

**Presentation made by Valeriu Ghiletschi
at the European conference: “Stepping up progress
in combating violence against children”
held in Ankara, Turkey, 27-28 November 2012**

28/11/12

Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

I have been invited to address you in my capacity as First Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development of the Parliamentary Assembly and as a member of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. On behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly, let me say that we have continuously followed the work of the Council of Europe and its partners in the field of “integrated national strategies” - our Sub-Committee on Children was present at the 2011 Kyiv conference on the topic - and of course, we are amongst the main partners in the current Council of Europe ONE in FIVE campaign to stop sexual violence against children, that has already been mentioned at this conference. The network of contact parliamentarians linked to this campaign has by the way held its latest meeting only last week in Moscow.

In 2013, my Committee will be preparing a report that is directly linked to the focus of this morning's session on the reporting of the suspicion of sexual violence against children and its legal implications. In general, children's rights are a priority for the Social Affairs Committee and the

Parliamentary Assembly. In 2012, we have created the new function of General Rapporteur on Children currently occupied by Ms Rupprecht from Germany. I am personally working on a report on "fighting child sex tourism" that should be debated in Strasbourg in April 2013.

However, as national parliamentarian from Moldova, I have been asked to share with you some information about the situation of children in my country.

What are the dangers threatening children in Moldova?

As far as Moldova is concerned, you are probably all aware that my country has had a long way to go to improve the situation of certain categories of children and still needs to pursue its efforts.

Generally considered as the poorest country in Europe in GDP per capita, our country continues to face difficulties in building up strong public social services including child protection systems, but the situation is currently improving as my colleague from the Moldovan government who is here today, may wish to confirm.

Nevertheless, yet too many children in Moldova are in difficult situations. Here are some examples:

- Many children live in very poor families where they may be vulnerable to trafficking activities or threatened of being abandoned by migrating parents. About 30% of the people living below the poverty line are children. About 25% of adults of working age have left the country and, unfortunately, some of them leave their children behind without having sought adequate care arrangements. In consequence, many

of these children are deprived of regular access to education and health care.

- Many children without parental care – be they orphans or not - are still placed in care institutions, just like many children with disabilities and children who have been victims of abuse within the family. Unicef Moldova noted in 2007 that only 3% of institutionalised children were orphans, and around 83% of children still had biological parents or extended families and had only been placed “temporarily”.
- Many of the residential institutions and schools in Moldova are unfortunately still inadequately funded, and staff in charge of child care is not always sufficiently trained.
- The phenomenon of sexual violence against children largely remains a hidden one as reporting is not yet easy for the victims. In consequence, the victims are seriously affected in the long-term and abusers are not punished. During the last ten months of 2012, only 218 cases were officially reported. From these figures, we can see that, although reporting of violence against children is encouraged in my country today (as I will explain to you in a moment), there is certainly room for further improvements.
- We know that further improvements also need to be made concerning a better coordination and thus greater effectiveness of government services related to child protection. Yet more children could be efficiently protected from neglect or violence if reporting mechanisms

were yet more reliable and social services cooperated more closely.

Today, the authorities of my country are aware of these problems. Great efforts are made to provide better support to families and protect children, but these efforts need to be pursued and “stepped up”.

What is done to improve child protection mechanisms in Moldova?

However, in favour of my country, I must say that many efforts have been undertaken in recent years to improve the human rights situation generally and the situation of children in particular. This also includes the reinforcement of child protection policies and services, reporting mechanisms and inter-sectorial and interagency collaboration in favour of children:

- A national Action Plan on Human Rights 2009 – 2012 was adopted by the Parliament and is currently being implemented;
- The Lanzarote Convention was ratified by my country this year and the relevant laws are currently being harmonised, in particular the Family Code, the Criminal Code, and the Criminal Procedures Code which represent the legal framework for prevention and prompt intervention in cases of child sexual abuse ;
- In 2011, a **Cooperation Memorandum of implementation of the pilot project “Free, strong and protected – towards a better child protection system in Moldova”** was signed by many partners at different levels: the four competent ministries (labour, social protection and family / education / health / interior), the local councils of Leova and Orhei region, the National Centre for Child Abuse

Prevention and the Children's Rights Information and Documentation Centre of Moldova. The aim of this project is to define, pilot and promote multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary cooperation mechanisms for monitoring and preventing abuse, neglect, exploitation and trafficking and assisting the victims. Starting at the national level, these cooperation mechanisms shall now be largely promoted and translated into concrete action at various levels down to the local level closest to the children and their family environment.

- In the Ministry of the Interior and its Centre for Fighting Human Trafficking, a Department for fighting child trafficking and online child sexual exploitation has been created. Measures have been taken to improve cooperation with the judicial authorities and at international level. In 2011, the Centre for Fighting Human Trafficking has become an active member of the international working group coordinated by Interpol aimed at identifying children victims of sexual abuse.
- In 2012, concrete action has been taken in the framework of the national cooperation pilote: at the initiative of the ministry, interdisciplinary teams visited more than 7,600 children at risk within their families, more than 12,300 children left without parental care and more than 6,100 dysfunctional families.
- Prevention programmes against child sexual violence and abuse are increasingly being developed in the educational sector for teachers and school psychologists. Under the just mentioned programme, police officers regularly visit schools and holiday camps and organise training sessions - more than 8,900 of them in 2012 alone. The

objective of such training is to raise the awareness of children, teachers, social workers, health professionals and caretakers of risks and possible measures to fight child abuse, violence and neglect, and very concretely to teach children where to turn if they experience violence.

- **A second major measure reflecting true progress in child protection was taken in 2012: the first steps have been taken to elaborate the “Strategy and National Action Plan for child and family protection for 2013-2030”.** In this context, several new laws are expected to be adopted in the near future, in particular, the law on Special Protection of children in risk situations and children separated from their parents - by the way, under this law, cooperation between different public, judicial and social services will be made mandatory;
- A specific institution has been created in recent years: the so-called National Centre for Child Abuse Prevention which strongly contributes to research and policy-design in this field and to promoting preventive measures across the country;
- Finally, and next to the activities developed by public authorities, I am glad to say that there is an increasingly active NGO sector in the country leading many activities in this field, such as the “Bad Touch” campaign launched by the National Centre for Child Abuse Prevention in 2011 with numerous media partners;
- As insinuated earlier, reporting mechanisms regarding violence against children have been improved in recent years:

- Professionals of different backgrounds, such as doctors, teachers or police officers, are obliged to report any cases of violence against children on the basis of clear evidence, and advised to alert the social services to take action for protecting child victims – very concretely, the Moldovan Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, in February 2012, released the instructions for intervention in cases of abuse destined to social workers in social and family protection services, family doctors and other professionals. In these instructions social workers are advised to keep records of the families where a risk of conflict or domestic violence was identified;
- In many places, such as schools, children would find confidential persons to turn to. Schools also keep record of dysfunctional families, one parent families, children left within extended family or showing poor school attendance;
- Emergency response services exist in many places, not in every village of course, but at least in every one of the "rayons" which is the regional authority regrouping a number of towns or rural communities;
- Several NGOs run telephone helplines for children which are made known via leaflets, announcements and other forms of public communication, including via the Ombudsman for Children appointed by the national parliament. Furthermore, the government is currently preparing a toll-free national helpline for children;

- Especially due to recent communication measures, there is greater awareness for and thus attention to the signs of violence against children which leads to an increasing number of cases being reported, though this certainly needs to be further encouraged.

In conclusion, I may say that child protection policies have truly been “stepped up” in Moldova in recent years. We expect that, in particular the inter-sectorial cooperation mechanisms, once put in place at various levels, will have a significant effect in fighting different forms of violence against children.

In the meantime, the following action still needs to be reinforced:

- Improve the economic situation of the country to provide public authorities with more resources for building up child protection systems;
- Raise further awareness of the particular vulnerability of certain categories of children: poor and discriminated children, abandoned children, children with disabilities and children having experienced violence of any kind;
- Learn from “good practice” elsewhere, including concerning very pragmatic approaches such as campaigns, training or reporting mechanisms.

Concluding remarks

In the light of this situation, where activities are being developed but still need to be reinforced, I am – as parliamentarian, as Moldovan citizen and as a father and grandfather – particularly interested in the exchange of good practice on effective child protection strategies, because I have been personally committed to this cause for many years, and I wish to take good practices back to my country and home parliament.

I will also be happy to report back to the Social Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly at its next meeting in January 2013.

Finally, I invite you to continue to involve your parliamentarians and parliaments, at national and European level, in these important debates, because national parliaments are central stakeholders when it comes to changing legislation and policies in favour of children.

Thank you very much for your attention!

Teşekkür ederim !