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**23rd SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN MINISTERS
RESPONSIBLE FOR FAMILY AFFAIRS**
(Paris, 14 - 15 October 1993)

**Report of the
Secretary General**

INTRODUCTION

1. The Conference of European Ministers responsible for Family Affairs, for which the Council of Europe has provided secretariat services since 1970¹, held its 23rd Session in Paris (France) from 14 - 15 October 1993, at the invitation and under the presidency of Mrs Simone VEIL, Minister of Social Affairs, Health and Cities, France.
2. The Conference was attended by representatives of 30 of the 32 member States of the Council of Europe. Twenty-three of those States were represented by a Minister or Secretary of State, and two of those States were represented by two Ministers. In addition there were representatives of 6 non-member States from Central and Eastern Europe present for the first time : Albania, Belarus, Croatia, Latvia, Moldova, and Ukraine, of which Albania and Moldova were represented at ministerial level. As at previous sessions, representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Commission of the European Community, and the Holy See attended.
3. The list of the Heads of Delegation at the Conference is given in Appendix I.
4. The theme of the Conference was "*Family policies, children's rights, parental responsibilities*". This was divided into three sub-themes, which were each introduced by one of the ministers before discussion was thrown open for general debate.

¹ The first session of the Conference took place on 10 September 1959 in Vienna

5. The theme had been the subject of national replies to a questionnaire prepared by the liaison officers responsible for the Conference. The national replies, as well as a summary of them, are available from the Secretariat.

6. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mrs Catherine LALUMIERE, opened the Conference, in the presence of Mrs VEIL. In her speech, Mrs Lalumière drew attention to the variety of forms that families can take in present-day Europe, whilst emphasising the legal support given to each person's need for a family in the European Convention on Human Rights. She explained the current legal activities in the Council of Europe concerning the elaboration of a draft Convention on the exercise of rights by a child, and on the revision of relevant articles of the European Social Charter. The Secretary General also referred to the traumatic situation of families and children in some parts of ex-Yugoslavia, fleeing from war-torn areas.

7. Mrs VEIL, as President of the Conference, replied to Mrs LALUMIERE, and recalled the tradition linking France to the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Family Affairs, which it was now hosting for the third time. This introductory speech referred to the background and preparation of the Conference theme, linked both to the International Year of the Family in 1994, and to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

8. The first sub-theme, *"rights of the child and parental responsibility"*, was introduced by Mr László SURJÁN, Minister of Welfare, Hungary. In connection with this sub-theme, the Minister drew attention to the particular role that families had played during the communist regime in protecting and preserving democratic values throughout this difficult times. He emphasised the importance of the rights of participation and information for children, since if young people are not properly informed they can easily be manipulated and misled. The Minister also reported on some of the initiatives taken in Hungary to promote the protection of children's rights. In his conclusion, he put forward the suggestion that the ministers responsible for family affairs should raise the question of considering the creation of a charter of family rights, both in order to express the basic importance and value of families, and in order to give them the protection and support that families need in times of crisis.

9. The second sub-theme, *"intervention of public authorities and parental rights,"* was introduced by Mrs Hedy d'ANCONA, Minister of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs, Netherlands. She emphasised that the philosophy behind family policy in the Netherlands is the concept of self-empowerment, defined as activating the vital capacities of families and their individual members to determine their own destinies, rather than compensating for any shortcomings or difficulties which they may encounter. The example she gave of this was that of avoiding placing children in care when a parental support programme would be sufficient. She then defined the role of central government in policy-making, as that of adaption to the new circumstances and challenges created by an ever-changing society. The instruments

at the disposal for the State to do this are monitoring, legislation, cooperation and innovation by experimentation.

10. Finally, the third sub-theme, "*protection of families and children in periods of economic crisis*," was introduced by Mrs Simone VEIL. After having recalled the role played by the Council of Europe, through the elaboration of the European Social Charter more than thirty years previously, in encouraging the economic, legal and social protection of the family, the French Minister evoked the results of the economic and political upheaval in Europe. The crisis was affecting not only the living conditions of families (unemployment, new forms of poverty..), but also family structures, often preventing parents from exercising their responsibilities in a normal way. The economic environment had always influenced the situation of families, and - whether by financial support to families, or by the services they provide (social services, education, health, child protection) - the public authorities have rarely remained neutral. In the current context of economic and social crisis, their intervention is essential for enabling parental responsibilities to be exercised and for improving the living condition of families. Thus it is important to support an improved relationship between family life and working life, given the continuous increase in the number of employed women. It is also essential to help families to have access to proper housing. It is not sufficient to make available the conditions of a decent life for families. Families who are in crisis should be taken by the hand, and policies for preventing family breakdown should be developed. In particular, they should be helped to take their responsibilities in hand by a policy of prevention, such as temporary material help, counselling, family mediation, and a policy of integration (mother and child protection, literacy courses..). The achievement of these aims, by means of the family, would enable the social fabric to be preserved and would improve the quality of life of children, the fundamental wealth of a country.

11. The debate at the Conference was often lively and spontaneous, and all Ministers were able to speak freely. Family affairs lend themselves to easy exchanges between participants in a Ministerial Conference. The Conference also benefited from beginning in the evening of 13 October with a dinner for Heads of Delegations hosted by the French Minister, by having the proceedings shortened by a day in comparison with previous Sessions, and by the holding of a discussion for an hour limited to Heads of Delegations only, together with senior members of the Council of Europe Secretariat. The Final Communiqué was not prepared long in advance of the Conference, which enabled it to be drafted (and amended) on the basis of the discussions that actually took place during the Conference. General satisfaction was expressed with these changes, which reflected the instructions which had been given at the end of the 22nd Session of the Conference in 1991 to 'adapt the organisation and working methods of the Conference in order to enable it to be more dynamic and creative in future.'

12. The final communiqué of the Conference appears in Appendix II.

13. The Ministers accepted with gratitude the invitation of the Minister of Social Affairs of Finland to hold the 24th Session of the Conference in Helsinki, in June 1995, on the theme of the place of the father in the family, in relation to family policies.

14. The Austrian delegation indicated that the Austrian Minister responsible for Family Affairs wished to invite the Ministers to hold the 25th Session of the Conference in Austria, in 1997.

APPENDIX I

LIST OF MINISTERS AND HEADS OF DELEGATION

AUTRICHE\AUSTRIA

Mrs Maria RAUCH-KALLAT, Federal Minister of Environment, Youth and Family, Vienna

BELGIQUE\BELGIUM

Madame Wivina DEMEESTER, Ministre des Institutions de Santé, du Bien-être et de la Famille, de la Communauté flamande de Belgique, Brussels

Madame Dominique DAUBY, Attachée au Cabinet de Madame Laurette ONKELINX, Ministre-Présidente du Gouvernement de la Communauté française chargée des Affaires sociales et de la Santé, Brussels

Madame Johanna SCHRÖDER, Conseiller au Ministère de la Communauté germanophone de Belgique,

BULGARIE\BULGARIA

Monsieur Evguenii MATINTCHEV, Ministre du Travail et des Affaires sociales, Sofia

CHYPRE\CYPRUS

Mr Georges ANASTASIADES, Secretary General to the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance, Nicosia

RÉPUBLIQUE TCHÈQUE\CZECH REPUBLIC

Monsieur Karel KOS, Premier Vice-ministre, Prague

DANEMARK\DENMARK

Mrs Karen JESPERSEN, Minister for Social Affairs, Copenhagen

FINLANDE\FINLAND

Mr Jorma HUUHTANEN, Minister for Social Affairs and Health, Helsinki

FRANCE

Madame Simone VEIL, Ministre d'Etat, Ministre des Affaires sociales, de la Santé et de la Ville, Paris

ALLEMAGNE\GERMANY

Mrs Hannelore RÖNSCH, Bundesministerin für Familie und Senioren, Bonn

GRECE\GREECE

Madame Marguerite KONSTANTINIDOU Collaboratrice auprès de la Division
Générale de la Prévoyance
Ministère de la Santé, de la Prévoyance et de la Sécurité Sociale, Athens

HONGRIE\HUNGARY

Mr László SURJÁN, M.D., Minister of Welfare, Budapest

ISLANDE\ICELAND

Ms. Jóhanna SIGURDARDÓTTIR, Minister of Social Affairs, Reykjavik

IRLANDE\IRELAND

Dr. Michael WOODS T.D., Minister for Social Welfare, Dublin

ITALIE\ITALY

Madame Maria DI GENNARO, Directeur Général au Département des Affaires
Sociales, Rome

LIECHTENSTEIN

Mag. Richard BIEDERMANN, Directeur de l'Office de l'Assistance sociale, Vaduz

LUXEMBOURG

Monsieur Fernand BODEN, Ministre de la Famille et de la Solidarité, Luxembourg

MALTE\MALTA

Dr Louis GALEA, Minister for the Interior and Social Development, Valletta

PAYS BAS\NETHERLANDS

Mrs Hedy D'ANCONA, Minister of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs, The Hague

NORVEGE\NORWAY

Mr Stig FOSSUM, State Secretary, Royal Ministry of Children and Family Affairs,
Oslo

POLOGNE\POLOGNE

Mr Robert LIPKA, Director, Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Polish Government for Women and Family Affairs, Warsaw

PORTUGAL

Mme Maria Raquel RIBEIRO, Directrice Générale de la Famille, Présidente de la Commission Nationale pour la Politique du Troisième Age, Lisbon

ROUMANIE\ROMANIA

Monsieur Dorel MUSTATEA, Secrétaire d'Etat, Chef du Département de la Protection Sociale, Ministère du Travail, Bucharest

SAINT-MARIN\SAN MARINO

Monsieur Santé CANDUCCI, Ministre de la Santé et de la Sécurité Sociale, San Marino

REPUBLIQUE SLOVAQUE\SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Madame Oľga KELTOŠOVÁ, Ministre du travail, des affaires sociales, et de la famille, Bratislava

SLOVENIE\SLOVENIA

Madame Tatjana PETRICEK, Conseillère au Gouvernement, Ljubljana

ESPAGNE\SPAIN

Madame Cristina ALBERDI ALONSO, Ministre des Affaires Sociales, Madrid

SUEDE\SWEDEN

Mrs Inger DAVIDSON, Minister for Civic Affairs, Stockholm

SUISSE\SWITZERLAND

Madame Ruth DREIFUSS, Conseillère Fédérale, Cheffe du Département Fédéral de l'Intérieur, Berne

Madame Ruth LUTHI, Conseillère d'Etat, Cheffe de la Direction de la Santé publique et des Affaires sociales du Canton de Fribourg

TURQUIE\TURKEY

Madame Türkan AKYOL, Ministre d'Etat, Ankara

ROYAUME-UNI\UNITED KINGDOM

Mr John BOWIS, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, London

COMMISSION DES COMMUNAUTÉS EUROPÉENNES\COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Madame Michèle TEIRLINCK, Responsable Secteur Famille, Direction Générale de l'Emploi, Relations industrielles et Affaires sociales, Brussels

AUTRES PARTICIPANTS/OTHER PARTICIPANTS

ALBANIE/ALBANIA

Monsieur Dashamir SHEHI, Ministre du Travail et de la Protection Sociale, Tirana

BELARUS

Son Excellence Madame N. MAZAI, Ambassadeur de Belarus auprès de la France, Paris

CROATIE/CROATIA

Son Excellence Monsieur Branko SALAG, Ambassadeur de Croatie auprès de la France, Paris

LETTONIE\LATVIA

Son Excellence Madame Aina NAGOBADS ABOLS, Ambassadeur de Lettonie auprès de la France, Paris

MOLDAVIE/MOLDOVA

Monsieur Dumitru NIDELCU, Minister for Labour and Social Protection, Kishinev

SAINT-SIEGE/HOLY SEE

Son Excellence Monseigneur Elio SGRECCIA, Secrétaire du Conseil Pontifical pour la Famille, Rome

UKRAINE

Mr Valeriy RYLACH, Premier Secrétaire de l'Ambassade de l'Ukraine à Paris, Paris

ASSEMBLÉE PARLEMENTAIRE DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE\PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Mr Tim RATHBONE, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom

SECRETARIAT GENERAL DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE
SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Madame Catherine LALUMIERE, Secrétaire Général/Secretary General

Monsieur Ulrich BOHNER, Cabinet du Secrétaire Général

Monsieur Robin GUTHRIE, Directeur des Affaires sociales et économiques

Monsieur Henry SCICLUNA, Chef de la Division de la Santé et de la Politique sociale

Mrs Anna M. GILLET, Administrateur principale, Division de la Santé et de la Politique sociale

Mr Thomas KATTAU, Administrateur, Division de la Santé et de la Politique sociale

Madame Christine MEUNIER, Administrateur, Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et de la famille de l'Assemblée Parlementaire

APPENDIX II

FINAL COMMUNIQUE

1. At the invitation of the Minister responsible for Family Affairs of France, the Ministers, or their representatives, responsible for Family Affairs of 30 States of the 32 member States² of the Council of Europe, and representatives from Albania, Belarus, Croatia, Latvia, Moldova, Ukraine, the Holy See, the Commission of the European Communities and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, met in Paris, France, from 14 - 15 October 1993 for the XXIIIrd Session of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Family Affairs, devoted to the theme "*Family policies, children's rights, parental responsibilities*".

2. The Conference was opened by Mrs Catherine LALUMIERE, Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Mrs Simone VEIL, Minister of Social Affairs, Health and Cities, France., was the President of the Conference, and the Vice-President was Mrs Ruth DREIFUSS, Head of the Federal Home Office, Switzerland.

3. The Conference theme was discussed under three sub-themes :

rights of the child and parental responsibility, introduced by Mr László SURJÁN, Minister of Welfare, Hungary;

intervention of public authorities and parental rights, introduced by Mrs Hedy d'ANCONA, Minister of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs, Netherlands;

protection of families and children in periods of economic crisis, introduced by Mrs Simone VEIL.

* * *

4. The background to the choice of the theme "*Family policies, children's rights, parental responsibilities*" by the French hosts of the Conference was, on the one hand, the holding of the U.N. International Year of the Family in 1994 on the theme "families, resources and responsibilities", and on the other hand, the need to rethink the position of children in society brought about by the implementation of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

² Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom

5. However, during the two years in which the Conference had been prepared, whilst the membership of the Council of Europe itself had increased from 25 to 32 States, the situation of many families in particular in some parts of Europe, had become extremely dramatic. The Conference recognised that the progress hoped for was seriously threatened by the misery and cruelty being suffered by some families and some children in Europe itself.

6. In recognising this fact, the Conference was aware of the problems raised in the message conveyed to it by the representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe concerning the situation of women and children in the former Yugoslavia.

7. Moreover, the Conference, which took place days after the first Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Vienna on 8 and 9 October 1993, wished to take up on its own account the commitments entered into by the Summit, to fight against racism in all its forms, xenophobia, antisemitism, as well as intolerance, and all forms of religious discrimination. All possible means should be used to give the possibility for families and children to live within democratic societies, based on the rule of law, backed up by implementation of the human rights instruments of the Council of Europe and of the international community.

8. Bearing this context in mind, the Ministers :

- meeting in the months leading up to the U.N. International Year of the Family 1994, reaffirmed their profound attachment to their belief in families as being the fundamental units of society

- recalled the central premise of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, according to which the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

- emphasised the critical role played by parents, both mother and father, in providing for the basic physical, material, moral and spiritual needs of their children

- perceived their own role being that of pursuing policies which support families in their functions, in particular those of bringing up children.

9. The Ministers reached the following conclusions:

- parents are responsible for bringing up their children according to the basic values of democratic society. High priority should be given to educational and mediation services enabling the resolution of family conflicts.

- children should be enabled to become mature, non-dependent and responsible citizens by having their rights and needs taken into account within the family.

- children should be educated and adequately informed about their rights and duties.

- the public authorities should ensure that a framework exists which favours the wellbeing and autonomy of families, for example by offering appropriate medical, social, educational and cultural services. This includes enabling effective partnerships between families, non-governmental organisations, local and regional authorities and central government, based on the principle of subsidiarity.

- the public authorities should make the necessary provision to enable children to help themselves to claim their rights, and are entitled to intervene in accordance with the law in the private family domain when the child is in danger within it. They need to be aware of the responsibilities and difficulties there are, on the one hand to respect as far as possible the integrity of the family unit and on the other hand to identify and to decide on adequate action in the case where the child's rights are being violated by family members.

- governments have a particular responsibility to protect families and children in periods of economic crisis, in particular by appropriate preventive measures and aid that can significantly reduce the number of families and children living in poverty in the full respect of their dignity.

- actions to support families and children need to take place within the context of family and social policies which are coherent and integrated.

10. The Ministers welcomed the initiative of the Council of Europe, pursuing proposals made by the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Family Affairs in 1989, in establishing a Childhood Policies Project which seeks to reflect at European level policy implications of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. They hoped that many of the activities of the Childhood Policies Project would be appropriately linked to children in their family situations.

11. They took note of the current initiatives taken by the Council of Europe in the legal field, including
 - (i) the draft European Convention on the exercise of their rights by children;
 - (ii) the updating of the relevant articles of the European Social Charter relating to families and children.
 - (iii) the preparation of a draft Recommendation on coherent and integrated family policies.
12. A number of Ministers requested the Council of Europe to examine the possibility of preparing a Charter which would set out in an appropriate manner the rights of families.
13. A number of Ministers agreed to ask the responsible authorities in their own States to examine the desirability of a rapid ratification of the Hague Convention on the protection of children and cooperation in respect of intercountry adoption.
14. The Ministers took good note of the message from the U.N. Coordinator of the International Year of the Family, and recommended the Council of Europe to ensure that this be marked appropriately at the European level in 1994.
15. In the context of their specific concern to ensure that the situation of refugee women and children from ex-Yugoslavia be kept in mind, and given the specific vocation of the Council of Europe in the human rights field, they wished to encourage the Council of Europe to organise a European network of psycho-social support to ensure solidarity with those working with families and children who have been caught up in distressful situations when fleeing from war-torn areas, in co-operation with the competent national authorities and international governmental and non-governmental organisations already active in the field.

16. Finally, the Ministers expressed their gratitude to the French Government for the excellent organisation of the Conference and the hospitality offered to them. They accepted with gratitude the invitation of the Finnish Minister of Social Affairs to hold the XXIVth Session of the Conference in Helsinki, in June 1995. The theme of the Conference might be the place of the father in the family, in relation to family policies.
