

Press Release

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Disappearance of new-born babies in Ukraine: PACE rapporteur calls for an immediate re-opening of judicial investigations

Strasbourg, 05.09.2005 – Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold (Switzerland, SOC), rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), visiting Ukraine from 29 August to 1 September, expressed her extreme concern about the disappearance of new-born babies in the country and allegations of trafficking of babies for adoption and of foetuses for scientific purposes. She called on the office of the principal state prosecutor to shed light on those cases already brought to his attention, to open investigations into any other suspicious incidents and to bring those responsible to justice. Ms Vermot-Mangold said that during her visit she had obtained detailed information on four cases and added that "whatever the number of disappearances, just one case is one too many".

The rapporteur first of all travelled to Kharkiv to speak to medical staff in Hospital No. 6, the family of one of the victims -who had been told by doctors that their baby had died but had not been given permission to see or bury the baby- and NGO representatives. "It is totally unacceptable to prevent a mother from seeing her child. This is a right that must be guaranteed to parents", she declared. Ms Vermot-Mangold also expressed her regret that she had been unable to obtain a clear answer from the regional prosecutor's office about the action taken in response to complaints submitted or any explanation as to the many contradictions and irregularities that she had become aware of. She said that improving the birth registration system, providing better training for medical staff and social services and applying to the letter national laws and directives would help limit malpractices.

Continuing her discussions in Kyiv, where she heard further witness accounts, the rapporteur welcomed the co-operation given by the Ombudsman, whom she encouraged to pursue the enquiries into the disappearance of new-born babies. The deputy principal state prosecutors undertook to order the re-opening of judicial investigations. Ms Vermot-Mangold called for these investigations to be meticulously carried out, stressing that if DNA tests were to be performed, the assistance of international experts would help restore the victims' trust in the justice system and would encourage others to come forward and file complaints.

Ms Vermot-Mangold noted the efforts taken by the Ukrainian authorities to uphold the rights of women and children, such as the amendments to the legislation on childbirth and the child protection programme drawn up by the Ministry for Family, Youth and Sport. She also stressed the need to step up efforts to combat illegal adoption – by reforming the current law as quickly as possible – the trafficking in human beings and the trafficking in organs and tissues for research or the cosmetics industry. She further called on the relevant ministries to co-operate more closely with human rights organisations, support their activities to prevent abuse and organise a panel discussion to co-ordinate their efforts.

Ms Vermot-Mangold plans to travel to other east European countries where there have been similar disappearances before presenting her report to the Parliamentary Assembly in the first half of 2006.

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President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Bruno Haller.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).