



Speech Reinhold Müller, Budapest Conference 24/25.09.2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cordially welcome you to the EFSC`s 2009 European Forum on Street Children which deals this year with the issue of: « **Migration of unaccompanied children: The increasing Challenge to a Social EU. The origin countries in Central and Eastern Europe after the first years of EU membership.** »

I would like to welcome in particular Mrs. Csilla Lantai Head of Child and Youth Department at the Hungarian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour whose presence shows the strong commitment that the Hungarian government has according both to the issues of unaccompanied children and the socio-political future of the new EU Member States in Central and Eastern Europe. Furthermore I would particularly like to welcome Mrs. Edit BAUER, Member of the European Parliament and Mrs. Agnes CSER, Member of the EU Social and Economic Committee and President of the Hungarian Health and Social Workers Trade Union. Thank you for honouring our conference with your presence.

Thank you as well to the other senior representatives from national governments for participating, Mrs. Nadejda PETKOVA, Chief Expert at the Department of Social Protection and Social Inclusion at the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour, as well as Mrs. Serenella PESARIN, Director General for the Implementation of Legal provisions at the Italian Ministry of Justice.

I also give my most cordial regards to Mr. Csaba OLASZY, the President and Bernadett Gelsei, the Director of our Hungarian member organisation Megálló Csoport. Their strong commitment to our cause made this important conference possible. I also welcome very cordially the representatives from the European Commission: Mrs. Marie-Anne Paraskevas, Principal Administrator at the Social Inclusion Unit of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and Mr.

Marek Stavinoha, Policy Officer at the unit for Fundamental Rights and the Rights of the Child at DG Justice, Liberty and Security. Your presence here shows the European Commission's appreciation for the European work done by EFSC and Megálló Csoport in favour of the most marginalized children in Europe among which unaccompanied children are represented as well as street children.

I also cordially welcome the great number of speakers and participants representing Child Rights NGOs among which I would like to particularly mention Mrs. Eva Kerpel, Hungarian Vice President of Missing Children Europe and Ivan Ivanov, Director of the European Roma Information Office. The most cordial greetings also to those representing welfare associations, local governments, child and youth authorities, universities and research institutes and in particular to all those coming from EFSC member organisations. Thanks to all of you for being with us during these two days in order to lead a critical and result oriented debate. A debate on the state of affairs and strategies to improve in a sustainable way the living conditions of unaccompanied and other marginalized children and also the shaping of the future role and policy of the EU jointly with the New Member States in Central and Eastern Europe in this field.

I certainly do not intend to present a detailed analysis of the situation. But let me just remind you of some key aspects of main topics which we will be dealing with.

As we have been stating in a number of previous conferences during the last years, street children are a growing issue, particularly, in the new EU Member States in Central and Eastern Europe - not only in Romania. But the phenomenon can also be perceived throughout a number of other Member States, particularly in the Mediterranean region, following the strong migration flows from outside of the EU and from Eastern Europe. Although there is a lack of concrete current data and facts on street children, our member organisations and other NGOs working in the field estimate that there are at least 150.000 - 250.000 street children, most of whom are living in the new Central and Eastern European Member States of the EU. Following a recent UNICEF report, approximately 1.7 million Roma children are not even administratively registered in Central and Eastern Europe. This ratio applies for a large proportion of street children as well, and is a reflection of social exclusion as

well as one of the root causes for its perpetuation from generation to generation. Unaccompanied children are certainly one of the core derivations for street children. Specific and targeted measures should be defined and implemented in order to improve the situation both of unaccompanied children in general and street children in particular, as it is clear that normal social intervention strategies are not sufficient or can hardly reach them. Most of these children live in the shadows and are strongly traumatised and socially excluded. They receive no formal education or health care and they are particularly vulnerable to becoming the victims of human trafficking, prostitution, drug addiction and crime.

EFSC's Romanian member organisation FRCCF and Terre des Hommes recently conducted several research studies on Romanian children found alone on the streets of Rome by the Italian authorities. Their research shows that more and more Romanian minors migrate to Italy unaccompanied (as well as to France and Spain) dreaming of, and being promised a better life. Unfortunately, they end up homeless, begging, shoplifting and prostituting themselves. Some of them become victims of child trafficking networks and may even disappear for good.

**Thus, what used to be a national level problem has become a European issue.**

Given this extremely alarming evolution, only a concerted and holistic European wide approach with the close co-operation of the EU with the Member States and European NGOs can contribute to solving the problem in a sustainable manner.

Given this situation we consider it very encouraging that the resolution of the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home affairs on the EU Communication "Towards a strategy on the rights of the child" dated 16 January 08 (2007/2093(INI)) "*Asks the Commission and the Member States to recognise the thousands of street children and children forced to beg as a serious social and human rights issue which infringes the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and also calls on the Member States to introduce sanctions against those responsible for the degradation of children forced to beg*" (paragraph 107).

We also note with great satisfaction that based on EFSC`s study on “European good practices regarding successful initiatives carried out by municipalities in Europe and aimed at the social reintegration of street children”, the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has approved during the spring session of the 27-29 May resolution 271(2008) and recommendation 253 (2008) on **“the social reintegration of children living and/or working in the streets”**.

Last but not least, we also welcome that the European Commission and the Member States have made the fight against child poverty a priority under the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (OMC).

Better inclusion policies for children, especially for those at high risk such as unaccompanied minors are a basic necessity everywhere in Europe. The EU has recognised this challenge for the first time in the Maastricht Treaty and set out in 1999 with the Tampere European Council, the common approach which is prevalent until today. This approach has been restated in the 2004 The Hague Programme.

In this context we have to consider that the new Central and Eastern EU Member States need to be given specific attention concerning child inclusive policies with special regard to the effects of migration. The main reason is that there are specific migration problems within these countries resulting to a large extent from the increased illegal migration through the external borders of the EU which is proving very difficult to control. This problem has exacerbated during the last decade and given the consequences of the Schengen convention has also acquired a European wide dimension. Nevertheless, the EU Member States most affected are facing very crucial challenges through this increasing phenomenon in the field of prevention as well as regarding the social re-integration of these immigrants in the society.

Thus, the problems of migration and integration, in particular of children are linked in an inseparable way. Please allow me some basic reflections on this:

It is beyond any doubt that these migratory flows are a byproduct of globalization and for that reason, we must be cautious not to lose track of the fact that their effects

should be dealt with at the roots - which means in a socially acceptable manner, with special consideration for the situation in the origin countries. We should not lose track of the fact that, when we set aside all of the abstract terms like “migration flows” and “immigrant quotas”, etc. and disregard all the facts and figures that we are essentially talking about **human beings**. There cannot possibly be any satisfactory set of rules from any nation state, either European or worldwide, which does not consider this fact as first and foremost. This is true mostly because of the **children**, who are the focus of all of our efforts. They are the ones who suffer the most from the countless interruptions and traumas brought about by the abrupt and complete change, the totally unknown and strange living conditions and cultures that they are plunged in to. The children are not usually in a position to express their fears and doubts. They are suddenly faced with conditions from the beginning, which require special levels of protection. Since 2003, increasing attention has been given to the integration of migrant children in their own right. Specific measures, namely in the field of education, are foreseen for them. More recently trafficked children have been given specific attention but children at high risk without access to basic services are still insufficiently addressed

The images of rebelling young people in the suburbs of cities across France some years ago, have once again shown us very vividly that inadequate and insufficient preventive integration measures at early stages will have not only have serious social and political, but also economic impacts. That brings us to the key element of the entire problem area: **Integration**.

Let me also highlight that there is a strong need to better synthesize the intervention methods carried out during the crucial emergency phases. For instance when unaccompanied children have to be rescued from a dangerous situation, and the long-term sustainable re-integration of these children into the society. We all know that motivation and love which these children often are experiencing for the first time in their life are substantial ingredients of any successful rehabilitation. There is a strong need for professional methods such as the mobile youth work or community based approaches to translate these values into a concretely successful action towards the young people concerned. Not to talk about the decisive element of a professional long-term integration of those high risk children with a migration

background in practical ways into the society. This necessitates specific innovative concepts, methods and curricula for vocational training. Here a joint action of social work , schools and enterprises is inalienable.

This applies particularly to the challenge of the increased 'internal' migration of Roma within the EU and in particular towards the countries in question and its strong exclusion impact on Roma children who are in an increasing way exposed to working or begging in the streets. Beyond any differences in methodology, all experts agree that this cross border problem must be tackled by long-term prevention and inclusion strategies carried out in close cooperation with Roma families and tribes. This is not easy given their specific ethnic and inter-cultural background. First of all a highly sensitive and appropriate sustainable schooling and re-integration of these children must be one of the priorities of a comprehensive migration related inclusion policy for street children in these countries - an approach which can in fact only be successful if both sides show the necessary pragmatism and will to build bridges.

Let us not forget that, according to their own comments, the young people in Paris and across France were more concerned with the **respect** afforded to them as **individuals** than they were with equality in their search for work and at the workplace. They primarily wanted the distain to end. That should give us food for thought.

Last but not least: Grasping the problems related to unaccompanied children facing us today will only be possible if all of the players concerned work together. This is true in each of your domestic situations, where social, educational and health authorities, welfare organizations, schools, labor unions, employers, churches and all other parties need to cooperate. The same applies at both the European and the national level.

Following these more general reflections, I would like **to summarize** some core aspects of the situation while putting it into the context both of the EU framework and the expectations of our member NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe:

The European dimension of the phenomenon of street children and the migration of unaccompanied minors is increasing and requires a joint policy action of a trans-national

nature, particularly at the EU level. The social aspects of migration, including the migration of children, are being increasingly but still not sufficiently thematised in EU policies, and they are a key aspect of the Issue Paper for building a EU strategy on the rights of the child. Street children are increasingly migrating from new Member States to old Member States. The New Member States are faced with the challenge of street children of third country origin. This migration demands new challenges for both new and old member states, relating in particular to ensuring access to services for children at risk and street children and a high quality of the interested services.

The challenges of the educational systems in light of the increased migration and mobility in the EU have been outlined in 2007 in the European Commission's green paper on "Migration and Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU educational systems". This document presents a number of important educational measures to foster long-term integration of children, illustrates in particular the hindrances posed by segregation and recognizes the importance of including second chance education as an integral part of the educational system. Nevertheless, once again the aspect of improving access to education for those children who are excluded from the system is not explicitly addressed.

Still, more efforts must be made in order to raise awareness at the policy-making level and to collect reliable and comparable data on children who are experiencing serious difficulties in accessing social services in the first place. EFSC member organizations report an increased dynamic from this point of view which is particularly affecting new Member States in Eastern Europe.

At the same time, national NGOs (EFSC member organizations) within the new Member States in Central and Eastern Europe are complaining about the fact that the degree of support from national bodies is not progressing sufficiently, compared with the support from the EU bodies, and not in line with the promises and hopes that occurred during the preparatory phase of the EU enlargement.

A lack of innovative models of public-private partnership has been noted by many of them. In particular new structures for the awarding of EU funding through national governmental authorities or bodies don't facilitate a straight advocacy commitment and

work of independent NGOs, particularly in `non-consensual` fields of co-operation with the governments such as regarding street children.

One core objective of this conference shall be to analyze the impact of the enlargement on policy co-ordination between countries of origin with countries of destination of migration, with a particular focus on strengthening the accountability of both sides. It will deal, particularly with the situation of child rights NGO's within the new EU Member States in Central and Eastern Europe after some years of membership. As a result, we would like to achieve strategic conclusions and advice on a new public-private partnership framework for NGOs in the new Central and Eastern EU Member States.

Here we are facing as always in social inclusion matters the challenge to translate – not only in linguistic terms - all these EU policy designs and declarations into reality particularly within national and local contexts. Facilitating this is one of the core tasks of EFSC as a platform between the EU and its NGOs.

I wish all of us lively and fruitful discussions during the next two days, and I hope we will be able to make a noticeable contribution to the same goals that the former Commissioner Frattini who launched in 2006 the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child expressed: "I am strongly convinced that legal migration and integration are inseparable and should mutually reinforce each other." This applies most strongly towards the children.

So: Let us start with the most vulnerable among them, those who are unaccompanied!

**I wish the conference much success!**