**Statement - opening of the CRPD Committee online 24th session**

By Yannis Vardakastanis

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Chairperson, Members of the CRPD Committee, Excellencies,

As President of the European Disability Forum it is my honour to deliver this statement. EDF is an umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities advocating for the implementation of the CRPD and defending the rights of persons with disabilities all over Europe. We have 100 members at national and European levels, and are member of the International Disability Alliance.

First of all, we would like to congratulate the chairperson for their nomination and welcome all the new members of the committee who were elected last year and have started their mandate. We are looking forward to working with you. We also congratulate the Committee, particularly its Secretariat, for its leadership by making its procedures more accessible to persons with disabilities, despite COVID-19 and the virtual nature of this meeting.

As an European umbrella organisation, EDF supports the involvement of national organisations of persons with disabilities, including, but not limited to our members, for the review of their countries by your committee. We also provide information to the Committee on European issues affecting persons with disabilities. We sent you an information note prior to this session, including on the disastrous impact COVID-19 has had, and is having on persons with disabilities living in Europe. We will also be involved in the day of general discussion on the right to work and in other activities of this committee involving DPOs.

Today I would like to inform you about an urgent matter to be considered by the Committee. The Council of Europe, which is an intergovernmental organisation gathering 47 European countries, is finalising a piece of legislation on involuntary treatment and placement in psychiatry that violates the rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities and all persons experiencing mental health problems- the said additional protocol to the Oviedo Convention.

The CRPD Committee already contested the adoption of this text in a statement issued in 2018 calling Member States to oppose the draft. This was also included in recommendations adopted by the Committee to several European countries. Unfortunately, this has not led to the withdrawal of the draft protocol. Despite additional opposition by the disability movement, human rights organisations and bodies within the Council of Europe itself, representatives of member states of the Council of Europe have continued to support this document.

The disability movement is appalled that the text will be put for adoption this year. As it currently stands, the draft additional protocol allows the involuntary treatment and placement in psychiatry of persons experiencing a mental health crisis following the decision of one medical professional. It also allows measures such as forced medication, isolation, restraint and electro convulsive therapy. The only measure explicitly excluded from the scope of this protocol is lobotomy.

In 2010 we could not accept this. In 2018 we could not accept this. And in 2021 we definitely must not accept this.

In this context, we have sent you a letter with suggested actions the Committee could take together with other UN special mandate holders to oppose to the adoption of the legislation. We also consider that the World Health Organisation has an important role to play as leading organisation on health, in particular in the context of its QualityRights initiative which promotes human rights-based approaches in mental health.

We are working with a wide range of civil society organisations, including our members- the European network of (ex-)users and survivors of psychiatry and Mental Health Europe, against this protocol. On the 25th of March, we will launch an advocacy toolkit against the draft protocol during an online event, to which you are all invited to attend. Our position is that the Council of Europe should redirect all its efforts on the draft additional protocol to develop guidelines for states to end coercion in mental health services, in line with the CRPD and the WHO QualityRights initiative.

We would like to thank you very much for your attention and support, and for this opportunity to address the Committee, Secretariat, UN agencies and civil society. We wish the Committee a fruitful 24th online session.