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# The Disability Movement Votes for Inclusion!

From the European Year of Citizens to the European elections

BELGIUM - BRUSSELS

2013 was the European Year of Citizens. Active citizenship means active involvement and participation of all citizens in all aspects of society. In the disability movement, we believe that nothing can be decided about us without us and this is not just a motto. It's a way of thinking, living and acting.

In times of crisis, it is more imperative than ever to make most of our rights as citizens and not let any decisions concerning our lives be taken for us without us. Europe is entering the 7th year of an economic crisis that has devastating effects mostly on the lives of the most vulnerable categories of citizens and in all European countries persons with disabilities have been the first to pay for this. EDF continues monitoring the impact of the economic crisis on the lives of persons with disabilities through its 'observatory of the crisis', while persistently pushing the European institutions for a social and human rights way out of the crisis.

Last summer, we met the leaders of the main political groups of the European Parliament; they all signed a declaration to take up a series of important initiatives for the full inclusion of 80 million Europeans with disabilities and the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Among others, the leaders of the political groups agreed to ensure the accessibility of their websites, documents and information to persons with disabilities in view of the 2014 European elections and to push for an ambitious and legally binding European Accessibility Act with strong measures at EU level to improve the accessibility of goods and services for persons with disabilities.

EDF has strongly and long campaigned for the adoption of such legislation. Through our Freedom of Movement Top Campaign, we have been calling on the EU to proceed to the adoption of an ambitious and legally binding European Accessibility Act and to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate

in society on equal terms with other citizens. In November 2013, the disability movement met with the Vice President of the European Commission, Viviane Reding to discuss the actions that the Commission is taking on the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities and the upcoming European Accessibility Act. Ms Reding expressed the European Commission's commitment to the preparation of the legislative proposal of the Act and confirmed that the Act is included in the Commission's 2014 work plan.

The political will and ambition of the European Commission and subsequently of the European Parliament and the Council will be a test of the real commitment of the EU to the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), the

first international human rights treaty that has been ever concluded by the EU itself, as well as by almost all of the EU Member States.

In 2014 the EU will submit for the first time a report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and will be questioned on the steps it has taken to date in order to ensure the implementation of the human rights enshrined in the UN CRPD. With regard to this, EDF conducted a survey through its member organisations all around Europe and is preparing an alternative report to the EU report on the implementation of the UN CRPD. EDF has also become a full member and chair of the EU Monitoring Framework, together with the European Ombudsman, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, the European Parliament's Petitions Committee and the European Commission. The Framework has the mandate to promote, protect and monitor the implementation of the UN CRPD by the EU.

Despite the fact that the UN CRPD foresees equal access to all information and communication technologies, 2/3 of public bodies' websites in Europe are still far from being accessible. Over a year ago, the Commission published a legislative proposal for the accessibility of public websites. Throughout all this period, EDF has strongly campaigned for a wider scope of the proposal in order to cover all public sector bodies' websites and websites delivering publicly available services. Only in this way, a real change for persons with disabilities will occur.

There is no doubt that we have a lot to anticipate in 2014. The upcoming European elections will be a good opportunity for Europe to live up to its commitment to the 80 million Europeans with disabilities and ensure that they fully enjoy their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. Many Europeans with disabilities will not have access to their right to vote, nor to stand as candidates. Europe should ensure that all European citizens with disabilities will have access to vote and to participation in political life on equal basis with others, as foreseen clearly in the UN Convention, to which the EU is a party. We expect from the candidate MEPs and political parties to reform Europe's economic recovery policies in order to ensure the protection of Europeans with disabilities from exclusion, discrimination and poverty and to allow them to enjoy their human rights. Furthermore, we ask them to push for the adoption of the European Accessibility Act, the proposed EU directive on the accessibility of public websites, as well as the proposed general non-discrimination directive to protect from discrimination in all areas of life. It is of major importance to establish mechanisms within EU institutions to mainstream the UN Convention, while ensuring the involvement of persons with disabilities through their representative organisations.

"Act. React. Impact." is the slogan of the 2014 European election campaign and we are here to accept the challenge and to vote for the inclusion of all citizens.

