



European Network of (Ex-)Users and Survivors of Psychiatry

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## **We strongly condemn the appalling human rights violations in the Pliskiv Psychoneurological Institution in Vinnytsia, Ukraine**

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The European Network of (Ex-)Users and Survivors of Psychiatry (ENUSP) and the European Disability Forum strongly condemn the abuse and severe human rights violations of the residents of the Pliskiv Psychoneurological Residential Institution in Vinnytsia, Ukraine, recently uncovered by activists of the organisation "USER".

The disturbing footage collected by activists exposed practices that should never happen to any person: residents, all who are persons with psychosocial and other disabilities, were kept locked up in a dark, cold room, completely naked irrespective of their gender and age. They were locked, without any support or means of communication, in a room without furniture or access to a toilet.

The footage was published on October 29, 2019 by Ukrainian media UA Vinnitsia. It was filmed by activists of the organization "USER", an ENUSP member. The video shows a room with a locked door, in the dark, where a group of about 10 people of different sexes and ages are kept completely naked. The room was cold and unheated, yet there were no blankets or clothes. The activists testify that these people were detained for a long time, were prevented from all communication with the outside world, and were unable to leave the room, not even having access to a toilet. Because of this, the residents were forced to relieve themselves and live in a room full of faeces, in a horrible stench. In addition, another group of naked women was discovered in locked rooms on the second floor, similarly with no personnel to assist them and with no access to water, toilets or urgent medical aid. Activists of "USER" declared that residents of the institution had said that they were regularly locked up like that, from 10 p.m. at night until 5 a.m. in the morning.

We would like to remind the Ukrainian authorities that such treatment and circumstances constitute torture and ill-treatment and are prohibited under human rights treaties. We further remind the Ukrainian authorities that every person has the right to be treated with respect for their rights and dignity.

We underline the fact that such grave human rights violations were discovered only as a result of monitoring undertaken upon complaints received from certain citizens. However, based on the testimonies of residents and other citizens, there is evidence that such a situation is systemic, and the abuse of the residents has been ongoing for years. Moreover, there are other institutions of the same type in Ukraine where monitoring is not being performed.

We call on the authorities of Ukraine to extend the investigation process which is currently taking place with regard to this particular institution and to monitor other institutions of the same kind, always with the participation of civil society activists and using international assessment tools, such as the WHO Quality Rights programme and guidance from European and national organisations of

persons with disabilities, such as USER. This must ensure that any further violations of the rights of people in Ukrainian institutions who may be illegally detained against their will or whose personal assets are illegally used by institutions are revealed, remedied and prevented in the future.

It is essential to note that under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), which Ukraine ratified in 2010, people with disabilities have the right to live in the community (art.19) and the right to enjoy the same rights and freedoms as others (art. 5), and be free from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art.15). This scandal clearly illustrates that institutional culture not only denies people the right to live in the community, but also enables cruel and inhuman practices.

We call on the authorities of Ukraine, to urgently put an immediate end to these human rights violations and ensure de-institutionalization and abolition of institutions for persons with psychosocial and other types of disabilities in their States. Naturally, this process must be fully accompanied at the same time by the development of the necessary support services in the community.

We hope that the residents will be protected from further harm, and that they will soon be experiencing warm and caring surroundings, fostering healing and growth, so that they can reach their full potential and be fully included as members of the community, and enjoy all rights and freedoms on an equal basis with others.