



Committee on Petitions

29.11.2016

MISSION REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

following the Fact-finding visit to Slovakia of 22 - 23 September 2016

Committee on Petitions

Members of the mission:

Ms. Cecilia Wikström
Mr. Peter Jahr
Ms. Soledad Cabezón Ruiz
Mr. Demetris Papadakis
Ms. Kostadinka Kuneva

Head of delegation (ALDE)
(EPP)
(S&D)
(S&D)
(GUE/NGL)

Accompanying Members:

Mr. Pál Csáky
Mr. Vladimír Maňka

(EPP)
(S&D)

Introduction

*„Life integrated in society should not be seen as a reward,
but as a right for all people with disabilities.”
Stakeholder at the consultation with NGO’s*

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE MISSION

The main objective of the fact-finding mission carried out by PETI was to seek answers to many questions that have arisen in the course of PETI’s work related to the European Union’s impact on the quality of the lives of persons, European citizens, with disabilities¹ who are institutionalized and thus not integrated in society. The choice of studying the subject matter in the Slovak Republic² was that of geographical balance as regards the missions accomplished by PETI in the past.

The viewpoint of the mission was undoubtedly a fundamental rights-based approach to the use of the EU Structural and Investment Funds for the maintenance (renovation, extension or building) of long-term residential centres for persons with disabilities in Slovakia. It was about how the EU’s solidarity can be shown through funding in the right way, so that it does not contribute to the survival of large scale residential institutions that limit the freedom of their clients to be part of society.

A number of central and eastern European Member States are investing EU funds in residential centres. Investment in the projected maintenance or extension of such institutions nevertheless constitutes an infringement of the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, runs counter to EU policies concerning equal opportunities, social inclusion and non-discrimination and should therefore not be eligible for funding.

PETI’s mission was timely, as in May 2016 the Concluding Observations of for Slovakia of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities were issued. The Committee expressed its deep concern regarding the high number of institutionalised persons with disabilities in Slovakia and noted that progress of the deinstitutionalization³ process is too slow and partial. The UN Committee recommended that Slovakia provide and implement a timetable to ensure that the implementation of the deinstitutionalization process is expedited, including by putting in place specific additional measures to ensure that community-based services are strengthened for all persons with disabilities. The Committee also recommended that Slovakia do not any longer allocate resources from the national budget into institutions and that it reallocate resources into community-based services in accordance with the investment priorities of ERDF Fund.

The PETI delegation found that the UN’s observations were rather accurate, as both the consultations with disability profiled NGO’s and with the competent government authorities confirmed the lack of implementation of the existing good strategies and the strikingly slow

¹ Adults with intellectual impairments.

² Here onwards referred to as Slovakia.

³ The term deinstitutionalization means the transition of residents from large scale residential institutions to community-based services.

speed of the deinstitutionalization process. In fact, the PETI mission confirmed that, as stated in the pre-mission briefing provided by Policy Department C titled European Structural and Investment Funds and People with Disabilities: Focus on the Situation in Slovakia, no persons with disability have so far been given the possibility to continue their lives living in society in the framework of the deinstitutionalization strategy in Slovakia.

It was a priority for the delegation Members to see for themselves facilities in Slovakia currently hosting people with disabilities. In order to attempt obtaining as broad an oversight as possible, the visit included three types of facilities: 1. A day-care centre in Trnava town entirely renovated from EU funds, where clients are integrated in their community outside a residential centre and also integrated in their families, 2. A facility employing people with disabilities in the historical old-town part of Trnava town and 3. A long-term residential institution in the nearby municipality of Zavar. The latter facility was not financed from EU funds, yet it was at an optimal distance from the two other facilities, had the same management as those and visiting it made it possible for the delegation Members to see an institution that has 130 male clients, who live their lives within the walls of a small-town institution, rather separated from society.



The photo features handcrafted gifts made by the clients with disabilities of the day-care centre visited by the delegation. Those products are purchased by the nearby car manufactures and then given away as protocol gifts or bought by the two factories' employees. Revenue generated from the sales is spent on activities for the clients such as excursions, theatre programmes etc.

This information was told by an 80-year old lady whose son has been a client of the centre for the past 20 years, the vast majority of that time before its complete renovation from EU funds. She said that her son is very happy to go to the renovated day-care centre every day, where clients stay from the morning until 3 pm and then return to their families for the evening.

The PETI delegation witnessed genuine commitment and engagement by all stakeholders met during the mission consultations towards the improvement of the everyday lives of people with disabilities in Slovakia.

The NGO's strongly urged for more European Commission and European Parliament scrutiny over the actual implementation of the deinstitutionalization progress in Slovakia and over the de facto use of EU funds. They insisted that investments from regional and national budgets are still being made into old and new institutions, which cement the institutional culture of dependency and segregation from the rest of society¹.

¹ To the knowledge of the European Commission these investments are not made from the EU Structural and Investment Funds.

The representatives of the Slovak government informed the delegation that the majority of the UN Committee recommendations have been transformed into deinstitutionalization programmes in Slovakia. Yet, it was comprehensible from the information provided that while the monitoring tools are in place, both calls for projects and project implementation under the Integrated Regional Operational Programme funded by ERDF to support community-based care themed investments in infrastructure and equipment with the estimated allocation for such activities of 200 million EUR, are in significant delay.

There was common understanding between the PETI delegation Members and the consulted stakeholders in Slovakia that changing the name plates on the doors of long-term residential institutions or creating mini-institutions is indeed not deinstitutionalization and it should not be supported by the EU. The responsibility lies primarily with the European Commission in the context of shared management, who building on the feedback of competent and very active disability NGOs, can make a change and cut EU funds that are not correctly used. The European Parliament shall on its behalf maintain strong scrutiny over the deinstitutionalization process in Slovakia, which pledge it can assume with the active support of the Slovak government authorities, who had committed during the PETI visit to informing PETI on a regular basis in writing about the roadmap and concrete achievements made in the progress of deinstitutionalization in Slovakia.

The first written report on how EU funds contribute to deinstitutionalization and how projects are progressing in Slovakia was promised to be sent to PETI until the end of 2016.

FINDINGS

I. Consultations with the NGO's

The PETI delegation was informed by the European Commission at the preparatory meeting organised in order to provide delegation Members with extensive information about the situation in Slovakia, that the NGO's working in the field of deinstitutionalization are strong and well organised.

This observation was indeed reaffirmed by the large number of NGO's taking part¹ in the consultation with the PETI delegation at the European Parliament's Bratislava Office. As recommended by the European Commission, the Slovak Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities² Ms. Zuzana Stavrovská was also invited and made very useful observations in the same way as the NGO's did.

¹ The NGO's were: Open Society Foundations, The National Council of Persons with Disabilities in the Slovak Republic, the Slovak Association for Help to People with Intellectual Disabilities, Carissimi, Mental Disability Advocacy Center, Socia, Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture, Social Work Advisory Board.

² The Commissioner's post was created in Slovakia by law in June 2015 in conformity with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on Equal recognition before the law, which paragraph provides for appropriate and effective safeguards to prevent abuse in accordance with international human rights. Accordingly, the Commissioner is involved with all processes associated with any violation of rights of people with disabilities and must treat all complaints officially.



The NGO's identified several issues in the area of deinstitutionalization in Slovakia:

NGO'S OBLIGATION TO CO-FINANCE THE NATIONAL PROJECT FOR DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION

NGO's raised concerns that the Slovak government expects NGO's to share the financial burden of deinstitutionalization, which in their opinion is not justified given that the task of deinstitutionalization is a national commitment assumed by the Slovak government. Appropriate national budget should be allocated for such activities and the responsibility belongs in the first place to the local (municipal, regional) governments¹, who are best placed to implement community-based care exercises. At the same time, the NGO's expressed their discontent as of the rather formal nature of their participation in the existing consultation framework.

LACK OF COMMITMENT BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO ENGAGE IN THE PROCESS OF DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION AND SCARCITY OF LOCAL RESOURCES

As the European Commission pointed out in the preparatory meeting for the mission, deinstitutionalization is a process and there has been mental progress relating to it in the public opinion. Yet, NGO's expressed their strong concern about the lack of positive involvement on behalf of the local authorities to actively support the desirable changes linked to deinstitutionalization. Sometimes people employed in the institutions (management, personnel) try to avoid losing their jobs. Sometimes these people are well connected to the administration and bloc the deinstitutionalization process at the core². In addition, the NGO's underlined that small municipalities are often unable to meet the statutory requirements necessary to receive state support.

DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION TOO SLOW AND FRAGMENTIZED

The Policy Department briefing pointed out that the planned activities under the revised National Project for deinstitutionalisation for the period up to 2020 encompass less than 10% of the 861 institutions in Slovakia and that to date no person with disabilities has been transferred from institutional into community-based care. The NGO's informed the delegation

¹ Since 2002 a decentralization process took part in Slovakia resulting in the transfer of many competences from the central government to the municipal and regional authorities, including aspects of social services, health care and education.

² As the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights formulated in his 2015 report, "strong vested interests to maintain institutions also exist at the level of municipalities, as well as within the medical and other relevant professions", referring to "the reluctance of the self-governing regions, which are the most important funders of institutional services in Slovakia, to implement the national deinstitutionalization policies."

that residential institutions received soft support for training and education, but did not enter the actual physical deinstitutionalization phase. The NGO's also denounced the lack of synergy between the Operational Programme for Human Resources funded by ESF and the Integrated Regional Operational Programme funded by ERDF¹, pointing out that although projects were prepared, due to administrative reasons not a euro has been used to date. There was also concern about the lack of coordination and cooperation between the national, regional and local levels.

SUSTAINABILITY OF EU FUNDED DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION PROJECTS

The NGO's pointed out the intense need for ensuring the sustainability of projects financed from EU resources and emphasized that the projects should help Slovakia in catching up with older Member States. They regretted that the Slovak national programmes² do not extend post-2020 in the field of deinstitutionalization and were concerned about the sustainability of disability related services afterwards.

DANGER OF CREATING SO CALLED MINI-INSTITUTIONS

In line with the findings of the Policy Department briefing, the NGO's also strongly warned against supporting from EU funds the creation of smaller facilities also referred to as mini-institutions, even if it would mean improved physical environment, as it does not achieve the goal of community living. The NGO's further regretted that there are still local, regional and state resources which are in fact allocated towards institutionalization.

LACK OF INFORMATION, LACK OF PUBLIC AWARENESS

The NGO's pointed out how little society, regional or local level governments really know about people with disabilities, their families, their communities, their needs. In line with the findings of the Policy Department briefing, they strongly emphasized the need for breaking down barriers between society and people with disabilities by the means of information campaigns raising more social awareness. The NGO's regretted the fact that society is now seemingly not yet ready to accept people with disabilities.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES, GOODS AND HEALTHCARE

The making available of assistance to people with disabilities, that is accessible to the people with no disabilities on a daily basis, was a further need identified by the NGO's. Such as the unimpeded use of public transport, which is a basic accessory available for the wider public, but not for people with disabilities. NGO's stressed that education (together with educational advice), goods and healthcare must be made accessible. So need to be early intervention services, which the NGO's consider insufficient and lacking the proper links to healthcare, advisory (including legal), social and pedagogical services. It was also underlined by NGO's that small municipalities in Slovakia, who are assigned to execute the social services, are unable to meet the needs of the people with disabilities as they lack the financial capacity and professional support to do that. In addition, there is a lack of services in order to support families with disabled persons including children, and a lack of accessible services in mother tongue for those disabled persons belonging to a national minority.

¹ In the framework of the OPHR approximately 30 million euros, in the framework of the IROP an estimated 200 million EUR is allocated for deinstitutionalization-related investments in Slovakia.

² Such as the National action plan for the transition from institutional to community-based care in the social services system 2012-2015, the National priorities for the development of social services in 2015-2020, the National action plan for the transition from institutional to community-based care in the social services system 2016-2020 or the Disability Strategy 2014-2020.

INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BUILDING ON THEIR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

NGO's urged more government action to help people with disabilities to develop independent living skills, as well as to implement information campaigns for people with disabilities which can help them tackle their fears of living independently and lower their learned dependency on long-term residential institutions. It was mentioned that there is very little self-help and self-advocacy for people with disabilities in Slovakia.

LEGAL CAPACITY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

A particular concern raised by the NGO's and by the Slovak Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities was that persons with disabilities do not enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life (such as getting married, opening a bank account, standing before a court or tribunal, exercising the right to vote etc.). The Commissioner informed the PETI delegation that with 1 July 2016 onwards the new Law on Non-contentious Proceedings does not allow for full deprivation of legal capacity anymore and only permits partial removal of legal capacity on stricter conditions. The possibility of reinstating legal capacity¹ also remains as an option. In this context the Commissioner emphasized the on-going drafting of an amendment to the Civil Code, which is necessary because substantive law currently still refers to full legal capacity only and does not contain provisions aimed at supported decision-making, thus being non-compliant with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

II. Consultations with the Slovak authorities²

The Slovak authorities confirmed Slovakia's pledge towards the transition from institutional care to community-based services, at the same time emphasizing that deinstitutionalization is a time demanding process. They acknowledged that only a small number of institutions were closed to date, but explained that many institutions have entered the path towards deinstitutionalization, so that they operate with 50% of their capacity in the traditional form and with 50% of their capacity in a pilot phase of deinstitutionalization. The authorities stressed that financial support for investments for the development of community-based social services is available as of 2016.



¹ In practice typically partly.

² The PETI delegation met with the senior hierarchy of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, including the Minister, the representative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic and the senior hierarchy of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Information. The former two are the managing authorities of the ESF and the ERDF respectively, while the latter is the central coordination authority for the management of the European Structural and Investment Funds, established as of 1 June 2016.

STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS AIMED AT ENDORSING DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

The PETI delegation was informed about the Declaration of the Government of the Slovak Republic for 2016 - 2020, in which the government committed itself to “continue supporting the process of deinstitutionalization of social services.” The authorities recalled that in the period of 2014-2020 Slovakia strengthened its commitment to deinstitutionalization and that no investment (reconstruction, extension or modernisation) of existing large scale facilities with continuous form of social service provided are recognised as eligible under the European Structural and Investment Funds in Slovakia.¹ The deinstitutionalization of social services was also mentioned to be included in the strategic documents titled National priorities for the development of social services in 2015-2020 and the National programme for improving living conditions of persons with disabilities for the period of 2014-2020. The authorities also informed being aware of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities May 2016 recommendations, which the authorities reported having been integrated into the national programmes. The new Action Plan (2016-2020), based on the 2011 National Deinstitutionalization Strategy², was foreseen to be adopted in October 2016.

DEGREE OF COORDINATION AND SYNERGY BETWEEN ESF AND ERDF

The Slovak authorities informed the PETI delegation that an Interdepartmental Working Group made up of the representatives of competent departments and relevant civil society organisations was set up in order to avoid problems similar to the serious lack of coordination during the previous programming period of 2007-2013. The expert body is responsible for the coordination of the programmes implemented as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds, as well as synchronisation between the ESIF and other EU or national auxiliary instruments. The purpose of the Working Group thus is to provide for joint planning in Slovakia and consequently to increase the efficiency of the use of the European Structural and Investment Funds in the country. Yet, it was confirmed during the consultations that by the time of the PETI delegation visit, the working group had not started its operation.

MONITORING BODIES FOR THE DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION PROGRESS

The Slovak authorities recalled the added value to the deinstitutionalization process of the Monitoring Committee for the Integrated Regional Operational Programme and the Monitoring Committee for the Human Resources Operational Programme, which bodies are tasked with reviewing the implementation of the respective operational programmes and the progress achieved in meeting their goals. The authorities also emphasized that the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office for Investments and Informatization will be able to substantially contribute to the stepping up of the implementation of public policies towards the deinstitutionalization of the social services in the Slovakia by guaranteeing that the support

¹ Slovakia, following the European Commission's observations during programming, inserted safeguards in the Integrated Regional Operative Programme (ERDF), which focuses on supporting the transition from institutionalised form of providing social services to community-based services, in order to guarantee that funds cannot be misused for ‘humanisation’ as for scaling down large capacity institutions without transforming their nature into independent living. The European Commission also ensured that any investment in buildings and equipment must be interlinked with the support of activities co-financed under the Operation Programme for Human Resources (ESF) by e.g. subjecting support to any large scale facility to the condition of annexing a transformation plan for the facility concerned, excluding support to institutionalised care or limitations of the capacity of supported facilities.

² Strategy for the Deinstitutionalisation of the System of Social Services and Alternative Care in the Slovak Republic, 2011

provided from EU funds is correctly aimed at achieving the objectives of deinstitutionalization.

PLANNED USE OF EU FUNDS FOR DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION IN THE PROGRAMMING PERIOD 2014-2020

The PETI delegation was informed by the Slovak authorities that two calls for proposals are to be launched in October 2016 under the Integrated Regional Operational Programme (ERDF). One with a 160 million euro amount allocated for the promotion of the transition of existing facilities into community-based care facilities and another with a 32 million euro budget allocated for building new deinstitutionalized facilities. These projects aim at facilitating easier access to effective and quality public services under the specific objective of promoting transition in providing social services and performance of measures for social and legal protection of children and social guardianship to the community level. Under the Operation Programme for Human Resources (ESF) there are 5 national projects are being implemented - with delay - at the contracted amount of 147 million euros, while there is 1 national project titled “Deinstitutionalization of social services facilities – Support to transformation teams” in the stage of preparation, and there are demand driven calls as well also in the stage of preparation.

FINANCING OF SOCIAL SERVICES

The PETI delegation was informed that currently the Slovak government pays 320 euros per bed per month from the state budget to the municipality funding the facility where a person with disabilities is placed¹. The authorities informed that the amount will be reviewed in the framework of a new law on social services, including social financing, to be expected in the first half of 2017, and the sum allocated will be linked to the degree of dependence of the persons with disabilities on the aid that they receive.

¹ As comparison it was said that an average pension in Slovakia is slightly above 400 euros.

III. VISITS TO THE FACILITIES

The PETI delegation visited 3 types of facilities:

1. *A day-care centre*: Optimal solution for caring for people with disabilities in a community-based facility

The facility in Trnava town was recently entirely renovated from EU funds. The conditions are exceptionally good, clearly above average. The people with disabilities - approximately 20-30 - spend their days at the centre and keep themselves occupied with handicraft activities. Cultural programmes, as well as excursions in nature belong to their daily lives. They do sports exercises and receive extensive wellness services as well.



2. *A facility employing people with disabilities:* Providing an opportunity for people with disabilities to find fulfilment in work they enjoy

The Tea House, also in Trnava town and also co-financed from EU funds, was located in a beautiful part of the old-town and could compete easily with any attractive café in the world. It employs people with different kinds of disabilities¹. The people with disabilities in this facility typically wash dishes, assist in the preparation of tea and coffee, serve visitors in general and attend to each other.



¹ The clients disabilities are mental retardation, polio with combined handicap, visual disability (blindness), partially impaired hearing (using hearing aids), Down syndrome, muscular dystrophy, limited movement (in wheelchair), malignant depression.

3. *A large capacity residential institution*: an existing institution where a large number of people with disabilities live their lives isolated from the rest of society

In order to broaden the insight of the delegation Members and for the reason of its accessibility (in the municipality of Zavar, close to Trnava town), the delegation visited an archetypal long-term residential institution. The institution has 130 male clients, who live their whole lives in the facility, grouped in rooms of 4-6. This facility has also been recently renovated, from Slovak government resources. The facility made the impression of being very well maintained, its decoration and community facilities made the impression of being superior to the conventional institutions that people with disabilities live their lives in in Central- and Eastern Europe.



The people with disabilities in the institution are kept occupied with handcraft work and by tending for a small garden and a few animals. Their everyday life also includes social activities. There were some persons locked up in isolation, as the PETI delegation was informed for reasons of severe mental disability-related behaviour.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Committee on Petitions:

1. Sharing the concern of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights regarding the persistence of large institutions housing thousands of persons with disabilities away from the community¹, urges that the Slovak authorities take further action to enhance the speed of transition to community-based services and community living in Slovakia, with specific attention to defining a roadmap with clear timeframes,

¹ Report by Mr Nils Muižnieks Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, following his visit to the Slovak Republic from 15 to 19 June 2015.

clear objectives and measurable indicators;

2. Emphasizes the need for EU funds to be used to build social inclusion and to make a noticeable contribution to the respect for human rights in Slovakia, regretting that currently there is no enforceable right for people with disabilities to live independently;
3. Emphasizes the importance of training for policy makers and care workers involved in the transition from deinstitutionalisation to community based care;
4. Urges that the financing of social services be guaranteed for community-based services in order to counteract the practice where municipalities typically do not pay for community-based care when there is an existing institution; urges the Slovak authorities not to support any investments into creating so called mini- institutions; urges the Slovak authorities not to support allocation of resources from national and regional budgets to institutions except in exceptional circumstances when the deinstitutionalisation process is already underway but the community based alternative with qualified personnel has not yet been secured and the resources are invested into infrastructure necessary for the provision of the needed care;
5. Urges to take steps to encourage and support the meaningful involvement of people with disabilities, their relatives and relevant civil society organisations in the planning, implementation and monitoring of ESIF funded projects; calls on the European Commission to develop guidance to assist Member States in meeting their responsibilities in this area;
6. Acknowledges the work and long-lasting contribution of the different NGO's in providing better life standards and social inclusion to the persons with disabilities; considers that they have an important role to play in the deinstitutionalisation process, providing their expertise and resources; points out nevertheless that the financing of this process should essentially remain the responsibility of the Slovak state;
7. Remains attentive to the commitment shown on behalf of the Slovak authorities during the PETI visit to rectify the delays occurred in the deinstitutionalization process in Slovakia, as well as the pledge to pass on the PETI delegations' message to the respective Monitoring Committees to speed up the deinstitutionalization process in Slovakia, considers that building up services and infrastructure to facilitate the transition to community-based care in Slovakia can greatly contribute to this goal;
8. Welcomes the information that six out of eight self-governing regions in Slovakia are ready to launch projects upon the presentation of the two calls for proposals under the Integrated Regional Operational Programme in October 2016, as well as the readiness of the Slovak government to expedite deinstitutionalization activities from October 2016 onwards;
9. Urges that the exact number of people with disabilities currently living in institutions and elsewhere in Slovakia and more detailed and disaggregated data on their characteristics and on the characteristics of institutions they live in be established, be registered with a specific breakdown of the varying degrees and types of disability, noting that the approximate reference of 40.000 institutionalized people is not sufficient; recommends also gathering statistics on the social and economic situation of

disabled persons to facilitate setting up and reviewing of policies towards integration;

10. Calls on the Commission to prepare a comparative analysis concerning the number of people with disabilities in institutions and the future perspectives of deinstitutionalization in the 28 Member States;
11. Endorses that efficient monitoring mechanisms be put in place regarding the quality of social services provided and their actual impact of the daily lives of people with disabilities in institutional care;
12. Calls the attention of the Slovak authorities to the condition of sustainability of the deinstitutionalization projects pointing out that there needs to be exact follow-up to measure the sustainability level, at the same time emphasizing that better financing for social services should be also a priority in the post 2014-2020 EU budget;
13. Invites the Slovak authorities to make full use of the officially established Interdepartmental Working Group and to start and intensify its work without any further delay;
14. Expresses its concern as to the legal capacity of people with disabilities in Slovakia, recalling that all people placed in institutions generally are under guardianship and that this matter is therefore of crucial importance for them in their everyday lives; urges that the persons subject to the decisions restricting their legal capacity be heard during the procedures - even if that requires the judge to go and visit the person in the institution, if that person is not able to leave the institution for the hearing -, and that their social skills be factored into the decisions;
15. Welcomes the recent legislative reform of procedural rules governing guardianship proceedings and recommends the Slovak authorities to continue, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, taking legislative steps to fully abolish deprivation of legal capacity in the Civil Code and to introduce supported decision-making, based on respect for personal self-determination and individual consent, also recommend to the Slovak authorities to facilitate the reinstatement of the legal capacity of people with disabilities in as many cases as possible;
16. Fully supports more self-advocacy and more action of people with disabilities representing themselves, their views and interests in Slovakia, quoting “Nothing About Us Without Us”, the much cited motto of the UN International Day of Disabled Persons in the year 2004;
17. Expresses its concern about the disenfranchisement of people with disabilities in Slovakia, reiterating that granting all people with disabilities the right to vote and stand for elections would not only give them fuller enjoyment of their rights, but would also increase their visibility in society;
18. Calls on the Slovak authorities to ensure that the monthly state funded care benefit currently transferred to the municipalities is not used for maintaining the institutions, but to be earmarked and effectively used for improving the life standards and social inclusion of the persons with disabilities themselves, such as establishing a stable network of personalised home-based assistance with the appropriate frequency,

underlining that such an method should be supportive of deinstitutionalisation as it would give the dependents the choice regarding the form of care; urges the Slovak authorities to ensure that the amount of the monthly state care funded benefit reflects the actual costs of social services and is sufficient for their coverage;

19. Urges the Slovak authorities to attempt to reduce bureaucratic obstacles to public procurement procedures related to projects supporting deinstitutionalization and to observe utmost transparency in the course of the related public procurement procedures;
20. Invites the European Commission to provide all possible assistance to the national authorities tasked with managing the respective EU Funds which fully comply with their commitments, in this case for the competent authorities in Slovakia, and to proceed with the simplification of the rather complex bureaucratic procedures;
21. Welcomes the commitment made by the Slovak authorities during the PETI visit to make year 2017 the year of focus on raising positive public awareness related to the social inclusion and equality of people with disabilities, noting that awareness arising must include the voices of people with disabilities;
22. Urges the Slovak authorities to pay particular attention to offering people with disabilities life-long learning possibilities and better access to the labour market;
23. Urges the need for a comprehensive approach by planning social integration from infancy onwards, with inclusive education and an employment plan, such as reserved places in the public sector and a system of incentives within the private sector to promote the autonomy of disabled persons;
24. In particular calls on the Slovak authorities to use EU funds to support children to live with their families and be fully included in all aspects of the life of their communities and schools;
25. Urges the Slovak authorities to ensure accessible services for families with disabled persons, including children which would facilitate their everyday life; furthermore urges the Slovak authorities to make services available also in mother tongue for disabled persons belonging to a national minority;
26. Considers that a decision to organize a European Year of People with Disabilities focusing on the full integration of people with disabilities¹ would again be timely and could well contribute to the promotion of an inclusive European Union for all European citizens and residents;
27. Urges the European Commission to further look into the situation of investments in institutions for people with disabilities in Slovakia and to support the systematic evaluation of the progress and efficiency of the transition from institutional to community-based care, as well as encourages the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets to further examine the subject matter.
28. Recommends to the Slovak authorities to continue the dialogue with the European

¹ The last Council decision was taken in december 2001 to prepare the European Year of People with Disabilities in 2003.

Parliament on a regular basis in particular in the form of periodic reports, such as annual monitoring reports, to the Committee on Petitions regarding the developments in the deinstitutionalization process;