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The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania welcomes and supports the EC proposal for the development of an EU strategy on mental health.

The EU strategy on mental health is of a vital importance for economic and social development of future Europe. Even more important EU mental health is for the new EU member states, which have at this moment very high prevalence of mental health problems in the population and far from effective mental health care systems.

1. How relevant is the mental health of the population for EU's strategic policy objectives?

In the draft national mental health policy, Lithuania follows and supports the WHO Declaration and Action Plan for mental health, highlighting that mental health is a very important issue in a broader context of development of individuals, families, communities and societies. In countries like Lithuania, for many decades mental health was understood only in the context of biomedical paradigm in management of mental illnesses. In the draft of a new national mental health policy, promotion of positive mental health is emphasized, as a way to a more productive and socially responsible Europe, which is in line with EU's strategic policy objectives.

2. Would an EU strategy add value to existing and envisaged actions and are the proposed priorities adequate?

The development of an EU strategy is very important in supporting new initiatives within member states and those of WHO Regional Office for Europe.

The priorities identified in the Green Paper are supported by Lithuania as very relevant to the current situation in Europe, and especially in new member states.

The main topics of the Green Paper consultation meetings, held in January, March and May 2006, represented basic systemic problems which Lithuania and other new member states in the Central and Eastern Europe are facing, and which will be an enormous challenge in the coming years:

a) Integrating of mental health as a strategically important public health problem in national policies, through proper mental health promotion and prevention activities, in order to effectively

manage epidemics of destructive and self-destructive behaviour (suicides, violence, alcohol and drug abuse) in the population.

b) Development of community based mental health services as alternative to the traditional pattern of institutionalisation of adults and children having mental health problems, and putting a special emphasis on human rights in the field of mental health care, to prevent the traditional patterns of stigma, intolerance and social exclusion and to introduce the culture of social inclusion.

In the EU strategy it should be clearly stated in that historical patterns of institutionalisation of children and adults with all kinds of social and mental health problems (including mild cases) has no future in modern Europe. This could contribute to the willingness of politicians and societies in the new member states to make clear political decisions about an urgent need to invest in modern approaches such as parent training, service users involvement, development of community based services, and independent monitoring of systems and services performance.

c) Introduction of modern approaches in the field of mental health information, research, evaluation and monitoring, with a goal to move to new level of evidence-based mental health policy and services.

3. Are proposed initiatives appropriate to support the coordination between member states, to promote the integration of mental health into health and non-health policies and stakeholder action, and to better liaise research and policy on mental health aspects?

The initiatives presented in the Green Paper are welcome and are very appropriate in achieving the stated goals.

Coordination between Member states.

It needs to be taken into account that some of the new member states will need support from other EU member states and EU, to develop a new level of research and monitoring capacity in the field of public mental health, and to introduce modern concept of public mental health as an integrated component of public health. It is our belief that development of an EU mental health strategy will be of a crucial importance for reaching these strategic goals in the new member states.

Mental health in health and non-health policies and stakeholder action.

Even more, than the former EU countries, new EU members, like Lithuania, need to overcome the tradition of non-cooperation or ineffective cooperation between sectors in the field of managing public mental health problems. The process of development of a new national mental health policy was a successful attempt to introduce all main stakeholders, including representatives of civil society and representatives of non-health sector, into the process of policy formulation and development. There is a growing understanding in Lithuania that mental health problems cannot be solved in psychiatric institutions and that NGOs, municipalities, non-health sector, and general society have to share the responsibility in the process of tackling mental health problems.

Linking between research and policy.

It should be even more emphasized that positive changes cannot take place without constant independent evaluation of processes and measured outcomes.

In summary, Lithuania welcomes the Green Paper on Mental Health and is very much looking forward to the development of an EU strategy on mental health and the formation of an EU platform on mental health. In the EU mental health strategy, Lithuania as a new member country, would like to see even clearer statements about the need to develop and implement mental health policies based on modern values and evidence.

Yours very truly,

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Minister of Health

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