

Excellencies, Dear colleagues, Dear Young Delegates

I am particularly honored to participate in the High-level Launching Conference for the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027).

Considering that complex issues concerning children's rights need to be addressed and require adequate responses, the adoption of a Council of Europe Strategy serves the aim of agreeing on a shared vision and agenda and developing a common reference framework with specific objectives. The Strategy constitutes a basis for effective short and long-term action. It is particularly important that the six priority areas and the three cross-cutting issues are the result of a broad and inclusive process including consultations and active engagement with different stakeholders. Since children represent the main target group and stakeholders of the Strategy, one of the central aspects of the procedure was the child consultation. I would like to deeply thank the children for their key contributions, and I am particularly proud that Greece, through the Ministry of Justice, participated in the process.

Given the current situation in Ukraine and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, it is important that the sixth priority area concerns children's rights in crisis and emergency situations.

At national level, the adoption of integrated strategies constitutes the key to the effective promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

The first National Action Plan for the Rights of the Child, a comprehensive horizontal strategy for the protection of children's rights with 7 priority axes, was adopted in June 2021. Moreover, the recent amendments to the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure enhance the protection of minors victims.

Additionally, in December 2021, the "Children's House" of Athens was put into operation for the first time. In that specially designed space, an interdisciplinary approach is applied so that children can be heard in a more child-friendly environment. This is in line with the Strategy's 4th strategic objective and ensures that the best interests of the child are upheld in criminal proceedings.

In the new legal framework for the National School of Judges, children's rights and child-friendly justice principles have been included -for the first time- in the regular training of judges and specifically in their mandatory training programmes.

Furthermore, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, human rights-related materials with an emphasis on the rights of the child (such as the UN Convention) have been included in the skills workshops and the curricula in primary, lower, and upper secondary education.

Since child participation is one of the key objectives of the Strategy, I would like to highlight that many of the above policies were included in the proposals submitted to the Ministry of Justice by the "YouSmile" Children's Rights Team of the "Smile of the Child" Organisation, which consists of children. It is essential to strengthen the role of children and enhance their right to be heard and influence decisions made by adults based on article 12 of the UN Convention.

The Ministry of Justice also participates in the consortium of a project which aims at promoting and reinforcing child participation in criminal proceedings. The consortium is composed of 6 partners in 4 EU countries with the DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL-ITALIA being our key partner.

The Ministry of Justice is also supporting a project which aims at training Greek and Cypriots criminal, civil and administrative judges in the field of child-friendly justice. We are also planning initiatives related to the management of the communication of minor victims and their families, the further protection of the rights of minor victims in the justice system and the rights of minor victims with disabilities.

Finally, Greece is implementing a National Action Plan for the Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. The plan is based on the principles of the Lanzarote Convention and the European Strategy to combat sexual abuse of children for the period 2020-2025. The Greek Government's initiatives clearly reflect its strong commitment to the effective promotion and protection of the rights of the child and the implementation of the rights of the child over the next years. The Council of Europe's Strategy will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in planning our policies.