

Opinion on the official hard-drugs experiments in the Netherlands
-based on the article “ Ook Utrecht wil meedoen aan experiment met vrije heroïne”-

It is known that the Dutch loose soft-drugs policy is one of the most controversial governmental policies within the European Union. Nevertheless practical evidence suggests that the solution adopted is actually working and that other states have much more problems in this area. Following the same progressive trend, the Dutch authorities approved official experiments with hard-drugs for medical purposes.

An article in De Volkskrant in September 1998 was reporting that following the experiments with free heroine already begun in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, Utrecht would start as well with such an experiment in 1999. The experiments with free heroine were started in July 1998 and consisted on free administration of heroine, under official control, to certain selected groups of people. The subjects were divided in 3 groups: the first group was going to receive 12 months heroine and then 6 months methadone, the second group 6 months methadone and then 12 months heroine and the third group, 12 months methadone and then 6 months heroine. The purpose of the experiments is to investigate whether the hard-drug addicts can be ultimately cured or not, what would be the ways to do that, if at all possible, and how long would the whole operations have to last. Many opposing voices have been heard and lot of debate has been going on. There are naturally sides of this new experiment that would require careful argumentation. In the further lines we will investigate these reasons and comment on them.

It is self-explanatory that the problem raised a lot of debate. The issue at stake is not at all straightforward. Pro and counter opinions were brought at every possible level. The highest debate level was of course within the Second Chamber of the Parliament. The pro and cons positions were stated on clear party lines, as politics usually works in the Netherlands. While PvdA and D66 were for the experiment, VVD has refrained from casting a vote and CDA was definitely against. Except for the indecision of VVD, there are no surprises in this scheme. Finally the agreement reached was that the experiment will continue only on a relatively small scale and if the first results will be successful the large scale will be subjected again in parliamentary sessions. Let us indeed consider the dilemma related to this experiment. What are the contradictory issues? Obviously the argument against is concerned with the use of human potential for the sake of science. The people for the experiment were not at all hard to be found; hard-drug addicts that heard about free distribution of heroine did not hesitate at all to offer their services. The experiment would make de facto use of these human beings for medical purposes; the outcome though is not even visible, therefore the policy is at big risk. In the worst case the people will become even more addicted and after the heroine administration there would be a negative instead of a positive outcome.

The argument against is reasonable but cannot see behind a traditional view of “laissez-faire”. Answering to the concern about experiments with human beings, it is

known that the subjects, very carefully selected after all, have previously failed to be cured by standard treatments with methadone in the special anti-drug centers. Thus, this is the ultimate chance for them and maybe a great chance for new hard-drug users to be actually cured. Wouldn't it be inhuman to let them hopelessly leave in their addiction, without any chance of them to be cured? Moreover, the experiment in its initial form would only test a limited number of subjects and in function of the results would modify the size of the target group. There is of course another reason, a hidden one, underlying this proposal. By constructing such special centers with controlled administration of heroine and by amplifying the experiment at a larger or even a natural scale, the whole hard-drug operations that are presently out of control would be controlled and limited. Why would hard-drug users look for heroine on the black market if they could get their sufficient potion in official centers? Besides, at the same time, even without their knowledge, attempts could be made to cure them. It is not a much more different issue than the acceptance of euthanasia, after all. The beginners could be cured eventually, while the old addicts without hope of being cured, could be in this way kept under control. It might sound egoistic, but in any case the idea of this experiment could be developed into a solution for the uncontrolled distribution of hard-drugs. Netherlands is already a pioneer in the soft-drugs policy and it seems that there are far less problems relating to drug use here than in other countries where even the smaller quantity of soft drugs can mean months in prison. Why not try to also diminish and ultimately have under complete control the dangerous hard-drugs market?

It is highly unlikely that other states in the European Union or even in the world would make a similar step concerning drugs-policy in general and hard-drugs policy in particular as the Netherlands is presently performing. It is therefore necessary that this measures are carried through as only by having actual proves a traditional world-wide mentality regarding after all innovation would be replaced with a more liberal view.