

Video message by **Commissioner Vladimír Špidla** for the Conference on „**Monitoring child well-being : better policy and practice**“ organised by Eurochild on 11 November 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sorry that I am unable to be with you in person today - but happy that I can contribute to your discussions.

The rights of the child are an integral part of human rights. Over the last few decades, they have received increasing attention at international level - as well as in the European Union itself. In particular, there has been a growing focus on the protection of children from trafficking and sexual abuse. In recent years, we have also seen a growing interest in the conditions of children in institutional care.

During its current mandate, the European Commission has paid great attention to the rights of the child. A broad European strategy was adopted and a number of actions have been carried out. Nonetheless, major challenges to the welfare of children in Europe remain. Please allow me to name just a few:

- First, the levels of child poverty remain unacceptably high. Most often, we define poverty in relative terms - but there are also

children living in Europe in conditions of absolute poverty. This is particularly true of Roma children who, very often, face dramatic poverty, social exclusion and discrimination.

- Second, many children of immigrants and asylum seekers and in particular, minors on their own, face not just poverty but also serious risks to their security.
- Third, in general, there are still too many child victims of abuse, child pornography and trafficking.
- Fourth, in some Member States, very high numbers of children - those with disabilities but sometimes also without disabilities - still spend their whole childhood in institutional care. Their perspectives for independent living are extremely poor. In these Member States, there is a clear need for transformation of care from the institutional model to family- and community-based care.
- Finally, there are still children in Europe who are born with disabilities but who do not receive adequate treatment, although it is or should be available, for instance some children with spina bifida and hydrocephalus.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are facing many difficult challenges. I wish you all, not only a fruitful discussion today, but continued success in your efforts to improve the conditions of children in Europe.