

**EURONET speech in plenary session of Council of Europe conference,  
"Building a Europe for and with Children"**

**Stockholm, 8-10 September 2008.**

(10 Minutes)

Kathleen Spencer Chapman, EURONET President

1. Thank you for inviting the European Children's Network to speak at this significant conference. It's an honour to be here, and we are extremely encouraged by the commitment to children's rights shown by many, in particular the Council of Europe and the Swedish Government.

2. I'm going to speak about how NGOs and the Council of Europe can work more closely together, in our view, to support the implementation of the proposed strategy on children's rights, in order to achieve more for children's rights in Europe.

Like the speaker from UNICEF, NGOs are interested in working together in order to achieve concrete outcomes for children.

Firstly, I will briefly reflect on what the Council of Europe has achieved over the past few years, and give some general comments and suggestions for the strategy going forward up to 2011; I will then propose some ideas about how the Council of Europe and NGOs can work more closely together.

3. But before that, I will briefly introduce the European Children's Network

NGOs are very used to working in partnership. EURONET itself is a partnership, or network, of 36 children's rights NGOs including national NGOs from many different European countries, as well as NGOs who are themselves transnational alliances. Together, we represent a wide range of activities including the direct provision of services to children and young people, advocacy and campaigning, research, training of professionals, and organising the participation of children and young people in practice and policy development.

EURONET has been working for over 15 years to promote children's rights within European Union policy-making. This includes campaigning to get children's rights included in the EU Treaties (which has been very nearly achieved a number of times, and we hope will be soon!), as well as working closely with the European Union Institutions around developing a children's rights strategy.

More recently we are very pleased to have been cooperating with the Council of Europe, in particular on the campaign against corporal punishment of children.

And as I said, NGOs are used to working in partnership – EURONET also cooperates closely with other NGO networks in our work at EU level.

4. I think it's fair to say that NGOs from many different European countries have been heartened by the Council of Europe's work on children's rights.

It's often very difficult to convince policy-makers in our countries to make the changes we advocate. It is very encouraging to see the Council of Europe speaking out so strongly on issues which are really important for children's rights, and which NGOs experience on a day-to-day basis in our direct work with children and young people. It backs our work with real international legitimacy.

The new Convention on combating child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation is one example of how relevant this work can be:

It is estimated that across Europe, between 10% and 20% of all children are sexually assaulted during their childhood. One of EURONET's members, my own organisation in the UK, runs the UK's child helpline, ChildLine.

In one recent year, nearly 12,000 children spoke to ChildLine about sexual abuse - an average of more than one full classroom of children per day, every day of the year. And that is just in one Council of Europe member state.

We urge Member States to ratify and implement the Convention as soon as possible.

So, without going into more detail on its various strengths, the Building Europe for and With Children Programme has made a number of concrete steps forward and is an excellent basis on which to build for the future.

5. I'd like to congratulate the Council of Europe on the draft strategy which we've been discussing here. It reflects a clear vision and sense of direction. We believe it can have a concrete and positive impact on the creation of a culture of children's rights across Europe.

We like a lot of things about it, but I'd just like to pick a few which will in our view help underpin cooperation between NGOs and the Council of Europe:

Firstly, the strong basis of the strategy on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The work of EURONET and its members is also firmly rooted in the Convention.

The focus on mainstreaming children's rights and coordination is also important and will continue to be absolutely key. The danger is always that children's rights remains in a separate silo, and not integrated throughout policy areas.

We like the relevant selection of issues for children's rights in Europe including the special focus on the most vulnerable children, such as children without parental care.

EURONET also welcomes the emphasis on children's participation. This is an area where governments have barely begun to understand what this really means in practice. This is also key area for partnership with NGOs.

6. However, one thing that we would like to see is an explicit commitment to continuing the excellent work that's begun in the campaign against corporal punishment; we've heard lots of references to this during this week but we'd like to see this included in the strategy.

EURONET also recommends paying extra attention to securing real political ownership and buy-in from all governments – both at a political level, and also to actually implement the strategy. This is essential for the strategy to have real impact.

The strategy needs sufficient resources and follow-through to make the most of each activity.

I'd also like to emphasise the importance of closer cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe. Both institutions can add a lot of value to each other's work. EURONET welcomes the cooperation agreement between the Council of Europe and the Fundamental Rights Agency which was referred to by the previous speaker.

7. Moving on to the question of partnership with NGOs:

I don't need to tell you that NGOs are an important source of expertise about problems and challenges on the ground, and children's perspective on issues.

The involvement of NGOs is also a crucial step in amplifying the impact of the Council of Europe's activities. For example, NGOs have been using the trafficking Convention to highlight the difference between agreed international standards and best practice, reflected in the Conventions, and what governments are actually doing, which has helped make a difference to the impact we can achieve.

So, two main areas of recommendations:

**(i) Firstly, make it easier for NGOs to use the Council of Europe.**

NGOs can help broaden the impact of Conventions, and stronger and more visible monitoring processes linked to the Conventions would be very useful. And how about involving NGOs more closely in monitoring implementation? NGOs can be the eyes and ears of the Conventions, and of other tools such as guidelines and judgements of the European Court of Human Rights.

NGOs are interested in information and research which enables them to identify how their countries are doing, especially in relation to others, so would welcome products such as indicators and comparative reports from the

Council of Europe. We can use this not only to highlight best practice and learn from each other, but also use it nationally to identify where countries are particularly falling behind.

The Council of Europe has also produced some really good publications, but most NGOs just don't know about them and they are not visible enough to those who might use them. These need to be better distributed. More translation into other languages would help.

**(ii) Secondly, engage more directly with child-rights specific NGOs**

The Council of Europe's formal structures for engaging with NGOs have a value, but we would argue they are not sufficient for the purpose of this strategy. National NGOs can seem confusing as there are so many of them, doing different kinds of things. But perhaps start by developing a database of national child rights NGOs to whom publications and even a newsletter – written in an accessible way – could be distributed.

At a European level, the European Children's Network and other relevant networks should be given observer status on all committees or working groups addressing children's rights-related topics. We have a whole pool of members to draw from to ensure that the right organisations with the right expertise can come to input on the subject in question.

EURONET also welcomes the idea of a children's rights platform, and we are committed to working in partnerships within such initiatives where there is a tangible outcome for children.

So, as a network which is campaigning at a European level, EURONET looks forward to working together with the Council of Europe around activities which support our common objectives, to share experience, and add value to each other's initiatives. Linked to this, before I finish, I'd like to briefly mention a campaign which EURONET is running over the coming months to call for support from EU decision-makers for combating all forms of corporal punishment against children in Europe. I hope you will all be able to support this; we've already been working with the Council of Europe to complement its own campaign on this issue.

And finally, to conclude: I think this conference is an excellent example of how we're already working together to develop a strategic vision for improving the implementation of children's rights in Europe.

Thank you.