

VICE PRESIDENT FOR DEMOCRACY AND DEMOGRAPHY
Conference of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027
Rome, 7 April 2022, 09.50

[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,

Children's rights are human rights, under all circumstances, anywhere and all the time.

At a time when the rights of millions of children fleeing the Russian aggression in Ukraine are at stake, I must stress how urgent it is that all of us respond to their needs, so that they can **recover, regain a sense of normality and be a child again**. Through our **solidarity**, we can ensure that children are **respected, empowered** and their **rights upheld**.

In this vein, I would like to congratulate the Council of Europe for launching its **ambitious strategy** for the rights of the child. It embodies an **overall vision for a long-lasting positive impact on children's lives**. A vision we share.

Both, the European Commission and the Council of Europe set out to protect and fulfil the rights of the child, without discrimination.

Through the development of your strategy, presented today, and the EU Strategy for the Rights of the Child, which we launched in 2021, we have achieved **complementarity across a number of our common objectives**.

Child participation is a central priority for us both. At the Commission, we have developed **child-friendly policy documents** and will set up an **EU Children's participation platform**. The **Conference on the Future of Europe** has also seen the participation of the younger members of society.

In the area of **child-friendly justice**, our EU standards are aligned with those of the Council of Europe. We will keep working with the Council of Europe, to strengthen the implementation of the 2010 guidelines on child-friendly justice. This will help national justice systems to cater better to children's needs.

Worldwide, one out of every 2 children still suffers from some form of **violence**. **Yet, violence is preventable**. Through **integrated child protection systems** we can protect children from experiencing violence. I am proud that, through EU funding, the Council of Europe has supported Member States in the setting up of the **Barnahus** project. These "Houses for Children" are **a flagship example** of our cooperation.

We contributed to the establishment of «Houses for children » in **Slovenia, Finland, Ireland and Spain**. These safe spaces will allow child victims of abuse to be interviewed in an adapted environment, with their **best interest** front and centre.

We are witnessing a rise in **child poverty**. Through the **European Child Guarantee** we committed to help lift children in need and their families, out of poverty, by providing them with access to key services, childcare and education.

The Child Guarantee will play an important role as we work to provide **children fleeing the Russian aggression in Ukraine** with access to health care, education and other support services.

Another tool we have to support our Member States with, is **the technical support instrument**. Our projects have enabled reforms for childcare inclusive education, preventing early school dropout, and supported the shift towards the de-institutionalisation of children.

We supported **Bulgarian** authorities and stakeholders to agree on a **national quality framework for early childhood education and care**. This will guide policy and investment decisions, and should **equip each municipality and kindergarten** with the tools needed to help improve their daily activities.

In **Poland**, we are backing the development of a new legislative framework for inclusive education. We have supported **Portugal** in establishing a monitoring system assessing the inclusiveness of its education system.

This year we will help 10 Member States with the **implementation of the European Child Guarantee**. It will render the education system **more inclusive** by integrating children from migrant and vulnerable backgrounds, as well as children with disabilities.

The challenges facing us all are more pressing than ever. **Protecting, respecting and fulfilling** children's rights in Europe and across the globe is a great responsibility and is a **human imperative**. It is indispensable to the **future of our shared values**.

I thank you very much and look forward to our continued cooperation in pursuit of this noble goal.

END

[660 words; 6 minutes average speaking time.]