

**2ND EUROPEAN FORUM ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
(4 MARCH 2008)**

Rights of the child

Speaking points for Vice-President Franco Frattini

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

- I would like to thank you for being here today. We have in the room representatives from European Institutions, from the Council of Europe, from the UN, from Member States, the Network of Ombudspersons, and civil society.
- Many of you were in Berlin in June 2007 at the first meeting of the Forum. This second European Forum on the Rights of the Child is another important step in building a solid EU strategy on the rights of the child.
- Every woman, every man, every child, every family, and every nation in Europe and outside Europe has a stake in our discussions today.
- It is a violation of fundamental rights when children are denied food, or housing, or education.
- It is a violation of fundamental rights when children are sold into the slavery of prostitution, when they are

abused sexually and when they are used to commit crimes.

- Fundamental rights are children's rights - and children's rights are fundamental rights.
- Children have an important stake in policy outcomes, but they have little power to shape them. They do not vote and they cannot directly represent their own interests in governing bodies. Their ability to influence policy is limited.
- This is why we are here. I like to think of us as the institutional and social "guardian angels" of all children. Together, we can make a difference to the fulfilment of children's rights to survival, development and protection. This is why it is important that we speak to children, and more importantly, that we listen to them.
- I have just received the results of a Eurobarometer with children, young people between 15 and 18 years old. For the first time we were listening to children on their rights, priorities, violence... This is a good example of a European comprehensive strategy for children.
- This is not an easy task. We need to do this right. There are high expectations on this, and I share them fully. In the coming months we shall be working closely with all of you in the Steering Group to learn about your experience and share ideas on how to do this. We need tools to ensure the effective

participation by children, including those who do not, or cannot, go to school or who are socially excluded.

- As a sign of our commitment to listen and to talk with children, my colleague Margot Wallström and myself will be conducting later this morning a symbolic ceremony inaugurating a Children's meeting place in this building.
- Building a Europe for children means building the future of Europe. Children are the future of us all. Children are actors in their own right, and not just passive recipients of policies made by grown-ups for grown-ups.
- This requires a major shift in the way in which we conceive our policies. For too long policies have been developed with consideration only for the needs of grown-ups. The impact of these policies on the rights of children was often a by-product. For example, children's care and education have sometimes been treated mainly in the framework of policies designed to attain other – of course – noble objectives, such as more jobs or demographic trends.
- Children account for over 2 billion of the world population and make up about one third of the population of Europe. They are citizens of Europe today, and they will be tomorrow. They, therefore, are the future and it is right to say that we are not talking about “their future”; we are talking about “all our futures”. One reason for this is that while the recent EU enlargement has increased our population to 490

million, Europe is ageing: in 2050 a third of its inhabitants will be over 65.

- Every year at least two million new residence permits are granted in our continent, for work, for study or for family reasons. The newcomers will soon form their own families and their children will have a new task, the task of aiding a process that is the key to successful immigration: the integration of newcomers in their host society.
- This is why children do not just have their own future before them; they are the future of us all. If we think about how difficult and complex it has become for certain cultures and religious beliefs to integrate in our Europe, we cannot ignore how much children can do for European integration, simply because their initial experience - socialisation at school - is a key step on the road to integration.
- It is a step they can take freely unfettered by roots and traditions that are often difficult, and sometimes even hostile, and with all the energy that the new society can inspire in newcomers. Children will share the same future and map it out together. This is how they can become the key players in a process of integration. I would say children are the best Ambassadors for integration at European level.
- Last year in Berlin we have agreed that children's rights must be considered in their own right, and integrated in policy making from the outset. Today, we have an opportunity to do that.

- Out of the 78 million Europeans living at risk of poverty today, 19 million are children. My colleague Vladimir Spidla will tell you more about that later.
- Every child living in neglect on our streets is the picture of a violation of fundamental rights. We cannot look away. We cannot ignore the fact that a child is suffering. And we cannot ignore the consequences: lack of education, marginalisation, exclusion, unemployment, poverty. We need to break this cycle of poverty.
- Fighting against child poverty should focus on education, housing, family, culture, sports, etc. What matters is that policy responses are formulated with the right balance in mind between helping families and helping children in their own right.
- The December European Council expressed concern with the situation faced by the Roma across the Union. The Commission will report back to the European Council in June, and I am determined to ensure that the rights of Roma children as individuals are taken into account.
- Breaking the circle of poverty for Roma children must be possible. For example, the European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg has ruled recently that segregation of Roma children in separate schools is contrary to the Human Rights Convention. This kind of segregation is unacceptable, and concrete steps must be taken in Member States to end this.

- Roma children suffer from a double discrimination: they are victims of stereotypes and prejudice in society, and this makes them more vulnerable to poverty and to violence, even from within their communities. We must combat discrimination of Roma children. And we must combat violence against Roma children.
- In fact, we must combat violence against all children. No child is safe from violence. Violence against children exists everywhere. Children are victims of trafficking, victims of sexual exploitation, victims of the violence of adults.
- The Commission launched an initiative for the adoption of a single telephone number throughout Europe to signal cases of disappearance of children. However, I must say that I am disappointed with progress made at national level with the implementation of such a basic tool. Only four Member States showed good will until now.
- I have also launched an initiative to put in place a Child Alert mechanism in every Member State. You will have a demonstration later of what such a system can do in practice. With future French Presidency we will discuss the implementation of such a system.
- An EU-wide Child Alert system could easily be put in place by interconnecting similar national systems when trans-border cases occur.

- I have discussed this issue with the Ministers of the Interior and Justice, and there seems to be consensus on this initiative. We don't need a legislative initiative. Now we need action and political will.
- Since the adoption of the 2006 Communication on the Rights of the Child, we have undertaken concrete actions. The Commission has recently adopted the Communication "a Special Place for Children in EU External Action".
- Work has also been undertaken on poverty and social exclusion of children within the context of the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.
- We have supported the Mobile Alliance against Child Sexual Abuse Content to obstruct the use of the mobile environment by individuals or organisations wishing to consume or profit from child sexual abuse content. The recent Safer Internet Day was aimed to create awareness messages on the safe and ethical use of information and communication technologies. We are working to set up a mechanism to stop on-line payments when purchasing images of sexual abuse of children on the Internet.
- The Commission intends to continue to build on this strategy, and I trust that we can count on the active support of the Member States, of the European Parliament, of the Council of Europe, of UNICEF, of the Ombudspersons and of civil society.

- My final word on our objectives: full promotion of children's rights and zero tolerance of violation of these rights.