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## World and our society owe a lot to children



*An increased attention needs to be paid to care and protection of rights of a child by all organizational bodies of our society, our country as well. Both world and our society still owe a lot to children. Rights of children are repeatedly disregarded, often very seriously. Still pertaining to a group that is least capable to influence steps and measures taken by governmental bodies, children remain endangered. Moreover, there remains an actual issue of overcoming gap between the rhetoric about rights and the real life of children by way of their reflection in legal regulation, politics, as well as in implementation practice. The public has to be aware of children's rights and the rights have to be comprehensible both for public and for children. Otherwise, they fail to fulfil their purpose. The highest goal and final intended effect is to create an atmosphere of esteem for children and their rights, not only in our country, but in all countries of the world. Children form a numerous group having only minimum possibilities of enforcing their rights. Therefore, there*

*are considerations on a need of establishment of specialized institution for protection of rights of children. Opinions differ not only in our country, but also throughout the world.*

*My opinion is explicit and clear. I am a defender of rights for the children as well as for the adults. Cases, that I have dealt with, confirm that we still owe a lot to children in this country as well. They still form the most vulnerable group of inhabitants. Each individual infringement of rights of a child requires special attention. It should be reminded that children need to be helped, but not only if their rights are infringed. The sooner and better children get aware of their rights, the more efficiently they can enforce them. In the spirit of this philosophy, confirmed by many experiences, I have decided to promote education of children, also through a realization of the Project of Child Collaborators of Public Defender of Rights. I believe that involvement of my young „colleagues“ along with cooperation of other experts will enable to disclose and solve some children's worries, which remain invisible to the eyes of adults for various reasons. However, we should also let the child collaborators of the Public Defender of Rights talk.*

*Pavel Kandráč  
Public Defender of Rights*

**T**he Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which we commemorated just on the day of the 1st meeting of child-representatives in the seat of the Public Defender of Rights, clearly states: „Childhood is entitled to special care and assistance“. Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1959 also emphasizes that „mankind owes to the child the best it has to give“. States, which are parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, recognized that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. They also emphasized that in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. The Convention also assures to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

## Creation of network of children collaborating with the Public Defender of Rights

We consider it necessary to pay attention to the specific needs of children and the youth, to the real acknowledgement of serious nature of their observations and opinions by adults. We point out the necessity of participation of this important group in the solution of issues associated with children and the youth, with emphasis on a support to their social and civic involvement.



Pavel Kandrač with kids from the Private Kindergarten at Nobelovo square in Petržalka district in Bratislava

The project aims to increase the efficiency of protection of and compliance with the rights of children in the Slovak Republic, to increase the efficiency of the activities taken for the protection of rights of children by children themselves, improvement of legal awareness and information available to children, but also to broad professional and general public as for the rights assured by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our goals also include an improvement of level of education of children, including education to tolerance and respect for other socially appreciated values. We pay specific attention to the issue of infringing the rights of children in the Slovak Republic by state bodies. The project will assure better monitoring of observance of the rights of children with follow-up analysis of threats and subsequent preventive measures, also in connection with new dangers induced by a social development that are mainly transferred by audio-visual and information means. Based on a synergy of individual state bodies, schools and other institutions dedicated to children and the youth, the project should also improve their coordination. We offer a possibility to get involved in our project to schools and other facilities dedicated to children and youth on voluntary basis. We are looking forward to receive the information that children in other school or facility choose their representative(s), who can identify themselves with mission of child ombudsman and are determined to defend rights of each member of their collective. We expect of the children to act as contacts between their peers and the Public Defender of Rights in dealing with everyday troubles

experienced at school, at home or in specified facility. We are prepared to present our project before children, educators, child carers and other employees of schools and facilities dedicated to children. And we would be also glad to meet with parents of the children. We deem it important to co-act with management of schools and other facilities for children, with psychologists, school counsellors and other educators, employees as well as with parents. We have also involved other experts into realization of the project. We intend to organize regular meetings of the child representatives with the Public Defender of Rights and other experts, focused on complaints received from the child representatives as well as on continuous improvement of knowledge on child rights, on methods of their protection and solution of both their everyday and exceptional troubles, but also on knowledge of obligations and accountability for their own behaviour. The meetings are to be held at least quarterly in the Office of the Public Defender of Rights. We emphasize that involvement into project would not charge schools and other facilities with any financial or other material burdens and that we are obliged to keep confidentiality and observe relevant provisions concerning personal data protection.

On December 10<sup>th</sup>, December 2008, on the occasion of the International Day of Human Rights, the Office of the Public Defender of Rights gave official „green light“ to the Project on Creation of Network of Children Collaborating with the Public Defender of Rights. An invitation for the first meeting of child-representatives was accepted by representatives of all addressed schools and facilities for children: Children's Home, in Nova Baňa; Elementary School, Jelenecka in Nitrianske Hrnčiarovce; L. Novomeský Gymnasium in Bratislava; United School, Tilgnerova 14, Bratislava; Gymnasium J. Kollara 2 in Žiar nad Hronom; Diagnostic Center for Youths in Bratislava-Zahorska Bystrica; F. V. Sasinek Gymnasium Skalica; Vocational School of Commerce, Na pantoch in Bratislava.



The first meeting of child-representatives in the seat of the Public Defender of Rights

## Child-representatives in schools and children's facilities

We are pleased with existing interest of schools and other facilities dedicated to children in cooperation with the Office of the Public Defender of Rights. We are very glad that also the Project on Creation of Network of Children Collaborating with the Public Defender of Rights contributes to further increase of the interest in favour of children.



Public Defender of Rights discussed with students of L. Novomeský Gymnasium School at Tomášikova street in Bratislava on the occasion of the International Children's Day

### How children chose "Tomombudswoman"

In November 2008, the students of L. Novomeský Gymnasium at Tomášikova in Bratislava had a unique opportunity to participate in election of their Tomombudsman. They voted in an electronic way, using their on-line student record book. Candidates had a task to write an essay themed „Why I would like to become a Tomombudsman?“. **Nikola Revicka**, winner of the poll, was ceremonially inaugurated on the occasion of the Fight for Freedom and Democracy Day. We are quoting the conclusion of her essay: :

*„School ombudsman should be a student with task of helping other students in solving the issues, which they can't cope with. We study voluntarily in our school, thus we should not suppress our personality, our uniqueness and our human rights. Nobody can deprive us of them, but sometimes someone is needed, who acquaints us with them and directs us towards a solution. Don't let matters permanently unsettled, as they will get bigger and bigger like a snowball rolling down a hill and gathering snowflake after snowflake. The snowball may tumble someone or get shattered. What possibility will you choose? "*

*I came to curtain, from which a bug had been watching me for all the time, giving me an inspiration. Everyone likes freedom. Even those, who want to deprive us of it. Even bugs. I took a napkin, smiled at the bug and released it to freedom. Freedom for me, freedom for you. Yes, that's why I want to be your ombudswoman.“*

The tomombudswoman along with management of the school and the project coordinator mainly expect that the project will improve education of pupils in the field of rights of a child and human rights, provide other doors, on which children can knock in the case of trouble, provide other experiences on the basis of cooperation with the Office of the Public Defender of Rights and work with peers, develop forms and incentives of our cooperation in interest of children.

### Children's home took part in this project too

We highly appreciate interest of the Children's Home in Nová Baňa in our project. Child ombudswoman **Klaudia Hakeľova** along with management of the children's home expect that the project will improve legal awareness of young people and education of employees in children's homes, develop cooperation in the cases, when courts or administrative bodies fail to act flexibly and in the best interest of child, form cooperation in commenting on the laws that have impact to activity of children's homes, on lives of the children housed in the children's homes as well as the children leaving the children's homes. They also consider it important to develop child personality in the field of healthy life style, including provision of information on anorexia, bulimia, influence of imprudent diets to organism, education focused on responsible approach to planned parenthood and parenthood education itself as well as work in the field of addiction prevention, mainly with respect to tobacco, alcohol, drugs, gambling and use of internet. They also require information on activities of non-governmental organizations that could help children after leaving the children's home. They think that main purpose of cooperation with the Public Defender of Rights lies in thorough preparation of children for leaving the children's homes and integration of children into society.

**Mirka Darnadiová**, pupil of the Elementary School in Nitrianske Hrnčiarovce, became enthusiastic ombudswoman in her school. After the meeting held in the seat of the Public Defender of Rights she stated that she was looking forward „bulletin dedicated to us, the child-representatives. It will enable us to get better familiarized with work of the Public Defender of Rights, emulate his work in activities we will perform in our school and help us to better promote a possibility of help to schoolmates who will need it.“ She would also like to use the bulletin for acquaintance of the work and experiences of other school child-representatives. We believe that some of her questions will be answered by her colleagues on the next page.

## Specialized child-representatives

Students of Gymnasium school in Žiar nad Hronom decided to form a collective body for protection of their rights. Many of the specialized school child-representatives have personally faced various problems. Now they want to help their schoolmates, who struggle with alike misery

### Lucia Gulašová, 17 years old

I think that function of school ombudsman is important in this time. Many students face bullying, they have conflicts with other people from their environment or suffer from own troubles of mental origin. Ombudsman can help just in such moment. My task is to organize meetings at school, municipal or higher levels. It is important to have an overview of school life... Maybe just this will push us forward, maybe we will move towards solving of problems also owing to my assistance.

### Petra Rafaelisová, 11 years old

I am second-year pupil in secondary school. When I first time heard of child-representatives, I asked who actually was an ombudsman. Ombudsman is an important person, because he can help people to solve various problems. But not only this, he or she is also true human being, a significant part of our world. Hand of support is extended. I will deal with schoolmates with mental problems. I believe that if anybody in this school has such problem, I will be able to advice him on the person, whom he can contact, and on the way that he can use to solve his troubles.

### Sofia Fabová, 12 years old

During a short time of my life I have already gained many bad experiences, which, in my opinion, made me almost adult too early. I personally suffered from horrors of anorexia and depression. I didn't comprehend that a human being could really experience such things as described in magazines and shown in TV. Now I am already freed, owing to doctors and my closest people and I am enjoying life. I want to help young people with similar troubles and show them the way of life and pleasure instead of sadness and distress. I want to persuade them that it is worth to fight and that all troubles can be removed, if one endeavours and is surrounded by the people, who are willing to help him.

### Izabela Reichelová, 16 years old

I think that this project will create a better atmosphere in the school. Students will not only feel themselves more safely, but, in particular, they will feel that they are not alone and that there is someone who will give a hand of support to them in the case of need and misery.

### Peter Gombala, 15 years old

I expect that establishing a function of child ombudsman will improve relations between pupils, both in and out of the school. Moreover, I expect that relations between pupils and teachers will improve as well.



### Peter Murár, 15 years old

I am student in 1.C class. I am pleasantly surprised with project of child-representatives and glad that I take part in it. I am mainly delighted that we can choose our own form, in which we will help other pupils in our school. I am engaged in the field of doping in sports and I have a lot to say about this issue on the basis of my own experiences. I hope that I will be able to help as well.

### Veronika Lukáčová, 16 years old

This project brings something new to our school. It can mediate own advice centre for students. It enables us to better understand the others...or look at them from other perspectives and provide help where needed.

### Wewe Rišňovská, 11 years old

How I imagine a work of ombudsman? I mainly want to communicate a lot with people. Communication is very important. Communication keeps us together and strengthens our relations. In good and in bad times. I want to familiarize people with work of ombudsman, with prevention of violence and bullying. People don't even perceive many wrong things, as they are frequent in the people's life and tolerated by a society. They don't know where a border lays. Actually, even I don't know it exactly. But I believe that in the course of time and with new gained experiences I will find it. Probably each person places the border on different place. However, we should not harm each other. Another matter is campaigns. The campaigns for help to children, who are bullied, maltreated or suffer from various mental troubles or addictions. Child-representatives help to solve such problems. Also you can come and chat with us, tell us or write something. We will have own webpage under the school's website. Once...There you will be able to obtain more information on us and our activity. If you need us, we will be here for you.

### Nikola Do Anhová, 15 years old

I study in 1.A class. After the meeting with ombudsman in Bratislava, I also want to help and contribute to success of the project as much as I am capable. I am sure the project will have the best results.

## Other experts are also participating in the Project

**Dr. Štefan Matula, psychologist from the Research Institute of Child Psychology and Psychopathology, chairman of the Children's Fund of the Slovak Republic:**

*„When a child is born, he/she is small and defenceless and if parents didn't care for him with love from the very beginning, he wouldn't maybe survive longer than just three days. If a child is flooded by love and care by his relatives during childhood and adolescence, he himself then kindly and decently behaves towards his schoolmates and friends too. But not always the result is quite so good and then it happens that schoolmates intentionally harm one another and, it is the worst thing, they harm weaker ones, who can't adequately defend themselves. Therefore, I support, with all my heart, an idea that children at school will arrange a culture of their mutual relations without help of adults in such a way that no longer will it be possible for a stronger kid to harm weaker one and that he will esteem it as an honour to protect rights of those who are weaker of him.“*



Experts in the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of child-representatives in the seat of Public Defender of Rights, held on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2008

**Dr. Igor Škodáček, Chief Physician of the Clinic of Child Psychiatry of the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University and the Children's Teaching Hospital with Outpatients' Department:**

*„Law, psyche and child have many mutual interconnections. The system of rules of law enables to adequately live according to human possibilities, where pleasure is interconnected with obligation to work, taking care of less capable citizens or helping each other against natural disasters and malevolence of some people. Rules, which people establish to live as good life as possible, depend on their psyche. Also the children should have as nice life in the society as possible, taking into consideration their rights and obligations. A society of human beings produces complex system of various acts, both good and wrong ones, reflecting activity of their psyche. Brain starts to develop as early as during intrauterine life, where each human being enters*

*into the most intimate contact with his mother, which he further develops after birth in contacts with his relatives, peers, other adults from his birthplace and, finally, in contacts with people worldwide. Our brain is adapted to such activity, since it contains more than one hundred billion neurons and each neuron receives about 40 thousand up to 70 thousand connections from other neurons.*

*It is a huge universe of possible connections with neighbouring world and possibilities of formation of relations with other individuals, who have to establish rules of symbiosis. Unfortunately, the rules are from time to time distorted, not only by mentally competent individuals with different culture and upbringing, but sometimes also by people with variously impaired functions of psyche. Fearing of such unknown factor as impaired psyche, people fear of or even hate the individuals with defects of mind, sensation or action. And such individuals then often suffer in society since their very birth, although many of them are very creative people, only afflicted with, for example, neurosis. Based on information provided by the World Health Organization, about 450 millions people suffer from mental and neurological defects. One out of 6 Europeans has one or several mental disorders, but less than one half of them undergo treatment. Number of people, who are mentally unbalanced up to impaired to various degree, will increase so quickly that in twenty years given disorder will pertain to most frequent health and social problems. Mental disorders are manifested as early as in childhood and during adolescence. Many of afflicted individuals are not capable of concentrated learning, they are anxious, apprehensive, suffer from mental anorexia, their comprehensiveness is retarded, they are depressive with suicidal tendencies, they take drugs, they feel themselves otherwise structured. They are often bullied and maltreated, not only by their family, but also by their peers, who thus overcome their own inferiority feelings and manifest behaviour disorders. Such situations impair correct legal relations.*

*And here is the space for very important role of child ombudsmen. In addition to logical rationality, they also have to be sensitive, so that they are able to help their peers in such situations. They have to be known in classes, school so that their peers will know whom they can contact. Pointing out to problematic peers, they will also help their families, when number of unfortunate problems that can be solved by legal means will be reduced owing to intervention or even suggestion of treatment. It is no longer needed to fear of people with mental disorders that can be cured. Child ombudsmen are important in prevention of unrecognized mental disorders of minors.“*

## Also civil association can assist at achieving the goal of project

**Zodpovedne.sk**

Our society is characterized by fast technological progress, which daily confronts millions of people owing to technological and economic development to such extent that was unforeseeable until recently. New products of science and technology bring new threats and produce new victims. Therefore, the Office of the Public Defender of Rights got engaged in the project focused on safe and responsible use of internet, mobile phones and new technologies, which is realized by the civil association eSlovensko, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, Slovak Committee for UNICEF, Telefonica O2 Slovakia company and SK-NIC company under title „Zodpovedne.sk“ (meaning “Responsibly”). Dr. Alexandra Stachova represents the Office of the Public Defender of Rights in the Advisory Committee:

*„In general, children are one of the most threatened groups of inhabitants and it is also true in connection with audiovisual and information means. Several researches provided alarming results, which confirmed that children in their activities performed using internet or mobile phones gullibly approach to unknown individuals, with whom they communicate. They often don't realize or underestimate dangers in form of personal data misuse, internet frauds, manifestations of violence, discrimination, pornography or various addictions, which are associated with such communication. To assure protection of children, society has to take steps for elimination, but mainly for prevention of occurrence of possible dangers. Activities realized in this field should be focused not only on threatened group of children, but also on parents and educators. Their school should use an attractive form to get the issue closer to prevention of any forms of impairment of human rights at simultaneous coordination of all approaches, mainly involvement of state bodies, economic players, NGOs, pedagogical and upbringing-educational activities as well as parental control.“*

**Details of the project can be found on following websites: [Zodpovedne.sk](http://Zodpovedne.sk), [Pomoc.sk](http://Pomoc.sk), [Cookie.sk](http://Cookie.sk).**

**PLAY TRUE – live in true, do not lie to yourself**

In the meeting of child-representatives on December 10<sup>th</sup> 2008, Jaroslav Malchárek, Chairman of the Civil Association “Sports against Drugs” presented the project “PLAY TRUE – live in true, do not lie to yourself”, which is also a pilot project of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic. It is the first educational project focused on the issue of illegal doping and its adverse impacts to young generation on national level. The project's goal is to evoke disapproving attitude of young people and society to the use of illegal doping, mainly by pointing out to serious impacts of the use to young individual and his family with emphasis on moral and ethical aspect of the issue as well.



The project was christened by Bibiana Obrimčáková, State Secretary of the Ministry of Education

On December 15<sup>th</sup> 2008, collective of creators from the Civil Association “Sports against Drugs” christened with saffron the above mentioned interesting and, considering its theme, unique project realized under the auspices of Dušan Čaplovič, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Slovak Republic. Topicality of the project's theme follows from high increase of users of illegal doping (including anabolic steroids and drugs) among recreational sportsmen and young people who don't perform sports. Such users take said substances in attempt to gain, quickly and without bigger effort, an attractive physique, failing to realize serious consequences of the use. The non-commercial project will be presented on DVD and in form of book, which will be available for free, mainly at schools and sports clubs. .

*Main partners of the project are the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, Antidrug Fund, General Secretariat of the Ministerial Committee for Drug Addictions and Drug Control, Slovak Olympic Committee, Presidium of the Police of the Slovak Republic, State Pedagogical Institute, Slovak Association for Sports at Schools, Association of School Counsellors, Slovak Anti-Doping Committee, UEFA, the Office of the Public Defender of Rights.*



## How to get involved in the project

## Public Defender of Rights is also Ombudsman for children

*Do you want to get involved in the Project on Creation of Network of Children Collaborating with the Public Defender of Rights - Child ombudsmen?*

*Contact Henrieta Antalova, project's author and sponsor and Head of the Office of the Public Defender of Rights:*

**Phone:** each working day from 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.

+421/2/48 28 74 01

+421/2/43 63 49 06

You can leave a message on answering machine after 4.00 p.m.

**Fax:** +421/2/48 28 72 03

**E-mail:** antalova@vop.gov.sk or office@vop.gov.sk

**Web:** www.vop.gov.sk

Internet portal [www.detskyombudsman.sk](http://www.detskyombudsman.sk) is under construction

**[www.detskyombudsman.sk](http://www.detskyombudsman.sk)**

*We are looking forward to hear from you.*

## Notice

In March 2008, the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) decided to grant the Public Defender of Rights associate membership. Subsequently, the Public Defender of Rights got fully engaged in the activities of the network. The Office of the Public Defender of Rights participated in a research study of ENOC realized within the framework of EU programme Fundamental Rights and Citizenship and subsequent assessment seminar dedicated to the theme of participation of children in decision-taking in matters concerning them.

According to law, any person, thus also a child can contact the Public Defender of Rights. In more than six years of his activity, the Public Defender of Rights settled more than 2000 cases concerning children. He helped to remove unnecessary delays in dozens of litigations concerning proceedings on maintenance and support of a minor, on granting the custody of a child to one parent after divorce, taking decisions regulating the contact with the child as well as in proceedings on paternity determination. Intervention of the Public Defender of Rights also assisted at removal of unnecessary delays in proceedings before the offices for labour, social matters and family concerning provision of monetary allowance for compensation of social consequences of serious disability of children, in granting of orphan's pensions, in protection of right to privacy of children, right to education and right to health care. The Public Defender of Rights contributed to improvement of legal regulation in favour of children, to assigning of apartments to families with minors. Owing to him, children enjoyed time off during public holidays that were unjustifiably cancelled by headmasters in two individual cases. He played an important role in positive perception of transformation of children's homes in the municipalities, which initially refused them. Along with lawyers from his office, the Public Defender of Rights provided, free of charge, more than 3500 legal advices to children, their parents, grandparents and other relatives as well as to teachers and other educators.

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