

## BUILDING A CHILD-FOCUSED REGIONAL COALITION

### Our “Mandate” from the 4<sup>th</sup> gathering of the Black Sea NGO Forum (2011)

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This document was based on consultations originating from a special panel organised at the Black Sea NGO Forum (2011) and represents a vision for a **child-focused, multi-country Regional Coalition** in the Wider Black Sea Region (for an explanation of the ‘Wider Black Sea Region’ concept please see the textbox at the end of this document).

The following individuals, speaking on their own behalf as Forum participants, contributed substantially to this paper (random order): **1. Nabil Seyidov**, President, NGO Alliance for Children’s Rights, Azerbaijan; **2. Bogdan Simion**, President, The Romanian Federation of NGOs for Children – FONPC; **3. Daniela Gheorghe**, Executive Director, FONPC, Romania; **4. Zini Kore**, President, BKTF Coalition, Albania; **5. Danjela Shkalla**, Coordinator, BKTF Coalition, Albania; **6. Mira Antonyan**, Child Protection Network, Armenia; **7. Sasa Stefanovic**, Network of Civil Society Organizations for Children in Serbia (MODS), Serbia; **8. Mariana Ianachevici**, President, Alliance of Active NGOs in the Field of Social Protection of Family and Child - APSCF, Moldova; **9. George Bogdanov**, National Network for Children Bulgaria; **10. World Vision** child protection experts from the following World Vision offices: Albania (Dea Haxhi), Armenia (Grigori Grigryants and Romanos Harutyunyan), Azerbaijan (Naila Mustafayeva), Cyprus (Jocelyn Penner and Eve Jolly), Georgia (Tamar Aleksidze), Romania (Andy Guth and Daniela Buzducea) and Serbia (Tijana Moraca).

Between November 2011 and April 2012 several rounds of consultations were conducted and the document was discussed in board meetings or general assemblies of the above-mentioned national coalitions. These decision-making fora decided that the document stands as a significant basis for collective engagement. As a step to formalize their decision to cooperate in a regional coalition an MOU has been drafted and is now being discussed. In July the initially un-named initiative to create a Regional Coalition was titled **ChildPact – Regional Coalition for Child Protection in the Wider Black Sea Area**, after internal consultations based on proposals made by a branding expert.

ChildPact is now circulating its ‘Mandate’ to a wider audience, i.e. potential partners, donors, supporters, stake-holders. Feed-back from these groups is welcome until **1 December 2012**. Please channel your feed-back through the persons mentioned above or at: [mirela\\_oprea@wvi.org](mailto:mirela_oprea@wvi.org).

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## I. RATIONALE AND PROPOSAL

**Recent reports and empirical evidence show that in the Wider Black Sea Region the number of vulnerable children is increasing while the number of children in the general population has decreased sharply in the past 20 years!** The list of major child welfare and protection issues in this area is lengthy and includes: high numbers of institutionalized children; lack of preventive, early intervention and alternative services; weak systems to provide support to children who are victims of violence; non-functional juvenile justice systems; increasing numbers of working children, as well as children with disabilities and special needs; increasing numbers of street children; high numbers of children unregistered at birth; high numbers of refugee children living in inadequate conditions; increasing numbers of abandoned children; increasing numbers of school drop-outs; increasing numbers of children abandoned or 'left behind' by their migrant parents; increased child poverty, particularly among Roma and children living in rural areas; scarce access to services and protection of children from the so-called 'non-recognised entities'.

In the last 20 years governments in the Wider Black Sea Region have been striving to reform the child welfare and protection systems. However, reforms are incomplete or inadequate and this is the case not only in poverty- or conflict- stricken areas. Countries that have grown economically are also growing their numbers of institutionalized children! Very often governments and politicians commit to reforms by developing and approving new laws for children, policies, strategies and action plans. But implementation is most often hindered by the decision-makers' feeble political determination, translated in such "constraints" as inadequate funding, lack of human resources, an incessant redesign of public policies or overlapping political priorities. The lack of political will at the national level is compounded by global and regional changes in economic, welfare and employment policies and very often the external and internal factors that led to the public demand for reform are changing during the reform process. In the recent years, the economic crisis affected already fragile social systems, and children were among the hardest hit.

For all these reasons and many others, children in the region are in dire circumstances. In the **Republic of Moldova**, more than 100,000 children (or 18.3% of the child population) are labourers with 75,000 of them being involved in hazardous activities; the duration of their week can exceed 42 hours<sup>1</sup>. In **Bulgaria**, 6,899 children are still living in large scale institutions that are well-known for their harmful effects on children's development<sup>2</sup>. In **Serbia**, although the regulatory framework is in place and the number of institutionalized children is decreasing, in the recent years there is a growing number of children who remain 'invisible' - invisible in the welfare, education and health systems, in particular children with different disabilities, children who are not registered at birth, children from rural areas and Roma children<sup>3</sup>. In **Romania**, in the 1990s over 100,000 children were living in residential care institutions; at the end of 2010 there were still 69,920 children<sup>4</sup> deprived of parental care, out of which 41,775 (or 62.43%) were placed in family care alternatives such as foster care, kinship care and guardianship. Taking into consideration the decreasing child population, this actually means that reported against the general child population of the country, the percentage of children deprived of parental care remained at the same level (around 1.7%), despite reform efforts, as evidence of a weak

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<sup>1</sup> National Bureau of Statistics, *Working Children in the Republic of Moldova: The Results of the 2009 Children's Activities Survey, Overview*, [http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii\\_electronice/piata\\_fortei\\_de\\_munca/Munca\\_copiiilor\\_sinteza\\_eng\\_2009.pdf](http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/piata_fortei_de_munca/Munca_copiiilor_sinteza_eng_2009.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Presentation made by George Bogdanov, National Network for Children Bulgaria, at the fourth edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum.

<sup>3</sup> Presentation made by Sasa Stefanovic, Network of Civil Society Organizations for Children in Serbia (MODS), Serbia, at the fourth edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, General Directorate for Child Protection, 2010.

prevention system. **Azerbaijan** is home to roughly 3 million children. Various studies show that about 9,000 of these children are deprived of parental care and growing up in residential care facilities and about 50,000 children are differently abled, with limited or no access to mainstream education. In addition, each state agency maintains a separate child information registration system so that a holistic approach is practically impossible<sup>5</sup>. In **Albania**, 12% of children are exploited for child labor, 52 % percent of children are subject to abuse and 30% experience domestic violence<sup>6</sup>. In **Armenia**, 5,000 children continue to be institutionalized as a consequence of derisory alternative care, prevention and early intervention systems. The recent economic crisis brought forth a growing number of working children and children living in extreme poverty; current state support packages are inadequate for the needs of children and families<sup>7</sup>.

In this context, some professionals in the wider Black Sea argue that the concept of children's rights and their right of participation is generally not accepted by citizens and governmental institutions. This is why many in the region now fight for child welfare reforms as it is high time to help and push these governments to put forward practical solutions for all vulnerable children. Let us in the NGO field join our forces! Let us build a regional coalition to push stakeholders and ourselves towards effective and long-lasting results for all vulnerable children in all our countries!

## **2. VISION, OBJECTIVES, VALUES AND STAKEHOLDERS**

ChildPact will have clearly defined aims that will be relevant for all countries represented in this regional coalition. ChildPact will be a unified voice to promote the interests of children living in the Wider Black Sea area. In particular, Child Pact will advocate for child protection as described in the UN Child Rights Convention. ChildPact will represent the interests of those children living inside and outside of families who are most vulnerable and exposed to poverty, violence, exploitation, trafficking, social exclusion and lack of access to health, education and other state services. ChildPact will be formed by representative national coalitions whose main objective is the promotion and protection of children's rights.

### **ChildPact's principles and values**

ChildPact will always act in the best interest of children. ChildPact believes that all children have a right to inclusive education, that children should grow in their families, that they should never be discriminated against for any reason, and that boys and girls should never be favoured over their gender. ChildPact believes that all children currently living in institutions are entitled to alternative, community-based care and that physical punishment of children should be forbidden.

### **ChildPact's vision**

**Children in the Wider Black Sea area have their rights guaranteed and live in a society that not only protects them, but actively supports their development to the highest levels of their potential, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender or social background. The Wider Black Sea area is a prosperous area where children are considered the region's most important resource and development goals aim at creating a better future for them.**

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<sup>5</sup> Presentation made by Nabil Seyidov, NGO Alliance for Children's Rights, Azerbaijan, at the fourth edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum.

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2011, available at <http://www.unicef.org/sowc>.

<sup>7</sup> Presentation made by Mira Antonyan, Child Protection Network, Armenia, at the fourth edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum.

### **ChildPact's mission**

ChildPact represents the interests of the most vulnerable children in the Wider Black Sea area, be they from EU or non-EU Member States, in policy debates at national, regional and international levels.

### **ChildPact's objectives:**

1. Strengthen the role and capacity of civil society organisations in defining and monitoring child-related public policies in the Wider Black Sea area, by supporting their contributions to policy cycles and dialogues at domestic and international (in particular EU) levels, based on child participation principles;
2. Promote an enabling environment for civil society coalitions at regional and national levels, by building national-level capacities and advocating for sustainable funding mechanisms for such entities.
3. Raise public awareness of child rights and protection issues in the national and regional contexts and advocate for regional cooperation in identifying solutions to common threats to children's well-being.
4. Strengthen connections between national coalitions and promote regional cooperation initiatives to advocate for vulnerable children.

To meet its objectives, ChildPact will seek to collaborate and become a dialogue partner for the following stakeholders:

1. The European Union, acknowledging that the European Union is a regional stakeholder with significant capacity to impact children's rights. In particular, ChildPact will work in the context of three EU policy areas: Development, Enlargement and Neighbourhood;
2. The Black Sea Economic Organisation, acknowledging the role of this organisation in promoting regional confidence and cooperation as well as economic development opportunities that are favourable to future generations;
3. The Council of Europe, acknowledging its leading role in promoting children's rights and protecting children from violence (ex. 'Building a Europe with and for Children' Campaign);
4. National governments, in particular those bodies with responsibilities and activities in the fields of: children's rights, protection and welfare; human rights; and social and human rights dialogue with the European Union;
5. Eurochild, CONCORD, CRC NGO Group, CRIN and other international and EU-based umbrella organisations, in acknowledgement of their excellent work in this field.

## **3. CHILDPACT'S LEGAL STRUCTURE**

ChildPact will be a formally registered not-for-profit entity. The registration will be made in one of the founding member countries, according to local legislation requirements. To ensure EU-level representation, ChildPact may choose to be registered or represented in Brussels as well.

## **4. CHILDPACT MEMBERSHIP**

**ChildPact will be an official representative platform of child-focused NGO coalitions:** its members will be national-level coalitions with an interest in contributing to ChildPact's objectives and learning from each other. A country can be represented in ChildPact by one or several national coalitions that focus on any aspect of children's rights, protection and welfare.

A national-level coalition is defined as a group of non-governmental organisations that come together to work towards common goals. A national coalition enables its members to speak with a stronger voice on topics related to children's rights, development, protection and welfare. These entities have a structured format and democratic decision-making bodies that may include: a general assembly, an executive board, a treasurer and a secretary of the board. A coalition is different from a working group

(that can also include governmental entities, donors, etc.) or from individual NGOs that have in their names the word 'coalition' or its synonyms.

ChildPact can also have associate members such as: individual NGOs from various countries; 'families' of NGOs; Ombudsman offices; national-level networks and working groups; individuals with strong interests in ChildPact's activity field; and other entities with an interest in children's rights and well-being. Unlike ChildPact's full members, the associated members will not have voting powers and their access to ChildPact's services will be subject to ChildPact's internal decision.

Any coalition of child-focused NGOs from the above-mentioned geographic area can become a ChildPact member. Membership criteria will be based on the following elements: **1.** The interest expressed by the national-level coalition; **2.** A reasoned commitment evidencing the applicant's capacity to actively contribute to RC activities; **3.** Proven experience in working in the field of child protection; **4.** Ethical demeanour as evidenced by organisational records.

## **5. FUNDING MODEL**

Throughout 2012 World Vision International (WVI) made available some of the resources needed for ChildPact to be established. These resources included and were limited to: **1.** Staff time to coordinate the initial phases of this initiative. This included staff time at the regional level and staff time in the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Serbia; **2.** Resources to explore the interest of potential members to join ChildPact (i.e. resources to organise coalition-building seminars in the eligible countries, resources to formalize existing informal networks); **3.** Producing two baseline studies to learn about similar past initiatives and about the EU as an influencer in children's issues (case study on Romania's accession to the EU); **4.** Creating ChildPact's corporate identity and creation of a contacts database. If needed and based on existing resources WVI will continue to make such resources available.

In the long-term, the RC will need additional funding to cover various categories of costs such as: human resources; lobbying, advocacy and campaigning activities; research, data-gathering and evidence production; representation and stake-holder engagement. Various options can be envisaged for acquiring the needed financial resources: **1.** Membership fees; **2.** Grant applications for acquiring project funding; **3.** Budget lines in members' own budgets and project proposals; **4.** In-kind services such as member's staff time, resources and expertise.

## **6. GOVERNANCE MODEL**

ChildPact is and will be a democratic structure. The highest governing body will be the General Assembly that will approve the general directions proposed by the board of directors. The General Assembly will mandate a Board of Directors to develop the general directions into results-oriented goals. The Board will have a President and a Vice-President, elected or designated on a rotational basis.

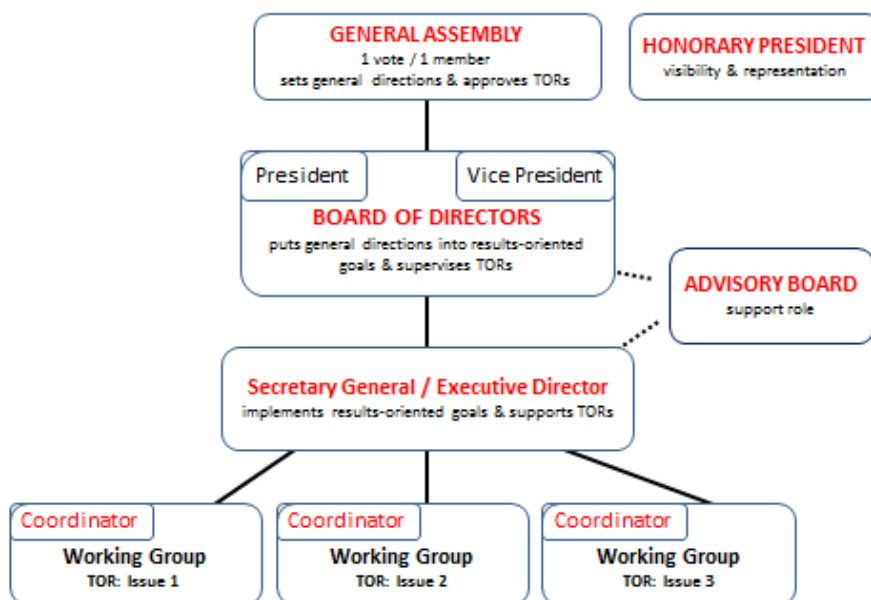
Ideally the above-mentioned goals would be implemented by a Secretary General or an Executive Director and his / her team of staffers, interns and volunteers. The Secretary General / Executive Director and the RC Board should be supported by an Advisory Board composed of senior and high-level / high-visibility individuals with proven records of dedication to children's welfare and well-being.

ChildPact's work will be carried out in working groups established by members interested in issues such as: child inclusion, early development, deinstitutionalisation (DI), support to families with children, etc. Each working group will have a coordinator and each working group will develop its own Terms of

Reference (TOR). The TORs will be approved by the board and they will be supported by the Secretary General / Executive Director.

Ideally, the RC will have an honorary president who is a very visible, respected and committed child rights promoter / defender.

For relations among these structures please refer to the proposed organizational chart below.



## 7. BENEFITS FOR THE CHILDPACT MEMBERS: SERVICES AND ADDED-VALUE

ChildPact might want to offer some of the following services to its members, its stake-holders and the general public:

1. Empower and build capacity of national-level coalitions to promote, monitor and otherwise influence child-related public policies at national and regional levels;
2. Advocate for the establishment of sustainable mechanisms of funding for its members, such as a Black Sea Trust for Children (accumulated by government and international donors contributions, as well as various fund-raising initiatives);
3. In relation to the EU, advocate for:
  - a. an EU standardized approach towards candidate and neighbouring countries that identifies particular children's rights , by developing and promoting minimum standards and guidelines, based on research of current legislation and good practices, to be adopted by national governments and regional bodies;
  - b. the EU to target children's rights as a specific policy area which is properly mainstreamed and adequately resourced;
  - c. the EU to increase its financial allocations for children's issues and make children visible in the EU budget, particularly in those instruments most relevant to the Wider Black Sea area (structural funds, IPA, ENPI, etc.).
4. Advocate for regional organisations to strengthen their child rights agendas in recognition of the fact that the young generation is our region's most important resource;

5. Conduct sub-region and region-wide child wellbeing studies and comparative analyses of child-focused laws, active measures and strategies. Develop a Regional Annual Report / Monitoring Mechanism on progress of implementation of commitments and legal obligations in child rights and child welfare systems within EU/CoE Action Plans;
6. Create peer education opportunities among different coalitions and facilitate experience exchanges on innovative solutions for child welfare system reforms, including for government policy-makers;
7. Coordinate with EU based coalitions (such as CHI, IFCO, CRIN) so as to mobilize efforts for lobbying on child rights issues;
8. Promote the active participation of children and create regional children's summits where children, professional and decision-makers can meet and exchange knowledge and experience on issues of mutual interest and issues important for the whole region;

(Open list - Other proposals can be included).

## **The 'Wider Black Sea area' Concept Explained**

The emergence of the Wider Black Sea Region was as a result of multiple developments including the eastward Enlargement of the European Union and various political, economic and social transformations in the countries surrounding the Black Sea and their neighbours.

In 1992, when the Black Sea Economic Organisation (BSEC) was created, it was agreed to extend the definition of the Black Sea Region beyond the littoral states and include areas of the Balkans and Caucasus. Hence countries like Albania, Serbia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova could be included in the BSEC membership. For the list of BSEC Members please see: <http://www.bsec-organization.org/member/Pages/member.aspx>.

Conceptualizing the area in terms of a 'Wider Black Sea Region' enables the inclusion of a wider array of child rights concerns to be addressed in a cohesive and coherent manner, instead of through unrelated and uncoordinated solutions. Many countries in the region have inherited broken child protection systems as successor governments from communism and reforms have been met with huge challenges. Also, many countries have a special relationship with the European Union, as Member States, Candidate Countries, Potential Candidate Countries or Eastern Partnership Countries. These elements and more are at the basis of creating a regional coalition as a dialogue partner for national, regional and EU-level bodies in which children's rights are concerned.