

**EURONET**  
**THE EUROPEAN CHILDREN'S NETWORK**



**CONFERENCE REPORT**  
**CHILDREN AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE**  
Organised by EURONET, the European Children's Network  
2 - 3 May 2003

Project supported by the European Commission 

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## 1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EURONET would like to thank all the persons who helped to prepare and carry out this important event:

The youth facilitators, the team co-ordinators, the accompanying adults, the interpreters, translators, the volunteers, the technicians and the rest of the staff working in the different venues of the conferences.

Our thanks also to all members of the European Parliament and their office's colleagues who sent presents to the young delegates as a *souvenir* of their experience in Brussels.

Our special thanks to the colleagues from UNICEF-Belgium, Maison de Quartier Saint Antoine in Brussels, the European Network of Street Children Worldwide and BICE!

EURONET would like to stress the importance of the European Commission' support to this project from its beginning, in October 2002. The project is part of the "Prince Programme" organised by the European Commission's Secretariat General, Public debate on the future of Europe Unit, Task Force on the Future of the Union

Last, but not least, , all our gratitude to the young delegates who came to Brussels :

**Merci!** - Благодаря ти! - **Bedankje!** - Thank you! - **ευχαριστώ!** - Mulțumesc!

**iGracias!** - Tack själv! - **Ddiolch 'ch!**

## **2. INTRODUCTION TO EURONET PROJECT: "Children are European Citizens Too"**

### **2.1. Children's National Consultations**

The Conference "Children and the Future of Europe: children are European citizens Too" is part of a project aiming at promoting the participation of young people (under 18 years of age) in the discussions on the Future of Europe.

**EURONET, the European Children's Network**, with the support of the European Commission, started a process of national consultations in October 2002 which brought together children and young people from 11 countries across Europe.

The leading actors in this project (member organisations of EURONET) worked with their national networks and groups of children and young people. In Greece this was the General Secretariat of Youth of the Ministry of Education and in Bulgaria this was the Children's National Parliament. The networks used their expertise to mobilise a broad debate amongst children and young people within an average age group of 11-17.

Each national group came up with their own set of thematic subjects, which they chose to concentrate and focus their discussions on.

Each national consultation then produced a report with a set of key messages. As part of the consultation process, children elected a national delegation of around 4 members to come to Brussels and present their collective reports and key messages to a conference entitled "Children and the Future of Europe: children are European Citizens Too," organised by EURONET on Thursday 3 April 2003.

### **2.2. Preparatory Conference for the Children and Young People**

On 2 April 2003 the children and young people had a preparatory day to discuss and prepare their statements for the conference day. 35 children and young people under the age of 18 representing Belgium, Bulgaria, England, France, Greece, Ireland, Romania, Scotland, Spain, Sweden and Wales came to Brussels for this event.

This delegation did not represent all of Europe's children and youth, however it represented a wide and diverse group of young European citizens. There were children from EU member states as well as candidate countries, some delegates came from immigrant families, others belonged to traveler minorities, some lived in foster care while others came from deprived backgrounds or lived in isolated areas.

The preparatory conference aimed at providing an opportunity for the young delegates to meet each other and exchange experiences before the main conference on 3rd April. They met to decide how they would participate in the following day's conference and to discuss the issues of concern to them.

A team of young facilitators - Steven and James from Article 12/England, Jonathan from Save the Children/Wales and Stu from Article 12/Scotland, facilitated the preparatory conference.

The facilitators opened the meeting with several activities that helped to 'break the ice'

- Greeting each other in all the languages
- Recording on a flipchart a list of hopes and fears for the 2 day meetings
- Establishing the ground rules

The Programme then continued with an Introduction to the Convention on the Future of Europe by **Delphine Moralis from the European Youth Forum.**

All the participants were asked to take time to write down on a coloured post-it their individual vision for the Future of Europe:



## Sharing Thematic Messages from our national consultations

National delegations presented their key thematic messages to the larger group.

### Where are our voices heard? - Consejos / Conseils / Councils

At the end of their presentation, the Spanish delegation asked the group to list the children's or youth councils in their country where the voices of children and young people are heard.



In Spain, for example, there is the «el Consejo de Infancia y Adolescencia» (Children & Youth Council) of the Leganés City Council



In Ireland there is a Junior Advisory Board linked to the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children



In Wales, there is the Funky Dragon (Young People's Assembly Wales).



In the UK, there is a Youth Parliament.



In Greece there is a Youth Parliament



In Scotland there is an organisation called Article 12



In Flemish-speaking Belgium there is the Vlaamse Jeudgraad



In Bulgaria there is a Children's Parliament

### What do we think our collective Key Messages are?

Following the lunch break, the young participants divided into 6 thematic groups based on the subjects of the workshop dialogues for the main conference on Thursday 3 April. Each group worked to identify the main issues on their specific theme as they had emerged from the earlier national presentations. Each thematic group then developed a set of what they felt were the key issues, problems and possible solutions that were emerging and that were of concern to all the children and young people present. One young facilitator plus an adult resource person supported each group.

Each thematic group then reported back to the plenary on the main issues of concern to them and what they felt were possible solutions.

After a discussion, it was decided that young delegates from each thematic session would jointly present their key messages at the conference the following day. There would therefore be no individual presenters, resource persons or rapporteurs, but rather there would be joint presentations from those young delegates who were willing to act as representatives for their thematic group. Volunteers from each of the thematic groups were then invited to nominate themselves. In addition, a group of young delegates volunteered to present the overall theme of child participation to the next morning's plenary session and in the meeting with members of the Convention.

## Conference Children and the Future of Europe, 3 April 2003

Before the conference opened the children and young people set up an exhibition with the material that each delegation brought to display the work carried out in each participating country.

The morning plenary session was chaired by **Helle Thorning-Schmidt**, a Danish MEP and member of the European Convention who actively promoted children's rights within the Convention.

### **3. OPENING REMARKS**

#### **3.1. The vice-president of the Convention, Jean-Luc Dehaene.**

Mr Dehaene made the welcoming remarks. He is from Belgium and is a former Belgian Prime Minister. His welcoming remarks addressed most of the issues that had been discussed by the children and young people.

Firstly, he introduced the role and aims of the Convention. He explained that the Convention would have to agree on a new Treaty for Europe and he mentioned in this respect that the new text would also include the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, which he thought would protect children's rights in a better way.

Mr Dehaene underlined the need and opportunity for children and young people to participate in the discussion on the future of Europe through different channels, and mentioned the unprecedented efforts for transparency carried out so far by the European institutions to listen to its citizens, including the youngest ones. He reminded the Conference delegates that the Convention was launched through the Laeken Declaration, a document in which all European leaders committed themselves to "bring Europe closer to its citizens" especially to the younger citizens. As an example of this determination to include everybody in the debates, Mr. Dehanene referred to the Youth Convention, where 210 young delegates between 18 to 25 years of age, from each EU and candidate country, gathered in the European Parliament last year to discuss, over three days, their expectations of the European Union and its role in the Future of Europe.

Another example of the efforts carried out by the Convention to listen to everybody was the organisation of a day of debate for schools and pupils - *Spring Day in Europe*. This project was developed with the EU Ministries of Education and supported by the European Commission. The idea of the Spring Day in Europe was to get schools to organise their own event, but simultaneously on 21 March 2003. It was hoped that this would help to increase pupils and teachers involvement in the planning of a new Europe. Schools in the EU member states or associated countries were also invited to take part in this Spring Day. Participation took many forms: discussions, meeting with celebrities and experts involved in European matters, a debate between pupils within the school or between pupils from schools in different countries, either directly or via the Internet.

Apart from these examples, Mr Dehaene also mentioned the efforts of the Convention to talk to civil society (representing groups of citizens in Europe) and he explained that he was appointed with responsible for relations with civil society.

Regarding the new Treaty, Mr. Dehaene assured delegates that it would define the goals of the EU without limiting the different competences. What can better be done at the European level, should be done at the European level. However, Dehaene said that we must also make efforts within our own countries: national organisations can also put pressure on their governments and it is up to us to organise that kind of approach.

Mr Dehaene closed his speech by wishing everyone a fruitful debate and hoped to hear the outcomes and follow-up to the event. Unfortunately, there was no time for questions as Mr. Dehaene had to attend a meeting of the Convention.



### **3.2. The Chair, Mrs Thorning-Schmidt,**

She briefly welcomed all the participants. She explained that she is member of the European Parliament (MEP), an institution that has made significant efforts during the past 2 years to form a European policy for children, and to persuade governments to adopt measures that enhance children's rights all over Europe. She also admitted that policy makers often tend to forget children, which she deeply regretted. She said, " for all of you children are the building stones of the future Europe, and we need to make sure that your voices are also heard when we discuss (...) This conference today is a good reminder for us all that we need to include your perspective in our daily work."

As a member of the Convention, Mrs. Thorning-Schmidt has participated in the drafting of an article in the future European Constitution with a clear reference to children's rights as an objective of the European Union. She said, " because today the rights of children are not very clear, and children are often invisible in EU legislation. Of course there is an article in the Treaty, which calls to member states to prevent violation of children's rights, but there is no legal basis in the Treaty as such, to promote and protect the interests of children. Today, issues concerning children are only considered on a case-to-case basis."

The Danish MEP declared she was more optimistic now, because " it now seems like we will be able to include a reference to children's rights among the objectives of the new constitutional treaty." The insertion of such a clause would help to protect effectively children's rights by allowing for systematic and continuous response to the needs of the children.

The chairwoman concluded by reminding everyone how rare it is that politicians, policy makers or even parents have the chance to listen to so many young, serious and interesting voices at once.



### 3.3. Bill Bell, head of the advocacy unit at Save the Children UK which is one of the organisations members of Euronet:

"EURONET is a coalition of national and international NGOs in the EU who care deeply about children's rights and the European Union's role in promoting, protecting, and fulfilling those rights. We believe strongly in the importance of involving children and young people in our own work and in encouraging the institutions of the European Union to display a similar openness to the views and opinions of young people. Today is an excellent example of how children and young people, civil society, and the EU itself can work together to create the opportunity for this to happen."

"EURONET has been actively involved in the work of the Convention on the Future of Europe since its start. We recognised the Convention process as an important opportunity to, once again, raise the issue of the invisibility of children in the treaties of the European Union. The arguments for this are clearly set out in various submissions we have made to the Convention and its working groups. To summarise:

- A real 'Citizen's Europe' must make special efforts to include its youngest members and show that it cares about what happens to them. This is especially true when this group has no opportunity to participate in the formal political process.
- Children are currently considered in an *ad hoc* way and therefore a quite uneven way in the development of EU legislation, policies and programmes. Children need to be seen as full human beings and their rights and interests treated systematically and sensitively by the European institutions. Only in this way can we ensure that Europe do not -by neglect- affect children in a negative way.
- A major concern for Euronet has been the fact that children's rights - agreed internationally in the Convention on the Rights of the Child - have been acknowledged by all the member states but not by the European Union.

We have therefore actively involved ourselves in the work of the Convention:

We have prepared detailed analyses of children's situation in the current treaties, and made concrete recommendations as to how the treaty could be amended so as to make children fully visible. We ensured that children's interests were represented at consultation meetings organised by the Convention.

We encouraged our members to talk individually to their governments and urge them to support our position. We also asked for support - that we received - from civil society groupings with similar concerns e.g. the Youth Forum. Thanks to the support of the European Commission's Prince Programme, we have supported children and young people themselves to become part of this process, which has led to the presence of so many children and young people at this conference.

After all this work, EURONET was therefore delighted when the draft constitutional treaty issued recently included the protection of children's rights in the objectives of the Union. For the first time in the history of the EU, children and their rights are close to getting the recognition they deserve.

## 4. Childrens' Collective Key Messages

Groups of young delegates jointly presented the key messages of each thematic group to the plenary. These key messages had emerged from the national consultations and were discussed in the sessions of the Children's Preparatory Conference the day before.

### 4.1. Key Messages on Trafficking in children: Christian & Erika (Sweden)

Human trafficking is a problem that surrounds us all in the EU. It is not visible, but it happens almost everywhere and it must stop. Half a million children and women have been transported to countries within the EU to be sold as slaves within the sex industry. Even though the EU has discussed trafficking since 1996, not many concrete measures have been taken. The consequences are multiple, for instance: increased organised crime; child abuse; smuggling of people; human rights violations, etc.

#### We propose:

-  To change the attitude towards trafficking and place the issue high on the agenda.
-  To create a special department for trafficking within the EU system (Europol)
-  To increase co-operation between national police forces and customs.
-  To strenghten legislation against traffickers.
-  To support victims at social level, both within EU and candidate states.
-  Increase welfare in the countries which are senders of human slaves
-  To increase information about this problem to protect children from traffickers.

### 4.2. Key Messages on Children in institutions: Jay (England), Jessica (England), Maeve (Ireland), & Siobhan (Ireland)

The main themes that this group looked at were:

1. How poverty relates to this issue
2. The rights of children living in institutions
3. Staff Vetting
4. How children have the right to be kids and act as kids, even when they are in care or institutions.

"I suppose -said Maeve - that we need to understand first what this topic is all about. Who are the children in institutions/care? These are kids living in either institutions, care homes, juvenile centres, foster care or orphanages. "

The group stressed that most of the children have at least one parent, and are in institutions because of poverty.

#### We propose:

-  More funding for street children
-  Poverty cannot be a reason for placing children in institutions
-  To keep normality in the lives of people living in institutions and foster care

The group concluded by reminding that " this is a very important topic that the EU has to look at, as it affects so many children. The overall message that we hope you will hear is that children who live in such places have and need the same rights as children who live with their parents."

#### **4.3. Key Messages on Poverty & Social Exclusion: Merfine (Belgium), Savvas (Greece) & Tara (Wales)**

Children and young people think that poverty affects all the spheres of their lives (family, school, work, etc)

- Living in poverty means you have difficulty getting education, getting health care and that you do not eat properly.
- The relationship with friends would not be good because they do not understand you or know what you are going through.
- People from poorer backgrounds are discriminated against.
- There are not enough things for young people to do and activities are often too expensive.
- Transport is a big obstacle for young people, especially when they live in rural areas.
- Poverty and social exclusion often leads to desperate reactions, with drug abuse and/or domestic violence.
- There is a lot of discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers.

**We propose:**

- 🏠 Better distribution of wealth.
- 🏠 The EU should force governments to have more funding schemes. "The government could help poorer families more"
- 🏠 Governments should cooperate to solve problems about refugees in Europe. To create equal rules for all countries about how people should be treated and fight social exclusion.
- 🏠 "Fixed wages for under 16 years old" ("If young people had more money there would be less problems with drugs and thefts)
- 🏠 Better programs for the incorporation of children from refugees and asylum seekers. Refugees should also make an effort to adapt to their new environment.
- 🏠 Children exposed to poverty should go to a Help Centre to talk with teachers and friends.

#### **4.4. Key Messages on Education: Lidia (Spain), Nawal (Belgium) & Sophia (Greece)**

Education is a very important part of children's lives. In general the group underlined the need of child participation in the development of the education system.

- Children don't know about their rights.
- Pressure of exams is increasing today. There are equally excessive demands for university entrance examinations.

- Need to reappraise the aims of the education system: "we have to become open-minded persons and not just be taught about books". This issue relates to the need for more free time for leisure activities and sports.

Poverty has a direct negative impact on the chances of education for many children:

- "If you're poor you're bullied, which means you won't try your best in school. You give up... If you don't do well in school you'll end up with a crap job and no money"
- Poverty would negatively affect that the child studies; in situations of extended families, it is the older child who has to take care of his siblings and do house work, thus missing school and not being able to do homework.
- The cost of school and higher education fees is becoming too high.
- The role of teachers and parents is also considered essential: Sometimes, pupils and teachers have disagreements, which can affect the standard of a pupils work.
- Young people are often left to wonder the streets, missing school.
- The lack of trust of families for the system makes them sometimes aggressive against teachers.

**We propose:**

- 🏠 Child Ombudsmen and advisors (young and adults) in schools.
- 🏠 Better dialogues with teachers
- 🏠 Different and adapted learning programmes
- 🏠 Support to parents exposed to poverty and other problems to help them participate in more school activities and understand the relevance of their children's education
- 🏠 More funding for education
- 🏠 Greater access to services and activities for children.

#### **4.5. Environment: Christos (Greece), Hicham (Spain) & Numa (France)**

Young people strongly want to be part of this debate and each delegation proved they were aware of the core problems related to the environment: the Welsh denounced their polluted beaches, the Greeks the dumping of waste in sea waters, the French road safety in mountain areas, the Spaniards 'crazy' urban development, etc. They finally agreed on a list of basic demands to European policy makers:

**Our Worries, "a world-wide dustbin":**

- Nuclear energy
- Plastic bags
- Waste produced by tourist sector and its lack of respect for the environment of the lands they visit.
- Traffic pollution
- Deforestation
- Global warming

**We propose**

- 🏠 An European Ministry for Environment
- 🏠 Children need to be green and clean, more environment aware, so that they can pass on the message to future generations

- 🏠 The environment is ours
- 🏠 Active groups in every society that helps support new initiatives. More opportunities for NGOs to take part in the solutions to environment pollution.
- 🏠 There must be a permanent campaign and it has to be made collectively, including all citizens, thus children as well.
- 🏠 Promotion of renewable energies and new alternatives to the use of petrol. More research on this.

#### **4.6. Key Messages on Discrimination: Camille (France), Inge (Belgium) & Rafael (Spain)**

Children and young people feel discriminated as a group by not being respected, not having a voice, bullying, violence, and employers treating young people badly. Discrimination can take different forms and affect particular groups of children and young people in a stronger way: black and minority ethnic young people, children living in care, living in poverty or living in isolated areas; children with disabilities, young person's sexuality, religion, etc.

##### **We Propose**

- 🏠 Educate the entire community about the differences in human society.
- 🏠 Focus institutional support especially in schools: teachers and other people who work with young people should encourage everyone to feel comfortable with themselves.
- 🏠 Europe is a vast continent, and not all of its citizens are Christians, children feel that all religions should be equally recognised by the new EU Constitution.
- 🏠 Positive role models and encourage the media to use positive images of groups who experience discrimination.
- 🏠 We should treat refugee and immigrant children as equals, help them to learn about our culture and have them teach us more about theirs; help them if they have problems, ask them how they live in their country and respect them as equal to everyone else.
- 🏠 European and national schemes to address the needs of children from multicultural backgrounds.

#### **4.7. Key Messages on Participation: Andy (England), Eleni (Greece), Georgia (England), Irene (Spain), Madalina (Romania), Sacha (Wales) & Teri (Scotland)**

Participation has been treated by all delegates as an overall theme that runs through each of the 6 intergenerational dialogues

##### **We propose:**

- 🏠 Participation is one of the major features of the CRC (the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). However, this right has not yet been fulfilled.
- 🏠 Decisions are made by adults and agreed upon by adults, and children have just to accept them. But "we, children, we also care about our society; we care about our rights, and the rights of others."

- 👤 Children understand the meaning of responsibility and believe it should also lie in their hands. "So we want to participate in discussions about improvement of the educational system, our cities, the environment, and in general in all those decisions made by politicians that will anyway affect the lives of children and young people."
- 👤 The right to participation is linked with a child's right to information so that participation would acquire a true meaning.
- 👤 The voting age should be lowered to 16, because at that age children can already work, pay taxes, get married or even go to prison but they don't have the right to decide.
- 👤 Adults should work with children like it happens in the cross-generation dialogues we are having today in this conference, so that together we change society and decisions made by policy makers.

### Europe, listen!

- 👤 Children are citizens, in their countries and also in Europe.
- 👤 The EU does many things that affect children, but it doesn't listen to us and so they do not have any idea of how their decisions affect children in every country of Europe.
- 👤 The EU has not yet given a clear focus of what it wants for its children, in all aspects of their lives.
- 👤 Children know they have special rights that are recognised by the CRC, but it seems the EU does not accept the obligation to this international law. The EU has to acknowledge the CRC and work to defend and promote children's rights in all Europe.
- 👤 The EU has to be accountable to citizens, that includes its youngest.

After the presentations, the Chair asked the children to elaborate on some of the issues and a lively debate took place.

The sense of the debate was that it is not enough to have general sentences in the new Constitutional Treaty about vague ideas. The new objectives such as social protection, the fight against poverty, social dialogue and gender equality need to be clearly written in the Constitution. At this stage children and young were encouraged to come up with even stronger demands to add to the objectives of the Future of Europe. Mrs Thorning-Schmidt declared her full support for lowering the voting age to 16 for all European children.

The conference was then divided into 6 different Thematic Dialogue groups.

Each dialogue was opened with a brief introduction by the Chairperson, who then gave the floor to the **under 18 resource person**. They presented their major concerns on the chosen issue as well as their ideas for action. Everyone had different methods of presenting the issue, which was decided by the young people themselves at their Preparatory Conference. The remainder of the session was a dialogue between the adults and under 18s. Designated rapporteurs (adult or 18) reported back to the afternoon plenary session on the main issues raised and the key recommendations from the respective dialogues.

## 5. Thematic Dialogues

### Trafficking in children

**Chair: Linda McAvan** (MEP from the UK and member of the Convention)

"We want people to notice the trafficking situation that exists in our own society"  
(Erika, 17, from Municipality of Nacka, Sweden).

### Children in institutions

**Chair: Bartho Pronk** (MEP from The Netherlands)

"Poverty cannot be a reason for children to end up in institutions (...) the children of Europe won't take it anymore!"  
(Siobhan, 16, ISPC Junior Advisory Board, Ireland)

### Poverty and Social Exclusion

**Chair: Carlos Carnero** (MEP from Spain and member of the Convention)

"Eliminate Ministers and create more employment and they will have houses and there will not be any more poor people."  
(Merfine, 12, Maison Quartier St. Antoine, Belgium)

### Education

**Chair: Peter Delahaye** (Director of the Brussels' office of UNICEF).

"In past years, education is given only the leftovers of governments' budgets"  
(NAME?, 17, Salvati Copii, Romania)

### Environment

**Chair: Bill Bell** (Head of Advocacy in Save the Children UK)

"The problems (...) mentioned need almost a revolution to be solved."  
(Savas, 17, Institue of Hermioni, Greece)

### Discrimination

**Chair: Giacomo Filibeck** (President of the European Youth Forum)

"The politicians are the most discriminatory actors: they only take action in countries where they can get benefits."  
(Rafael, 13, Child Council of Leganes, Madrid, Spain)

### Overall Theme : Children's Participation

"As a young person I feel as though I am seen as a problem that will not go away",  
(Andy Butler, 15, Article 12 - England)

## 6. Reporting of the Thematic Dialogues to the Plenary

In the afternoon, the plenary session listened to the rapporteurs of each dialogue. The session was first chaired by **Helen Agathonos** (Director of an organisation called "Institute of Child Health", in Greece.).

### **Trafficking in children (Olivia Lind-Haldorsson, Save the Children European Officer)**

- 👉 Children who agree to be witnesses in court cases against trafficking, should have the support of the government, but also those who do not want to be witnesses, should have our support.
- 👉 Children should never be sent back to their countries without their consent.
- 👉 EU member states should harmonise their laws so that escaping from one country to another does not mean that they escape punishment for their crimes.
- 👉 All laws should be harmonised according to the CRC, especially Art. 34 & 35.
- 👉 Police should cooperate across borders and there should especially be a common vetting system.

### **Children in institutions (Siobhan, Maeve)**

- 👉 Children's right to practice the religion of their choice, no matter what the religion of their country is
- 👉 Children's right to appropriate accommodation, in other words we need appropriate juvenile centres. All staff needs to be police cleared properly.
- 👉 We want all EU countries to reach the same high standards in institutional care and we want the EU to develop minimum guidelines for all the countries to follow.

### **Poverty and Social Exclusion (Numa & Merfine)**

"We have firstly identified causes that this problem leads to":

- 👉 Discrimination
- 👉 Reduction of opportunities for different generations and countries
- 👉 Psychological effects on the population
- 👉 Economic immigration
- 👉 Job failure & unemployment
- 👉 Drug abuse and related problems
- 👉 We believe that the current war in Iraq is also going to create problems

We have an special message to the Convention on the Future of Europe:

Poverty and social exclusion is directly connected to children's rights. The CRC recognises the right of the child to basic rights (survival, health, education and many others) it is an obligation of the EU institutions to include an article on children rights. We would like to stress that European children are not begging for special treatment because these rights we are asking for are human rights and European children are European citizens according to articles 7 and 8 of the CRC.

And we have another 5 recommendations:

- 👉 No more wars. The money spent in the war should go to the fight against poverty.
- 👉 Free Education
- 👉 Minimum wage for young workers
- 👉 More information in schools on children's rights as well as obligations
- 👉 All European States should work together in the pursuit of these objectives.

### Education

- 👉 First of all: you should always ask the opinion of children. For instance, today in this conference of Euronet, everyone of us have freely chosen the workshop were we wanted to be and it have not been the adults telling us what to choose.
- 👉 Apart from the freedom of choice we think children's participation should be encouraged and children should be invited to take part in the management of the schools and the decisions made for the curricula leading to an education tailored for the individual, which would make us all get greater life skills.

### Environment (Christos & Hicham)

- 👉 We want the EU to encourage research, funding and implementation of alternative ways of renewable energies (solar, wind, etc).
- 👉 Holistic approaches on the basis of joint collaboration between EU institutions, national governments and civil society to promote solidarity on issues of environment at international level.
- 👉 Community services and control and policing units
- 👉 Centres of education on enviromental issues for children

### Discrimination

- 👉 We have to take away the fear of the unknown and we can do this by giving information at schools and to parents
  - 👉 Learn to accept differences
  - 👉 Create a society that respects.
  - 👉 Talk more about our feelings to others.
  - 👉 Make sure that children get good examples (from schools, tv, family, in the street)
  - 👉 Make sure that schools are mixed as much as possibe (cultures, gender, etc)
- We should not abuse the right of participation in detriment of others.

**Sophia** presented a proposal for an anti-war statement:

We children from 11 European nations participating in the Euronet conference "Children and the Future of Europe: Children are European citizens Too," meeting in Brussels on 2 & 3 April 2003, wish to express our strong views against the war in Iraq and its implications on the rights of the children of which the right to life is paramount. This war, and any war, violates the UN CRC. We call on te EU and on the countries supporting this war to take immediate actions so that the war against Iraq comes to an end.

**James Anderson**, a youth facilitator from England (Article 12) asked all if we wanted to keep a minute of silence to help us think about the children in Iraq at that difficult moment, and the whole Plenary stood up for a minute silence.

The Chair announced that as a result of this two-day meeting, **a song of peaceful words** had been composed that would be a fitting close to the efforts and work of all these young delegates: the song, written by students of the Greek delegation, was sung by Sophia and Christos, who also played the guitar.

**Simone Ek** (senior adviser on children's rights for Rädna Barnen, Sweden) took over the Chair for the closing plenary session. She welcomed Commissioner Wallström, who is also from Sweden, and in charge of Environment at the European Commission.

## **7. CLOSING REMARKS Commissioner Margot Wallström**

(European Commissioner for Environment)

"It is the children who pay the highest price of our shortsighted politics, our political mistakes, our wars" These were the words of Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save the Children. He pronounced these words in 1919. What we have really learnt since? We ask the children of Iraq or in many other countries. The consultations you have done to prepare this conference give ample evidence that the sad conclusion of Eglantyne Jebb is still valid."

"A Romanian delegate writes, 'protect the world, so I the child of today can see the things that you saw when you were children. Don't take away from me the wonders of the earth -he continues-, protect my education and my health, so that I can continue teaching my children to protect the environment...' This is a perfect definition of sustainable development. I am simply amazed by this awareness, and, at the same time touched by how much worry and concern are reflected in what this participant and other children are saying. Children clearly understand the implications of our present behaviour for future generation"

"That is why it is so important to harness this wisdom and their concerns to give children a voice in determining the future of Europe. This must be reflected by the Convention on the Future of Europe. You are calling for full recognition of children as European citizens and you have of course my total support for this obvious demand. (...)The Commission has started to do this now regarding environmental issues.

The future of Europe depends to a great extent to what we do with the environment today (...). From the issues that children have been discussing in the preparation of this conference there are two that are of major interest for me as environment Commissioner and these are health and pollution. These are of course interrelated.

Children are, for a variety of reasons, more vulnerable to the dangers of air pollution (respiratory problems, air quality standards, etc) and to infections by contaminated water. Even the way we live is not good: Children need to move and exercise to promote healthy growth. We should not condemn them to live in a world of polluting cars while building roads that eat up the green areas where they could play.

The Commissioner continued and explained the different activities of her office.

"We also invited pupils throughout Europe to come to Brussels and play the role of their national environmental Ministers and deal with the issues that concern them most. The conclusions have been presented to the EU Greek Presidency."

Mrs Wallström continued explaining what her team is doing to address the environment problems affecting European children:

"Sometimes these are the long-term effects of certain polluters, for example children exposed to cigarette smoke may develop cancer at a later moment of their lives. Sometimes it is a cocktail of several factors with very negative effects on children's health".

Environment and health is one of the 4 priority areas in the 6<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Programme. And right now the Commission is developing a concrete community strategy on Environmental health, with a particular emphasis on children. This strategy will focus on obtaining and analysing more information about how environment affects health. But already now we know enough to be able to take some measures, for instance related to ozone, air quality and chemicals, which causes asthma, allergies, and cancer amongst children.

Another aspect of this strategy is to mobilise all stakeholders: national governments, the public, industry, academia, international organisations and NGOs . We also seek a closer co-operation between environment and health agencies in order to succeed. Children must of course be involved in this process.

The Commissioner concluded: "I wish you all good luck for you have become now the ambassadors for a better environment in Europe, ambassadors for the European children as a group to be recognised and their right to be heard."

After her speech Commissioner Wallström went into several questions raised by the children:

- Do you think that at the present rate of environmental pollution, water pollution, the refusal of some countries to adopt any measures to resolve these problems will make the earth uninhabitable one day? **(Rafa)**
- What do you think of the nuclear power plants proliferation in Ireland? **(Siobhan)**
- The problems that you have mentioned before needs almost a revolution to be resolved. Is the European Commission ready to start a revolution? **(Savas)**

The Commissioner encouraged all not to be pessimistic: "I've always thought that we can make a difference . We all have responsibilities. The future is not something that suddenly hits us. We are building it up together, and all the generations have to get involved and be aware of their joint responsibility. "

She concluded by expressing her believe in that a lot has already been achieved through legislation, through peaceful negotiation, and agreements on necessary limits to preserve the environment. "In fact, the problem arises when it is about implementing what has already been agreed upon by every Member State. This is now what we have to concentrate on".

## 8. MEETING WITH CONVENTION MEMBERS AT THE EP

### Convention Members Present:

**MEP Klaus Hänsch (Member of the Presidium of the Convention, Germany); Commissioner António Vitorino (Justice & Home Affairs, from Portugal); MEP Alain Lamassoure (France); Mr Adrian Severin (Representative of the Romanian Parliament at the Convention); Mrs Meglena Kuneva & Mrs Neli Kutskova (Bulgaria, Representatives of their Government at the Convention).**

After the conference the children and young people presented the key messages of the conference to a delegation of Convention members in the European Parliament. The Convention members gave a warm welcome to all delegates who had come from all over Europe to deliver their messages.

The Convention members assured the children and young people that they were very keen on including their demands for real recognition of children as citizens in the text of the Constitutional Treaty, which they were discussing on that very day at the Convention meeting.

### Some Farewell Messages from the children and young people to the Convention on the Future of Europe:

*"Make things better, listen to the citizens of Europe and lead by example, otherwise Europe will fail. »*

**Merfine, Nawal, Sakina and Warda (Belgium)**

*"On the last night everyone gathered together to relax and talk, we like to think that it was more of a small celebration. The atmosphere was smitten with cheer and achievement but with a mix of sadness as everyone was leaving the next day. We had gathered together as one to try to make Europe a better place for children and young people to live in and we, personally, think that we are well on our way to making it happen".*

**Kerri, Teri, Mhairi, and Wendy (Scotland)**



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# Euronet Member Organisations

## EU OFFICES

ISCA, International Save the Children Alliance

BICE, Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance

OMEP, Organisation Mondiale Pour l'Education Prescolaire

ENSCW, European Network on Street Children Worldwide

## AUSTRIA

Kinder- und Jugendanwaltschaft Salzburg

## BELGIUM

Kind en Samenleving

## DENMARK

Red Barnet

## FINLAND

Pelastakaa Lapset r.y.

## FRANCE

COFRADE, Conseil Français des Associations pour les Droits de l'Enfant

## GERMANY

Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Jugendhilfe

## GREECE

Institute of Child Health

## IRELAND

ISPCC, Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

## ITALY

Save the Children Italia

## LUXEMBOURG

FICE, Fédération International des Communautés Éducatives

## NETHERLANDS

DCI/NL, Defence for Children International / Netherlands

## PORTUGAL

IAC, Instituto de Apoio à Criança

## SPAIN

POI, Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia

## SWEDEN

Rädda Barnen

## SWITZERLAND

EACH, European Association for Children in Hospital

## UNITED KINGDOM

Save the Children Fund/UK

NSPCC, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

## ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

### BELGIUM

Child Focus

### GREECE

European Children's Television Centre

ARSIS, Association for the Social Support of Youth

### POLAND

Polish Forum for Children Rights  
"Children's Letters to the World Foundation"

### ROMANIA

Salvati Copii  
Save the Children Romania