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**Open meeting of the
MHE Committee on Mental Health and Minority Ethnic Communities
Vienna, 1 June 2007**

Participant list: Sandra Grant (InterMinds Scotland), Marianne Kastrup (Danish Centre for Transcultural Psychiatry), Nace Kovac (SENT, Slovenia), Ali Taghian (ENAR), Marcel Vige (Diverse Minds UK)

MHE staff members: Mari Fresu (Rapporteur), Fanny Muller

Apologies: Tarafa Baghajati (ENAR), Felicity De Zulueta (UK), Eva Foldes (Open Society Institute, HU), Espe Ngituka (UK), Valeriu Nicolae (Roma Network), Els van Mourik (SAMAH, Netherlands), Raghu Raghavan (UK)

1. Welcome and outline of the meeting

Marianne Kastrup welcomed the participants on behalf of Mental Health Europe. She outlined the agenda of the meeting and the main issues to be addressed. She informed about the expected outcomes of the workshop:

- a) *Presenting an overview of the MHE Committee members' activities* in relation to mental health issues concerning minority ethnic communities and cultural diversity in the European Union.
- b) *Defining the MHE Committee's areas of action:* drafting aim, objectives and a working strategy on the basis of the MHE working document (mailed to the Committee's members prior to the meeting).

All the participants introduced themselves before the start of the presentations.

2. Presentations by members of the MHE Committee

In the first session of the meeting, the members of the MHE Committee presented their own organisation's activities in the field in order to exchange knowledge and experience on key issues related to mental health and minority ethnic communities.

Marianne Kastrup, who chaired the meeting on behalf of Mental Health Europe, introduced the main objectives and areas of work of the MHE Committee. She provided some background information on mental health and minority ethnic communities. In particular, she stressed the fact that in general migrants or people from ethnic minority groups living in Europe are more likely to be diagnosed with mental health problems, to be diagnosed and admitted to hospital and to be socially excluded. She addressed some key issues to be discussed and agreed on by the members of the Committee are the vision, the approach (policy / research oriented?), the main objectives and outcomes to be achieved.

Marcel Vige from Diverse Minds (UK) gave a presentation on the Mind's policy on black and minority ethnic mental health. He presented some key facts on the mental health situation of black Caribbean and African groups in England. Marcel talked about the often difficult interaction between these groups and mental health services emerging from the presumption that such groups are inherently dangerous and in need of 'containment'. He also gave an overview of Diverse Minds' key activities, which include: working with other stakeholders to influence politicians and decision makers; organising relevant conferences and seminars; delivering training and producing regular information for Diverse Minds members.

Sandra Grant from InterMinds (Scotland) presented the Mental Health programme of the National Resource Centre for Ethnic Minority Health (NRCEMH). She explained that this programme was established in 2003 in order to address race equality issues across mental health services and beyond. The programme focused initially on two major activities: capacity building seminars across Scotland and the establishment of a national Transcultural Mental Health Network. The 2006 work plan covers both areas of mental health service delivery as well as mental health improvement activities. She gave some examples of community engagement work.

Ali Taghiani spoke on behalf of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and pointed out some relevant issues to combat to fight racism and discrimination in the EU. In particular, he stressed that: each patient must be seen as patient independently from his/her legal/illegal status; ethnic minority groups deserve more and better information as so far they are not well aware of the services available and of their entitlements; health professionals are not familiar enough with different cultural backgrounds and need to be trained to a cultural diversity approach; there is a need to consider the great potential of refugees/migrants (not just the problems) and it is important to raise the accountability of the institutions involved.

Marianne Kastrup gave a presentation on the activities of the Danish Centre for Transcultural Psychiatry. She gave some background information about the organisation, informing that the Danish Centre was established in recognition of the lack of local expertise regarding assessment, treatment and follow-up of the increasing number of migrant patients. In order to improve this situation, the Danish Centre has been active in raising awareness initiatives, creating networking opportunities, providing information and advice to key stakeholders in the migrants' field. Marianne also presented the results of a research project on how do various groups utilise mental health services. She finally raised some issues of concern for the work of the MHE Committee, such as raising awareness about the specific problems of ethnic minorities with mental disorders and

analysing migrants' utilisation of mental health services and equal opportunities in access to educational and social services.

3. Discussion on the MHE Committee's areas of action

The second session of the meeting was dedicated to the discussion on the role and work plan of the MHE Committee on Mental Health and Minority Ethnic Communities.

A debate took place about the key priorities for the work of the Committee. The MHE working document was discussed by the participants in order to agree on which vision, aim and objectives the Committee should have.

In brief, the members agreed on the following key points:

- **Committee's vision** is of a positive approach to mental health, based on a strong members' commitment to the promotion mental wellbeing among minority ethnic groups in the European Union
- **Aim:** raising awareness at the European level of the core themes permeating the issue of mental health of minority ethnic communities in Europe and advocating for culturally sensitive approaches and empowerment strategies as a desirable alternative or supplement to therapeutic treatment.
- **Objectives:**
 - To establish a cross-national exchange of effective strategies in the European Union tackling health inequalities and promoting better mental health and well-being of minority ethnic communities.
 - To promote cooperation between key stakeholders and decision makers at different levels by providing examples of how such partnership can be put into action.
 - To disseminate knowledge and raise awareness across Europe by addressing a multitude of interrelated social-cultural issues such as access to services, cultural and educational diversity.

For a full version of the minutes and for more information please contact Mari Fresu, MHE Project Coordinator, at mari.fresu@mhe-sme.org