

Welcoming Speech Reinhold Müller, Warsaw Conference 10.-11.12.2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cordially welcome you to the European conference which the European Federation for Street Children jointly organizes with its Polish member organization Society of the Friends of the Children (TPD) and which deals this year with the issue of: « Child Poverty and Drug Addiction: Challenges and Lessons in Central and Eastern Europe to improve the dialogue with the EU institutions on a Child inclusive Health Policy ».

I would like to welcome in particular Mr. Krzysztof Stanowski, Vice Minister of National Education and Mrs. Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, Member of the Polish Parliament whose presence shows the strong commitment that both the Polish government and the Polish Parliament has according to both the issues involving child poverty and the strong need to battle against the risks of drug addiction for children and young people. Thank you for honouring our conference with your presence. I would also like to welcome Mr. Piotr Jabłoński, Director of the National Polish Bureau for Drug Prevention and Ms. Mariola Gosłowska, the representative of the Prevention Department, at the Police Headquarters of Warsaw. With your presence and contributions we are confident that specific expertise on the situation of young people regarding drug addiction will be combined with the capacity to consider the problem in a joint co-ordinated approach bringing together the efforts of NGOs and State authorities. Furthermore we are glad to welcome Mr. Jacek Kozłowski, Governor of the Mazowieckie Province. Your presence highlights the fact that practical intervention strategies and approaches towards the phenomenon of drug abuse of children and youth should primarily be carried out in the community, and also on a local and regional level. Thank you for your presence.

Last, but not least I would like to welcome the representatives from the EU institutions. We are very pleased that Mrs. Agnes CSER, Member of the EU Social and Economic Committee and President of the Hungarian Health and Social Workers Trade Union, is able to join us tomorrow. Having contributed to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the EU White Paper "Together for

Health: A strategic approach for the EU 2008 – 13”, you are best situated to help us to better understand how to benefit from the larger strategic European framework in the field of health policy to improve the fight against drug addiction of children and youth on the level of the Member States in Central and Eastern Europe. Thank you for honouring our conference with your presence.

The same applies to Mr. Andrzej Kośnikowski from the European Commission who works as a Policy Officer at the Anti-Drugs Policy Coordination Unit of the Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security. With your competence in the central policy unit of the Commission related to the problems we are dealing with at this conference, you will certainly facilitate our attempts to understand in concrete terms how the *‘European Action on Drugs’* can be used both by national and local authorities as well as NGOs active in the field; and this to improve the situation of vulnerable children and youth in Central and Eastern Europe facing the horrible threat of drugs addiction.

I also give my most cordial regards to President Wiesław Kołak, President of TPD and his collaborators. Your sensibility to the issue of drug abuse by children and youth and your conviction that the problems linked to this phenomenon must also be tackled on a European level in addition to the field work in the national context of your country, made this important conference possible in such a short period of preparation.

I also cordially welcome the great number of speakers and participants representing Child Rights NGOs from all over Europe, in particular those coming from EFSC member organisations. The most cordial greetings to those of you representing welfare associations, local governments, child and youth authorities, universities and research institutes. Thanks to all of you for being with us during this conference to lead an open debate on a hidden problem which threatens in an existential way the future of our societies as it concerns those who will shape our future, our children and youth. Drug addiction of children and youth is a problem, which many politicians still tend to shy away from or simply ignore, as it is inflicting with the euphemistic visions to be politically ‘sold’. This applies also, unfortunately to many areas of the press unless the issue can be presented in a sensational way.

I certainly do not intend to present a detailed analysis of the situation, as I am not an expert on the particulars of the topic of drug addiction which we are currently dealing with today or in the future. But let me remind you of some key aspects of main topics which we will be dealing with.

Street children, due to their permanent lack of access to basic social, educational and health services are particularly vulnerable to drug abuse and health hazards. Drug abuse constitutes a serious threat to health and to the development of the child, which will hamper the child's present and future opportunities to be actively included in society. The determinant environmental, social and psychological factors that facilitate the vulnerability of children at risk to drug abuse are increasing in Eastern European Member States, where the economic transition has led to particularly precarious social structures and life situations. This has led to a generalised increase in drug consumption and trafficking and to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

In all EU Member States, vulnerability to the diseases linked to drug abuse is disproportionately affecting street children, in particular those with a migration background. This phenomenon can on the one hand only be successfully addressed through holistic and targeted policies implementing the EU principle of "Health in all policies", particularly in those policies which directly target the active social inclusion of children".

On the other hand, drug abuse and deviant behaviours should be addressed through concrete and direct intervention methods bringing together multidisciplinary networks of local actors, ranging from the health sector to the social services, the justice system and the educational sector; from both field based NGOs and public authorities.

Drug abuse also entails, for many street children and children at risk, the risk of getting involved in the illegal circles of drug selling. The implications to this are exposures to risky behaviours and the long-term social inclusion of the child, in a vicious circle of social exclusion. Criminal organisations that are increasingly crossing national borders should be the object of a combined action at EU level. Thus the problem should be addressed according to the European Commission White Paper "Together for health: a strategic approach for the EU 2008-2013" through a combination of nation-specific and

EU-co-ordinated measures taking into consideration the principle of subsidiarity. Nevertheless, policy co-ordination in the field of health may not be enough to tackle a major threat to health, requiring a continuous combination of local, national and trans-national measures, and investing in different policy fields such as health, migration, social inclusion, education and the fight against organised crime. A coordinated action is the elective way to keep pace with these changing realities and take active steps to build more cohesive societies. This can also contribute to ensure that the principles of access, opportunities and solidarity of the EU's Renewed Social Agenda are realised for all citizens, especially for the most vulnerable among which are certainly those children living in the streets.

The Issue paper for building a strategy on the rights of the child proposes the creation of a "European Alliance on Drugs", which will be analysed in the course of the conference as a potential means to fight the abuse of drugs among children. The impact of early prevention measures is absolutely crucial.

In this framework, I am confident that with the participation both of high level experts and practitioners, the conference will focus on a number of major issues of this topic which: will be dealt with in three sections:

1. Firstly, we will try to establish an analysis of the state of affairs. In particular of the social and political factors leading to the increasing vulnerability of children at risk to drug abuse, with a focus on the Central and Eastern European EU Member States. We hope to acquire in this section as well as in the following one some examples of policy coordination in the field of combating drug abuse from both a cross-sector and trans-national perspective.

2. In a more practice-oriented part, we will present innovative intervention methods towards children and youth concerned by drug addiction in both an emergency and long-term treatment perspective. This will also include methods and new ways of interaction between NGOs, national and local health authorities and the EU to overcome the vicious circle of child poverty and drug abuse through prevention and sustainable social inclusion. Case studies and field related reports shall contribute to an exchange of best practice.

3. The panel discussion will finally deal with EU health and anti-drug concepts with a special impact on the protection of vulnerable children. While being positioned between economic constraints and growing social marginalisation, we would like to examine how far they are realistically and strategically future-oriented in the light of the real needs in the field and the legislative national frameworks of anti-drug abuse interventions in the Eastern and Central European Member States. Of course the whole enlargement issue will always appear in the background of this debate.

Finally, we would like to present to the participants for their approval a joint declaration with strategic proposals both to the EU institutions and national governments for combating the structural origins of high risk children`s vulnerability to drug abuse, especially child poverty.

If thus we would achieve, to lead during these two days a critical and result oriented debate on the state of affairs conceiving core elements of a new strategy to improve in a sustainable way the protection of the most vulnerable children against drug addiction, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe by combining the policy design concepts of the EU in the health and anti-drug sector with a better co-ordinated public-private intervention strategy in the field, this would be valuable.

Again I thank you for being with us and

I wish the conference much success!