

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 71/04, (EUR 39/002/2004, 20 February 2004) Denial of medical care/health concern

ROMANIA Patients at the *Poiana Mare* psychiatric hospital

On 20 February, we issued an Urgent Action about *Poiana Mare* psychiatric hospital in which 17 people had died since the beginning of the year. The research team has the following to report about the effects of our action:

"The publicity in the Romanian media given to this action was extensive and the pressure on the Romanian authorities, our letter-writing has played a very considerable part in this and has produced some important results. A copy of the appeal was presented by Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament, to Adrian Nastase, the Romanian Prime Minister, in the course of his visit to Brussels on 25 February 2004. Subsequently, the director of the hospital was replaced and some additional resources were reportedly immediately allocated to improve diet and living conditions in general. A special commission of the ministries of health and justice was tasked to investigate the situation in *Poiana Mare* and in five other high-security hospitals. On 11 March, the Ministry of Health also announced that it was initiating a thorough assessment of all facilities that would begin in mid-April. The preliminary findings of the special commission were published on 1 April and some of their observations are similar to those contained in Amnesty International's report, *Romania: Memorandum to the government concerning in-patient psychiatric treatment* (AI Index EUR 39/003/2004, 4 May 2004).

Separate criminal investigations into the deaths of patients have also been initiated. In a letter received in London on 17 May 2004, Prime Minister Adrian Nastase informed Amnesty International that 21 patients had died in the hospitals between 1 January and 17 February 2004. Post mortem examinations had promptly been carried out in only four cases. In 17 cases the hospital administration apparently did not consider the cause of deaths as suspicious and did not report them to competent judicial authorities. As a result of Amnesty International's intervention, a criminal investigation into each of the 17 cases has now been initiated. 'In all these cases, investigations preliminary to the criminal prosecution shall be carried out. They shall consist of hearings, ordering investigation activities with regard to the documents and forensic expertise on corpses, as the case may be, seizures of documents etc.'

A month after the Urgent Action, a secret video was filmed in which patients at *Poiana Mare* hospital, talk about their lives and the appalling conditions they have to endure. This can be found at:<http://news.amnesty.org/mav/index/ENGEUR395042004>.

The Mental Disability Advocacy Center, a regional NGO based in Budapest, has published an extensive compilation of English translations of Romanian newspaper articles and government statements concerning *Poiana Mare* Hospital on its website See:// www.mdac.info/region/romania.htm."

Many thanks to all those who sent appeals. No further action is required from the UA Network as campaigning will continue through other means.