



**ENOC 14th annual meeting
Strasbourg, 7-9 October 2010**

**Speech by Ms Maud de Boer-Buquicchio,
Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe**

Supporting a strategic approach to children's rights

Madame la Présidente,

Dear members of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first of all express how pleased I am that you have chosen to meet in Strasbourg. I hope that the Council of Europe's commitment to children's rights will make you feel welcome and at home.

"Listening to children and involving them in the promotion and implementation of their rights" – this is the motto of this year's annual meeting of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children. This is extremely timely because, as you certainly know, the Council of Europe has just embarked on an ambitious project to promote child participation and we are keen to join efforts with ENOC. This is not the only topic of common concern.

Let me just mention the Council of Europe's current priorities that are of relevance to you and to this very meeting.

As regards **development of legal standards:**

Since the launch of the Programme "Building a Europe for and with Children", ENOC has been invited and contributed to the negotiations of very important texts. Most recently, you have also played a key role in assisting us in a consultation with children on the issue of **Child-friendly Justice**. Thanks to your help, we could learn about the views of almost 4000 children from 25 countries about justice in all its forms. To record young people's experiences, we used a questionnaire and a variety of other methods, including focus groups, interviews, and even drawings and paintings. Key themes identified by the children were the need for family involvement when faced with the justice system, mistrust of authority, the need for children to be treated with respect, as well as the importance for them to be listened to.

Of course, this exercise was far from perfect but we don't want to hide behind obstacles and we learn through experience. The outcome of this consultation has had a clear impact on the text of our draft guidelines on child friendly justice, which is expected to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers in mid-November.

It may be of particular interest to you that the views of children have supported a provision for an unequivocal right to access

independent and effective complaint mechanisms for all parts of the justice system. Also the provision for confidentiality in professionals' dealings with children was strengthened as a response to the feedback from children.

Inspired by this initiative, we are highly motivated to involve children and young people in a range of other projects in the next years: The projects on child-friendly health, child-friendly social services and the development of Council of Europe guidelines on child and youth participation.

ENOC and its members support is essential to get the standards **right**. But it is also important to get the standards **known**. As you certainly know, the Council of Europe is quite productive in the field of children's rights and I encourage you to get inspiration from the many texts we have adopted. Let me just focus on one of them: our recent **Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse**. This ground-breaking treaty is the first international instrument to tackle all forms of sexual violence against children, including abuse within the family environment. As you know, estimates show that about 1 out of 5 children fall victim to sexual violence. Apart from sexual abuse, child prostitution and pornography, the convention also deals with grooming and sex tourism.

The Convention calls for member states to encourage the participation of children in the development and implementation of

policies and programmes to fight sexual violence. It also requests countries to create “independent competent national or local institutions for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, ensuring that they are provided with specific resources and responsibilities”.

We recently came across an excellent example of participation facilitated by one of your members. I must admit I was impressed and touched at the same time by the report on this project developed by the **Norwegian Ombudsman, Mr Reidar Hjermann**, who established an “Expert Group on Incest” comprising eight girls who had been abused by somebody in their family environment. Mr Hjermann and his team managed to create an atmosphere in which the girls felt comfortable enough to share their experience and recommendations.

The Council of Europe Convention on Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse entered into force on 1 July this year and has been signed by 33 Council of Europe member states, but only 9 states have ratified it so far.

In order to promote the ratification and implementation of this convention, but also to raise general awareness of the extent of sexual violence against children, the Council of Europe will launch on 29-30 November in Rome a **campaign to stop sexual violence against children**. Motivated by the success of our campaign “Raise your hand against smacking” against corporal punishment of children, we are enthusiastic about the idea of triggering a pan-European campaign against sexual violence, which is – as we certainly all agree – one of the worst and most disgusting forms of violence against children.

We have asked the members of the Council of Europe network of focal points on children’s rights **to set up national campaign teams** that bring together all relevant actors and to start setting up a strategy for the fight against sexual violence in the respective member states. We very much count on Ombudspersons and their offices to support and push for a campaign at national level. Of course, your potential involvement depends on the respective circumstances in your country, but you may also consider:

- contributing to the analysis of national legislation and policies to identify the measures that need to be taken to achieve the campaign objectives,

- preparing child-participation activities within the national campaign,
- engaging NGOs, media and professionals to break the taboo and speak openly about the extent of sexual violence in European societies and the harm it does to children,
- disseminating the materials we are preparing.

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Finally, we have to get the standards **respected**. I would like to refer here to the Council of Europe's mandate to **monitor implementation of legal standards** to which member states have committed themselves. You are certainly aware of what the European Court of Human Rights can do and has done to challenge violations of children's rights. But have you ever thought of using one of the other Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, such as the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the European Committee of Social Rights, or GRETA, the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings?

I am very happy that yesterday, representatives of these mechanisms as well as of the Human Rights Commissioner, the Parliamentary Assembly and, of course, the Court had the possibility to meet some of you and reflect together on how Ombudspersons and Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms can better work together in cases where advocacy at national level is not enough. The Council of Europe stands ready to support you in building the capacity you need in order to make optimal use of all these tools.

Dear Ombudspersons,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I know that achieving effective protection of children's rights is a huge challenge that cannot be put on the shoulders of one single institution. Guaranteeing children's rights calls for **a strategic approach** and that is why we do all we can to put our actions into a broader and more coherent context. The **Council of Europe policy guidelines on national integrated strategies for the protection of children from violence** contains all the building blocks we need to launch a sustainable process that moves on from the areas of political will and evolves to accompany new social needs and challenges. The role of ombudspersons is highlighted in these guidelines and I encourage you to use them at national level as well!

I would like to thank you for your support, congratulate you on your achievements and encourage you to keep investing in your network and your relations with the Council of Europe.

I wish you an excellent meeting!