Table of Contents

Introduction

Euronet Campaigns
- Euronet- conference 22 November 2000: a report
- Euronet project 'Challenging Discrimination against children in the EU': regional seminars and recommendations
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to issue eleven of the Euronet, the 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 concerning children. The Newsletter also aims to be a means of communication between NGO' at national level. Therefore, you are invited to contribute articles on any initiative, which is relevant to Euronet's work, either, by phone (+32 25124500), fax (+32 25126673) or e-mail (savechildbru@skynet.be). In January 2001 Mieke Schuurman left Euronet and Floor Gussenhoven took over her tasks as co-ordinator. You can contact her for any questions, ideas or remarks about the newsletter.

This newsletter gives a report of the Euronet conference that took place the 22 November 2000 to launch the 'Agenda 2000 for Children and Young People in Europe'. Furthermore this issue includes a summary of the regional seminars organised by members of Euronet in the framework of the non-discrimination project as well as the recommendations following the Euronet-report 'Challenging discrimination against children in the EU', which was presented to the European Parliament at the Euronet-conference on 23 November 2000.

EURONET CAMPAIGNS


Euronet has been involved in the project "Youth for Europe" which aims to stimulate the participation of children and young people in European issues. Euronet's member BICE (international Catholic Children's Bureau) has been leading the Youth for Europe Project to develop a young people's network on children's rights and to develop a young people's version of the Euronet report "A Children's Agenda for 21st Century Europe: First steps".

The Youth project involved the participation of children and youth groups in five EU Member States: Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Spain and the UK. These youth groups met in their national countries and communicated with each other via the internet. The representatives of the groups met in Dublin in October, where they presented the results of the national discussions and developed a European Agenda for Children. This Agenda has been presented at the final Euronet conference in the European Parliament in Brussels on 2 November 2000.

Participants of the conference were Peter Philips (chair and member of the UK young peoples group), Pierre Mairesse (in charge of the Youth Programme within the European Commission and representing Commissioner Reding), Alain Aussems (the co-ordinator of the Euronet project) and groups of young people and their co-ordinators from the UK, Spain and Belgium.
Amongst the audience were MEP's, European Commission officials, and representatives from national governments and NGOs including all the transnational, national and associate members of Euronet and children's organisations based in Brussels.

Introduction
Peter Philips affirmed young people's determination to combat all types of discrimination based on racism, sexism, poverty or disability. He noted that young people are the future of Europe and challenged the audience of decision-makers to do more than "merely look important" but to act on the recommendations of the Euronet report.

Pierre Mairesse praised the report. Its contents and in particular its methodology which was "exemplary". The key message of the report was the need to treat young people as citizens and Pierre Mairesse explained the distinction which has to be made between actions taken by the member states and actions on EU level. Currently there is no reference to a children's policy in the EU Treaty which poses a limitation on the actions the European Commission can take. Euronet would therefore need to persuade all the other EU institutions i.e. the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament of the case for a European children's policy. However Pierre Mairesse did indicate three areas in which the European Commission could act:

- Internet access for schools: young people had expressed concerns about the internet exclusion. Commissioner Reding had launched an E-learning initiative which aims to ensure that by the end of 2001 all school children in the EU will have access to the internet and their teachers will have internet training.
- Youth Policy: Commissioner Reding will be preparing a "White Paper on Youth" (to cover young people from 15-25). The European Commission will take on board the recommendations of the Euronet report in drafting the White Paper.
- EU Youth Programme: The existing EU Youth programme allows young people in Europe to do voluntary work in another European country for periods of six months upwards. Perhaps young people could be encouraged to help those even younger than themselves in social work projects?

Alain Aussems, the co-ordinator of the Euronet project, made the observation that developing the participation of children and young people is not an easy process. If we are to take the process seriously, we need a paradigm shift. Traditionally young people have been seen as the subjects of laws. We need to develop an inter-generational process based on mutual respect and with the shared goal of finding common solutions to common problems. He emphasised that the conclusions of the Euronet project, as set out in the "Agenda 2000", were intermediate rather than definitive and part of an ongoing process.

Presentations
Each national group described their overall approach and research methodology, describing sample size, age of participants and geographical distribution. They presented the results of their work using a variety of methods including drama, sketches and news reporting.

Unfortunately the groups from Italy and Ireland could not attend the Brussels conference. The views and findings of the Italian group have however been incorporated in the Agenda 2000. The conclusions of the Irish group regarding education and health were summarised by John Errington, the Programme Director of Save the Children UK:

- Improved teacher training and more inclusive education system
- Greater equal opportunities and improvement systems of education and qualifications
- The rights to free health care
- The rights to a safer environment

**UK - Save the Children UK Youth Group**

The UK group presented their conclusions in the form of a BBC news report. Each member of the group played the role of a news journalist, reporting on their findings in each subject area. The group reported that young people were strongly against physical punishment of children, that children needed to have a stronger say in political life and to be educated about their rights. There were concerns too about the media and the internet including the need for stricter controls over violence and pornography and the need for a more accurate portrayal of young people on TV. In order to meet these goals the UK group recommended, *inter alia*,

- Young people to be made aware of their rights and in particular about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child through citizenship education.
- UNCRC to apply to all children including asylum seekers and refugees.
- Voting age to be reduced to 16.
- Appointment of a Commissioner for Children in all EU countries.
- Stronger laws to protect the privacy and prevent press and media intrusion.
- Parents and other adults in authority to be educated on how the internet works.

**Belgium - BICE Youth Group Belgium**

The Belgium group would have liked to debate their findings with the audience but due to time pressure, they restricted their contribution to outlining their recommendations on educational reform in four main areas.

- Schools must contribute to the growth and development of children throughout their lives. These must be "schools for life". Schools must change- young people must no longer be regarded as the passive recipients of knowledge- they must be able to fully participate in and shape their own education.
• Pupils must have the rights to a civic education and the right to learn about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
• Children must be made aware of their legal rights and responsibilities - to be aware of what you can and cannot do in order to maintain a healthy society.
• Teachers must be better trained in psychology to enable them to help those pupils who have emotional problems. Learning difficulties or those pupils who are violent. A teacher must be able to support a child: to provide a listening ear and to involve pupils in their own education. An end to teachers having a job for life - otherwise teachers loses motivation and drive.

Spain-FONAT and Save the Children Spanish Youth Group
The Spanish group acted out their recommendations in the form of an Oscar ceremony. Awards going to the best means of promoting child participation:
• A Ministry for Youth.
• The right to vote in associations at the age of 14.
• The right to vote in legislative elections at the age of 16 with under-16s given a "shadow vote".
• More political training and education for young people.
• Young people to be allowed to participate in their country of residence and of birth.
• Equal distribution of wealth, to include young people.
• More "participative spaces" for young people.

Conclusion
Pierre Mairesse commented that he had thoroughly enjoyed the groups' presentations. It made a real change for him to see a report's conclusions presented in such an interesting way. He made three further substantive points:
• He was struck by the importance that the young people attached to education and schools and commented that is an area where the EU can act to improve matters.
• The participation of young people will be an important chapter in the European Commission's forthcoming "White Paper on Youth".
• It is vital that young people participate in debates on the future of the EU and the structures need to be built to provide a real democracy for young people.

Closing remarks
Peter Phillips drew the conference to a close. He thanked all those who had taken part in the conference and in particular the representatives from the European Commission, the European Parliament and the translators. He urged the adults present to do as much as they could to implement the ideas in the report and to keep in touch with young people on how these ideas could be taken forward.
Video
In order to prepare the final version of the report, all young people participated in workshops in Madrid on 6-8 October 2000. The organisers of the Madrid workshops made a video, narrated in Spanish, showing how the young people worked together and providing a permanent record of their work. The video was shown to the conference audience. Copies of the video will be sent to the relevant Spanish Ministries responsible for preparing the Spanish Presidency, which will begin in January 2002. Representatives from the Spanish Ministry of Social Affairs also attended the Euronet conference.

The final report "Agenda 2000 for children and young people in Europe" will be disseminated among Euronet members. To order the Agenda 2000 (available in several languages), please contact Euronet co-ordinator Floor Gussenhoven, tel.+32 2 5124500, e-mail savechildbru@skynet.be.

Euronet project "Challenging discrimination against children in the EU"

In December 1999 Euronet received funding from the European Commission for a project which intended to promote the rights of the child to non-discrimination, social inclusion and participation. The objective of the project was to stimulate dialogue among children, young people and adults on discrimination and social exclusion experienced by children and to highlight ways to combat this social exclusion and discrimination through the direct participation of children in decision making processes. The project involved Euronet members in all 15 EU Member States and during the year 2000 regional seminars were organised in France, the Netherlands and Finland where different aspects of discrimination and social exclusion were discussed.

France
Lyon, 27 September 2000, organised by COFRADE. The theme of the seminar called "C'est pas juste!" was discrimination of young people...their proposals for the realisation of their rights. Children and young people from 8 till 18 years participated in the conference. They were asked to work on and give their comments on several themes as 'environment', 'violence', 'racism' and 'participation', mentioning the effects of those forms of discrimination and giving their suggestions and ideas regarding improvement of existing situations.

The goal of the seminar was to bring together the organisations (and their contributions) which participated in the consultation, to offer young people the opportunity to focus on one particular theme and to formulate recommendations for the Euronet conference of 23 November 2001.

Following this seminar COFRADE formulated a 'Colloque Européen' (October 2000), emphasising that children are citizens too and therefor should be able to express themselves and their ideas should be heard. Fully implementing the right to expression contributes to the implementation of children's rights in
general. The seminar showed that children and young people do have their opinion, they do know what is happening in the world and they are aware of the existence of social exclusion and discrimination.

Several proposals for the French government as well for the European Commission were made to eradicate discrimination in general and more specifically to protect victims of discrimination, children in prison and to improve the situation in the suburbs. Among them the recommendation to stimulate dialogue between different ‘quartiers’, to train the police in dealing with children and young people, to teach the Rights of the Child at primary school and show children what they can do if their rights are violated, to develop a special program for minors in prisons and to train the people working in prisons in working with children and young people. To combat discrimination in general the children and young people suggested to increase the age of majority to 21; to give more attention to subjects as racism, exclusion, the environment and all other discrimination-related subjects at school; to get more positive attention of the media instead of the focus on the problems of children; to help young people to build their associations to combat discrimination; to enforce existing laws more effectively and to stimulate the participation of children.

The Netherlands
Amsterdam, 6 October 2000, organised by Defence for Children International-section the Netherlands. The seminar dealt with several subjects as bullying at school (Bob van der Meer, National Centre for School Improvement- the Netherlands), discrimination of children in residential care (Barbara Leblfinger-Prömer, Kinder-und Jugendanwaltschaft- Austria), the legal aspects of discrimination of children (Bert van Praet, Kind en Samenleving- Belgium) and the situation of children without status (Marjorie Kaandorp, DCI- the Netherlands). 25 People working with or for children participated in the seminar. Some outcomes of the seminar:

a) Bullying: bullying is a form of discrimination and violates the rights of the child. The risk to become a victim of discrimination increases when a child has been abused at home, when a child is different or has been a victim before. To combat bullying one should start at the bottom: young children and parents should be informed about the consequences of being bullied, the victim should be supported to develop social skills, the silent group should be mobilised by means of for example writing down a protocol on bullying and teachers should get advise on how to deal with bullying. One should start teaching social skills to children from the age of 2 years to avoid discrimination at a later stage. At the European level there is a need to exchange the experiences on the various aspects of bullying.

b) Discrimination of children in residential care: Children in children’s homes are stigmatised and at risk to become a victim of discrimination. They are considered to have a lower intelligence than average children and are not supported to reach a higher degree. During a conference in Austria children in residential care suggested several things to improve their situation: they need to get more information, there voices should be heard,
they want to be consulted on quality standards in the homes, they want to have their privacy.

c) Legal aspects of discrimination: a consultation among 3000 children (age 8-12) took place in Belgium, during which children were asked to look at their own circumstances and consider whether they were in conformity with the UNCRC. The children noted that a lot of things are decided by adults (holidays, homework...), that there is no safety on the roads and that there is no objective reason for not having the right to vote. They recommended a more structural children's participation on a political level. Government officials need to be trained on how to deal with children's participation and children want to be more involved in the education process.

d) In the Netherlands there is no right to Dutch social services without a legal status, except in urgent situations. As a result children without legal status cannot go to doctors or to school, often because their parents are afraid to be known.

DCI-NL has recommended the Dutch government to implement the UNCRC in the field of national health and education law and policies. The European Commission should appoint a special rapporteur on this to follow up a European implementation and a study has to take place on the European level on the position of minor asylum seekers in Europe. At the national level schools should be told that children have the right to go to school until the age of 16, with or without status.

Finland
Helsinki, 6 October 2000. The Seminar ‘Children's rights in Europe: does Europe discriminate its own children?’ in Helsinki was attended by 65 professionals on child-care, authorities, teachers, politicians etc.

The first keynote speaker, MEP Mrs. Hautala referred to the EU Summit in Biarritz where the text for the declaration of the basic rights was accepted. She emphasised not to underestimate the meaning of the declaration. She pointed out the positive programmes that the EU has, but that this is not enough and this does not constitute any whole programme designed to improve the life of European children. The European Union can encourage the governments and NGO's to make the life of children better, specially with respect to poverty, and children have to be encouraged to become the decision makers in the issues in their own environment.

Ms Thors (MEP, chair Unicef Finland), stated that the EU should have a child perspective on issues. As long as there is not such a perspective, the EU has not understood the convention on children's rights. She further addressed the issue of child labour, a problem that is still very bad in many countries. Both ILO and Unicef have started many projects in Pakistan and a broad campaign is on its way to change the situation in the country.

Mrs.Kurki- Suonio told about the work of the office of the Finnish parliament's rights ombudsman and the possibilities of monitoring children's rights. John Errington (SCFUK) spoke about discrimination of children in the UK: young people have been absent from debate on social exclusion and very few young
people from the most socially excluded groups are actually expressing their opinions by the election-mechanism. Though on some issues young people are prepared to get involved. The differential between rich and poor in the UK is one of the widest in the world and the government has now pledged to end child poverty in twenty years.

Jeff Mills told about the SNAP-project implemented by Sane the Children UK. The organisation is working with school drop-outs trying to get them back to the society as full members also using the human rights that belong to them. Dean Moss presented a participation programme he worked with in the UK. The aim is to teach children the methods to study the convention of the Rights of the Child and also to make their own activities bringing the message forward to the media and to the decision makers.

Ms. Anna Skvortsova from the Finnish-Russian Co-operation Network told about the situation of children in St. Petersburg. Children as well as women, single men, elderly and disabled are the main groups that shoulder the heaviest burden. Russia is moving towards the situation of the high-inequality countries in Latin America: for half of the population only the most basic pleasures of human existence are possible and unequal income means unequal access to health care, education etc. According to statistics of the Ministry of Health of RF, over half of all children under the age of three do not get enough food. The number of children living in incomplete families has increased and the social and political upheaval has led to large numbers of homeless children on the streets. Commercial sexual exploitation of children and children prostitution are one of the newest and most hidden phenomenon in Russia. Experts noted that governmental and social agencies are incapable to influence the situation. On the other hand they stated that the existing structures are capable to work toward prevention, but certain conditions have to be met: proper funding, good organisation and co-ordination of work. From the long term perspective only a support of Russian communities in establishing child support structures and transferring best practices in dealing with social problems will be a sustainable solution that can be helpful in standing against exploitation of children.

Regarding family policies there has been accepted a special program of supporting families and children two years ago. The main perspectives of the program are assisting and supporting vulnerable families and protecting children in crisis, neglected and unsupervised children and street children. NGO’s sometimes substitute what should be guaranteed by public services. Over 300 NGO’s in St. Petersburg are working on child-related issues, their work being often far more effective than anything offered by the state structures. Which does not mean they experience a lot of difficulties such as the lack of educated staff.

Reasonable, suitable solutions have to be found by working together. The reconstruction of new social policies and new social cohesion in Russia seems to be dependent on the strengthening of the role of the civil society. The aim of international co-operation ought to be to support citizens as they
themselves build better preconditions for their own well being. The establishment of networks of alliances between local powers, governments and NGO’s and between areas within the Northwest of Europe has to go on.

- The main recommendations of the Euronet report 'Challenging discrimination against children in the EU'

Euronet’s non-discrimination project has been closed with a conference in the European Parliament on the 23 November 2000. At this conference the results of the consultation with children and young people, the results of the above mentioned seminars and the research have been presented to representatives from the EU institutions. Marie-Thérèse Hermange (French Member of the European Parliament) chaired the conference and Gerison Lansdown, Euronet’s researcher, presented the report ‘Challenging discrimination against children in the EU’. This was followed by the presentations of the representatives of young people from France and Italy on the consultation on discrimination and a presentation of Bill Bell, who gave recommendations on discrimination and social exclusion of children and young people in Europe. Marie-Thérèse Hermange (MEP) and Baroness Emma Nicholson (MEP) gave their reactions on the report.

The conference was a success for Euronet and the young people involved.

The outcome of the report is that explicit measures are needed within the EU to challenge the discrimination against children, to render them more visible, acknowledge them as citizens of Europe and ensure that their voices are heard and taken seriously. Some of the recommendations will be given below.

a) To challenge discrimination against children the EU should give a high priority to children throughout the decision and policy-making bodies. An EU Children’s Unit should be established within the Secretariat General of the European Commission to create awareness and to promote the interests of the child. Existing and proposed EU directives, policies and programmes should be subjected to child impact analyses.

b) EU legislation, policy and programmes should promote the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by all Member States. The rights and interests of the child have to be taken into account under the EU programs under article 13 (discrimination) and 137 (social exclusion). Moreover there should be implemented a new Article into the EU treaties acknowledging the rights of children, based on the UNCRC and an EU Action plan should be adopted by the Council of Ministers to raise awareness of children's rights. Member States should scrutinise their legislation to ensure it does not discriminate against children and that non-discrimination legislation actively addresses the concerns of children.

c) To combat the lack of independent advocates for children at national and EU level, the European Commission should initiate discussion between member states on establishing children's ombudsmen or commissioners throughout the EU. Dialogue should be established between relevant Directorates, ombudsmen, commissioners and children’s NGOs to look at the impact of policy on children.
d) Information should be collected on children and their lives in the EU. Without adequate data, assessment of children's needs and protection of their rights is not possible. Eurostat should work on a wider range of data about children's lives; a transnational study should be initiated to highlight aspects of social exclusion on children; the EU should investigate the situation of children without legal status throughout the Member States.

e) An effective co-ordination across the EU has to be introduced on matters affecting children. The different policies and legislation impact directly or indirectly on children, but across the departments there is a lack of collaboration to ensure visibility and consistency of policy on children. Member State ministers with responsibility for children should meet on a regular basis and a European steering group should be established to provide a framework for dialogue.

f) Children should be recognised as citizens and should be listened to. Member states should develop more effective approaches to promoting children's participation at all levels (the voting age should be lowered from 18 to 16 years). The European Commission should initiate a dialogue with children and promote their active participation in policies that affect them.

The Euronet report 'Challenging discrimination against children in the EU' can be ordered from Euronet and is available in English, French and German.