Dear Readers,

Since our last Spring newsletter the European Children’s Network has been busy working with the European Commission, and other Children’s Rights NGOs in Brussels, on the Communication “Towards a Strategy for the Rights of the Child”. The Communication was launched by the Commission on 4 July and on 13 July the President of the Commission, Barroso, and Vice-President Frattini held a question and answer session with Children’s NGOs in Brussels. The European Children’s Network welcomes the Strategy on Children’s Rights, which it has asked for for many years already, and which is aiming to mainstream children’s rights in the work of the European Union on the basis of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

EURONET has also worked positively with the Austrian EU Presidency on children’s rights, in particular with the L’Europe de l’Enfance group and on the Fundamental Rights Agency, which has been taken over by the Finnish Presidency, to come to an agreement. Concerning fundamental rights, EURONET has also contributed to the thematic report on children’s rights of the EU independent group of experts on fundamental rights. Information on our member organisation, Child Helpline International’s, work on setting up an EU toll-free number for child help-lines across the EU is also included in this newsletter.

Finally I would like to welcome our stagiaire Emilie White. She has been responsible for this newsletter and can be contacted for any questions you have on it.

Editorial by the Secretary General, Mieke Schuurman

NGOs give a positive but cautious response to the Communication

Following the launch of the Communication, the Commission invited children’s NGOs to participate in a Question & Answer session chaired by President Barroso and Vice-President Frattini, on the 13th of July. The European Children’s Network was represented by Mieke Schuurman, and Emilie White, with EURONET members from Save the Children Brussels, Sweden, and Lithuania, CHI, EFSCW, and the NSPCC also present. President Barroso opened the meeting by emphasizing the need for active involvement of all stakeholders throughout Europe, including the direct participation of children carried out “in the proper way.” The main questions raised by NGO representatives during the session reflected the need for funding; child participation; effective data collection mechanisms; coordination with member states and field organisations; and a shorter number for the proposed 6-digit helpline. NGOs also questioned how these projects would be implemented, and Mieke Schuurman suggested that the European Forum should include an expert group comprised of children to ensure effective input on policies which affect them, as well as backing the need for general resources for implementation. In response, Frattini revealed a plan of action to be carried out over the next two years, including the creation of:

1) An Inter-service group headed by an administrative coordinator;
2) An electronic Discussion Platform (Autumn 2006);
3) A European Platform chaired by the Commission (December 2006)
4) A Communication strategy and Website (Early 2007)
5) A Study on the impacts of the Commission’s existing children’s rights instruments

Frattini added that the current initiatives will continue alongside the

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new projects and that a unit focusing on children will be created within his own Justice, Freedom & Security Directorate General. Close cooperation is expected with the Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs Committee (LIBE) of the European Parliament, and Commissioner Louis Michel has committed to giving priority to child poverty and aid for development and children in his own Directorate General in 2007.

EU Safety Update on Children’s Toys

An EU risk assessment on the use of Phthalates, which are used to soften PVC plastics in, for example: clothes, child care articles, toys and floors, has concluded that the ban on toys and childcare articles which could come into contact with children's mouths, (and for which EURONET campaigned actively), should remain, and that worker’s exposure in processing plants should be limited, but that all other uses are safe. The Commission working group on DINP and DNOP will now establish definitions of products which can be considered as intended for children's mouths in order to determine which toys should be banned.

Commission launches Children’s Strategy

On the 4th of July the Commission launched its Communication: "Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child" in which it recognises children’s rights as a self-standing set of concerns which merit specific and urgent action where children's needs are not being met. The Communication recognises the need for the EU to create a comprehensive strategy to use its international influence to promote children's rights worldwide. Among the concrete plans, the Communication proposes the creation of a European Forum comprised of stakeholders headed by a Coordinator to act as a focal point; the creation of a website and a European child helpline; as well as the allocation of funding in favour of children's programmes.

Report on World Fit for Children Conference, Palencia

The European Children’s Network, represented by Mieke Schuurman, took an active part in the Third Intergovernmental Conference on Making Europe and Central Asia Fit for Children in Palencia, Spain on the 19th-20th of June. Representatives from over 50 countries gathered to reaffirm commitments made at the UN Special Session on Children in May 2002, and to review progress on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), UNICEF also launched their "Global Report on the Impact of the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.” At the Conference Roundtable, mechanisms for monitoring implementation of the CRC were discussed, with participants reaching agreement on the following key recommendations for future action:

1) Develop a clear strategy for the realisation of children's rights needs alongside mobilisation of resources
2) Create Timebound Targets for establishing self- and independent monitoring mechanisms by 2010
3) Compile, analyse and use data for research on monitoring
4) Include child participation in monitoring processes
5) Establish regional and subregional partnerships to share experiences.

EURONET’s Press Release

EURONET released its press release in conjunction with the Commission’s launch of the Communication, entitled: “NGOs call for commitment to make European Children's Strategy a reality”, in which the network welcomes the strategy whilst calling for a Commissioner for children’s rights; meaningful participation of children; coordination of all EU policies with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; a European Forum which includes children; close involvement of civil society at all levels and sufficient resources for effective implementation.

Press Coverage for EURONET’s Press Release

The Press release was posted in full on the CRIN website, and was distributed through various links including from the Euractiv article, and Italian sites: Redattore Sociale, Superева.it and Unimondo.org
**CHI calls for 3 or 4 digit Child Helpline**

Child helplines across the world received 11.3 million calls in 2003. A child helpline is founded on the belief that children and young people have the right to be heard, a human right outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC).

Telephone helplines for children and young people should have several characteristics: accessibility to children and young people 24-hours daily, 7-days a week; free of cost for the caller; and the ability to provide assistance to the caller. While a helpline provides children and young people with an opportunity to express their concerns and talk about the issues directly affecting them, it can also enable children and young people who are in imminent danger to contact someone and obtain help.

In 2004 European child helplines dealt with 776,480 calls. Of these 140,563 calls were on abuse and violence; 6215 calls were about homelessness and basic needs and 4693 calls were about commercial exploitation. Other issues included family or peer relationships, sexuality, school related and psychosocial health.

Given the wide range of reasons for which children contact helplines, the designation of a toll-free, easy-to-remember three or four-digit number is imperative to improve and safeguard the lives of children. This number should be a universal access number earmarked for children, similar to emergency services numbers currently offered in many countries and should be accessible from both landline and mobile phones.

In 2005, MEP, Lissy Gröner, in support of children’s rights and the European child helplines, presented a Written Declaration to the European Parliament in 2005. The Declaration signed by almost 400 MEPs, advocates for:

- European Union support to child helplines and them being recognised as an essential part of the child protection system of Member States;
- A common toll-free 3-4 digit telephone number for EU child helplines;
- European Union support to CHI as a platform for EU child helplines to network and liaise on regional issues and that CHI be provided with assistance for this.

CHI argues that children need a separate 3-4 digit number that is easy to remember as opposed to getting one of the six-digit numbers of perhaps thousands of similar numbers for services ranging from poisoning to weather forecasts.

EURONET has been supportive throughout the whole process and has been actively advocating for our goals within the EU. As we are based in Amsterdam, this support has been vital.

Written by Trine Ericksen

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In the European strategy on the Rights of the Child, launched on the 4th of July, the Commission proposes the attribution of a single six-digit telephone number for child helplines in Europe. The telephone number series 116 + 3 digits has been allocated to social services within the EU and anybody who provides a social service within the EU can apply for one of the many numbers available.

EURONET in the News

In support of EURONET member, Child Helpline International, the European Children’s network gave an interview to the EU Observer.com: “Brussels moots EU-wide child helpline”, about the Commission’s plans for a Europe-wide Child Helpline. The helpline would be available to all member states, in addition to their current helplines, and the same six digit number, starting with 116, would be used in all 25 countries. An organisation would be appointed to manage the line. EURONET, alongside other Children’s NGOs, is campaigning for a shortening of the children’s helpline number to three or four digits, as a shorter number would be easier for a child to remember.
European Transparency Hearing

EURONET was present at the European Economic and Social Committee’s European Transparency Initiative Hearing, held in Brussels on the 11th of July. The session, chaired by the co-president of the EESC’s civil society liaison group Jean-Marc Roirant, was part of the follow-up to the Commission’s Green Paper on a European Transparency Initiative. While all representatives present were clearly in favour of improved transparency measures, concerns were raised about effective implementation. Further concerns regarding definition of the term ‘lobbyist’ and the terms, conditions and benefits of public registration of lobbyists were discussed. Whilst most representatives were in favour of voluntary or mandatory registration linked to a code of conduct, opinions differed on how this could be effective and fair without excluding organisations, or limiting information which should already be public. Specific reference was made to the current suggestion that information would be offered in exchange for voluntary registration.

Member states clash over scope of Fundamental Rights Agency

Member states are in disagreement over the scope of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) which is due to start its work to implement European law in conformity with Article 6 (2) of the Treaty of the European Union and in particular the Charter of Fundamental Rights. During the Austrian EU Presidency, the European Children’s Network has worked with the Austrian Permanent Representation to ensure that the newly established agency will deal with children’s rights.

Along with Save the Children, Eurochild, and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), EURONET sent three key messages to the Permanent Representations of the member states to the EU:

1) The FRA should ensure that respect for children’s rights, as laid down in the UN CRC, is included.
2) Collaboration and close liaison between the Fundamental Rights Agency and the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies, including the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, is very important in order to avoid conflicts of competences with UN and Council of Europe human rights bodies.
3) The FRA’s work should be closely linked to work undertaken under the auspices of the Commission’s Communication: “Towards a strategy for children’s rights”.

The Austrian Permanent Representation informed civil society in a meeting in Brussels that it has been proposed that the Agency will work on thematic areas, for example children’s rights. However, the scope of the Agency’s work will be decided in a multi-annual framework, proposed by the Commission, after the regulation has been adopted by the Council of Ministers. At the moment there is disagreement within the Council on whether or not the third pillar jurisdiction should be included. A group led by the UK and Germany are opposed to this, while the European Parliament and other countries are in favour. The exact scope of the Agency will be decided at political ministerial level, possibly at a Council meeting in October 2006.

More information: mieke.schuurman@tiscali.nl

Member Input: Lithuania

Child Participation in Practice

Thank you to Loreta Trakinskienė, Secretary General of Save the Children Lithuania for the following input on child participation projects in Lithuania.

In a child participation project being carried out since 2000 in schools all around Lithuania, 47 anti-violence groups were established, consisting of 5 to 20 school children between the ages of 12 and 18, with the aim of creating the safest possible school and social environments. All the activities were grounded in the principles of the UNCRC recognising that every child is an active human being requiring protection, and all participants agreed to abide by the obligations of the Convention and the Lithuanian government. Projects such as “School without anger: we know how!” art competitions; “I am against violence” theatre groups; and declaring May a month without violence to children, were set up, and research teams, organised by children alongside professional researchers, carried out studies on bullying, finding that over 50% of children in Lithuania are victims of verbal aggression.

Over 600 children were involved in the projects, with child-care specialists, doctors, teachers, social workers and artists supporting the activities. Every anti-mobbing group was assigned an adult consultant by a school administration. The main issues arising from the projects involved child protection against aggressive adults, family and peer violence and bullying at school. Some groups also discussed the negative aspects of violence in the media. Consultants were present at these discussions to ensure an appropriate environment for the children to speak about violence and to facilitate children’s self-expression and self-consciousness, as another crucial objective was to inform the children about their rights and where to ask for help. Special seminars were also organized for the consultants in order to give them updated information on children’s rights and raise their awareness.

As the child psychologist, V. Satir, once said, children are active participants of their own life and environment. Therefore, the most important moral obligation of adults is to ensure the safest and most creative environment for every child. It is not possible to cre-

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te a safe school environment without the active participation of children. In fact, this experience has shown us that it is the older children who usually encourage the younger ones to become involved in participation and take part in the activities of these groups.

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Austrian Presidency & the Constitution

EURONET members sent letters concerning the need to keep children’s rights in the Constitutional Treaty to their heads of state and ministers of Foreign Affairs prior to the European Council held on the 15th - 16th of June. In response, the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs gave the following reply to the European Children’s Network:

- Children’s rights are very important to them.
- A renegotiation of the Constitution is not going to take place at the moment.
- For Austria, the inclusion of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU Treaty is very important.
- In the future, Austria will always do its best for a legal basis for children’s rights at international and EU level.

The European Children’s Network welcomes this statement.

At the Council Decision of 15/16 June it was agreed that the ratification process for the Constitution should be continued and a time-path agreed for this. Therefore a renegotiation of the Constitution is not likely to take place in the near future. The European Children’s Network will continue to monitor events and discussions around the Constitutional Treaty debate, and ensure that children’s rights remain on the agenda of these discussions.

EURONET continues active involvement with L’Europe de L’Enfance

On the 2nd of May EURONET’s president, Simone Ek, presented a strategy paper for future work at the L’Europe de L’Enfance group meeting in Vienna on the 2nd of May. The recommendations include continuing action on a more formal basis; organising regular internal, ministerial and senior civil servant meetings to ensure continuity and focus; developing a clear long-term strategy; and establishing stronger links with the European Institutions and the new UN Human Rights Council. The meeting was attended by over 50 participants including Commission representative, Patrick Trousson who presented information on the Communication towards a children’s strategy, social ministries, and Austrian NGOs.

Finnish Presidency

Finland, which joined the EU in 1995 took over the presidency on July the 1st. Although negotiations over Turkey and Croatia are set to play a key role, the Finnish presidency hopes to promote Europe to its European citizens by creating greater transparency through transmitting Council sessions over the Internet, effective legislation and efficient management of the EU’s work. The four target areas will be to reactivate the so far passive period of reflection on the Constitutional Treaty; continue accession decisions on Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia; coordinate on innovation initiatives, and strengthen the EU’s international role. The presidency also hopes to make advances on criminal law and police cooperation to combat international crime, human trafficking and terrorism. The Finnish Presidency will also pick up on the Commission’s Communication, Towards a Strategy on Children’s Rights which will be discussed at the L’Europe de L’Enfance meeting in Finland as well as in another probable meeting at Council level.

For more information

Results of EU Poster Competition

The results of the EU’s poster competition for children’s rights were announced on the 18th of May at the prize giving ceremony in Brussels. NGOs hope that child participation at the EU level will increase to ensure that children have a voice on policies that affect them. EURONET wishes that children’s participation at EU level will be genuine and will allow children to speak and to be heard.

For more information

Participant at the EU poster competition.
(Courtesy of Loreta Trakinskienë)
**Events to look out for**

Dunfermline, Scotland: 25 August; **Children in Europe Conference, “An Appetite for Life? Young children, food & eating”**, Tel: 0131 222 2443

Stuttgart, Germany: 16-18 October 2006; III European Conference, **Child in the City**, Tel: +31 30 6933 489; fax: +31 30 6917 394 Email: Ivan.Keulen@europoint-bv.com

Brussels, Belgium: 24-25 October 2006; II International Conference: ‘Juvenile Justice in Europe: A Framework for the integration’ at the International Juvenile Justice Laboratory. Tel: +34 923 19 41 70; fax: +34 923 19 41 71 Email: bruxelles2006@oijj.org

Helsinki, Finland: 22 November 2006; Inter-agency Conference, Save the Children: ‘Borders of the European Union—Open or Closed? Child sexual exploitation, trafficking and the Internet’. Tel: +358 9 4135 5400 Email: leena.karjalainen@savethechildren.fi

[University of Gent], Belgium: Fridays, 6 Oct to 10 Nov; Children and Parental Responsibility. Tel: +32 9264 6285, Fax: +32 9264 6493, Email: Kathleen.Vlieghe@UGent.be

**Recent Publications**


Council of Europe: Paper on Corporal Punishment: “The Right not to be hit, also a children’s right” June 2006


**WATCH THIS SPACE**

Following the launch of the new newsletter, the European Children’s Network is currently developing an entirely new website on which all future newsletters, documents, and member’s information will be posted and regularly updated.

Watch this space!

**Member’s Corner**

If you have any stories, facts, figures, events or publications you would like to publish on the EURONET newsletter do not hesitate to contact me at europeanchildrenetwork@skynet.be

**Member Spotlight**

EURONET member, The Flemish Children’s Rights Coalition, a network of 28 NGOs defending children’s rights has launched its new website:

[www.kinderrechtencoalitie.be](http://www.kinderrechtencoalitie.be)

The Coalition aims to contribute to the application of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Email: [info@kinderrechtencoalitie.be](mailto:info@kinderrechtencoalitie.be)

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**Save the Children Denmark**

Save the Children Denmark

Save the Children is the world’s largest independent movement for children. Save the Children fights for children’s rights. We deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children’s lives in Denmark and worldwide.

Education and protection are the key areas of Save the Children Denmark’s work. Save the Children Denmark provides emergency relief and combats child labour, poverty, HIV/AIDS, sexual abuse and trafficking. Save the Children Denmark supports vulnerable children by providing holiday activities, child care centres and time out with respite families. Save the Children Denmark works with local communities to put children’s rights on the public and political agenda.

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