



Building a child-friendly Europe: turning a vision into reality

**Conference on the Council of Europe Strategy
on the Rights of the Child 2012-2015**

The draft Strategy on the rights of the child (2012-2015):
turning a vision into reality

Draft speech for Anica Djamić
Committee of Ministers Thematic Co-ordinator for Children
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Croatia to the Council of Europe,

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DRAFT SPEECH



**Votre Altesse,
Chère Secrétaire Générale adjointe,
Ministres,
Mesdames, Messieurs**

Our continent is facing serious economic challenges and uncertainty and our children too, are greatly affected by the current crisis. The decisions we make today will change our vision of tomorrow's Europe. Our children will have to live with the consequences of the solutions we impose on them.

We want children to be at the heart of those decisions and also to bring their own input. Indeed Kristinn has already given us a taste of what young people expect from us.

Today many of you have contributed to identifying the main challenges your countries face in protecting children's rights. This is not an easy task.

My mission now is to share with you the vision that the Council of Europe, an organisation of 47 member states has for children on our continent.

In 2005, the Council of Europe has promoted an agenda for children's rights which has led and will continue to lead to political changes in their best interests.

I am here in my capacity as the Thematic Coordinator of Children's Rights of the Committee of Ministers. My role is the following: I will bring the draft Council of Europe Strategy for 2012-2015, on which we shall reflect during this conference, to the Committee of Ministers, the decision-making body of our organisation, for its approval early next year. This will pave the way for the work of the Council of Europe and its partners over the next four years.

The two previous cycles have had a different strategic focus and have both brought us closer to our ultimate vision:

- We have mainstreamed children's rights among the Council of Europe actors and partners in Europe.

- We have identified the need for and assisted in the drafting, adoption and promotion of new standards and policy guidelines which have all brought the UN Convention on the Right of the Child closer to the children in Europe. You have all contributed to this process in different ways and the results are there. We can now proudly say that the Council of Europe has a large array of standards

- We have brought about legislative and policy change on children's rights in our member states.

- We have made serious efforts in ensuring that children have access to information and standards in a child friendly language and in all this work we have encouraged child participation and consultation with children.

- We have put in place co-operation agreements with our international partners, in particular through the setting-up of a Children's Rights Platform which has contributed to reinforcing the network of national focal points and to working more efficiently with NGOs. This has also been achieved through joint programming and implementation.

The forthcoming third cycle, will allow us to shift gears and focus on implementation. Implementation, in co-operation with our partners, of the standards we have developed together over the past few years.

The process leading to the draft Strategy text we now have in our hands has been intense. We have consulted widely with our member states through the focal points, with our international partners including the European Union and their bodies, the UN bodies, including UNICEF, and NGOs. We are very thankful for this participation and input. It will be particularly useful to us once we reach the stage of initiating its implementation.

The message from this consultation process is clear: We must **continue to tackle the challenges our children face with the legal and other tools at our disposal.**

It is important to be aware that the Council of Europe has a number of structures which have all been part of this process and which will all have a key role to play in the successful implementation of our next Strategy. Indeed, I would underline the word "implementation". For this is the spearhead objective of the new Strategy. You may think that this Strategy is ambitious. In response, quoting Francis Bacon, I say: **"A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds."**

This draft Strategy, therefore, is not a one man show. It is the fruit of the efforts and input of the whole Council of Europe: The Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the European Court of Human Rights and of course the Committee of Ministers, supported by its various intergovernmental bodies.

The previous Strategy has benefited from the dedicated attention and concrete support of all these bodies.

Through this support, the Council of Europe has been placed on the map as an unavoidable central hub and force to be reckoned with for children's rights in Europe and beyond. This has been also been achieved because other international organisations such as the UN and its special representatives, rapporteurs and committees believe in the Council of Europe. Because governments, civil society, academics and children have been, are and will remain real actors in our work.

I am therefore particularly proud to present to you now the four key objectives of the new strategy:

Strategic objective 1: Promoting child-friendly services and systems

Children have told us that they feel a general mistrust in the public services and systems. They should be treated as individuals and should be treated with respect.

We want children to be respected whenever they need any kind of service or have to be part of a public system. Be it in the justice system, the health system, in the social service system or in the educational system.

Our legal standards in these areas should be in the forefront of law reform in our member states, and trigger core changes in national practices.

Strategic objective 2: Eliminating all forms of violence against children

On the one hand, children report that they are alarmed about the impact of violent incidents and crimes and they feel unprotected against them. They expect to be able to report this violence and to obtain support. On the other hand, however, children also admit an alarming tolerance towards unacceptable forms of violence such as corporal punishment, especially within the family.

Informing and raising awareness of children and parents or carers on the fundamental principles and possible remedies enshrined in our legal standards are crucial steps to ensure that children are free from all violence, physical or moral, in any place and situation.

Strategic objective 3: Guaranteeing the rights of all children and especially children in vulnerable situations

We believe that it is our obligation to make sure that children's rights are a reality for all children, including these in a vulnerable situation, such as children in alternative care; children with disabilities; children who are migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless or unaccompanied; children in detention; children of Roma origin, who are travellers or belong to any other national minority group; street children, etc.

Strategic objective 4: Promoting child participation

It is our hope that we will be able to weave close ties between the Council of Europe, children and youth, representatives of governments and civil society in working together in order to make sure that children's views are taken into account in decisions that concern them.

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Many of you may say, that **this is a very challenging Strategy** In implementing these four strategic objectives our biggest fear indeed is to fail and let the 150 million children in Europe down and to let our partners down too. Yes **this is a very challenging Strategy but it is also an opportunity**. Not only because you have all contributed to its preparation, but because it is **an opportunity to change, to improve, to map out and to work together**.

During the consultation process, a number of proposals for co-operation were made. We shall use these offers in building an alliance around the Programme "Building a Europe for and with Children". This alliance, we would like to call "the Council of Europe Platform on Children's Rights", and it will assist us in developing our co-operation even further for the benefit of the children who need our support. This afternoon our key partners will examine together how best we to move forward.

We anticipate **new working methods** with our member states, through the **Network of Focal Points on children's rights**. Their role should be clarified and hopefully reinforced. It is important that they continue to work in a transversal way at state level as children's rights issues should also be mainstreamed. We believe that they can also have a more important role to play with regard to the Committee of Ministers. Tomorrow the back-to-back meeting with representatives of the Focal points will provide us with elements for consideration but also for action! This will also be done for the non governmental organisations that work with the Council of Europe. We need to map out our potential.

As I just said, it is important for us to work together to achieve the ambitious objectives ahead.

We are very proud that the panel this afternoon on the Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms is so richly represented. We hope that in the years to come these mechanisms will also be able to focus more actively on children's rights, develop child-friendly materials and listen to the views of children in their monitoring exercises as far as this is possible and hopefully in partnership with NGOs and other international bodies. The result of such initiatives would also ultimately favour a better implementation of the UN Convention.

What are the next steps?

Thanks to the extensive and impressive participation in the consultation process in the run up to this Conference, we are pleased to inform you that a road map is being prepared. This road map or action plan will set out in a clear and transparent manner the actions to be taken by the Council of Europe with a view to achieving the strategic objectives.

My role is to bring forward the discussion and to present the draft strategy to the Committee of Ministers. I am very committed to our work in this field and I will make sure that the views expressed at this Conference reach the right ears. I also count on you to take back from the discussions the inspiration and the strength it takes to make sure that in four years time we will have contributed substantially to changing legislation, mentalities and ultimately the lives of the children in need of our protection and who we are committed to protect and empower.

We do not have the right to let them down.

Nous n'avons pas le droit de les laisser tomber.