

Speech European Parliament, februari 23th 2016

Goodafternoon everybody, it is an honour to be invited here today and i am more than happy to share my views with you.

My name is Michel Degens, i am the president of the Mambo Social Club. We are a cannabis social club based in Belgium and we cultivate cannabis for our members. Our members are recreational and medical users of cannabis.

The fact that i am standing here today is the proof of how wrong the current system regarding cannabis is. Before you shouldnt have to stand an idealist and activist, but doctors and scientists. The fact that sick people are turning their hope towards people like me and not towards doctors and specialists raises questions about how we see the cannabisplant today and how we treat people that choose to use it, weither this is for recreational or medical reasons. Science for example has allready proven that domestic violence rates drop if people have acces to cannabis. This is not a medical property, but one of the many positive side effects. I also happen to be the kind of person that rather talks about positive side effects than about collateral damage.

When i am thinking about the medical use of cannabis i think that Science needs to conduct more studys and the medical sector needs to acknowledge that there is something they can't explain yet. This is no reason though to obstruct the patients that are using cannabis with succes today to relieve their pains and symptoms, in whatever form that may be. It's not because you can't explain something it should be forbidden. The reason to keep this medicine prohibited probably lies elsewhere and can not be justified any longer today.

The cannabisplant should not be allowed to be exlusive for Big Pharma or allready wealthy entrepreneurs who are interested in the plant because of its money generating properties. The plant is from the people, too many lives have been affected for worse because people have been labeled and treated as criminals just for using the plant. It is impossible to justify that it would be ok for investors to make a lot of money with something people have been punished harshley over and had their lives and futures ruined for.

Cannabis is a plant that belongs to everyone, not only a few. The cannabis genetics we have available today are the work of a lot of passionate people from all over the planet, they are not the achievements of Big pharma companies. For this reason the plant will always be from the people, just as it should. It will be impossible to take the plant away from the people because people are really passionate about this plant. They have a social, cultural and spriritual bond with cannabis and they recognize the benefits of the plant.

There is no problem with pharma companies being allowed to cultivate cannabis as a medicine, but only when the patients and citizens have the same right to do so.

We need legitimacy for the plant and the people that choose to use it, whether it be for recreational reasons or medical reasons. The use should be decriminalised and patients should have access to cannabis in the form they choose and that fits them best.

Patients need to have the freedom of choice to choose where they want to obtain their cannabis. If they want to grow it themselves, if they want to buy it at a pharmacy or if they want to appoint a cannabis social club or a compassionate grower to grow it for them that is entirely up to their choice. Medical users of cannabis should have the freedom to choose the system that fits them best and to make that decision themselves.

There should be a freedom of choice and the options are clear: people need to be allowed to grow a certain number of plants, and regulations for home cultivation should be imposed. The production of cannabis for medical purposes should be regulated and proper standards should be imposed. People should be allowed to unite in cannabis social clubs so that they have the right to cultivate cannabis collectively for their own personal consumption. These clubs should get a government issued permit to cultivate and distribute cannabis to their members and governments need to impose a clear set of rules for these clubs.

In turn these clubs then can be taxed and they can provide jobs and create revenue. Revenue that today entirely disappears into the illegal circuit and the pockets of criminals. These clubs can fulfill a social function and they are in the position to sense and feel if persons are developing problems, so that they can provide guidance towards professional help if needed. They can also cultivate cannabis for sick members and grow exactly those strains that suit the patients needs best. The Cannabis Social Club is a good model that can play an important role at the heart of a community. It is important that the economic model that will be implemented in the future in Europe is a compassion driven social economy that benefits communities and people instead of a capitalistic model that only has attention for financial profit and gains for a few. This plant has the potential to bring so much good to humanity in general, as a medicine, as an economic resource and as a recreational drug that is less harmful than the socially accepted drugs Alcohol and Tobacco, let's not be blind for this potential. If you look at the state of the planet it is clear that we need this change, let's accept and embrace this.

Thank you.