

## **Speech**

**International Conference on Child Participation in EU  
Decision Making Processes – May 2019**

**Organised by the Romanian Presidency of the Council of  
the European Union**

**As a child, I wanted to change the world around me.**

**I had thoughts and ideas that I wanted to share with others,  
but I had no way how to convey these to decision makers.**

**It was virtually impossible to be part of the policy-making  
processes that affected me, as a child.**

**I was frustrated with these barriers that shaped the society I  
was part of - so at age 16 I made a decision that would  
shape my life, ..... and that of many around me.**

**I decided to go into politics.**

**Little did I imagine, that that decision would bring me here today, to address this very important summit, on behalf of Eurochild, as its President.**

**I wasn't the only child that felt ostracised, at that time.**

**I am sure that many adults my age, and even younger than I am, who are present here today, can identify with this.**

**Unfortunately, today, many children continue to feel the same today, and face the same challenges we have faced.**

**In real terms, there are virtually no adequate structures, that incorporate child participation in the process of decision-making.**

**Where they exist they are still in their infancy, and on a global scale, they are just a dream.**

**But meetings such as today's give me hope.**

**On behalf of Eurochild, I would like to congratulate Romania for giving visibility to child participation during its presidency of the European Council.**

**Congratulations for acknowledging the essential importance of child participation and for organising the first-ever Children's Summit under an official EU Presidency programme.**

**This initiative is a critical milestone in the history of the European Union ..... especially ..... since it is being organised during the week of the 'Future of Europe' summit in Sibiu.**

**I am so pleased that the Romanian Presidency is setting a precedent, which I hope, in the future, other EU Presidencies, will build upon.**

**Eurochild, and all of its 176 member organisations, want this summit to be the first step of many.**

**Eurochild would like to encourage all of Europe to reach out to all children, from all different backgrounds.**

**The right of Children to participate is key to achieving access to all of their rights: such as protection from violence; from poverty and discrimination; and, tackling today's environmental challenges, amongst others.**

**Fundamentally, child participation is key for our children to gain their rightful dignity.**

**Children are agents of change, in their own lives, the lives of our communities, our countries and our world.**

**Therefore, it is essential that the European Union listens to children, and ensures that children can influence decisions that directly affect them, and all of us.**

**Child participation in decision-making needs to gain traction.**

**Child participation must be recognised as fundamental, for children to ensure their full human dignity, their healthy development, and their holistic wellbeing.**

**Child participation is a two-way street, which benefits, not only the children but also society at large.**

**Through the work of Eurochild, we have witnessed, and are still witnessing this dynamic.**

**We have experienced and still experience, first-hand, the benefits of child participation.**

**Our children's council within Eurochild, gives this amazing organisation, incredible added value.**

**Their contributions inspire and inform our work. We are convinced that without the children's input we will definitely not be as comprehensive and effective.**

**However, although the benefits of child participation become immediately evident, we must admit, that there are still many challenges.**

**Unfortunately, cultural attitudes that exist, view children, as passive, rather than active contributors to our societies.**

**The paternalistic mentality, which is still present, many a time overprotects children, rather than help them reach their full potential.**



**Such cultural attitudes and paternalistic mentalities must be overcome. Our plans to establish child participation, as an integral part of a structured ongoing process, to empower our children to become active citizens, critical thinkers and contributors to our societies, cannot continue to be hindered.**

**Children are game changers.**

**Children have the potential to be effective, and most essential contributors.**

**Let's be the generation to unleash this potential for the benefit of our human family.**

**However, we must ensure, that we do not opt for tokenism, instead of meaningful, and purposeful child participation processes.**

**To truly achieve this, we need the political will of our politicians, authorities and decision makers.**

**Then, we need to adopt a comprehensive approach, that ensures inclusion and equality for all.**

**We need to determine how child participation contributes towards the development of relevant strategies, policy objectives, design and implementation.**

**We also need to make sure, that these determinants are optimised, so that the input from children is used in the best possible way.**

**I am sure that you all realise, that we are at a critical juncture, in child participation history.**

**Child activists like Greta Thunberg; Malala Yousafzai; the 'March for Our Lives' ..... the student-led demonstrations in support of stronger gun violence prevention measures; the youth climate change protests and other instances of children and youth activism in our times, are highlighting the value added that child participation brings to our communities, countries and our world.**

**Child participation strengthens democracy.**

**Child participation instils in children the necessary empowerment, resilience, knowledge and insight to strive for the wellbeing of our societies.**

**Child participation will also better equip our children, to engage with political actors.**

**Child participation will secure the take-up of decision-making positions, and leadership roles for our children, as second to nature.**

**In a world which has become so uncertain ..... where humanity has become so suspicious, we need wise and astute leadership.**

**We need our children to be resilient, wise and determined to lead, to overcome the challenges, and to be innovative.**

**Children will definitely become active citizens, that bank on critical thinking to challenge norms, and to bring about the much-needed, ongoing, positive change.**

**Child participation is the proactive approach that keeps our societies relevant for today and tomorrow.**

**We must not think of our children as the future. They are also our present, as fellow citizens and our present, valued contributors.**

**Child participation in decision-making, needs to become a reality today and not in the future.**

**Governments are obliged to move in this direction.**

**With almost universal ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, governments have a duty to ensure that children and young people's voices are heard, and their views acted upon.**

**This convention may have been ratified by all EU member states, but we must question the real progress we actually made in this respect.**

**Therefore, we must ask ourselves: Did we truly fulfil this obligation, or did we only scratch the surface in terms of implementing our responsibility and our commitment towards children's rights?**

**We need to be bold.**

**We need to be sincere.**

**We must ask ourselves: Have we done our duty towards our children and the whole of our human family?**

**Eurochild hopes that other EU presidencies follow the example set by the Romanian government and keep children, and specifically child participation, firmly placed on their agenda.**

**I urge our European family of nations to commit to this responsibility, and place children's rights at the top of the agenda ..... as the norm and not the exception.**

**Every forthcoming EU presidency should have the political will, to organise similar conferences and events, to keep reminding us adults of our commitments, and obligations towards our children.**

**I urge our authorities to keep themselves on their toes, to carry their responsibility towards our children effectively.**

**I truly dream that we can work together, to make Europe the model of child participation, for other regions of the world to follow.**

**We already know the way.**

**Guidelines on how to ensure child participation do exist and are accessible.**

**Let's build on the positive experiences of child participation that already exist all across Europe.**

**Last year's Eurochild conference in Opatija, organised together with children, was just one example.**



**Undoubtedly, during this summit, we will hear other good practices from the national level. The European Union is not new to dialogue. It has organised a structured dialogue for young people, which we can learn so much from.**

**However, Eurochild would like to see future Trio Presidencies taking more systematic steps to involve children ..... asking what matters to them ..... and debating issues so that children will make meaningful contributions to policies.**

**Let me also take this opportunity, on behalf of Eurochild, to acknowledge the important work of UNICEF; the European Parliament Intergroup on Children's Rights (in particular Anna-Maria Corazza Bildt as child rights coordinator); The Learning 4 Wellbeing Foundation and its ground-breaking work in facilitating dialogue between children and adults, and all the children's rights communities at international, national and community level.**

**All this shows us that we truly know the way.**

**We have the experience ..... and we have the expertise .....  
and we have the wisdom of our children.**

**In this important year of change in our European Union, we must celebrate what we have achieved together.**

**We must reinforce each other's efforts to ensure our next European leaders harness the extraordinary energy and clear ideas, that come from involving and engaging children in our work.**

**The upcoming elections of the European Parliament will thus be a critical moment for us Europeans.**

**We need to elect representatives that believe in children's rights and child participation in EU decision making.**

**In this regard, initiatives like the #VoteForChildren coalition campaign are of significant importance.**

**Children's rights organisations joined forces to recruit a new generation of MEPs to become 'Child Rights Champions' to protect and defend children's rights.**

**These candidates have pledged to listen to children's voices, involve them in decisions affecting them, and act on children's views.**

**Therefore, I urge all Europeans, voting in the upcoming European Parliament Elections, to vote for Child Rights' Champions.**

**Research on child participation in policy development has been undertaken, and a number of salient recurring indicators emerge.**

**At the heart of this exercise, are children's rights and a comprehensive approach that seek to champion true and effective child participation.**

**As key decision makers and political actors, we came here today, to reaffirm our support. However, the real work continues, when we return to our countries.**

**It is time for decision.**

**Europe is at a most important historical juncture.**

**Let's invest in a Europe that is truly living its values today and laying the foundations for tomorrow .....  
for a Europe that includes, and that works, for the dignity of all.**

**We must elect policy makers that believe in children and young people.**

**We must also reach out to all children, and to all young people from whichever social groups they may come from.**

**We must, in particular, keep central to our vision, those children that come from socially-excluded groups.**

**We must instil a social, economic and legal environment that promotes children and young people's participation.**

**Consultation with children, needs to employ a variety of approaches, as this ensures that children who use different styles of communication are included.**

**This consultation must take place in child-friendly safe environments.**

**Policy-makers need to ask the children for recommendations on what helps them to participate effectively as children.**

**Children themselves are the experts on their own participation.**

**Let's bring them to the tables with us.**

**Let's give them their rightful place.**

**Professional training must be given to adults tasked with securing child participation in decision making and policy development.**

**Dedicated programmes aimed at educating children about their right to participate are also critical.**

**The children's declaration that will be adopted at this summit, which includes such programmes, should also help to develop, and empower, the children with the necessary participation skills.**

**Our commitments to children's rights have been made, decades ago.**

**The 30-year-old UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines our responsibility to make sure that children participate in decisions which influence their lives.**

**The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights also reaffirms this.**



**On the other hand, in the context of the 2030 Agenda, children's participation is crucial for the successful implementation of the SDGs and for achieving a sustainable future for all.**

**We need to walk the talk!**

**The time has come to effectively implement these commitments and to translate them into an inclusive approach that gives children what is rightfully theirs.**

**Our politicians and our authorities can make all this happen.**

**Let's make this year a special year. Let's truly celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the CRC.**

**On concluding, I now wish to address myself to our children present here.**

**Dear children, please remember that you have a right to make your voice heard and a right to be listened to.**

**These are rights that are yours, and that no one can take them away from you.**

**Every single one of you has something to offer, and we are here today to make sure that you achieve these goals.**

**Please be the agents of change, to our world.**

**Our Europe needs you.**

**Our World Needs You.**

**Our Human Family needs you.**

**We need you to be our activists.**

**We need you to be our effective leaders, of our nations tomorrow.**

**You are our hope, for inclusion, for equality, for social justice, and peace.**

**Thank you.**

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