



Minutes of the EU High Level Group on Disability meeting
Thursday 15 December 2016, Centre de Conférences Albert Borschette, Brussels

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Joint meeting with representatives of civil society

1. Opening by director Mr Georg Fischer

Mr Georg Fischer (director of DG EMPL Directorate C on social policies) opened the meeting and reminded participants that social issues have become a priority for the EU in the recent years, what can be seen in the European Semester and the European Pillar of Social Rights. Promoting rights of persons with disabilities also figures high in the Commission's agenda and the ambition is to put them even higher in 2017.

The aim of the Pillar is to stimulate action and thus it sets principles that can be pursued in Member States' social and employment policies. The public consultation is ongoing till the end of the year and all comments received are duly taken into account by the Commission. However, at this stage it is difficult to predict whether all of them will be included in the final version of the document. In January 2017 there will be the conference on the Pillar.

As regards the European Disability Strategy, the responsibilities in the field of disability are shared. It is up to the Member States to take the action in many areas and the EU is helping. One way of support is legislation, at present for example through the proposal for the European Accessibility Act. Currently, the European Parliament and the Council are establishing their positions on the proposal, and the Commission is in permanent dialogue with both co-legislators.

COFACE mentioned the lack of involvement of civil society representatives on the plenary panel of the planned January conference on the Pillar. COM replied that the involvement of civil society is expected for the workshop.

2. Concluding observations of the UN Committee - Slovakia – Mr Ján Gabura

SK presented the reporting process to the UN Committee. In September 2015 Slovakia received the list of issues in relation to the initial report. It consisted of 33 questions; most of them were related to some specific rights, such as equality and non-discrimination (art. 5), access to justice (art. 13), equal recognition before the law (art. 12) and accessibility (art. 9). A working group was created in order to prepare Slovak answers. The response was sent in November 2015. The dialogue with the UN Committee took place in April 2016 and the concluding observations were published on 13 May 2016. In total Slovakia received 88 recommendations. Most of them (8 recommendations) focused on article 5 on equality and non-discrimination.

In 2017, Slovakia will focus its action on three specific recommendations: rec. 10 on the full participation of persons with disabilities through their representative organizations in the development and implementation of disability-relevant legislation and policies (SK agrees that funding provided to these organizations is not sufficient and will try to improve the situation); rec. 26 on the development of a holistic and comprehensive network of health and social care services for the early diagnosis and intervention for children with disabilities (SK is planning to create a working group); rec. 30 on accessibility to buildings or transport (SK is preparing a project for the first quarter of 2017 entitled „Promoting universal design of buildings and built environment” aiming at developing standards of universal design).

3. The Commission response to the three UN Committee recommendations to be addressed in 2016, information about the EU Framework - state of play – Ms Emmanuelle Grange/ Inmaculada Placencia Porrero

COM informed about a follow-up report on the three UN Committee recommendations that should be submitted to the UN Committee 12 months after the Concluding Observations. The COM intention was to come back to the UN with some concrete achievements, therefore the report is little bit delayed; it will be sent to the UN before or slightly after Christmas. These 3 recommendations were:

- to adopt the European Accessibility Act - it was adopted by the Commission in December 2015, and is currently being discussed in the European Parliament;
- to update the EU declaration of competence in the field of disability - COM has started gathering information on what happened since 2010 in terms of disability legislation, and is going to publish an updated list of legal acts in the field of disability (now they are over 130, compared to 40 pieces of legislation in 2010) as an annex of the Progress Report on the Implementation of the European Disability Strategy. However, it is not a declaration of competence because it would require discussion with Member States and reaching agreement on a formal decision on which competences belong to the EU or to Member States. This discussion will imply longer time than the year given for reporting;
- to withdraw COM from the monitoring framework at the European level in order to separate its role of focal point from the monitoring activities – COM stopped to participate

in the framework meetings immediately after the recommendations were issued, but its withdrawal needs to be formalized. Thus, the document for the final withdrawal has been submitted to the Council and the process of formal withdrawal is on-going.

COM further underlined that it took into account another UN recommendation on more structured dialogue with the organizations representing persons with disabilities and has strengthened this dialogue and also financial support for disability NGO networks.

To the question of **COFACE** on the functioning of the framework without COM and the role of COM as focal point, **COM** replied that the Commission would continue to carry out its activities in the field of promotion, protection and monitoring of the implementation of the UN Convention as a focal point. It will be meeting framework members and decide how to organise the dialogue and cooperation which are needed. In addition some members of the framework have own financial resources and COM continues providing financial support to FRA and EDF.

4. Cases dealt with by the UN Committee

4.1 Austria – Mr Max Rubisch

The case (CRPD/C/14/D/21/2014) concerns Mr F who lives in Linz and is blind and depends on public transportation for his daily activities. He particularly uses tram Line 3 of the city of Linz, which is managed by Linz Linien GmbH, a company owned by the city that runs the entire public transport of the area. In March 2004, Linz Linien GmbH started to equip the tram stops of the city with digital audio systems. In August 2011, it extended the railway network of tram Line 3 but none of the new stops was equipped with the digital audio system.

After exhausting available domestic remedies Mr F complained to the UN Committee referring to discrimination and breach of articles 5, 9, 19 and 20 of the UN Convention. In its opinion the UN Committee stated that the non-installation of the audio system resulted into a denial of the access to ICT, and facilities and services open to the public and thus amounts to a violation of articles 5 and 9 of the Convention. However, the UN Committee was of the view that the violation of articles 19 and 20 of the Convention did not take place.

It made some recommendations that AT should remedy the lack of accessibility for Mr F and should also provide him adequate compensation for the legal costs and prevent similar violations in the future. AT stated that the opinion of the UN Committee is non-binding but the country takes it into account and in fact the National Action Plan on Disability 2012-2020 aims at guaranteeing inclusive and accessible transport. Linz Linien GmbH will continue developing electronic timetable information with digital voice systems that will replace the current system in the near future. No compensation to Mr F will be provided.

France wanted to know how to ensure that transport system is equally inclusive throughout Austria, while the country is much decentralized and how does the government organize itself at federal level. **Austria** informed that competences in the field of transport are divided between federal and regional authorities and the coordination between them is needed. In this

concrete case the obligation relies on Linz (funding) and on federal level (legislation). To make transport accessible everywhere is a long term process and the UN Committee does not take account of financial situation, it just requires action and puts forward recommendations.

COM asked whether it would be really a costly issue to equip all tram stops with new screens and whether it would be a disproportionate cost. **Austria** admitted that in this particular case costs would not be so huge.

4.2 United Kingdom – Ms Stephanie Harvey

The UK case (CRPD/C/15/R.2/Rev.1) was brought about to the UN Committee by one UK NGO and it concerns the cumulative impact of legislation, policies and measures adopted by the UK from 2010 (especially the Welfare Bill 2010) on social security schemes and on work and employment. The articles in question were 19, 28 and 27. UK received 11 recommendations from the UN inquiry and the UN Committee stated that "there is reliable evidence that the threshold of grave and systematic violations of the rights of persons with disabilities has been met".

UK's government objected to UN Committee's findings on the basis of wider context of the reforms and national evidence. UK would appreciate more clarity of the process and non-expansion of the scope of the inquiry halfway through the process that took 4 years to ensure full objectivity because in the meantime policy has evolved as well. Recommendations could be narrower and clearer. At the same time organisations supporting the allegations now feel a little bit frustrated because the findings are not legally binding.

5. Presentation of the Presidencies' plans

5.1 Slovakia – outcomes – Ms Eva Hodges

Slovakia presented the main achievements of its outgoing Presidency. It reached a political agreement on better working conditions for fishermen, 4 general approaches, prepared and adopted 4 sets of Council conclusions (on women and poverty, on implementation of the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative, and on accelerating the process of Roma integration). It also dealt with cases from European Court of Auditors on Roma integration and submitted 3 progress reports to EPSCO Council (on the European Accessibility Act, posting of workers, and the Horizontal Equal Treatment Directive).

With regard to the European Accessibility Act, the Presidency devoted 6 meeting days to this proposal. In the negotiations the special focus was given to issues which were essential for advancing the negotiations in the Council, in particular better identification of the scope and prevention of possible conflicts between the European Accessibility Act and existing Union law providing for specification on accessibility. It also dealt with the concern of many Member States on administrative and financial burden of the proposal, proposing additional transitional measures. Together with the incoming Maltese Presidency, the Slovak Presidency is preparing a questionnaire that will be sent to all the Member States in the nearest future, in order to receive their final position on the proposal.

The Presidency also continued in the negotiations on the Horizontal Equal Treatment Directive with the aim to obtain maximum possible progress. As concerns other initiatives on disability, the Presidency (under auspices of EDF and its Slovak member) has organized a conference (12 November 2016) devoted to the UN Committee's recommendations and their follow-up. The conference was held in Bratislava and was attended by around 150 participants. The Presidency was also actively involved in the fight against women's poverty.

5.2 Malta – programme – Mr Emanuel Darmanin

Malta presented the programme of its Presidency for the first half of 2017. It intends to pursue further five priorities identified by the trio of Presidencies (the Netherlands, Slovakia and Malta): a Union of jobs, growth and competitiveness; a Union that empowers and protects all citizens; towards an energy union with a forward-looking climate policy; a Union of freedom, security and justice; the Union as a strong global actor.

In addition, own priorities of the Maltese Presidency have been outlined in the following big areas: migration, single market, security, social inclusion, Europe's neighbourhood, as well as maritime issues. In EPSCO Council, the Presidency will try to advance on the following issues: guaranteeing decent work, making work pay, supporting gender equality, social dialogue.

With regards to disability, the Presidency will seek to advance discussions in the Council on the proposal for the European Accessibility Act and will work to reach agreement in the European Parliament, following in the footsteps of the previous Presidencies. The Presidency is planning to devote 6 meetings to this proposal (2 in February, and then 1 per month). It will also circulate the questionnaire prepared together with the Slovak Presidency, in order to get detailed picture of Member States' opinion on the Act.

The Presidency will also try to reach agreement on two currently discussed directives: Horizontal Equal Treatment Directive (meeting to be held in the Council next year) and the Directive on certain permitted uses of works and other subject-matter protected by copyright and related rights for the benefit of persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled.

6. Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017-2023 – Ms Ita Mirianashvili

The Council of Europe (CoE) gave an overview of its new Disability Strategy for the years 2017-2023 adopted on 30 November 2016. It will be launched officially in Cyprus on 27-28 March 2017. CoE wanted to reflect the human rights approach on disability, and tried to involve as many stakeholders as possible via the public consultation. The Strategy is not binding for the CoE's members and does not introduce any new legal obligations. CoE wanted the Strategy to be a roadmap and an inspiration for Member States and other stakeholders on policies, activities and measures to ensure implementation of UN Convention at national and local levels focusing on key areas in which the CoE is working.

The Strategy has five priority areas: Equality and non-discrimination (UN Convention art. 5-7); Awareness raising (art. 8); Accessibility (art. 9 and 21); Equal recognition before the law (art. 12) and freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse (art. 16). In addition, there are also five cross-cutting issues: participation, co-operation and coordination, universal design and reasonable accommodation, gender equality perspective, multiple discrimination, education and training.

While implementing the Strategy, CoE recommends a “twin-track” approach: specific projects, campaigns, training, activities etc. organised at the national and local levels by national stakeholders in the Member States; and mainstreaming of the disability-related issues in all the work and activities of CoE. As for the follow-up on the implementation, the Council predicts to issue biennial reports to the Committee of Ministers.

COFACE informed participants about the submission of the European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care (the group is currently co-chaired by COFACE) on including deinstitutionalization and community-based services in the Strategy during the public consultation. COFACE expressed its concern that these important issues are not reflected in the Strategy. **EASPD** agreed with the COFACE and expressed a concern that early childhood education and care are not included in the Strategy. **CoE** reacted that not all suggestions from the public consultation could be included as priorities in the Strategy. Experts decided to concentrate on 5 main priorities, but it does not exclude action in other fields.

European Disability Forum (EDF) welcomed the reference to the UN Convention in the Strategy but expressed its concern with regards to the wording used "shift from substituted decision-making to supported decision-making" that is according to EDF not in line neither with the UN Convention nor with Committee's recommendations. EDF also wanted to know how the organizations representing persons with disabilities (DPOs) can participate further in the implementation of the Strategy. **CoE** replied that after extensive discussions it was decided to keep the wording as it is and, as for the participation of DPOs, the plan is to develop a roadmap for the implementation of the Strategy together with Member States, DPOs and international organizations, including the EU.

Mental Health Europe expressed its satisfaction with the fact that the equal recognition before the law is reflected in the Strategy, in contrary to the European Disability Strategy. In addition, they questioned that the Additional Protocol to the Oviedo Convention would be in line with the UNCRPD. To the **European Women's Lobby** question on women with disabilities, it was replied that they are included under the cross-cutting issue relating to multiple discrimination.

7. Information on gender and disability

7.1 Presentation of European Disability Forum – Ms Ana Peláez Narváez (member of the EDF Executive Committee and gender expert in the UN Committee)

Ms Peláez elaborated on the disadvantaged situation of women with disabilities and the position of the UN Committee in this respect. With regard to gender based violence, the UN Committee has observed some kind of negligence in the EU Member States, thus, it addressed the issue not only in its recommendations for the EU but also for individual countries. Regarding the EU, the UN Committee is concerned that the EU has neither mainstreamed a disability perspective in all its gender policies, programmes and strategies, nor adopted a gender perspective in its disability strategies.

The UN Committee also recommended that the EU develops affirmative actions to advance the rights of women and girls with disabilities, establish a mechanism to monitor progress and fund data collection and research on women and girls with disabilities, accede to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

As concerns the actual and important issues and according to the UN Committee, the EU:

- Should urgently implement the concluding observations of the UN Committee in regards to women and girls with disabilities;
- Should take women and girls with disabilities into account while implementing the Sustainable Development Goal 5, even if they are not expressly mention there;
- Should ratify the Istanbul Convention;
- Should implement the UNGA resolution on women and girls with disabilities.

7.2 The Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019 - disability perspective – Commission, DG JUST – Ms Katarzyna Ptak

COM agreed that women with disabilities are disadvantaged as concerns the labour market, poverty and social exclusion. Regarding violence, Fundamental Rights Agency has conducted a survey in 2014 and the results show that 34% of women with disabilities experienced physical and sexual partner violence during the relationship (in comparison to 19% for women without disabilities). In addition, women experience more barriers to mobility, access to buildings and transport than men.

In order to address the problem, and after the consultation with various stakeholders from across the EU (including organizations representing women with disabilities), DG JUST proposed the Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019 that is structured around five priority areas and includes 33 key actions.

Some actions undertaken by the European Commission in 2016:

- In March 2016 DG JUST prepared a proposal for the EU to accede to the Istanbul Convention that is being discussed in the Council. According to the COM proposal the EU should accede only in matters falling under its responsibility, in order not to break the subsidiarity principle.

- EU dedicated 2017 to combating violence against women, thus three weeks ago officially launched 2017 European Year of focused action to fight violence against women;
- European Semester also serves as a tool to advance women's rights. There were 10 country specific recommendations on gender within the Semester in 2016;
- DG JUST, together with DG REGIO, will monitor how the needs of women with disabilities are addressed through the funding initiatives such as ESF and ERDF;
- It is too early to come with some specific solutions regarding the inclusion of women with disabilities in policy-making but the Commission is open to participants' suggestions;
- In 2016, there were some Equinet seminars on how to tackle discrimination against people with intellectual disabilities and how to improve the career progression of women.

EASPD expressed its appreciation of the fact that the Commission puts so much focus on gender issues, and expressed its view that in order to advance the rights of women, we first need to ensure them with the legal capacity (art. 12).

European Women's Lobby expressed its support to the UN Committee's recommendations, and mentioned the Gender Equality Index as a vital tool to measure the progress between women and men in Europe. It also welcomed the EU's willingness to accede to the Istanbul Convention, at the same time underlying that only 14 EU Member States ratified it. It expressed concern that the Commission decided to withdraw its draft Maternity Leave Directive that was supposed to guarantee the work-life balance for families, especially those with disabled children. Another concern related to the austerity measures that according to EWL failed in guaranteeing new jobs and had devastating impact on all citizens, especially on women. Thus, it encouraged the Member States to engage in discussions with civil society, in order to develop national reform programmes. The last suggestion made concerned the funding – according to EWL, the EU should introduce gender budgeting as a tool to advance gender mainstreaming. EWL will conduct a campaign on gender budgeting in 2017.

8. EU latest policy developments

8.1 Accessibility Act - state of play - Commission – Ms Inmaculada Placencia Porrero

COM informed that the proposal for the European Accessibility Act (EAA) is also discussed within the European Parliament, which is currently preparing its position and amendments. The Committee leading this process within EP is the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee (IMCO), but because of the document's complexity, many other committees are involved. The Employment and Social Affairs Committee is associated to this work and has exclusive competence on a few provisions. The other committees providing opinions are Transport and Tourism, Petitions, Women's Rights and Gender Equality and Culture and Education (on audio-visual media services). It is difficult to predict how the final version of EAA will look like. At the end of January 2017 the first draft of the Committees opinions will be published, then there will be a period of putting amendments. Only when the position of the Member States and EP are finalized, the EU will start official negotiations.

Some Member States have already asked the Commission to have bilateral information meetings with national experts on EAA. COM is open to such kind of meetings and is ready to provide clarifications. Moreover, COM is organizing a 2-days long seminar on accessibility in February 2017. Its aim is to give concrete examples on addressing different accessibility problems.

8.2 European Disability Strategy - summary of the Progress Report - Commission – Ms Emmanuelle Grange

COM explained that the Progress Report is undergoing inter-service consultation that is closing on 15 December 2016. The report should be formally adopted in the coming weeks. It has 20 pages, is very factual – do not propose any new actions, rather describes the progress made in the first 5 years of implementation. It contains a summary of main actions the EU have undertaken in the 8 areas identified. COM wanted to make a link with the concluding observations of the UN Committee.

There are also 5 annexes providing more detailed information on various topics. One of them contains a detailed analysis of responses received from the public consultation on the mid-term review on the Strategy implementation. It showed that citizens are not satisfied with what was achieved, especially in the field of employment.

Another annex includes reference to the EP's and European Economic and Social Committee's reports on the UN Committee's recommendations. Another annex contains a list of EU legal acts in the field of disability.

The Strategy objectives remain fully relevant despite emerging challenges. By the end of the next year COM will try to have bilateral and multilateral meetings on the future disability strategy, in order to start collecting comments and ideas.

European Blind Union underlined that even if there are still 3 years for implementation, in 2019 there are European elections in both the Commission and the Parliament, therefore one should already start thinking about a new strategy in order to have it ready before the shift in power. The EU should adopt the new Strategy 2020-2030 as soon as possible, and to take into account critical comments made by the civil society on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

COM informed that the next strategy shall be adopted at the end of this Commission or at the beginning of the new one and expressed its belief that the current commissioner, Ms Marianne Thyssen, will contribute to the discussion.

To the question of **EWL** on women and girls in humanitarian settings and other emergencies, COM explained that over the last 5 years there was a positive evolution in EU external action, and in emergencies there has been quite a number of policy actions in which disability was underlined. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 is an example of how the EU contribution helped to advance inclusion of persons with disabilities in the document.

As concerns the question of **EWL** on inclusion of references in the progress report to other important strategies (Europe 2020, or UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), COM admitted that the EU needs to step up more on equality between women and men.

9. NGO networks' presentations of main achievements of their grants in 2016

9.1 International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IF) – Ms Jana Moravcova

IF wrote two reports that will be presented in EP on 25 January 2017. The first one relates to the right to health of persons with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (SBH) because the IF findings show that the financial coverage of treatment and assistive products for patients with SBH is insufficient. The second one conducted in cooperation with EDF aims at assessing the impact of cross-border health care on persons with disabilities and those with chronic conditions. Overwhelming majority of the respondents had neither heard about this mechanism (77%) nor about the National Contact Points.

In 2016 for the first time IF organized training in Ireland for young people with SBH on the UN Convention and human rights, with the aim of empowering them with the competences and tools necessary for disability rights advocacy. Other trainings are planned for Italy and Scotland. Since late 2015, IF has also been involved in activities related to European Reference Networks (ERN), cross border cooperation of professionals in the area of rare diseases with involvement of patients. IF has been trying to encourage a creation of SBH network, created and consolidated a group of clinicians, specialists on SBH to cooperate across border and join ERN as an affiliated network. First workshop for clinicians was held in Ghent in October 2016, next one will be held in autumn 2017.

9.2 European Blind Union – Mr Romain Ferretti

EBU was working mainly on three areas: campaigning, capacity building, information and awareness-raising. As for campaigning, EBU tries to keep e-books and audio-visual services in the scope of EAA; advocates for the ratification of the Marrakesh treaty by the EU; has managed to include mobile applications in the scope of the EU Accessible Websites Directive and now supports Member States in implementing it on national level; advocates for EU legislation on silent vehicles, and for the accessibility of payment terminals.

As concerns reporting and analysis, EBU collected data on article 7 Children with disabilities (report will be issued in 2017), and published a report on article 28 on social protection. It also works on access to braille literacy, and tries to assess the situation of blind and partially sighted students in Europe. In the field of awareness-raising, EBU will publish a guide on the UN Convention in a version accessible to blind and partially sighted individuals that will serve as basis for information sessions next year. In the area of low vision, EBU prepared video featuring partially-sighted persons in their daily-life.

9.3 Autism Europe – Ms Aurelie Baranger

AE conducted a review of the autism policies in the field of healthcare, education and employment in the Member States. It was accompanied by a survey addressed to the autism community. Analysis of 900 responses from 28 countries is still on-going, but it can be seen that the autism community underlines the need to reduce red tape and speed up diagnosis for young children, the need for harmonized guidelines for diagnosis in Europe, need to improve access to diagnosis of adults, need for a specific contact person or a "one stop shop" in all countries for any question and need for training of general practitioners, paediatricians, teachers on needs of persons with autism, as well as the need to foster access to vocational training, employment opportunities, reasonable accommodation and more autonomy.

There are some ongoing projects that will be continued in 2017: drafting a strategy to promote self-advocacy; sharing knowledge and good practices to foster equal opportunities (there was 12th International Congress "Happy, Healthy and Empowered" in Edinburgh in September 2016 with presence of 1700 participants from 60 countries); disseminating information on EU objectives, policies and actions as well as good practices across Europe; building capacity across AE network in Europe and promoting exchange of best practices through networking; raising awareness of autism across Europe through campaigns with participation of MEPs and celebrities.

On that occasion, **German representative** made an announcement about the annual event to be held in Berlin on the topic of the implementation of the UN Convention in Germany. It will take place on 4-5 December 2017, and all interested entities are invited to attend. There is no detailed programme yet, but the 2017 conference will be entitled "inclusion days".

10. Accessibility projects and measures

10.1 EU Disability Card - Estonia - Mr Meelis Joost

The project is implemented by the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs, in cooperation with Social Protection Board and Unemployment Board. Estonia first conducted mapping of the situation (through questionnaire sent to 49 member organizations, asking about problems while visiting Estonia, benefits and special treatment of persons with disabilities). After receiving the feedback from member organizations, it started to establish rules on who will get the card. Afterwards, it conducted meetings with stakeholders to discuss services and benefits they could provide and created a platform for providers. It also organized a Disability Day Conference in Tartu (more than 200 people present, vivid discussion on the process).

Many providers already decided to take part in the project. Transport revealed to be the main challenge among the areas. In the next phase of the project, Estonia will try to encourage more providers of services to join, will enhance co-operation with 7 other participating countries, and will continue making the environment for providers available online.

10.2 EU Disability Card - Malta - Mr Michael Debattista

The conference launching the project took place in December 2016, during disability week activities, and was very well received by the participants. Malta intends to produce around

7000 cards. It is currently working on the accessible application form, and tries to solve the following problems encountered while preparing the cards: size of Braille dots and of font.

In addition, a number of organizations have been already approached to recognize the card, and it was decided that persons holding both EU Disability Card and Special Card issued by Maltese authorities will be able to benefit from them. Malta has already published a call for tenders for the database and website, and is currently reviewing the entities that are interested. The call for tenders for information and publicity campaign was also published, but had to be withdrawn (due to inclusion of Google and Facebook adverts, that should be paid directly). The new call has been recently issued, this time without including problematic adverts.

In relation to both presentations, **Greece** wanted to know whether there is any specific time framework for the other Member States to join the project. **COM** explained that all interested countries can join at any time, but must be conscious that there is no more EU financial support available. COM would prefer to evaluate the ongoing phase of the project (with participation of 8 first Member States) before launching any other call for proposals that will at the same time depend on sufficient number of other interested Member States.

Italy asked how the 8 countries participating in the pilot project dealt with finding providers of services and benefits. **Slovenia** (also part of a project) spoke about its experience. Already in 2012 it decided to ask all municipalities for information on benefits available in their region, in order to assess the situation on the ground. Afterwards, it created a working group composed of representatives of different ministries, in order to create legislation on the benefits. At present only one is under legislation – persons with disabilities do not have to pay the touristic tax. The intension is to create similar legislation also for other benefit's areas.

10.3 French mobility and inclusion card – Mr Thierry Boulissiere, Mr Pascal Froudière

The card was officially announced by the French President during the national conference on disability. Its aim is to introduce a simplification; one new card will replace three previous separate cards: disability card, priority card, and parking card. In addition, there will also be a single decision-maker. The card will be issued by one, single institution: the Department Council, which also grants the Personal Autonomy Allowance. Thus the issuing time of cards will be shortened. The aim is also to make elderly people benefit from the card.

The new card is created by the Digital Republic Act (French law of 7 October 2016). It will be highly secure (the State printing house will be in charge of the manufacturing process), and the fabrication process will be centralized, what will allow constituting an easily accessible database to law enforcement authorities. In addition, there will be a website allowing the users of the card to follow the fabrication process and ask for a card duplicate.

France admitted that by introducing such a system, it is moving away from the European model of parking card. However, according to FR, the Council Recommendation of 4 June 1998 on a parking card is outdated and requires substantial amendments, as the technological

developments that happened over the last 20 years allow for a better protection and security than the one foreseen in the Council's recommendation.

COM wanted to know whether the French card will be recognized by the authorities of other countries. Furthermore, in practical terms, without putting the card in the front window of the car, how the person would be able to prove that is entitled to park in a given place. **FR** explained that every card holder can ask for a duplicate and thus have one card for personal use and another one to leave in the car. It will give the possibility to check whether the car is rightly parked.

EBU expressed its concern about the EU Disability Card as every country involved implements the card differently, what will make its recognition complicated. It asked COM to carry out proper analysis at the end of the project, to see the main achievements and identify main difficulties encountered. EBU also expressed its concern regarding the French card, which is not close to the European model, and underlined that Europe needs a harmonized, unified model of the card that will be implemented throughout the continent.

10.4 Project SIMON Assisted Mobility for Older and Impaired Users – Ms Eva Muñoz

SIMON is a demonstration oriented project (to be tested and validated in real life conditions), which started in January 2014 (should finish in March 2017), with four large scale pilots in Madrid, Lisbon, Parma and Reading. It aims at promoting independent living and societal participation of mobility impaired people as concerns public parking areas and multiple transport modes, through the adoption of specific navigation information and access-rights management solutions. Another aim is modernisation of European Parking Badge. It is supported by the EU under the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme.

There is a different deployment of SIMON in every city. For Madrid, it is important to ensure that neighbouring cities adopt the same regulations, in order to harmonize the law in the whole agglomeration. In Lisbon, the project is primarily aimed at checking the technology used. Parma has a different model of a parking badge that is used to enter restrict areas in the city centre. In Reading the system to monitor occupancy of parking places for disabled people was put on place. In Madrid 2000 cards were issued, in Parma 3300, and in Lisbon 1400 complementary badges are in use.

There is a mobile application assisting the project, to provide indoor and outdoor navigation features for persons with disabilities. SIMON also has tools for the public authorities and management platform for the cities involved, allowing them to share statistics and knowing more about how the users use the system. Parking controllers and enforcement officers are involved in the project, as well as citizens, who are evaluating the users' experience.

Main output of the process will be to propose to COM a new model of the EU parking card for persons with disabilities.