



Reaching the heights for the rights of the child

Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016-2021

High-Level Launching Conference

Sofia, 5-6 April 2016

Statements

**Ms Bernardica Juretić
Minister of Social Policy and Youth
Croatia**

Esteemed representatives of the Council of Europe and European institutions, esteemed ministers, esteemed representatives of all Council of Europe member states, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to have the opportunity to greet you on behalf of the Republic of Croatia and on my personal behalf. It is a great pleasure to be here today at the opening of this important conference organized by the Council of Europe, launching a new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016 – 2021.

This conference is a kind of a continuation of the Conference on the implementation of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2012 – 2015 held in Dubrovnik in 2014, where progress was analysed as well as future needs and challenges in the implementation of the children's rights standard. I believe that the conclusions of the Dubrovnik conference served as guidelines for adopting a new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child which will be presented at this conference.

Promotion and protection of children's rights in Croatia, who is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child since 1991, is one of the fields in which significant progress has been made in



Bulgarian Chairmanship
Council of Europe
November 2015 – May 2016
Présidence de la Bulgarie
Conseil de l'Europe
Novembre 2015 – Mai 2016



the past years. It is notable in both the promotion of rights and interests of children in the public space, as well as in the implementation of legal regulations and strategic documents.

In 2014, with the aim of more efficient promotion of all children's rights as guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Croatian Government adopted the **National Strategy for the Rights of Children in the Republic of Croatia for the period from 2014 to 2020** as the fundamental document which promotes a comprehensive and integrative approach to children's rights. During the public consultation process regarding the Draft National Strategy for the Rights of Children, the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth held workshops on active participation of children.

I believe it is important to emphasize that the process of defining **national indicators of well-being of children**, that is «markers», which will be used to assess children's state and needs as well as the implementation of policies in Croatia, is in progress, which is one of the key priorities of the National Strategy. The National Strategy and the new Council of Europe Strategy 2016 - 2021, **as one of the fundamental strategic fields**, stipulate **active participation of children** along with a set of measures and activities aimed at promoting children's participation in all segments of the society.

Participation of children in the community's development, as provided for by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, has to be, and indeed is, a priority for our community. Therefore, the **Council for Children** acts as a coordination authority at the national level with the aim of harmonizing the operations of state and other bodies in view of monitoring the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as of national legislation and programmes. Alongside esteemed experts in the field of protection of children's well-being, representatives of competent ministries, relevant institutions and civil society organizations, **the children's representative and the representative of the National Council of Pupils also participate as members of the Council for Children**, which enables children to participate directly in the procedures of shaping and creating policies towards children.

Furthermore, I would like to emphasize that this year the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, as the authority competent for the domain of children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is to initiate the procedure regarding the ratification of the **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure**, which was signed by Croatia at the end of 2013. This most certainly represents a significant step towards improving the rights of children in Croatia, since the children will be able to address the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child if they are not able to realize the protection of their rights within the national system.

For the purpose of ensuring service provision in local communities in accordance with needs, age, cultural and other needs of children, it is important to ensure the right of the children to present their views through cooperation of all institutions, units of local and regional government and civil society organizations. Further to the foregoing, and with the aim of a wider application of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth

continually **supports financially the projects of civil society organizations** aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of children as well as their active participation in the society. In 2015, financial support amounting to 490,000.00 kuna - more than EUR 64,000.00 - from the State Budget was allocated for the implementation of 14 projects. The stated projects were aimed at promoting the participation of children in local communities, designing children's leisure activities, encouraging their creativity and improving early intervention. As an example of good practice, I would like to mention the action of the Union of Societies Our Children of Croatia entitled «Cities and Municipalities – Friends of Children», as well as the activities of Children's Councils and Children's Forums across Croatia, all of which not only contribute to improving the participation of children and parents in the local community, but also to the democratization of the society as a whole.

Despite all efforts and activities, research on exercising the right of children to participation in Croatia indicate that a significant number of children believe that they are not heard enough and that they do not have the opportunity to present their views even though they are an important part of the society. Participation of children requires changing adults' and children's attitudes and behavior, and implies adults' active support and provision of conditions for children to present their views. In a practical sense, this means that children should be heard by adults and recognized as adult collocutors, that adults should pay attention to the manner of communication amongst children, and that they should give due consideration to children's views in the stage of making decisions which concern them. For that reason, it is necessary to familiarize the relevant institutions and parents, as well as any person who is in contact with children, with the importance of ensuring a meaningful participation of children as well as with the provision of specific guidelines on the manner of ensuring the participation of children in the society.

Today's event is an excellent opportunity to remind ourselves of our common responsibility in ensuring children a better future by protecting their rights and by responding to their needs. We are aware that a lot more effort is necessary to ensure complete exercise of all children's rights and that further efforts should be made at the European, national and local levels since the well-being of a child is the well-being of the society. I believe that this conference will contribute to directing development and identifying quality suggestions for the future policy towards children.

Thank you for your attention!