



Bill Rammell MP
Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education
Department for Education and Skills
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith St
London SW1P 3BT

14th December 2006

Dear Mr Rammell,

Re: EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child

A growing number of EU activities affect children, directly or indirectly. These include, among others, policies and programmes in the fields of international development, trade, health and consumer protection, criminal justice, and social inclusion. It is crucial to ensure that these activities contribute where possible to enhancing children's well-being and safeguarding their rights.

The NSPCC and Save the Children are aware of an increasing number of risks to children which transcend national boundaries and where cross-border cooperation is essential, such as threats associated with the internet, child trafficking, or the need to prevent sex offenders from crossing borders to work with children. While the primary responsibility for safeguarding children's rights lies with national governments, the EU provides significant opportunities to help address such problems.

In this context, the NSPCC and Save the Children would like to see the DfES support in its entirety the future EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, announced in a Commission Communication of 4th July 2006¹. The DfES has indicated this is currently not the case. We believe that this strategy is a useful and necessary complement to actions taken at Member State level to promote children's rights, and its development should be actively supported.

We welcome the UK Government's statement of potential support for some actions proposed in the Communication, such as combating the use of credit cards to purchase child abuse images on the internet; involving children more in the decision-making process; and enhancing the EU's active role in international fora. We are also pleased that this matter has been accorded significant attention by the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee, which recognises the importance of children's rights².

Fears that a European children's strategy would extend the European Union's competence are in our view unfounded. The Communication does not propose new legislation or extend into new policy areas, which would impact on domestic policy. Rather it will help ensure that existing activities are based on children's

¹ COM (2006)0367 final

² Thirty-Eighth Report of the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee

rights principles, including by guaranteeing participation of children themselves in EU policy making. Therefore it does not require the legal base for children's rights, which the shelved Constitutional Treaty would have provided.

We agree that it would have been useful for the Communication to have been based on closer cooperation with Member State governments. The active involvement of governments in shaping and supporting the strategy is crucial for its long-term success.


The strategy is a positive example of attempting to join up current decision making for the benefit of children both in the EU and internationally. While the EU cannot presently itself ratify the UNCRC, all of its Member States have done so, along with nearly all countries in the world. It has a responsibility, therefore, to ensure that its own activities are in line with children's rights standards, and where possible to actively promote children's rights.

The proposed European Forum on the Rights of the Child will play a different role from the L'Europe de l'Enfance Committee and the ChildONEurope Observatory³. In contrast to the Committee, the Forum is due to bring together representatives of a range of relevant stakeholders, most importantly children and young people themselves, as well as civil society organisations and others. It should contribute to the design and monitoring of EU actions, discussing regularly and feeding into the development of EU policies, which affect children, as opposed to the Committee's role of exchanging good practice on national policies and activities. We believe that the Forum will assist in mainstreaming children's rights in EU policy.

We therefore hope that the UK will support the development of an EU strategy on children's rights to make the most of the Union's capacity to contribute to protecting children and promoting their rights.

We would be happy to arrange a meeting with you to explain our views on this important matter in more detail, or to provide any further information which may be of use to you. Please do not hesitate to contact Kathleen Spencer Chapman, NSPCC European Adviser, on 020 7825 2758 or kspencer@nspcc.org.uk, or alternatively, Louise King, Save the Children UK Policy Adviser Child Rights and Protection, on 020 7012 6762 or L.King@savethechildren.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Phillip Noyes
Head of Public Policy, NSPCC



Colette Marshall
UK Regional Director, Save the Children

³ The ChildONEurope Observatory is a network of national centres and observatories on childhood from 9 Member States, with 12 Member States (including the UK) having only observer membership.