THE EUROPEAN CHILDREN’S NETWORK
Issue 5, 1999

NEWSLETTER

(Table of Contents in box on left)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Report of Euronet Symposium 2

News from the European Institutions and Member States
PVC in Soft Toys for Children 10
Hermange Report 10
New Law against Child Sexual Exploitation in Italy 10

News from Euronet Members
Focus on Children publishes new newsletter 11
European Network for Children’s Play launches new Web Site 11

Forthcoming Events 12

Euronet Publications 13

Euronet Members Organisations 14

• INTRODUCTION

Welcome to issue Five of the Euronet European Children’s Network newsletter. Its purpose is to keep you informed of Euronet’s actions and membership and to brief you on relevant developments in the European Union and member states’ policies affecting children. The newsletter also aims to be a means of communication between NGOs at national level. Therefore, you are invited to contribute on any initiative which is relevant to Euronet’s area of work, either by phone (+ 32 2 512 4500), fax (+ 32 2 512 6673) or e-mail “savechildbru@skynet.be”. This issue contains a report of the Euronet Symposium which was held on 27 and 28 January 1999 in Brussels, and some news from the European Institutions. For information on the contents and the distribution of the newsletter please contact Mieke Schuurman at the address above.

REPORT OF EURONET SYMPOSIUM (in box, to separate from rest of newsletter)

Euronet project funded with the support of the European Commission DG V.
On 27 and 28 January 1999 EURONET launched the report “A Children’s Policy for 21st Century Europe: First Steps”. Participants from most EU countries and Eastern European countries took part in the programme. Commission representatives, MEPs, young people and experts on children’s issues made interesting contributions at the Symposium. Several journalists covered the launch. It was reported on Euronews, TV Brussels, the Bavarian radio and in several national newspapers.

This newsletter contains a summary of the first day of the conference. The conference report and action plan will be published separately and distributed at the beginning of March to readers of the newsletter and the participants at the conference.

Bartho Pronk MEP chaired the first day of the Symposium. He stressed the importance of the EU for children and complimented Euronet on an excellent report. He said “The fact that 20% of children live in poverty in the EU is shocking. The EU is one of the richest nations but children experience violence, abuse, pollution, and need to be protected from this. There are many divergences across the EU, for example family forms differ from North - South and East -West. This influences our views towards children and towards the state. Despite these differences there is a need for an EU children’s policy.”

Presentation by Sandy Ruxton, author of the report “A Children’s Policy for Europe: First Steps”

Sandy Ruxton began by saying that during the last decade ‘children’s policy’ had come of age in Europe. This reflects the values and standards of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by all EU member states.

At national and local level there are several positive examples of this trend, such as Ombudsmen or Commissioners for children in Austria and Sweden and a Commission for Children’s Rights in Portugal. Despite these positive examples there remains plenty to be done if we are to make children’s rights a reality, especially at the EU level. Immense challenges are facing the EU as we move into the 21st century, which will have a huge impact on children:

- **Demographic challenges**: the next 30 years could see the EU child population fall by 11%, whereas the numbers of over 60s may grow by 50%.
- **Economic and political challenges**: the introduction of the single currency, enlargement, the employment agenda.
- **Social challenges**: one fifth of children still live in households with an income of below 50% of the average in their country.
Therefore an EU children’s policy must be developed if the rights and interests of children and young people are to be acknowledged and addressed fully within the Union.

Sandy Ruxton spelt out four weaknesses in the EU’s current approach to children’s issues.

Firstly, in general children’s interests are invisible within the EU policy-making process, for example children only receive a miniscule percentage of resources from the EU Budget.

Secondly, children’s interests are often overridden by economic interests.

Thirdly, there is no focal point within the EU structures for developing overall policy direction and mainstreaming a children’ perspective across all policy areas.

Fourthly, the EU has very limited legal bases for action in relation to children. The Article K1 in the Amsterdam Treaty refers for the first time ever to children. However, tackling offences against them remains very limited and it is covered by the third pillar which concerns intergovernmental co-operation. Other Treaty articles on combating social exclusion and non-discrimination on the grounds of age are useful too, although they do not specifically target children.

The main recommendations of the report are:

- That the EU should provide a legal framework to ensure that children’s interests are fully respected within EU policy making.
- A Children’s Unit should be established, which would provide a lead within the Commission and oversee the development of an overall EU children’s policy. It could also develop liaison between the EU institutions and children’s NGOs.
- To improve opportunities for children themselves and involve them more into decision-making processes.
- To improve available information on children and monitor their circumstances more effectively.

Sandy Ruxton concluded by stating that the twentieth century had shown what could be achieved with popular support, such as improvements in the living conditions of working people and progress towards equality between the sexes. “At the beginning of the new millennium, it is time to put children on the European agenda too: time for a children’s policy for twenty-first century Europe”.

Daniel Diaz Muñoz (a young person) and Purificacion Llaquet Balledou of Save the Children Spain presented the European Children’s Agenda for Action

Daniel Diaz Muñoz:

Daniel Diaz Muñoz spoke on behalf of the millions of children who live in the EU. He said “I am a member of a young people’s organisation called AJAO 100 of Save the Children in Spain, who organise different activities: weekends with other young people, playing sport,
studying and living together. We have come to the Symposium from different countries: Portugal, Sweden, Ireland and Spain”.

“Our intention is to express the concerns of all young people in the EU: we feel excluded from your discussions, your concerns. Young people who live in the EU have a right to be respected, to be heard and to participate in the development of Europe. But so many discussions exclude us and the 90 million children who live in Europe and we are unable to vote. Young people have opinions and needs and want to be citizens of Europe with full rights”.

“Last year there was a meeting in Belfast where 150 young people developed a young people’s European agenda. These are some of its conclusions:

- Young people should have access to education which prepares them for life
- There should be more exchange between students in Europe
- Health programmes should pay more attention to children.
- The EU should work to combat the social exclusion of children and young people
- EU countries should work to combat organised crime.
- The EU should pay attention to the needs of young people in the media.
- The EU should pay attention to the problem of juvenile delinquency
- The EU should fight against social discrimination and discrimination against young people”.

Purificacion Llaquet Balledou of Save the Children Spain:

Purificacion Llaquet Balledou confirmed what Daniel said about children and young people wanting to participate in the development of Europe and in the development of citizenship in Europe. “We are still a long way from such a Europe:

- Children are invisible, despite the fact that the economic, cultural, social and political development of Europe depends on its 90 million children and young people.
- Children are indirect beneficiaries of action directed at other groups such as workers, women and families.
- There are many new changes affecting the future of Europe such as EMU, enlargement, the future social model, it is necessary to know the impact of these changes on the lives of children.
- It will be necessary to study the impact of demographic changes on children, including the difference between rich and poor and the consequences of divergences in wealth.

Euronet - the European children’s network has identified proposals for the development of a children’s policy for 21st century. Amongst the proposals the most important is that a new article must be included in the Treaty on the European Union, so that the EU can contribute to the promotion and protection of children’s rights. One of the political priorities of the EU should be that legislation must be compatible with the principles of the
**best interests of the child** as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by all member states.

In addition, it is necessary that more proposals from the EU are aimed at young people and children and that a proportion of general programmes is targeted at young people. An annual analysis of expenditure on young people must be published. This will help us to see the priorities. Moreover, **civil dialogue** must be created where children are defenders of their own interests and rights.

The agenda presented today by Euronet identifies action that can be taken with existing legal bases that the Commission and the member states can use to begin to develop a children’s policy. For example, adopting the Daphne programme to combat violence against children and also ensuring that EU action on discrimination treats children as a group, who experience discrimination on grounds of age.

This year we will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is a good opportunity for the Commission to publish a communication on children”.

_Mary Banotti MEP_

Mary Banotti congratulated Euronet on the **report**: “It is a **working tool** and will help get the issue on the political agenda.

Petitions were made to the European Parliament about a year ago on abducted children. Then when the **Dutroux issue** hit the headlines, children became an issue in the EU and all over the world: for the first time all MEPs were queuing up to support the resolution.

**Children are seen as a soft political issue**, something that women politicians deal with. The priority given to children was summed up by the quote in the report that no Minister goes home to their member state and says that they have succeeded in negotiating a bill for children, they go home and talk about farm subsidies. One never hears about the Social Affairs Ministers sitting until 4 o’clock in the morning discussing children’s issues.

Children’s issues must be dealt with in a number of different policy areas. There are serious political issues at stake with children’s policy and it is important that these are not exploited in media terms. For example we should not see issues such as children in war or children who have been sexually abused exploited by the media.

On **children’s participation**, it took a long time to convince people that this was important. However, the more we hear from young people the better. At the world Congress in Stockholm, there was a presentation by street children which was very important and interesting.
Despite the fact that there are limited competencies in the EU Treaties strong lobbies have grown up around many of the issues that MEPs consider important such as animal welfare, environment and disability. Lobby groups must become more effective, the report of Euronet is extremely professional and is an excellent way of establishing a lobby and establishing networks. It is unfortunate that it often takes a tragedy to put an issue on the agenda. Until the Dutroux affair the EU had hardly mentioned children at all.

NGOs need to lobby not only at EU level but also at national level. MEPs and others worked hard on ensuring that the non discrimination clause was included in the Treaty - now we need a more direct reference to children’s rights. The European Parliament is an important ally in the process of ensuring that children’s rights are included in the Treaty, however the decisions are taken at national level by Ministers”.

Response by Ms Soledad Blanco, Head of Unit of Equal Opportunities, European Commission, DG V.

Ms Soledad Blanco said that DG V supported the preparation of the report and she complimented Euronet on the report. “The report states that there are important changes going on whether demographic or otherwise and that these have a strong influence on family structures. Children’s issues remain principally within national competencies and member states responsibilities”. However Ms Soledad Blanco confirmed that there are new possibilities for children in the Amsterdam Treaty.

“Europe is characterized by declining birth rates, changing family structures, rising divorce rates and a need for continuing international co-operation on family and children policy. The European Commission has limited competence in this area, moreover there are significant divergences between the member states”.

What is the Commission doing:

- proposals on reconciling work and family life
- proposals on the changes in distribution of work
- work on maternity leave, paternity leave and part time employment
- activities on reconciliation of child care and work and increase in the participation of men in the caring role
- studies and networking regarding equal opportunities and activities combining training and care are funded by the NOW programme

At the moment the Commission is undertaking preparatory measures on non discrimination and social inclusion.

One delegate raised the question of whether there should be a children’s unit in the Commission. Ms Soledad Blanco answered that at present the Commission is reorganising and looking at whether there is duplication between what different areas of
the Commission is doing. If there is a stronger legal base this will give greater possibilities to support activities to promote the interests of children.

**Question Time Panel: Responses to the European Children’s Agenda**

During the afternoon a question time panel answered questions on European children’s issues asked by the delegates. Members of the question time panel were experts from UNICEF, the Austrian Institute for Family Studies, the European Commission, the European Parliament and Euronet's national contact people.

**Budget Lines for Children:**

*Marianna Paraskeva, European Commission, DG V*

At present there is limited co-ordination within the Commission on children’s issues. After the Dutroux affair two budget lines, Daphne and STOP, were created. There is no longer a continuation of the family and children budget line. Children are mainstreamed into other budgetlines. There is a dispersion of competence within the EU on children’s policy. Only one unit in the Commission can pull this all together

**European Parliament Report on the Protection of Family and Children:**

*Ms Hermange MEP*

Ms Hermange, author of a European Parliament report on the protection of family and children, said that there are several proposals in her report concerning children. These include that the Council of Ministers should meet twice a year to discuss Family and Children’s issues and that each year guidelines and national plans should be developed (rather like the employment guidelines). Moreover there should be a focal point within the institutions like the Observatory on Health or Environment.

**Children in the EU Treaty:**

*Helen Agathonos, Euronet contact person, Greece*

Euronet is a network of children’s NGOs that has worked for a reference to children in the Amsterdam Treaty. Children’s NGOs now need to work together in an organised manner for a comprehensive reference to children’s rights in the next EU Treaty.

**Discrimination against disabled Children:**

*Sandy Ruxton, author of the report*

There should be a programme or actions directed at working on the discrimination that children experience on grounds of age. Double discrimination affects disabled children.
The non discrimination clause in Article 13 gives the EU the possibility to address discrimination that children who are disabled experience.

Voting Age:

 Helmut Wintersberger, Austrian Institute for Family Studies
Lowering the voting age is a priority for many young people in Austria and Germany. This was also a conclusion of the regional seminar which was organised by Euronet’s member organisation in Austria in October 1998 on the participation of children and the age limit for political participation.

Violence against Women and Children

 Sandy Ruxton, author of the report
Concerning violence against women and children, it is important that the Daphne programme is adopted without undue delay. This will enable the EU to work Europe wide on issues concerning violence against women and children.

 Janet Nelson, UNICEF
In October 1998 a consultation about violence against women and children was undertaken by UNICEF. UNICEF believes there is a family issue in relation to the violence against women and children. The family as a whole needs support and parents have to learn how to carry out their role better and take care of their children.

Involvement of small Children’s NGOs

 Diana Sutton, Save the Children
It is important that small children’s NGOs link with what is going on in their national network: you can get involved at national level through coalitions working on European issues.

Council of Europe Statement on its Action Programme for Children

 Anna Gillet, Council of Europe
Anna Gillet from the Council of Europe made a short statement on the Council of Europe Action programme for children. There will be a Ministerial Conference in June in Stockholm where the family and children Ministers will meet to discuss family and children’s policy. The Council of Europe programme for children was only just adopted, because many member states of the Council of Europe wanted to focus on child protection only.
Closing Speech by Ursula Schleicher MEP, Vice President of the European Parliament

Ursula Schleicher MEP congratulated Euronet on publishing this stimulating report, which represents a significant contribution to debate about the future of the Union itself. She stated that it is vital that the EU should do what it can to ensure that a child perspective is integral to its policy-making and to encourage children to become active and responsible citizens. The EU can and should ‘add value’ in relation to particular child welfare issues, particularly - but not exclusively - those where a transnational dimension is concerned.

Ursula Schleicher gave some examples of initiatives that the European Parliament has taken during the last years concerning children. In 1992 a resolution for a European Charter of Children’s Rights was proposed. In 1996 following the Dutroux affair in Belgium and the Stockholm World Congress on the sexual exploitation of children, the Parliament - together with other EU institutions - decided to promote a more ambitious child protection agenda. On November 20 of that year, the International Children’s Day, the Parliament adopted a report on measures to protect children, which argued among other things that the protection of children should be written into the EU Treaties. Recently the European Parliament has adopted an own initiative report on the protection of children.

The European Parliament plays a significant role in deciding the EU’s budget. Ursula Schleicher was delighted that at the end of last year the Parliament adopted budget lines on combating and preventing discrimination and social exclusion, both of which include children.

Pressure from the Parliament will not be enough to achieve real change for children, and the role of NGOs will be crucial.

NEWS FROM THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS AND MEMBER STATES

PVC in Soft Toys for Children: Contradictory Interpretations of latest Studies

Following information in previous newsletters on the possible ban of PVC in soft toys by the European Commission, the EU’s Scientific Committee for Toxicology adopted a new opinion. This opinion concerned toys and child-care articles intended to be placed in the mouth by children under 3 years of age, made in soft PVC containing certain phthalates. It confirmed that the Dutch study on the danger for children does not provide a clear answer whether these toys are dangerous for children’s health. The Committee has recommended carrying out a comparative study by different national laboratories to determine whether the testing method used by the Dutch group can be reproduced and to
pursue additional studies to determine children’s total exposure time to toys made of soft PVC.

Following the study of the EU’s Scientific Committee, Commissioner Bangemann, who is responsible for industry in the European Commission, is considering an immediate ban on using some plastic softeners in babies’ teething rings and dummies, and a temporary prohibition on other toys. Commissioner Bangemann’s proposals would amend an existing EU directive on the marketing and use of products. This would require the approval of both national Governments and the European Parliament.

In the mean time the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) and Greenpeace continue to demand an immediate embargo on the sale in the Union of toys made of soft PVC containing phthalates. “It is not acceptable that any hazardous substance be used in children’s toys”, said the toxics adviser of Greenpeace International’s European unit.

Hermange Report on Protection of Family and Children

On 28 January 1999 the European Parliament voted the Hermange report concerning the protection of families and children in Europe. In her report Ms Hermange said that children are the future and she regretted that they are neglected in European policy. Presenting her report in the European Parliament she called for a genuine European childhood policy. The European Parliament recommends that an ombudsman responsible for children and a European centre for endangered children are established.

New Law against Child Sexual Exploitation passed in Italy

At the end of July 1998 the Italian Parliament passed a new law against children’s sexual exploitation. It covers new fields such as the production and dissemination of pornographic documentation by Internet.

NEWS FROM EURONET MEMBERS

Focus on Children in Ireland published New Newsletter

Focus on Children, Euronet’s national contact person, which consists of 30 member organisations in Ireland and Northern Ireland and some associate member organisations has published the first issue of its newsletter. It is a colourful newsletter which has been designed and produced by young people of Crosscare Aftercare unit as part of the
continuing Youth Participation Programme of Focus on Children. The newsletter contains information on activities of Focus on Children as well as of Euronet.

Copies can be obtained from Carol Conlin, Focus on Children, 542/544 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast BT4 3HE, tel: +44 1232 672366, fax: +44 1232 672399, e-mail “foc@iol.ie”.

European Network for Children’s Play launches Web Site

The European Network for Children’s Play has launched its own web site. The ENCP site intends to encourage contacts, networking, discussion and information exchange between all those interested and/or involved in the fascinating world of children’s play, the right to which is laid down in art. 31 of the UN Convention on the Child.

The site also provides an introduction to current hot items, such as the new EU safety standards for play equipment. Site visitors can also join the Network, share materials, make announcements, etc.

In the meantime this site includes the Euronet newsletters that have already been published and other information on Euronet activities.

The address of the web site is: http://www.ndo.be/encp

• FORTHCOMING EVENTS

• Dublin, Ireland
23/24 February 1999: AGM Focus on Children in Dublin, Ireland. For further information contact Sean Lawless, tel: +353 18788708, fax: +353 1 8788734, e-mail: “foc@iol.ie”.

• Brussels, Belgium
1 March 1999: Seminar “Children are unbeatable!” in the European Parliament, Brussels. For further information contact Peter Newell, tel: +44 171 700 0627, fax: +44 171 700 1105 or e-mail “epoch-worldwide@mcr1.poptel.org.uk”

• Brussels, Belgium
1 and 2 March 1999: European Round Table on Children’s Health in the European Parliament. For further information contact the office of Hiltrud Breyer MEP, tel: +32 2 284 7287, fax: +32 2 284 9287.

• Brussels, Belgium
17 March 1999 from 15.00 until 18.30 hr: EP roundtable of experts, NGOs and politicians on the situation of children in Central and Eastern European Countries. For further
information contact Gloria Macias Svensson, Rädda Barnen EU liaison office, tel: +32 2 7321800, fax: +32 2 7322115.

- **Seville, Spain**
  April: event in Seville, Spain, organised by Save the Children Spain and Rädda Barnen “Educating, not Punishing”. For further information contact Purificación Llaquet Baldellou, Save the Children Spain, tel: +34 91 5130500, fax +34 91 5523272, e-mail: “funcoe@funcoe.es”.

- **Barcelona, Spain**
  28-30 April 1999: Barcelona, “Quality of Life for Children & Adolescents in the Urban World”. For further information contact Purificación Llaquet Baldellou, Save the Children Spain, tel: +34 91 5130500, fax +34 91 5523272.

- **Stockholm, Sweden**
  27-28 May 1999: Stockholm, Rädda Barnen is organising a meeting of national children’s rights coalitions. For further information contact Simone Ek, tel: +46 8 698 90 00, fax: +46 8 698 90 13, e-mail: “simone.ek@rb.se”.

- **Brussels, Belgium and Member States**

- **Venice, Italy**
  Autumn 1999: European Seminar on the issue of children and justice, organised by BICE Italy. For further information contact Isabella Poli, tel/fax: + 39 0573 401804, e-mail: “biceit@tin.it”.

**LIST OF PUBLICATIONS**


- **Euronet -Leaflet ‘Children are European Citizens Too’,** in 11 European languages.


- **Euronet- A Proposal and Invitation: Building a Europe with and for children,** in English, French and Spanish (September 1997).

- **Euronet- The Single Market - What is in it for Children?,** in English (February 1998).

- **Euronet- Active Voices, Children’s Choices - Children as Citizens of Europe** by Sandy Ruxton (researcher Euronet): a Discussion Document, in English and Spanish.
- **Euronet- A Children’s Agenda for Europe**, outcome of Belfast conference, in English and Spanish. (May 1998)

- **Euronet Report of the Austrian Seminar “Participation of Children and Youth in Political Decision Making-Processes. Is the lowering of the Age Limit for Political Participation an Answer for Europe?”**, in English. (October 1998)

- **Newsletter of the International Save the Children Alliance (Brussels office)**: this monthly newsletter gives more information on European issues for children as well as EU development policy related to children. It is produced once a month, in English, French and on e-mail.
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*includes UK NGOs in membership
This newsletter is available in English and French and on e-mail. Euronet partners are encouraged to translate the newsletter in their own language or highlights of it. The Spanish member organisation Funcoe has done this for a number of existing Euronet publications. If you are translating the newsletter please let the Euronet coordinator know. Could you also inform her about any national initiatives which are planned. These can be included in the newsletter.