



## **CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR FAMILY AFFAIRS**

Lisbon, 17 May 2006

MMF-XXVIII-HF (2006) 1 final

**28<sup>th</sup> SESSION**

**Lisbon, 16-17 May 2006**

**COMMITTEE OF LIAISON OFFICERS**

**3<sup>rd</sup> preparatory meeting**

**Lisbon 15 May 2006**

**“CHANGES IN PARENTING:  
CHILDREN TODAY, PARENTS TOMORROW”**

**FINAL COMMUNIQUE  
AND POLITICAL DECLARATION**

## FINAL COMMUNIQUE

1. At the invitation of the Portuguese Minister for Labour and Social Solidarity, the Ministers responsible for Family Affairs, or their representatives, of the member states of the Council of Europe (CoE)<sup>1</sup>, and representatives of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, Parliamentary Assembly, of observer States, of the Conference of OINGs enjoying participatory status with the CoE, Committees of the CoE, of children and parents of the CoE Consultation as well as international organisations and NGOs, met in Lisbon, on 16 - 17 May 2006 for the XXVIII<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Family Affairs, on the theme "**CHANGES IN PARENTING: Children Today, Parents Tomorrow**"

2. The Conference was opened by Mrs. Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Mr. José António Vieira da Silva (Portugal), Minister for Labour and Social Solidarity, President of the Conference, welcomed the participants introduced the debate. Mr Seamus Brennan was elected Vice-President of the Conference (Ireland).

3. The Conference was divided into three sessions on:

*i. "Family policies in the light of demographic changes in Europe and different patterns of family life"*

Chair: Mr. José António Vieira da Silva (Portugal)

Introduced by Ms Karin Wall (Portugal), Professor, University of Lisbon

*ii. "Supporting parenting in the best interests of the child"*

Chair: Ms Gisèle Mandaila (Belgium), Secretary of State for Families and Handicapped People

Introduced by Ms Mary Daly (Ireland), Professor, University of Belfast, Chair of the Council of Europe High Level Task Force on Social Cohesion, Coordinator of the CoE report on Positive Parenting

*iii. Follow-up of the Portorož conference on "Reconciling working and family life"*

Chair: Mr Paul-Eerik Rummo (Estonia), Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs

Introduced by Mr Fred Deven (Belgium), Scientific Director, Population and Family Study Centre/CBGS

### Context

4. The main aim of the 28<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Family Affairs was to discuss experience, views and good practices regarding action in the area of changes in parenting, the new challenges relating to it and support for parents in the best interests of the child. The conference also took stock of the follow-up to the 27<sup>th</sup> session in Portorož, Slovenia (21-22 June 2001) on the theme of "Reconciling work and family life". These issues are a matter of major concern to ministers responsible for family affairs and should also be of concern to other ministers.

5. Ministers responsible for Family Affairs are meeting for the first time after the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, which took place in Warsaw (Poland) on 16-17 May 2005. The Summit adopted a Plan of Action laying down priorities for the Organisation's work in the years to come. Two points are particularly relevant for the topics covered by this conference:

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<sup>1</sup> Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

***i. The rights of the child and the eradication of all forms of violence against children***<sup>2</sup>

The rights of the child are being mainstreamed throughout relevant activities of the Council of Europe through the programme “Building a Europe for and with Children” (officially launched in Monaco on 4-5 April 2006) composed of two closely linked themes: on the one hand, the promotion of the rights of the child and on the other the right of the child to be protected from all forms of violence. The action will be implemented in such a way as to reinforce coordination of all the activities of the Council of Europe relating to children. This ministerial conference will also be the first major contribution to the programme.

***ii. Future of social cohesion***<sup>3</sup>

A review is currently being undertaken of the Council of Europe’s Strategy for Social Cohesion by a specific task force involving an in-depth analysis of the European social model in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and of the future of social cohesion in the member states of the Council of Europe. A widespread debate in the member states should result from this exercise.

**Background**

6. Following the previous ministerial conference, the Forum for Children and Families (created in 2000 to address and discuss issues related to children and families) developed the programme “Focus on Children and Families”. The programme concentrated on certain “key issues<sup>4</sup>, and important legal instruments were adopted by the Committee of Ministers<sup>5</sup>. The programme conformed to texts from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that called for the development of a European Strategy for Children to serve as an inspiration and guidance for policy makers and those who actively support children’s issues at a European level.

7. At present, the Committee of Experts on Children and Families (CS-EF), set up by the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS), is carrying out a project on “Supporting parenting in the best interests of the child”, focusing also in greater detail on parenting in situations of poverty and social exclusion, and on the role of parents in combating violence involving children.

8. The starting point for this conference was to provide an opportunity for exchange of experience, views and standpoints on the issue of changes in parenting at an international level.

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<sup>2</sup> “We are determined to effectively promote the rights of the child and to fully comply with the obligations of the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child. A child rights perspective will be implemented throughout the activities of the Council of Europe and effective coordination of child-related activities must be ensured within the Organisation.

*We will take specific action to eradicate all forms of violence against children. We therefore decide to launch a three year programme of action to address social, legal, health and educational dimensions of the various forms of violence against children....”*

<sup>3</sup> *The Council of Europe will step up its work in the social policy field on the basis of the European Social Charter and other relevant instruments. The central task is to jointly define remedies and solutions which could be effective in fighting poverty and exclusion, ensuring equitable access to social rights and protecting vulnerable groups. The Council of Europe, acting as a forum for pan-European cooperation in the social field, will work out recommendations and promote exchange of best practices in these areas as well as strengthen assistance to member states.*

*We instruct the Committee of Ministers to appoint a high-level taskforce to review the Council of Europe strategy to promote social cohesion in the 21st century, in the light of the Organisation’s achievements in this field. Policies to promote social cohesion must take account of the challenges posed by ageing and other social and economic developments.*

<sup>4</sup> (abolishing corporal punishment including within the family, ombudspersons for children, the right to education, social work with school children, recreation for families, children in care and at risk, participation of children in society, child Day-care and reconciling work and family life)

<sup>5</sup> like the following Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member states: N° R (2005) 5 on the rights of children living in residential institutions; N° R (2002) 8 on child day care; N° R (2001) 16 on the protection of children against sexual exploitation.

The conference afforded an opportunity to assess the present situation in Europe and to look at demographic and legal aspects of new family structures. The impact of demographic trends on social cohesion was taken into consideration as well as issues linked to families' living conditions and parenting in Europe from a demographic viewpoint.

9. The Council of Europe's instruments stress the importance of family life and the safeguarding of the rights of family members:

- the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees the right to respect for private and family life. The scope of this protection was expanded and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights shows the complexity of modern family relationships. It recommends that State action to protect the family should not be limited to traditional family;
- the European Social Charter states that "The family as a fundamental unit of society has the right to appropriate social, legal and economic protection to ensure its full development" (art.16).

10. It is recognised that families - as pointed out in the Revised Social Strategy for Social Cohesion - are the place where social cohesion is first experienced and learnt and that a social cohesion strategy, while fully respecting the autonomy of the private sphere and of civil society, must seek to be supportive of families.

11. In a complex and changing society, support for families – together with their legal protection – in fulfilling their functions is necessary and should be a topic high on the policy agenda of member states. In particular, parents need help in counteracting harmful social and market pressures, in reconciling the demands of work and family life and in adapting to a situation in which children are seen as bearers of their own rights as individuals.

#### ***I. "FAMILY POLICIES IN THE LIGHT OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN EUROPE AND DIFFERENT PATTERNS OF FAMILY LIFE"***

##### **Present trends**

12. Families in Europe face key challenges as a result of rapid economic, social, cultural and political change. Trends like population decline and ageing, greater variety and instability of family living arrangements, the impact of new gender roles on family life and higher female labour market participation exist in all the European countries, but with variations within and between them. Changes regarding the increasing cultural diversity in European countries (because of migration, for instance) and the challenges this brings with it should also be considered.

13. Different priorities can be identified in member States in relation to current demographic trends (postponement of marriage and childbearing; continuing low birth rates; growing numbers of divorces and remarriages; lone-parent families; reconstituted families; childless families; the increase in one-person households; greater social occurrence of unmarried cohabitation and of same-sex cohabitation; longer life expectancy).

14. It is recognized that there is an increased demand for acknowledgment of new family forms, indicating a willingness for these new forms to take on the obligations that were, in the past, assumed by the traditional family. Although the rate and pace of these changes vary markedly between and within countries, it is clear that the traditional or conventional family no longer constitutes the only family form or the principal normative and social environment in which children are born and reared. The family concept of our time includes a variety of settings in which children are brought up and cared for (e.g. single parents' families, families of multi-ethnic origins). However, despite these changes, the family in different forms is the core unit of society, and family values and family solidarity remain strong.

15. It is difficult to predict how family life will develop in the future or to extrapolate from one society to another. The indicators used as a basis for policy are progressively being adapted

to reflect changing social values and practices. Family relations based on reliable partnership and respect, intimacy, love, unconditional support, trust and effective management of everyday life, the practice of equality, tolerance and solidarity are key requirements for improving the quality of life of the citizens of Europe.

16. Ministers are aware of the difficulty in defining the boundaries between state intervention and personal autonomy and that family–state relationships and family solidarity assume different meanings across Europe and have been evolving over time and space. The new family forms need to be also eligible for any implemented family support to be able to face daily life in a positive way and to assure the child wellbeing.

17. Ministers emphasised the importance of the questions raised by greater life expectancy. The associated issue of the need for support to working parent(s) with care responsibilities for both children and parents was also raised as well as the different national approaches intended to promote a better reconciliation between work and family responsibilities.

18. It has been recognised that this is a multi-actor field where local authorities, non-governmental organisations, civil society and families themselves have an important role to play.

19. In formulating family policy, governments need to be aware of the fact that an important condition for their well-being lies in the share of the responsibility for their children, as well as in the provision of financial family support and opportunities to reconcile work and family life. These concerns are important also from the point of view of the future of the children. In this context, it is very important to support the couple by promoting their parenting function.

20. Governments need to take into consideration increased risks during the life course of partnerships at times of difficulties for the partnership or single parenthood and provide preventive and supportive measures to deal with partnership instability.

21. A high employment rate – a secure job – is a crucial factor in the transition to adulthood and the subsequent effect on fertility. Measures within the labour market and educational and housing policies are needed to create an institutional framework to support success and earlier transition and thus set the conditions for an environment secure enough to start a family and have children.

## ***II. “SUPPORTING PARENTING IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD”***

### **Implementation and promotion of the Rights of the Child in the family and in society**

22. National reports showed clearly that the rights of the child are a priority area in member States, all of which are party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. A major concern of legislators is to ensure that the rights and interests of children are protected and promoted, irrespective of the marital status and living arrangements of the family.

23. Ministers took note that parenting is a particularly important topic in the present work of the Council of Europe and agreed that it should become a domain for public policy in its member states, to ensure that appropriate processes and policies are put in place. They underlined the fact that extensive efforts are already being made by member states to support families and that these initiatives should be expanded further. Existing policies and results of research and experiences from practical work were focused upon during the Conference and could serve as examples for these future developments.

24. Such an approach would also allow the Council of Europe to support recent policy initiatives and to implement instruments developed by its Committee on Children and Families/CS-EF and its two working parties.

25. Ministers listened with interest to the suggestions by the representatives of the group of children and parents brought together by the Council of Europe in 2005 to actively contribute to its work on positive parenting. They recognised the importance of the participation of children and of taking account of their opinion and suggestions in a decision-making process affecting them. Account also needs to be taken of the views of parents and of their valuable experience.

26. After discussing the importance of parenting and the respect of the rights of the child within the family, Ministers agreed on the need, among other measures, to develop and offer awareness raising activities, which should include learning about positive - non-violent - parenting, good communication skills and setting of boundaries.

27. Adoption and the care by new partners of children from a previous relationship were also considered. It was agreed that the situation and the role of step-parents – who often play an important part emotionally as well as economically in stepchildren’s lives – should be studied further ethically and legally, taking into consideration the rights and obligations of the biological parents.

### **Positive Parenting**

28. Ministers recognised that within the family, there is a shift from parental authority to parental responsibility, from father as head of the family to the family as a community, and that positive parenting is crucial in successfully bringing up children in contemporary society.

29. The Council of Europe considers a non-violent upbringing as a human rights issue and, to a considerable extent, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), changed the context within which parenting is carried out. In granting children rights as individuals, it redefined not only children’s place in society but the relationship between parents and their children. These rights, together with the latest knowledge from research and practice, are the constituent elements of positive parenting.

30. Ministers discussed the need to abolish corporal punishment, as a human rights issue within the family as well as the protection against all forms of violence, including abuse within the home environment. They recognised the State responsibility on this subject as well as the responsibility of the family and all the members of the society and decided to take some further concrete steps in this direction to provide adequate measures with a view to preventing any violence within the families against children and other dependant family members

31. Ministers agreed that national legislation or programmes which include provisions against violent parental upbringing of children provide a platform for all to build on, making it easier for professionals to stress an anti-violent view and giving parents and even young children an opportunity to assert their rights and preferences in this regard. They make explicit the state’s view on corporal punishment, sending a clear message to people who consider it an acceptable behaviour, be it inside the family or outside the family by having recourse to physical or psychic restraints.

32. Prevention is underlined as the most important factor in dealing with discipline. Moreover, for discipline to be effective, it should occur in the context of a relationship where children feel loved and secure. To maintain a positive emotional tone in the home, play and parental warmth and affection for the child are extremely important. The need to have parenting programmes available for parents to learn about positive parenting and their importance was also stressed. Training schemes, including on the rights of the child, should be foreseen for a number of people - ranging from family members to professionals dealing directly or indirectly with children.

### **Role of men in the family**

33. Ministers recalled previous sessions of the conference which focused on the important topic of men's responsibility in family life and the importance of fathers in their children's upbringing, particularly the XXVI<sup>th</sup> conference in Helsinki on "The status and role of the father – family policy aspects" and the previous conference in Portorož.

34. In several countries there are still social, economic, cultural and psychological barriers preventing full participation of men in family life and in their fatherhood. Measures – including awareness-raising campaigns on new family culture as well as legal positive measures - should be promoted to enable fathers to fulfill their responsibilities towards their children. The economic view of fatherhood, particularly in the case of absentee fathers, should not hide the father-child relationship. An enhancement of the role of men in the family is also a prerequisite for further development towards gender equality.

### **Intergenerational relationships**

35. Ministers recognised that, although substantial changes in family building patterns have been taking place in European countries, the family in its different forms and the bond between family members are still very strong. For Ministers, family continues to be a live reality and a living arrangement they are seeking to promote. As the most reliable social network, the family offers clear support, both in material and non-material terms.

36. Though the previous sense of moral responsibility towards family members seems to be changing, it happens that today's parents not only support their children, but also their own parents. Consideration should be taken of older people who are supporting their family financially and/or through other forms of support, for instance by looking after their grandchildren. Trust in the reliability of families is a vital element of the social fabric.

37. Ministers exchanged views on intergenerational relationships, the kind of support and ties presently existing between family members and how public authorities and civil society could support such intergenerational exchange. They stressed the fact that a society is cohesive when people accept responsibility for one another. Everybody has a part to play in developing the sense of mutual responsibility and interdependence that is necessary for social cohesion.

38. Although societies vary in the expectations that they have of public authorities and of family members as care providers, Ministers agreed that provision should be made not only for childcare, but also for care of frail older people on the grounds that high quality, affordable and reliable facilities and services make reconciliation of paid work, care work and family life possible.

39. Ministers considered existing wide-ranging initiatives aiming at strengthening the local social service units and at providing support to parents in general and parents in difficult situations in particular, which result in an important number of programmes and funding sources.

### **Exclusion/Poverty**

40. Ministers recognised the concern of governments to prevent exclusion and poverty, particularly for lone-parents, families at risk, migrant families; discussion of different family forms focused on the consequences of divorce, in particular the risk of poverty, low educational achievement, unemployment and other forms of social exclusion. Children living in lone-parent families are found to run a greater risk of falling into poverty than children in two-parent families.

41. Ministers discussed another important concern – particularly for some European countries – which is the increase in the number of "social orphans", children in need of care because their parents have abandoned them as a consequence of family breakdown or lack of financial resources.

42. The extent to which public authorities should play a role in relieving hardship during life transitions and assisting families in managing changing situations was also taken into consideration as well as the issue of whether governments should intervene to try to reduce the incidence of family breakdown and promote particular family forms that are considered to be more socially secure. Ministers stressed the importance of major policies such as employment, income support, housing and educational policies as well as access to service provision in reducing poverty risk and promoting better opportunities. In addition, the importance of ensuring that public policy reaches the families who are most in need of support was stressed as well of encouraging employers to provide conditions for companies to be family-friendly.

### ***III. FOLLOW-UP OF THE PORTOROŽ CONFERENCE ON “RECONCILING WORKING AND FAMILY LIFE”***

#### **Promoting family-friendly work places**

43. Ministers considered developments in this field since the Portorož Ministerial Conference in 2001, particularly concerning flexible working arrangements, leave policies, support for families, including those with caring responsibility for members with disabilities and older people, and equal sharing of family responsibilities. These aspects are particularly important given the fact that nowadays a great number of children have dual or one-and-half earner parents.

44. Although conditions for family and working life vary widely across Europe, depending on social, cultural and economic factors that differ from country to country and from region to region, numerous activities and initiatives are undertaken by all the member States to balance working and living arrangements. These policies to assist working parents at both European and national level vary from state to state and are designed to serve multiple aims: to combat poverty by encouraging a larger proportion of women to join the labour force; to create a more equitable gender balance; to support the free choice to have children by making it possible to combine - in particular - motherhood, fatherhood and family responsibilities with working life.

45. Ministers discussed the best way of achieving the most adequate reconciliation between working and family life, crucial to a range of social issues like the low fertility rate in Europe and the changes in family structures. They agreed on the fact that an integrated policy response is required. With regard to changes in the composition of the labour force, new forms of work organisation and improving social protection should be considered. The question of taking on household tasks and the availability of care structures for children, the elderly and other members of the family were also taken into consideration.

46. Ministers recognised the importance of gender equality and of a fairer distribution of household work and care responsibilities within couples. A better reconciliation of working and family life is also a pre-condition for promoting gender equality – together with the well-being of children, parents, families, local communities and society. Some countries have incentives to encourage men to take parental leave, but reductions in working hours for parents and shorter full-time working hours confirm the traditional gender distribution of caring and household tasks.

## DECLARATION

We, the European Ministers responsible for family affairs, meeting in Lisbon, on 16 and 17 May 2006,

*Welcome* the considerable progress made in Europe in the field of family affairs since the first conference organised in Vienna in 1959;

*Congratulate* the Council of Europe on its valuable contribution to improvement in this field, particularly for the rights of the child and the promotion of innovative approaches in member states;

*Express* our satisfaction with the decision of the heads of state and government of the Council of Europe, at their 3rd Summit in Warsaw, to give priority to the rights of the child and the eradication of all forms of violence against children, in particular through the programme “Building a Europe for and with children”, and to the future of social cohesion;

*Recall* the crucial role of the family in maintaining social cohesion, the importance of family life and of safeguarding the rights to support families of different forms, which is reflected in the main instruments of the Council of Europe;

*Commit ourselves* to taking co-ordinated action in such a sensitive field as family affairs, which is crucial not only for the present, but particularly for the future of a stable and cohesive Europe. An holistic and integrated approach to policy is needed which involves different levels of government, the private sector, civil society and families as well as children themselves;

*Share the opinion* that family-friendly measures of a sustainable family policy could be a response to the threat of population decline and that the well-being of families and their children should be a policy priority;

*Suggest* that governments should respond to their own socio-demographic changes by adapting legislation to take account of different family lifestyles. Although several concrete measures have been implemented in member states, there is still some policy and legal vacuum, particularly on consequences of the spread of new family forms (for instance, on lone-parenting or duties towards children in reconstituted families);

*Recognise* the fact that an appropriate and supportive family policy taking into consideration the new family context could improve the demographic and socio-economical situation. The provisions, to be effective, should be supportive, permissive, responsive to changing needs and provided on a universal basis;

*Stress* the crucial role of research for progressing in this field. We therefore underline the importance of taking into consideration its results in an efficient policy-making process as well as closer co-operation between researchers, demographers, policy analysts and decision makers as an important component in the effective governance of change. Action should be accompanied by monitoring and an evaluation procedure based on a system of priority objectives;

### **Supporting families in the best interests of the child**

*Recognise* that parenting, just as providing support for it, involves an ongoing set of activities and relationships that change over time and which must be considered in an holistic fashion;

*Consider* that parenting, though linked to family intimacy, should be designated as a domain of public policy and all the necessary measures should be adopted for supporting parenting and creating the conditions necessary for positive parenting. Positive parenting is defined as parental

behaviour that is nurturing, empowering and provides a structure or set of boundaries making the full development of the child possible;

**Underline** that these measures should be based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe's relevant legal instruments, recognise and respect the parents, or all those in situations of parenting, as the primary guardians and carers of children, subject to the child's best interests, and reflect a diversity of provision recognising that parents, children and families are heterogeneous. The measures, aimed at positive parenting, should be part of an integrated package;

**Consider** that these measures should aim to provide adequate living conditions, especially those relating to income and access to services, for positive parenthood;

**Stress** the importance of facilitating the involvement of parents and children in and through public policy, considering with respect their views and experience;

**Undertake** to promote equal chances for children and parents regardless of their gender, family situation or background;

**Express** our availability to take adequate measures with a view to preventing any violence within the families against children and other dependant family members;

**Underline** the necessity to adopt programmes aimed at providing appropriate support for families with children with disabilities;

**Encourage** the establishment of a network of services such that people can access services in their local area and that all services operate on a principle of partnership and empowerment of parents and children;

### **Reconciling work and family life**

**Consider** that, although there has been positive change since the previous conference in Portorož, public authorities should further improve policies to reconcile family and working life. These should include a wide range of integrated measures and the social and economic acceptance of women in the labour market and the role of men in family life. Measures should be accessible and affordable; they should provide quality care, flexible working arrangements, conducive forms of leave at a parental level and other form of family related leaves and available financial support through benefits or tax relief;

**Are convinced** that policies should not only encourage men to take up their responsibilities in family life and in parenting, but facilitate their doing so;

**Underline** that employment policy is closely linked to family policy and that labour market and family policies should recognise the preferences of people for reconciling work and parenthood;

**Take note** of an improvement in the possibilities of parental leave and other forms of leave and care, not only for young children but also in order to care for other family members, due to disabilities, age or sickness;

**Underscore** that providing families with high quality child-care services at an affordable price, including those aimed at very young children, remains one of the most important elements for the successful reconciliation of work and family life;

**Draw attention** to the fact that improving job security, particularly for young people, and increasing their participation in the labour market should create supportive conditions for having children and thus should also be considered as a factor for safeguarding the demographic future;

**Focus** on how to improve the quality and quantity of work and make employment more compatible with family life and the care of children, also with a view to having a greater number of women willing and able to enter and remain in the workforce;

**Request** the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to pursue its valuable function in the field of family affairs, and particularly:

- to ensure appropriate follow-up to this ministerial conference within its intergovernmental programme of activities, taking its budgetary possibilities into account;
- to take into careful consideration the work of the Organisation in the field of positive parenting and in particular the draft recommendation to member states on this topic, which is being drafted and should be submitted to the Committee of Ministers in 2006 for adoption and for monitoring;
- to reinforce co-operation with the European Union, relevant United Nations bodies and other international institutions working in this field in order to optimise efforts and create synergies in such a crucial and extended domain.

**Commit** ourselves to promote and pursue a common European policy in the field of family affairs and the rights of the child within the framework of the Council of Europe.

**Suggest** that the next session of the ministerial conference take place in 2009 to mark the 50th anniversary of the conference, which could be an opportunity to assess the development in this field over this period, in particular the evolution of the situation of positive parenting in Europe and to discuss key elements and prospects for the future.

**Invite** the Secretary General to transmit the declaration adopted on the occasion of the XXVIIIth session of the ministerial conference to the competent bodies within the Council of Europe and other international organisations, and inform them about actions to be taken in consequence.

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The European Ministers responsible for family affairs, on the occasion of their XXVIIIth Conference expressed their warm gratitude to the Portuguese Government for all its efforts, which ensured the success of the conference, and their congratulations on the perfect organisation of the event.