

“Beyond the horizon: a new era for the rights of the child”

High-level Launching Conference for the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)

High-level Session I – European Institutions and bodies (9:45-10:15 am)

Ms Maria Andriani Kostopoulou, Chairperson of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) **(6 minutes)**

[Dear Prime Minister (if Mr Draghi is confirmed),
Dear Undersecretary,
Dear Minister,
Dear Secretary General of the Council of Europe,

Excellencies,
Young delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Determined and strategic action in favour of children and their basic human rights is needed more than ever before: The current reality on our continent increases the urgency of speaking about the rights of the child to protection in Europe, and, in particular, of the protection of children in the most vulnerable situations. We will be speaking about children's rights for the next two days, but this event and also the new Strategy as such, then need to be followed up by taking action to ensure that we actually reach children in their countries, communities and families and improve their protection and well-being.

I am convinced that the Strategy for the Rights of the Child we are launching today will prove to be a powerful tool and will live up to its role to provide guidance even in such unprecedented circumstances through its inclusive, innovative and pro-active approach. It is firmly grounded on strong and shared goals. Together with our partners, the Council of Europe will step up the action as urgently needed and stands behind its member States to ensure that we continue to put into practice our human rights legal standards and to continue to innovate and respond to the needs of a contemporary world.

The overall vision of this Strategy is to have a long-lasting positive impact on children's lives, in the fulfilment of their rights, their protection against any harm, and the promotion of their well-being. It is firmly anchored in international treaties and standards constituting the key references for any Council of Europe work undertaken on the rights of the child, most prominently the UNCRC and the specific targets of the UNSDG Agenda 2030.

As the Chairperson of the Council of Europe Steering Committee that prepared the Strategy, I would like to express my gratitude for the large support and commitment of Council of Europe member states to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child. Your support will allow the Council of Europe to undertake relevant and meaningful action in this area in the six years to come.

The five transversal priority areas stemming from the previous Strategy for the Rights of the Child - freedom from violence, equal opportunities, access to and safe use of technologies, child-friendly justice, and giving a voice to every child – are those that are and remain of highest relevance for all children in Europe; and we will address these areas through targeted action, together with our states such as:

- Strengthening responses for **combatting violence against children**, including sexual violence and harmful behaviour, by elaborating guidance on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education and in supporting our members State to elaborate more effective strategies to prevent violence against children;
- Improving **access to quality mental health care** for all children in Europe, and notably the most vulnerable ones;
- Moving even further in making **child friendly justice systems a reality** in all our member States, based on a review of the implementation of the relevant European Guidelines
- And to explore **how to remove existing barriers faced by children defending their Human Rights**.

In addition, the new Strategy contains a **sixth priority area dedicated to children's rights in crisis and emergency situations**. And here, I would like to quote a sentence from the introduction of the Strategy itself:

“The global pandemic that all countries have faced since early 2020 has shown that new and widely unexpected challenges can suddenly emerge, and that despite strong standards and references for upholding the rights of the child, law and policy makers should always **“expect the unexpected” and be prepared, responsive and ready to adapt.**“

In the Steering Committee CDENF, and at the Council of Europe, we believe that the new Strategy, as much as it is comprehensive in terms of challenges and responses here-to, is also responsive to children and their needs and ready to adapt to new realities. Let's reflect together over the next two days how this ambitious intention can become true. Dear Ministers, State Secretaries, I count on your political force, your determination to ensure that this Strategy will make a difference in your countries

Let me warmly **thank the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers** of the Council of Europe for hosting this Launching Conference for the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027). Thank you, [dear Prime Minister,] for demonstrating that the Rights of the Child is a

priority on your agenda, which reaches far beyond the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers and will continue to be a priority for the upcoming Presidencies of Ireland and Iceland. Allow me to thank also Ambassador Giacomelli, for your total devotion in the negotiation of the Strategy at the level of the Committee of Ministers. Your support and determination is what has allowed us to be here today, in Rome.

Ladies and Gentlemen, young Delegates, I am looking forward to two intensive days of exchange, discussion, and reflection, for upholding and promoting the rights of all children in Europe – now and in the future!