

Council of Europe High-Level Conference, 7-8 April 2022, Rome  
**“Beyond the horizon: a new era for the rights of the child”**  
**Launch of the New Children’s Strategy 2022-2027**

**Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca**

**Meeting at a time when children’s rights are being further threatened, with thousands of Ukrainian refugee children fleeing the war, and thousands of others captured in the conflict zones, the Council of Europe’s new children’s rights strategy is even more important.**

**Eurochild acknowledges the longstanding commitment of the Council of Europe to children’s rights.**

**Eurochild’s member organisations across 35 countries in Europe, are enthusiastic, to partner in delivering this new strategy, at a national level.**

**Eurochild being an umbrella organization for children’s civil society organizations, believes that, at this time of crisis, an even stronger civil society voice is imperative, and their involvement at different levels of policy is essential.**

**On the other hand, we believe that child participation should be central to the development of our policies.**

**Eurochild is experienced in this role, through our work at EU level.**

**We believe that, as civil society organizations, we need to unite and coordinate our forces, to influence policies for children, where they most impact them, in particular at a national level.**

**Within Eurochild's network there are hundreds of civil society organisations that work with and for children, together with many national child's rights networks.**

**I am pleased to see, that several of our member organisations are represented here today, such as the Spanish Plataforma de Infancia, which is an excellent model of strong coordinated advocacy, that plays a vital role in progressing children's rights in Spanish legislation and policy.**

**The importance and the effectiveness, of civil society organisations, is clearly evidenced during the prevailing Ukrainian Refugee crisis. I would like to take the opportunity to salute and commend the many members of civil society organisations, that are at the frontline of the Ukrainian war, to support children and families during this time of another huge historic human suffering and displacement.**

**Eurochild is well informed about this invaluable contribution, by civil society organisations, as we have created a support network for information sharing, among our members on the ground.**

**The role of Civil Society is also a vital role in holding governments to account.**

**As a pan European network, Eurochild looks forward to monitoring the effective implementation of the Council of Europe's Strategy on the Rights of the Child.**

**Children need a strong and united voice to promote and protect their best interests.**

**We firmly believe that defending children's rights, provides the foundation for inclusive societies, resilient democracies, peace-building and holistic wellbeing.**

**I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Council of Europe for also integrating the voices of children in this new strategy.**

**I am pleased to note that the Council of Europe has involved children meaningfully in many different areas of its work, such as the Child Participation 4 (for) Europe project.**

**Eurochild observes that there are many synergies between the Council of Europe Strategy, and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.**

**We therefore believe that it is important that these strategies should reinforce one another, rather than implementing them in silos.**

**Another opportunity for children to effectively participate in the EU decision making process, is the EU Child Participation Platform.**

**This is an important opportunity for the necessary change to take place for all children living in Europe.**

**Eurochild is continuously advocating to national governments to foster a strong political will to ensure that all policies affecting children are developed through meaningful and inclusive child participation.**

**I reiterate our appeal to all governments across Europe to uphold child participation as the equitable and legitimate methodology and practice.**

**From our experience we are continuously amazed, at children's creative and innovative ideas and aspirations.**

**When listening to the members of the Eurochild's Children's Council and the members of the Children's Council of The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, a foundation which I lead, I am overwhelmed and astounded with their passion and knowledge.**

**Child Human Rights Defenders need to be protected and listened to. It is after all, our responsibility and duty to do.**

**A matter that surely concerns us all is the emergence of an anti-children's rights movement which is threatening the advancement of our objectives.**

**Finally, I would like to end my contribution by quoting Jess Lair, a US University Professor and Author who inspiringly said and I quote: 'children are not things to be molded, but are people to be unfolded.'**

**When we instill a growth mindset in our children, we equip them with the confidence to become whoever they want to be, and the perspective they need, to unfold their incredible potential.**

**The time is now for children to be listened to, to be involved, and to be encouraged to participate, for them to unfold their incredible potential in their best interest, but also, in the best interest of all of our societies.**