



Closing session

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Madame Minister,
Dear participants,
Dear colleagues,

What a challenging task. Quel défi!

Over the past two days, children's rights have been at the **centre of our attention**, in the **heart of our reflection** and will be the **core of our action** for the years to come. For the Council of Europe, this is not just another conference. We have heard a **remarkable number of achievements**, **highlighted persisting challenges**, **shared solutions and explored opportunities**. For this reason I am particularly honoured and proud to conclude this conference on a positive and motivating note, allowing all of us to leave Dubrovnik with a sense of pride. I think that Minister Opacic was perfectly right when she opened this conference yesterday by saying that **we would all learn something new here**.

Before moving on to highlight some of the main points of these last two days, allow me to remind us all that we could never have got this far alone; the progress that we have achieved is a joint achievement, it is **your achievement**. I want to thank the rapporteurs of the Roundtables for having made my concluding remarks a little less challenging.

We are half way through the Strategy and this conference has helped us redefine the direction toward the realisation of our goals, based upon the realities that you have brought to us. This was an opportunity for us to share with you the **first successes** of the Strategy, and to question and **redefine the way forward** in our work. Bridges still need to be built between the standards that were established by the CoE and the realities of children in Europe who are facing old and new challenges.

We have a **solid international legal framework**, anchored in the UN CRC, we look forward to seeing a new generation of constitutions, on which all of our strategic objectives should be built. We need to bridge the governance gap between **rhetoric and effective enforcement**: Let us overcome this challenge. **Implementation of children's rights has been at the core of our strategy and as we have seen today, it will remain to be so.**

I encourage all our member states to really consider the conclusions of the Council of Europe monitoring bodies, which have delivered a child-focused impact over the past two years – the Court, the Human Rights Commissioner, CPT, GRETA, the Social Charter, the Venice

Commission – and **to link them to the UN Committee work and reporting**. We cannot work in isolation and I look forward to supporting the recommendations of Ms Sandberg this morning on how we can better bridge the gap between the UN monitoring and the Council of Europe work and having a more regular exchange between our committees and the UN CRC should also facilitate and alleviate the strain on states reporting to different monitoring bodies at different international levels. You have proved that we are not working in isolation and I thank you for having showed your support with the outstanding presence here in Dubrovnik.

Let's not miss the opportunity the 25th anniversary of the CRC gives us: Let us seize it and make the most of it. Let us think about how governments, national parliaments, and civil society can use the momentum to set up a solid national children's rights agenda, hold debates, generate discussions, **change**.

Our **anti-violence agenda** is strong and will remain at the heart of our work. Our experience, our member states' good practice and experience will be shared. I have high hopes and a strong ambition for the Lanzarote Committee and the ONE in FIVE Campaign. I appreciate the emphasis and focus the participants gave on ways to involve more efficiently the private sector, parents, and young people in prevention through education. I look forward to launching a **European initiative** to make the action against sexual violence sustainable, unforgettable. No child should have to suffer secondary victimisation when reporting sexual violence, whether that suffering comes from silence or from speaking up. I count on our member states that have the resources and the knowledge to **share their experience** and to support our other member states in setting up structures supporting victims. We must not, under any circumstances, let down the children who are falling victim to sexual violence. As was underlined by Minister Horne from Norway, "**we cannot rest as long as one child is unsafe**".

Peter Newell reminded us that 25 of our member states have banned corporal punishment. I am convinced that in a few years' time many more will have followed. To get there, we need to support all those who care for children to educate them in an empowering, solid and strong way. How can we still, today, in many parts of Europe believe that hitting a child is for his or her well-being? Hearing a child cry, suffer and feel pain is not listening to **the voice of a child**.

Child participation needs to become **systematic, sustainable, inclusive and integrated, in all settings**. As Ms Sandberg pointed out to us yesterday, there are still many "**token mechanisms**" for children to participate, but that does not mean that the views of children are taken seriously by the states and decision makers. Minister Kristjansdottir shared with us her experience in listening to children, victims of sexual violence. For her this was a **life changing experience**, not only as a person but more importantly as a politician. I see that she has experienced the AHA moment; realising with **awe** how the advice of children can be revealing, how it can have an impact. We need more strong politicians like her to share their views. Let's trigger that change.

What will make the real difference is when all our member states will have public services staff that are **trained**, that are **aware** and that are **proud** to listen to children and give due weight to their views.

This conference has shown us a series of good practices on child-friendly **health, social and justice systems**. The important data that has and is being collected needs to be used to support our states in delivering accessible child-friendly systems all over Europe.

Children in vulnerable situations are the hardest to reach, and the least informed of their rights and the most silent: the Roma children, children living in poverty, on the street and in ghettos, children with disabilities, children in care, of national minorities, LGBT children and of course children deprived of liberty. The call for support for the Global Study on children deprived of liberty has not and will not be left on the side because we are committed to ensuring that **all alternatives** are found to keep children out of detention or in closed confined institutions.

We need to make **children visible in all national policy, training, strategies**. We need to trust them. Here I also count on our institutional partners to keep up their pace: the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress, and all our intergovernmental committees. To meet this challenge we will continue our **transversal work** on children's rights and increase **mainstreaming of children's rights** into all areas where children are directly or indirectly concerned and fight all "mainstreaming fatigue". We must rise to the challenge of expectations and prove that we can provide the guidance and assistance that our member states and all stakeholders working for children's rights ask us for. We must also remember, as pointed out by one of our speakers yesterday, that **this is not a wish list, it is a must list** (Peter Newell). A must list for us all.

During the current Strategy, we have been unable to address some of the demanding **emerging issues** such as children's use of the **Internet and new information and communication technologies**; questions related to children's **privacy and personal data**; as well as the challenge of protecting children's rights in a society where **access to potentially harmful information and images** is practically unlimited. In that regard, I thank Bernard de Vos for so eloquently pointing out the hyper-sexualisation of today's society and what it does to the sexual development of our children.

The Council of Europe may be one of the oldest human rights institutions in Europe, **but we deliver modern responses** and we **encourage new thinking** – a thinking that reflects the ever-faster changing society that we live in. We need to be ready to take into account the current **austerity measures** that have followed the economic crisis. As Mr Firerens pointed out, children in poverty face a frightening reality which we cannot tolerate and which he has pointed out to us in a revealing way. **He certainly took us out of our comfort zone**. But are we really supposed to be in our comfort zone? We certainly need to consider how **technological developments** and the revolution in **means of communication and interaction** are changing behaviours and living environments and what happens when **the virtual actually becomes a considerable part of everyday reality**.

Together, on national, European and international levels, with **meaningful partnerships and solid cooperation**, our responsibility is to make children's rights a **tangible reality**. I want to highlight the fundamental importance that the Council of Europe attributes to our partnerships with the UN SR VAC, UN CRC, UNICEF, the EU, and the large number of committed NGOs that we collaborate with on a daily basis.

You have given us suggestions and you have raised crucial questions. We will bring the messages that this conference has delivered back with us to Strasbourg, and we will work to find the right answers. It is evident that this Conference has provided the Council of Europe with a wealth of suggestions and directions.

We have a duty not to give up or lose speed – our joint mission is far from completed and, while this conference has certainly served to illustrate the progress we achieved, it has also served as an important reminder that we still have a long way to go.

I want to thank all of you for helping us to point out these and many other challenges during this conference. They will guide the Council of Europe's activities to reach the goals of our Strategy by the end of 2015, and they will serve as a basis for setting up our new objectives for 2016 and beyond. For us, the next months will be dedicated to preparing the Committee of Ministers to adhere to the messages and suggestions delivered here in Dubrovnik. We shall prepare the work of the Committee entrusted with the preparation of the next Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child. At the same time we shall continue to remain committed to our present Strategy. Despite the huge task that awaits us to reflect upon your suggestions I look forward to having the time to digest what has been shared and suggested.

So, once again, let us leave Dubrovnik with a sense of pride. A sense of pride of what we have **accomplished together.** Let us also leave Dubrovnik determined to do even better in the future; to strengthen our joint efforts and to continue to build on the precious partnerships that we have established. Only if we act all together can we achieve change and improve the respect for the rights of all children.

And let us remember: with the current pace of our society, the future is here and now and it depends on you – it depends on us all.

Thank you.