STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE WORK OF L’EUROPE DE L’ENFANCE

Paper for the L’Europe de l’Enfance meeting of 31 October 2007 in Lisbon

The European Children’s Network, EURONET, would like to present to the members of the L’Europe de l’Enfance group its position on a strategy for the future work of the group. EURONET believes that L’Europe de l’Enfance is a welcome initiative which could be explored and developed to a far greater extent than it is at the moment. EURONET has participated in all meetings of the group since the Belgium Presidency hosted the meeting in November 2001. EURONET has participated in different ways - by providing papers on different subjects discussed at the meetings, delivering speeches and taking part in discussions. Therefore EURONET believes that it can make a valuable contribution to the discussion on strategies for the future work of the group designed to improve fulfilment of the rights of the child in Europe.

EURONET Recommendations on the future strategy for “L’Europe de l’Enfance”

On the basis of several developments in the EU it is timely and important to establish L’Europe de l’Enfance on a more formal basis. These developments can be summarised as follows.

Firstly, the Commission Communication, “Towards an EU Strategy on Children’s Rights,” which was issued in July 2006 on the initiative of Commissioner Franco Frattini, Vice-President of the Commission responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security, has made a first step towards developing an EU strategy on children’s rights.

Secondly, the European Council has adopted the Lisbon Treaty in October 2007, which includes specific references to children’s rights in the European Union’s objectives. Children’s rights are included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is referred to in the Lisbon Treaty, making it a binding document for the EU.

All EU Member States have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and are obliged to implement it. The EU which adopts legislation affecting children’s rights in Member States, must also be bound to the Convention.

Finally, the UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence against Children has found that “violence against children happens everywhere, in every country and society and across all social groups. Violence against children includes physical violence, psychological violence such as insults and humiliation, discrimination, neglect and maltreatment. Although the consequences may vary according to the nature and severity of the violence inflicted, the short- and long-term repercussions for children are very often grave and damaging.”

In the light of these developments in the EU, EURONET makes the following recommendations:
• **More formal meetings with clear outcomes**
  Meetings need to be planned on a more formal basis and clarity is needed both on what
  the meetings hope to achieve and how outcomes can be efficiently assessed. Until now
  meetings have taken place on an ad hoc basis. There is a need for systematic follow-up
  on issues discussed at previous the meetings instead of having a different agenda for
  each meeting.

• **High-level Participation with at least one meeting at ministerial level per year.**
  The current situation is that informal meetings take place which do not oblige the
  Member States to attend or implement decisions. This can result in disjointed
  discussions on some issues within a group that may or may not be fully representative of
  the Union. Member States have also different expectations on the outcomes of the
  meetings, making it difficult to assess progress. Member States should reaffirm and
  support their support for the L’Europe de l’Enfance meetings, as this group is in an ideal
  position to champion cooperation on European children’s rights issues – a task that will
  become even more important with the implementation of the EC Communication on
  Children’s Rights. With regards to the Communication, there is a need for the L’Europe
  de l’Enfance group to take a lead on ensuring a successful Green Paper and White
  Paper consultation process including full and inclusive consultation with all stakeholders.

All Member State Ministers with primary responsibility for children should meet at least
once per year to discuss issues of common concern at EU level and across the Member
States. The Commissioner with the responsibility for children (or an EU focal point or
“Special Representative for Children”) should also attend to ensure co-ordination with the
Commission’s agenda.

• **Regular meetings of senior civil servants with a link to Commission activities**
  Senior civil servants from the Member States should meet regularly to exchange
  information on and discuss EU children’s policy, through the L’Europe de l’Enfance
  initiative. EU officials with responsibilities for children should be invited in order to
  encourage close linkage with the Commission’s activities. Links should also be
  established with the Council of Europe’s ‘Building a Future For and With Children’ action
  programme and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and its concluding
  observations.

• **A clear long-term strategy for the L’Europe de l’Enfance**
  On the basis of current and longer-term developments in the EU in the field of children’s
  rights the L’Europe de l’Enfance group should develop a clear strategy for children’s rights
  and set up a list of subjects that they would like to discuss and cooperate upon.
  Many decisions taken by the EU affect the lives of children directly or indirectly and many
  issues of concern to children are transnational in nature e.g. in the field of social
  protection, media and internet, health, justice, environment, asylum and migration
  legislation, etc. Euronet’s 2006 report “What about us? Children’s Rights in the
  European Union: next steps” gives a complete overview of the internal policies and
  legislations of the EU affecting children and we suggest to take this as a basis for deciding
  on the issues that the group should have on its long-term agenda. Part of the L’Europe de
  l’Enfance strategy should also include the involvement of the group in the work on the
  Communication on the Rights of the Child and to the White Paper on Children’s Rights
  that will follow within the next two years. The European Forum provides a unique
  opportunity for the L’Europe de l’Enfance group to ensure the involvement of Member
  States, and build on the exchange of good practice at the EU level. ChildONEurope could
  also play a key role in providing data and analyses on specific child rights subjects,
  feeding into the development of the Strategy.

• **Develop stronger links with the European Institutions**
Cooperation with Commissioner(s) responsible for children’s issues, Commission civil servants responsible for children’s rights in the different DGs, and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency is recommended. The Children’s Unit, as proposed in the Commission Communication, should be fully established with appropriate staff and financial resources and cooperation with it should be given a high priority.

Cooperation with the European Parliament is also recommended. This could be done by establishing contacts with the MEP Alliance for Children’s Rights in the European Parliament and with the Intergroup on Family and Protection of Childhood, as well as following-up on the EP LIBE resolution to be finalised by the end of 2007. In many legislative areas affecting children the EP has powers to amend and co-decide. In particular in the field of budget the EP is the authority together with the Council of Ministers. This could be a yet unexplored field of cooperation. Cooperation with national parliaments is also recommended.

In addition, greater links should be established with the emerging priorities regarding children on the EU social agenda as part of the Lisbon Strategy. One such area is the priority of tackling child poverty, where there are already established resources and the L’Europe de l’Enfance group could have a significant impact.

- **Commit to the elimination of Violence against Children**

  Following the UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence against Children published in 2006, the L’Europe de l’Enfance group should ensure that the EU commits to the elimination of all types of violence against children. There is a need for the EU to take a leading role in promoting the highest standards towards ending all forms of violence in all settings. In particular, the EU should call for the inclusion of a ban on violence in the UN General Assembly Omnibus resolution on child rights which should be adopted in December 2007. The resolution focuses on violence against children. L’Europe de l’Enfance should do their utmost to support the appointment of a Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on the Elimination of Violence against Children, with the mandate and resources required to enforce global commitments to end violence against children.

**Background information**

**Terms of Reference:**

The L’Europe de l’Enfance group was established on 20 November 2000, International Children’s Rights Day, by the French EU Presidency. At the first meeting Ministers responsible for childhood participated in the meeting. Since 2001 successive Presidencies have invited Ministers and/or senior civil servants to meet, exchange experiences and to cooperate together on an informal basis (outside the formal EU framework).

The initiative set out to:

- Better understand the living conditions of children in Europe, the policies and the best practices followed;
- Develop comparative studies;
- Develop common investigating and operational methods of approach in order to fight a growing number of transnational phenomena with a negative impact on children, such as unaccompanied foreign migrant children, paedophilia, sex tourism, illegal and dangerous information on the internet, etc.

In this context it was felt that the group should meet to exchange best practices and strategies in the field of children’s rights within the EU and in relation to implementation of the
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The aim of the group was to mainstream children’s rights in all EU policies.

However the group cannot adopt binding declarations and L’Europe de l’Enfance does not an official status in the EU structure. Although meetings are organised at a Ministerial Level or at a senior civil servant level they are held on an informal basis.

In order to support the L’Europe de l’Enfance it was agreed between ministers that a scientific body should be established to develop studies, exchange information and undertake comparison of childhood and adolescence. To this end, a European Network of Centres and Observatories on Childhood was officially launched in Florence on 24 January 2003, under the acronym “ChildONEurope”. Its aims are:

- Exchange of knowledge and information on laws, policies, programmes, statistics, studies, research, best practices regarding childhood and adolescence;
- Exchange of knowledge on methodology and indicators in order to obtain comparability of information;
- Comparative analysis on specific subjects.

EURONET is looking forward to further cooperation with the L’Europe de l’Enfance group and we are at your disposal for further information.

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