

Press Release – *Legalizace* Magazine

November 15, 2021—Prague

Writing about cannabis is a crime!

On November 3, 2021, the *Legalizace* magazine and its editor-in-chief, Robert Veverka, were convicted of inciting and promoting “toxicomania” by the district court in the town of Bruntál.

The editor-in-chief, Robert Veverka, and the publishing company of the *Legalizace* magazine, both prosecuted since the summer of 2020 for allegedly inciting and promoting “toxicomania”, were given a one-year prison sentence contingent on a probationary period of two and a half years as well as a fine of 50,000 CZK by the district court in Bruntál following two court hearings.

According to the public prosecutor, Jan Žalman, Veverka and the publishing company have committed the crime of inciting and promoting toxicomania by publishing more than two hundred articles during 2010–2020 which allegedly gave the impression of cannabis processing and handling being legal, provided qualified instructions on cannabis cultivation, processing, and storage, and by publishing cannabis-themed advertisements as well as offering legal and freely marketable cannabis seeds which appeared several times as a supplement of the printed magazine issues. This conjecture was confirmed by Judge Marek Stach in his verdict on November 3, 2021, when he found the defendants guilty of the above.

Although the judge admitted that the *Legalizace* magazine gives the impression of a very objective medium, as it provides broadscale, comprehensive information and expert opinions as well as insight into the medical aspects of cannabis, he proclaimed the reason for his verdict is that some of the articles may incite the desire in certain individuals to acquire equipment that could enable them to grow, harvest, process, and use cannabis in a way which is illegal. The judge also stated that if the printed photographs depict cannabis flowers evidently covered with resin, these images cannot therefore be of industrial cannabis without psychoactive properties. According to the judge, such content is a temptation to readers; almost every issue of the magazine allegedly possesses the capability of influencing the conduct of readers and inciting them to abuse addictive substances. Although the majority of the articles found in the published magazine issues are legally sound, according to Judge Marek Stach, even one single article with the potential to incite readers is enough for the *Legalizace* magazine to constitute the crime of inciting and promoting toxicomania.

“The judge mentioned that he is not competent to assess the benefits of the current legislation, the benefits of cannabis products in healthcare, or the negative effects of cannabis use, but that he must base his verdict on the existing legislation which is binding for all. He stated that according to his judgement, *Legalizace* magazine evidently and factually constituted the criminal offence of inciting and promoting toxicomania. He did not take into account the legislative provisions allowing for cannabis to be handled legally in certain cases or the comprehensive and educational nature of the information published in the magazine. On the contrary, the judge expressed his doubts as to whether the individuals who granted interviews to the magazine were made aware of its content and overall message. Personally, I consider the verdict to be very biased and severely restrictive of the freedom of expression, the right to express political opinion, and the right to information,” says Robert Veverka.

The verdict is not final, the defendants are waiting for the written statement of the reasons for the court’s decision to be issued and will use this time to consider a possible appeal. The verdict has caused considerable outrage among the lay and expert public alike, which is calling on the newly appointed Chamber of Deputies to update the outdated legislation on psychoactive substances and the specific section of the law referring to the inciting and promoting of toxicomania.

If you care about freedom of the press, you are encouraged to donate to Robert Veverka’s crowdfunding transparent bank account no. 2900469065/2010 (IBAN: CZ432010000002900469065, BIC/SWIFT: FIOBCZPPXXX –

<https://ib.fio.cz/ib/transparent?a=2900469065>). The funds collected will be used to cover the costs of the lawsuit and for the further fight for freedom of expression.

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Robert Veverka is the publisher and editor-in-chief of *Legalizace* magazine, the head of the Legalizace.cz NGO, a member of the Prague Council Commission for Drug Policy Coordination, and a representative and member of the Security Commission and Education Commission of the Prague 2 municipal borough.