Towards an EU strategy on the rights of the child

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drawn up by Roberta **ANGELILLI** (UEN, IT) in response to the Commission's communication on an EU strategy on the rights of the child. The resolution was adopted by 630 votes for, 26 against and 62 abstentions.

Overview of the strategy: Parliament calls on the Commission to put forward a proposal to create a **specific budget line** for children's rights, in order to finance work to implement the Commission Communication, and child-specific projects, such as a European early warning system on child abductions. The budget line should also include subsidies for NGO networks working in this field and ensure children's participation in the work to implement that Communication and those projects. It also calls for an **effective monitoring system backed with financial means and annual reports** to ensure the implementation of the commitments set out in the Commission Communication and the future strategy on the rights of the child. Furthermore, the Commission should draw up a comprehensive EU **Child and Youth Report every two years**, beginning in 2008. Parliament applauds the Commission's plan to introduce an EU-wide child helpline telephone number. It calls for the following, inter alia:

-the protection of children's rights to be included among the priorities Multiannual Framework of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (the Agency), and for the Agency to set up a network for cooperation with international institutions, particularly ombudspeople for children and NGOs;

-children's rights to be mainstreamed in the external policies of the EU. The Commission should submit a report on the possible inclusion in all international agreements between the EC and third countries of a specific and legally binding clause on respect for children's rights, as defined at international level.

Parliament feels it is regrettable that not all Member States have yet established an ombudsperson for children's rights, as called for by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The EU should make financial support available to the European Network of Ombudspeople for Children (ENOC).

Violence: Parliament affirms that no forms of violence against children in any setting can be justified and that all violence must be condemned. It calls for Community legislation that prohibits all forms of violence, sexual abuse, degrading punishment and harmful traditional practices. Member States must either implement specific legal provisions on female genital mutilation or adopt laws under which any person who carries out genital mutilation may be prosecuted. Member States must also act against honour crimes, and raise medical practitioners' awareness of harmful traditional practices. A legal framework should be established on sexual exploitation and child abuse and judicial cooperation should be strengthened between Member States, Europol, Eurojust and all competent international bodies. Parliament affirms that the sexual exploitation of children should be considered equivalent to the crime of rape insofar as concerns penal sanctions.

It goes on to state its support for the commitment shown by the Commission which, in conjunction with the main credit card issuing companies, is assessing the technical feasibility of excluding websites involved in online sales of child pornography material to be excluded from the online payment system. Parliament calls on other economic players such as banks, bureaux de change, Internet service providers and search engine operators to take an active part in efforts to combat child pornography and other forms of commercial exploitation of children. One of the Commission's basic priorities should be to strengthen cross-border operations against child pornography internet sites with a view to making a commitment to closing down illegal websites.

Members call for the creation of an adequate regulation system in dialogue with providers, the media and industry, aimed at prohibiting the broadcasting of harmful images and content (including cyber bullying) and the marketing of violent video games. Parliament points with concern, moreover, to the growing problem of MMS exchanges of pornographic images, calling on Member States and Internet service providers, in collaboration with search engine companies and the police, to implement blocking technology to stop Internet users from accessing illegal sites related to child sexual abuse.

Sex tourism involving children should be considered a crime in all Member States and subject to extraterritorial criminal laws. Any citizen of the Union committing a crime in a third country should be dealt with under a single set of extraterritorial criminal laws applicable throughout the EU.

Poverty/Discrimination: 19% of children in the EU live below the poverty line and assistance measures must therefore be taken, including measures to support their families. Member States must adopt ambitious targets for reducing - and eventually eradicating - child poverty, and perform their duty to assist all children against the risks of malnutrition, disease, ill-treatment and abuse, whatever their social and/or legal status or that of their parents. Roma children and children belonging to other national minorities in particular should be covered by targeted measures, in particular with a view to ending the discrimination, segregation, social and educational exclusion of which they are often victims. Parliament takes the view that the EU should set itself the objective of ensuring that there are no homeless children or street children in the EU, calling for appropriate measures to be taken to assist homeless children, since most of them are badly traumatised and socially excluded. It asks for consideration to be given to the possibility of devising a Community instrument on adoptions, that improves the quality of care with regard to information services, the preparation of international adoptions, the processing of international adoption applications and post-adoption services.

Child labour: it is essential to ensure that those children who are legally old enough to be in employment are remunerated on the basis of equal work for equal pay. The Commission must ensure that deliberations by human rights committees set up under trade and cooperation agreements focus on the problem of child labour. Products being sold in the EU may be produced by child labour. The Commission is asked to implement a mechanism by which victims of child labour can seek redress against EU companies in the national courts of the Member States. It is also asked to enforce supply-chain compliance and especially to come forward with mechanisms that make the main contractor liable in the EU in cases of violation of UN conventions on child labour in the supply chain.

Children in armed conflicts: MEPs call for measures to protect child soldiers and victims of war.

Lastly, MEPs call for very specific measures to ensure that all children are registered at birth, making it, a basic legal right such as obtaining a nationality or an identity at birth.