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**„Education, Employment, Equal Opportunities –
Empowering Disabled People“**

European conference on the Integration of
persons with disabilities
11 and 12 June 2007, Berlin

Empowering Disabled People

During its EU Presidency, Germany wants to make visible the social responsibility of the European Union for people with disabilities by organising a conference on the integration of people with disabilities. The conference will also be a contribution to the "European Year of Equal Opportunities for All". The main objective of the European Year in Germany is to make people more strongly aware of the positive value of diversity, respect, recognition and tolerance in society.

The conference focusses on the integration of people with disabilities into education and employment and on the promotion of equal opportunities for them with particular regard to accessibility. These issues are highly relevant to people with disabilities and in the centre of political attention all over Europe. The priorities of the conference are based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which is the first universal legal instrument containing provisions on education, training and employment and whose fundamental principles are non-discrimination and equal opportunities. It will give new impetus to disability policy worldwide.

In Europe, the conference wants to make the public more strongly aware of the rights of people with disabilities and bring forward the development of the UN Convention since looking beyond the national horizon makes it possible to learn from each other and further develop already existing social standards together for the benefit of people with disabilities.

Using the relevant articles of the UN Convention as a basis, the conference wants to describe common principles which promote the active integration of people with disabilities into mainstream education and the mainstream labour market and equal opportunities on a national but also on a transnational scale. The conference will offer participants an opportunity for a practical exchange of experiences and opinions.

Preliminary programme

11 June 2007

09:00 – 10:00 **Registration, Welcomes snack**

Official Welcome

10.00 - 10.30

EU-Presidency

Franz Müntefering, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs
(confirmed)

European Commission

Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities (confirmed)

European Disability Forum (EDF)

Yannis Vardakastanis, EDF-President (confirmed)

Keynote speeches

10.30 - 12.30

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Prof. Gerard Quinn, National University of Ireland (confirmed)

Integration into the general education system

Kenneth Eklindh, UNESCO (confirmed)

Integration into the open labour market

Belinda Pyke, European Commission, Head of Direction G
“Equality between Men and Women, Action against Discrimination,
Civil Society” (confirmed)

Equality of opportunities regarding accessibility

Kalle Könkkölä, Disabled People International (confirmed)

12.30 - 14.00

Lunch

Panel Sessions

14.00 – 15.00

Panel I

Equal opportunities at school - Integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream education

Introductory notes :

1. Ingrid Körner, president of Inclusion Europe (confirmed)
2. Cor Meijer, Direktor der European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (confirmed)
3. Karin Evers-Meyer, German Federal Government Commissioner for the Interests of the Disabled (confirmed)

Panel II

More employment - Integration of people with disabilities into the main- stream labour market

Introductory notes :

1. Robert Anderson, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (confirmed)
2. Ersébet Szollosi, National Council of Federations of People with Disabilities
3. Franz Thönnies, Parliamentary State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, presenting a german project: „job - Jobs without barriers“ (confirmed)

Panel III

Promotion of equal opportunities – removing barriers

Introductory notes :

1. Rodolfo Cattani, Europäische Blindenunion
„Enclusion aus Sicht der Nutzer“
2. Prof. Lisa Waddington, Universität Maastricht
„Barrierefreiheit in Europa herstellen – welche Ansatzpunkte bietet das europäische Recht?“
3. Liz Lynne, Vice-President of the Disability Intergroup, MEP

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15.00 – 15.30 **Coffee break**

15.30 – 17.00 **Panel Sessions continuing**
Discussing and working on theses

Ministerial reception

18.00 – 18.10 **Reception**

18.10 – 18.30 **Welcome by Franz Müntefering**

18.30 – 20.00 **Informal exchange of views of EU-Ministers on the Convention on the Rights for persons with Disabilities:**

Agenda:

1. Vladimír Špidla, European Commission, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
2. Representative of a disability organisation
3. Exchange and discussion

Dinner

20.00 – 20.15 **Welcome**

20.15 **Dinner**

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12 June 2007

09.00 - 10.30 **Presentation of the results by rapporteurs**

10.30 – 11.00 **Coffee break**

11.00 - 13.00 **Discussion**

Participants:

1. Idália Maria Marques Salvador Serrão de Menezes Moniz, Secretary of State Adjunct and for Rehabilitation (confirmed)
2. Bertram Brossardt, BUSINESSEUROPE (confirmed)
3. Representative of ETUC (tbc)
4. Horst Frehe, chairman of Deutscher Behindertenrat (confirmed)
5. Wallis Goelen-van den Broeck, European Commission Head of Unit “Integration of People with Disabilities” (confirmed)

Future prospects:

Continuing the European Exchange on Disability Policy

Anne McGuire, UK, DWP Parliamentary Under Secretary for Disabled People (confirmed)

Closing words

Franz Thönnies, Parliamentary State Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

13.00 – 14.00 **Lunch**

Annotations to the panels

Panel I

Equal opportunities at school – integration of people with disabilities into mainstream education

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 24

Education

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and life long learning [...].

Respect for the diversity of human life increases if disabled and non-disabled children grow up together and learn together. The UN Convention explicitly recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to education. Based on the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities, this right is to be realized within an inclusive education system.

Already the UN Standard Rules contain the principle of "inclusive education". UNESCO incorporated this principle in its strategies at the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain, and consolidated it as part of "Education for All" at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in the year 2000. The UNESCO strategy wants schools to react flexibly to the needs of those who are learning so as to include all children irrespective of their physical, intellectual or other conditions. It is based on the assumption that inclusive schools are the most effective means to combat discriminatory attitudes, to create an inclusive society and to achieve education for all.

The extent to which inclusive education has been achieved differs considerably. The OECD has developed a system of statistics and indicators over the last few years to make inclusive education in the member states comparable. The aim of OECD is to provide information for national and international players to improve education for people with disabilities.

The panel will give an overview of the state of inclusive education in the member states of the European Union. Obstacles to inclusive education and possible solutions will be discussed with the participants in the panel. Together, we want to seek ways to come closer to the aim of an inclusive education system as described in the UN Convention.

Panel II
More employment –
integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream labour
market

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 27

Work and employment

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. [...]

To have and retain work is a vital issue for people with disabilities. The aim of the UN Convention is that people with disabilities can exercise their right to work in the open labour market. This course is also pursued by the UN Standard Rules.

The integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream labour market is a central issue also in Europe. The question of how to promote the employment of people with disabilities and secure existing jobs meets with great interest. One priority of the revised Lisbon strategy is the creation of more and better jobs for all people. Furthermore, the employment policy guidelines for member states in the context of the European Employment Strategy are also geared to the integration of people with disabilities. In its multiannual Disability Policy Action Plan, the European Commission identifies priorities for action including inter alia measures to improve access to employment and continued employment and measures to effectively combat discrimination in working life.

The panel wants to show ways and make suggestions as to how the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market may succeed in a positive way. This will cover the whole range from training and the taking up of employment to the return-to-work principle. The aim of the panel is to identify principles which help to remove barriers on a national but also on a transnational scale and promote the employment of people with disabilities with a view to the open labour market.

Panel III
Promotion of equal opportunities -
removing barriers

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 9

Accessibility

1. To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. [...]

People with disabilities want to live a self-determined life and make use of their opportunities in society in the same way. This requires that infrastructure, products, services and technologies are accessible to them. To take account of the need for a barrier-free design, the UN Convention therefore includes provisions aimed at the implementation of accessibility. The fact that accessibility is important if people with disabilities are to enjoy equal opportunities is also stressed by the UN Standard Rules.

This principle is also pursued by the European Commission in its Action Plan including the concept of "Accessibility for All" which is not only for the benefit of people with disabilities but for the benefit of all people. Besides the physical environment, the accessibility of information and communication technologies becomes increasingly important in this context. In view of the progressive development of the information society, it has to be ensured that people with disabilities are given equal access to the knowledge-based society against the backdrop of the aim of creating an "information society for all".

In the panel, strategies in the field of accessibility will be exchanged. It should identify barriers and outline solutions to achieve the aim of full participation of people with disabilities in the life of society.