



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Symposium on the state of fundamental rights in the EU today

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

(Council Press Room, 175 Rue de la Loi)

Brussels, 28 June 2017

Spokespersons'
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SPEECH/XX

Ladies and gentlemen,

Madam President, Excellencies, distinguished speakers and guests,

I am glad that today's Symposium organised by the Fundamental Rights Agency in close cooperation with the Maltese Presidency is dedicated **to the protection of the rights of the child**, which is one of the objectives of the European Union. I would like to extend a particularly warm welcome to the children and young people who are participating today as speakers, observers and as rapporteurs.

The backdrop for this event – the FRA 2017 fundamental rights report - coincides with the 10th anniversary of FRA's establishment and I would take this opportunity to thank the Agency for its work.

On long journeys, a question particularly beloved of children is "Are we there yet?" With regard to implementation of fundamental rights, no, we are not there yet! We are, as FRA says, "between promise and delivery". Those four words acknowledge a certain amount of road travelled and progress

made. They also convey the message that we must not lose sight of our destination, namely the protection, respect and promotion of fundamental rights.

This message is very much in line with the European Commission's approach, detailed in our own **Commission's Annual Report on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, adopted last 19 May.**

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On that occasion, the Commission delivered **three important messages:**

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First, we noted that we are at an existential period for our societies and for the future of European integration. In this context, we strongly reaffirmed that fundamental rights are the foundation of our European Union and our communities.

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We are a **Union of Values.**

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Second, it is our duty to uphold democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law: **when the rules are breached, we stand up and enforce them.**

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Third, **fundamental rights are for all – not only for a few.**

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We need to continuously assess progress and to set and note achievement of milestones. We also need to adjust and adapt

~~to challenging and adverse conditions. This stocktaking exercise is very timely and in line with the Juncker Commission's focus is on concrete results. We need to diagnose the real problems and focus on solving those.~~

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As today's focus is largely on the rights of children, I would like to focus your attention on the fact that in 2016, more than **one in four children in the EU were still at risk of poverty or social exclusion**. The European Pillar of Social Rights chapter on social protection and inclusion provides an opportunity to redouble efforts and monitor progress much more rigorously. The Social Pillar very clearly sets a right for children to be protected from poverty, and it very clearly states that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance their equitable access to and enjoyment of a range of social rights. In terms of disadvantaged groups, FRA's surveys continue to show that the situation of Roma children is particularly alarming. Progress has been made particularly in the right to education, but the Commission had to launch infringement proceedings against three Member States on the segregation of Roma

children in education. Still, much more needs to be done to ensure an **integrated** approach to child poverty that links education and training to finding work.

Nine hundred thousand children applied for asylum in the EU between 2014 and 2016. With the April adoption of a communication on **the protection of children in migration**, we have set out EU actions and recommendations to Member States to address gaps and shortcomings. We welcome FRA's engagement in the hotspots in Greece and Italy supporting the efforts of the Greek authorities and EU agencies, such as EASO, to provide practical guidance on child protection. The Commission will now establish an EU-wide guardianship network, to develop and exchange good practice and guidance on guardianship, taking also into account the work done by FRA. Member States are encouraged to strengthen guardianship and ensure that guardians are swiftly appointed for all unaccompanied children, to safeguard their best interests and wellbeing. Unaccompanied and separated children should be cared for under the auspices of **integrated national child protection systems** and more needs to be done

to ensure a range of care options, including the availability of foster care. **Child safeguarding and child protection** need to be embedded in all hotspots and reception centres hosting children. People working with children in migration should always be trained to do so. Member States are also encouraged to speed up **family reunification** procedures – this is critical for the best interests of the child. Access to **inclusive formal education** is not yet assured for all children in migration within the EU and Member States are encouraged to step up efforts. More needs to be done to support transition to adulthood, or leaving care, also with regard to access to education and training.

Children are often **stigmatised or victimised because of** their ethnic and migration background and the Commission has been put in place a high level group to work with Member States and other actors, including FRA on practical, actionable policy responses, including on **hate crime recording**.

For child victims of violence, and to ensure access to justice, the Victims' rights directive needs to be implemented fully. There are many gaps remaining including with regard to specialised services for child victims and in improving **children's access to justice, for example on their right to information and on their right to be heard.** ~~In February 2017, FRA published a report on children's experience of the justice system illustrating some of these gaps, as well as good practice. The report documents why~~ ~~W~~e need to listen to children and empower them to be involved in **all decisions that concern them.** After all, they are experts on their own situation.

Of course on all these matters, it is **Member States and their national, regional and local authorities** which are at the forefront in implementing and promoting fundamental rights. The EU supports Member States, through its legislation, policy guidance, funding programmes, and operational and other actions by EU agencies.

The Commission and FRA 2017 fundamental rights reports bring ~~s a lot more~~ clarity on what has been achieved as well as gaps and challenges ~~at across~~ the EU and national levels. It ~~also brings good and promising practice to light~~. I hope that today's informed discussions will focus on **concrete implementation and renew commitment and efforts on abiding by our strong European values in implementing fundamental**al rights.

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