



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



Ref: CommHR/NM/sf 002-2017

Mr Viktoras PRANCKIETIS

Speaker of the Parliament (Seimas)
of the Republic of Lithuania
Lithuania

Strasbourg, 10 February 2017

Dear Speaker,

I am writing to you in connection with the scheduled discussion in the Lithuanian Parliament of issues related to the protection of children's rights.

During my visit to Lithuania in December 2016, I had fruitful discussions with several members of the Parliament, including the Chairpersons of the Social Affairs and Labour and Human Rights Committees, as well as members of the delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, on matters related to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and domestic violence, and the rights of children. As concerns the latter issue, I emphasised the need to take resolute steps, specifically at legislative level, to fully abolish the use of corporal punishment and any other form of violence against children.

Violence against children has a high cost for society. Not only does it inflict multiple and lasting consequences on the lives of children, including their social development, physical and mental health, and education, but children exposed to violence can also be more likely to adopt violent behaviour themselves, thus perpetuating violence across generations. From my discussions relating to domestic violence in Lithuania, I learned that children are, after women, the second largest group affected. This makes it all the more imperative to address such issues through a comprehensive and multidimensional approach.

I understand that next week the Parliament will look into several initiatives and policy proposals aimed at better protecting children from violence, including those related to the abolition of corporal punishment in all settings. Such a policy has already been adopted in 30 out of 47 Council of Europe member states. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to express full support and encouragement for this important undertaking and I very much hope that the Parliament will vote it into law.

In view of the above-mentioned discussions, I would also like to draw attention of the members of the Parliament to the [Council of Europe Policy Guidelines on Integrated National Strategies for the Protection of Children from Violence](#), which are a useful instrument for developing a holistic national framework for safeguarding the rights of the child, eradicating violence against them and promoting a culture of respect for the rights of the child. In order to prevent and address violence against children in a systematic and effective manner, it is essential that the authorities adopt a coordinated strategy at national level, with the involvement of all the relevant actors, and to subsequently ensure effective and independent monitoring of the implementation of such a strategy.

In my discussion with parliamentarians and governmental officials last December, I also emphasised the importance of ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), which sets up an effective framework for the protection against violence and covers all categories of victims, including children.

There are several other areas where resolute action must be taken in order to strengthen the existing legal framework for the protection of the rights of children in line with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. For instance, mandatory reporting by all relevant professionals of incidents of alleged violence against children plays a key role in creating a safer environment for children. There should be an efficient system of alternative (foster) care in families and family-like settings, having regard to the high incidence of violence experienced by children in institutions. It is also important to ensure that justice is child-friendly and quality psychological services are made available for children, most notably in the framework of domestic violence-related judicial proceedings. The promotion of positive and non-violent forms of child-rearing should form a basis for the planning and implementation of policies related to children and the family. The Council of Europe has developed a [recommendation](#) on positive parenting which could serve as a source of inspiration for such policies. I hope that the Parliament can provide a decisive impetus for these changes, including through necessary amendments to the legislation.

Lastly, parliamentarians have an important role towards creating a favourable environment for the work of key human rights institutions in the area of children's rights, both by supporting them in discharging their mandate in an independent and effective manner, as well as by providing them with adequate resources to carry out their functions.

I stand ready to discuss all these matters further with you and other members of the Parliament. I would also be grateful if you could ensure that all members of the Seimas receive a copy of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nils Muižnieks". The signature is written in a cursive style and is followed by a horizontal line.

Nils Muižnieks