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Federica Mogherini

High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Johannes Hahn

Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

REPRESENTED COALITIONS:

ALBANIA, UNITED FOR CHILD
CARE AND PROTECTION (BKTF)

ARMENIA, CHILD PROTECTION
NETWORK

AZERBAIJAN, NGO ALLIANCE
FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA,
STRONGER VOICE FOR
CHILDREN

BULGARIA, NATIONAL
NETWORK FOR CHILDREN

GEORGIA, NGO COALITION FOR
CHILD AND YOUTH WELFARE

KOSOVO, COALITION FOR CHILD
PROTECTION (KOMF)

MOLDOVA, ALLIANCE OF
ACTIVE NGO'S IN SOCIAL
PROTECTION OF FAMILY AND
CHILD (APSCF)

ROMANIA, FEDERATION OF
NGOS FOR THE CHILD (FONPC)

SERBIA, NETWORK OF CIVIL
SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FOR
CHILDREN (MODS)

Re: Towards a new European Neighbouring Policy – ChildPact's contribution to the Consultation

Dear Mrs. Mogherini,

Dear Mr. Hahn,

we write this letter with the belief that we can provide inspiring answers to some of the questions highlighted by the Joint Consultation Paper "Towards a new European Neighbouring Policy".

ChildPact and its members from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova welcome the joint initiative of the European Commission and of the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to reframe the current European Neighbouring Policy (ENP), as well as the reflective discussion they have opened to all the interested stakeholders who were looking forward to advance the results the EU has been harvesting in collaboration with its partner countries, in the Eastern Partnership area.

Based on our overall experience in the East Neighbouring countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova), in the EU Enlargement candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia) and in two of the EU Member States (Bulgaria and Romania), through the extensive work of our members and of the 600 child-focused CSOs they represent, we call on the EU to consider the following suggestions:

- A. The ENP should pursue the fostering of deeper relationships with the EU's Eastern partners by promoting and supporting regional cooperation endeavours. ChildPact argues that opportunities to pursue peace and greater security in the region should start with children. - Why?**

1. Because tackling the difficult should start with the lightest feasible steps.

Unlike delicate political issues such as democracy building or security safeguarding, regional cooperation on child protection, as a non-sensitive issue, can open doors of collaboration towards new relationships of trust between the EU and partner governments.

In the context of widespread instability and tensions between the Eastern partner countries, there is a new urgency to use regional cooperation as a means towards progressive and innovative tools to address the challenges that no one nation can solve on its own. In this regard, ChildPact argues that the survival of the state should not be the one and only criteria for regional cooperation¹. Instead, the criteria for regional cooperation should be the survival of its people. *ChildPact argues that child rights and protection is the most uncontroversial issue in the region. More specifically, ChildPact believes that if employed correctly, regional cooperation can manifestly change the lives of millions of the most vulnerable children across the Eastern Partnership region. Because the combination of knowledge, resources, capacity and ambition necessary to significantly help the most vulnerable children in our region are not found within one state, a cooperative approach could change the story for our most cherished and yet most vulnerable class of citizens.*

2. Because there's more non-threatening European legacy to be advanced.

Before broadening its spectrum of regional cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries and other regions in the world, the EU should not overlook the lessons learned during the previous EU accession process nor the transition experience enabled by the new EU Members States.

The protection of the rights of children is one of the most powerful EU Enlargement success stories². Today, Romania, one of the youngest among the EU Member States, is a powerful example of how far and well the EU-partner country engagement can go when the cooperation road is paved with political will. The EU's tools of engagement used in Romania's case offer a successful roadmap to encourage societal advancement in the Eastern Neighbouring area because all countries in the region express the political will to care for their children. Part of the formula for successful child protection reform during Romania's process of accession included the introduction of solutions by the Romanian Government and the EU's willingness to fund them and celebrate them. The EU supported some of Romania's most significant actions towards reform, namely: (1) a central child protection agency charged with the reform process and reporting directly to the Prime Minister; (2) the decentralisation of child protection services; (3) a plan to close each residential institution and not just to deinstitutionalize individual children; (4) building human capacity to ensure capability to create and run alternative child protection services; and (5) encouraging a cultural mind shift away from state sanctioned care through the largest social campaigns at the time. The EU provided encouragement through three different avenues. First, the EU maintained a unified voice about Romania's child protection reform efforts. It coordinated its messaging and used the strengths of each main EU stakeholder institution to keep the issue current (in this case, the EC and EP). Second, central to EU engagement on Romania's reform efforts was the role of the EP Special Rapporteur to Romania. The Special Rapporteur created and maintained a political space for child protection reform. *The story of the Romanian orphans is an aspiration of what is possible when multiple stakeholders from all levels of policy engagement come together to change the lives of children. Such a vocal EU legacy should be promoted in a region where children remain the most vulnerable category of citizens, facing abuse, trafficking, discrimination and predominantly, poverty. Certainly, the EU does not wish to have at its borders a desperate young generation of citizens growing far from European values, and being forced to ensure their survival by every means. Thus, through regional cooperation and through sharing learnt lessons and expertise the EU and its partners can effectively advance together on a road of collaboration.*

¹ 'Regional Cooperation in the Wider Black Sea Region: why successful child protection demands a regional response', ChildPact, available at: <http://www.childpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/ChildPact-Regional-Cooperation-Brief-April-2013.pdf>

² 'Welcoming Europe's Youngest. How the EU Accession Process Transformed Child Protection in Romania & Lessons for the Current Enlargement and Neighborhood Countries to Increase the Child Protection Reform in the Region', World Vision International, available at: <http://www.wvi.org/europe/publication/welcoming-europes-youngest>

B. The ENP should provide an ever more detailed framework for sector cooperation while explicitly deepening the focus of engagement on those country priorities that best serve the interests of the EU – partner government cooperation. ChildPact stresses that prosperity at EU's borders starts with the social and economic empowerment of the younger generation.
– How?

1. By adopting the most rewarding investment-return paradigm of action and promoting it in the partner countries

Investing in children's well-being implies greater democratic stability and economic development in the Eastern partner countries. On the long-term, care budgets are spared, a growing labour force is promoted, inter-ethnic dialogue is enhanced and the potential of social unrest are being tackled.

Research has shown that children who are abandoned, abused or severely neglected can face significant life risks that are costly to society, including lower earnings, poorer education achievement, higher consumption of health services through old age and greater risk of incarceration³. Thus, investments, particularly in early childhood lead to significant reductions in infant and child mortality, future criminal activity, drug use/abuse, and costs of social services⁴. Moreover, USAID, one of the most important donors in the region along with the EU, has shown⁵ that child welfare programs are among the most successful democracy-building programs that they have ever put in place. Advancing child welfare reform programs involves working with a wide range of stakeholders in the implementing countries, from local authorities, to governments, to media and civil society organisations. Furthermore, at local level, citizens perceive child protection reform measures as an immediate benefit brought to their community. USAID's experience shows that investing in children takes off as a grassroots democratic development where parents, professionals and bureaucrats join in dialogues and community efforts to ensure a better life for their children.

A whole new generation of vulnerable citizens is waiting for decision makers to shift their strategies of short-term investment for immediate gains. The EU should support the Eastern countries' governments in realising that children are one of the safest and most profitable bets in a long-term race towards prosperity.

2. By fostering appropriate results through applicable demands

Amongst so many development concerns that need political and economic commitment, the EU support could mean substantial added value to the Eastern partner countries if it enables those priorities which would not get a prime time attention otherwise. Thus, by tracing more explicit roadmaps towards progress through policy instruments such as the Country Action Plans, concrete advancement could be harvested.

³ Currie, J., & Widom, C. S. (2010). Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect on adult economic well-being. *Child Maltreatment*, 15, 111–120.; Fang, X., Brown, D. S., Florence, C. S., & Mercy, J. A. (2012). The economic burden of child maltreatment in the United States and implications for prevention. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 36, 156–165; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2011). *Child maltreatment 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm10/cm10.pdf>

⁴ Engle, P., Black, M. M., Behrman, J. R., Cabral de Mello, M., Gertler, P. J., Kapiriri, L., Martorell, R., & Eming Young, M. (2007). Strategies to avoid the loss of developmental potential in more than 200 million children in the developing world. *Lancet*, 369, 229–242.

⁵ 'The job that remains: an overview of USAID child welfare reform efforts in Europe and Eurasia', USAID, available at: http://www.eldis.org/go/home&id=57332&type=Document#VSPg_vmUcWl

From this perspective, ChildPact argues that the ENP Action Plans should expand the scope of the issues they are aiming to tackle, while creating a clear framework for progress for the partner countries. Furthermore, these issues should be personalised according to every country's needs. Child welfare and youth empowerment, nonetheless, should be a critical priority for every government aspiring to a prosperous society.

C. The ENP should continue to support an enabling environment for civil society action in the Eastern partner countries, considering that CSOs are vehicles of democratic stability, social diversity, government accountability and societal progress and involvement.
– *Who?*

Monitoring, capacity building and advocacy for improved quantity and quality of government sanctioned services is the mission of civil society coalitions/networks. With specialized expertise and the ability to unify opinions, civil society coalitions are well suited to play an important role in democratic governance. Particularly, CSO networks bring an essential added value to this reckoning in terms of innovation, expertise, information and political pressure that encourage evolution. *ChildPact believes that child-focused CSO networks are capable of promoting regional cooperation and European values through child rights advocacy, provided that these actors are appropriately equipped in terms of internal governance, funding, advocacy and communication skills. Even more, by advocating for the promotion of a non-sensitive issue such as child protection, CSO networks contribute to fostering democracy at local levels by empowering communities and implementing tangible changes in the lives of citizens. Furthermore, networks are present through their members at the local level and unified at the national level to encourage local government ownership while promoting consistent funding and adequate capacity building at the national level.*

ChildPact, the Regional Coalition for Child Protection⁶, is a network of 10 child-focused national networks from 10 different countries: **Armenia**, Albania, **Azerbaijan**, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, **Georgia**, Kosovo, **Moldova**, Romania and Serbia. Bringing together 600 NGOs, our members work with more than 500.000 vulnerable children from the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus areas. ChildPact's four objectives are: **1.** Monitor and influence child-related policies at regional and European levels; **2.** Strengthen the capacity of its members by actively supporting their expertise development, visibility and credibility; **3.** Advocate for regional cooperation at inter-governmental and civil society level; **4.** Raise public awareness of child rights and protection issues.

Thank you for considering our input!

Yours sincerely,

Mirela Oprea,

ChildPact Secretary General

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⁶ Find more information about ChildPact at: www.childpact.org