NEWSLETTER 6: EUROPEAN ELECTIONS SPECIAL

THE CHILDREN OF TODAY ARE THE VOTERS OF TOMORROW

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INTRODUCTION
Why a special elections issue?

Welcome to issue six of the Euronet the European Children’s Network newsletter. This issue is dedicated to the European Elections which will be held from Thursday 10 until Sunday 13 June 1999 in all countries of the European Union. This new Parliament will, following ratification of the Amsterdam Treaty, have more power and wider responsibilities for the well-being of the citizens of Europe. It will be the Parliament that takes Europe into the 21st century. However, the most important citizens of the new century – the children of Europe – will have no vote in June 1999. But they have a voice through EURONET, a coalition of networks and organisations campaigning for the interests and rights of children at European level. Since children are still invisible on the European agenda it is now time to mobilise your organisation and start promoting children’s issues on a European level with your national MEPs, candidate MEPs and the general public. This newsletter gives you information on the European elections, the manifestos of the different political groups in the European Parliament and tools to use for campaigning for children.

If you have questions, ideas or remarks about the campaign you can contact Mieke Schuurman at the address above.

Why is it important for you to get involved in the European elections?

Some decisions that affect children are no longer taken on a national level but are taken by the European Union. Examples include cross border trafficking, the single market, consumer issues and the media. Moreover, the proportion of the EU’s budget which is currently spent on children is miniscule in comparison with other aspects of EU activity. EU investment for children should therefore be increased. All European citizens have access to the European Parliament to attend its meetings. However, children are not allowed into the European Parliament without being accompanied by an adult.

Campaigning for children in the European elections does not need to be costly or time consuming. As you can read in this newsletter, there are several activities you can do which cost a minimum of time and personnel. This is a concrete way of how you can support Euronet on a national level.

• The European elections are an ideal occasion to inform politicians and candidate MEPs on European children’s issues. You can use the report “A Children’s Policy for 21st Century Europe: First Steps” and the leaflet “Children are European Citizens too” with the key recommendations of Euronet. A model letter is included in the section ‘Why are Children Important in the European Union? A Model Letter’.
• The report is now available in four languages, English, French, Spanish and German, and the leaflet with the Agenda for Action is available in the 11 EU languages. You can get copies from your national contact person (see list at the end of newsletter).

• The European elections are a good occasion to ask MEPs and candidates to take stands on children's issues. After the elections you can follow-up on these commitments. Children and young people can also ask questions to MEPs. You can find information on what kind of questions you can ask and some background information on the report in the sections ‘What can you do?’ and ‘What is in the Report’?

Agenda for Action

Euronet’s Agenda for Action is set out in the leaflet which states the key recommendations Euronet would like to achieve for children. The leaflet should be used in campaigning during the European elections. You can distribute this Agenda for Action to politicians, political parties and the media.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?


There are several activities you can do to raise awareness for children with MEPs, candidate MEPs and the media.

Try to do a few of the following activities. It is also a good idea to get children and young people involved in campaigning and let them voice their ideas to the politicians. After all, they are the voters of tomorrow! Euronet’s organisation Focus on Children in Ireland is planning to do this with the groups of young people they are working with.

Activities you can do for the European Elections at National Level

Sending Letters:

• Ask candidates for the European elections to talk about what they plan to do to promote children’s issues once they are elected. This can be done by sending or e-mailing letters from NGOs and children and young people in which you ask them to promote the inclusion of a legal base for children in the EU Treaty and the participation of children (see model letter). Most political parties hold election meetings which you can attend and use as an opportunity to talk to politicians, or you can invite them to a national event on children.
Questions to ask candidate MEPs

- In political debates journalists often ask questions on economic affairs, the euro and agriculture. They should be made aware of other types of questions they can ask concerning children. This can be done by giving interviews and tips to journalists on what questions they could ask candidates on European children’s issues or simply by sending out the leaflet.

Some examples:
- “If you were to be elected would you then support the inclusion of a new article referring to rights and needs of children in the EU Treaty, during the next revision of the Treaty?”
- “Could you tell us the reasons for being a candidate MEP and what you would do for children?”
- “If you were elected would you use your power as a budgetary authority to extend the budgets which are currently targeted on youth to younger children and increase resources available to children in general budgetlines and programmes?”
- “If you were elected would you ensure that the EU institutions promoted a dialogue with NGO’s and children-led organisations”.
- “If you were elected would you work for EU-programmes for children and would you be prepared to support the development of an Intergroup on children’s issues?”

You can use the leaflet to get more ideas for questions or call the Euronet co-ordinator (Mieke Schuurman).

10th Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

- You can use the fact that this year is the 10th Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a means of getting attention for the rights of the child.

For example, you can ask candidate MEPs the following question:
- “If you were elected would you support the inclusion of a legal base to promote the protection of the rights and needs of children based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child”?

Distribution of leaflet

- You can circulate the leaflet as widely as possible to politicians, political parties, the media and other children’s NGOs.
- National platforms of children’s NGOs can be used for disseminating the European Children’s Agenda to member organisations.

A questionnaire

- You can prepare a questionnaire for politicians and candidates and ask them about their commitment to do something for children once elected. In this questionnaire you can cover different subjects which are mentioned in the report, such as violence against children, social exclusion of children, non-
discrimination of children, the participation of children, children and the media, children as consumers and information on children.

Important Points to bear in mind when Campaigning

- In all these activities it is important to identify issues which are relevant in your country and on which you have a lot of knowledge, and to raise European aspects of these issues with candidate MEPs.
- You also should work on ALL political parties with the same message, so that your organisation remains impartial and is not linked to one or more political parties.
- In some member states there are rules governing what type of political activity NGOs can engage in. It is important to check out what these rules are.
Why are Children Important in the European Union?

In this section you can find a model letter which you can send to (candidate) MEPs. This letter can be adapted for national use and you can include more questions. You can find examples in the ‘What can you do’ section.

Model letter to sent to candidate MEPs.

To: (Candidate) MEP

Dear Mr/Ms,

I am writing to you as a member of (Name children’s organisation), which belongs to the European Children’s Network, to draw your attention to the position of children within in the European Union and ask you to take children’s issues forward in the new European Parliament, should you be elected.

The development of the EU is dependent on its 90 million children, one fifth of the population of Europe. Children will be more affected than any other population group by decisions with long-term implications being taken now. Children deserve attention as active citizens of Europe today with their own specific human rights and needs. A children’s policy focuses on the specific interests of children (rather than other population groups, such as family, youth and women), with children defined as those up to 18 years of age.

At national and local level there has been a visible trend towards policies which explicitly recognise the distinctive position and interests of children. It is also important to focus attention on how Europe and the disappearance of national boundaries can affect children in both positive and negative ways.

This year is the tenth anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This Convention has been signed by our country. If you are elected, would you then be prepared to work for a legal base in the EU Treaty which promotes and protects the rights and needs of children? And would you promote the involvement of children and young people in decision making at all levels through appropriate mechanisms?

You will find enclosed the leaflet with the European Agenda for Children from the European Children’s Network, Euronet. This leaflet contains the main recommendations for children in the EU. I ask you to support these recommendations and carry them forward in your work as a (future) MEP.

We wish you good luck in your elections campaign and hope that you will take European children’s issues forward.
For more information you can contact ............, tel.....

Yours sincerely,
The Swedish Example:

Euronet’s member organisation in Sweden, Rädda Barnen, ran a campaign for their national elections last year. They wanted to put children’s issues on the election agenda and requested that the different political parties observe children’s rights into their election debates and into their political programs. This is an example of what you could do and what kind of effects it can have.

To support their election campaign, Rädda Barnen published their own election manifesto for children with a list of sixteen priorities and concerns they wanted to raise with the public and politicians. Some of their priorities were:
- To create a secure school environment,
- To strengthen the position of the child in the legal process,
- To ensure citizenship for stateless children
- To ensure the best interests of the child in family reunification matters
- To criminalise the possession of child pornography
- To strengthen the position of children with disabilities.
- To give all children an equal right to day care facilities

The manifesto was supported by posters which called on voters to vote for children and asked the public to examine the policies of the different parties affecting children.

Rädda Barnen obtained a lot of publicity in newspapers for their election manifesto. People in general were interested and it gave Rädda Barnen the profile of demanding political will. In general there was little debate on children with each political party leader on television. However, at the very last minute before the elections the Prime Minister promised day care facilities for all including those with unemployed parents whose children lose day care facilities.

For further information contact Simone Ek, Rädda Barnen, tel: +46 8 698 90 00, fax: +46 8 698 90 13, e-mail: “simone.ek@rb.se”.

Follow-up after the Elections

Follow-up after the elections is very important. Euronet will send you a draft letter after the elections which can be adapted for you to send to newly elected MEPs.

The replies MEPs have given to questions on European Children’s issues and the commitments they have made to actively do something should be followed-up after the MEPs have been elected. Please let the Euronet Brussels office know the results of your campaigning, such as publicity and answers from politicians, so that Euronet can also follow this up in their contacts with the European Parliament and the national agenda where there is a European dimension.
After the elections you can write to MEPs to congratulate them on their election. You can also ask for a meeting with them and you can begin co-operating with them on European children’s issues in the future. Keep briefing them on children’s issues which are on the European agenda.

**(in a Box)**

**Some Basic Facts on the European Elections**

The forthcoming European elections will be held from 10-13 June in all EU Member States. There are no uniform electoral procedures for all Member States yet, but the proportional system has been generalised. A proportional voting system means that each political party which gets a certain percentage of the overall votes receives a corresponding number of seats in the Parliament.

Polling will take place on 10 June in Denmark, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, 11 June in Ireland and 13 June in the other eleven countries.

The number of members of the European Parliament that can be elected per country has been set according to the number of inhabitants of that country:

1. **Belgium**: 25 seats; proportional representation in the framework of 4 constituencies; preference voting;
2. **Denmark**: 16 seats; proportional at national level; preference voting;
3. **Germany**: 99 seats; proportional at national or Länder level; 5% threshold to secure seats;
4. **Greece**: 25 seats; pure proportional at national level;
5. **Spain**: 64 seats; proportional at national level;
6. **France**: 87 seats; proportional at national level with a 5% threshold;
7. **Ireland**: 15 seats; quasi-proportional in a system with four constituencies, preference voting;
8. **Italy**: 87 seats; proportional at national level with a distribution between regional electoral constituencies; preference voting;
9. **Luxembourg**: 6 seats; proportional at national level;
10. **The Netherlands**: 31 seats; proportional at national level;
11. **Austria**: 21 seats; proportional at national level with a 4% threshold; preference voting;
12. **Portugal**: 25 seats; proportional at national level;
13. **Finland**: 16 seats; proportional at national level, preference voting;
14. **Sweden**: 22 seats; proportional at national level with a 4% threshold; preference voting;
15. **The United Kingdom**: 87 seats; proportional in the framework of 11 regional constituencies.

(Source “Agence Europe”)

**Analysis of Election Manifestos of European Parties**
To what extent do the election manifestos of the political groups take children’s interests into account? In this section the election manifestos from the Party of the European Socialists (PES), the European People’s Party (EPP) and the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR) and the European Greens are discussed in relation to children. The manifestos of the Union for Europe (UPE), the European Radical Alliance Party (ARE) and the Confederal Party of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) were not available at the time of publishing.

For the full text of the manifestos and the list of candidates you can contact the offices of the political parties in the European Parliament in Brussels or the national political offices in the member states (you can find the address in your telephone directory). If you experience any difficulties contact Mieke Schuurman at the Euronet Brussels office.

The address is the same for all political parties:
European Parliament, Rue Wiertz, 1047 Brussels, Belgium.

- PES Secretariat: tel: +32 2 284 21 11; fax: +32 2 230 66 64; website: http://www.pes.org/english/content4-4e.htm
- ARE Secretariat: tel: + 32 2 284 3324, fax: +32 2 284 99 93.

**Draft Election Manifesto of the Party of European Socialists (PES)**

The PES wants to bring Europe closer to the people and believes in equal opportunities for all and is in favour of eliminating discrimination in all its forms. In addition the responsibility for family, society and work must be shared and domestic violence must be combated.

Concerning employment the PES makes a specific commitment to the promotion of programmes to help young people to find employment.

One of the commitments of the PES is to support youth in the 21st century. “Young people are the future of Europe and Europe is their future. They are key agents for social, economic and technological progress and, as such, they are right to have high expectations and hope of Europe. We must do all we can to ensure their full participation in society through education, employment, culture and democratic participation. Particular attention must be given to helping young people who are denied opportunity because of poverty, unemployment, or ethnic identity.”
European Union youth programmes must be reinforced to enable young people to develop their European identity and commitment. We commit ourselves to improving opportunities for young women and men in a Europe that secures the well-being of future generations.

Concerning the strengthening of security and fighting crime the PES states that cross-border crime, such as trafficking in drugs and human beings has a direct impact on peoples’ lives. The PES commits itself to fight crime by stepping up law enforcement cooperation within Europe and improving the effectiveness and democratic accountability of Europol.

Action Programme 1999-2004 European People’s Party (EPP)

Concerning employment the quality of school education must be improved. The EPP also proposes to move towards equality in family life as well as in professional life, by managing working time in a way that currently only applies to women: part-time work, breaks in a career, parental leave.

Concerning the fight against poverty and social exclusion the EPP is convinced that a policy which stimulates solidarity between generations at a local level, and which includes integrating programmes for both young and old will contribute greatly to the fight against social exclusion.

Concerning the better implementation of internationally-agreed minimum social standards, particularly against child labour, the EPP states that a stronger common position is required by the EU in the relevant international organisations, such as ILO and the UN.

Concerning European training and education policy the individual abilities of children should be taken into account. “Therefore models for pre-school education should be developed”. The EPP also stresses the role of the family in respect of education of children and young people. However school should support parents in bringing up their children.

In respect of international crime the prostitution of women and children is mentioned. The EPP mentions several measures which should be taken to combat international crime, such as judicial cooperation, Europol, exchange of personnel and joint training (e.g. the STOP programme). Concerning measures to fight drug-related crime the EPP asks for measures to prevent drug-taking particularly by young people. In addition, the fight against the traffic and sexual abuse of children must be intensified: “Legislation must provide for the prosecution of residents of Member States who have committed sexual crimes against a child abroad, even where the foreign state where the offences have been committed has not become involved in the case. Once a person had been convicted of crimes against children,
that person should never be permitted to exercise either a profession, or be involved in a voluntary activity which involves children.”
Concerning missing and abducted children the EPP encourages the creation of a European NGOs network.

Draft Electoral Manifesto for the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform party (ELDR)

The ELDR welcomes the extension in principle and practice of non-discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in the Treaty of Amsterdam. In addition the ELDR supports the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into EU law.

Liberal Democrats place a high value on the development of the concept of citizenship: “European citizenship contributes to a greater awareness of living within a political community under the rule of law, and underpins the concept of freedom of movement within the Union.”

In Europe’s information society, equality of access to high quality education and secure freedom of expression must be universal.

The goal of the ELDR concerning social solidarity is to achieve a society of active citizens with equal opportunities.

Concerning the environment, the ELDR are in the vanguard of the fight to protect the natural environment in the interests of future generations.

Concerning employment, greater and more innovative investment in education, training and life-long learning must be enhanced.

A Common Green Manifesto for the 1999 European Elections

The Greens want to “build a society respectful of fundamental rights and environmental justice: the rights to shelter, to good health, to education, to culture, and to a high quality of life.”

The Greens also would like direct participation of people in decision-making that concerns them.

Concerning solidarity the Greens want to promote and implement equality, at national, European and international levels.

The Greens are working for “a redistribution of domestic work and the work of caring for others”.
The Greens are also working for improved structures for democratic participation in political decision-making, involving NGOs, Trade Unions and citizens at all levels.

A substantial part of the manifesto concerns the safeguarding of the environment. It is stated that production processes and consumption levels in Western society are severely damaging the environment, threatening people’s health and jeopardizing future generations. In this respect amongst others chemical pollution, causing more and more allergies, irritations and cancer, and transport is mentioned. The manifesto calls for the “promotion of public transport, as well as provisions for safe walking and cycling to ensure basic mobility for all citizens”.

Concerning employment a new model of full employment must allow for a more flexible lifestyle, combining phases of employment, education and training, as well as for time to care for children, the elderly and sick household family members, to do household work and to enjoy a social life.

Concerning the enlargement of the European Union, the EU should help the applicant countries to raise their ecological and social standards.

On the subject of human rights and citizenship the manifesto states that there should be specific measures against discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and identity, ethnicity or religion. In addition, the framework directive on a statute for resident citizens from third countries should be adopted at the European level, including specific rights to family reunification and access to employment as well as electoral rights.

ANNEX I

What is in the report “A Children’s Policy for 21st Century Europe: First Steps”? 

The report’s aim is to set out a vision for the future of children’s policy in the EU. It demonstrates that the EU’s current focus in relation to children is incoherent. It argues that an EU children’s policy is needed.

The report mentions the following limitations in and weaknesses of the EU’s current approach to children’s issues:

- In general children’s interests are invisible within the EU policy-making process.
- Children receive only a miniscule percentage of the EU budget.
- Children’s interests are often overridden by shortsighted economic interests. The reason for this is that Governments do not invest in children and that is why they prefer shortsighted economic interests, but in the long run the investment in children would benefit the economic interest.
There is no focal point within the EU structures for developing overall policy direction and mainstreaming a children’s perspective across all policy areas.

The EU has very limited legal bases for action in relation to children. Article K1 in the Amsterdam Treaty refers for the first time ever to children. However, the competence for tackling offences against children remains very limited and it is covered by the third pillar which concerns intergovernmental co-operation.

Other articles on combating social exclusion and non-discrimination on the grounds of age are helpful, although they do not specifically target children.

The report sets out a series of recommendations which would form the basis for an EU children’s policy.

**Short Term Recommendations:**
- the adoption of a legal basis for the Daphne Programme on violence against children.
- the development of a European Commission ‘Communication’ on children.
- the inclusion of children in Eurostat’s annual demographic report.

Other recommendations are related to specific EU policy areas which are analysed in more depth in the report. These issues are: violence to children, social exclusion, non-discrimination, citizenship and participation, free movement of people, media and internet, consumer policy, education, health, environment, employment, Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and information on children.

**Medium and Longer-Term Recommendations:**
- A new article should be inserted in the EU Treaties so that the Community can contribute to the promotion and protection of the rights and needs of children.
- The establishment of a Children’s Unit, which would provide a lead within the Commission and oversee the development of an overall EU children’s policy and develop liaison between the EU institutions, including the European Parliament, and children’s NGOs.
- The improvement of opportunities for children themselves to participate more in decision-making processes.
- The improvement of available information on children and more effectively monitoring of their circumstances.
- The incorporation of respect for the principles and standards of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into EU law, policy and programmes.

**List of Euronet member organisations:**