EURONET, the European Children’s Network, a network of international and national non-governmental NGOs working for children’s rights and protection has been working on a project to stimulate debate on the future of Europe in relation to children’s rights within the new accession countries and for this purpose has expanded contacts with children’s rights NGOs within the ten new EU member states and accession countries Romania and Bulgaria.

In line with the activities agreed in the contract, the following has been carried out: establish contacts with children’s NGOs in the ten new EU Member States and accession countries; the organisation of three regional seminars within the new EU Member States with participants of national children’s NGOs and of the European Children’s Network; the organisation of a training day on EU policies and children’s rights for participants who attended the regional seminars in Brussels and a closing conference in the European Parliament on the outcomes of the regional seminars with Members of the European Parliament and several Commission officials.

The preparatory process
During the period of May 2004 until December 2004 a list of existing children’s NGOs in the new EU member states and Bulgaria and Romania was put together. This was done in cooperation with existing contacts in the new Member States, with input from EURONET member organisations in Western Europe, of which several worked on children’s rights in the new Member States and input from websites of children’s NGOs.

After the setting up of the list of children’s NGOs three organisations were contacted and asked to co-organise a regional seminar within their countries. These organisations were the Polish Forum for Children’s Rights in Poland, Our Child Foundation in the Czech Republic and SEECRAN (South-East European Children’s Rights Action Network), who all agreed to host a EURONET seminar within their country. Together with the hosts of the seminars more children’s NGOs were identified that could be invited to the seminars. The hosts also assisted in finding national and regional speakers for the seminars.

The EURONET Management Council decided in cooperation with the host organisations on the children’s rights NGOs that needed to be invited to the seminars. This included at the most two NGOs per country and a few more from the host country.
Before the seminars took place participants received an information package on the work of the European Children’s Network on children’s rights within the European Union and on the membership of the European Children’s Network.

All seminars were set up in similar way, including an introduction on the work of the European Children’s Network on children’s rights in the EU, introduction on work of participating organisations, presentations from EU representatives, presentations on specific trans-national subjects by experts from the participating countries and a working session to identify common trans-national children’s rights issues that the EU should work on.

Regional Seminars in Central and Eastern Europe on Children’s Rights in the EU

Polish Seminar on 19 March 2005
On 19 March 2005 the first seminar took place in Warsaw, Poland. The meeting was hosted by the Polish Forum for Children’s Rights. Participants came from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The meeting was attended by about 20 participants (CHECK) and three representatives from EURONET.

At the seminar an introduction was given by a EURONET management council representative on the work of EURONET within the European Union and how national children’s NGOs are involved in this. Following this speakers from the EC Representation in Warsaw, the Polish Child Ombudsman and a representative from the Polish Ministry of Education and Sport took part in a Forum Discussion on the relevance of EU and national institutions to children’s rights.

The afternoon session discussed European and trans-national children’s rights issues with presentations from two national Polish children’s NGOs. Then the seminar split up into two parallel working groups to identify the key areas of concern and to propose several recommendations for the future work of EURONET. These recommendations would be brought to the final conference in Brussels on 14 June 2005.

During the conclusions of the seminar the two working groups presented their findings and identified areas on which EURONET could have an impact and adopted 4 recommendations in view of the final conference.

Czech Seminar on 23 April 2005
On 23 April 2005 the second seminar took place in Prague, the Czech Republic. The seminar was hosted by Our Child Foundation from the Czech Republic. Participants came from Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The meeting was attended by about 10 participants (CHECK) and two representatives from EURONET. A researcher and expert on children’s rights in the European Union, Sandy Ruxton, who works for EURONET on a report on children’s rights policies in the European Union, also took part in this seminar.

At the seminar an introduction was given by EURONET’s Secretary-General on the work of EURONET within the European Union and how national children’s NGOs are involved in this. This was followed by presentations from the EU Commission
representative in the Czech Republic and a representative of UNICEF in the Czech Republic. The afternoon session focussed on two European and trans-national children’s rights issues which were on Roma children within the countries participating in the seminar and on sexually exploited and missing children, in particular within the Czech Republic.

The meeting was not split up into working groups because of the smaller size of the seminar. The meeting came up with a list of key areas of concern for children’s rights within the new Member States and recommendations to work on these areas. Four key recommendations came out of this seminar for the conference in Brussels.

**Slovenian Seminar on 21 May 2005**
On 21 May the third seminar took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The seminar was hosted by SEECRAN. Participants came from Cyprus, Malta and Slovenia. The meeting was attended by about 15 person (CHECK) and two representatives from EURONET.

At the seminar an introduction was given by a representative of EURONET’s Management Council on the work of EURONET within the European Union and how national children’s NGOs are involved in this. This was followed by presentations of a representative of the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport and the deputy human rights ombudsman in Slovenia. The afternoon session focussed on two thematic areas: the Roma children and the actual extend of the phenomena of separated children, in particular in Slovenia. The seminar ended with a discussion on the key recommendations for the Brussels conference, which involved three thematic areas.

**Evaluation of the Regional Seminars**
An evaluation was prepared after each regional seminar took, so that lessons could be learned for the following seminars, mainly on practical organisational matters. In relation to the contents of all three seminars, the participants were all very positive about the fact that these seminars were organised and about the contents that were discussed. In first place because they learned more on European issues affecting children’s rights and the need to cooperate together on European level. In the second place to meet with other children’s rights NGOs from neighbouring countries and discuss cross-border children’s rights themes with them.

All participants were interested to take part in the final training day and conference on 13 and 14 June 2005 in Brussels.

The recommendations of the seminars will be used by the European Children’s Network for its future work programme. The results will also be used in a report that the European Children’s Network is drafting on “A Children’s Policy for Europe”. This report includes many different thematic areas around children’s rights, including themes that were discussed at the regional seminars. The report will be published at in November 2005.

**Training Day and Final Conference**
On 13 June 2005 in Brussels a training day was organised for all participants that took part in the regional seminars. This included participants from Estonia, Latvia,
Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta. The whole Management Council of the European Children’s Network also took part in the training day and was involved in the giving of the training.

The training day started with an interactive icebreaker quiz, which included knowledge questions on the EU. The quiz was done in small groups. The rest of the morning session was focusing on the functioning of the European Union, with a section on the European Commission, with a Commission official and an NGO representative from the Social Policy Platform. Another section was focusing on the European Parliament with a representative of the European Parliament and a Children’s NGOs in Brussels, Save the Children. The third section was focusing on working at national level for European thematic areas around children’s rights and presentations were made by the Spanish member of EURONET and a UK member of EURONET who was specialised on the accession country Bulgaria. Each section was followed by time for discussion.

The afternoon session started with two presentations on the building of links between the EU and the national level. EURONET presented its campaign for a legal base for children’s right in the European Constitution and EURONET’s Swedish member presented their involvement within EURONET and work they had done during the Swedish EU Presidency. After these presentations the meeting split up into three working groups, which each had to develop an EU campaigning strategy for work at the national level. The participants from the Central and Eastern European countries reported back to the plenary on the outcomes of these strategies and some very inspiring ideas were brought up by the participants, who all actively participated during the whole day.

On 14 June 2005 a conference was organised by EURONET in the European Parliament. The meeting was hosted by Lissy Gröner MEP. The meeting was attended by all participants from the training day plus several other members of EURONET.

The first part of the meeting focussed on an EU Strategy for Children, which was linked to the proposal of Commissioner Frattini to write a communication on children’s rights. Presentations around this subject were made by Lissy Gröner MEP, Patrick Trousson (Commission civil servant, responsible for the communication on children’s rights), Murielle Laurent (representing the Belgium Minister for Health, Children and Youth Welfare), Mieke Schuurman (Secretary-General EURONET). The presentations were followed by debate.

The second part of the conference was a thematic debate on the subjects that arose from the regional seminars. The host of each seminar presented the key recommendations of each seminar. After this interventions were made by Commission officials and Livia Jaroka MEP from Hungary on the subjects of Child poverty and social exclusion; “Children in institutions” and Discrimination of children, including Roma children. A lively in-depth debate with all the participants followed.
Evaluation of training day and conference
The training day and conference was considered very positive by the participants of the meeting and by the management council of EURONET. All new EU member states and the two accession countries participated in both days.

The participants had learned a lot during the training day on how the EU impacts on children’s rights and how national children’s NGOs can be involved in this. Many of the participants also recognized the importance to work together in a European network like EURONET and several of them have decided to become members of EURONET.

On the other hand, EURONET learned a lot from the children’s NGOs from the new Member States, in particular on issues that are at stake within their countries. EURONET wants to take these recommendations forward in its future work.

Another positive aspect was that several MEPs and Commission officials wanted to be involved in the final conference and were also impressed by the high level of debate that took place on the themes that were discussed here.

Follow-up to this Project
EURONET will continue to work with the children’s NGOs that took part in this project and encourage them to join our network and cooperate together for the rights of children in Europe. This will make EURONET a representative organisation to work with for the EU institutions. EURONET will keep the NGO in the new Member States informed on our work via our newsletter and website and will ask them to update on their activities and work.

EURONET will take the recommendations from the regional seminars and conference into account in its future work programme. EURONET will also include these in a new report on “A children’s policy in Europe”, to be published in November 2005. EURONET will use the report as an input to the communication of the Commission on children’s rights.