discovered by AATSZ staff, while others infected are spotted by chance in various health institutions in the country.

All those who seek a free, anonymous service, which is granting secrecy, approach the organisation providing humane and responsible services continually, with confidence. Their website is one of the one hundred most frequented websites in Hungary.

To maintain services and HIV prevention by AATSZ, HUF 9-10 million would be indispensable, per year.

The necessary HIV tests are bought by AATSZ from their own resources, with no state support at all!

AATSZ does not even possess with any assets of its own after 15 years of work!

AATSZ purchases tests necessary to HIV monitoring from its own resources, though promises have been made to give state support, which has failed due to continuous changes in positions and regrouping of tasks. The organisation fails to have any property of its own. Up to 1998 it had not had a pc either. The one available now is not suitable for Internet connection, though 95% of candidates for HIV test gain information on HIV / AIDS and other sexually transmittable diseases from website [www.anonimaids.hu](http://www.anonimaids.hu)

For the evaluation of tests, after several solutions, the virology laboratory of the National AIDS Committee (NAB) has proved to be the most reliable one for AATSZ.

The NAB laboratory has always been put to the risk of professional and political developments. (Earlier the National Health Authority, OTH, was paid by AATSZ to analyse their blood samples, whereas OTH had enjoyed the amount to cover the costs of all tests, in the capacity of being the responsible institution for the task, along with OEK).

**The NGO AATSZ repeatedly and urgently calls the attention on the followings:**

Sex channels by cable television providers pose danger as they fail to give special warning on the hazards of having "unsafe sex"

Because of shortage of information Hungarian women are put to danger

At points of anonymous monitoring 50% of women polled do not think of sexually transmittable diseases at all, and practice contraception against unwanted pregnancy with pills only. Young women (of sexually active age group) are aware of not more than three types of sexually transmittable diseases.

Women have never been made conscious of the facts that everybody is responsible for herself and active protection against HIV – with condom – is in their OWN INTEREST!

A survey by AATSZ has disclosed, these days the majority of women decide on protective measure, using condom by judging the partner sympathetic and its use is mostly restricted to vaginal intercourse.

"50 % of HIV positive people monitored by AATSZ the past four years are young women"

Curbing the spread of AIDS is a matter of public interest, as well as a private one!

The Hungarian State has not treated the NGOs as equals!

AATSZ misses the image of a "state serving its citizens". On behalf of state officials partnership, readiness to help falls short. Organisations dealing with HIV / AIDS prevention – less than 10 NGOs – are generally not granted the chance to communicate directly with officials. Despite the explicit request of NGOs, they are not notified about ministerial tenders, action programs which are HIV /AIDS prevention related. Beside this, the ministry has not got prepared for receiving the tenders of the European Union which support HIV prevention, let alone for managing partnership which is a criterion of entering for a tender, or translating tenders into Hungarian, or forwarding them to the appropriate organizations, or granting a part of the budget as an own share.

The ministry fails to invite tenders related to HIV monitoring and prevention, or if they do not, they do so with considerable delay and they modify their conditions in the meantime. With the distribution of scarce funds they disregard priorities among NGOs. The modest amount to be spent on HIV prevention is distributed among many partners, thus making wrong decisions: "so that everybody has their share". This policy results in sharing " happy poverty" among organisations willing to work for the cause, but unable to finance operation costs.

In the name of every Hungarian citizen AATSZ demands that sheer promises of policy makers be exchanged for financial support and help AIDS prevention in Hungary.

For a member state of the European Union, as it is statutory in Hungary, anonymous HIV/AIDS monitoring and launching prevention programs are imperative.

# THE WORK OF “HÁTTÉR”, SUPPORT SOCIETY FOR GAYS AND LESBIANS IN HUNGARY

by Kárpáti József, attorney at law, Gay Legal Aid of Háttér for Háttér Társaság a Melegekért.



The present study is a summary of the legal status of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people in Hungary, including the still operative discriminatory laws and the possible directions of development.

In its resolution 37/2002 (IX. 4.) AB the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Hungary repealed, among others, §199. of the Penal Code (“unnatural sodomy”), and ordered that the previously ended non-appealable trials be revised, provided the convict has not yet been freed of its negative consequences. By this decision, the paragraph most severely discriminating gays and lesbians was abolished; nevertheless, not all of the discriminative laws were superseded.

The government is considering the creation the law of equal treatment that – according to the conception – would give protection against discrimination also on the ground of sexual orientation. In our point of view – to stress the importance of the current rule of law – the government would act correctly if after the resolution of the Constitutional Court which exerts overall prohibition on discrimination against gays and lesbians, along with the preparation of the anti-discrimination law, it would abolish those deeply rooted, severely anti-discriminative rules of law that still exist in the Hungarian legislation. (As I will argue in the present summary, the government has taken far from enough steps towards cleaning up the rules of law.)

I would emphasize four main issues linked with discrimination. The first two are trying to reflect on the discrimination on the level of rules of law, the third one criticizes the fragmented anti-discrimination laws, and the fourth one discusses the lack of regulation concerning transsexuals' situation.

(The summary is based on the laws in force as of 31<sup>st</sup> October 2002.)

## 1. Marriage, partnership

According to §10. (1) of the Family Law a marriage can take place between an adult man and an adult woman.

According to the definition of §685/A of the Civil Code, partners are, unless other regulations apply, two persons living together outside of marriage in a mutually kept household, in emotional and economic unity.

In its regulation, 14/1995 (III.13.) the Constitutional Court declared that it is contrary to the constitution that the rules of law that apply to partners openly co-habiting outside of marriage in an emotional, sexual and economic unity and which define their rights and responsibilities, apply legal consequences only to the partners described in the Civil Code. At the same time, it suspended the procedure, and called upon the legislator to pass a law about same-sex partnership in concert with this. The Parliament of the Republic of Hungary amended §578/G and §685/A of the Civil Code by the law XLII/1996, by which it extended the rule applying so far to different-sex partners to same-sex partners as well. The amendment entered into force on 19 June 1996.

At the same time, the regulation refused the appeal about the unconstitutionality of the institution of marriage with the argument that marriage is traditionally the bond of a man and a woman.

The judgment can be deemed partially progressive, particularly in the mid 90's, since it provides possibility for same sex couples to co-habit, moreover to benefit from the legally definable goods that different-sex partners enjoy.

On the other hand, as it became clear during the interpretation of the recently passed rules of law, it precludes gay and lesbian couples in an indirect way from such benefits that are exclusively reserved for married couples.

I will supply only a few examples here:

The beneficiaries of the additional interest subsidy described in §13 (1) of the 12/2001 (I.31.) governmental act concerning state support of residential property can be married couples only. With respect to the fact that only two persons of different sex can get married, the rule of law excludes same-sex partners from requisition of this state benefit. The regulation is especially particular, since the birth of a child is not a prerequisite for the granting of the loan. The only condition as personality status is concerned, the fact of the existing marriage.

The Hungarian Family Law theoretically does not preclude adoption by a homosexual person, although it is a very rare phenomenon in practice. Nonetheless, according to the referring regulations of the Family Law (§45 (5), §51 (2)) two persons can adopt a child mutually only if the foster parents are married partners.

According to §2 (1) e) XXXIX/2001 of the law on foreign citizens' entry and residence, a relative, unless other regulations apply, is the foreign citizen's married partner, dependent offspring, adopted child, foster-child, the married partner's offspring, the parent in the case of a minor, moreover, the foreign citizen's and the married partner's dependent ancestor. The co-habiting partner is excluded from the definition. This is of special importance, because it is the relative in several cases who can provide the necessary certificates for the foreign citizen's residence or domiciliation, besides getting certain benefits with respect to the relative (e.g. §14 (1) b)). Co-habiting partnership provides no ground for residence under family reunion.

According to §4 (4) LXXXVIII/1993 about the rental of residential property and other rooms, unless the party entitled to assign the tenant rules otherwise, married partners in case of mutual request must make a contract. (Co-habiting partners are again left unmentioned.)

Certainly, in some cases same-sex cohabitants have the possibility to provide for each other benefits that otherwise are not faculties by civil contract or statement (such as last wills or various statements of patients' rights). However in the cases described above, since these are coercive rules, the legislator tightens the circle of the grantees by tools of public law so that same-sex couples are not included.

In the point of view of Háttér Support Society for Gays and Lesbians in Hungary of outstanding public utility, the government should take steps towards providing same sex couples living in a long term relationship with all those rights that are available to different-sex couples, with special regard to the benefits that are based merely on marital status and not on having a mutual child. The legislation could do this in a way that it opens legal marriage also for same-sex couples, or a way that it creates a special, registered relationship that is different from the Hungarian models of regulation and which could function as a quasi-marriage.

## **2. Military service**

According to appendix 037 a) of the 12/1997 regulation of the Ministry of Defence about professional and contracted soldiers' medical, psychological and physical fitness, homosexuality is listed as a type of personality disorder. Háttér Support Society for Gays and Lesbians in Hungary initiated a subsequent control of norms with the Constitutional Court because the aspect and wording of the regulation is contrary to the current scientific opinion and violates the dignity of gays and lesbians. The process is going on.

Previously, appendix 037 a) of the 7/1996 (VII.30.) of the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Social Welfare regulating the military service done on liability ruled the same until 9/2002 (II.28.) of the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Health abrogated it. The latter regulation shows a milder wording: only "disorders of gender identity and orientation" are deemed personality disorders. The International Classification of Diseases No.10. (ICD-10) does not classify homosexuality as a 'disorders of sexual preference' or a 'psychological and behavioural disorder related to sexual development and orientation'. The new rule of law would be requested to be more exact in its wording, similarly to the 28/2002 (X. 17.) regulation of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Defense.

Previously again, homosexuality was treated as a personality disorder in the annotation to the code number 014 of the 21/2000 (VIII.23.) of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Defense regulating the declaration of mental and bodily incapacity to work and earn as a public or civil servant within the armed forces, in addition to the use of the health care by such servants. This rule of law was modified by the regulation 28/2002 (X.17.) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Defense in such a way that its text complies with the definitions of ICD-10. The modification entered into force on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2002. The modification itself is to be highlighted, because it solely involved the incriminated annotation pertaining to the code number 014.

In the point of view of Háttér Support Society for Gays and Lesbians in Hungary, appendix 037/a of the 2/1997 (V.16.) regulation of the Ministry of Defense contains an appalling legislative discrimination, which demands immediate remedy, whereas appendix 037/a of the 9/2002 (II.8.) regulation of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Health, would require a more exact wording.

## **3. The defects in the anti-discrimination legislation**

Beyond the direct legislative discrimination, we have to mention the defects in the anti-discrimination legislation in Hungary.

The Hungarian law presently in force mentions the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation solely in §7 (4) CLIV/1997 of medical care, whereas all the other basic rules of law such as §70/A of the Constitution, §76 of the Civil Code and §5 of the Labour Code prohibit discrimination on a general level, without actual reference to sexual orientation. It is the practice of the Constitutional Court and courts of original jurisdiction that established the view that gays and lesbians, such as any other distinct groups of society are entitled to equal treatment in the same way as other groups of minorities.

The Hungarian legal system leaves us with no solution as to the general definition of direct and indirect discrimination, furthermore, as to the description and sanctioning of the group of typical cases adhering to the practice of discrimination, such as victimization and harassment.

Beyond these there is almost no kind of special system of sanctions that would be effective enough to prevent or act as a deterrent from violations of laws by discrimination or homophobia.

The Penal Code deals with the offences originating in the afflicted person's religious, racial or ethnic background (c.f. §155 about homicide, §156 about Apartheid, §174/B about violence against the member of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group), but it never refers to sexual orientation as a possible motivation of offence.

The employer proven to be discriminative can be liable for its deed only to the extent of a moderate offence (c.f. governmental act §93 28/1999 (XII.28.) about the regulation of offences), thus any Roma or homosexual whose personal dignity has been violated can only hope in the positive outcome of a civil case about the violation of his/her personality rights. However, such an ending is unforeseeable and has to be preceded by a lengthy civil case involving general rules of justification.

In the point of view of Háttér Support Society for Gays and Lesbians in Hungary, the answer for the latter problems could be a unified code of anti-discrimination. In the new rule of law the sexual orientation of the afflicted party should be definitely mentioned as a possible motive of discrimination, the concept of direct and indirect discrimination should be defined in general, and phenomena that are instrumental to discrimination such as the so-called victimization, harassment, and orders to discriminate should be prohibited. An effective, proportional system of sanctions needs to be introduced, and an independent body should be set up to investigate cases of discrimination. It is unavoidable to amend some rules of law that regulate related fields. In cases related to discrimination, the afflicted person's obligation of burden of proof needs to be relieved. In some cases the obligation should be reversed or presumptions made. In the anti-discrimination law, Obligation of positive, accountable action should be prescribed and be debited to the government that aims at the dissipation of prejudices in public and educational institutions. The prohibition of discrimination of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and trans-gendered people should be explicated in the National Curriculum.

#### **4. The rights of transsexuals**

In the Hungarian law, there is no norm as to the personal or legal status of people who intend to undergo sex change. The juridical conditions of gender reassignment surgery and the financial coverage by the national health care system have remained without clarification. Changing the certificate of civil status and the name of the person who has undergone sex change does not even occur to the legislator as a problem.

In the point of view of Háttér Support Society for Gays and Lesbians in Hungary, the government should create inclusive standards as to the rights and protection of transsexuals. The rules of recording the transitioned persons' particulars in the certificate of civil status, the process of gender reassignment surgery in the health care system and the rules of social insurance need to be clarified. The anti-discrimination law should include the prohibition of discrimination based on gender identity.

This paper was written by Kárpáti József, attorney at law, Gay Legal Aid of Háttér for Háttér Társaság a Melegekért.

Budapest, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2002

## ANNEX : THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL AIDS STRATEGY

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People living with HIV, when their infection is proven, will be taken in care by the medical institutions. Medical care normally takes place in the National Institute for Dermatology and Sexual Pathology (Országos Bőr és Nemibeteg Gondozó Intézetben (OBNI)), and in the Department of Internal Diseases #5 (Immunology) of Budapest City Authority's St László Hospital (Fővárosi Önkormányzat Szent László Kórháza V. Immunológiai Belosztálya). The HIV positive patients undergo immunology and virology tests. Further treatments and therapies are dependent of laboratory results and clinical status. The Department of Internal Diseases #5 (Immunology) of Budapest City Authority's St László Hospital has exclusively been appointed to provide medical treatments. The most up-to-date treatment is accessible by all patients, which is free of charge; the costs are covered by a special fund of social insurance. Hungary's participation in international projects makes sure that the most advanced therapies are applied at the earliest.

### • MONITORING, DIAGNOSTICS.

The order of diagnostics and monitoring is ruled by decree ESZCSM 18/2002 (27 12) („On necessary measures and the process of monitoring in order to prevent the spread of infections causing Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome”).

### Monitoring

The decree 18/2002 is laid down on the principle that prevention should be based on giving information to the affected and not on mandatory monitoring. Voluntary monitoring is to be extended. To achieve this, the network of institutions entitled to provide counselling and monitoring, including those for anonymous monitoring has to be developed.

### Objectives:

To raise the number of voluntary tests to follow giving information in high-risk groups.

To reintroduce tests for HIV combined with anonymous counselling.

To perform and control statutory, regular, mandatory medical check-ups in prostitutes.

To give preventive treatment in health workers with job related exposure to HIV if they have contacted the virus.

### Tasks:

1. A system stressing voluntary tests may not replace mandatory monitoring in the following areas:

In health workers engaged in invasive treatment which cannot be done by a contaminated specialist, for danger of infection;

In persons who may contact human blood, sperm, vaginal discharge while working;

In staff making out medical certificate for prostitutes;

In staff working with dead or live donors when transplanting organs;

In blood donors;

In milk donor mothers.

2. Monitoring based on voluntary tests:

Primarily, it stipulates the following mandatory tests which had been deregulated by former decrees:

In sexual partners of HIV infected persons;

In patients with sexually transmittable active venereal diseases and in the partners of these;

In HIV infected mother's offspring;

In intravenous drug addicts;

In inmates of penal institutions of custody and persons in youth custody;

In sperm donors e.g., when performing artificial insemination.

3. **Test covered by OEP (the National Health Fund):** Tests for HIV both in inpatient and outpatient care are frequently required. In such cases monitoring is covered not by the state but by the institution where monitoring is being done. In view that immediate results are often necessitated, quick testers can also be used. Examinations made by quick testers have to be repeated over the next routine examination.

4. **Anonymous monitoring:** A special emphasis is given to counselling and information in anonymous monitoring. In voluntary anonymous testing, sample identification marks free from personal details have to be recorded in health documents.

When a sample tested is found positive, blood sampling has to be repeated to verify results. Results from anonymous examinations can never be issued under the bearer's name.

**5. Sentinel surveillance tests:** WHO in its so called first generation sentinel tests aimed at discovering infections in expectant mothers firstly, and in patients with venereal diseases, respectively (when the patients tested are unidentifiable). Nevertheless, the guidelines issued by UNAIDS in 2000 point out the importance of making tests in groups of high risk of HIV infection. According to these the new target groups are the followings: male homosexuals; prostitutes; intravenous drug addicts. According to the guidelines of the year 2000 with risk groups of such orientation, HIV monitoring has to be done anonymously so as to assess the frequency of HIV infection.

**6. Pay tests:** There has been an increasing demand for HIV tests as a service to instances which do not fall in with the above mentioned 5 categories. Payable services provide certificates to immigration, travelling, visas and employment.

**7. Confirmation tests:** Each HIV test result found positive has to undergo a so called confirmation test in order to exclude or confirm HIV infection. Throughout the confirmation process international practice and EU directives are to be adopted.

The confirmed HIV positive cases have to be reported to the Epidemiological Department of the National Centre for Epidemic for sake of epidemiological data collection. Communication on records which are free from personal details, must help with the Euro-conform, compatible evaluation of HIV/AIDS epidemiological situation based on qualitative research.

## ● AIDS-PREVENTION

Risks affecting the Hungarian population are related to the specific geographical situation of Hungary, with the transit traffic between West and East Europe and with migration between regions and continents. The increasingly worse epidemiological data on destructive, sexually transmittable diseases in the East – European region, with prostitution becoming international, the emergence of organized international criminal groups, the ever increasing number of migrants from countries of high HIV infection rate, along with the intravenous drug addicts,

whose increase in number has slowed down the past few years, pose danger by themselves to the Hungarian population, especially to the sexually active, young generation.

All these risk factors can only be diminished by coordinated programs, activities which offer multiple approaches. From this point of view prevention plays a decisive role because in case of most sexually transmittable diseases tools for definitive recovery are not accessible yet. The emergence and spread of resistance to medicines has increasingly posed a risk factor in curable diseases, too.

## Main objectives:

To diminish behaviour related risks of sexually transmittable diseases in Hungarian youth;  
To diminish the infection rate of sexually transmittable diseases in groups of high risk of infection, to monitor the infected and to provide them care at an early stage;

## Objectives:

Risk decrease at population level, primary prevention programs for low risk groups:

To widely disseminate authentic knowledge on sexual behaviour related psycho-somatic risks in public education by appropriate techniques regarding the age of the target groups;

To make and diffuse personal consultancy model programs for schools;

To launch information campaigns tailored to population needs e.g. campaigns to people travelling to regions of high rate of infection;

To influence the environment of sexually active young generation to promote safe sex;

To demonstrate sexual activity related risks and transfer, well grounded information to individuals of risk groups whose life conditions and social background prevent them from fully benefiting from programs in public education (prevention programs for young people living bereft from their families, for socially deprived young people, for gypsy youth).

Programs for prevention and care in high risk groups:

Programs to diminish harms in intravenous drug addicts, including programs aiming at diminishing the amount of drug intake;

Activities in gay culture to demonstrate psycho-somatic risks deriving from sexual behaviour;

Programs accessible to high risk groups to develop consultancy services on AIDS and sexually transmittable diseases, including the development of anonymous AIDS consultancy

network and that of out-patient surgeries for sexually transmittable diseases.

## **Tasks:**

### **1. Youth / School:**

To involve basic knowledge on sexual life in the curriculum of subjects in public education, including psychosomatic risks, prevention by individuals, means of safe sex and contraception. At least 3 times 2 hours in each module in courses 8, 9 and 10 of schooling.

To involve experts from school health network into sexual education. To invite personal consultancy on contraception and sexual life in two hours a week to pupils in institutes of public education with the contribution of nurses and the school nursing system.

To overview the tasks and the ways of funding the above school health programs and to work out the techniques of tendering and the standard of health promotion for institutions of public education.

### **2. Free time:**

To develop promotional material for travel agents, companies engaged in tourism, campaigns to raise awareness on risk factors of AIDS/HIV infection in travellers who are going to highly infected regions;

To launch multi-channel media campaigns repeatedly on particular risk factors of sexual activity in youth, addressing them through popular media (e.g. pubs visited by young people, university clubs, schools, beaches, giant bill boards placed for target groups, electronic media inserts in programs for young people);

### **3. Condom:**

To improve access to condom, to set up condom vending machines in the toilets of public places, clubs. To generally extend these within five years to follow pilot tests, with amendments to legislation applicable to outlets;

To support free access to condom at events favoured by young people;

To promote the use of condom in youth magazines, in publications addressing young people.

### **4. Deprived youth:**

To provide contemporary training programs, target oriented media campaigns and orientation to socially deprived young people, brought up in children's homes on the topics of contraception and safe sex, with the involvement of social workers and nurses, with NGO activists and members of target groups concerned. To organize on-street programs for promoting safe sex, accompanied by condom

distribution and drug prevention activities. To find funding sources by means of supporting tendering.

To support in-service training programs for experts working with deprived, drug addicted, socially handicapped people on the topics of sexual abuse, abortion prevention and safe sex.

### **5. Intravenous drug addicts:**

To promote syringe access programs with the involvement of social workers, surgeries for drug patients, and other drug addict care points, to set up automatic syringe dispensers, to help with programs aiming at decreasing drug dosage, lessening the scope for drug related prostitution.

To train social workers, NGO activists working with prostitutes to identify the symptoms and the consequences of drug abuse in order to take care of intravenous drug addict prostitutes by addiction treatment or other low threshold services.

To promote orientation and anonymous monitoring programs for intravenous drug addicts involving their social workers and surgeries for drug patients.

### **6. Gays:**

To launch target oriented information campaigns involving organizations, media and public places for gay people in order to diminish sexual behaviour related risks and demonstrate condom use and techniques for safe sex.

To initiate public discussion within gay culture involving gay organizations on the inherent risks typical for groups of particular sexual behaviour, on the myths and misbeliefs about sexual behaviour and gay identity. To promote a rational approach to the relationship between HIV infection and gay identity, involving the media to curb risky behaviour.

### **7. Prostitutes, anonymous monitoring:**

To develop the organizational infrastructure of anonymous AIDS consultancy and monitoring. To involve one service provider a region at least by means of tendering in anonymous AIDS counselling, to work out the ways of funding tasks, to assure quality, to lay down the principles of access, to set up and support regional anonymous AIDS consultancy and monitoring centres, to establish the information functions of such centres (call service). The goal is to create by tendering a network of AIDS counselling centres in several points of the country, offering regionally relevant, up-to-date information, with the participation of health care service providers and NGOs, possibly co-operating with organizations and structures catering for drug addicts.

To set up mobile surgeries for sexually transmittable diseases, under the scheme of cost refunding, but with partial financing, to cater for prostitutes, cooperating with the highly affected regions and local governments. To increase pressure by the police on prostitution related criminal groups, to diminish health risk related to prostitution, to stop negative discrimination of prostitutes with no health certificate versus the ones with health record booklet and if necessary, to initiate amendments in legislation in order to raise participation in regular health check-ups.

#### **8. Immigrants, refugee and asylum seekers:**

To organize consultancy service in refugee camps;  
To edit and distribute multilingual publications;  
To work out HIV test policy for migrants;  
To co-operate at departmental and inter-institutional levels;  
To prepare experts and social workers from institutions dealing with migrants on the issue of HIV/AIDS prevention

Beside these, special programs to promote prevention targeting the population in the army and prisons have to be elaborated, as well.

### **● PREVENTION IN HIV INFECTED PATIENTS**

Within a wider range of AIDS prevention there is a call for target oriented prevention among those having a life style with high risk of HIV infection and especially among people infected by HIV.

#### **Objectives:**

To diminish potential infection in people adopting risky behaviour;  
To diminish the occurrence of risky behaviour in the HIV infected population and to diminish the rate of infection transfer;  
To prevent/slow down the development of AIDS;  
To preserve health and the ability to work in infected people;  
To enforce the role and participation of HIV infected patients in prevention programs;  
To develop and reinforce social care for socially vulnerable HIV/AIDS patients.

As HIV spreads basically by sexual way in Hungary, the most important tool for promotion is safe sexual practice (including the use of condom, too), to promote relevant knowledge in a language most appropriate to the target population.

Another kernel task in HIV/AIDS prevention is raising awareness on facts which help relieve the infected and the not-yet-affected alike, of myths and fears. To prevent the development of AIDS in HIV infected people is a peculiar task, which is also in line with calling for a healthy way of life. In the process of diminishing risk the key role is played by that how awareness of prevention and health promotion can be improved.

PLUSS, the Hungarian self-help organization of people with HIV and AIDS may play a decisive role in this field. This work can be made very successful by personal experience, community sympathy with fellow sufferers as well as the emotional commitment of non-positive members. It is vitally important to have an access to suitable means to professional preparatory work. Organizations should be notified about the most important professional events and to give them a chance to participate in them. Recreational trainings are efficient methodological tools where up-to-date information reaches the affected in a concentrated way or by the application of combined methods. To have a free access to publications all the time is also of paramount importance. Condom use should be widely adopted and making it available free is also indispensable in secondary prevention.

### **● SOCIAL DISADVANTAGES AND AIDS STRATEGY**

Being vulnerable to HIV/AIDS is basically due to social disadvantages, deprivation of different types. AIDS strategy aims at diminishing unequal conditions in this field and giving equal opportunities.

#### **Objectives:**

To diminish unequal conditions lying in HIV/AIDS risk factors in the Hungarian population;  
To diminish vulnerability of target groups suffering from deprivation.

## **Rudimental challenges:**

Basically negative impact of social and economic disadvantages on potential infection (sexual behaviour, drug addiction);  
Exclusion from or poor access to health services (monitoring, care);  
Difficulties in coping with problems;  
Lack of social support, isolation;  
Shortage of authentic, culturally accessible information related to HIV;

Among current socio-economic conditions the following groups require prime attention:

Romany population;  
Migrants (immigrants, refugees);  
Marginalized adolescents;  
Young unemployed;  
Certain deviant behaviour types, such as prostitution, are likely to be related to poverty and deprivation. However, particular sexual orientation may also result in social disadvantages.

## **Tasks:**

To co-ordinate activities mainly in the sectors of social, educational and employment policy, at government and municipality levels;  
To promote self organization of socially deprived groups, relying on and cooperating with relevant NGOs;  
To open up vocational training (for social workers, district nurses), research, pilot tests;  
To develop services to promote individual strategies in coping with problems;  
To reinforce the network of social support;  
To improve access to HIV/AIDS monitoring and care;  
To provide targeted information to the deprived;  
To stand up against prejudices causing segregation, to call for need for communication;

## **• MEDICAL TREATMENT, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND CARE FOR HIV PATIENTS**

### **Outpatient care, Home care, Extension of clinical day care, Studies of cost efficiency**

HIV/AIDS patients with manifest symptoms are treated at St László Hospital, Budapest, by the appointment of the Minister of Public Welfare in 1986. Medical care of such patients has been going on exclusively in this hospital ever since. The past 15 years have seen considerably improved conditions in patient care, which is partly due to the administration of antiretroviral

medicines, and partly to the development in diagnostics of HIV disease and opportunistic complications. Special immunology tests, as well as HIV-RNA copy counts, new ways of patient care, day and home cares have also contributed to improved medical treatment of patients. Adult patients are treated in the ward of the Department of Internal Diseases #5 (Immunology), consisting of outpatient and in-patient wards. Whereas, infant care is provided at Paediatric Department of Infectious Diseases No 1 and at Paediatric HIV surgery.

The main scope of clinical care is to diminish the extent of immune harms caused by HIV disease, to prevent AIDS related complication, to diagnose it, to treat it and last but not least to provide psychic support to HIV/AIDS patients and to create a helpful environment for the patient and their family. Currently there are 440 HIV infected patients catered for by the centre, out of which up to 360 are being given combined antiretroviral treatment. The number of patients under care and under treatment annually increases by 20 to 30 people. Procurement of antiretroviral medicines is carried out at the expense of the extra fund of the National Health Insurance Fund, which are given to the patients free of charge, and the therapy is made under a protocol annually renewed. The Centre regularly participates in international clinical tests, and in other European scientific tests, respectively (EuroSIDA, DAD).

## **Objectives:**

To improve medical, psychosocial care in HIV/AIDS patients, to dramatically improve their life quality, prospects, ability to work;  
To provide HIV infected patients with cost optimized, combined antiretroviral treatment, free of charge who require therapy under medical protocol;  
To diminish social, labour, community discrimination and segregation.

## **Tasks:**

To provide HIV infected patients with medical and psycho-social therapy continually, at a high standard;  
To annually update the medical protocol, to implement and adopt its content;  
To introduce new diagnostic tests, to apply them clinically (to monitor therapeutical medication standards, to perform HIV resistance tests);  
To elaborate and implement new methods to raise willingness in patients to cooperate (therapy compliance), to monitor long term alteration in metabolism, to diminish their harms;

To modernize HIV/AIDS patient care individually.

The wing of the hospital building presently used to accommodate patients, can remain so only for one or two years for bad general state of repair of the building. Within the project of general reconstruction of the hospital this task is also to be solved.

To raise the number of doctors, nurses with special training, laboratory staff according to needs who are in charge of treating HIV/AIDS patients.

To make a decision based on medical policy about the hospitalization of HIV infected patients who are active drug addicts using

syringes, holding a special council of infectologists.

To establish an appropriate institutional and professional background for treating opportunistic complications in AIDS patients who are active drug addicts using syringes in the reconstructed pavilion.

To improve the standard of social care and that of institutional background, to employ social workers.

In-patient care is increasingly affected by a burden of social nature. The number of homeless people among HIV infected and AIDS patients is increasing. In them there is a high rate of patients suffering from antisocial personality complexes.

## NGO CONTACTS:

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<p><b>PLUSS</b> Phone.: (+36) 1-455-81-93 Email.: plusshiv@eqnet.hu Fax.: (+36) 1-455-81-93</p> <p>Saint László Hospital, Gyáli str 5-7, Budapest 1097 HUNGARY</p> <p>Contact: Zoltan LACZO</p>	<p>Blue Point Drug Counseling and Outpatient Center Web: www.kekpoint.hu E-Mail: bluepoint@matavnet.hu Phone : +36 6-80-505-678 14 Kulso Szilajyi utca, 1046 Budapest Budapest Hungary</p> <p>Contact : Dr Joseph Racz</p>
<p>Hungarian Civil Liberties Union Társaság a Szabadságjogokért</p> <p>Phone: + 36 1 209 0046 Web: www.tasz.hu E-Mail: tasz@tasz.hu</p> <p>Eszék u. 8/b Budapest 1114 Hungary</p> <p>Contacts : Judit Fridli and Eszter Csernus</p>	<p>AATSZ - Anonymous AIDS Association</p> <p>Phone: + 36 1 466 9283 Web: www.anonimajds.hu</p> <p>1113 Karolina út 35/b. Budapest, Hungary</p>

This report was written and compiled by

Zoltán Laczó  
president of PLUSS Hungary  
Budapest, 15 February 2004