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Opening session

10 years : what have we been doing during these years

sexual abuse and sexual exploitation are crimes

1. These crimes need to be seen

Europe is a continent made of very different countries: different mentalities, different conceptions of what it is to be a child, different conceptions on how far child protection should go, and consequently different legislations, as legislations reflect what a society considers to be wrong or right.

But the crime seen from the perspective of the child is the same wherever it happens. International conventions help to make the national legislations converge and one big task of the work of the Lanzarote Committee is to work for this convergence.

Awareness raising may seem as a new fashion in policy making but mentalities are sometimes helping the crime to happen, to be hidden and thus to continue to happen.

2. These crimes need to be prevented

Children need to be trained and empowered. They need to know that certain areas of their body are private and that they can refuse to anybody to touch these areas of their body. Parents need to know the dangers their children are exposed to and help them manage between good and bad secrets.

We need also to help people that feel they are sexually attracted by children and that don't want to prevent abuse.

3. These crimes need to be prosecuted

Another task of the Committee is to make sure that these crimes are named crimes and are prosecuted wherever they happen. Of course nobody needed an international convention to make sure that the dark stranger jumping out from the dark and raping a child is prosecuted. But when it comes to what is happening inside the family, some traditions or mentalities may consider that what is happening inside the family is not the government's business. When it comes to the same crimes committed through internet, some may consider that it cannot be a crime to tap words on a keyboard. We are here to help legislations overcome these public opinions. We are here to tell that a child sometimes needs protection from those that are there to protect the child. We are here to make clear that a keyboard may be the tool that people use to commit crimes, sometimes even giving instructions online to what the abuser should do with the child to satisfy them.

4. The perpetrators of these crimes need to be punished

Some may consider that the aim is reached when the abuse stops, but we know so many cases of parents having abused all their children one after the other as they grew older. We know so many cases of people professionally in contact with children that abused a high number of children in their reach. These professionals need not only to be punished for what they have done but the unabused kids need to be protected from them.

5. The victims of these crimes need to be taken care of

In a lot of countries children are transported by police from their school, home or day care center to hospitals, then have to go through numerous and lengthy auditions at a police station, and then the children as well as their families are just left alone with their suffering and their trauma. We need to make policy makers, prosecutors and other stakeholders aware that child abuse is not just a case, solved when we have identified, captured and punished the criminal. The child is not just a witness, whose role is to help the prosecutors build a good case, but the child is a wounded victim that needs help. It is strange that even nowadays a child will get immediate help if she is physically injured in a car crash but will too often get no help at all if it is mentally injured through sexual abuse.

In the last ten years the Lanzarote Committee has been defining its **working method, monitoring by thematic rounds rather than country by country reports**. This method has shown advantages, like the easy comparison of how countries are addressing the same challenges in their own way, the identification of good practice, the building of capacity among the delegates through presentations in the Committee and visits of facilities or meetings at Europol and Interpol. and capacity building to country evaluations that make it difficult to compare countries.

This method has also shortcomings. The fact that our Committee is not issuing country reports gives us a different image than the one from GRETA or the CPT.

Country reports are read with high interest by the national authorities as well as by the press, the political opposition in Parliament and civil society. There can also be a difference in the quality of information gathered by a delegation visiting the country and the facilities compared to the information given by the governments in replies to a questionnaire. During our first visit in Hungary earlier this year the members of the visiting delegation could get a glimpse of that difference.

The **choice of subjects for our monitoring rounds** was lead by the importance of the phenomenon:

We know today that the risk of sexual abuse of children is highest **in the child's circle of trust**. This area has been our first priority to look into: are prevention campaigns still in line with the old concept of stranger danger? Are the crimes committed inside the circle of trust of the child criminalised like they should be? Are the victim audition procedures child-friendly? Is the child and its family offered psychological help and treatment?

Our next monitoring round put the focus on strangers that try to become friends through means of **internet and communication technologies**, a major issue with the rapid increase of access of children to these technologies. But in this context we also discussed the rising phenomenon of children sharing self produced images of themselves and the risks of extortion that comes with this practice.

Meanwhile **the refugee crisis** with its huge numbers of children travelling, sometimes accompanied sometimes not, through Europe brought a new situation of danger of sexual abuse and exploitation that made the Committee react and decide an urgent monitoring

round on the procedures the parties of the convention put into place in order to protect the children against these crimes in this very particular situation.

Conclusion:

The Lanzarote Committee has done a good job in the last 10 years, we have been verifying the implementation of the convention, we have been sharing a lot of good practice examples from the Parties to the convention, we have been doing knowledge building among our delegates. The number of ratifications that were decided after the Convention came into force is impressive.

We can be proud of our work but there is still a lot to be done.