

20 Years United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

## A new era for children's rights in the European Union?

On 20th November 2009 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. To mark the occasion, the Swedish Presidency of the European Union is organising a high level conference of the **permanent intergovernmental group L'Europe de l'Enfance**. Bringing together ministers from several member states, plus senior representatives of royal families from across Europe, the conference paves the way for renewed commitment to children's rights across the EU.

*"It is the first time EU representatives from such a high level gather to celebrate children's rights"* said **André Rouvoet**, Deputy Prime Minister of the Netherlands and Minister of Youth and Family. He added *"Let the rights of the child be the foundation for how we respond to all our future challenges"*.

Mr **Goran Hägglund**, the Swedish Minister for Health and Social Affairs and the meeting's host, looked forward to stronger collaboration at EU level on children's rights. *"The Lisbon Treaty puts the protection as children's rights as a specific EU objective. We look forward to the adoption of an EU strategy on the rights of the child"*.

In the closing debate, **Jana Hainsworth**, Secretary General of Eurochild calls for a paradigm shift in how we think of children in society. *"Children must be valued in their own right, not as 'adults in the making'. Well-being needs to look at the quality of children's lives in the present. But by happy coincidence such an approach will reap huge economic and social benefits in the future too. We have the economic arguments at hand."*

Taking place at a turning point in the EU's history with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty<sup>1</sup> and the beginning of a new Commission, Jana Hainsworth challenged participants to capitalise on this opportunity. *"The EU2020 agenda will be greatly enhanced if we put children's rights and well-being at its heart. What is good for children is good for society as a whole."*

More specifically **Eurochild calls for:**

- An overarching focus on 'people and planet' in the EU's agenda 2020 in which the implementation of **children's rights are a fundamental building block**;
- **Commitment to a comprehensive EU strategy on the rights of the child** as part of the Stockholm Programme which sets out the EU's framework for action in the areas of freedom, justice and security;
- **Adoption of an EU Recommendation on child poverty and well-being** as a political legacy of 2010 the European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion. It should build on the substantial body of work already carried out at EU level. Such a Recommendation would represent an important tool for the realisation of children's rights within EU member states.

END

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<sup>1</sup> The new Lisbon Treaty for the first time explicitly provides that protecting the rights of children is an objective of the EU, both internally and in its relations with the wider world (Article 3). Moreover, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which will become binding under the Lisbon Treaty, clearly reaffirms the EU's commitment to the rights of the child (Article 24).

<sup>2</sup> Eurochild is a network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to promote children's rights and improve the quality of life of children and young people. Eurochild's work is underpinned by the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

