

# **Media and Disability**

**European Congress**

**Athens 13 – 14 june 2003**



# **FINAL REPORT**

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**Athens 13 – 14 June 2003**

Organised within the framework of the European Year of People with Disabilities and the Greek Presidency of the European Union

**Organisers:**

- The Greek Ministry of Health and Welfare
- The European Commission
- The European Disability Forum
- The Greek National Confederation of Disabled People



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Mr Costas Stephanis – Minister of Health and Welfare - Greece  
Mr Dimitris Thanos – Deputy Minister of Health and Welfare - Greece  
Mr Christos Protopapas – Minister of Press and Mass Media - Greece  
Mr Donald Tait – European Commission, Unit for the Integration of People with Disabilities of the Directorate General Employment and Social Affairs  
Mr Yannis Vardakastanis – President of the European Disability Forum

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Ms Maria Beldekou – General Secretary of Welfare - Greece  
Mr Donald Tait – European Commission – Integration of People with Disabilities Unit of the Directorate General Employment and Social Affairs  
Mr Yannis Vardakastanis – President of the European Disability Forum



# Introduction

The “Media and Disability” Congress was organised with the support of the European Commission and the Greek Presidency of the European Union specifically with the Ministry of Health and Welfare and in close collaboration with the European Disability Forum and the Greek National Confederation of Disabled People

## The background

This congress was one of the highlights at European level of the European Year of People with Disabilities. Its primary aim was to examine the important issue of the portrayal of disability in the European media and to explore ways in which it could be improved. This aim was based on an action proposed in the Madrid Declaration, which provided the framework for the European Year:

*“The Media should create and strengthen partnerships with associations of people with disabilities. Information on disabled people should be included in the media in recognition of the existence of human diversity. When referring to disability issues, the media should avoid any patronising or humiliating approaches but focus instead on the barriers disabled people face and the positive contribution to society disabled people can make once these barriers have been overcome.”* — Madrid Declaration

## Objectives

The Congress adopted an original and innovative approach: For the first time, this congress brought together organisations of disabled people and professionals from the different sectors of the European media so that together they could debate and reflect on ways to increase the visibility of disabled people and to look for the way in which their portrayal can be improved.

More than 300 people, representing all parties concerned by this issue in Europe, gathered together to achieve this ambitious objective: mainstream media professionals working in television and radio, whether private and public, journalists, advertising executives, communications agencies, media specialising in the area of disability, government bodies of the Member States responsible for Press and information, and of course, disabled people’s organisations.

The final programme was the result of considerable preparation involving the organisers, representatives from the main European media networks and organisations of disabled people.

The programme was based on the theme of “improving the portrayal of disabled people in the media”. It was drafted in such a way as to explore different strategies capable of improving the portrayal of disabled people in the media, based on examples of good and bad practice.

The preparatory working group, which wanted to cover all the different themes, identified five important areas to be covered, which resulted in the Congress being structured around six plenary sessions.

A first session on the issue of the portrayal of disabled people in the media in general and five sessions dealing with a more specific topic: The image of disabled people in the news - the image of disabled people in advertising and fiction - the employment and recruitment of disabled people in the media – access to media and its new technologies – the role of policy makers in supporting positive action.

Each session included presentations by several subject specialists, followed by questions and discussion.

This document is the final report of the Media and Disability Congress. It aims to give an overview of the Congress: summaries of the opening and closing speeches and reports from the plenary sessions.

It also includes the full text of the Media and Disability Declaration, which was adopted by all participants at the end of the Congress.



# Opening session

## **Mr Dionisis Botonis – Political correspondent of New Greek Television (NET)**

Before handing the floor to the different speakers, Mr Botonis welcomed this first European Congress on this subject and stated that still in 2003 the issue of media and disability was problematic. He stressed the need for the media and disabled people to work together and forge close links. “It is clear that nobody can achieve something alone, we must all work together...”

## **Pr Costas Stefanis – Minister of Health and Welfare - Greece**

*Professor Stefanis is a graduate of the School of Medicine of the University of Athens, specialised in Neurology and Psychiatry is Member of the Athens Academy and is an Honorary Professor in Psychiatry at the University of Athens. He has undertaken several important missions for a number of Medical institutes and academies in Greece at international level. He is founder and Director of the University Institute of Research on Mental Health in Greece. He has undertaken considerable research in neurological science and his publications have reached international acclaim.*

Mr Stefanis spoke of the importance of this kind of conference, which brought together disabled people and the media. It was in this way that the viewpoints of one group in society - which justifiably called for the right to equal treatment- and that of the media -which was the channel for social awareness and consciousness which influenced the way in which society develops-.

He noted that still today, society is not aware that disability is an integral part of society. More than 10 per cent of the population has a disability. We all live with disabled people whether at work, at school or in the street. Disability is part of our everyday life. However, society continues to ignore disabled people, who remain invisible for the majority of people. Society cannot see reality due to prejudice or unconscious fear. Nevertheless, the way in which society treats disabled people is the very image of the level of civilisation of this society, as it reflects the degree of respect and dignity with which each of its members is treated.

Improving on this situation requires governments and the relevant bodies to legislate and take the necessary steps to make the life of disabled people easier. But, this is not enough. A shift in society’s general attitude is also necessary. This is where the role of the media is vital. In the “image-based world” of today, the messages passed on by the mass media are highly influential. The mass media can be the catalyst in this process. By choosing not to hide the existence of disabled people but on the contrary to portray them in a realistic way, bringing out their specific skills and abilities rather than their impairments and “incapacity”, the mass media can help to achieve in society a “more socially correct awareness” in relation to disability.

Mr Stefanis first spoke of the need to include the specific situation of people with intellectual disability during the discussions. He then wished the congress success and hoped that the debates on disability and the media, would result in concrete proposals, as well as resolutions and theoretical conclusions, so that the media would be in a better position to portray disability in an appropriate and accurate way. This in turn could result in a shift in society's perception of and attitude to disabled people.

## **Mr Dimitris Thanos – Deputy Minister of Health and Welfare - Greece**

*Graduate of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki School of Dentistry. Mr Thanos has held leadership roles in student unions and associations. Since 1986, he has held important posts within Greek's Pasok party, both at local level and in the Central Committee. Mr Thanos was nominated Deputy Minister of Health and Welfare in April 2000.*

Mr Thanos recalled the objective of the congress: to raise the issues affecting the lives of disabled people so as to discuss practice at local and European level. The mass media had a crucial role to play by sending out the message that disabled people are full members of society.

Despite the number of agreements and protocols established and signed, disabled people in Europe continue to be denied the right to participate equally and to equal rights and often face social exclusion. This is an issue which is at the very foundation of a welfare state and a society built on solidarity: "every civilised society must guarantee access to equal opportunities".

To overcome this form of social exclusion, disability-related issues must be mainstreamed into all policy areas. For policy makers to achieve this, they must in the first instance identify and define the needs of disabled people and they must also work with all interested parties: disabled people of course in the first instance, but also employment agencies, training centres, trade unions, etc. It is by working together that disabled people will be equipped with the appropriate tools and skills, which will lead to their independence.

Repeating Mr Stefanis' words Mr Thanos, referring back to Mr Stefanis' speech, stressed the fact that disability was everyone's responsibility and not just that of the authorities responsible for social affairs. Neither is disability a problem of an individual or a family. Each one of us must play a role and take action to create a climate whereby disabled people can be equipped to make decisions for themselves. Our attitudes must change. This is where the mass media has a significant role to play, by shaping society's attitudes, and by "promoting actions which will enable our society to rid itself for ever of stigmas which are still commonplace." Mr Thanos concluded by calling on everyone in society to take action so that "we can live side by side and go forward together to overcome prejudice and entrenched positions of all kinds".

## **Mr Christos Protopapas – Minister of Press and Mass Media - Greece**

*Graduate of Business Administration of the Athens University of Economics and Business (ASOEE), Mr Protopapas has been actively involved in the Greek disability movement for a long time. As President of GSEE (Greek General Confederation of Labour) and Vice President of ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation), he ensured the participation of disabled peo-*

*ple in civil society. He was appointed Secretary of State at the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs in 1996 and then Minister of Press in October 2001. He has continued to contribute in a decisive way to promote disability issues.*

This congress aims to deal with an important issue: a social issue which is of concern to society in general since disabled people are first and foremost citizens. They are citizens who are entitled to the foundations of a European model of prosperous development including: quality of life, equality, better education and justice for all. And this must respect differences and qualifications.

Laws, although necessary, are insufficient. It is action and everybody working together, particularly disabled people, that is the key to success. In order to achieve this objective, we also need the media. Everyone is aware the impact visual image has on the way in which different social groups are perceived. Everyone is aware that the media generates attitudes and patterns, and that it influences public opinion. The media must, in turn, deal responsibly with the issue of disability and thus in a professional and impartial way, “they must highlight the concept of equality because we are all equal. We want integration and equality not disabled people being portrayed as miserable.”

Insufficient information leads to stigmatisation and prevents growth and shifting attitudes in society. People cannot see the capacity disabled people have to participate in the economic growth of a country just like every other citizen. From now on, two levels of information are vital: the first relies on the State’s dealings with other agencies to achieve results in the short and long-term. The second relies on the media and its role in society, increasing the extent of coverage and communicating a fundamental principle: to be more democratic the specific characteristics must be respected and the stereotypes avoided.

Ten percent of Europeans have some kind of disability and in spite of this, their access to information is poor in most countries. This sector of the population does however have the same right to leisure activities and information as everyone else. One way in which this problem could be resolved would be to introduce a mandatory broadcast of at least one news broadcast a day which is accessible to hard-of-hearing people. Furthermore, by introducing legislation in this respect, we avoid an ongoing form of marginalisation and exclusion. Of course, the media quite rightly must maintain its freedom of expression and therefore the choice of programmes it broadcasts. It is for this reason that regular communication between the media and disabled people must be ongoing so that effective ways to meet the needs of everybody can be found.

Mr Protopapas reassures the media that he is willing to enter into dialogue with them, to understand their constraints and their demands and to look for solutions together. He concludes his presentation by proposing “that the whole of society takes a first step and that we all help to achieve the same result. This is the only way we can be sure that we are on the right track for the future”.

## **Mr Donald Tait – European Commission – Unit for the Integration of People with Disabilities of the Directorate General Employment and Social Affairs**

*Within the European Commission's Unit for the Integration of People with Disabilities, Mr Tait is more specifically responsible for raising awareness of disability-related issues with the Directorates and Services of the European Commission and the organisation of the European Year of People with Disabilities and its promotion in the Member States.*

Mr Tait, speaking on behalf of the European Commission, thanks the Greek Presidency of the EU and the Greek National Confederation of Disabled People for taking the initiative to organise this congress, which is an important contribution to the European Year of People with Disabilities. He is delighted to see the media's level of active participation in the event. He gives a general overview of the current situation and speaks of an ever increasing trend towards individualism which opens the way for self-determination creating awareness of disability as a human rights issue. This is in spite of the all too widespread lack of awareness of what being disabled in today's society implies, namely prejudice, segregation in education, discrimination in the workplace and transport. All of these issues call for creative solutions to enable disabled people to play a full role in all aspects of our society's social and economic life. "Please make no mistake, disability is truly a rights issue."

Mr Tait announces the upcoming launch by the Commission of a EU-wide information campaign on the new rights and obligations in the Directive on equal treatment in employment and occupation and recalls that to make it a success, we will need the active support of all, and in particular the media.

The crucial issue of lack of information and awareness in the area of disability was recently highlighted by a survey on disability: 57 % of Europeans recognise that they are not well informed on this topic. Mr Tait notes that legal instruments alone will not be enough to achieve full participation of disabled people in society. It is essentially about changing attitudes. This change will not take place of its own accord, it requires a concerted effort on all of our parts. This includes governments, NGOs, employers, employees and authorities at all levels.

To be successful, we must overcome the primary barrier, the lack of information. We need precise and up-to-date information representing the reality faced by disabled people. Which are the obstacles that disabled people face, how can we overcome these obstacles and what are the benefits in doing so for society as a whole? This is why the media, with its unique power to be able to access all parts of society, is essential. This is true at all levels and for all the different media, whether television, radio, newspapers or the Internet.

The media will be even more efficient if it works closely with organisations of disabled people at both national and European level and with the European institutions, by creating coordinated action to promote the interests of disabled people. A productive society is one that invests in the competence and skills of disabled people. We must stress this positive aspect and counteract the negative aspects so often associated with disability.

For its part, the European Commission is committed to help improve the situation of people with disabilities – this is indeed a core policy commitment for the Commission. The Commission

is striving for a Europe where every citizen's needs are met. The European Year of People with Disabilities presents a unique opportunity to reach this objective. The principles of participation and inclusion encapsulate this year, which is not the year for, but the year of disabled persons. We must promote the idea that disabled people are European citizens like any others but also that throughout the EU they have common concerns and similar needs. This campaign must be led by disabled people themselves, in collaboration with local and national authorities, NGOs and of course it is vital that the media is involved.

This year can be considered a success, if after 2003, it leads to positive, progressive and sustainable results. It is precisely the support of the media that will make this possible. Mr Tait hopes that this Congress will be the starting point for various commitments and activities in this regard, like Media Action Plans and the establishment of an ongoing dialogue between the media and organisations of disabled people. The European Commission, for its part, will publish a Communication by the end of 2003 on the future of its disability policy, based on the results of the Year.

We must not let the momentum built up by the European Year dwindle and on the contrary we must use the results of the numerous new initiatives to make a resolute commitment to advance disability-related issues in a sustainable way.

### **Mr Yannis Vardakastanis – President of the European Disability Forum**

*Graduate of the University of California, Mr Vardakastanis began his career as a special consultant to the Greek Minister of Education for the education of disabled students. He has been President of the European Disability Forum since 1999. Mr Vardakastanis is also a member of the Management Committee of the Platform of European Social NGOs.*

The EDF President warmly thanks the organisers of the Congress, which is taking place at a historic turning point for the European Union. First of all, because very shortly, the European Union will be made up of 25 countries. There will be more than 50 Million disabled workers, fighting daily to play a role in all political and social activities, to overcome barriers, fight discrimination to acquire their own place and position in this common European future of a great big European family.

The organisations of disabled people are active in shaping and establishing their own future, in particular by following the progress of the European Constitution. A historic moment also because this year is the European Year of People with Disabilities, a European initiative which aims to increase the visibility of disability at all levels. This can be achieved through a different perspective, a new outlook that one needs to have on disability. "No measure or policy can be discussed without the active involvement of disabled people. Disability is an issue of equal treatment not an issue of charity." This is the reason why we call on the whole of Europe but also on each individual Member state and on each and every one of us to bring about change in the attitudes that have been entrenched in society for such a long time.

A change in attitude is also dependent on the significant power of the media : The media can educate, inform and reinforce awareness in an effort to change attitudes in society. We must



work more closely with the media-based organisations and draft a code of conduct together as to how disability are portrayed, whether in fiction or in the news and newspapers. With the extensive work of the media as our basis, we can develop a new approach, which will put disability at the centre of all political and social initiatives in the future. The end of the European Year of People with Disabilities must mark the beginning of a new era for disabled people, which will see an attitudinal change in society and legislative and institutional reforms to eradicate all remnants of social exclusion.

This Congress is the last in a whole series of events that have been made possible by the very active involvement of the Greek presidency. As EDF President, I would like to thank gratefully for the interest shown and the work in collaboration with disabled people that has been undertaken. We hope that this approach will be followed up by future Presidencies.

This Disability and Media Congress can really leave its mark. We will look at the different opinions and approaches of the mass media and attempt to draw conclusions. This could form the basis of a Declaration. Finishing this Congress by producing a common Declaration on the way in which disability must be portrayed in the media would be a significant step for us. “Here in Athens in the birthplace of civilisation, we could agree that a page is turning and on this basis, let us go forward to highlight the human rights and to guarantee the place of disabled people in society.”

# PLENARY I :

## THE PORTRAYAL OF DISABILITY IN THE MEDIA

*“The history of the portrayal of disabled people in the history of oppressive and negative portrayal. This has meant that disabled people have been presented as socially flawed able bodied people, not as disabled people with their own identity.” David Hevey, 25-3-1992*

### **Key issues for discussion:**

How would disabled people like to be portrayed in the media? Is there a consensus? Which messages should be delivered?

What can be done to make sure that the media do not reinforce negative and discriminatory attitudes of society towards disabled people and what is its role in overcoming this stigmatisation?

The mass media can play a key role in communicating a positive message in relation to disability. What are the difficulties in doing this and how can this message be communicated?

**Moderator: Mr Christphoros Vernakakis – Project Research Consulting**

### **Mr Richard Rieser – Director of NGO Equality in Education, United Kingdom**

Mr Rieser, who is also a trainer of disability trainers, presents the history of attitudes towards disabled people. He analyses how that has negatively affected the portrayal of disability in the British media. His presentation includes visual illustrations of good and bad examples of such portrayal. Mr Rieser starts by stating that the idea of perfection is still very topical today. An example of this is the fact that disabled people never appear on the front pages of many magazines or the fact that the Olympic Games are different depending on whether or not the participants are disabled. This negative attitude towards disabled people, which still exists today, dates back to the beginning of time.

In Ancient times, the Greek philosophers believed that disabled people did not have the right to live. Next, the Judeo-Christian tradition advocated the idea of granting asylum. The assimilation of disabled people and beggars also dates back to this period. In the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Witch Hammer*), the guidebook for Inquisitors during the Inquisition, thousands of

women, deemed to be witches were lawfully assassinated. In many cases, they were disabled women. The same applies to literature: The witches in Grimm's Fairy Tales are often disabled. On the contrary, it is rare to see an image of a disabled person portrayed during the Renaissance. Finally, Shakespeare describes Richard III as a disabled king, 100 years after his death and with no proof.

Generation after generation, the idea that disabled people are different from other people has been fixed in people's memory. It is without any doubt in the 20th Century that the most extreme examples occur: the eugenic societies which considered disabled people as a threat to genetics and which misinterpreted Darwin believing that disabled people should be sterilised so that their disability would not be passed on to the next generation. In Germany, the Nazis went even further by producing and broadcasting propaganda films.

During this same period, President Roosevelt hid his disability. Suggesting that a disabled person could not be considered a respected politician.

It was after the Vietnam War, from which 21 million people returned home with a disability, that movements of disabled people were founded and it was their campaigns that led the American people to adopt the Disability Discrimination Act.

The approach is changing today. It considers disabled people to be "handicapped" by their environment. We may not be able to do much about the impairments, but we can certainly overcome the barriers. The portrayal of disability is particularly stereotypical in the film industry, where disabled people are generally either violent, great achievers, pathetic, a burden for society, asexual, unable to participate in everyday life or wishing to get revenge. Disabilities should not be ridiculed. The media must fight against all these stereotypes.

Disabled people must be portrayed as ordinary people who do ordinary things. The Employment Directive is in line with this thinking: There is no longer any reason why disabled people cannot work as media professionals or actors.

Governments have even made mistakes in their awareness raising campaigns in favour of disabled people. They fail to show that it is really the barriers that have been put up by society that are disabling. Nevertheless, there is still an increase in good advertising practices.

Mr Reiser ends his presentation with some examples of positive portrayal of disabled people where their human qualities are shown in the first place and not their disability. Mr Reiser believes that there is a long way to go but that we are getting there.

## **Mr Peter Radtke – General Secretary of EUCREA International – ABM - Germany**

Mr Radtke is the General Director and Chief Editor of a television company, which deals exclusively with disability topics. As such, he explores how the media, the main vehicle portraying disabled people, concentrates all too often, on either the impairment or disability itself, or on the other side of the coin, it promotes the idea of the 'hero fulfilling his destiny'. Neither



of these two one-sided approaches are true to the reality of the life of disabled people as an integral part of our society.

Mr Radtke believes that the way in which disability is portrayed in the media is a complex issue. Although he has often heard disabled people complaining that the image portrayed of them was false, in his opinion, this image is not really false, but one-sided. Both viewpoints need to be considered, that of the media and that of disabled people, with the needs and expectations of both sides.

The media is a product of our society insofar as remaining very close to its consumers. Before we examine the question of where the media get their ideas from, we must start by drawing up a list of stereotypes and prejudice in society relating to disabled people. Then, we must consider effect of this mix of reality and fiction on society.

For centuries, disabled people have been considered freaks of nature. There are many examples proving this. Although times are changing, the recent discussions on antenatal diagnosis and abortion are proof that even today, public opinion has not changed much. It is within this context, that we must consider the role of the media and the extent to which it can be held responsible.

The media has a very important role to play in the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people, as in reality these two groups rarely have any contact. In many European countries, despite major efforts in favour of integration, or “inclusion”, disabled people continue to live in institutions based on segregation. Contact between the two groups is overshadowed by ignorance and fear.

The media is the only channel for non-disabled people to be informed about people who represent 10% of the population. The image of disabled people is the one conveyed by the media.

In the past, the media portrayed disabled people in a very negative way. Equally negative images existed in theatre where disabled people were always the characters that were mocked and ridiculed, and in films where the assassins often had some kind of physical impairment. After the Second World War, the media began to portray disabled people in a new way. With this new approach, they could be portrayed in two ways: either as people who needed a considerable attention or care, thanks to which the journalists could rely on the pity of their audience or readership, or by concentrating on their qualities that made them less disabled sometimes to such an extent as to glorify them as “super-crips”. This approach was one based on sensationalism to attract attention.

Portraying disability in this way was never in the best interest of disabled people. Unfortunately, it is the ratings that count for media professionals and it is only when their readership or audience is guaranteed, will they allow themselves the luxury of more responsible reporting.

This is how over the last few decades, the portrayal of disabled people by the media swings between the beggar or Batman image: a beggar implying someone who cannot do anything without help; and Batman implying the disabled hero who achieves extraordinary things.

This is not false image but it is distorted as it only reflects one of many different aspects of the life of an individual. It is dangerous as it gives a single image, which is too simplistic to understand what disability really is. Nevertheless, it is difficult to correct this false image conveyed to a badly informed public. It is a fact that a disabled person is rarely considered as an individual by the public, for whom, he or she represents the whole community of disabled people.

Is the solution to provide a positive image of disabled people? Mr Radtke does not believe so. "Disability is not an easy product to sell. If we sell it with too fancy a label, we will lose our credibility". What we really need is an objective impartial description covering the positive and negative aspects of life. Otherwise, the risk of repeating past mistakes is too high.

There are several examples of ways in which the portrayal of disabled people has made progress over recent years and this has taken place in particular in the cinema. Several films portraying disabled people reflect the change in social attitude towards this group of people. Increasingly frequently, the roles are played by disabled people themselves.

This is also a good way for the public to be informed without realising it as they are being entertained at the same time. However, what we still need today are films about the everyday life of disabled people. Although some people believe that this is boring, Mr Radtke believes that "the everyday life of disabled people is something new and sensational for most people."

## **Mr Carlo Romeo – RAI Social Secretariat - Italy**

Mr Romeo presents the viewpoint of the Italian national television service in relation to disabled people, emphasising the concrete measures they have developed to increase the visibility of disabled people in the media and to improve the image of disability.

He begins his presentation by explaining the role of RAI's Social Action Department. This service maintains links with voluntary associations working in different social sectors and in particular with the most vulnerable groups. He monitors the descriptions and the audio subtitles.

RAI is also responsible for raising awareness amongst the public about different social problems. It is based on the service contract established between RAI and the Ministry of Telecommunications.

For several years now, RAI has closely monitored the communication problems relating to disability. It has made efforts to promote a communications policy based on integration. The first results are beginning to emerge. The main difficulty is to develop a homogenous and appropriate culture for communications professionals.

Trying to establish effective communication is a determining factor. A series of programmes prepared by the RAI examines this question in more detail. One example of this is a whole day dedicated to the life of Michel Petrucciani. Particular attention and considerable resources were made available to provide people with visual and hearing impairments with access to popular television programmes by using audio descriptions. These adaptations are also useful for non-disabled people.

The service contract means that the government is obliged to pay a grant of several million euros.

New information has brought about a new revolution in the area of communications – it is that of global culture. As Neil Postmans puts it, Europe’s media has been able to evolve consistently and has done so better than the United States. People involved in this revolution must always bear in mind that in the world of the media, we do not add, we transform.

Communication on social issues is subject to a number of uncertainties, such as increasingly tight budgets, superficial attitudes and ratings that are not necessarily dependent on the theme but more on the way in which the subject is treated. This kind of programme has to be made as interesting as *Rain Man* or *Blade Runner*. We need both an effective means of communication for those working in the field and an informed audience. For example, a workshop was organised successfully with the best examples of European television on disability topics. This exchange of experience is vital and very beneficial.

We must ensure that a person’s disability is no longer the determining factor in his job, or lack of job, in particular in the media. In other words, a disabled person should not deal with disability-related themes exclusively and on the contrary he or she must work on general topics. There should be more disabled professionals in all sectors of the media. If we want to achieve real integration, we must free ourselves from our preconceived ideas and create stepping-stones, which, would bring about an ongoing exchange of values and languages. Mr Romeo finishes with a quotation from RAI’s advertisement for the European Year of People with Disabilities. It reveals a new language to speak about disabled people and a universal message: “our most serious mistake is to attempt to awaken qualities that are not present in individuals, rather than developing those that are.”



# PLENARY II:

## THE PORTRAYAL OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

*“A new approach to disability is necessary so that journalists do not dramatize the issue but address it from an understanding of the problem.” There are disabled journalists who know how to deal with this subject and who can open doors by exposing the type of situations encountered by these people”. Ms Anna Diamantopoulou, European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs*

### **Key issues for discussion:**

How should disability be treated in the news? How to get away from the charitable and medical approach?

Despite the fact that disability concerns 10% of the population, the presence of disability issues in the news is very low. Why is this?

Currently, disabled people are not targeted as a potential audience. Why? How can this be changed?

Good experiences of the media and disabled people working together have been developed in some countries. What are the results? What is the way forward?

How can a network of ongoing dialogue between the media and organisations of disabled people be developed?. This would ensure that disability related topics would be covered in a pertinent and correct manner?

**Moderator: Ms Periklis Smerlas – Political Analyst – Consultant to the Greek Ministry of Press and Mass Media**

### **Ms Elspeth Morrison – disability trainer with the BBC, United Kingdom**

Ms Morrison trains television and radio broadcasters to improve the way in which they portray people with disabilities. She makes a presentation on the use of drama in the portrayal of disability related topics using examples from different BBC television programmes.

She is an independent trainer and her goal is to convince people of the importance to deal with disability issues on the radio and television She was given this mission when a survey

revealed that disabled people were only represented in less than 1% of information programmes. One of the main complaints by disabled people is that they are neither seen nor heard on the screen, on the airwaves or in the newspapers, or that they are asked to be involved, but for the wrong reasons.

Journalists simply do not think of dealing with disability. In a stereotypical fashion, the portrayal of disability in the media can be divided into the following categories: The “sensational” subjects where a person, who does have a disability, achieves some sporting or other triumph. Then there are the subjects which try to play to our heart strings where we are made to pity the situation of a person who is tied to his wheelchair. Then there are the charitable programmes whose aim is to raise money to improve the situation of disabled people. Finally, the last one holds the most hope and is increasingly common and is reports on disabled people who are leading campaigns to access their rights, for accessibility. There are reports where disabled people speak themselves about the subjects of interest to them, which are often related to another topic other than disability.

Ms Morrison then shows two video extracts, which highlight how reporting on disabled people is perceived different depending on our own experience and the tone of voice used by the narrator.

The media still really needs disability equality training. This training must be provided by disabled people themselves and it must be supported by the management. We would hope that soon disabled people taking part in different programmes will be so “normal” and commonplace that journalists will no longer need any training.

## **Mr Peter White – BBC Disability affairs correspondent – United Kingdom**

Mr White has worked at the BBC since 1974 and has considerable experience in disability related issues on television and on the radio. As the first blind person to report on the news, Mr White shares his experience as a disabled journalist and analyses how this experience has resulted in a paradigm shift within the BBC. Mr White referred back to the previous video clips, commenting that the problem originates from the considerable gap of knowledge and understanding of what disability is. In his opinion, every report on disability does not need to be made by a disabled person (if this is the case then the same should apply for reporting in all areas). However, it is clear that more disabled people should be working in the media sector, both in front and behind the cameras. Until this happens, negative reporting, as described by Ms Morrison, will continue to exist.

Mr White knew early on that he wanted to be a radio reporter. It was the medium with which he grew up and had been a source of knowledge, a distraction and a concert hall since his childhood. He was discouraged to pursue this interest and he had to fight to oppose all the reasons put in his way. At the beginning of his career, he did not want to cover disability related topics because he did not see how he could avoid the miserable and offensive stereotypes. Neither did he want to make programmes about disabled people that were produced solely by non-disabled people.

However, he changed his position as he grew convinced that it was up to him as a disabled person working in the media to make programmes on disability related topics. In fact, today programmes about disability made by disabled people are increasingly common.

His move from radio to television was bravely initiated by the BBC. His first report was on the day the Disability Discrimination Act was adopted. This meant that he was able to deal with the subject in a totally impartial way as he was able to speak with first-hand knowledge. The only non-disabled person who was interviewed was the Minister. All the other people on the set were disabled people speaking for themselves. Since then, this is the model that he has adopted: “what is important is not to transform and present disability as a kind of circus but to describe it as a normal aspect of life”. It is also important never to lose one’s objectivity. Another category of disability related programme should show that disabled people make up a very diverse group of people and that they do not necessarily agree on everything themselves: education, social benefits, schools, etc. Showing their disagreements would make them appear like any other people.

Today, there are other disabled people who have followed his path. However, they continue to say that they do not receive enough support at the beginning of their careers and that the recruitment policies are not ambitious enough. Despite considerable praiseworthy achievements, more disabled people should be recruited in the BBC, whether as producers, reporters, administration staff or at management level. It is only then that the subjects covered can really reflect reality.

## **Mr Fernando Mendía – Director of Communications of ONCE (The Spanish Organisation of the Blind) - Spain**

Mr Mendía explains how disability in the news can be beneficial for the media and how the approach to disability related issues can be improved by working with organizations of disabled people.

Until ONCE set up a press agency about fifteen years ago, disabled people in Spain were invisible both in terms of public opinion and in the social and political arena. Since then, Servimedia has become the main specialist agency in social and political information and it distributes comprehensive information on disability including the needs, problems, the demands of disabled people and their organizations. It distributes some 150 dispatches a day including 30 concerning the disability movement.

The agency is an example of the social integration of disabled people and of their professional skills, as 40% of its employees have a disability and they hold key positions in the Senate or the Parliament. Servimedia has agreements with universities to provide training and job opportunities. It has expanded its scope to include a publications service, which distributes newsletters for the disability organizations who were finding it difficult to communicate their messages and campaigns to the policy makers and general public. The agency acts as editor for some 30 magazines published by these organizations, in particular the monthly magazine of CERMI (The National Spanish Council of Disabled People), the only newspaper specializing in the subject of disability, which has a print-run of 50,000.



As these activities do not have enough impact on the general public, Servimedia created a communications service whose aim is to help the organisations to convey their messages using other media. This service ensured the coverage of the first European Congress on Disability, which took place in Madrid in February 2003, and which was included many times on radio, television and in the newspapers. The impact was considerable and in particular much more credible as the information was communicated by “objective” professionals of the mainstream media. This was achieved at an extremely reasonable price. The communications service also provides public relations advice in their dealing key contacts in the political, economic and social arenas.

The TIC news has revolutionized the communication of the organizations of disabled people. Servimedia supports them so that they can avail of these opportunities and helps them to keep their Internet sites up to date as an internal communication tool. Servimedia also publishes a daily electronic newsletter with the support of the European Social Fund. ‘Solidaridadigital.com’ has all the regular sections of any daily newspaper and a considerable range of news concerning the disability movement. It is hugely successful and the number of hits is constantly growing.

An important point: the other media have followed Servimedia’s example and have started to include topics on disability more regularly and have opened up their programmes to the organizations of disabled people. Three private radio stations have started dedicated programmes, the national radio service has a 5-minute programme once a week on the CERMI and the main electronic newspaper is featuring the European Year. Finally, both private and public television channels often cover topics on disabled people.

What is the result of these efforts? There is no quantitative answer, but it is sure that the image of disabled people has improved considerably. From now on, the disability movement in Spain must be considered socially and politically. There is evidence to back this up. The Eurobarometer survey of May 2001 shows that Spain is one of the countries where the general public had no negative attitudes or feelings towards disabled people. This fact was confirmed by a study carried out by the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research. Another indicator of the impact of good communication is the will of companies to employ disabled people. ONCE has worked together with businesses to create 2,000 jobs over the last 4 years.

Mr Mendía finished by stressing that there is still a lot to do, although Spain has already made a lot of progress on the path to full integration of disabled people. “we know that communication has been the instrument of this first part of the journey, it is vital for us to reach our destination because we really need to reach the general public.”



# PLENARY III:

## The portrayal of disabled people in ADVERTISING AND FICTION.

*“By including disabilities in its creative output, advertising will help society gradually come to recognize that disability is not limited to just a few people in an insubstantial minority but that it is a normal and substantial part of the society in which we live”. The images of Disability – UK Ministry of Disabled People and Communications*

### **Key issues for discussion:**

What is good or bad portrayal?

To what extent can the presence of disabled people in advertisements and fiction contribute to viewing disability as one more element of human diversity? Can disability be stimulating and have creative potential in advertising and fiction?

How should disability be treated in the news? How to get away from the charitable and medical approach?

Why are disabled characters usually played by non-disabled actors?

Will the audience be put off if disability is included in advertising and fiction?

**Moderator Mr Enrique Tufet-Opi – Director of Communication Europe – Weber Shandwick**

### **Mr Dominic Lyle – Director of the European Association of Communication Agencies**

Mr Lyle, who has considerable experience in the area, makes a presentation on the portrayal of disabled people in advertising. In particular, he compares charity advertising with the others.

[RTF bookmark start: WfIci][RTF bookmark end: WfIci]Mr Lyle is amazed that in the 21st century, the media still pays very little attention to disabled people and that in the countries where the rights of disabled people are protected by legislation, these laws do not protect their portrayal in the media, despite the strongly held view that the way in which the media portrays disabled people has a significant impact on the perception which non-disabled people have of them in real life.

It is because of advertising's emphasis on bodily perfection that disabled people have been excluded from advertising images. People think twice before using disabled people as models out of fear that the audience will feel uncomfortable. The rare images of disability are usually of wheelchair users: advertising is a visual medium which needs the equipment clues such as wheelchairs to denote disability as part of the diversity depicted

Mr Lyle thinks that the advertising industry contributes to discrimination in at least two different ways: in addition to concealing disability from the general public, it often ignores the role of disabled people as consumers. Secondly, some advertisers, notable charities, present a particularly distorted view of people with disabilities in order to raise money. The depiction of disability in charity advertising can be a serious problem. He remarks that despite opposition from the organizations, pathetic images focusing on "super cripples" continue to be used. This approach only reinforces the perceived "inadequacy" of other disabled people.

More recently, charity advertising tends to focus on the "abilities" rather than the "disabilities" of disabled people. This development is a step in the right direction, which does however run the risk of obscuring the need for change and perpetuates the idea that these people need to be supported by charities. "The focus remains squarely on people with disabilities and not on the disabling society in which we live: this is exactly the opposite of what is needed". It is the bad marketing of charities that play a role themselves in what Mr Lyle calls the "disabling process".

The problem of these "disabling" images is that they have been devised by non-disabled people. Until quite recently, people with disabilities have had no say in how they were represented in the media and advertising. In fairness to the advertising professionals, Mr Lyle recognises that they did not know what disabled viewers might want from broadcasting. Some of disabled people's criticism of the way in which they are portrayed could be taken into consideration by the broadcasters.

Disabled people want the media to treat them with respect. They want them to respect the diversity of disability, to respect their point of view and above all to consult them, to respect their abilities and in particular to involve disabled media professionals. Advertising should therefore include disabled people in their creative output more frequently as this would help society recognise disability as a normal and substantial part of our society. But, apart from a few very fine examples, the majority of advertising agencies do not do it. Why is this? Out of fear that the effectiveness of their advertising would be undermined, that the brand they are promoting would be systematically associated with disability but also because they do not feel concerned about the place disabled people have in society. They just want to make the best possible films.

A good advertisement aims to gain consumer loyalty. However, some companies are beginning to see the potential which precise images in advertising which do not stigmatize anything. Research shows that the disabled consumer is more brand loyal than other consumers. Advertising executives are beginning to realize that disabled people are not just consumers like everyone else.

Other conservative critics believe that any advertisement showing an image of disabled people, unless it is aiming to raise money, is an exploitation of the image of the disabled person. There is also criticism of the people who believe that you are using sympathy to force them to buy a certain product. The response of disabled people is that this is not exploitation so long as the person has given their consent and has been paid correctly. As far as mainstreaming disability is concerned, is it useful to include disabled people in advertising in a more systematic way? Yes, if advertising focuses on the abilities and talents of the people. It can then increase the visibility of disabled people and familiarize the general public with the different kinds of disability. It can help disabled people in overcoming the feeling of isolation by showing the examples of interaction between people with disabilities and non-disabled people. They can show the general public disabled people in senior positions.

In order to achieve this, agencies and clients must look for new paths together. Look for originality; do not include a disabled person in an ad if it undermines the original objective of the advertising.

In conclusion, Mr Lyle reiterates the need for the media to be better informed on disability issues and believes that if the business community was aware of the potential of this market, there would be much more disabled consumers in advertising. This would benefit everybody, the advertisers, charities, agencies and in particular disabled people themselves.

## **Mr Carlos Biern – Director of co-productions at BRB Internacional – Spain**

Mr Biern presented a very popular Spanish cartoon whose main character was a young boy with a visual impairment. It was a good example of disabled people being depicted in a positive way, which also made very good business sense.

Mr Biern works in the commercial production of cartoons. He produces films and shorts, which are distributed worldwide. 'Nicolas', which is co-produced with the BRB, was produced two years ago and has been very successful. Twenty-six half-hour episodes had been broadcast with a target audience of children between the ages of six and ten years old.

The story is of a young boy, who has had a visual impairment since birth, arriving into a new neighbourhood and of the different challenges he meets - new friends, a new school, a new guide dog. It is the first series in the world where the main character is a young boy with a visual impairment, who is not depicted as a super hero. The idea behind the series had come from an organization of blind people (ONCE) and the Spanish national television company who wanted to correct the first impressions that children have of disability such as strangeness, occasional fear, and not knowing how to behave.

So, the cartoon portrays the everyday life of Nicolas, who is a clever, funny and good-humoured ten-year old boy. We see him surfing the Internet, cooking, being involved in group situations, taking things at his own pace with his ups and downs. Being blind is a problem but it does not mean that you cannot live like a non-disabled person. It is during childhood that knowledge and social habits are acquired. In addition, everyone is aware the impact television has on young people. It is therefore vital that television portrays life in a realistic way and that

it fulfils its educational role. It is an excellent tool to teach and to overcome stereotypes by using positive images. If we want the message to reach children effectively, the programmes must be both educational and entertaining. Considerable effort was put into the script and production (mainly during the research phase, which was facilitated by working together with ONCE) so that it would be as true to the real life of a young blind person as possible and the series did achieve its objective. In fact, 'Nicolas' while it is entertaining, also sets a standard for the integration of people with disabilities in everyday life. Young audiences got to know a blind person who is able to live in a very similar way to themselves and who can even play sports. They learned about Braille, the use of guide dogs and the specific needs of these people.

This series has been hugely successful. It has been broadcast twice and has very high ratings. It has been covered broadly by other media who have welcomed its educational and entertaining quality. It has been broadcast in more than 40 countries around the world, but only two in Europe. This is where the problem lies. Apparently, the majority of national television companies prefer to buy American and Japanese programmes, which feature violence almost exclusively.

Mr Biern points out that this series is available on video and has been adapted (sub-titling and dubbing and audio description) for young disabled people.

## **Ms Alison Wilde – University of Leeds**

Ms Wilde is the author of an empirical research project on the portrayal of disability in the media. Her presentation mainly focused on the portrayal of disability in fiction. She provided examples of good and bad portrayal in British and American fiction analysing the impact these can have on media audiences.

Ms Wilde also discussed the use by American and British authors of the social model of disability, which presented disability as a problem of society. She believes that this interpretation favours the portrayal of disability in fiction. Ms Wilde prefers to use the term "impairment" to speak about disability.

# PLENARY IV:

## THE EMPLOYMENT AND RECRUITMENT OF PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY IN THE MEDIA

*Improving the image of disabled people in the media inevitably means providing access and job opportunities to disabled people in those media. The media should try and increase the number of disabled professionals in their workforce, and should be more proactive in offering work placement opportunities to disabled young professionals. This will often mean removing physical barriers and the willingness to undertake workplace adaptations.*

### **Key issues for discussion:**

Should the media, in co-operation with disability organizations, develop disability awareness training, in order to prevent stereotypes and stigmatization?

Should disability awareness modules be included in studies for journalists and other media professionals?

How can the media increase the number of job opportunities for disabled employees?  
What measures should be developed to support disabled staff?

**Moderator: Mr Patrick Worms – Vice-President of Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide – Belgium**

### **Ms Wendy Harpe – Senior Diversity Manager at the BBC Diversity Unit**

Ms Harpe has considerable experience of diversity issues, with strategic responsibility for disability within the BBC. She outlined the BBC's policy on employing people with a disability and the concrete initiatives taken by this broadcaster, which is one of the most proactive media in the field.

Ms Harpe began by describing the situation in the United Kingdom: 11.7 million disabled people; since 1995, legislation that covered employment, access to buildings, goods and services and, soon, transport; a highly active movement of disabled people; and, finally, financial support from the government. She considered that employing disabled people was therefore not necessarily an extra financial burden on employers. The legislation – which was not perfect, as it was not based on human rights – was nonetheless powerful, as it guaranteed equal rights to employment and imposed a whole series of obligations on employers, such as physical adjustments, task reallocation, the rescheduling of working hours, etc.

Of the 5.5 million disabled people of working age, 2.3 million had a job. People with disabilities represented 18 % of the workforce, and 0.8 % of them were employed in broadcasting. Ms Harpe then outlined the reasons that had prompted the BBC to introduce change: a desire to meet its legal obligations, to live up to its reputation as a good employer and, finally, to ensure that its employment policy was consistent with the image the BBC conveys to its audience and in its programmes.

Before embarking on a change, it was first necessary to define a strategy and identify goals. The goals for the BBC were to increase the number of disabled employees, implement best practice and fulfil its legal obligations. Then came the drafting of the policy: the BBC drew up guidelines on the employment of people with disabilities. This called for lengthy, intensive research and consultation with the staff of the BBC, Management and disabled people. Getting the backing of Management was also vital. The guidelines cover all areas: recruitment, training, promotion, redundancy and keeping one's job.

Once the policy had been drawn up, the three tools necessary for implementing it were put in place: training, a placement agency, and follow-up. Training was specific to each job and met real needs. "Extend" was a placement programme designed for disabled people which aimed to find them long-term employment. Run by the Diversity Centre, it had helped to change the BBC by bringing in a large number of disabled people in one go, and had proven its worth. For follow-up, the BBC had carried out an audit which had highlighted needs, in particular the need for accessibility, and these had been met. Follow-up had also focused on recruitment. Finally, the extremely useful Central Support System had been set up.

The BBC set aside funding for accessibility support to supplement the inadequate funds from the government, so no department of the BBC could argue that support for disabled employees was too expensive. This central system coordinated assistive technology and included an ergonomics unit and a disability advisor. Now that the infrastructure was in place, the BBC was looking to the future: being attentive to and respecting the different communities of disabled people and their experiences; using the size of its market to try to persuade manufacturers to make communication technology accessible; ensuring that the voices of disabled people are heard thanks to its broadcasts.

## **Mr Juan M<sup>a</sup> Casado Salinas – Head of Institutional Relations at Andalusian Radio and Television (RTVA) – Spain**

Andalusian Radio and Television was deeply committed to combating stigmatisation and discrimination against people with disabilities. Mr Salinas explained how, thanks to ongoing dialogue with disability organizations and the employment of people with disabilities, had improved the image of disability in the eyes of its audience.

The RTVA was a major public communication service which, in its efforts to promote the integration of people with disabilities, took into account the opinion of disability organizations, its legal obligations and, of course, its financial limits. Its aim was two-fold: to facilitate access for people with sensory impairments to the world of images and sounds and to show its com-



mitment to improving the image of people with disabilities. To do this, the RTVA felt it needed to make people with disabilities visible, both actively in its programmes and, at the very least, as an audience.

For thirteen years, Mr Salinas had carried out research which showed a significant development in the image of people with Down's syndrome. As proof, he gave the example of a person with Down's syndrome, whose progress had been shown in early documentaries and who was then able to take part in debates and later, armed with a university degree, entered the labour market in the audiovisual sector. A few months later as a regular participant in a popular radio programme where the same individual would express opinions on an equal footing with other guests. Mr Salinas saw this as public recognition of the progress made by people with disabilities.

For ten years, the RTVA had also broadcast a weekly information programme specially for people with a hearing impairment, thanks to the combination of images and voice with subtitling and sign language. The originality of this programme lay in the fact that it was produced in collaboration with the Andalusian Deaf Federation, which had set up a production company and trained deaf people in the various specialized areas of the audiovisual sector. Deaf people would like sign language to be used more systematically; Mr Salinas thought that subtitling was more appropriate since, if an interpreter were present too often, this could lead to the widespread social rejection of people with a hearing impairment. He spoke out against the price of subtitling, which was too expensive for many regional TVs. He called for an initiative to get subtitling subsidized and for co-operation between television channels in this area, and he also hoped that the development of digital television would facilitate the use of audio description.

In 2001, the RTVA had signed a co-operation agreement with the Confederation of physically disabled people with a view to normalizing their presence in programmes and eliminating architectural barriers. But the difficulties confronting these people in terms of access to education meant that they still had few experts on the subjects discussed in these broadcasts. Many legal measures acted as incentives promoting the employment of people with disabilities, but this system could only work effectively in large companies or in the public sector. The RTVA reserved 3 % of its job offers for people with disabilities. But lack of access to education and appropriate training were a major obstacle to their finding employment in the audiovisual sector, which demanded high qualifications.

For the RTVA, making disabled journalists more visible was essential in order to speed up their integration in the media. With this in mind, a blind journalist had been recruited to present the television news. Before handing over to her, Mr Salinas concluded by saluting the professionalism of technicians and journalists with a disability and by encouraging enterprises to take on more people with disabilities, as it was essential for them to be visible if all aspects of their lives were to be normalized.

**Ms Nuria del Saiz Gaitán** recounted her experience as a blind journalist at the RTVA, where she presented the television news, a flagship programme for this channel. She explained how, with the help of assistive technologies and thanks to the co-operation and help of the whole production team, she had been successfully presenting the fifteen-minute news every day for five years.

## **Ms Hiltrud Fischer-Taubert – Editor with the Zweite Deutsche Fernsehen (ZDF) – Germany**

Ms Fischer-Taubert presented the point of view of this German public broadcaster and described the influence of the German government on the ZDF's current recruitment policy

To understand the situation of people with disabilities within the ZDF, it was useful to know some facts about general employment conditions in Germany. According to German social legislation, at least 5 % of an enterprise's workforce must consist of people with disabilities. If this percentage fell below 5 %, the employer had to pay a compensatory tax, which was reinvested in integration measures.

At present, the ZDF was under this 5 % quota. Of the ZDF's 3,600 employees, 180 had a disability, representing a quota of 4.7 %, whereas a few years earlier the quota had been 6 %. This was because, the year before, the ZDF's disabled employees had had an opportunity to take retirement before the age of 60, for reasons to do with unemployment readjustments. In addition, the criteria had changed and it was more difficult now to be regarded as having a 50 % disability and thus as belonging to the category of "worker with a disability".

Most of the ZDF's employees with a disability had become disabled during their lives as a result of an accident or an illness – this was particularly the case with older employees, who were generally able to keep their jobs thanks to appropriate human and technical support. Of course there were also young employees who had become disabled during their professional lives at the ZDF – for the most part these were editors, sports reporters, film editors or employees in the administrative and production departments.

Based on the disability law, an agreement on social benefits for workers with a disability had been introduced by the ZDF in 1979. This guaranteed a high level of protection and support: suitable workplace, flexible working hours, assistance if necessary, preferential attention for the highest positions, basic training and advanced training measures, and the appointment of an ombudsman to protect their interests. This agreement had enabled more people with disabilities to be taken on the previous year by the ZDF.

Although the Federal Ministry of Employment had made special efforts to create 50,000 new jobs for people with disabilities, their unemployment rate remained above average. The ZDF had also made special efforts to include workers with a disability: it had put an emphasis on training, which was the basis for equal opportunities. Practical lessons and training courses had been organized, and of those undergoing trainings one person out of every fifteen had a disability. But above all, it had co-operated closely with RH-Integra, the information and advisory agency, on whose Board the ZDF was represented by its disability ombudsman.

RH-Integra acted as a bridge between employees and employers: advising people with disabilities on job opportunities and advising enterprises on everything to do with employing people with disabilities. This system had proved both inexpensive and highly effective.

By way of example, two short videos were screened, one showing the work of a person with a disability in a senior position and the other RH-Integra.



To conclude her talk, Ms Fischer-Taubert introduced her team, composed of two editors and an assistant. One of the editors had a visual impairment, and there were disabled journalists among their free-lance staff. If her programme was open to criticism for not currently being presented by a non-disabled person, this was because to date they had not found a suitable disabled presenter. The ZDF stood by its principle of applying the same professional standards to everyone, whether they were or were not disabled. To do otherwise would be discrimination.

## **Mr Olivier Harland – France Télévisions – Diversity Unit – France**

Mr Harland, who is responsible for harmonizing programmes for the French Radio Television channels, presented his work in the Diversity Unit, in particular the exchange of programmes on disability. He also outlined how his unit operated as a monitoring centre on media and disability.

Mr Harland and Mr Laplace recalled how, starting in 1997, French public television had developed the image of people with disabilities through a number of broadcasts and programmes: an information programme on campaigns to improve accessibility in towns; reports for the television news, documentaries on the Paralympics, an annual broadcast of 30 hours live – the Telethon – to raise funds for research and to improve the daily lives of severely disabled people.

In 2001, France Télévisions set up a unit responsible for programmes on “difference”. Its aim was to promote diversity in broadcasts for young people, fiction and discussion programmes, and to try to harmonize them in mainstream programmes. These differences affect everyone – men, women and young people – who found it difficult to fit into community life or play a normal part in it, including disabled people. In pursuit of this goal, France Télévisions followed several different paths. First of all, it was active in the International Programme Market, which compiled lists of the programmes on diversity broadcast by European channels and disseminated a catalogue listing all the programmes on diversity that had been broadcast by the French channels. Next, a European database of the different ways in which European channels approached disability had been set up. It contained copies of this type of broadcast, which could thus be made available to interested programming units. The other European TV channels, which were enthusiastic about this initiative, regularly fed into the database. The Diversity Unit also acted as a link between the producers and directors of audiovisual projects and the various France Télévisions channels; for this purpose, it had a correspondent in each programme department. Furthermore, by putting non-professionals in touch with the appropriate professionals in the audiovisual sector, the Diversity Unit enabled them to get their messages across on the airwaves by including them in programmes. Another of the Unit’s activities was to pass on information from the NGO sector for programmes and television news. Finally, it worked for the sports department at France Télévisions, notably preparing the coverage of the Paralympics in Athens in the summer of 2004.

After presenting the various activities of the Diversity Unit, Mr Harland gave a detailed list of the broadcasts of the three French public channels that incorporated ‘disability’ aspects in their broadcasts: regular reports in the national and regional television news; a weekly programme devoted to disabled people; TV films; documentaries, and discussion programmes.

Before concluding, Mr Harland added a clarification about access for people who were deaf or hard of hearing. At present, only 16 % of France Télévisions' programmes were subtitled, but this percentage would see an increase of 50 % by the end of 2006.

# PLENARY V:

## ACCESS TO THE MEDIA AND ITS NEW TECHNOLOGY

*Disabled people, including people with sensory impairments, regularly watch television for entertainment, news and information, socially and for company. Digital television has the potential to make broadcasting more accessible for disabled people. But at the moment, with no political intervention, is the market actually fulfilling this potential?*

### **Key issues for discussion:**

Is it possible that political decision-makers, broadcasters and manufacturers want to exclude disabled people from enjoying the same right as other citizens to access broadcast services?

Does it help or hinder a solution when we strictly separate the broadcasting service and the receiving equipment?

Can a voluntary approach deliver accessibility in this area or do we need mandatory requirements?

Can standardization provide some of the answers?

Is there a framework that allows for approaches adopted by different countries and examples of best practice to be shared across Europe?

What role can broadcasters play in making digital television more accessible?

What role can national governments and the European Union play in making digital television accessible for disabled people?

**Moderator: Mr Gerry Stallard – Cenelec – Stallards Consultancy Services LTD/Media Access**

**Ms Leen Petré – European Campaigns Manager – Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) – United Kingdom**

Ms Petré highlighted the importance role of receiving equipment for blind and partially sighted people, and raised a number of issues to do with auto description and additional narration.

Ms Petré aims to make television accessible to the 7.4 million blind and partially sighted people in Europe, for whom this medium was a source of entertainment and information and a means of participating in social life. A survey carried out by the RNIB showed that, in the UK, television was the main source of information for 94 % of blind people. Yet many of them had particular difficulties when it came to watching television, and would like suitable adjustments to be made so that they could make better use of it. These adjustments should be explored in the light of the development of digital television, which would soon be widespread in Europe. Many countries had already announced that this change would be introduced between 2006 and 2010.

For Ms Petré, the advent of digital television meant a major potential to improve accessibility to television for blind people. But the vital precondition for this was that total, equal access to these services for partially sighted people needed to be ensured. Three aspects were of interest to partially sighted people: audio description, on-screen browsing and interfaces. Audio description supplemented subtitling, and consisted of additional narration, in between dialogues, to describe the background, the action, costumes and the actors' expressions: it was a huge help in following the action.

An extract from a Harry Potter film – with audio description – was screened to show how useful this equipment was, and how it worked. But it was not yet available everywhere – only in some countries, which used different techniques. Spreading it through digital television could help it develop. Another possibility offered by digital TV was on-screen browsing, but this required the user to select the channel and then browse to find the desired programmes and services, which was not possible for blind people. Technically, however, alternative methods of access and browsing did exist, such as voice commands, techniques that needed to be made more widely available. Then there are accessible interfaces. To use television, a remote control was needed. Ms Petré would like manufacturers to include an accessibility interface in remote controls directly, right from the design stage, following the principle of 'design for all'. She added that manufacturers should take the 'design for all' principle into account in all their products, so that they could easily be fitted with additional accessibility tools.

Organizations of people with hearing or visual impairments had drawn up a list of all their needs in terms of equipment, for manufacturers, who did not seem really interested. At EU level, efforts were being made to achieve EU-wide standardisation and coordination between manufacturers and broadcasters (Cenelec's 'TV for All' project). As part of the campaign to combat exclusion, the organisations were calling for a European evaluation report to be produced on the work done to make digital television accessible: this report would be based on National Action Plans and would allow for an exchange of experiences and good practice between Member States. The Action Plans should indicate existing levels of subtitling, signing and audio subtitling; production and supply methods; targets to be reached, identified with disabled people; the measures envisaged for reaching these targets, together with requirements for service providers and broadcasters and, finally, compulsory measures to ensure that these requirements were met.

In conclusion, Ms Petré expressed the hope that 2003, the Year of People with disabilities, would also be the year in which manufacturers, broadcasters and policy-makers would demonstrate their political will to commit themselves to these changes.

## **Mr Marcel Bobeldijk – President of the European Federation of the Hard of Hearing (EFHOH)**

Mr Bobeldijk presented the point of view of people with a hearing impairment and their families in relation to media accessibility; he focused on the problems arising from the lack of subtitling and other kinds of support equipment.

Mr Bobeldijk began by saying that, by 2005, almost 82 million people in Europe would experience hearing problems, and by 2015 there would be 91 million, 174,000 of them children. This is one person in seven. This was, therefore, a very high number of viewers who could not be excluded from access to television. Sign language for children who could not read and subtitling for everyone else were therefore crucial. Yet there was a dire lack of them in several European countries. Why? Outside the United Kingdom no legislation – either national or EU-wide – existed in this area. No legislation on this required Member States to provide services for people with a sensory impairment. It was often said that subtitling was difficult to produce, that it was costly and was useful only to a marginal fraction of the population. Yet subtitling cost only 1 % of the total production cost of a television broadcast, and economies of scale could be achieved. Broadcasters in the different countries should collaborate more and co-ordinate better. An example: a Flemish television programme had been broadcast with subtitles in Belgium, and subsequently in the Netherlands – but this time without the subtitles!

The United Kingdom was the European country with the highest percentage of subtitling – in fact a law made subtitling compulsory, even for commercial channels. Even advertisements were often subtitled. There had been a campaign on subtitling in the UK in 2002, which had been a great success. The same applied to Sweden. In the Netherlands, 75 % of broadcasts by public channels were subtitled, but none of the seven private channels.

Digital TV would lead to a huge improvement in subtitling: more legible fonts, better colours and the possibility of graphics. One of the conclusions of the Seville Congress in 2002 had been that digital television would be a major vehicle for the information society.

The report submitted by Cenelec in 2003, on the standardisation agreement for access to digital television, contained many references to the possibility of interactive services for people with disabilities. Problems currently remaining were the woefully inadequate use of subtitling, audio description and signing, the complexity of symbols and terminology and, finally, browsing from one menu to another, which was confusing.

Hard of hearing people must have access to the new digital television technology, such as choice of size and colour of characters, downloading subtitled films, interactive television with subtitles, voice commands, etc. and, above all, appropriate subtitling. Subtitling was vitally important. Without it, TV lost a great deal of its usefulness – and yet TV was the most important medium for news, education, sport and politics. Most political debates and electoral campaigns took place on TV – very often with no subtitling. It was not surprising that the abstention rate for elections was so high among hard of hearing people.

Mr Bobeldijk concluded by reminding his listeners that subtitling was not just essential for the

81 million people who were hard of hearing – it was also an asset for children with a disability, children learning to read, people learning a second language, elderly people and others... “We have a clear aim: to achieve 100 % subtitling by the year 2010.”

## **Mr Paul Gardiner – Head of Technical Standards and Information of the Independent Television Commission – United Kingdom**

As an expert on research into engineering management, Mr Gardiner contributed the broadcaster’s viewpoint to the debate on accessibility and new media technology. He outlined the research – past and present – into the provision of this new technology.

Mr Gardiner worked on the regulation of commercial television, in body which, while not a government agency, had to comply with legislation. Like the other regulating bodies, his was soon to be incorporated into one single body, which would be responsible for regulating the whole field of telecommunications. His role was to watch out for the interests of consumers as the communications sector entered the digital era, including the interests of people with disabilities. Hence the importance to him of media access technology.

Before going into the technical aspects, Mr Gardiner mentioned a recent study on general attitudes to disability in the media, which showed that the majority of TV viewers were in favour of a greater presence of people with disabilities on the screen, chiefly to combat negative stereotypes and promote a positive image. Coming back to the technical aspects of access to the media, he noted that subtitling – by means of teletext – was making constant progress in both public and private channels and that by 2010 the majority of programmes would be subtitled. The improvements digital TV would make to subtitling – incorporated into the digital system – were obvious, and the aim was to have 80 % of broadcasts, by both cable and satellite, subtitled. Both the cost of producing subtitles and the time it took (it was still slow) would be considerably reduced.

Digital TV also meant huge progress with audio description, which was essential for blind people. The techniques required were still complicated and called for standardization, which was currently under discussion. The aim was to achieve audio description for 10 % of programmes in the coming 10 years, as against 4 % now.

Finally, signing, on which many people with a severe hearing impairment were dependent, should be provided in 5 % of programmes in the next 10 years. Research was currently being done to improve this support, which could be left up to people to use if they wished, by using a system of ‘closed signing’. But this system had come up against some difficulties: lack of sign-language professionals, need to find solutions for transmitting the additional information, and cost. In-depth research was well under way. Mr Gardiner also spoke about other new access possibilities such as the EPG (electronic programme guide), a browsing tool that was quick and easy to use, needed only minimum memory and made it possible to programme the desired services and information quickly. Finally, he stressed the fact that digital television would only be able to live up to all its potential if it was as easy to use as analogue television. This is where efforts should lie, in a collaboration involving researchers, regulators and manufacturers.

# PLENARY VI:

## “THE ROLE OF POLICY-MAKERS IN SUPPORTING POSITIVE ACTION”

“Emerging technologies have an immense potential for improving accessibility. The development and exploitation of this potential must be backed up by a solid regulatory framework. We must put in place the resources and infrastructure necessary to ensure the development of solutions that will be applicable in all EU Member States...” *Mr Neil Kinnock, European Commissioner*

What is the situation in the different EU countries? How have these policy frameworks helped improve participation by and the presence of people with disabilities in the media? To what extent can a policy framework benefit the more proactive media?

### **Key issues for discussion:**

- How can people with disabilities participate in the public and political arenas?
- How can the rights of people with disabilities be protected in the media in order to prevent discrimination?
- What mechanisms should be put into place to guarantee an accurate portrayal of disabled people in the media? Media monitoring centres? A media ombudsman? Is it the role of the media or of government to ensure the presence of disabled people in the media?
- Should on-going co-operation between the media and disability organisations be regulated?
- Should a legislative framework protect and defend the rights of people with disabilities in the media?

**Moderator: Mr Stefan Trömel, Director of the European Disability Forum**

### **Ms Maria Eagle – Minister for Disabled People – United Kingdom**

Ms Eagle outlined government initiatives in the United Kingdom, the most advanced country in the European Union when it came to regulating for accessibility.



For Ms Eagle, the importance of this Congress was obvious. Disabled people contributed greatly to enriching society by their talents and gifts – something they had for so long been prevented from doing. Now, however, disabled people were no longer regarded as invalids but as people who, as they had become increasingly autonomous, could be full citizens. The approach to disability was broadening: paternalism was disappearing, giving way to a struggle to break down the barriers facing people. Negative stereotypes must disappear, and European culture, based on fear and ignorance, had to change. This was where the role of the media was of the utmost importance – they bombarded us daily with images of a world as they wanted to see it, and as they thought it was. A world which, all too often, did not include disabled people.

For Ms Eagle, policy makers could change this state of affairs in three different ways. First by laying down a solid regulatory framework, next by demonstrating to society the advantages for everyone of full participation by disabled people; and finally, by being the champions defending the rights of disabled people. Because of her responsibilities, Ms Eagle's work areas cut across others and touched on those of the other ministries; she therefore tried to influence the various ministries and persuade them of the importance of disability issues, which she tried to make a key issue for the government. She goes to great lengths to ensure that the rights of disabled people are properly taken into account in all ministries.

Ms Eagle thought that the greatest barrier was ignorance – a belief confirmed by the organisations she meets on a daily basis. To combat ignorance, the 'Images of Disability' initiative had been launched, with the aim of encouraging advertisers to improve the way in which disabled people were portrayed by including images of disability in their creative output. Although not compulsory, the initiative had been a great success. Working groups, incentives, best practice guides, a competition for the best advertisement, etc., had all contributed to this success.

Another priority for Ms Eagle was to convince people that attitudes had to change. That it was not just access to employment for disabled people that had to be improved, but access to a whole range of services. Introducing legislation was not enough: employers had to be convinced of the importance of a diversified workforce, especially when it came to intellectual disability. Employers operating in a highly competitive environment had to be convinced of the importance of disabled people as a market, and thus of the fact that it was also in their own interest to make goods and services more accessible. Disabled people had a purchasing power of 60,000 million euros a year – and like everyone else, they were consumers. It was up to policy-makers to persuade economic suppliers of the value of this market. Here too there were government incentives, such as the prize for the service provider with the most accessible services.

The final role of the policy makers was to draw up an effective, solid, legislative framework. This was essential for enabling disabled people to become autonomous. And the legislative framework would have to be re-evaluated regularly, and any loopholes closed. In this context, since taking up this job Ms Eagle had set up a Commission on the Rights of Disabled people whose Task Force, which included disabled people, issued recommendations for new legislation – and had brought about a strengthening of the tools to ensure that the legislation was applied. Addressing the media present, Ms Eagle urged them, with their power to change hearts and minds, to influence the public using words and images. "The media are the mirror of a society. No country can achieve its full economic or social potential if it ignores the immense potential of disabled people."



## **Ms Marlies Ypma – Minister for Health, Welfare and Sports – the Netherlands**

Ms Ypma recounted the experience of her ministry in image building in the Netherlands, the involvement of the government and the background to a campaign it had funded.

The Netherlands voted in favour of an Anti-Discrimination Act in early 2003, which would come into force in December 2003. Its scope covered vocational training and public transport, and would probably be extended to cover goods and services and primary and secondary education. The Netherlands had supplemented this legislation by an Action Plan to raise awareness of disability issues.

Taking advantage of the momentum generated by the numerous activities carried out in the context of the European Year, the Netherlands were funding several campaigns, including a four-year campaign to improve the accessibility of the Internet. ‘Ambassadors’ were going round to businesses raise awareness about the importance to take the needs of people with disabilities into account. Exposure to the media was one of the factors of success. Another campaign, co-ordinated by a committee on “the work angle”, set up by the government, raised awareness of disability issues in the workplace: organisations of employers, workers and people with disabilities went around to workplaces together to promote a positive, realistic image of people. The government’s approach was to begin by talking, discussing and convincing, and only then to lay down rules.

Ms Ypma then described the role of the government in the “image building campaign”, which would be presented in more detail by Mr Besemer. This awareness raising campaign had been made possible by the availability of funding, ideas and above all the deep commitment of several people in the government, who were convinced of the value of developing an appropriate image of people with disabilities. As the budget was large, the risk involved was high. First it had been necessary to persuade and involve NGOs, and then companies– both of which had been hesitant to begin with. The starting point had been that the message to be conveyed had to come from disabled people themselves and not from government. The government, although responsible for managing the budget and participating in the campaign, had to take a back seat. Its role was to stimulate action, but not take the initiative. It was also to act as a relay between enterprises and NGOs, which were not used to working together and whose cultures and aims were very different. Throughout the campaign there had been a need for a great deal of research, in-depth reflection and lengthy discussions between all the players involved. In conclusion, Ms Ypma underlined that the government would like to conduct other campaigns of this type, and she emphasized one of the lessons to be learnt from this experience: it was essential to involve the media, but they had to be persuaded to get involved, and on no account forced.

## **Mr Ronald Besemer – Dutch Council of the Disabled and the Chronically Ill – The Netherlands**

Mr Besemer gave a concrete example of fruitful co-operation between the government, the media and disability organizations in the Netherlands to improve the image of people with disabilities in society by carrying out a successful awareness raising campaign.

“A Challenge for the Netherlands’ was a national campaign on the image of people with disabilities, initiated and launched by the government in 2001.

The first to be involved by the government were the disability organisations (the Dutch Council of the Disabled and the Chronically Ill and the Federation of Parents’ Organizations). The adequate budget allocated by the government enabled them to work with professionals and the media and to carry out a campaign based on highly professional marketing in communication. The aim was to initiate a movement in the Netherlands to stimulate contact between people with and without a disability, and to enable them to adapt or correct the images they had of one another, on the basis of their common interests. The theme for the first year focused on how to behave with disabled people and the feeling of embarrassment that sometimes exists. The media played a major role: television, radio, advertisements linking the campaign with existing programmes, showing contacts and relationships between people with disabilities and those without, in everyday life. Each of the campaign’s activities centred around a particular theme and showed all aspects, both negative and positive, in relations between disabled and non-disabled people. Three tools were used for getting the messages across: advertisements, a street campaign and a website. The messages were first sent out in advertisements, both paid and free, on television, on radio and in the press. Then they were passed further on by a campaign in the street, using a considerable amount of materials made available to everyone who wanted to take part in the campaign in their own area or town. This had a major multiplier effect. Finally, messages were sent around the internet thanks to a special website which included all the events in the campaign, gave detailed information on the campaign itself and had a chat function that allowed targeted people to communicate with one another.

A researcher was involved throughout the project, which allowed the organisers to shift the focus of the activities as they went along to keep in line with the aims, and to evaluate the results, which proved very positive. By way of a very positive example, Mr Besemer explained that, inspired by the campaign, a television director was going to produce several episodes of a television series, which would be screened shortly. They would be subtitled, and the actors would be disabled. Naturally, disability organisations were working with him on this project. This is proof that joint activities between the media and people with disabilities could be the starting-point for long-lasting collaboration.

# Closing session

## **Ms Maria Beldekou – General Secretary of Social Welfare- Greece**

Having thanked the audience for its active participation in the congress, Ms Beldekou remarked on the general agreement that media had an impact on society and the way in which disability is portrayed. To date, disabled people had not been accurately portrayed, and negative stereotypes were still being perpetuated by the media. It was time these prejudices were abandoned, together with all forms of discrimination.

The media had the power to change the public's perception of disability by bringing disabled people more to the fore and helping them to be understood by the general public. While people were not born equal, they did all have the same rights. Society as a whole needed to become aware that disabled people represented a quality workforce; our democratic societies needed to guarantee their rights at work, at leisure and in social and political activities, and to ensure that policies to facilitate their active participation in society were introduced in all areas. Despite the progress that had been made, all too often disabled people were confronted by discrimination. It was time to put in place a structure to tackle the negative attitude that had been deeply rooted in society for so long – a structure that would guarantee and uphold the concept of dignity and self-esteem. This Congress had been an opportunity to put across the concepts of equal access and positive action. The social partners, governments, the business world and disability organisations needed to commit themselves, together, to creating a society without barriers in any of its sectors. The role of the media was also of the utmost importance. They could help society to have a more real, more human image of disability. Because they presented events to us while they were actually taking place, they could present disabled people to us in their daily lives, far removed from paternalist images. Ms Beldekou thanked the participants for their speeches, which had made us “feel wiser at the end of this Congress”.

## **Mr Donald Tait – European Commission – Unit for the Integration of People with Disabilities of the Directorate General Employment and Social Affairs**

For Mr Tait this Congress, organized in the context of the European Year of People with Disabilities, was a unique opportunity for people with disabilities to put disability at the top of the agenda, to challenge negative stereotypes and to raise awareness of disability issues.

Mr Tait gave an overview of what had been said during the Congress. Yes, the different media sectors had a key role to play, as each of them shaped the vision we had of society. It was obvious that an important group in society remained ignored and forgotten – a group that represented a huge potential audience for the media, television, radio and newspapers but which they had not yet sufficiently included. It was abundantly clear that more effective inclusion in the media of people with disabilities would be of benefit to both sides, media and peo-

ple with disabilities. Whether because it would be in the interests of the media, because it improved their image, or because it was legitimate to take into account the economic market they represented, one thing was clear: people with disabilities had to be present, seen and integrated in all the ordinary, general aspects of everyday life, like any other citizens. Not as objects of charity, or as super-heroes. There was also a need to broaden the image of disability, and show it in all its diversity. There was also a need to have more people with disabilities as employees in the media sector.

All this would not just happen – it would take a strategy and a policy; decisions would have to be taken at a high level. Advertisers needed to be encouraged to choose to put forward people with disabilities in normal situations, and videos and television broadcasts too. Workplace accessibility needed to be improved. As regards the new technologies, we should make the most of what they had to offer and prevent them from becoming a source of discrimination by adopting the notion of “design for all”.

Finally, policy makers needed to legislate, encourage and persuade. All the key players needed to pool their efforts in order to break down the barriers facing people with disabilities in relation to the media, and to make sure that it was people with disabilities themselves who were at the heart of this change, so that the right messages were sent out.

A great deal of progress had been made. If this Congress had been held ten years or so previously, its tone would have been quite different. Much remained to be done, both at the level of Member States and at EU level, but the European Year of People with Disabilities had undoubtedly given a fresh impetus throughout the European Union, moving things along the right track.

## **Mr Yannis Vardakastanis – President of the European Disability Forum**

As the Congress neared its end, Mr Vardakastanis voiced his conviction that it would prove to have been a historical event. The foundations had been laid for closer co-operation between media and disability organisations, both at EU level and at the level of each Member State. It had been said over and over again how important it was for the media to portray people with disabilities appropriately and accurately.

As the final speaker at the Congress, Mr Vardakastanis broadened the scope of his remarks. When, in 1999, the EDF had proposed to the European Commission that 2003 should be declared European Year of People with Disabilities, this initiative had come with a dream attached: a dream of creating, within the European Union, a progressive model based on the European cultural heritage. A model that would advocate anti-discriminatory legislation and policies, and respect for the rights of people with disabilities.

Now that we had reached the middle of that Year – to varying degrees, of course, and in different ways in the different Member States – it was clear that things were moving and that a fresh wind of change was blowing on the European Union in terms of disability issues. Mr Vardakastanis thanked all the players who had made decisive contributions: the European Union, European institutions and disability organisations.

Mr Vardakastanis felt that, in recognition of this positive contribution, each one of us should take our responsibilities more to heart and should fight for a Europe for everyone, which would promote the rights of people with disabilities using the European Constitution and EU directives, both those specifically on disability and the more general ones. We were living in strange times, both innovative and conservative, marked by globalization and market forces that defied the European social model. It was our duty to ensure that 2003 would be the cornerstone on which to build a progressive new policy on disability in Europe, one that would not leave people with disabilities at the margins of society that would not design a two-speed or three-speed disability policy. We had to find the necessary financial and social support. Finally, we had to ensure that our new cultural model, resulting from the myriad new technologies, served the needs of everyone and did not lead to fresh discrimination or exclusion. Today a new, people-based ideology appeared to be emerging, and this was cause for hope. Let us hope that the message from this Congress would be this: we share the same idea, which is that the rights of people with disabilities are within their reach – “they can do it themselves; they don’t need to depend on the social environment”.

Thanking the organisers of the Congress and the participants, Mr Vardakastanis concluded by hoping that if everyone had made the effort to attend, it meant that everyone was ready to pool their efforts to embark on a new journey to a Europe for people with disabilities.

# DECLARATION ON MEDIA AND DISABILITY

After discussing and coming to an agreement on its final wording, the 300 people attending the Congress approved the following Declaration. In doing so, they expressed their commitment to taking action and to disseminating the Declaration, in particular to their own organizations.

## Why the need for a Media and Disability Declaration?

- because today up to 10 % of the media's audience have a disability;
- because the media have the role of reflecting the social diversity of their audience;
- because a more positive portrayal of disability in the media would attract a wider audience, by improving the overall quality of the content of programmes and articles;
- because a more realistic portrayal of disability could change the image of people with disabilities in society;
- because people with disabilities are currently under-represented in the media sector;
- because professionals with a disability employed in the media would improve the quality of the media as employers;
- because accessible media, endowed with technological mechanisms for ensuring access for all, would also attract a wider audience.

## Full text of the Declaration

Disabled people are insufficiently represented in media output and the number of disabled people employed in the sector is generally very low. Without doubt the mass media has a significant impact on society and a major role to play in promoting a shift in attitudes and the way society looks at disability. Disabled people represent a vast audience that is currently inadequately catered for, and the media industry will therefore gain from addressing this issue more effectively.

This declaration has been prepared and adopted at the European Congress on "Media and Disability" held in Athens on 13-14 June, 2003 by over 300 participants from different parts of the media, media networks, advertising and communication companies, organizations of disabled people and representatives of EU Member States. It is adopted within the framework of the European Year of People with Disabilities 2003, and follows the common vision established in the Madrid Declaration.



## **The representatives at the European Congress on Media and Disability declare that they will:**

- promote change in the mainstream media sector to improve its portrayal and inclusion of disabled people
  - increase the visibility of disabled people in all genres;
  - increase coverage of issues which specifically concern disabled people and their families;
  - promote positive images of disabled people that are not based on charity or the medical approach and avoid negative stereotypes;
  - encourage close cooperation between disabled people and their representative organisations, the disability specific media and the mainstream media industry;
  - increase the number of disabled people employed throughout the media industry, particularly at professional levels;
  - ensure the accessibility for disabled people of media services;
  - ensure the physical accessibility of the working environment in the media industry;
- and they will take this back to their individual organizations for discussion and endorsement.

## **Suggested ways in which the above aims can be achieved:**

- production of actions plans and development of strategies to promote inclusion of disabled people within media organisations;
- development of diversity units within media organisations and the inclusion of disability issues within their practices;
- delivery of disability equality training for employees within the organizations;
- encouragement of Further Education establishments to include disability as a topic within media and communication studies courses;
- exchange of best practice within the sector and encouragement of monitoring of progress;
- where appropriate, development of training and employment programmes to increase the participation of disabled people with the sector;
- access audits of workplaces in the media industry;
- development and use of appropriate technologies to promote access for and inclusion of disabled people to media services;
- joining the new EDF media and disability network that will be established as a result of this declaration.

As a result of this congress and to take forward the declaration, a committee will be set up by the European Disability Forum, in cooperation with European and national media and advertising organizations. The membership of the committee will be established by October 2003.

Organizations are encouraged to endorse this declaration.



For further information, please contact EDF:  
Helena González-Sancho;  
Communication Officer;  
Tel: 00 32 2 282 46 04;  
Fax: 00 32 2 282 46 09;  
e-mail: [communication@edf-feph.org](mailto:communication@edf-feph.org)