

Dear Mr Mayor,

Dear Mr State Governor,

Dear Mr Minister,

Your Excellency Ambassadors,

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for the hospitality of the city of Blagoevgrad shown to me and for inviting me here to speak on the award “the cowardly dies every day, the brave – only once” in memoriam of the Italian magistrate Giovanni Falcone”.

My name is Erik Leijonmarck and I am secretary general of European Cities Action Network for Drug Free Societies (ECAD) which this city, Blagoevgrad, is a member of.

ECAD was founded in 1994 by cities that wanted stronger actions on illicit drugs and reject legalization of drugs. Since then, our cities have worked very hard to address the size of their drug problems through concerted actions on drugs by investing in prevention, treatment and control.

Use of illicit drugs is a preventable malady and a risk factor for a wide range of negative outcomes including mental and other illness, school dropout and academic failure, road accidents, unemployment, low life satisfaction and relationship problems. Drug use and other social problems are intertwined so that drugs use is associated with and commonly exacerbates other problems.

ECAD is a warm supporter of the UN drug conventions which restricts the use of drugs to medical and scientific purposes only. The success of the conventions is evident when comparing use of illicit drugs, which amounts to roughly 5 percent annual prevalence, to levels of use of licit drugs such as tobacco and alcohol, which are up to ten times higher.

Those seeking to replicate policies of commercialization and legalization of mind altering substances like those already in place for alcohol and tobacco, have a hard time accounting for the health burden to our societies and cities from those legal drug industries.

There is no inherent conflict between the international drug control and human rights. Control over drugs does not equate mass incarceration of drug users. It is important to maintain societal norms of non-drug use supported by enforcement of the law while ensuring that those with an addiction problem are directed towards treatment to prevent them from relapsing in crime and addiction. This is not a choice between using either the law or the health care but a choice to utilize both whenever appropriate.

It is important to recognize that the trafficking and retail sales of illicit drugs constitute an important source of revenue for organized crime. Drug demand reduction is therefore imperative to break the power of the mafias by undermining a vital source of income to them. To seriously combat organized crime each of us must come together and do our part. We must never give up on policing and prosecuting criminals and their organizations but we must also be tough and address the

vulnerabilities in our communities that legitimize crime and fuels demand for drugs. ECAD is working hard to do the latter and we are very encouraging to those who do the former.

We are very glad to have the city of Blagoevgrad on board for this important work and we are very proud over the work being done by Giovanni Falcone and his successors, in Italy, in Bulgaria and across Europe.

Thank you.