



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union

Skopje, 6 April 2012

Speech at the Closing Conference of the EU-funded and UNICEF co-funded project "Justice for Children"

6 April 2012, Skopje

Hotel Holiday Inn

Speaking points

H.E. Mr. Aivo Orav

Head of the Delegation of European Union

Dear Minister Mr. Bedzeti,

Dear Deputy Minister Mr. Bajrami,

Dear Deputy Minister Mr. Ibrahimimi,

Dear Mr. Yett,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- **It is a big pleasure to be here with you and to discuss about the most vital element of all our societies – that is Children.**
- **We all agree that children are our future – future we have to invest in.** The quality of this investment, the seeds we plant will predefine the outcome – the face of our society, its welfare and viability in the future.
- This is why **justice for children with all its components is so crucial.**
- **Justice for children is an important pillar holding the palace of justice system as a whole; It reflects the degree of humanity of our legal systems.**
- For these reasons the **EU is firmly committed to promoting justice for children and children’s rights** in general in both its internal and external policies.
- **Children rights also form part of EU accession requirements under the Copenhagen criteria.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is these key reasons that influenced the decision of the **EU, UNICEF, together with the Government partners some two years ago to launch a very comprehensive and ambitious project on justice for children.**

- This EU-funded and UNICEF co-funded project had an **objective to support the relevant stakeholders both within the Government and civil society in supporting and consolidating the ongoing juvenile justice reform.**
- I am particularly satisfied to note that most of our ambitious goals have been achieved.
- The EU, UNICEF, the Government and many other actors, working together, managed to **lift the juvenile justice system into a higher standard all across the board and to align it with the state of the art international practices.**
- The Project provided a **helping hand to the relevant Government bodies in comprehensive revision and improvement of legal framework.** We have assisted in **developing modern policy monitoring indicators** that are already used by relevant stakeholders.
- Furthermore, the committed Project team provided **high quality training and international advice on modern juvenile justice systems,** prepared numerous **manuals and guidelines for practitioners and policy makers alike.**
- We have assisted in **strengthening the institutional framework to ensure a comprehensive and preventive approach** to juvenile justice; National Council for Prevention for Juvenile Delinquency and a number of local councils at municipal level were established with the assistance of the project. The **National Strategy on Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency was prepared** providing a clear direction for the future.
- The Project also introduced some **very innovative prevention tools, such as mentoring that have already provided remarkable results**

– for example, none of the children in conflict with the law who were part of the mentoring project repeated their crimes.

- And last but not least – the project has **effectively raised citizens' and all stakeholders' awareness of the importance** of justice for children system.
- **Hence, a lot has been achieved.** A solid foundation has been laid in this area, providing a sound basis for the ultimate completion of the ongoing reforms and most importantly – for its sustainable implementation.
- For the success of the EU-UNICEF project, we would like to first of all **thank and appreciate our partners at UNICEF** for their excellent work, pro-activeness and commitment. **Equal praise also goes to the authorities – both local and central – and to numerous people from the academia and civil society** - without their strong commitment and devotion nothing would have been achieved.
- Hence, the **ongoing justice for children reform is a joint undertaking** – each and every of us plays an important role in its successes and failures. Therefore **close cooperation and good will on all sides is crucial** to finalize these ambitious, and very important reforms.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- As latest EU progress reports show, there has been substantial **progress made on legal, institutional side of the reform** where the focus of our project also lied.
- Now **attention is moving to implementation**
- Here we can still see a **mixed picture: despite efforts and substantial steps forward, much remains to be done.**

- In particular, **more attention to the institutions dealing with juvenile justice is still needed** in order to ensure full justice for children. They need **more resources, more space, more people and training** to carry out their important tasks. Personal commitment and motivation that they have is clearly not enough.
- We know that your budget is limited; however, **saving on prevention proves more costly at a later stage**, once children enter the repressive justice system.
- Furthermore, **legal aid for children who cannot afford it should be fully ensured**, as this is one of the internationally recognized fundamental rights.
- **Better coordination and monitoring** of reforms is needed > discussions and exchanges are crucial not only for sharing information, but also for finding best solutions for all.
- And finally, **active involvement of local administration** is crucial to ensure successful implementation of the reforms.
- In this context, a **significant step forward** has been made with the **establishment of the local councils for prevention of juvenile delinquency**.
- We **warmly congratulate the local councils** with their establishment and hope that soon they will become fully operational. To make this happen, we would again need **active engagement of all relevant actors** and **sufficient resources allocated** for this purpose.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude by saying the following

- **A well-functioning juvenile justice system can be a hallmark of country's entire justice system.**

- Given the relatively limited scope of resources that need to be allocated - **achieving this goal could be a relatively quick win** not only for the current government, but also for the generations to come.
- **We believe that the EU-UNICEF project provided the right impetus for this. And that this strong impetus will further sustain.**
- And let me assure you - **will stand ready to provide further assistance and support for you to plant the best seeds for the future!**

Thank You.