

May 17 2013

Directorate A, Enlargement Policy and Communications
DG Enlargement, European Commission
Rue de la Loi 170
B-1046 Brussels, Belgium

Re: Written contribution for the 2013 Progress Reports

ChildPact is a regional coalition for child protection in the wider Black Sea region that represents over 600 NGOs from (alphabetical order): **Albania**, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kosovo¹ (under UN resolution 1244), the Republic of Moldova, Romania and **Serbia**. Collectively ChildPact serves over 500,000 of the most vulnerable children in these countries. Established in 2011 at the Black Sea NGO Forum (supported by the European Commission and the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), ChildPact is meant to grow (various countries are now applying for ChildPact membership). ChildPact's mission is to represent the interests of the most vulnerable children in policy debates at national, regional and international levels. ChildPact has 4 main objectives: **1.** Strengthen the role and capacity of civil society organisations in defining and monitoring child-related public policies in our region; **2.** Promote an enabling environment for civil society coalitions at regional and national levels; **3.** Raise public awareness of child rights and protection issues in the national and regional contexts; **4.** Advocate for regional cooperation in identifying solutions to common threats to children's well-being. More on ChildPact: www.childpact.org.

ChildPact welcomes the recent EU documents that are concerned with children's rights in the European Union and abroad. In particular ChildPact welcomes and correlates this written contribution to: **1.** the EC Recommendation "Investing in Children – Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage" from February 2013; **2.** The European Council Conclusion on Preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting children's well-being from October 2012; **3.** The EC Communication 'An EU Agenda for Children' (with its special chapter on Children in EU's External Action) from February 2011.

As a **regional / multi-country** coalition of child-focused NGOs that includes both EU Member States (Romania and Bulgaria) and EU candidate countries (Albania and Serbia), along with Kosovo (under UN resolution 1244) and EU Neighbouring countries (such as Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova), ChildPact would like to emphasize the following aspects and recommend the following EU actions:

A. There are valuable lessons from the previous EU Enlargement that could apply to the current EU Policy on Enlargement today. Such lessons could increase the impact of child protection reform in the Enlargement countries and this is why it is important that they are acknowledged and utilized. The experiences of ChildPact members Romania and Bulgaria are a case in point. These

¹ "This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UN Security Council resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice's opinion on Kosovo 2008 declaration of independence".

countries' accession process vastly impacted child protection reforms, as the EU provided encouragement through various mechanisms. Two of these mechanisms played a crucial role in Romania for example. First, the EU maintained a unified voice about Romania's child protection reform efforts, coordinating its messaging and using the strengths of each EU institution (in particular the EC and the EP) to keep the issue current. A unified, coordinated voice allowed for credibility of message and consistency of engagement at a time when the EU's ability to provide a unified and coordinated voice on child protection reform in partner countries was less audible than today, when the Lisbon Treaty provides the platform to champion a unified voice for child protection in the EU and around the world. Second, the EU offered sustained support for specific reform themes that were the vital and are still present today in the present candidate countries (ex. decentralisation of child protection services; one central agency on child protection charged with the reform process and politically authorised to direct changes for various government bodies; successful service models brought to scale for nationwide coverage). However, in the previous Enlargement process various degrees of such support was granted by the EU in the various candidate countries in spite of similarities of situations. Based on the previous Enlargement experience, ChildPact believes that the EU should have a homogeneous approach towards Candidate Countries in what children's rights and protection standards are concerned, so that similar requirements and support apply to countries that experiment similar challenges in this field.

Concretely, ChildPact can bring the example of three such lessons, that could apply again:

1. Position child protection as a high priority on the political agenda

While child protection is reflected as a priority in inter alia EU external action including Enlargement, more can be done to position child protection as a high priority on the political agenda. A coordinated political agenda between the EC and EP that prioritises child protection can provide clear, consistent and influential messages to partner countries in the Candidate Countries. The creation of a long-standing EU rapporteur on children's rights would carve out a special place for the issue. As a cross-institutional focal point to track the reform process across the region, a rapporteur could coordinate funding and technical support, and give political voice to hasten impact-driven responses by partner governments.

2. Adopt a systems approach to child protection programming, strategy and funding

According to ChildPact's experience, current EU policy and funding mostly concentrate on issue based objectives, while a stronger correlation with systemic reforms or approaches is needed. A systems approach to child protection will acknowledge the multi-sectoral nature of child protection reform and help solve for political and administrative capacity. In a systems approach, there might be a greater focus on prevention, and the critical roles and assets of key actors responsible for child protection. These actors include government, civil society, parents, caregivers, families and other community structures.

3. Support the scale up of successful child protection services nationwide

Through financial, strategic and technical assistance, the EU could support service delivery models that align with government commitments, foster on-going partnerships between local authorities and civil society organisations, and collect relevant evidence for scale up.

B. Regional cooperation can be a key factor in accelerating the pace of the child protection reforms. As a regional coalition, ChildPact is best positioned to observe that there is a wealth of best practices and a great number of lessons learnt. It is obvious that together the countries in this region (i.e. the Candidate Countries and their EU neighbours that share a similar child protection culture) hold the knowledge to implement the needed reforms for the vulnerable children. But such best practices and lessons learned should be shared and the EU could have a crucial role in encouraging the countries to learn from each other and, in particular, its own MS with relevant experience (such

as Romania and Bulgaria), to share their transition experience in this field. Regional cooperation in child protection is important for at least 4 main reasons: 1) it encourages innovation in solving the complex problems that characterize the child protection sector; 2) it takes advantages of economies of scale where regional cooperation provides a platform to share scarce resources and for small states to access capacity and expertise unavailable at local level; 3) it creates political will as the region as a whole can bring along 'slower' reformers; 4) it builds trust for greater engagement: as a non-sensitive issue regional cooperation on child protection can be the precursor of new relations among countries. The EU should support regional cooperation and cross-country learning, in particular among the Candidate Countries and the EU 'new' Member States so that the lessons learnt in the previous Enlargement process can be made available to the current candidate countries.

C. Regional and national level civil society coalitions for children's rights are key stakeholders for promoting reforms and for the scale up of services. ChildPact members in the Enlargement area (MODS in Serbia and BKTF in Albania) and the European Union (FONPC in Romania and NNC in Bulgaria) amply demonstrate that: they strive to ensure that national investments and policies are efficient and cost-effective. Civil society organisations have a demonstrated capacity and an impressive motivation to deliver high-quality services and their willingness to take and handle risk provides an alternative when traditional approaches prove ineffective. Many services currently funded and / or operated by governments in Enlargement countries were originally modelled by civil society organisations before being transferred to government ownership. Coalitions of child-focused NGOs can contribute aggregate evidence about specific regions and trends. For all these reasons genuine policy dialogue and adequate support to civil society organisations and their coalitions can lead to social innovation and long-term results, while ensuring that national level reforms are driven by local needs and demands. The EU should acknowledge the important role played by the regional and national coalitions of child-focused NGOs and support, financially and otherwise, their missions in the Candidate Countries.

Conclusions

In addition to the written feed-back provided by ChildPact members in Albania (BKTF) and Serbia (MODS) provided to the in-country EC Delegations (and here within enclosed for quick reference), ChildPact takes this opportunity to high-light several aspects that can contribute to improved progress in the next reporting period. While ChildPact members MODS and BKTF look specifically at shortcomings observed in the reporting period, ChildPact takes a forward-looking approach. Thus, ChildPact calls the EC attention on the following aspects:

1. There are valuable lessons from the previous EU Enlargement that could apply to the current EU Policy on Enlargement today. The EU should encourage initiatives that makes these lessons and best practices available for improved reform design and implementation.
2. Regional cooperation can be a key factor in accelerating the pace of the child protection reforms. The EU should encourage and support, financially and otherwise, regional cooperation initiatives that are meant to bring together governments and civil society organisations willing to work together to address regional challenges and learn together and from each other.
3. Regional and national level civil society coalitions for children's rights are key stakeholders for promoting reforms and for the scale up of services. The EU should use its influence and funding to support the ambitious missions that these coalitions have in improving children's lives in the Candidate Countries.

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