

The Bulgarian Group against the proposed “National Strategy for the Child 2019—2030” has now reached over 145.000 concerned citizens, Bulgarians and foreigners living in Bulgaria. There have been numerous information campaigns and protests in over 30 cities across the nation, which have, unfortunately, been widely ignored by the media and politicians alike. Even at the Parliamentary hearing little attention and no reassurance have been given to the representatives of the national group.

The Strategy and new approaches to Social and Child Services are based on the Norwegian Model and heavily funded by Norway and its mechanism. In the name of “the rights of the child,” politicians, lawmakers and NGOs are busy working to undermine what Bulgarians hold dear: the traditional family and the role of the parents. The Strategy itself contained little of parents’ rights and had a child-centred core. Much of what has been proposed and developed over the last year or two has been very worrying to parents, especially in view of what Bulgarians have observed happening in nations where such legal frameworks are in full force.

Our beloved homeland is riddled with self-serving politicians and greedy opportunists. To our shame – as a part of the European Union for more than ten years – we have come last in the main indicators of human existence, such as the economy (our minimum wage is 287 Euros), healthcare and employment, but worst of all in terms of mortality, disease and poverty.

We Bulgarians tend to be very agreeable and patient, even to a point where we have endured being manipulated, deceived, robbed and made poor and powerless, by those who are supposed to govern us for our well-being. But when, with their actions, the rulers came to reach out to get to our children, under the pretext and pretense of great concern for their well-being, our patience ended.

When, in 2018, our governing bodies proposed a project “The National Strategy for the Child 2019-2030,” under the slogan, “All rights for all children”, prepared, supported and consulted by 152 NGOs, financed by dubious foreign funds, we as parents shuddered at the thought and concept. The Strategy assumes by definition that all parents are incompetent and incapable and that all children are potentially abused (mentally and physically). It implies that the decisions and responsibility for our children belong to the state and to certain NGOs and only under their professional care and advice our children will be able to blossom and develop.

The Strategy is based on three premises:

- comprehensiveness of its object (it targets all children at conception, no matter whether they are in a need, abandoned or injured, “the strategy targets the three stages of childhood, as a period of the entire human life cycle” - pregnancy and early childhood; childhood; teenage years);
- the presumption of every parent as incompetent, most often an abuser (emotional and/or physical), who must be replaced by private organizations, schools and professionals to decide on matters of their upbringing and the cultivation of knowledge and values (often questionable and rather inadmissible to our way of life and morals), taking away the constitutional and legal rights and responsibilities of parents to raise and educate their children in the spirit and traditions of our people. According to the Bulgarian Constitution (Article 47), the “raising and upbringing of children” is the “right and obligation of their parents,” and the state’s role in this

process is to assist them, not replace them. This seems to be under attack nowadays.

- The child-centred model (adopted from the third protocol of the UN Convention, which has NOT been ratified in our country) - authorizing the child, regardless of the age and maturity, to make decisions and receive social services and counseling without PARENTAL CONSENT. Defining the child as a separate entity, with separate rights, which is contrary to Bulgarian law, ignoring terms such as: minor, juvenile, parent, guardian/custodian, etc.

After our national protest, which took place in 30 cities on 11. May 2019, quoting the words of our Prime Minister's official statement: "There will be no Strategy, I will order the Minister of Labor and Social Policy to reiterate in the morning, lunchtime and evening at the briefing that there is no Strategy for the Children". We would have accepted his statement with due attention if it wasn't for what followed them. Despite his words, the ideas embedded in the supposedly annulled Strategy are being passed as laws and regulations, changes and amendments that are even contrary to our Supreme Law, they also contradict AIN principles enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. They were voted in our legislature with effect from 1. January 2020. The ideas in the spirit of the Strategy were pushed into changes in twenty-eight laws (starting with the Child Protection Act) and a passing of a whole new law – the Social Services Act.

The changes provide for the removal of our children from our homes with a multidisciplinary team of police, social workers, psychologists, etc., even after an anonymous signal, on absolutely unspecified criteria and definition of the term what is called a "child at risk." The child is literally thrown into foster care indefinitely, the procedure is administrative until it is brought to court, which can take months, maybe years. From then onwards, under certain conditions of the law and most of all through lobbying non-governmental organizations, the removed child can be adopted by people from all over the world and the family will never see him/her again (personal data, such as personal number, certificate of birth, are being changed). This is a true distortion, and it is not done in the best interest of the Bulgarians, and certainly not in the best interest of the child.

Working for the benefit of various non-governmental organizations promoting gender ideologies as well as early sexual education, the Law on Social Services was adopted in March 2019, and will be in effect from 1. January 2020. With this law the complete abdication of the state is in mind, which openly admits that it is incapable of fulfilling its purpose, namely to be a STATE in which there is a systematic order and guaranteeing the rule of law.

The social functions of the state are transferred to private organizations, often international ones (and there is no clear requirement for them to be licensed in our country) and everybody is their target, not just those in need. Due to the new executive power of the providers of social service, they will have the right to enter our homes (without a court order, such as a newly adopted plan published in the Government Gazette in July - patronage care for babies under 3 years of age in all 28 regional cities - the same patronage care was made mandatory in the Strategy) will provide counseling and mediation services in our courts (which is happening already now, but after 1. January 2020 it will be mandatory) will provide our children

with counseling and health services without requiring parental knowledge and consent to do so.

We do not deny the need for social care services and effective legislation for children in need, but with the only condition of clear, strict criteria, clear definitions and rules put in place, without intermediaries as Scandinavian-funded NGOs who dictate the rules (Strasbourg, Norway and others). We cannot accept NGOs and social services who can act independently of court orders and due procedure to intervene in families. We believe in upholding the family and supporting struggling parents, not to undermine parental authority and the family unit. We refuse to live in fear of social services. As stated above, according to the Bulgarian Constitution, the State and its institutions must assist the family.

The National Group “No to the Strategy for the Child 2019—2030” seeks to inform citizens not only of the tragic events and consequences that have occurred in Norway through its Child Protection Services, a scandal now known on a global scale, but also to warn of the consequences such models, funded by the same country and by NGO’s from other nations with similar ideological approaches, could have if adopted here. There are several documented cases in which Bulgarian children were removed, some forcefully, from their parents in the name of protecting the child. The National Group is very concerned that things are going out of hand far too quickly. The Group wants withdrawal of the mentioned above laws and clarity from the government, something it has failed to provide so far.

WE ASK FOR SUPPORT, cooperation, sharing of articles, literature and expertise, to be facilitated in practical directions to overcome the problem. We would like our voice to be heard by civilized Europe, our demands to be objectively reflected. We also hope for cooperation with European and international organizations that are fighting the disfiguring of humanity, starting with children and breaking up families. Best regards from over 145,000 Bulgarians and their families.