



SUMMARY MINUTES 4th MEETING OF THE INFORMAL EXPERT GROUP ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Brussels, 18 February 2014

1. INTRODUCTION

The fourth meeting of the informal expert group on the rights of the child took place on 18 February 2014. Delegates from 22 Member States attended the meeting: BE, BG, HR, CZ, DK, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, GR, IE, HU, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, UK, and the Commission was represented by the children's rights team (Fundamental Rights and Rights of the Child Unit, DG JUST). Ms Georgia Dimitropoulou from the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) participated in the meeting as an external expert. The meeting was chaired by Aleksandar Romanovic, DG Justice.

2. THE 8TH EUROPEAN FORUM ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Aleksandar Romanovic informed the Delegates about the [8th European Forum on the Rights of the Child](#)¹. The Forum is a yearly event organised by the European Commission, DG Justice. Stakeholders from across the EU, such as Member States representatives, Ombudspersons, international organisations, NGOs, academics and practitioners are invited to participate. The 8th European Forum, in which 270 stakeholders and experts on children's rights took part, including 75 Member State representatives, further explored the theme of child protection systems launched at the 2012 Forum. The first day of the Forum was dedicated to high-level speeches, while the second day focused on more specialised debates and exchange of experience on international parental child abduction, children on the move, bullying and cyber bullying and female genital mutilation (FGM) in four parallel sessions. Vice-President Reding stressed in her speech that implementation of the actions outlined in the EU Agenda for the rights of the child (EU Agenda) requires the use of legislation, data collection, funding, support for child participation, and increased cooperation and partnership among different actors, including coordination among different services. All of these tools and methods are components of child protection systems. In the Forum there was a broad consensus that within the EU, child protection systems are the responsibility of EU Member States, but that the EU also has a role to play, particularly when a child's safety may be of concern to more than one country, for example when an unaccompanied child moves from one country to another, or when a child goes missing. Vice-President Reding announced that in 2014 the EU will develop guidance on the strengthening of child protection systems.

3. EU GUIDANCE ON CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS

Alexander Hoefmans, DG Justice, informed the delegates about the future guidance on child protection systems and recalled that it derives from the [EU Strategy towards the eradication of](#)

¹ A summary report and presentations are published at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/rights-child/european-forum/eighth-meeting/index_en.htm

[trafficking in human beings \(2012-2016\)](#)². The guidance is also mentioned in the [Communication on female genital mutilation](#) of 2013. The objective of the guidance is to find ways to promote and support an integrated approach and facilitate cooperation and coordination among all agencies involved in child protection issues, breaking down functional silos, to have a more comprehensive approach, with an emphasis on cross-border aspects. The focus will be on consolidating work done, rather than setting a future agenda. In parallel to the preparation of the guidance, the Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU is carrying out a mapping of national child protection systems in EU28. The mapping will be completed by June 2014. The work on the guidance should be finished in the autumn 2014, before the 9th European Forum on the rights of the child. DG JUSTICE plans to launch an online public consultation at the end of March/beginning of April 2014 to receive input from all interested parties in the field of child protection.

Discussion:

MT asked to what extent the Council of Europe guidelines on Child-friendly justice would be used in drawing up the guidance. **The Commission** explained that the Guidelines were already referenced in the EU Agenda for the rights of the child as a specific action point is dedicated to their promotion. Also, recent legislation (victims' rights directive, anti-trafficking directive) which will be referenced in the guidance focused on child-friendly justice, relying on the Council of Europe Guidelines.

UK and NL asked whether the guidance on child protection systems would establish a binding set of standards for the Member States and whether the document would be discussed in the Council. **The Commission** explained that the guidance was most likely to take the form of a Commission Communication. The aim is to provide information on EU legislation and policies relevant to child protection systems, clarify where the EU can support national child protection systems, and showcase good practice on child protection systems in cross-border/transnational as well as national contexts. The guidance will be adopted by the Commission and aims to support Member States in strengthening their child-protection systems. In the guidance, the Commission will not be proposing any mandatory set of standards.

GR asked whether the Commission would be proposing harmonisation of national practices in child protection systems and whether the guidance will reference the relevant chapters of the UN Convention on Human Rights. GR further explained a difficulty in co-ordinating work across different departments and wondered whether the guidance will recommend coordination at national level. **The Commission** explained that the guidance will not be a binding legal instrument or impose harmonisation between MS; it will put forward an integrated approach and will be based on UNCRC article 19 and CRC General Comment 13. Coordination is part of a functioning child protection system and specific questions on coordination will be put forward in the public consultation questionnaire with a view to including this section in the final document.

NL: Inquired about the added value of the EU adopting guidance on child protection systems. **The Commission** explained the added value should be seen in terms of cataloguing existing EU legislation, soft law and policies as a resource for policy-makers in the EU.

² The EU Strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in human beings 2012-2016 provides for development of guidelines for child protection systems in 2014. See section 2.1(3) http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/doc_centre/crime/docs/trafficking_in_human_beings_eradication-2012_2016_en.pdf

SK: Expressed hope to see added value from the guidance, namely in terms of good practices regarding social services entering homes to protect children, which is a specific issue currently dealt with in SK.

4. EU STUDY ON CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT IN JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS

Alexander Hoefmans, DG Justice, informed the delegates about the progress made in the civil and administrative part of the above mentioned study. The Commission is currently revising the national contextual overviews and is progressively sending the revised versions out to Member States, together with the national data sets. The importance of Member State engagement at this stage was stressed, given that this is an occasion for the relevant national ministries and stakeholders to review the data that will be published. The Commission has opted to centralise this review process in the hands of the members of the expert group and relies on them to coordinate and consult internally.

HU and IE inquired about the processes of the study and to what extent stakeholders had been given the occasion to review the information gathered by the researchers. **The Commission** answered that there had been exchanges between the contractor and the stakeholders [*NB. The stakeholders are included in the emails sent out to the members of the expert group with the request to review all the information*].

5. THE EU FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AGENCY'S MODEL ON GUARDIANS

Georgia Dimitropoulou, Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), gave a brief overview of research currently conducted in the area of children's rights. The study running in parallel to COM study on children in justice was at the stage of field work in 10 MS after the 1st phase consulting professionals working with children in justice was completed. The study on children with disabilities in EU-28 is a secondary data research focussing on the experience of disabled children facing violence, bullying, hate crimes and should be ready by the end of 2014.

The comparative report on guardianship systems in the EU in the area of child trafficking and **the handbook** on guardianship systems and legal representation of children have been circulated to the Delegates prior to the meeting. This work falls under the Commission's anti-trafficking strategy and will be a joint publication of FRA/COM. The first draft was discussed in Nov 2013 with the Member States, EU and experts. An integrated approach was chosen to include guardianship of trafficked children, but also children at risk of being trafficked. The report looks at how victims of trafficking are treated. The approach was based on the need to have a guardianship system in place for all children and to strengthen guardianship also to prevent trafficking.

The comparative report found disparities among the Member States in the treatment of children and the quality of service, monitoring (individual complaints, child participation), and independence of appointed guardians (resulting in possible conflicts of interest). There is also a lack of co-operation and coordination including in cross-border contexts, of needs assessment, and risk assessment.

Ms Dimitropoulou asked Delegates for a written feedback on both documents by 25 February or soon after that. [*N.B. In an email of 3 March Ms Dimitropoulou thanked those who have submitted comments and welcomed further feedback from the Member States by 12 March*].

Discussion: Several delegates took the floor, welcoming the work of FRA on guardianship. **LT** queried the issue of the status of guardians, which depends from country to country and does not

necessarily include only professionals. **LT** further asked if the system should be harmonised or should the Member States continue with their existing practices. **FRA** explained that the status of guardians is somewhat controversial. Research has shown that this can range from civil servants acting as guardians to systems entirely based on volunteers, either through guardian registers or delegated to NGOs using volunteers. To ensure a quality service, standards are needed in terms of qualifications, ability to implement the role of guardian, including vetting procedures for volunteers; in many Member States there are no criteria, no vetting or specific training. **NL and MT** wondered why the Hague convention and Brussels IIa were not referenced in the report and the handbook. **FRA** explained that these instruments were not listed because they do not contain specific references to guardianship systems. Several Member States, including **NL, IE and MT** wondered which Member State representatives were involved in preparation of the study. **FRA** explained that FRA expert network ([FRANET](#)) was used and that she will send them the list of stakeholders consulted so far. **LU** mentioned the practice whereby guardianship is transferred to the directors of the institutions where a child is placed or to a foster parent when the decision on the placement of the child is decided. The Delegate asked about the possibility of shared guardianship (as in shared custody). **FRA** stressed that the independence of guardians from the institution responsible for reception or care is necessary to avoid conflict of interest (this is also the case of children in immigration situations). A guardian must always act on behalf of the best interests of the child. **ES** pointed out an imbalance between the handbook and the comparative report. A guardian is a party in all judicial proceedings; a guardianship system does not only refer to situations of trafficking and is broader than it has been described in the comparative report. The delegate believed that the comparative study should be more profound and not only focused on trafficking. **FRA** explained that the report is a first draft and that further changes are possible. However, it would be impossible to give details on all aspects of guardianship systems in all 28 EU Member States, due to many particularities. This is the reason why the comparative study focuses on one area, which can be compared. **FRA** underlined that the handbook on the other hand will contain learning derived from the comparative study and will be broader and supplemented by examples of good practice. The aim is to take an integrated approach to guardianship systems. **MT**, like many Delegates, welcomed the work on guardianship systems, but wondered about the link between the comparative report and the handbook. The learning from the comparative report did not translate into the handbook, which in **MT's** view should be much leaner and contain a compendium of minimum standards derived from the report. **FRA** explained that the handbook goes beyond the comparative research. The discussion also touched upon difficulties of terminology.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY ON "MISSING CHILDREN IN THE EU"

Guido Lanzke, DG Justice, presented the key findings and recommendations of the Commission study [Missing children in the European Union](#)³. The study, carried out from August 2012 to June 2013, mapped the situation of and responses to children going missing for the period 2009-2012 in EU-27. The study revealed a variety of definitions and procedures used by the Member States as well as greatly varying degrees of data available with overall numbers obtainable from almost all Member States (with 2 exceptions). The overall data shows the magnitude of the problem with just under a quarter of a million cases of missing children reported in 2012. Data also showed gender balance in children going missing and a high proportion of the cases relating to children going missing from care settings.

³ The paper version was distributed to the Delegates. Then online version has been published on DG Justice webpage: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/missing_children_study_2013_en.pdf

A series of recommendations were drawn from the findings of the study which included: Minimum data to be recorded: year of birth, gender, nationality and migration status of the child; Categories to be defined per type of disappearance: To distinguish at least runaways; Additional info to be included: setting of disappearance, organisations involved in search, outcome and follow-up. In terms of operational rules and practices: there should be no waiting period before recording disappearance (24/48 h); a database should be maintained, consolidating locally collected data at national level; common procedure to enter Article 32 alerts for missing persons in SIS II should be agreed and distinctions (parental/ third party abductions, runaways etc.) added to the system. Finally, awareness should be raised about the importance of timely reporting of disappearances, the 116 000 hotlines and their services and national statistics on missing children should be published.

In closing Mr Lanzke pointed out that the 116 000 hotlines were now operational in all MS with the exception of Finland. This was achieved with Commission support for the MS in fulfilling their obligations under the Universal service directive, not least by providing funding of close to € 10 million to set up and improve hotlines and abduction alerts through the Daphne III programme. With all but one hotline operational, no further specific funding provisions have been included in the new Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).

Discussion:

Delegates welcomed the findings of the study, pointing out the importance of having such data and using these findings to define concrete actions. The complexity of the problem was stressed as well as the importance of definitions (missing children/absent children/runaway children etc). **ES** and **LV** pointed out that some known data was not included in the study.

7. TOUR DE TABLE: MEMBER STATE ACTIVITIES

BE: Reminded of the event that will be organised under the Belgian presidency of the Council of Europe (Nov 2014 – May 2015) to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the UNCRC. The conference for all member States of the CoE will take place on 9-10 December 2014 in Brussels and will focus on the best interests of the child. Delegates were asked to send contributions to the documents (an inventory of existing initiatives on the best interests of the child in EU Member States) sent by the BE delegate prior to the expert group meeting. The inventory will be finalised in March. *(N.B. The Commission circulated to the delegates the request by BE with documents attached again on 19 February)*

BG: In December 2013 a new human rights mechanism was introduced and reflection started on whether to participate in international protocols, final approval of reports, etc. The mechanism also has a legislative initiative. Reform of the juvenile justice system has a new action plan (Roadmap) complementary to the strategy, and it was adopted in March by the Council of Ministers. The table of projects is an integrated part of it and currently the majority of these projects are in their implementation phase. There are ongoing projects with UNICEF to enhance child-participation in decision-making processes.

SK: Confirmed they will be in touch with BE presidency of the Council of Europe and stressed it would be important to discuss the criteria for the best interests of the child. The SK delegate mentioned it could also be an interesting topic for its future EU Presidency. The new Slovak Family Code will integrate criteria on the principle of the best interest of the child. As a good model, the Delegate mentioned the Austrian example where the legislator wrote in law what constitutes the best interests of the child. SK was the 9th country to ratify the 3rd optional protocol of the UNCRC, which

will enter into force in April 2014. Discussions are currently ongoing to set up a national enforcement body for OP3. New competencies for social care system to get access to the child are being discussed. Finally, the Constitutional court challenged paternity legislation stipulating a maximum of 3 years after birth for the father to recognise the child.

CZ: The delegate mentioned that due to the recent change of government there were currently no significant new developments other than the fact that the new Civil Code and Act on Special Judicial Proceedings had entered into force on 1st January 2014.

NL: The new law on a youth care system has been adopted. The law is very comprehensive and will decentralise competence from the national level to the local level. The new law could be presented by NL at the next meeting of the expert group. Russia has introduced a law to prohibit adoption of Russian citizens by same-sex parents. NL has no agreements with Russia on adoption. NL Delegate suggested to address this issue in a future meeting of the expert group. The Dutch centre for International Child abduction is organising a European conference for family lawyers who represent parents in international parental child abduction cases, called LEPCA. The conference takes place on 8 and 9 May 2014 in the Peace Palace in The Hague, the Netherlands (<http://www.lepca.eu/>). UNICEF Netherlands in co-operation with the Ministry of Justice and Youth Ministry will organise an event to mark 25th anniversary of UNCRC.

EE: 1) A draft new child protection act aims to ensure the wellbeing of the child and protect the rights of the child. The draft emphasizes the importance of prevention, early intervention and effective assistance to children and families. It also aims to improve the quality of child welfare at the local level and to increase the state assistance for local governments in order to support their coping with child welfare issues. It should be sent to the Government in the first half of 2014 and to the Parliament before the summer. The draft law has passed the initial coordination of Ministries, NGOs and other partners. 2) A strategy Document on Alternative Care (of children separated from their biological families) has been prepared, focusing on decreasing the number of children in institutions and increasing the number of children in foster care. It will provide a support system with special services to children and different types of foster families, adoptive families and other families bringing up a non-biological child; it will also address support to children coming out of alternative care. The Strategy should be proposed to the Government by December 2014. 3) To reduce the risks of children and youth, as well as to support the parents in the upbringing of children, an evidence-based parenting program will be piloted. The parenting program will be launched within the framework of the [Children and Youth at Risk programme](#) and with the support of EEA grants. In October 2013 the Ministry of Social Affairs ordered an analysis to evaluate the needs of parents and children in Estonia and to suggest which parenting program would most effectively meet those needs. The programs "[Triple P](#)" and "[Incredible Years](#)" were evaluated and the analysis report was completed in January 2014. The next step is to consult with prospective partners and with the provider of the chosen program about a contract agreement. Specific activities will depend on the chosen program and its sub-programs. Initial implementation will be assessed at the end of the project. By the end of 2015, the program should to be piloted and ready for use

DE: In January 2014 there was a hearing on the 3rd and 4th state report at the CRC in Geneva; Special attention by the committee was focused on fight against child poverty and inclusion of children with disabilities in education. A group of children and young people from different ages, gender and backgrounds were part of the German delegation and had a chance to talk directly to the CRC for an hour during the break in the hearing. They had been selected by their peers in the different

federal states of Germany. CRC observations were published on 5 February. In December 2013 a new federal government started its work; strategic priorities in the area of the rights of the child will be – beside others – on cyber-bullying and combating child poverty.

FI: Changes in the social and health services are planned for 2015 and 2017. A working group was established by the ministry for social health to evaluate the child welfare law and the operation of social services. As a result, an action plan to improve child welfare services is being drafted and will provide specific quality recommendations in spring 2014.

UK: The President of the Family Division published a leading judgment on 14 January 2014 which sets out the most recent [statement of the law on handling cross border care cases in England and Wales](#)⁴. The senior family judiciary are currently working on updating the existing Practice Direction on public law Children Act 1989 care cases, including those with a foreign element, as part of the work of the Family Procedure Rule Committee.

IE: The Child and Family Agency was established on 1st January 2014 under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013. It has responsibility for children and family services previously delivered by the Health Services Executive together with domestic and sexual violence services, certain psychological welfare services, and preschool inspection services. It also has statutory responsibility for services previously provided by the National Educational Welfare Board and the Family Support Agency. Second, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has given a commitment to publish draft legislation to give effect to "Children First" guidance to deal with mandatory reporting of child welfare and protection. Finally, the Youth Justice Action Plan (YJAP) 2014-18 "[Tackling Youth Crime](#)"⁵ was launched on 3rd February 2014 jointly by the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.⁶

GR: The first National Action Plan (NAP) for Human Rights (2014-2016) was prepared under the coordination of the Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights, with the participation of officials of many ministries, public bodies, the Ombudsman and the National Commission for Human Rights. It was launched by three ministries on 10th of December 2013 (international HR day) and after an open consultation held until end of January 2014, the final text was adopted and published; it has been translated into English and will be published on the website of the Ministry of Justice. Concrete actions will be implemented and monitored. A special chapter in this Plan is to draft and adopt an Action Plan for Children' Rights and to establish until the end of 2015, a National Mechanism, pursuant to the UNCRC, in view of the next periodic evaluation of Greece (2017) by the relevant UN Committee. Other sensitive matters included in the NAP are actions for the unaccompanied children and the possible review of the guardianship system.

Mr. P. Giannakopoulos as coordinator of the NAP for HRs will participate in a Workshop on "developing and implementing National Action Plans for Human Rights", organised by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, on 27-28 March 2014.

The General Secretariat for Gender Equality inaugurated the 12/2/2014 in Rethymnon (Crete) one Centre (shelter) of advice and support of women and girls victims of violence.

⁴ <http://www.judiciary.gov.uk/Resources/JCO/Documents/Judgments/matter-of-e-a-child.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.iyjs.ie/en/IYJS/Tackling%20Youth%20Crime%20-%20Youth%20Justice%20Action%20Plan%20FINAL.pdf>

⁶ See press release: <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=3091>

Last week the EU ISEC 2012 Project for the “south-eastern network for children protection, prevention of trafficking and protection of unaccompanied children to the Greek Turkish borders was launched, with the Institute of health of child, as mandated body - project leader.

The Hellenic Presidency of the Council of the EU is co-organising -with the participation of EIGE- on March 5th a conference in Brussels to launch the results of the FRA survey on violence against women. It will also organise together with FRA, end of April, a two days seminar in Thessaloniki on “How can EU Member States combat hate crime effectively - Encouraging reporting & improving recording” as a follow-up to the work that was done by the Lithuanian EU Presidency.

RO: As of 1 February 2014, RO has a new legislation on criminal matters, as the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code, together with the implementation laws thereof, have entered into force, as well as the following three legislative acts: Law no. 252/2013 on the organisation and functioning of the probation system; Law no. 253/2013 on serving the non-custodial penalties, educational measures and other measures ordered by the judicial bodies during criminal proceedings; and Law no. 254/2013 on serving the custodial penalties and measures ordered by the judicial bodies during criminal proceedings. For example, as far as the juvenile victim of a crime against sexual freedom and integrity is concerned, the statute of limitations period for the criminal liability runs from the date the victim becomes 18. Moreover, the sanctioning system in case of juvenile offenders has changed as the adoption of custodial and non-custodial educational measures has been foreseen rather than penalties. Highlighting an example of an active role of the prosecutor in cases involving juveniles, the Delegate mentioned the Activity Report on 2013 of the Brasov Tribunal for Minors and Family. After participating in some civil cases, , the prosecutor has subsequently filed ex officio cases regarding abuses made by parents or other persons on children, thus initiating the procedures for triggering the criminal liability of the guilty persons.

ES: Spain is working on a reform of its children's and youth law. The authorities are also working on a reform of the implementation of the Hague Convention and Brussels IIa obligations. The Ministry of Justice is working with NL on the LEPCA project of lawyers and mediators <http://www.lepca.eu/>. Inter-country adoptions of children from Russia are of concern to Spain as 12,000 children have been adopted by Spanish families. ES is currently preparing a bi-lateral agreement on inter-country adoption with Russia.

PL: In January 2014 a new law on criminal proceedings has been adopted with three major changes, on trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation and victims in preparation for the ratification of the Lanzarote convention. A new juvenile act is in force whereby juvenile delinquency is now in principle under the family court (children under 17 years of age who are accused of a crime are referred to the family court and not the criminal court - except for the most serious offences). The new act contains safeguards, such as a single hearing per proceeding. Finally, there has been a case before the Constitutional Court on the issue of paternity with no possibility to contest paternity after a child's death.

FR: Regarding female genital mutilation, the Istanbul convention has been ratified and a law containing new provisions was passed in August 2013. There is also a national action plan on violence against women and girls. On the fight against poverty and social exclusion, there is an action plan with measures facilitating access to pre-school care and health and a system of family allowances. Finally, a programme to improve gender equality, by raising awareness among boys and girls in schools, "[l'ABC de l'égalité](#)", provoked a strong debate on gender identity.

HU: Agreed with the NL delegate that it would be interesting and important to elaborate on the topic of cross-border adoption in one of the future meetings, adding that an issue of same-sex couple adoptions could also be discussed. This is not only in the light of the materials sent for observation by colleagues from BE where this topic was also touched upon but also in connection with the gender equality awareness raising programme mentioned by the French colleague and the fact that (due to the case law of the ECHR) both in France and Austria there have been some recent legislative changes in this respect. The delegate mentioned that the Family Act (Act IV of 1952 Family Act, 1 July 1974) has been included in the new Civil Code (Act V of 2013 Civil Code entering into force as of 15 March 2014), including many amendments concerning adoption. For example a follow-up procedure has been included according to which the situation and circumstances of a child will be closely kept track of up until 5 years after the adoption. Due to the several changes the national legislation complies with the standards of the European Convention on the Adoption of Children that HU has signed on 29th November 2011, so its ratification has become an objective. As of 1st January 2014, due to amendments to the Child Protection Act, the institution of the child protection guardian has been established. In addition, the delegate mentioned that cyber bullying is one of the topics in the centre of attention of the ministry.

HR: The Hague convention on inter-country adoptions will enter into force in April 2014. The Optional Protocol #3 to the CRC on a communication procedure was signed in December 2013. A National strategy on the Rights of the Child 2014 -2020 is being developed and is aimed at tackling violence, addressing the best interests of the child, rights for children in vulnerable situations, child participation, and raising awareness about the rights of the child. A 2nd conference on adoptions was held, disseminating good practices and a six month pilot project has taken place to improve the capacity of centres of social care and raise awareness. The missing children hotline 116 000 was established in November, with the website up at the end of 2013 receiving 2000 hits a day. A mobile app is being developed and the online system piloted by Missing Children Europe is being tested. A ministerial conference of the Council of Europe is taking place on 27 and 28 March in Dubrovnik.

PT: A child-friendly version of the 3rd Optional Protocol to the UNCRC has been translated into Portuguese in co-operation with the UN Special representative on violence against children, to be distributed in schools, some African Portuguese Speaking countries and East Timor. There is an ongoing debate on child protection systems and the adoption regime with new proposals to be presented by the summer; CRC hearing in Geneva focused in particular on austerity measures and impact on education, social benefits, care and welfare of children.

MT: In March 2014 a white paper on the child protection act will be published focusing on guardians and mainstreaming guardianship for all "types of children", out of home care, mediator in child protection service, strengthening of child advocate service, and consultation with children. As part of the drafting of the child protection act, a big consultation exercise was undertaken with and on children in out of home care. On the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the UNCRC an event on child participation rights will be organised. National strategy on trafficking has been developed, also addressing children, even though no cases of child trafficking have been identified by the police in Malta so far. Front-line workers at the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers, child protection and family services were trained on indicators and awareness regarding trafficking.

LV: De-institutionalisation strategy is in place, with policy guidelines adopted at the end of 2013 to reshape the current system. Institutions should be re-organised as day-care centres and consultative centres for foster parents and guardians. A national nanny register was set up in September 2013 to

alleviate the problem of shortage of places in kindergartens. Financial contributions are coming from state and local governments. The implementation of the Lanzarote Convention is ongoing. This will affect different laws and amendments are already in parliamentary procedure. The 116 000 hotline for missing children is the responsibility of the ministry of the interior and is now up and running. For the 116 111 helpline for children additional funding will be provided for services to be operational 24/7 as most need is in evenings and weekends as well as during night time. A new action plan is in the pipeline for 2015 to implement the sexual abuse directive.

LU: With the appointment of the new government, a new ministry has been established for education, children and youth. The ministry is responsible for all kinds of institutions and services for children under 18: schools, children's rights, child care, child welfare, adoption... There has been a paradigm shift from considering a child being a member of a family to considering a child as an individual. The 3rd and 4th national report to the UNCRC has been discussed in Geneva, while the initial report on the second optional protocol to the Convention of the rights of the child, as well as the initial report on the Lanzarote Convention are being finalised. Working groups have been created on following themes: reporting obligations of abuse and neglect; introduction of new quality standards in the child care system; new lodging solutions for adolescent runaways.

8. CONCLUSION

The Commission invited the delegates to suggest items for discussion in future meetings of the informal expert group by writing to just-children-rights@ec.europa.eu. The delegates were also invited to send their comments on the FRA guardianship documents to Ms Georgia Dimitropoulou (Georgia.DIMITROPOULOU@fra.europa.eu) and to respond to the BE questionnaire on the inventory of existing initiatives on the best interests of the child by writing to Mr Joost Van Haelst (joost.vanhaelst@cjsm.vlaanderen.be). The next meeting of the informal expert group will take place towards the end of May/mid-June. The delegates will be informed thereof in due time as well as of the launch of the public consultation on EU guidance for child protection systems.