

*Embargo against delivery / Check against delivery*

Your Royal Highness,  
President of the Parliamentary Assembly,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Five years ago, we started in Monaco the process of 'Building a Europe for and with Children'. At that time, we were as thrilled as any architect may be when asked to urgently deliver a building combining functionality, sustainability, cost-efficiency and beauty. But the history of architecture proves that it is the magnitude of the challenge that triggers the biggest progress and evolutions. The results that we bring on the table today show that our design is taking good shape. Michelangelo said he saw the angel in the marble and carved to set him free. We saw in Europe a chance to guarantee respect for children's rights and we have unveiled that vision. And the vision is now determining our mission.

Let's be concrete. Five years ago 17 children, from different parts of Europe, participated in a preparation seminar prior to the first Monaco conference. They were asked which of their rights they felt were the least respected.

Here is the reply they agreed upon, after a long, thorough and at moments very passionate discussion.

The rights of children that were considered to be most at risk were:

The right to be protected from sexual abuse.

The right to be protected against corporal punishment.

The right to non-discrimination.

And the right to express one's views freely and to be heard.

Let's first speak about **violence**. Regrettably, routine exposure to physical, sexual and psychological violence continues to be a reality for many of Europe's 150 million children. Violence overtakes them in homes and in schools, in care and justice systems, in places of work and in the communities. All forms of violence, even the mildest ones, leave a print on the child's mind and soul and may have devastating consequences for the child's health and well-being. Violence continues to haunt the child also when he or she grows into an adult. Legal and social tolerance for violence seriously undermines any efforts we may undertake to promote children's rights and wellbeing. It is an element of distortion that has no place in our vision for a child friendly Europe. Compromising on this equals to building on moving sands. Confronting European governments with this dark picture and reminding them of their responsibilities is important. Helping them to change the pattern is crucial. What do we have to show in terms of concrete and measurable impact?

Since 2006, the Council of Europe is working to effectively address the phenomenon of violence in all its

complexity and in a sustainable way. The recommendations contained in the UN SG Study on violence against children conducted by Mr Paulo Pinheiro, who is present with us today, have inspired us to follow a two-fold approach:

On the one hand, we want to create the conditions to eliminate all existing and emerging forms of violence. This can only be done through the adoption of strong national strategies likely to address social, economic and political challenges. The Committee of Ministers Recommendation on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence was designed to meet this challenge.

On the other hand, we have designed tools to address some very widespread forms of violence, like corporal punishment and sexual violence, the two forms of violence mentioned by the children in Monaco in 2006.

We can show results in both fronts. The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse has been signed by almost all our member states; or more precisely, 43 among them, and ratified by 15. Launched in Rome last year, the ONE in FIVE campaign is helping governments and parliaments to take the necessary measures to prevent sexual violence, protect the children and prosecute the offenders. It is an empowering campaign: one of its aims being to equip parents and children with the tools they need to prevent and report sexual violence.

Similarly, we are making progress with our campaign against corporal punishment. When “Raise your hand against smacking” was launched in Zagreb in 2008, 18 member states had banned corporal punishment in all settings, including within the family. Today, we stand at 22 and six more member states have pledged to follow suit. The campaign has triggered a heated debate in many member states, and support for the children's rights argument is growing by the day.

In general, my personal impression is that the notion of children as individuals and holders of rights – as opposed to mini-human beings with mini-human rights - has become more widely accepted – even though there is still a long way to go.

In the last five years, the **fight against discrimination and the protection of the rights of children in situation of vulnerability** has been a constant concern. We have “zoomed in” a number of topics and adopted important legal standards and policy recommendations on key issues such as adoption, on de-institutionalisation and community living of children with disabilities, on the rights of children in alternative care, on policies to support positive parenting, on life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors, on strengthening the integration of children of migrants and of immigrant background. The European Rules for juvenile offenders subject to sanctions or measures and the guidelines on child-friendly justice, on child-friendly health care and on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families, are also reflections of our vision. The list also includes two recommendations that address the children's concerns about the lack of respect for their **right to participate**: the recommendation on measures to protect children against harmful content and behaviour and to promote

their active participation in the new information and communications environment and the recommendation on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18.

But Building a Europe WITH children is more than reminding governments of children's rights to participate. Listening to children's opinions is a priority for us as an organisation and we try to practice what we preach. The few children you will see at this conference, and in the video messages, are only the "tip of the iceberg" of the many children who were consulted on issues such as the already mentioned guidelines on child-friendly justice and child-friendly health care. Children were also directly involved in the drafting process of the new recommendation on participation of children and young people, and they have been invited to advise us as "experts by experience" on complex topics such as sexual violence and alternative care. Through our child friendly material, we have been able to reach and help to empower millions of children in Europe.

I apologise for this long enumeration of legal and policy instruments, but I believe that it is important to have a complete picture. As J.F. Kennedy said, "Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction". Each of these instruments is a building block serving a very concrete purpose, ensuring that children in Europe are enjoying maximum safety and maximum respect of their rights. The pieces of our puzzle are now assembling to show the vision of a child friendly Europe.

Your Royal Highness,  
President of the Parliamentary Assembly,  
Minister,

We are gathering again in Monaco with the objective of turning our vision into reality. This takes courage, determination, leadership and creativity. I should like to express my most sincere thanks to H.R.H. The Princess of Hanover and to the Principality of Monaco for having provided us with the space, the political and the financial support to drive the Monaco process towards a child friendly Europe. Albert Einstein used to say: "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer". Yes. We need a sustained effort, a commitment that doesn't depend on a financial, political or social context. It is the only chance we have to transform our vision in a reality for 150 million of children in Europe.

Last year, I went through a serious health problem and I was often asked where did I find the strength to keep working. Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, had the perfect answer: "If you are working on something exciting that you really care about, you don't have to be pushed. The vision pulls you". I know that many of you share this feeling and I am in particular grateful to our Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg and to the leaders of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional authorities for the crucial role they are playing in supporting the children's rights agenda.

They have understood that the best leaders are not those who make a lot of followers, but those who inspire other leaders. I count on their continued support.

Finally, I am also very proud of the partnerships which we have established with other international organisations starting with the European Union and the United Nations family, but also with non-governmental organisations and the private sector which have been very helpful in supporting our campaigning efforts.

So far, so good, but the work is still very much ahead of us, hence the importance of this Conference and the new Strategy.

The challenge is to change a vision into a reality, because a vision which is not put into practice is bound to turn into a disillusion. And when it comes to the well-being of children, disillusion stands for insecurity, discrimination and disrespect.

This is why the new Strategy aims at strengthening the monitoring of compliance with the standards, improving the assistance in practical implementation of standards and reinforcing outreach and partnerships.

The protection of children from violence, the promotion of child-friendly services, the protection of children in vulnerable situations and child participation will also be the main pillars of our future strategy.

Dear participants,

I strongly believe that the real focus of the strategy to come should aim at the **effective implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other children's rights standards**. We shall monitor, assess, research, assist, advice, recall and insist. And insist again. Until the laws, policies, attitudes and behaviours become the perfect lens we need to gain focus and unveil the vision we pursue.

Everything we do – and this Conference is an important part of that effort – is aimed at building a child-friendly Europe. This is an endeavour which I consider to be the most important one in my professional career, from my time at the European Commission and the Court of Human Rights, as well as during my terms as the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, during which children-related activities have been one of my top priorities. I believe this is only natural. A campaign for children's' rights brings together some of the most important objectives one can strive to achieve. A society which is friendly to children is the only society worth living in.

In fact, when you think about it, the term "child-friendly Europe" is a tautology. For those who consider that Europe is also a set of values, a model of society, and not only a geographic space, it represents two words to say the same thing. You will certainly agree that a Europe which is not friendly, respectful and safe for children, should not deserve to be called Europe at all.

Thank you very much.