

**Eurochild  
World Children's Day 2020  
Webinar 3  
Why and how does protecting children's rights strengthen our democracies?  
Introductory Remarks  
Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca  
20<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

Today we commemorate the 31<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the most widely ratified convention in history, the UN Convention for Children's Rights.

The UNCRC was built on the Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924, which was then, adopted in an extended form by the United Nations in 1959.

From a historical perspective we know that Children's Rights have been on the international agenda for a long time.

The commemoration of the UNCRC provides us with the opportunity to reaffirm that Children's Rights are also founded on the Declaration of Human Rights.

Today, therefore we must acknowledge not only the fact that Children's Rights are Human Rights, but also safeguarding them, is fundamental to effective and healthy democracies.

This important discussion today, comes at a time when serious concerns are rising across Europe.

The rise of anti-child rights movements is a reality. The fact that they are gaining much support is worrying.

Anti-child rights movements are abusively taking to social media and using fake news to be able to get their messages across. They are threatening not only children's rights, but also threatening human rights and our democracies.

I call upon all democratic governments to rise up to their responsibility to support the plight of child rights organizations, to put a stop to such anti-democratic behavior.

Governments cannot be complacent on such misdemeanors.

As democratic societies and democratic states we need to unite against this terrible threat to our children's potential and future.

Children have rights, which have been ratified by all EU member states and are part and parcel of the acquis of the European Union.

Our governments and authorities have the direct responsibility to ensure that children are acknowledged as valued rights holders in our societies.

**Child participation** is important. It must be safeguarded, promoted and encouraged, as it **is an inherent part of strengthening our democracies.**

From Eurochild's very own experience, from recent consultations with children, from across Europe, children clearly spoke of their involvement in decision-making processes.

Children have stated that they yearn to have their opinions heard by decision-makers.

The **Europe Kids Want Survey** indicated that **43.2% of respondents** clearly stated that ***they are unhappy with the way cities or towns engage with them.***

Eurochild, is also getting reports of child rights defenders, being told to shut up when speaking, such as in city councils.

Findings by a Eurochild report, which was published this week, titled: **‘Growing up in lockdown: Europe’s children in the age of Covid-19’**, highlights that children’s voices remain underrepresented in decisions taken by governments.

This report by member organisations from 25 European countries, finds that only 2 countries out of the 25 safeguard the right to child participation. While another 7 countries stated that child participation is safeguarded in a reasonable way.

Eurochild believes that, **to ensure the success of the recovery process, it is necessary that children are recognized and acknowledged as valued partners.**

**It is a complete undemocratic misconception to perceive children as passive citizens.**

**Children are part of our present society and very soon will become tomorrow’s leaders.**

**Child participation is needed to re-build responsible, sustainable, resilient and democratic communities and societies.**

**We need to ensure that their voices and their rights are at the heart of all recovery strategies and plans.**

I urge our decision makers to involve children and young people in global, regional, national and local policy dialogues.

I urge the EU to set up the proper mechanisms to enable children to participate in its decision-making processes.

Child participation must structural.

We are looking forward to seeing children taking a central role, on equal footing with other demographics, in the Future of Europe Conference.

We are also looking forward to their participation in building the European Children's Right Strategy.

We believe that Europe can be the leading global Child Rights Champion.

**Children are important drivers of change. We need their participation** for the realization of inclusive, equal, equitable, resilient and peaceful societies.

However, **anti-democratic movements are threatening several European countries.** These movements are challenging our fundamental human rights.

The Covid-19 crisis, has increased traction for such a threat to our democracies.

We are also observing that the space for child rights organization is shrinking. We are worried, as it is leading to a backlash **in the protection of children's rights**, and subsequently leading to reforms being left on the back burner by some governments.

### **Child Rights activists are under attack in Europe.**

And here, I would like to convey our support to two Bulgarian Child Rights Activists who have been under attack by anti-children rights movements.

**Velina Todorova**, who is a member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which is the UN body responsible for the monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and our very own co-host today, **George Bogdanov**, who is the Executive Director of the National Network for Children in Bulgaria have been under assiduous attacks. These last two years **George** was so constantly attacked that he had to file several cases in court due to counteract against the hate speech, insults and slander he was subjected to. **George** suffered all this, just because he is a Champion and an Activist for Children's Rights.

I therefore would like to urge the European Union, national governments and other international and regional organisations such as the Council of Europe, to be more vociferous and effective, in keeping in check these anti-democratic movements.

I would also like to assure **Velina** and **George**, that we are standing by them, and with all Children's Rights Activists. We stand together. Nothing will deter us from continuing with our work to safeguard children's rights in Europe. We will continue to work tirelessly to address this democratic deficit, **as strengthening our democracies is not a choice, it is a must!**

Finally, I must reiterate my statement, that we at Eurochild, are optimists.

We have hope.

We have confidence in the European Commission led by Her Excellency Ursula Von der Leyen.

We also must also acknowledge the great work and the ongoing endeavours of the EU Inter Parliamentary Group on Children's Rights.

We have also great trust and confidence in Vice President Dubrovka Suica, who has also made time, to be with us today.

Vice President Suica, is showing great commitment towards Child participation and in Child-Rights' Organisations and Defenders.

Your Excellency Vice President Suica we are glad you are here with us today, and we are very keen to hear your words.

Your Excellency the floor is yours.