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PRESS RELEASE

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Mental Health Europe calls on EU leaders to take social NGOs' claims for the EU 2020 Strategy into serious account

The European Commission had launched a consultation on the European Union's Strategy which will frame the policy directions leading up to the year 2020. After publication of the first analysis of consultation responses, Mental Health Europe, as many other NGOs, is astonished that the European Commission's overall conclusions seem to be that the best way to carry forward health and social issues is "business as usual". This option is unacceptable to Mental Health Europe. We therefore - prior to the informal meeting of the EU heads of states and governments on 11 and 12 February where the EU 2020 Strategy will be discussed - call on the EU leaders to take the views of the social NGOs into account and to put a serious emphasis on the fight against social exclusion of vulnerable groups in society such as people with mental health problems.

Mental Health Europe responded to the EU 2020 consultation and pointed out that one of Europe's main goals should be to ensure social cohesion in the European Union and to reduce inequalities. This includes combating the negative effects of the economic and financial crisis and growing unemployment which already had a considerable impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the population as many people are suffering from growing unemployment, fear and financial insecurity.

MHE emphasised that a stronger significance of the question of health and well-being should be incorporated in the EU 2020 strategy. Health determines the wellbeing of the citizens and effects their involvement in society and the labour market. It therefore has an impact on the social cohesion and also the productivity of a society. Targets should be set to improve the health care systems of the EU Member States in order to create equal opportunities for everybody.

In the consultation paper, the issues of health and wellbeing are only basically touched upon. It is important to acknowledge the importance of health and social aspects in an overall European strategy. The integration of vulnerable groups into society should be fostered since the number of people facing difficulties and exclusion such as people suffering from mental illness or other forms of sickness or disability, homeless people, migrants and other socially excluded or disadvantaged groups, is considerable. Not addressing the needs of these groups means excluding a significant percentage of European citizens.

To read MHE's response to the EU 2020 consultation, please go to: <http://www.mhe-sme.org/en/publications/mhe-position-papers.html>

For further information:

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Notes to Editors:

Mental Health Europe (MHE) is a European non-governmental organisation committed to the promotion of positive mental health, the prevention of mental distress, the improvement of care, advocacy for social inclusion and the protection of human rights for (ex-) users of mental health services, their families and carers. For more information: www.mhe-sme.org