

**Eurochild
Breakfast Webinar 3
20th November 2020
08.00 – 10.00**

Why and how does protecting children's rights strengthen our democracies?

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Opening Speech

The 20th of November for 31 years have been celebrated as World Children's Day. 31 years ago the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child came into being. It is the most widely ratified Convention in the history of the United Nations and the International Community. It is a Convention which is also ratified by all EU member states and by all the states of the wider European continent.

- Eurochild is a European network of children's organisations with almost 200 members across Europe, including all the European Union (EU) member states.
- Our members have some serious concerns about **anti-child rights movements in several countries in Europe**. Particularly in countries such as Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Serbia and Slovakia, there are anti-child rights movements, and these movements are gaining a lot of support. They use social media a lot, and use 'fake news' to be able to get their messages across.
- Today is **World Children's Day** when we celebrate the 31st anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The right for children to participate and to information is laid down in the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** which has been ratified by all EU member states and which is part of the *acquis* of the EU.
- **Child participation** is important and needs to be promoted and protected as it **is an inherent part of strengthening our democracies**.
- From consultations held with large numbers of children (recently and across Europe) it is clear that children want to be involved in decision-making processes which affect their lives and would like to have their opinions taken into account by decision-makers. (figure from Europe Kids Want survey: *43.2% of respondents are unhappy with the way cities or towns engage with them*)
- But we also get reports that when children speak in public at the local level, such as in city councils, child rights defenders often get negative reactions and are told to shut up. Children themselves are experiencing these negative attitudes, which is difficult for them to deal with.
- The need for measures to straighten **media literacy** among children is crucial (*Milena will address this later*).
- Decision makers must involve children and young people in global, European, national and local policy dialogues. The EU must set up mechanisms to enable children to participate in its decision-making processes. **Children are important drivers of change** and should be empowered to participate in decision-making as key partners for the realisation of more inclusive societies.
- However, **anti-democratic movements are threatening several European countries** (including Bulgaria) and the European Union as a whole. Based on conservative discourses, false

accusations and conspiracy theories, these movements are challenging human and fundamental rights. Among other things, this includes the democratic principle of participation. The Covid-19 crisis has increased traction for such discourses and the threat they pose. There is a **shrinking space for child rights organisations**, which has led to a **backlash in the protection of children's rights**. This has led to child rights reforms lacking behind in Bulgaria.

- **Child Rights activists are under attacked everywhere in Europe.** Velina Todorova, a Bulgarian member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN body responsible for monitoring the Convention on the Rights of the Child, has been under direct attack from anti-rights movements in Bulgaria. Last 2 years George Bogdanov from NNC our co-host in this webinar was attacked constantly by these groups and there are several filed cases from him in the court of hate speech, insult and slander. These movements are generally very well informed and aware of what is happening at the international and national level and of the functioning of the international bodies and they never miss opportunities to attack.
- **The protection of the rights of the child, including the rights of the child to participate in political and democratic life, are central objectives of the EU and key features of its identity.** Therefore, the EU as well as other international organisations, including the Council of Europe and UN bodies, need to step up efforts to ensure that children's rights are protected and enforced.