

---

*This article is based on a verbal presentation given to the Quality of Childhood Group in the European Parliament. Notes taken during the presentation were formulated into the article below, which has been checked and approved by Michiel Matthes.*

## A Vision for Children and Childhood in the European Union

by *Michiel Matthes*

*Secretary-General, Alliance for Childhood European Network Group*

### Introduction

On 12th October 2006 the European Commission published a communication entitled 'The demographic future of Europe, from challenge to opportunity' (COM (2006) 571 final). In this communication the following facts were identified:

- The population of the EU is aging;
- The balance between people of working age and older people will change;
- Too few children are being born.

A number of recommendations were then made with regard to how to address the challenges arising from these demographic trends. The communication outlined the numbers of people in the European Union:

- The numbers born
- The numbers working
- The numbers retiring
- The numbers dying etc.

However, this paper did not consider how children grow up or the quality of their childhood.

Furthermore reference is made to the Communication of the European Commission 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child' of 4.7.2006 COM(2006)367 final.

This is a very valuable document, which provides policy makers with a rich list of considerations and recommendations concerning the rights of children.

Both documents take important steps towards addressing questions regarding children, but they do not provide a vision for children and childhood in the European Union.

The structure of the paper is as follows:

- What is a good quality of childhood?
- How to improve the quality of childhood in society?
- The role that the European Commission could play.

## 2. What is a good quality of childhood?

We have made the assumption that a poor quality of childhood is harmful for children. When society as a whole improves the quality of childhood, it will be beneficial for the children and adolescents in question and for the societies in which they grow up.

Then the next question is: can we describe what a good quality of childhood is? In this paper we try to go deeper into this matter and specify what we consider to be the elements that make up a good quality of childhood across seven different categories.

When drafting the paper we were inspired by the following publications, among others:

- Learning: the Treasure Within, Report to UNESCO by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Jacques Delors
- UNICEF Report Card No 7, An overview of child well-being in rich countries
- Great Transitions, Preparing Adolescents for a New Century, Carnegie Corporation of New York
- Jesper Juul's presentation to the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood in the European Parliament on 6 March 2007.
- Various publications by DECET (Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training).
- Every Child Matters: Change for Children by the UK Government.
- Various publications by Children's Defence Fund in the USA.
- The various books by Janusz Korczak.

The Vision starts with an inventory of characteristics that a society would wish for with regards to the environment of childhood. Each society is free to use this list as a starting point for discussion and amend, enrich and adapt it to its own local environment and for the phase of development in which it finds itself. The categories of the inventory are as follows:

### In general:

- The child is respected as a fellow human being with his/her own aspirations to develop his/her inner potential.
- The child grows up in a society, that acknowledges the multiple (cultural and other) identities of children and families.
- A childhood in which children can learn from each other across cultural and other borders, and in which they learn how to address prejudice and discrimination.
- He/she is empowered to develop the diverse aspects of his/her identity
- He/she is challenged to live a meaningful life
- He/she has learned to actively address biases through open communication
- He/she has acquired a willingness to grow and to work with others to challenge institutional forms of prejudice and discrimination
- He/she has acquired a reliable basis for making informed choices

- He/she knows how to use the support systems available to him / her
- He/she expresses constructive curiosity and exploratory behaviour
- He/she believes in a promising future with real opportunities

### **Material well-being**

- He/she lives in a situation of sufficient material well-being (the percentage of children living in poverty should be continuously reduced)
- He/she is ready and able to participate in working life and has acquired the technical and analytic capabilities to participate in a world-class economy
- He/she learned to learn and has acquired the enquiring and problem-solving habits of mind for life-long learning
- He/she has acquired the capabilities to achieve economic well-being.

### **Physical and psychological health and safety**

- He/she is in good health, physically, mentally and psychologically. When he / she is ill or handicapped, he / she will be cared for in a good way;
- He/she understands what self-esteem and self-confidence are. Self-esteem provides a basis for a healthy mental development and for self-confidence to grow.

### **Educational well-being**

- He/she has been shown what it is to be relationally competent. The quality of the relationships of the child with important adults and others is a key element of the quality of his/her childhood and for his/her growth as a human being.
- He/she has shown that one can learn from each other across cultural and other boundaries.
- He/she is offered childhood education services, free from any form of – overt and covert, individual and structural – discrimination due to his/her race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
- He/she has learned things and has learned to learn.
- He/she has been shown what it is to live together with people from diverse backgrounds.
- He/she has been shown what it is to be.
- He/she has been brought in contact with art and has been invited to relate to it.
- He/she has cultivated a sense of responsibility and empathy for others, and his/her environment.

### **Family and peer relationships / sense of belonging / social skills**

- He/she has a parent / primary care giver who has the ability to form secure relationships.
- He/she has been shown what the value of respect for other human beings is.
- He/she has been shown what it is to belong to a group.
- He/she has been shown how to find ways of being useful to others.

- He/she has been helped to find a valued place in a constructive group.
- He/she has been shown how to form close, durable human relationships, including an intimate relationship with another person.
- He/she has been shown how to acquire social skills, including the ability to manage conflict peacefully.

### Citizenship

- He/she has been shown the requirements of responsible citizenship.
- He/she has been shown how to respect diversity in our pluralistic society.
- He/she has been shown what it is to be a national and a European citizen and a citizen of the world.
- He/she has been shown what it is to participate as an active citizen.

### Subjective well-being

- He/she can live in peace
- He/she has been shown what it is to be authentic
- He/she has been shown to live on a basis of integrity and as an ethical person
- He/she has been shown to take personal and social responsibility. Personal responsibility comes first. Once acquired this provides a good basis from which to develop social responsibility.

*From a philosophical point of view: is it right to address these questions?*

From a philosophical point of view we must ask ourselves the question: are we on the right track when we try to look into the question of the quality of childhood, and ways and means of improving it, or do we intervene in a improper way in the lives of ourselves and our fellow human beings?

The Alliance for Childhood European Network Group is of the opinion that we may undertake this initiative because of the following considerations:

- When drawing up this list we should bear in mind that the child is respected as a fellow human being with his/her own aspirations to develop his/her inner potential. In this context we like to mention that we should be careful not to dictate to a child 'to be authentic'. We go deeper into this question in paragraph 3.4, which is entitled 'The philosophy of interventions'.
- We should also respect the various organisations that work for and with children.
- But when we discover that children and young people are harmed in one way or another and if we are aware how things can be improved we may bring it forth and try to convince actors and stakeholders concerned, in a normal democratic way, and in dialogue with them, about the new insights required.

3. How to improve the quality of childhood in society?

The Alliance for Childhood European Network Group recommends the following steps:

3.1 Consider the whole system of childhood

If we want children and young people to grow with regard to the above mentioned qualities we should create childhood systems that reflect these qualities. This should be the case for the 'entire childhood system'.

Please find below a system for the whole of childhood, based on the notion of time:

Table 1 Framework for the whole system of childhood

Age categories	Home Situation	School Situation	Free Time Situation
25 and older	(6) (4)	(1)(4)	(4)
19-24			
15-18	(2)		
13-14	(3)	(3)	(4)
6-12	(5)	(1)	(5)
4-5			
0-3			
Pregnancy and birth			
Period from e.g.. 3 years before birth	(2)(6)		

As we know from the many academic disciplines studying the subject of children and childhood there is often a relationship between one event in the life of a child in one sphere, for instance the home situation, and other occurrences later on in his/her life, for instance his/her Home, Work or Free Time Situation later on in life. With these arrows we have attempted to depict these relationships.

The arrows are drawn at random with the intention of tentatively coupling cause and effect, in both a positive and a negative sense. A few obvious examples:

1. if a child doesn't learn to read well between the ages of 6 and 12 he/she will have a learning problem thereafter.
2. if a girl of 17 becomes pregnant and bears a child she will often not be in a good position to bring up her child; her son or daughter will often be confronted with the same

- problem at the same age. Her own training and development may also be hindered because she became a mother at such an early age.
3. if the parents/educators have (in)adequate contact with the school this influences the school results of the child;
  4. if a young person of 13/14 regularly uses drugs or alcohol then there is a chance that that person will become addicted, and this will probably have a negative effect on his/her development. Moreover his/her brain may be damaged, and because of this he/she will not be able to reach He/she full (professional) potential;
  5. if a child grows up in a 'good' network, i.e. a 'home' network but also a school or free time network, or even all three at the same time, then this has a positive influence on the other areas of the table, even affecting the following generations.
  6. brain research has discovered that the brain of a young child grows and develops in response to the communication of the child with the mother and father. If the situation is secure, emotionally comforting and wholesome it will be beneficial for the entire life of the person in question. But the opposite is also true.

#### Note:

In this note we used Table 1 to depict the whole system of childhood. However other authors use concentric circles to illustrate the same idea. The circle in the centre depicts the child and his family, the next circle the school environment, after that his neighbourhood etc. The key element of these figures is, that the child lives at the same time in different environments. If we want to address a specific quality regarding the child in order to address it we should simultaneously look at the different environments to address it.

### *3.2 Be aware of the complex organisational landscape of the whole system of childhood*

The table in the previous paragraph provides assistance in analysing the problems pertaining to the living environment of the child, but it can also be used to determine which people and organisations, actors and stakeholders, are now active in the different compartments of the table

Table 2: Analytical table in which to plot the present organisational set up

Age categories	Home Situation	School Situation	Free Time Situation
25 and older			
19-24			
15-18			
13-14			
6-12			
4-5			
0-3			
Pregnancy and birth			
Period from e.g.. 3 years before birth			

In each compartment of this table organisations and individuals are active; often they don't know each other, don't relate to each other and often they have a different perception with regards to what a child is, a different set of objectives, and activities that may go against the activities of one or more of the other organisations.

- The following conclusions can be drawn from this table:
- In every compartment people and organisations are active and are trying to achieve an optimum situation for that compartment; you could say that every organisation in a compartment, for example the kindergarten, the nursery school, the playground association or the employment exchange, deliver a product to the child in a certain age category; every organisation has its own goals and these do not necessarily fit with the goals of the other people or organisations;
  - However hard the different groups in a compartment try they will never succeed in realising their goals by acting on their own; for example: the police alone will not be able to turn young delinquents into people with the characteristics mentioned in Section 2; moreover, this is not the mission of the police;
  - In many cases organisations are geared up to repair things that have gone wrong instead of contributing to a good and healthy childhood system in the first place;
  - Cooperation with the other groups and people in that compartment, and in all the other compartments, is essential;
  - In our western societies we may say that there is not one organisation that holds an overview of the entire childhood system and its quality. We have created such organisations for the economy, for public health, for the environment, the telecom system, the road system etc., but not for children and childhood.



Today many organisations take on the task of repairing things that have gone wrong. However, we know that it is very beneficial to prevent things from happening in the first place. In this context please think about the following examples:

- If a baby up till 3 years of age does not get enough attention and sufficient opportunities to communicate with his/her primary care giver (Emmi Pikler states that the minimum is 25 minutes twice a day ) his/ her brain will not develop in an optimal way from the point of view of emotions, affection, relationships and so on. This person will suffer from this his /her whole life as healing from such damage is difficult and very costly;
- If a young child does not have a primary attachment figure who is sufficiently available the child will suffer and bear the consequences for the rest of his/her life;
- If a pregnant mother uses too much alcohol or drugs and/or smokes the foetus can be damaged and the person in question will have to bear the consequences for the rest of his/her life. The same is true for certain types of environmental pollution that may enter the body of the mother and harm the foetus.

In this note we therefore advocate that persons and organisations dealing with children consider the roles that they could possibly play, along with other actors, to improve the quality of childhood and to prevent bad practices occurring.

### *3.3. Address the Perceptions of the various Actors and Stakeholders and of the General Public regarding Children and Childhood*

In Section 3.2 we described in a schematic way the complexity of all the actors and stakeholders, and the way they influence each other (or not, as the case may be) within the whole system of childhood. If we want to work on the quality of the system of childhood we also have to address the perceptions of the various actors and stakeholders and of the general public.

When addressing the question of the quality of childhood we address a fundamental question of how we look at human life and human society, also in relation to the earth on which we live.

In this context we can ask ourselves the following questions:

Is it the objective of our childhood and school system:

- To ensure that in the first place children get good grades and a good PISA-score, which will boost the reputation of the school in question and move it up in the national league tables?
- Should we prepare our children to become competitive "soldiers" in the global economy?
- Should the aim of the school be to help the person in question to prepare for life in general and to enable him or her to earn a decent living?
- Should the aim be to help young people to be citizens and to be part of a democratic society?
- Should the aim be to help young people to live a sustainable life in harmony with the eco-systems of the earth?

The American author David Korten has written a very interesting book on this subject entitled 'From Empire to Earth Community'. In this book he argues that since approximately 3000 B.C mankind has developed two models for human societies, and these models compete with each other. The models are:

- The Empire Model
- The Partnership Model

Both models live in each of us, but each individual and each society has its own place in the range between the two of them.

Both models are based on stories that explain how the world functions. These stories give an answer to three basic questions:

- How do we prosper? the Prosperity Story
- How do we maintain order and keep ourselves secure? the Security Story
- How do we find a sense of meaning and purpose in life? the Meaning Story

The Empire Model is based on a different set of stories and perceptions to the Partnership Model. David Korten argues that both models are self fulfilling prophecies. When you treat people according to the Empire Model people tend to react within the same model. The same is true for the Partnership Model.

Please find below a systematic comparison of the two sets of perceptions:

**Table 3: Comparison of Perceptions underlying the Empire Model and the Participation Model**

Characteristic	Empire Perception of Humanity	Partnership Perception of Humanity
Life is	Hostile and competitive	Supportive and cooperative;
Humans are	Flawed and dangerous	Humans have many possibilities and are basically trustworthy
Order based on	Dominator hierarchy and fear	Order through partnership, dialogue and trust; respect for other human beings
Power	As a human being try to acquire as much power as possible	Love life
Competition / cooperation	Compete or die	Cooperate and live
Self-direction	Humans are incapable of self-direction; social order must be imposed by coercive means	Humans are capable of self-direction
Evolution	The survival of the fittest	A development of the whole of society / humanity based on cooperation and creativity
Success	Those who are rich and powerful are considered successful	Those who can take care of themselves and their families and who also contribute to the well-being of all are considered successful
Learning	Seen as a means to acquire power, wealth, status and success; based on competition, coercion, fear, and testing	Based on self-direction, relationships, dialogue and mutual learning
Participation	There are winners and losers	There is a place for everyone
Dominance	Men are dominant	Gender balanced
Rights	Defend the rights of the self	Defend the rights of all

Source: inspired by David Korten's book 'The Great Turning, From Empire to Earth Community', chapter 1.

With regards to the above the following remarks can be made:

- It is an important discovery, made by David Korten, that policy statements are based on perceptions about human beings and society in general.
- David Korten urges the reader to examine closely the underlying stories and perceptions of both Models, to investigate whether these stories are correct, and to expose false myths.
- In this context we note that the founding fathers of the European Union were among the first people in history to act according to the Partnership Model: they were the first to define relationships between states on the basis of the interests of the whole of the six founding member states, instead of the narrow individual interests of each separate state.
- When we address the question of the quality of childhood we must be aware that the current educational systems and other elements in the system of childhood are, consciously or unconsciously, based on the perceptions underlying the Empire Model.
- We will never be able to attain the fruits of the Partnership Model as long as our perceptions are still based on the Empire Model.

### 3.4 The Methodology of Intervention

Within the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group we cherish the well-known saying of Mahatma Gandhi as the First Law of Pedagogy (as mentioned by René Diekstra in his book *De Grondwet van de Opvoeding / The Constitution for Raising Children*)

---

*You have to be the change you want to see in the child.*

---

The Alliance for Childhood European Network Group is of the opinion that this saying should be the philosophy for interventions for all actors and stakeholders in the whole system of childhood.

Other parameters regarding interventions are listed below. They are inspired by, among others, the various books of Jesper Juul, a Danish author:

- The child is respected as a fellow human being with his/her own aspirations to develop his/her inner potential. The child is treated as a subject and not as an object.
- The quality of the relationships of the child with important adults and others is a key element of the quality of his/her childhood and for his/her growth as a human being. The adult should be able and willing to take on the full responsibility for the quality of the relationship with the child. Children have social skills and can take personal responsibility, but they do not have the ability to take responsibility for the quality of the relationship between themselves and the adult. If parents or educators do not take this responsibility the children cannot take on this responsibility themselves. They will choose to cooperate and this is harmful for them. For example, when a parent is an alcoholic

the child will often take on more responsibility than is good for him/her.

- The following values are considered fundamental for the quality of adult-child relationships:
  - Equal dignity. This does not have to do with equality or democracy. It means that the adult respects the child to the same degree as he/she would respect another adult regarding his/her actions, thoughts, ideas etc.
  - Personal integrity (taking care of our personal needs and boundaries and respecting those of the child)
  - Authenticity. Parents try to be perfect parents. Often the parent tries to play 'the role of the perfect parent', but the child is looking for the real person inside, not the role that the parent is playing.

### *3.5 Address the mission of organisations working with and for children*

Many organisations were established in the 19th and 20th centuries to address certain shortcomings in society. Due to this history their mission is often to repair things that have gone wrong. However, since then society has evolved enormously and at this stage it is more beneficial for organisations to start reconsidering their roles and to focus on working towards establishing a good quality of childhood in the first place. Early prevention in the life of the child is often much more beneficial as well as cheaper than repairing things 20 years later.

Examples:

- There are many organisations that have as their mission to help people psychologically or otherwise when things go wrong. Often it would be very effective if these organisations would also include in their mission to work on prevention / improvement of the quality of childhood.
- Schools;
 

The OECD's PISA Study has encouraged many schools to focus on PISA scores instead of helping children to develop in accordance with the objectives mentioned in Section 2. The Alliance for Childhood European Network Group is of the opinion that the dominant testing culture in our schools is harmful for the quality of the culture in the school and the quality of the relationship between the teachers and the students. As a consequence this testing is considered harmful for the educational process, for the practice of learning and for the growth of the human beings in question.
- Youth organisations often play a very good role in the lives of children and young people, but they are run by volunteers and get very little financial support. When children fail all sorts of professional support is available (psychologists, police, prisons etc), but for a fraction of the cost a child could have been helped to find his / her way in life in the first place.
- This is also true for sports organisations that focus very much on acquiring 'gold medals',

but they sometimes neglect to nurture aspects related to the quality of childhood with regards to their members. In this context we can ask the question regarding a talented sports person: 'Is it in the long term beneficial for a young person to be selected to be trained to gain gold medals in the future?' How do we reply to this question with regards to society as a whole? What price do we want to pay for the winning of gold medals?

### *3.6 Work with Coalitions of Actors and Stakeholders*

#### **On the local level:**

As mentioned in Section 3.2 not one organisation on its own can bring about an improvement in the quality of childhood across the whole system. Cooperation between various actors and stakeholders is necessary.

In this context it has been highlighted by René Diekstra that it is beneficial for schools to involve the parents in the school. It has been proved that the level of "attunement" between the parents and the school and the involvement of the parents in the school and vice versa have a positive influence on:

- the social-emotional development
- school achievement
- educational and vocational development of the child in question.

It has also been found that the success of parents in raising children is (also) dependent upon the behaviour of other parents in the neighbourhood. The greater the number of parents who are involved in the school the greater the positive effects on the children (with regards to their learning, behaviour and development). The more the parents are involved in the school the more the children are involved.

René Diekstra furthermore advocates that local government is given the task of establishing an organisation with the following remit:

- To make sure that there is a linkage between the parents, the school and the neighbourhood
- That there is consistency in the approaches of these three "actors"
- To ensure that minimum quality levels are attained.

However, it is also important that linkages are made between actors and stakeholders in many other areas. For example, in the city of Rotterdam it was discovered that certain young people were receiving support from up to 26 different professional organisations, and these organisations all followed the same trajectory, i.e.:

- diagnosis
- deciding which measures to take
- execution of the plan,

but they were not aware that other organisations were doing the same thing. It does not require much imagination to conclude that this approach is not very effective and that the

actions taken by one organisation may conflict with those of another organisation. In the meantime the city of Rotterdam has installed a computer system, which enables the various organisations to cooperate and attune their actions with each other.

### **On the national level:**

What is true at the local level is also true on the national level. Within central government we typically find various ministries working with children, young people, schools, families and so on, such as the:

- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Families and Youth
- Ministry of Internal Affairs
- Ministry of Social Affairs
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry for Sports
- Ministry for Culture
- Ministry of Health

Often each ministry works out of a different perception of the child, different objectives and activities that may go against the objectives of another ministry. Also here it is good to build coalitions and work out combined programmes together.

### **On the European Level:**

Basically what has been recommended for central governments is true also for the European Commission itself. Some modest steps to coordinate things regarding children have been taken by appointing a coordinator for Children's Rights in (Directorate General/Justice, freedom and security). This is a good first step, but much more extensive and in-depth work remains to be done, particularly with regard to co-ordinating the work of the different DGs.

## ***3.7 Monitor the Quality of Childhood***

The quality of childhood and the well-being of children is a new policy area. Therefore it is useful to gather statistics, to compare one situation to another and draw lessons from them.

The Alliance for Childhood European Network Group is therefore happy with the work done by:

- the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre which published the report 'An overview of child well-being in rich countries', Report Card No 7.
- the Verweij-Jonker Instituut in the Netherlands that published the report 'Kinderen in Tel' (Kids Count).
- The statistical work done by the Children's Defence Fund in the USA.

The advantage of providing this data is that advocacy workers, politicians and policy

makers are given a tool to discuss their own work area in a more grounded way. Differences become visible and counties and cities can learn from one another.

This area of statistics regarding the quality of childhood and the well-being of children is in rapid development. In these circumstances it would be good to develop on an EU level a methodology with regard to how data are gathered and what types of data, so that the statistics become more comparable.

### *3.8 Bring the various Communities working with and for children in contact with each other on the basis of the Quality of Childhood*

#### **Bring the Academic Communities together**

At this moment the following academic disciplines work on the topic of children, education and so on:

- educational sciences
- pedagogy
- psychology
- psychiatry
- paediatrics and health
- criminology
- physical environment of children
- local government administration

Our assessment is that there tends to be not much exchange between these disciplines. Often a breakthrough in one area is not known in another area.

It would be beneficial if these research communities would start to work together more with the objective of improving the quality of childhood.

#### **Bring the Academic Communities and the 'Organisations in the Field' closer together**

There are many organisations and individuals working for and with children who are challenged every day with how to cope with all sorts of problems with regards to children and young people. Often they are not aware of all the research outcomes that could be used in their daily work.

Also in this case increased contact between the research community and the people on the ground would be very fruitful for both sides.

#### **Bring the various Communities working with and for Children in the EU Member States closer together**

What is happening in one EU member state is often not known in another member state. The various member states can learn a lot from each other. One country has found a successful approach to a certain challenge and another member state has found a solution to another problem. By establishing networks, learning processes can be accelerated strongly, and people will experience increased job satisfaction through the process of



sharing approaches and discoveries with colleagues in other countries.

### **Apply the Open Method of Consultation to the policy area of children and childhood**

The Open Method of Consultation works well in various policy areas. We consider that it would be useful also to apply it to the area of children and childhood.

## **4. The role that the European Commission could play**

Many challenges in the field of children and childhood are common across the various EU member states. We can mention the following examples:

- Globalization and related challenges in the educational area;
- The business sector has identified children as a new target group of consumers, which is sometimes harmful for the children concerned.
- The global electronic village (television, mobile phones, the internet, computer games) is in some ways harmful for children and affects the quality of childhood
- Trafficking into the EU of minors to work in the sex industry
- Integration of the 28 million persons, who, along with their parents and / or grandparents, were born outside the EU
- Migration
- Demographic developments

We therefore recommend that the European Commission plays a role in this respect and helps member states to face the challenges in this area. The following fields of work have been identified for the Commission:

- Statistics: to monitor the Quality of Childhood in the EU Member States

To help to define a common approach in this area so that data become comparable;

- Create a European Research Institute regarding Children, Childhood and Children's Rights, which should become a platform for the various research disciplines working on the topic of children on the one hand and for the various national research communities working in the same fields on the other hand. On top of this the Institute could operate as an exchange platform between the academic community and organisations working directly with children.
- Coordinate the activities of the various DG's in the Commission with regards to children, childhood and the rights of children; this should include influencing the Stoiber process in order to reduce the legislative obstacles to the creation of safe spaces for children.
- Create an ongoing dialogue between the member states on the subject, including benchmark meeting on various subjects like the difficulties in the banlieus, which is not only a French problem.
- Strengthen the European Forum for the Rights of the Child.
- Stimulate the creation of coalitions of actors and stakeholders regarding issues related to childhood.
- Create a budget for children, young people, the quality of childhood and Children's Rights.
- Apply the Open Method of Coordination in the policy area of children and childhood.

## PUBLICATIONS CITED:

*'The demographic future of Europe, from challenge to opportunity' (COM (2006) 571 final) by the European Commission*  
*'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child' of 4.7.2006 COM(2006)367 final by the European Commission*  
*Learning: the Treasure Within, Report to UNESCO by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Jacques Delors*  
*Great Transitions, Preparing Adolescents for a New Century, Carnegie Corporation of New York*  
*Jesper Juul, presentation to the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood within the European Parliament on 6 March 2007 and his book 'Vom Gehorsam zur Verantwortung. Für eine neue Erziehungskultur.'*  
*Various publications by DECET (Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training).*  
*Every Child Matters: Change for Children by the UK Government (Green Paper).*  
*The State of America's Children, various Yearbooks by the Children's Defence Fund.*  
*From Empire to Earth Community by David Korten.*  
*De Grondwet van de Opvoeding / The Constitution for Raising Children by René Diekstra.*  
*Learning for Tomorrow's World, first Results from PISA 2003 by the OECD.*  
*'An overview of child well-being in rich countries', Report Card No 7 by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre*  
*'Kinderen in Tel' (Kids Count) by the Verweij-Jonker Instituut in the Netherlands.*  
*Janusz Korczak Foundation: various publications.*

**Michiel Matthes** was born in 1950 in Bussum, the Netherlands. He grew up in a nourishing family made up of both parents and four children. In 1967 he received his secondary school diploma. He studied Economics for Developing Countries at Wageningen University. From 1976 until 1980 he worked for the FAO in Ethiopia and Kenya. From 1981 until 2005 he worked for the Rabobank and the Unico Banking Group, for most of that period in the Netherlands.

He married in 1976 and has a family of three sons. In 2006 Michiel Matthes took the initiative to set up the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group. Since 2002 he has lived and worked in Brussels.

Date: 4th March 2008