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Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Minutes

of the public launch event of the Report on the Seminar on Children's Mental Health and Child Friendly Justice (London, November 2017) held in Strasbourg on Tuesday, 24 April 2018, from 2.30 to 3.30 pm

The Chairperson opened the public launch event and welcomed the participants.

Mr Michele Nicoletti, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, thanked Baroness Massey for having initiated the London seminar, and for her strong commitment to advancing the cause of children and the protection of the rights of young people. A society that did not take care of its children was a society with no soul and no future. The seminar in London had been an important step towards building a child-friendly society. He highlighted the importance of ensuring that professionals are trained and that there is coordination among various professionals. Early prevention policies needed to be enshrined in relevant legislation. It was important to move from a system that punishes, to a system that listens, understands and rehabilitates. Furthermore, for the system to be effective, it was important to build it not only for children and young people, but also with children and young people, and Mr Nicoletti was particularly pleased to see young people present at the launch event in Strasbourg. In conclusion, he expressed his commitment to continue the excellent work of his predecessor Ms Stella Kyriakides in making child protection and well-being one of the Assembly's priorities, and to closely co-operate with the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development on these topics.

Baroness Massey expressed her thanks to the Secretariats in the United Kingdom and Strasbourg for their help with organising the seminar in London and the present launch event. The aim of the London seminar had been to discuss how to improve the access to and the efficiency of child mental health services and the child-friendly justice system. The seminar had brought together an exciting group of people with very different backgrounds; about half of them young people. The publication on the seminar summarised the discussions held. The aim of the launch event was to discuss how to take the report conclusions forward. Another, national, launch event would be held in London on 19 July, and would bring together government and NGO representatives, as well as young people. In October, two round tables will be organised with the participation of authorities dealing with mental health and the justice system. They would look at the existing gaps and suggest further action. The PACE Sub-committee on children would also follow up on the conclusions of the report.

Ms Maryam Bi works for YoungMinds, which is - according to her - the number one UK charity dealing with mental well-being of young people. She expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to take part in the London seminar. Many young people felt that their views were not taken into account. Ms Bi was particularly interested in the role of culture, which was often disregarded. For example, among South Asian communities there were no words for talking about mental well-being. In many cultures, there was no dialogue on these topics, which were considered a taboo. It was important that decisions on policies that affect young people were taken in consultation with them. Maryam expressed her hope to use the lessons learned from the London seminar in her future work in this area.

¹ Minutes approved and declassified by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 25 June 2018 in Strasbourg.

Mr Victor Azubuike from the University of Warwick shared his first experience of interaction with the justice system, when his friend had been sentenced to prison at the age of 17. He expressed his concern that sometimes after prison the system did not provide young people with any means to better themselves, and they ended up re-offending. At the seminar in London, Mr Azubuike had been very impressed with examples of good practice from different countries. Of particular interest were: the Icelandic children's house model where help was provided to children who were subject to sexual violence; the training of the judiciary in Austria; and multi-agency child-centred co-operation in France. The two areas addressed by the seminar were of crucial importance in the context of the United Kingdom, where the age of criminal responsibility was still at 10 years, and where mental health issues were endemic. Mr Azubuike expressed his hope to continue his involvement in the two areas in the future.

Ms Stella Kyriakides thanked Baroness Massey, experts, Regina Jensdottir and the young people for their contribution to the London seminar. She pointed out that mental health issues had only started receiving attention in recent years, yet they remain stigmatised. It was important to analyse what we were doing well and what still needed to be done. Stronger focus was needed on prevention in her view. It was also particularly important to identify children who need help early. Services geared towards the needs of the children were crucial. The protection of vulnerable children remained high on the PACE agenda, in particular with respect to the migration crisis. It was necessary to address in particular the mental health needs of these children, and to integrate them effectively into society. Justice in many countries remained based on the needs of adults: child-friendly justice needed to be made a priority. Parliaments played an important role in this respect. Ms Kyriakides suggested that the present launch event could help raise awareness among parliamentarians about the topics of children's mental health and child-friendly justice and put these topics on the agendas of national parliaments. She also called on the parliamentarians to make full use of the materials produced by the Council of Europe Children's Rights Division.

Ms Regina Jensdottir felt that the London seminar had been a good opportunity to promote the Council of Europe instruments. In particular, the Guidelines on child-friendly justice were available in almost all official languages of the Council of Europe member states. Many countries were now trying to apply these guidelines, but many difficult issues remain to be solved as the focus on mental health was still a new phenomenon, related to many other topics, such as cyberbullying, eating disorders, computer addiction etc. Children suffering from mental health problems were often particularly vulnerable, and they were often also in conflict with the law. The London seminar had provided a great opportunity to listen to young people, some of whom were former offenders or victims of crime. It had resulted in a confrontation of views, which was useful and had been an eye-opening experience for many participants. It had allowed building on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe's recommendations and practices on child participation. This was something that the Council of Europe did a lot in its work, for example in the framework of the Lanzarote Convention and Committee. Children were sometimes more experts than adults and PACE as well as national parliaments should involve them as much as possible, while making sure that relevant safeguard policies were in place. The Council of Europe supported training programmes in many countries on how this could be done. It also supported the "Barnahus" model². A thematic exchange on mental health was foreseen in October. Ms Jensdottir stressed the importance of multidisciplinary mechanisms for detecting the children who are in need of help. In conclusion, she stressed that she was looking forward to the future co-operation with PACE and other partners on the topics of child mental well-being and child-friendly justice.

Ms Kerry McCarthy spoke about the wide spread of gang crime and knife crime in the United Kingdom, where very young teenagers were often involved. She mentioned a recent case in which a 19-year-old had been killed by five teenagers. One of them had had a psychotic episode at the trial – so mental health issues came to play here as well - and the case had been abandoned in his respect, but the others had been convicted to lifelong sentences. Ms McCarthy stressed that this was not only a tragedy for the victim and his family, but also for the perpetrators and their families as well.

Lord Touhig echoed congratulations to Baroness Massey on a successful event, which he had attended, and which he deemed very interesting and exciting. He pointed out the importance of identifying vulnerable young people, stressing the fact that in England and Wales 70 per cent of children excluded

²Barnahus (which literally means Children's house) is a child-friendly, interdisciplinary and multiagency centre where different professionals work under one roof in investigating suspected child sexual abuse cases and providing appropriate support for child victims in line with the Children Advocacy Centre model.

from schools had learning difficulties. They lacked basic skills, and this sometimes led to mental health issues and problems with the criminal justice system. He stressed in particular the danger of creating a social underclass. According to surveys, a child who had adverse childhood experience was 15 times more likely to commit an offence against other people. With preventive measures, the rates of violations could be substantially reduced.

Mr Joseph O'Reilly, who had also attended the London seminar, was impressed with the high quality of the discussions and mentioned that he had been struck by the number of young people who had themselves had problems in the past, but now worked as youth workers, and whose testimonies were extraordinary. Mr O'Reilly felt that the likelihood of impact of their involvement was far greater than that of highly educated professionals with a more privileged background.

Mr Valeriu Ghiletschi thanked Baroness Massey for this initiative. He echoed President Nicoletti's statement, with regard to the lack of trained professionals being an important challenge. Indeed, this was very important and Mr Ghiletschi noted that he had stressed this in his report currently underway with the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development. It was also very important to focus on prevention. If more support was offered to families, there would be less need to invest into other services.

Ms Reina de Bruijn-Wezeman, who had also attended the seminar, stressed how important it was to have young people participate, as it was useful to hear first-hand accounts of their experiences. She pointed out that the "unconventional" working methods used at the seminar allowed to gain a lot of information in a short period of time. Finally, she expressed her shock with regards to some of the information about the conditions in mental-health institutions both for children and adults that she had learned about during the seminar, which she assumed was not something limited only to the United Kingdom. She would definitely pay special attention to the issue especially given the report currently being prepared by the Dutch Secretary of State on the state of mental health institutions in her country.

Baroness Massey said that it had been a great pleasure to have this exchange of views. She agreed that more had to be done to involve families and children. She stressed that parliamentarians had the experience and influence to go back to their countries and raise awareness by organising round tables, seminars and through other means as well. Baroness Massey thanked the participants for the exciting meeting, and the Council of Europe and the PACE President for their support and co-operation.

List of Participants / Liste des participants

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Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable

List of members (81 seats) / Liste des membres (81sièges)

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M. Stefaan VERCAMER	Belgium / Belgique	Ms Petra De SUTTER
Mme Milica MARKOVIĆ	Bosnia and Herzegovina / Bosnie-Herzégovine	ZZ...
Mr Nikolay ALEKSANDROV	Bulgaria / Bulgarie	Mr Krasimir BOGDANOV
Ms Aneliya KLISAROVA	Bulgaria / Bulgarie	ZZ...
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Mme Marie-Christine DALLOZ	France / France	Mme Sophie AUCONIE
Mme Jennifer DE TEMMERMAN	France / France	M. Yves DANIEL
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