



## The need for action focusing on most vulnerable groups.

A mission report about HIV and AIDS in the Republic of Cyprus.



- This report was produced as part of INTEGRATION Projects which are designed to support the development of quality, local, community-based responses to HIV/AIDS in the new members states of the European Union via identifying, sharing and promoting best European and international practices. ([www.integration-projects.org](http://www.integration-projects.org)).
- The partners of the INTEGRATION Projects are committed to making sure that in each country there ought to be at least one trusted NGO where People Living with HIV/AIDS and members of vulnerable communities can find high-quality prevention and health support.



This initiative is partly funded by the European Commission (DG SANCO – project *AIDS ACTION & Integration Projects 2005-2008* ref n° 2004302) as well as by AIDES private donors. The European Commission and our co-funders cannot be held responsible for the views that are presented in this report.

• **Thanks to the actors of the Cypriot responses to HIV/AIDS who generously agreed to welcome us during this mission.**

• **Objective and methodology:**

The country missions organised as part of the INTEGRATION projects are designed to assess the local situation with regards to HIV/AIDS focusing specifically upon:

- the role played by local civil-society
- the situation faced by members of the communities most exposed to the risk of HIV transmission such as drugs users, men who have sex with men (MSM), sex workers, national minorities, and migrants originating from countries with high prevalence.

This mission also enabled to develop links in between local NGOs in Cyprus involved in responding to HIV/AIDS with their counterparts at the European level (fellow NGOs like AIDES in France and European organisations such as AIDS ACTION EUROPE and EATG).

This report is based primarily on a series of interviews and discussions with implementers and decision makers involved with HIV/AIDS prevention, harm-reduction, testing, and treatment in the cities of Nicosia, Larnaca and Limassol in Cyprus that took place between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2008. This report does not address the situation faced by the Turkish Cypriot Community residing in the northern part of the island.

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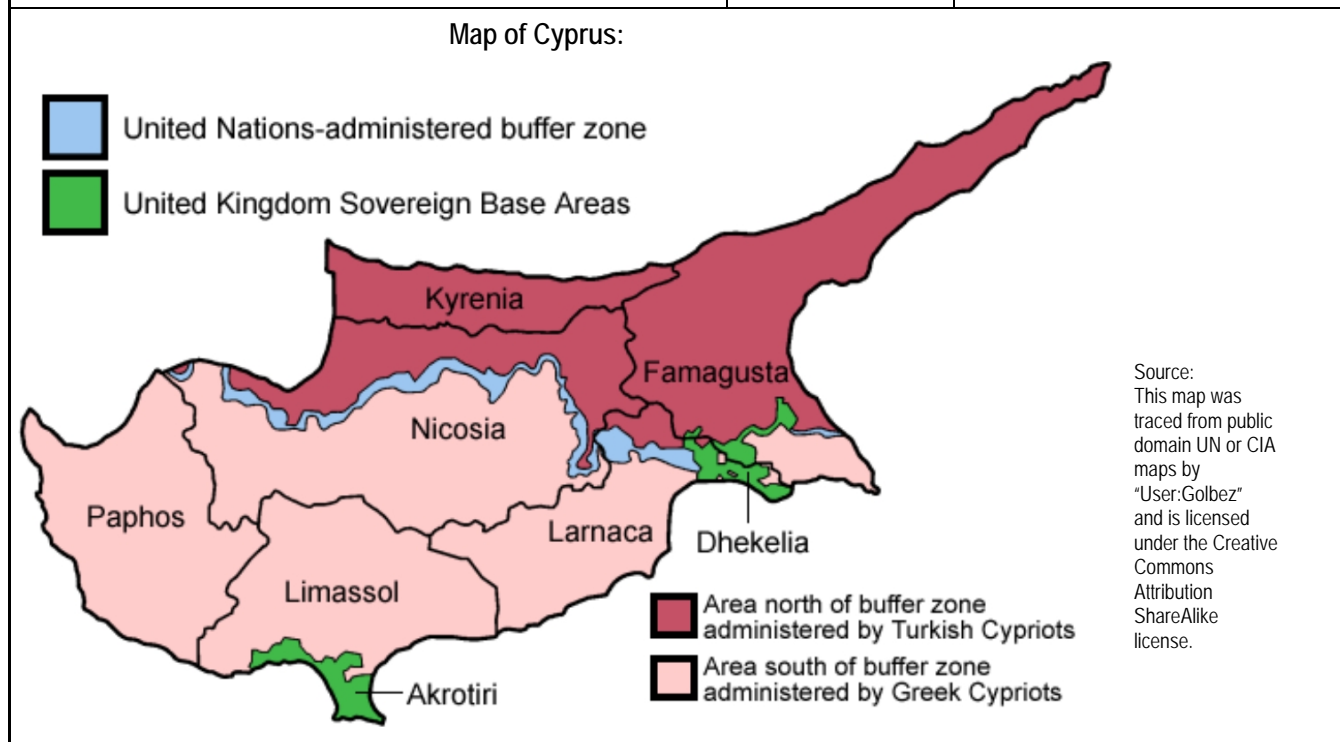


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## Overview

<p><b>HIV/AIDS:</b> Cyprus remains a country with a low prevalence of HIV, that is estimated to be about 0,1%. A total of 547 cases of HIV have been diagnosed from the beginning of the epidemic until 2007. The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Cyprus however has identified seven specific risk factors that may lead to an increase of the incidence of HIV in the island*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Difficult to reach populations, such as MSM, who have accounted for almost half of all known cases of HIV infection until now</i></li> <li>• <i>Increasing trafficking and use of drugs</i></li> <li>• <i>Recent emergence of minority groups with their own characteristics and problems</i></li> <li>• <i>(...) settling in Cyprus of seropositive people from countries with high prevalence</i></li> <li>• <i>Increasing proportion of resident seropositives who state Cyprus as the most likely country of infection</i></li> <li>• <i>Intensive population movements to and from Cyprus</i></li> <li>• <i>Increasing movement of population through the separation line, considered to be an important risk factor for both communities, because of the impossibility to monitor and control risky sexual behaviour and drug use."</i></li> </ul> <p>* Source: poster "HIV/AIDS SURVEILLANCE CYPRUS – 1986-2006" presented by the Cyprus Ministry of Health to EU Conference "Responsibility and Partnership – Together Against HIV/AIDS" in Bremen, Germany, in March 2007.</p>	<p><b>International and National Commitments:</b> Cyprus expressly committed to both the 2001 and 2006 "UNGASS" global declaration of commitment on HIV/AIDS.</p> <p>At the European levels, the main commitments binding the Republic of Cyprus include the 2004 Dublin Declaration on Partnership to fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia and the 2007 Bremen Declaration on Responsibility and Partnership.</p> <p>Keeping these promises specifically entails providing <b>universal access</b> to treatment for People Living with HIV/AIDS as well as adequate prevention, harm reduction, and testing services that effectively reach most vulnerable groups, including Men who have sex with men, commercial sex workers, people who use drugs, and migrants.</p>
	<p><b>Population:</b> 794,600 (1.1.2008 census)</p> <p><b>President and head of government :</b> Dimitris Christofias <b>Minister of Health:</b> Dr. Christos Patsalides</p>
	<p><b>Main languages:</b> <i>Greek, Turkish, English</i></p> <p><b>Human Development Index:</b> 0.903 (high) (28th)</p>



## Introduction:

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A one-week mission is obviously too short to enable comprehensive and exhaustive research about HIV/AIDS in the Republic of Cyprus. We nevertheless were able to meet directly many of the key stakeholders of the response to the HIV epidemic in Cyprus, including the staff member of the national AIDS Programme (Dr Laura Papantoniou and Anna Mouska), the head of the HIV/AIDS section of the Larnaca Hospital (Dr Yiannis Demetriades, Director of Gregorios HIV Clinic), leaders from the main NGOs that are active on HIV/AIDS, including Ms Despo Hadjiloizou and Maria Epaminonda of the Cyprus Family Planning Association, Ms Stella Michailidou and the board of directors of Kyfa, Mr, Constantinos Phellas of Rubsi and Mr. Alecos Modinos of the Gay Liberation Movement of Cyprus. We were also able to have long interviews with several people living with HIV who enabled us to understand – to an extent - what their daily situation is like.

We identified several current opportunities to remobilize action on HIV/AIDS in the republic of Cyprus:

- the "2004-2008 strategic plan for Cyprus", as its name suggests, needs to be renewed for the upcoming years.
- We also anticipate that the republic of Cyprus will present to the General assembly of the United Nation a progress report on the national response to HIV/AIDS in 2010, in line with the 2001 and 2006 international declarations of commitments on HIV AIDS.

The observations that we summarized in this mission report may serve as contributions to define what should be the future priorities of the response to HIV/AIDS in Cyprus. Clearly the drafting and the implementation of the Cypriot programme on AIDS is above all the shared responsibility of the local Cypriot actors of the response to HIV/AIDS, including governmental authorities, clinicians, local NGOs and people living with HIV. We noted the willingness of all parties to work together to set up the next 5 years National Plan.

Finally, we are most thankful for the warm welcome we received from all of the people we had the honour to meet!

Arnaud SIMON (NGO AIDES, France) and Nikos DEDES (European AIDS Treatment Group).

## **Our main observations:**

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### **1/ Where was the 2008 progress report on the national response to HIV/AIDS?**

We found surprising that the Republic of Cyprus is among the very few countries worldwide that have not submitted in 2008 a progress report about its response to HIV and AIDS<sup>1</sup> to the General Assembly of the United Nations, as pledged in the 2001 global declaration of commitment on HIV/AIDS. This progress report would have been a perfect opportunity to review and to evaluate the implementation of ambitious 2004-2008 strategic plan on HIV/AIDS in Cyprus (launched on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003).

In order to produce in a timely fashion the next report that is due for early in 2010, we would encourage the Ministry of Health of the republic of Cyprus to convene throughout 2009 regular meetings of key stakeholders of the response to HIV in Cyprus, including governmental officials, medical practitioners, local NGOs and people living with HIV (as recommended by UNAIDS).

### **2/ The quality of medical care.**

We would consider that overall, the quality and scope of medical care that is available for People Living with HIV in Cyprus is in line with best international standards. The team of medical practitioners at the Gregorios hospital (where all medical care for HIV/AIDS is centralized) pay close attention to the evolution of international prescription guidelines for antiretroviral treatments and - so far - they have been able to ensure access to adequate treatment to the people who need it. It must be noted that Cyprus was able to start prescribing HAART (highly active antiretroviral treatment, also known as "triple therapy") very early in 1996, in fact earlier than several western European countries...). Of course, over the long term, Cypriot health authority need to make sure that adequate budget is maintained to ensure a sustainable access to quality treatment to all the people who need it, in line with best international standards.

### **3/ The isolation faced by People Living with HIV**

That being said, people living with HIV (PLWH) whom we met shared with us the extreme difficulty they face on a daily basis, most crucially the fear of facing rejection if their HIV status were to be discovered by other people. On a small island like Cyprus, we heard, "everybody know everything about everybody", and visibly, not being able to speak openly about one's HIV status is a very tough burden for PLWH. This pervasive and intense isolation is documented in the comprehensive study about the health needs of People Living with HIV/AIDS recently implemented by Dr Constantinos Phellas, director of RUBSI. There was a very strong consensus among all the people that we met that there is a great need for social and psychological support for People Living with HIV/AIDS (This is by the way one of the main priorities of the NGO Kyfa).

### **4/ The need for additional prevention and support that reach vulnerable groups.**

NGOs that work on HIV in Cyprus (the Cyprus Family Planning association, RUBSI, and Kyfa) all reported that implementing prevention and support services is very challenging due to lack of funding. It appears that so far, only general prevention campaigns targeting young people have been implemented somewhat consistently (implemented notably by the Cyprus Family Planning association). In line with UNAIDS guidelines on prevention, there is an obvious need to also develop targeted campaigns that reach specific vulnerable groups, including MSM (who represent almost half of all diagnosed cases of HIV), injecting drug users, commercial sex workers, and migrants. Local Cypriot NGOs, to the extent that they are able to effectively reach and to mobilize members of these vulnerable groups, clearly have a strategic role to play in implementing both targeted prevention projects as well as support projects for people living with HIV/AIDS.

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<sup>1</sup> The progress reports that have been submitted by 147 countries worldwide can be downloaded from the following link:  
<http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/HIVData/CountryProgress/2007CountryProgressAllCountries.asp>

#### 5/ Maintaining and developing the involvement of all stakeholders, especially local NGOs.

The National Aids Committee of Cyprus brings together "*all competent governmental authorities and departments as well as private institutions, NGOs and the relevant specialized agency responsible for policy on this issue*"<sup>1</sup>. This very important committee clearly needs to meet on a regular basis, specifically to design and to organize the implementation of a new strategic plan on AIDS in Cyprus (due to follow-up from the ongoing 2004-2008 strategic plan). During our mission in July 2008, several respondents expressed the need for more regular meetings of this committee (the last formal meeting had taken place in October 2007).

#### 6/ The need to revoke the entry ban for HIV positive workers and students.

As reported in the 2008 edition of the guide "Travel and residence regulations for people with HIV and AIDS"<sup>2</sup> Cyprus is one of the few members-states of the EU that has legally forbids non-EU foreigners living with HIV to come to Cyprus to work or to study. This restriction does not have any demonstrated public health value. As the European Union will host the World AIDS Conference in 2010 (in Vienna, Austria), we encourage all European countries to revoke such restrictions.

#### A review of international commitments on HIV/AIDS that are applicable to Cyprus:

At the global level, numerous commitments have been made to implement adequate response to the HIV epidemic, which the government of the Republic of Cyprus has endorsed.

In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals, ratified by 192 countries, committed to "halt and reverse the spread of HIV (..) by 2015". In 2001, the Declaration of Commitment by the special session of the General Assembly of the United Nation (UNGASS) established a set of specific time-bound objectives to be achieved by all signatory countries. On this occasion, then Minister of Health Hon. Frixos Savvides notably made the following statement:

*Time-bound targets set by the Declaration of Commitment to be adopted at this Special Session for effective prevention, comprehensive care strategies, the promotion of respect for human rights, the reduction of vulnerability, support for deprived and marginalized groups, the alleviation of the social and economic impact of the epidemic and support for research and development through the building of effective infrastructures, will be strictly respected and actively promoted by Cyprus.*

In February 2004, within weeks after the republic of Cyprus officially joined the European Union, European countries agreed upon achieving a set of specific targets defined in the "Dublin Declaration on Partnership to fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia", drafted the occasion of the high-level conference organized by the Irish presidency of the European Union. These objectives include:

- to "establish and reinforce national HIV/AIDS partnership forums including meaningful participation of civil society, and particularly of people living with HIV/AIDS and their advocates, to design, review, monitor and report progress in the fight against the disease" (objective 4).
- to achieve 80% coverage of "prevention programmes providing access to information, services and prevention commodities" among "the persons at the highest risk of and most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS" by the year 2010 (objective 9).

More recently, the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS adopted in 2006 by the General Assembly of the United Nations

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<sup>1</sup> Description of the national AIDS committee by Health Minister Dr Christos Patsalides in his speech at the UN High Level Meeting on AIDS in New-York in June 2008. (<http://www.un.org/ga/president/62/issues/hiv/cyprus.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> This guide "Travel and residence regulations for people with HIV and AIDS - 2008" can be downloaded from the following link: [http://doc.ilga.org/ilga/publications/publications\\_in\\_english/other\\_publications/travel\\_and\\_residence\\_regulations\\_for\\_people\\_with\\_hiv\\_and\\_aids](http://doc.ilga.org/ilga/publications/publications_in_english/other_publications/travel_and_residence_regulations_for_people_with_hiv_and_aids)

committed to the goal of achieving "universal access to comprehensive prevention programmes, treatment, care and support by 2010". At this assembly, current minister of health Dr. Christos G. Patsalides expressed publicly his strong commitment to achieve this goal<sup>1</sup>.

We therefore look forward to the preparation and the publication of the 2010 progress report on national response to HIV/AIDS in Cyprus, that will hopefully integrate the views of all the main stakeholders of the response to HIV in Cyprus (Governmental official, medical practitioners, NGOs and PLWH).

### **Epidemiological surveillance:**

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The National AIDS Programme is in charge of publishing on a regular basis a report on epidemiological surveillance in Cyprus<sup>2</sup>. Some of the main points of the report include:

- "From 1986 to the end of June 2007, 547 cases of HIV/AIDS were diagnosed in Cyprus. On average, 25 new cases (...) were recorded on a yearly basis".
  
- "People who live abroad" represent a very high proportion (more than 40%) of the diagnosed cases of HIV: 224 out of 547.
  
- Sexual transmission is by far the main mode of transmission among people living with HIV who live in Cyprus "46,6% through heterosexual contact and 46% through sexual intercourse between men." Thankfully, transmission related to sharing of injection equipment by people who use drugs has so far remained extremely rare (only 3 cases reported from 1986 to 2006).
  
- As in many other countries, the number of cases of AIDS as well as the number of deaths from AIDS has dropped sharply since the mid-1990's. This is attributed "to a large extent to the introduction of antiretroviral treatment".

More than 50 000 tests for HIV are performed every year in Cyprus which represents an average of 60.8 tests per 1000 population, a ratio that is higher than most other European countries<sup>3</sup>. Of course, we need to make sure that these testing services are in fact able to reach – in a welcoming and non-judgmental way – the populations most at risk, notably men who have sex with men, commercial sex workers, and people who use drugs.

### **The specific need for targeted action focusing on gay men**

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In a recent "Literature review on HIV epidemics among MSM in Eastern and Central Europe" carried out by the School of Public Health in Zagreb, Croatia on behalf of the World Health Organisation<sup>4</sup> we can read the following about Cyprus:

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.un.org/webcast/aidsmeeting2008/statements/Cyprus\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/webcast/aidsmeeting2008/statements/Cyprus_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> HIV/AIDS surveillance in Cyprus. Data from 1986 to the end of June 2007. Dr Laura Papantoniou.

<sup>3</sup> EuroHIV. HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Europe. End-year report 2005. Saint-Maurice: Institut de veille sanitaire, 2006. No. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Ivana Bozicevic, MD, DrPH, Luka Voncina, MD, MSc - WHO Collaborating Centre for Capacity Building in HIV/AIDS Surveillance - School of Public Health, Zagreb, Croatia – presentation made at a strategic meeting on MSM and HIV in May 2008 in Bled, Slovenia.

- It is one of the countries with a high proportions of cases attributable to homosexual transmission in the total reported HIV cases (estimated by the authors to be about 57%).
- It is one of the countries where no prevalence data of HIV among MSM is know due to lack of research.
- Finally, there is only llimited information about prevention activities eventually taking place among MSM

The experts we met in Cyprus confirmed indeed that very little specific prevention and support activities in relation to HIV were taking place among men who have sex with men. This is obviously very regrettable as MSM do represent a very large proportion of positive HIV diagnoses. Targeted outreach activities have been well documented worldwide as playing an important role to reduce the number of new infections (by promoting the use of condoms and of lubricants). Such campaigns can also encourage gay men to get tested more often for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. This enable earlier access to life-saving antiretroviral treatments which obviously has tremendous benefits.

For that reason, it is a good news that the NGO RUBSI has recently become involved as a full-fledged partner in the European Project "Everywhere" that is designed "*to generate and validate a European model of HIV prevention targeting men having sex with men (MSM) in different European homosexual tourist destinations*" (a project coordinated by the Madrid Institute of Public Health and funded in part by the European Executive Agency for Health and Consumers). We hope this would enable Cypriot NGO members to acquire specific know-how on how to implement HIV prevention and support projects with Men who have sex with Men. Beyond capacity building of course, there is a need for a specific budget to enable the durable and professional implementation of such activities... We consider this clearly needs to be integrated as part of the new HIV/AIDS Programme for the Republic of Cyprus.

### The situation of drug users:

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As acknowledged in the latest yearly report submitted to Europe by the Cyprus Monitoring center for Drugs and Drug Addictions<sup>1</sup>, "the total number of problem drug users (heroin and cocaine users) in 2006 was estimated at 801 and the 95% confidence interval at 684 – 966." The prevalence of Hepatitis C among drug users who were tested is quite high: 23%. While hepatitis C is known to be far more transmissible than HIV among drug users, this high prevalence of hepatitis C among drugs users should be a cause for alarm. Of course above all, people living with HCV need to have access to adequate treatment (and being a drug users should not in itself be used as a criteria for exclusion from treatment for Hepatitis C). Also, this high prevalence reveal that some drug users engage is risky behaviors (ie. sharing of injection equipment) that could cause also an increase of the incidence of HIV. We have seen in several European countries unfortunately that the prevalence of HIV among injecting drug users can increase extremely quickly when adequate harm-reduction strategies are not implemented.

For that reason, there is a clear need to make sure that harm-reduction services in Cyprus adequately match – both in terms of scope and of quality – the needs of people who use injectable drugs. Such services include notably the targeted distribution to drug users of clean injection equipment as well as the prescription of opioid substitution treatments.

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<sup>1</sup> 2007 NATIONAL REPORT (2006 data) TO THE EMCDDA by the Reitox National Focal Point CYPRUS. New Developments, Trends and in-depth information on selected issues. Cyprus Monitoring center for Drugs and Drug Addictions.

## The situation in prisons:

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As described in the April 2008 report on the current situation of drug related issues in prisons in Europe<sup>1</sup>, "testing for HIV and Hepatitis B and/or C are mandatory on admission in all prisons in Cyprus (...). Such testing is not applied on release (...). Needle/syringe exchange, condoms, non-supervised visits and drug free units are not found at all in Cyprian prisons."

"Regarding care, antiretroviral treatment for HIV is provided in all Cyprian prisons". Concerning drug-related treatments, "drug free treatment with psycho-social support is offered in more than 50% of prisons, whereas treatment with antagonists and substitution treatment, not at all".

There exists a wealth of documented good practices that make it possible to protect and preserve the health of inmates. We would invite decision makers who are involved with this issue in Cyprus to get in touch with the European Network Connections (<http://www.connectionsproject.eu>) that promotes responses to drugs and infections across the European criminal justice system.

## Is it not time to revoke the entry restrictions for People Living with HIV in Cyprus?

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As noted in the 2008 edition of the guide "Travel and residence regulations for people with HIV and AIDS<sup>2</sup>", there are "no restrictions for short-term tourist stays and no HIV testing on entry". However, "Foreign nationals [outside of the EU] applying for a residence permit for work or study must undergo a Health Ministry medical examination to confirm there is no infection with HIV, hepatitis B/C or syphilis", and if the results are positive, the residence permit is not granted.

CYPRUS	No restrictions for short-term tourist stays. No HIV testing on entry	Foreign nationals applying for a residence permit for work or study must undergo a Health Ministry medical examination to confirm there is no infection with HIV, hepatitis B/C or syphilis. All foreigners working or studying have to be tested for HIV	HIV tests particularly important for construction workers, bar maids, house maids, people working in the tourism industry, exceptions for employees from international enterprises and UN. If the result of the examination is positive, no residence permit is granted. This does not apply to citizens of the EU.
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<sup>1</sup> H. Stöver, C. Weilandt, H. Zurhold, C. Hartwig, K. Thane: Final Report on Prevention, Treatment, and Harm Reduction Services in Prison, on Reintegration Services on Release from Prison and Methods to Monitor/Analyse Drug use among Prisoners. [http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/drug/drug\\_call\\_en.htm#obj](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/drug/drug_call_en.htm#obj)

<sup>2</sup> This guide "Travel and residence regulations for people with HIV and AIDS - 2008" can be downloaded from the following link: [http://doc.ilga.org/ilga/publications/publications\\_in\\_english/other\\_publications/travel\\_and\\_residence\\_regulations\\_for\\_people\\_with\\_hiv\\_and\\_aids](http://doc.ilga.org/ilga/publications/publications_in_english/other_publications/travel_and_residence_regulations_for_people_with_hiv_and_aids)

Updated information about legal entry restriction for People Living with HIV in Cyprus also are available of the following page: <http://www.hivtravel.org/Default.aspx?PagelD=143&CountryId=56>

## A short history of the mobilisation for the rights of Gay men in Cyprus: yes, dedication brings results!

*Based on an interview with Mr Alecos Modinos, co-founder of both the Gay Liberation Movement of Cyprus and of the AIDS Solidarity Movement, an activist who played a central role in getting Cyprus to abolish its antiquated anti-gay laws.*

Late XIX century: Cyprus, then a part of the British Empire, adopted the "anti-sodomy laws" of the Victorian era. After Cyprus became independent in 1960, the following articles were maintained in its criminal code:

*"171. Any person who -*

*(a) has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature; or (b) permits a male person to have carnal knowledge of him against the order of nature, is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for five years.*

*172. Any person who with violence commits either of the offences specified in the last preceding Section is guilty of a felony and liable to imprisonment for fourteen years.*

*173. Any person who attempts to commit either of the offences specified in Section 171 is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for three years, and if the attempt is accompanied with violence he is liable to imprisonment for seven years."*

Autumn 1979. The mental health association of Cyprus organizes a first public discussion on homosexuality. Alecos Modinos joined this association soon thereafter.

In 1982, a two-day seminar specifically dedicated to homosexuality brings together more than 500 people. Lawyers, psychologists, sociologist, and renowned authors present their views freely and denounced homophobia. Strangely, Modinos recalls, *"the vast majority of the participants to this seminar were women... men were noticeably absent"*. The full transcription of this meeting was published in 1985 as a book, which became a key advocacy tools that was then used to defend the rights of homosexuals in Cyprus.

On December 10, 1987, Modinos along with 15 other activists (15 men and a woman) officially founded the Gay Liberation Movement of Cyprus, an association dedicated to the defence of the rights of gays and lesbians.

After having attempted, in vain, to convince leaders of the main Cypriot political parties of the need to repeal the antiquated anti-sodomy laws of Cyprus, after several formal requests to the Parliament of Cyprus remained unanswered, Modinos decided in 1989 to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. He recalls that deciding to take the State of Cyprus to court was not an easy choice to make, that Cyprus after all was already severely affected by the division of the island following the 1974 invasion by the Turkish army. However, he says he found it extremely unfair the same Cypriot leaders who were denouncing the human rights violations caused by the Turkish army were unwilling and unable to acknowledge the human rights of gay men in Cyprus.

In May 1989, with the assistance of a lawyer, Modinos formally submitted a case to the commission in charge of reviewing human rights issues at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg: A most promising precedent had been set by the case of David Norris V. Ireland on October 26, 1988, whereby the same Victorian-era anti-sodomy laws were deemed to be contravening with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

On December 6 1990, a first formal hearing was held which deemed the case to be eligible (the members and friends of the Gay Liberation movement consequently organized a big party to celebrate this very positive step in December 10, 1990!). The European Court of Human Rights finally decided on April 22, 1993 (Case of Modinos v. Cyprus) that indeed the "anti-sodomy laws of Cyprus" were contravening with Article 8 (ie. the right to respect for one's "private and family life,

his home and his correspondence") of the European Convention on Human Rights. These laws, therefore, should be repealed.

The parliament of Cyprus consequently proved very reluctant to reform the laws in accordance with the decision of the European Court of Human Rights. A first reform in June 1998 strangely specifically limited to a maximum of two consenting adults of the same gender the right to have sex. On the same occasion, the penalty for homosexual relations with people less than 18 years old was made vastly harsher (while at the same time, the legal age of consent for heterosexuals was 16...). This same laws also added specific restrictions to freedom of speech with regards to homosexuality... Parliamentarians then openly expressed that they were then feeling obliged to vote "against the order of nature"...

In 2000, the law was slightly normalized (removing notably the strange maximum limit of two consenting adult). Most parliamentarians however then found excuses to leave the room when they had to vote...

In 2002 finally, the age of consent which was 16 years old for heterosexuals and 18 years old for homosexuals was reformed to become... 17 years old for both heterosexual and for homosexuals!

Thanks to the dedication and courage of Alecos Modinos with his fellow Cypriot supporters of Gay rights... it took a total of 13 years of legal proceedings in order to finally have Cypriot laws that no longer discriminate against gay men !

*Congratulations Alecos!!*

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