



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General Enlargement

The Director General

Brussels,

Dear Ms Epure,

Commissioner Füle asked me to reply to the letter sent by the Member Organisations of the European Expert Group on Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care on 10 November 2011. In this letter, the Commission was encouraged to use the new structural funds 2014–2020 as well as the pre-accession financial assistance to promote transition from institutional to community-based care.

I can fully agree with you that old residential institutions should belong to the past. Although responsibility for social inclusion and administration of care institutions falls under national competence, as part of its enlargement policy, the Commission has been constantly inviting candidate countries and potential candidates to pay due attention to the creation of community-based services as an alternative to institutionalisation. In general, it has encouraged candidate countries and potential candidates to take action towards promoting the inclusion of people with mental health problems, as well as their empowerment and human rights. This has been expressed notably in the yearly Progress Reports that the Commission published in October 2011. These areas are also under particular scrutiny in the monitoring process established with Croatia until its accession foreseen for 1 July 2013. The Commission may also provide pre-accession financial assistance in this respect.

So far, creation of community-based services in the enlargement countries has been slow. This is understandable, as change always requires strong political will, as well as financial means (although institutional care is even costlier). Major improvements take time, and will only be achieved in the medium or long term. Thinking needs to change also in the society as a whole. Severely disabled may also well need to stay in residential care. This is not completely excluded by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which recognises residential care as one form of care.

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It is with interest that I learn that you are developing a set of common guidelines for the transition from institutional to community-based care. These could be of assistance in the context of the enlargement policy. The contact person in DG Enlargement will be Mrs Katja de Sadeleer, Chapter Desk for Consumer and health protection (including mental health) and Coordinator on children's rights, tel. 02 296 12 47.

Yours sincerely



Stefano Sannino