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ADOPTION, AT WHAT COST?

Comments to the report presented at a round table conference, Brussels, February 26th 2008

First of all I would like to thank the organisers, Terre des hommes, for the invitation to this round table conference. In my opinion it is of importance that we, as receiving countries of adoptable children, has the will to enter into a free and open-minded debate on the issues raised in the report.

I myself, as the responsible of the Central Authority for intercountry adoptions in Norway, have read the report with a lot of interest. As far as I can appraise, the report gives a fair and accurate presentation of the present situation in Norway, coming to this topic.

I will follow your proposal not to concentrate my comments on part two of the report, but rather stick to the recommendations presented by TdH in part 1. Still, just as an opening remark, I would state that even if Norway in the study comes out pretty well, I think we also have some challenges in our country in order to improve our work and further develop our practices. Especially regarding the post-adoption work, which might be of even more importance in years to come if the number of children with special needs increase, we certainly have challenges to face in Norway. The other very short comment on part 2 of the report which I would like to mention is the same as my Suisse colleague just presented; -the recommendations on specific topics of improvement could have been sorted out more precisely.

So, further to some comments and reflections on the recommendations of the report;

All in all I would say that from the NO point of view we can give our support to most of the recommendations put forward. Nevertheless, when coming to the question of funding and co-funding of the accredited bodies as well as adoptive parents, to allocate the sufficient budgets for these means is a responsibility of the national Parliaments. This is an issue which we, as the Central Authority, is not in the position to have strong opinions on, as one have to take into consideration different national and regional needs and demands before doing the final priority.

One of the reflections I had when reading the study is the following paradox; -Global development, more rich people trying to have a child might give local/national consequences in countries of origin if these people on their own search for adoptable children, especially for the accredited bodies which try to stick to a high ethical standard. On the other hand, national/local development might end up in a reduced demand for inter-country adoptions. All in all, this might give a global consequences which increase the mis-match between no of children in need of inter-country adoption and no possible adoptive parents demanding for a child. In my opinion we, as receiving countries, should meet this challenge with a joint and common attitude coming to the way we handle inter-country adoptions. The Hague Convention is our common platform, but in my opinion the national authorities also have to follow up the convention in a pro-active and proper manner, especially trying to avoid that countries having ratified the convention end up in a competition regarding children in need of inter-country adoption. So, in my opinion there

should be a call for an international, coordinated action and need for a common policy on the question of how to control the inter-country adoptions. I think this is one of the most important issues to deal with in years to come.

I also would like to comment on the recommendation concerning the central authorities (pages 6 and 7) where there is a call for a strong CA-autonomy. On one hand, I see there are good reasons for the recommendation. But, in my opinion, on the other hand, autonomy from the politicians in power might put the CA in a weak position, coming to influence and decisions which have to be taken at the national level. (I was at an informal meeting between European CAs in Vilnius last autumn, and reflected after about the huge amount of opinions, discussions and proposals which came up, but there were NO decisions taken at all!) In my opinion the CAs might benefit a lot from having an open and not very distant relation to the Ministry and politicians. But, this "balance" is only possible to have if there have been a clarification of the different roles and positions of the Ministry/politicians on one hand and the CAs on the other.

Then, a short comment on the proposal in the report concerning a balance between the needs of the children to be adopted, the prospective adoptive parents and not to have a mis-match between the no of children and no of applicants. The question could be; -should there be given more power and position to the countries of origin in order to define the number of children possible for adoption for a certain period? Then it might be easier also to keep the no of applicants at a level to handle. (I foresee this, at least in a short term, might be a problem for the accredited bodies, as the financial situation might grow worse, if the no of applicants decrease).

Coming to the question raised in the report concerning centralisation/decentralisation, I think it might be useful to divide between the handling of applicants and accredited bodies. To centralise the follow-up and control of the accredited bodies will give them an equal framework and the same demands from the authorities. This seems important, especially because they are in a competitive situation towards each other, and should benefit from having transparent and equal rules and a common platform from which to do their professional work.

In my opinion it might be difficult to settle a certain standard saying the applications should be handled at a centralised or decentralised level. The different countries have very different ways of governance, and these should be respected. But having a decentralised way of handling the applications in my opinion demands for a close follow-up from the Central Authority coming to education and training of the professionals dealing with the applications, in order to give them the same professional standards and through this ensure the applicants throughout the country are given an equal and fair treatment.

I think, coming to the question about the number of accredited bodies is not the most important question. But, how the Central Authorities monitor, follow-up and control them, and which procedures the accredited bodies have to stick to in order to still be accredited, is of great importance. The financial transparency of the ABs and possibility for the CA to really enter into the final reports on the budget from the accredited bodies is very important.

Finally, inter-country adoptions in my opinion is very far from voluntary work. It is highly specialised work including law, ethics and politics as well as professional knowledge from social work, psychology and social anthropology. This fact, as I see it, that inter-country adoptions has the need both for professionalism and a balance between subsidiary and equal treatment, demands for a dedicated cooperation at an European level between the receiving countries.