

Building a child-friendly Europe: Turning a vision into reality
Conference on the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child
2012-2015

Under the Presidency of H.R.H. The Princess of Hanover
Monaco, 20-21 November 2011

STATEMENT

Margarita Popova – Minister of Justice of the Republic of Bulgaria

Thematic area: Protection of children against all forms of violence

Esteemed Mrs Maud de Boer-Buquicchio,
Your Royal Highness,
Esteemed colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to extend my appreciation to the organisers and the host of this important forum which gives us the opportunity to discuss future steps aimed at strengthening children's rights, also in the context of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2012-2015. I am convinced that today's sharing beneficial experience in the indicated thematic areas will enrich us with knowledge on specific issues of the various national legal systems and intensify our cooperation in this field.

One of the basic priorities of the Bulgarian criminal policy is undoubtedly the protection and the promotion of children's rights as well as prevention of all forms of exploitation. Violence against children is considered to be a very serious violation of human rights and appears in many forms – sexual, labour, domestic violence, forced marriages, etc. In consideration of the importance of the problem, the Bulgarian government took numerous measures for the elaboration of an adequate and effective policy aimed at combating all forms of violence against children, including legislative amendments, strengthening of the cooperation between public and NGO sector and international cooperation. All measures aim at raising prevention effectiveness, improving the measures for assistance to children who are victims, and availability of effective criminal procedures for the perpetrators of such crime. Concerning substantive criminal law, particular focus is put on sexual criminality against children. Bulgaria signed on the 25-th of October 2007 the Council of Europe's *Convention on the*

Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and this was an important step in the correct direction. In view of ratifying the Convention we carried out detailed analysis of its compliance with the relevant Bulgarian legislation and subsequently drafted legislative amendments in the Criminal Code and in the Criminal Procedure Code. The amendments in the Criminal Code adopted in 2009 introduced new offences like “Corruption of children”; criminalisation of the intentional use of the services of children involved in prostitution; offences related to the participation of children in pornographic activities. Numerous of the existing offences of sexual nature against children were supplemented. These amendments were also motivated by the necessity of addressing the increasing cases of Internet abuses and the misuse of various communication and information technologies for the perpetration of various sexual crimes against children. Furthermore, in 2010 new legislative amendments providing for increased punishment for some particularly publicly reprehensible violations against children were adopted, aimed at introducing more effective, proportionate and dissuasive judicial response.

On the 2nd of November this year the National Assembly adopted the Law on ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. The Law is in force as of 19th of November 2011. In short terms we shall deposit our ratification instrument to the Secretary General and in three months we shall become the succeeding State Party to the Convention.

For the purpose of an effective implementation of the amended legislation, Bulgarian magistrates participate in regular trainings at the National Institute of Justice. Courses encompass the new criminal law standards established by the Council of Europe Convention and the issues relating to sexual offences against children and their participation in criminal proceedings.

Allow me to share with you my personal expectations for future actions on European level for enhancement and guaranteeing children’s rights. Once the Strategy is adopted in the terms foreseen, we all should engage in prompt activities for its implementation on national level. We should also work for raising public awareness of transmuting violence against children and all countermeasures we can take in our common European home.

Thank you for the attention!