Towards an EU strategy on the rights of the child

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PURPOSE: to present an EU strategy on the rights of the child.

CONTENT: the purpose of this Communication is to propose the establishment of a comprehensive EU strategy on the rights of the child.

The EU, and its Member States, are bound to respect the rights of the child under international and European treaties – in particular the UNCRC; the Millennium Development Goals and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). In March 2006, the European Council requested the Member States to take the necessary measures to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty and to give all children equal opportunities regardless of their social background. This Communication gives effect to these decisions. The strategy is structured around seven specific objectives, each supported by a series of actions. In brief they are:

1) **Capitalising on existing activities while addressing urgent needs:** The Commission will follow-up its Communication on fighting trafficking in human beings; the Open Method of Co-ordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusions; the strategic partnership with the International Labour Organisation to fight child labour; and the EU guidelines on children in armed conflicts. In particular, the Commission will: attribute one single six digit telephone number within the EU for child help lines and one for child hotlines dedicated to missing and sexually exploited children; support the banking sector and credit card companies to combat the use of credit cards for purchasing sexual images of children on the internet; launch an Action Plan on Children in Development Co-operation; and promote a clustering of actions on child poverty in the EU.

2) **Identifying priorities for future EU action:** The Commission intends to analyse what it is that hinders children enjoying their full rights. The assessment will be updated every five years. It will tackle specific, critical areas rather than attempting to cover all areas of relevance. Concretely, the Commission will: assess the impact of existing EU actions affecting children's rights; issue a consultation document to identify future actions; and it will collect comparable data on children's rights.

3) **Mainstreaming children's rights in EU actions:** All internal and external EU policies must respect children's rights in accordance with the principles of EU law and provisions. The strategy will mainstream children's rights when drafting EU legislative and non-legislative actions that may impact upon children.

4) **Establishing efficient coordination and consultation mechanisms:** The Commission will seek to strengthen co-operation among the main stakeholders and make optimal use of existing networks and international organisations or bodies involved in children's rights. The purpose of this action will be: to bring stake holders together in a European Forum for the Rights of the Child; to set up a web-based discussion and work platform; to involve children in the decision-making process; to set up a Commission Inter-service Group; and to appoint a co-ordinator for the rights of the child.

5) **Enhancing capacity and expertise on children's rights:** All actors involved in implementing and mainstreaming children's rights (concerning both internal and external policies) should

acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to help them with their work. To this end, the Commission will continue to make training available. Practical tools such as guidance notes and instructions will be improved, distributed and used as training material.

6) **Communicating more effectively on children's rights:** To raise awareness of children's rights, the Commission will design a communication strategy on children's rights as well as providing information on children's rights in a child-friendly manner.

7) **Promoting the rights of the child in external relations:** The EU will continue to enhance its active role in promoting the rights of the child in international forums and third country relations. The Union will continue to pay particular attention to the right of girls and children belonging to minorities and it will continue its on-going work on children in armed conflict. Lastly, the EU will also discuss the global study on violence against children which is currently conducted by the UN Secretary General's independent expert.

The Commission is committed to allocating the necessary human and financial resources in order to implement this strategy effectively. It will strive to secure the financial resources needed to fund the actions set out in the communication. In order to increase transparency the Commission will prepare an annual progress report. To conclude, the Commission calls on the Member States, on the EU institutions and on other stakeholders to take an active part in the development of this strategy in order to contribute to its success.