



Council of Europe

Note
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Council of Europe anti-torture Committee publishes report on Serbia

Strasbourg, 14.01.2009 – The Council of Europe's Committee for the prevention of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CPT) has published today the report on its periodic visit to Serbia in 2007, together with the Serbian authorities' response. These documents have been made public at the request of the Serbian Government.

During the 2007 visit, a number of allegations of physical ill-treatment of persons detained by the police were received. The CPT has made a series of recommendations to address this issue, as well as to improve the practical implementation of fundamental safeguards against ill-treatment, such as access to a lawyer (including for detained juveniles), access to a doctor and access to an interpreter for detained foreign nationals.

As regards prisons, the delegation received almost no allegations of ill-treatment of inmates by staff at Sremska Mitrovica Correctional Institution, and only a few allegations at Belgrade District Prison. This contrasted with the situation at Požarevac-Zabela Correctional Institution, where a number of recent allegations of physical ill-treatment were received. The CPT has recommended measures aimed at decreasing tension in the last-mentioned establishment, in particular in the high security unit and the remand section.

The CPT observed disturbing levels of overcrowding in all the prison establishments visited, especially in sections for remand prisoners. The Committee has taken note of the ongoing and planned refurbishment and expansion projects concerning various prisons and has called upon the Serbian authorities to devise, as a matter of high priority, a comprehensive and fully-budgeted refurbishment programme for Belgrade District Prison. The situation was exacerbated by the absence of constructive activities for prisoners in remand sections, and the inadequate provision of purposeful activities and work opportunities for sentenced prisoners. On a more positive note, the CPT welcomed the ongoing refurbishment of the Special Prison Hospital.

Turning to psychiatry, hardly any allegations of physical ill-treatment of patients by staff were received at the Specialised Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital in Kovin. However, inter-patient violence was a problem. In addition, the CPT has expressed concern about the frequent resort to mechanical restraints in the establishment, sometimes for prolonged periods. As regards safeguards surrounding involuntary placement, the Committee found that they remain unsatisfactory and has made recommendations to improve the situation. In the light of the poor material conditions found in the Kovin Hospital, the CPT has also recommended that the establishment be the subject of a comprehensive refurbishment programme. More generally, the Committee welcomed the adoption, in 2007, of a Strategy for the Development of Mental Health Care aimed at reducing the size or closing down some of the psychiatric hospitals in Serbia, and developing community care; the CPT has encouraged the Serbian authorities to implement these plans as a matter of priority.

No allegations of ill-treatment were received at the Special Institution for Children and Juveniles in Stamnica. However, instances of inter-resident violence were observed, which was hardly surprising given the combination of severe overcrowding and low staffing levels in various parts of the establishment. The CPT has expressed particular concerns about the living conditions and lack of activities in Pavilions 1 to 6 (the "upper zone") and made recommendations on this issue. More generally, the CPT has recommended that steps be taken to reorganise the system for provision of care to persons with mental disabilities, as well as to improve the legal safeguards surrounding the placement of people in specialised institutions.

In their response, the Serbian authorities provide information on the measures being taken to address the issues raised in the CPT's report.

The CPT's visit report and the response of the Serbian authorities are available on the Committee's website <http://www.cpt.coe.int>

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