

## **DRUG SCENE CHANGES DURING TWO DECADES: SLOVAKIA 1993 – 2012**

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### **Abstract:**

Study presents short overview of drug situation's indicators during the first, or heroin decade of drugs, and then during the second, soft and synthetic drugs decade of drugs in Slovakia. Then the results of series of nation-wide school surveys, mapping development of licit and illicit drugs use among children and youth during nineties are outlined. The results indicated constant growth of licit and illicit drugs consumption among primary school pupils, and secondary school students until the fourth wave of nation-wide school surveys in the years 2006 – 2007. However, the next wave after four years has detected profound change in the expected pattern of further growth in the case of illicit drugs. Instead of this decline of use or at least stabilization occurred among Slovak youth. At the same time we have found growth of use in the case of licit drugs – alcohol and tobacco, more profoundly among girls. Also the use of new synthetic drugs among young people was revealed via traditional school survey.

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**Key Words:** Licit and illicit drugs, school surveys, new synthetic drugs

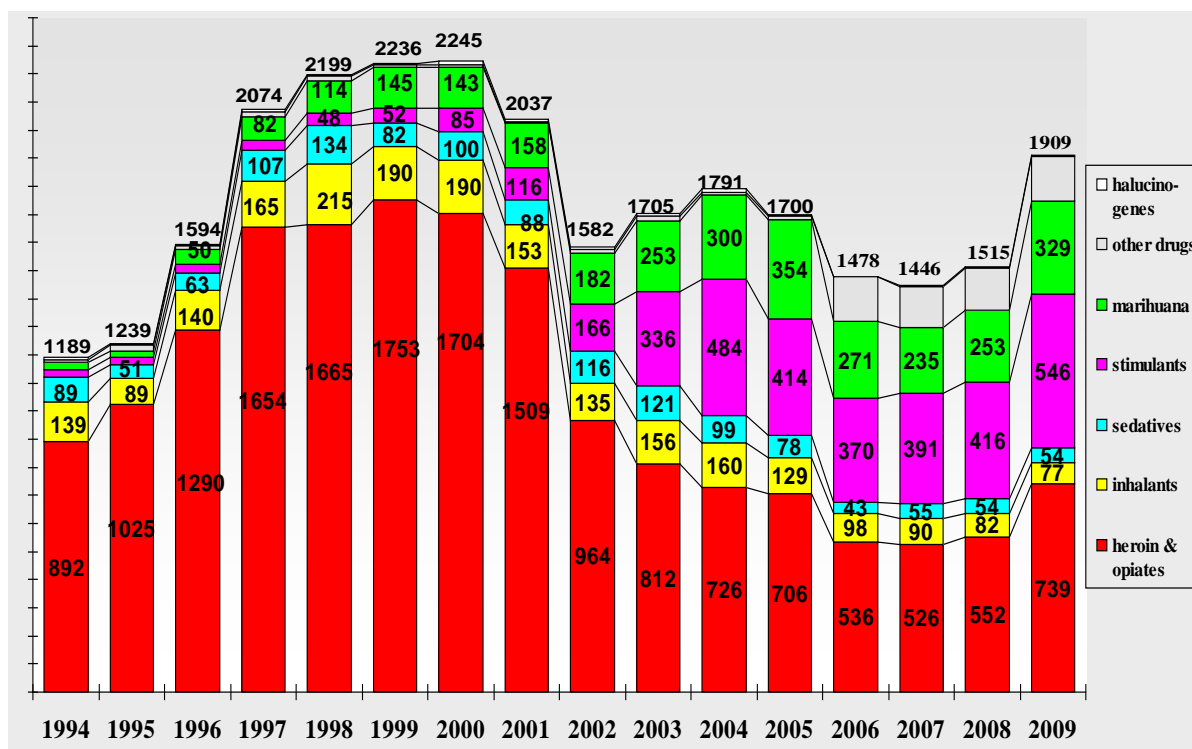
### **Introduction:**

Slovakia became an independent state by January 1<sup>st</sup> 1993, when common state of Czechs and Slovaks ceased to exist. This event had happened three years after the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Czechoslovakia was divided by a parliamentary decision, through which the two parts of former state became two independent states: Czech and Slovak Republics. Slovakia has an area of 49 thousands km<sup>2</sup>, overall number of inhabitants is 5.4 million.

Slovakia in similar way as neighbour post-communist countries in Europe did not have real drug problem before the year 1990, as the main problem consists in tobacco and before all alcohol. After few years the problem with illicit drugs, however, became fully developed and so called "heroin epidemics" had reached its peak around the year 2000 (see Picture 1). After this heroin prevalence, indicated mainly by number of treated heroin addicts, went down and other non-opiate drugs prevailed, resulting to the occurrence of new synthetic drugs.

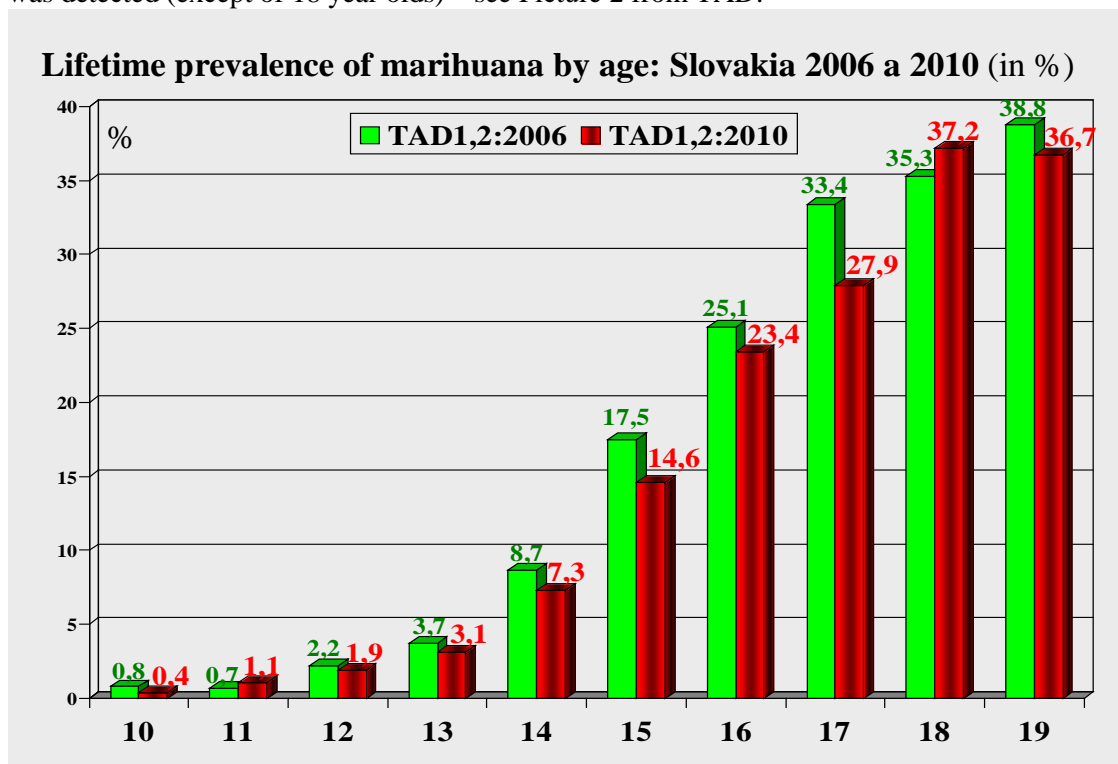
### **Main Text:**

School surveys are part of key indicator of drug situation monitoring in population. In Slovakia the fifth wave of school surveys TAD (Tobacco–Alcohol–Drugs) took place in primary school pupils from 10-11 to 14-15 years (TAD1), in secondary school students from 15-16 to 19-20 years (TAD2), and in their teachers (TAD3). These nation-wide representative surveys were implemented in the spring of 2010 (Nociar 2010).



Picture 1. Numbers of treated drug addicts in health care facilities: Slovakia 1994-2009  
Source: UVZ SR. Processing and graph: A. Nociar

One year later the fifth wave of the European school survey on alcohol and drugs (ESPAD) took place in secondary school students from 15-16 to 19-20 years. It should be said, that from years 1994-1995 until 2006-2007 TAD and ESPAD surveys demonstrated constant growth of illicit drugs use, before all marihuana. In the case of marihuana, however, in the years 2010-2011 clear decline was detected (except of 18 year olds) – see Picture 2 from TAD:



Picture 2. Results of the primary school pupils and the secondary school students by age:  
Lifetime prevalence of marihuana.

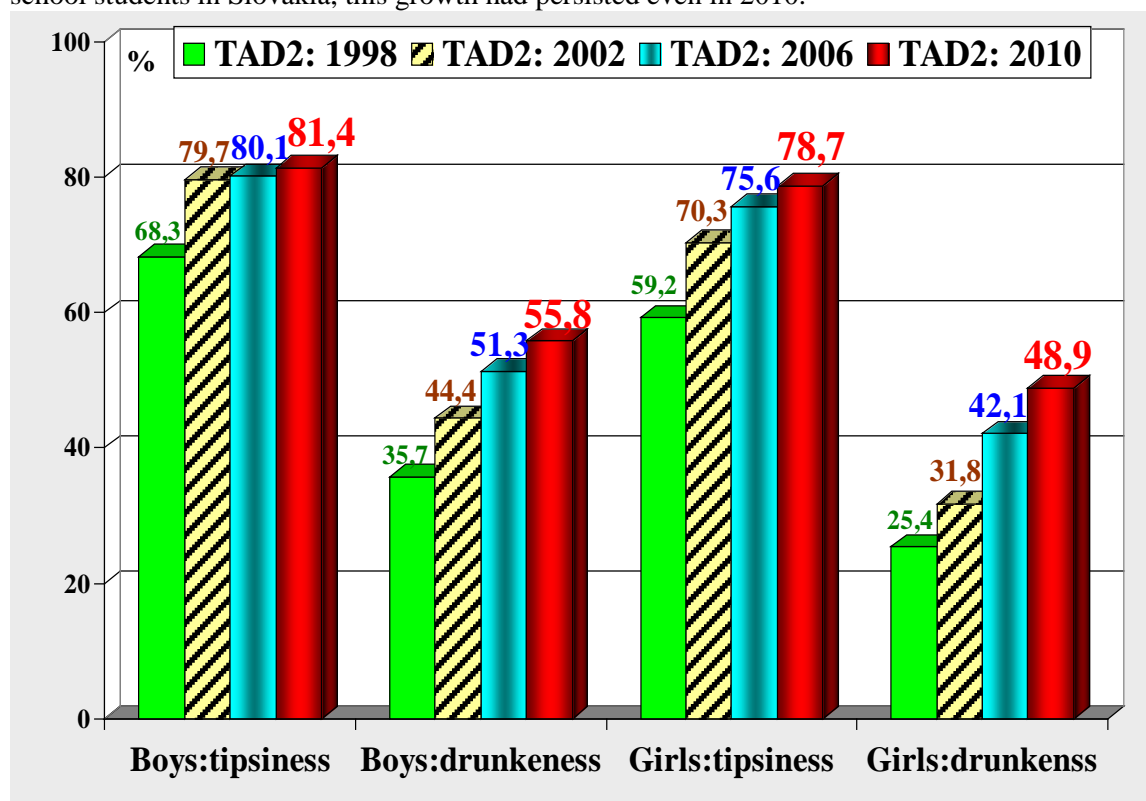
Source: UVZ SR. Processing and graph: A. Nociar

The same decline in TAD2 from 2010 had been detected practically in all remaining illicit drugs:

Table 1. Lifetime prevalence of illicit drugs – the TAD2 results from 2006 compared to the TAD2 results from 2010 (in %)

Lifetime prevalence of illicit drug	Boys		Girls		TOTAL	
	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010
Marihuana	39,1	36,4	26,5	22,4	31,6	28,5
Ecstasy	6,8	5,6	5,5	3,5	6,0	4,4
Inhalants	6,0	5,4	4,4	4,1	5,1	4,7
Amphetamines	3,2	3,6	5,6	2,7	4,5	3,1
Heroin	1,0	0,6	0,6	0,4	0,8	0,5
Cocaine	1,9	2,0	1,6	1,0	1,7	1,4
LSD	3,9	2,8	1,7	1,2	2,6	1,9
Stimulants	3,8	4,7	3,5	3,0	3,7	3,7

It should be added, however, that in the case of licit drugs, i.e. tobacco and alcohol in secondary school students in Slovakia, this growth had persisted even in 2010:



Picture 3. Results of the secondary school students by gender: tipsiness and drunkenness 1 and more time through life.

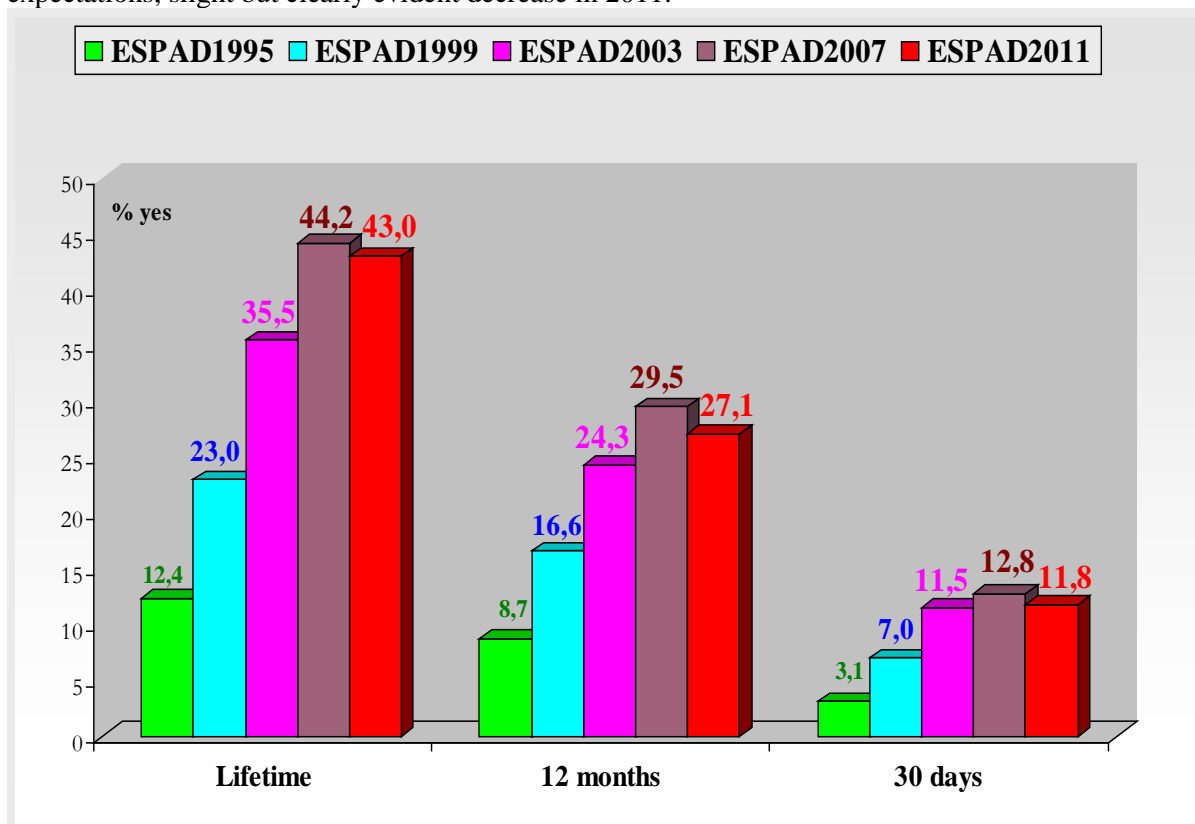
Source: UVZ SR. Processing and graph: A. Nociar

The ESPAD survey results from 2011 in majority of cases had confirmed a trend towards decrease of illicit drugs:

Table 2. Lifetime prevalence of illicit drugs – the ESPAD results from 2007 compared to the ESPAD results from 2011 (in %)

Lifetime prevalence of illicit drug	Boys		Girls		TOTAL	
	2007	2011	2007	2011	2007	2011
Marihuana	50,6	47,9	37,8	38,3	44,2	43,4
Ecstasy	8,6	7,2	6,5	5,1	7,6	6,2
Inhalants	10,6	10,0	8,6	8,3	9,6	9,2
Pervitin (meth)	8,1	7,4	6,4	6,2	7,3	6,8
Alcohol with pills for getting high	14,1	11,0	19,5	13,9	16,8	12,4
Heroin	1,0	2,4	0,6	1,4	1,7	2,0
Cocaine	2,6	4,0	2,5	2,8	2,6	3,4
LSD	6,6	7,1	5,0	5,1	5,8	6,2
Synthetic cannabinoids	-	5,4	-	2,5	-	4,1
Mephedrone	-	2,3	-	1,0	-	1,7

The ESPAD surveys from 1995 till 2007 have also demonstrated constant growth of illicit drugs use, before all in marihuana. But also in the case of marihuana there was, in contrary to our expectations, slight but clearly evident decrease in 2011:

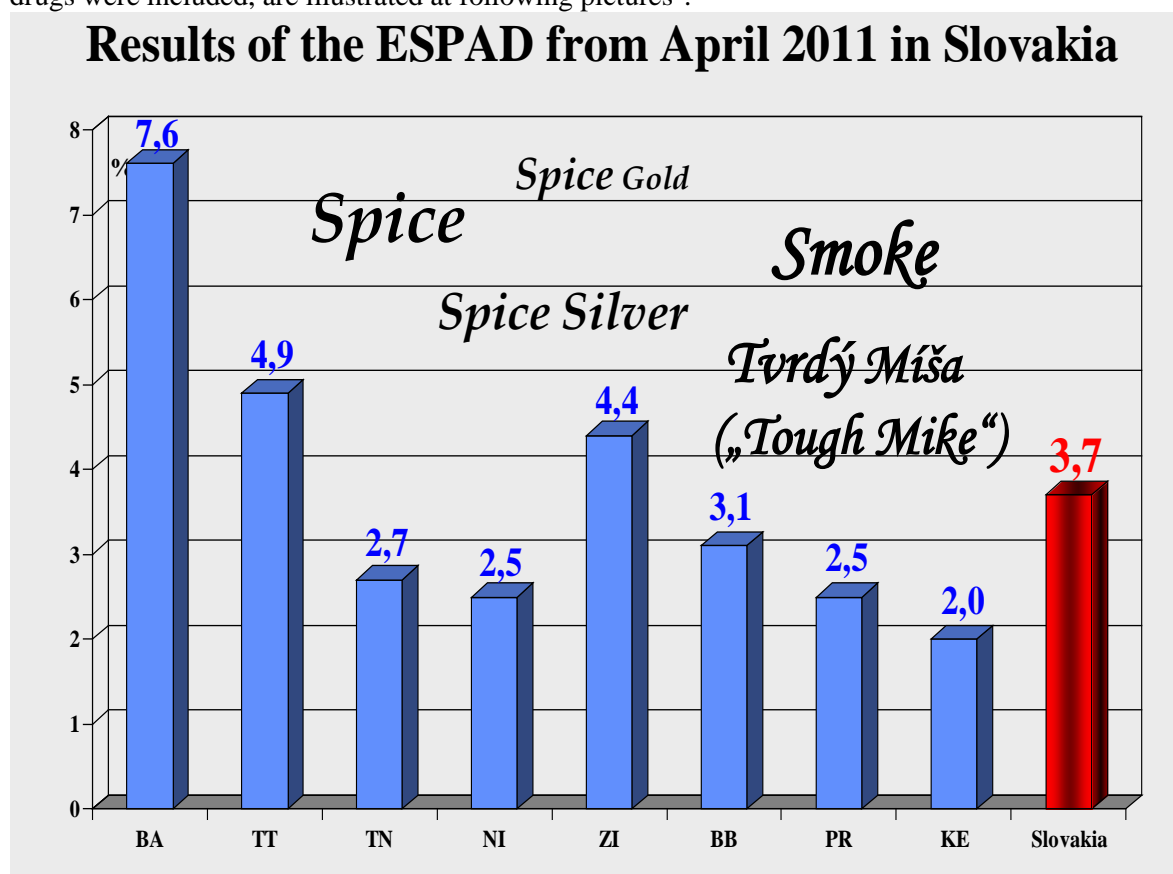


Picture 4. Results of the secondary school students in Slovakia: Marihuana prevalence  
Source: UVZ SR. Processing and graph: A. Nociar

After the fifth wave of nation-wide surveys we can conclude, that drug situation is getting relatively stable, or in some instances we might see some improvement. Anyhow, before we begin to celebrate, we ought to be aware of the fact, that this decline is really small and the level of eventual stabilization is unacceptably high.

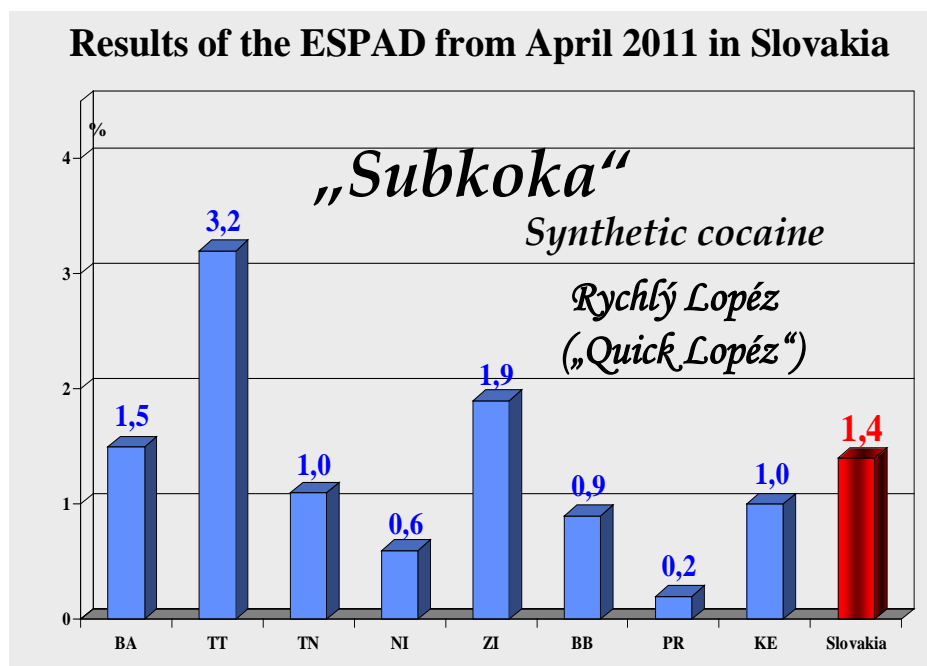
It is difficult to say anything conclusive towards causes of that decrease. What might be said is, that Slovakia have joined majority of EU member countries, where such a trend have started earlier. It is also possible, that we are again witnessing very quick changes of drug scene, rise of synthetic cannabinoids and cathinons, and dangerous mixtures of unknown composition, sold as „bath salts”, causing sometimes uncontrolled aggressive behaviour.

Therefore it was important to get at least preliminary information regarding new synthetic drugs and their possible presence in our potentially vulnerable population of young people. The results of ESPAD in the whole country and eight districts, where such a questions on new synthetic drugs were included, are illustrated at following pictures<sup>1</sup>:



Picture 5. Results of the secondary school students in Slovakia: Lifetime prevalence of synthetic cannabinoids  
 Source: UVZ SR. Processing and graph: A. Nociar

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations from BA to KE stand for 8 regions of Slovakia: Bratislava, Trnava, Trenčín, Nitra, Zilina, Banska Bystrica, Prešov, Kosice



Picture 6. Lifetime prevalence of mephedrone in secondary school students in Slovakia

Source: UVZ SR. Processing and graph: A. Nociar

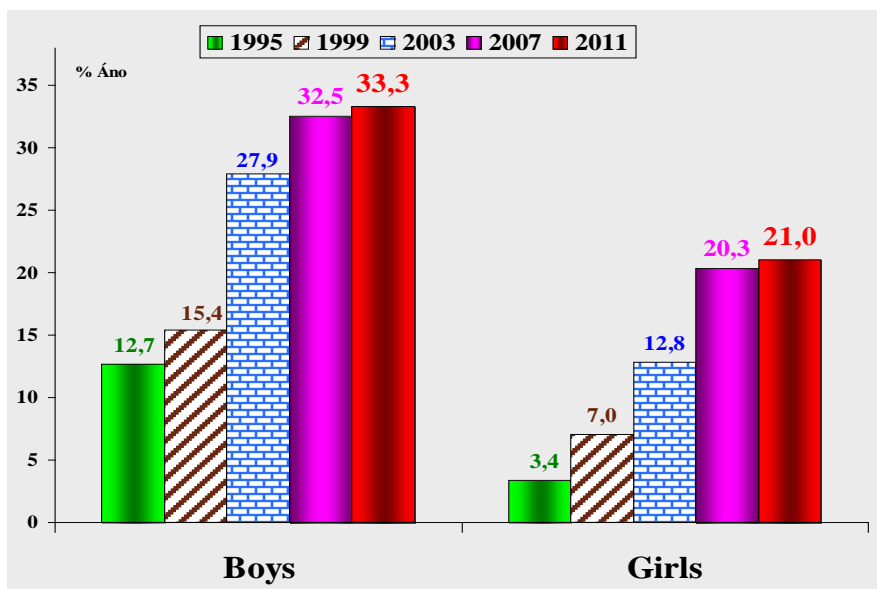
Affirmative answers to questions on new synthetic drugs are overlapped to some extent, but it might be said, that overall prevalence was around 5 %.

Reflecting further about changes on drug scene in Europe, it might be possible also, that in similar manner like after all-European “drinking binge” after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World war practically in all European countries (Smart 1989), where only after more then 20 years some decrease of per capita alcohol drinking occurred, perhaps something is happening also in the field of drugs. Following decline of illicit drug use among youth in the countries of Western Europe, such a decline, after some time shift started also in the Central and Eastern European post-communist countries, where illicit drug use also have reached its natural peak.

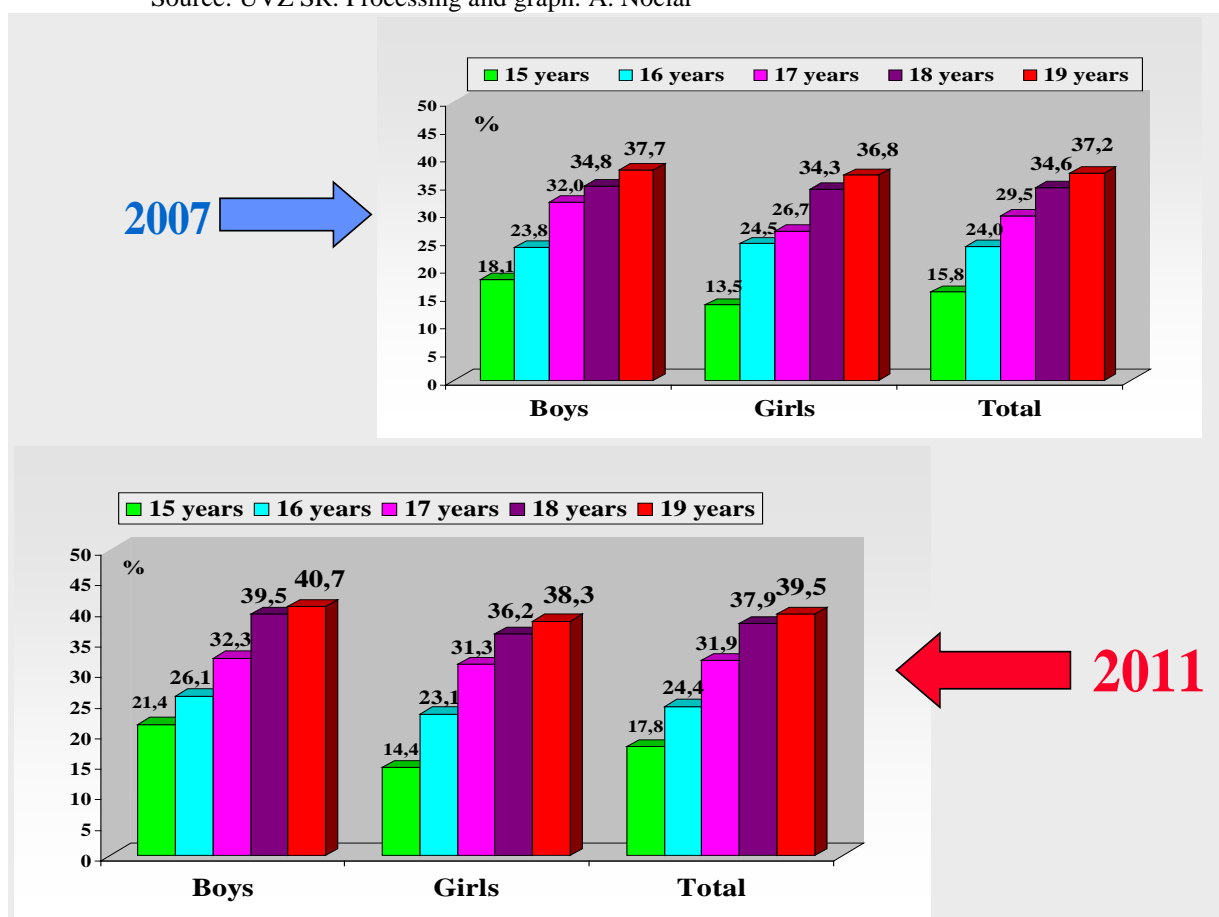
Sorry to say, but growth of abusive drinking of alcohol among youth was again confirmed, especially among girls and young women. This was true not only for hazardous and risk drinking, but also in binge drinking, i.e. drinking to get drunk as quickly as possible. Because our version of questionnaire was complemented by CAGE and ADS (Nociar 2011), some results on these topics are below (see Table 3, Picture 7). Moreover, this unfavourable trend was present also in the case of tobacco (see Picture 8):

Table 3. Results of TAD2 from 2006 compared to 2010; and the ESPAD results from 2007 compared to 2011 (in %)

T A D 2006 – 2010:	Boys		Girls		TOTAL	
	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010
CAGE 3-4: problem drinking	6,8	10,2	5,1	8,8	5,7	9,4
ADS: heavy dependence signs	5,8	6,5	2,8	3,0	4,0	5,7
E S P A D 2007 – 2011:	Boys		Girls		TOTAL	
	2007	2011	2007	2011	2007	2011
CAGE 3-4: problem drinking	6,7	9,4	6,5	7,9	6,6	8,7
ADS: heavy dependence signs	5,3	6,6	3,9	4,6	4,4	5,6
Binge drinking – 5+drinks in a row: 3-times or more in 30 days)	32,5	33,3	20,3	21,0	26,3	27,6



Picture 7. Comparison of ESPAD surveys 1995-2011: binge drinking (3-5 drinks or more 3 or more times during 30 days) among secondary school students in Slovakia  
Source: UVZ SR. Processing and graph: A. Nociar



Picture 8. Comparison of the ESPAD surveys 1995-2011: regular smoking (1-5 cigarettes or more per day) among secondary school students in Slovakia  
Source: UVZ SR. Processing and graph: A. Nociar

**Conclusion:**

Except of certain decrease or stabilization of traditional drugs like marihuana, heroin, cocaine and amphetamine-like stimulants, there were detected in previous 4 – 5 years in Europe and also in

Slovakia, more and more frequent emergences on new synthetic drugs, known as „Spice“, „Legal highs“, offered via internet, or directly in so called „Smart shops“, or „Crazy shops“. EU member states as well as the EU as a whole have reacted by their own legislation changes, or common EU legislation, like in the case of mephedrone. Drug situation in Slovakia parallelizes overall situation in the EU, when after a period of traditional drug use there was swift change to new synthetic drugs, like metamphetamine and ecstasy, but more recently to synthetic cannabinoids, stimulants like mephedrone or other “Legal highs”, frequently of unclear composition.

After two decades of drug problem in Slovakia it's time to come to terms with reality – that young people today are living in the environment where a presence of drugs is no more exception. Drugs are offered via black market, or even more openly, but also in the atmosphere of more-less publicly declared opinions on illicit drugs “safety”. Moreover, we can hear that perhaps the time is coming to decriminalise, or even to legalise, at least some of them, as some voices try to declare more and more publicly.

Finally, realistically speaking, due to still high prevalence of marihuana among 15 to 19 years old, it would be reasonable to support the development of low threshold network of contact points with accessible short term counseling and treatment, targeted at so called soft drugs, including relatively new synthetic drugs and dance or disco drugs.

Anyhow, we should not forget old observation from clinical practice – that intuitive, but also empirically based conclusion: topics of so called licit, and so called illicit drugs belong to each other as a male-screw entirety, and to try to put them apart has no sense.

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