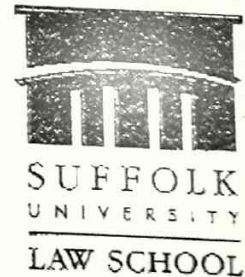


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March 16, 2004

KS P 31/3

Commissioner Gunther Verheugen
Directorate General for Enlargement

Dear Commissioner:

I am enclosing a copy of a letter I recently sent to Mr Prodi; I also enclose a recent law review article I wrote about international children's rights and international adoption. I am a dual citizen of the United States and Ireland, and have spent considerable time in Europe. I am a strong supporter of the European project.

I am appalled, however, at the statements that have been made by the European Parliament and by your office about children's rights being violated by international adoption. The vast, vast majority of adoptions carried out internationally are literally life saving, when it is clear that there is no alternative family life for the children involved. Everyone would love to see judicial reform and an end of corruption in adoption and in many other spheres of life. However, the idea being pushed by Baroness Nicholson that international adoption inherently violates the rights of children is absurd, unfair and even cruel.

I hope you achieve your objective to improve family life and institutional reform in Romania and Bulgaria. However, the idea that children will find a happy ending in the absence of adoption, simply because the EU says so, is profoundly unfair, and certainly untrue.

I have never been to Romania, and although I am an adoptive parent, I did not adopt from Romania. However, it must be pointed out that the commitment, love and care of adoptive families in the US and in Europe are well known. I urge you to conduct much more time into empirical investigations concerning the actual life conditions of children. Repeating again and again that adoption is somehow related to abuse or to "selling" children may satisfy an agenda of the adults involved, but does little to shed light on the true rights of children.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sara Dillon".

Sara Dillon

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Mr Romano Prodi
President,
The European Commission
Brussels

March 11, 2004



Dear Mr. Prodi:

I am a law professor in Boston, where I teach the law of the European Union, as well as International Trade Law and International Children's Rights. I am a dual citizen of Ireland and the US, and taught law at University College Dublin for nearly seven years. I am a long-time supporter of the EU's role in the world, an admirer of the EU's "social market," and a supporter of European enlargement.

However, as an adoptive parent and as a human being, I am writing to you as a matter of the greatest urgency to find out why the EU is apparently taking an official position on intercountry adoption that equates adoption with a "violation of children's rights." In particular, I am baffled at the manner in which the rapporteur for Romania in the European Parliament, Baroness Nicholson, has been allowed to dominate and distort the debate on international adoption generally. In the name of transparency, I would like you to define the European position as you see it.

International adoption has, in a genuine, immediate and concrete way saved the lives of thousands of children. It is clear to me that many of the prominent child welfare organizations (UNICEF and Save the Children in particular) oppose adoption on ideological grounds, in favor of keeping even the most neglected children in their country of origin. In a world in which there are millions of street children snuffing glue and paint, millions of bonded child laborers, and tens of thousands of child prostitutes, this opposition is incomprehensible to me. Baroness Nicholson's position now seems to be that she will stop intercountry adoption not only in Romania, but as widely as she can.

It is disgraceful that child welfare organizations have been allowed to associate legal and reputable adoption, carried out through licensed agencies, with such horrors as child trafficking and organ harvesting. American adoptive parents are thoroughly examined and vetted before being allowed to adopt. Every aspect of their lives and backgrounds are checked out. Adoptive families in the United States, and indeed in Europe, are extremely successful, loving and committed.

There are many aspects of US foreign policy with which I disagree. I do not love everything about the United States. But one thing Americans do very well is open their hearts to children in adoption. We have a culture of adoption in the United States, domestic and foreign. The transracial family is a good thing, in cases where the children in question are not going to be brought up in alternative family care in their countries of origin. To pretend that in-country solutions can always be found is absurd—it is simply

not true. American adoptive parents in recent years recognize and celebrate the cultural heritage of the child, and at the same time accept the child fully as a cherished member of the family.

I am annoyed beyond words to hear repeated denunciation of adoption as selfish, exploitative and everything else negative that one could imagine. And to the extent that the EU is using its influence in other countries to stop adoption, I must protest. Of course there should be no corruption associated with adoption; every sane person would agree with this. But the agenda of the Baroness and those who agree with her is not simply about corruption—it is about discrediting and stopping intercountry adoption.

There is not a shred of evidence that lawful American adoption practices have anything to do with child trafficking—yet mysteriously, under the influence of UNICEF and now of the EU, countries are made to feel ashamed and are inclined to put their children back into institutions, where they will never be visited by anyone.

Do you follow the statistics on the fate of children who grow up in institutions in the former Soviet Union, for instance? Fixing these larger social problems takes time; the rights of children are immediate.

While in Ireland, I perceived a strange left-right coalition against adoption—on the right, because there is resistance to bringing in children who are different racially or culturally. On the left, because the professional social workers all tend to be vehemently anti-adoption and anti-American. It is not the 1950s. Adoption is no longer secretive. In developed countries, readier access to abortion has meant that unwanted children are no longer as much in evidence; but where they do exist, they have rights. Pretending that “traditional structures”, or “group homes” will solve the problem is itself a violation of children’s rights where it is just not true. And whether or not it is true is an empirical matter, incumbent on all of us to seek the answers to.

Have MEPS and representatives of the Commission done much visiting of institutions housing children around the world? It is my wish that an impartial, skeptical but open minded international body be formed to deal with this problem, as I see the influence being exerted by anti-adoption rhetoric as literally costing the lives of children. The notion that the most important right of a child is to stay in the country of birth, at the expense of the right to life and the right to be loved, is patent nonsense.

I intend to continue to work on this issue, and despite my great admiration for the EU, must ask for a formal explanation of the EU position on intercountry adoption. At the very least, I hope that this letter will encourage you to set up a task force, seeking information independently and carefully, based on real facts on the ground, about why children go into care, whether it is likely that they will find alternative families to love them--for if not, what possible reason can there be to oppose international adoption?

No one maintains that intercountry adoption will solve the problems of the world’s children on a mass scale. Neither will political asylum solve the problems of political persecution generally. But it will save the lives of individuals. And so can, and so does, international adoption.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

Sara Dillon



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Imprimé le 14/05/2004 à 12:50 par ROSEZ VIVIANE

