**Yannis Vardakastanis speech in the 9th session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities (14-16 June 2016)**

Thank you Mr. President. My name is Yannis Vardakastanis and I have the privilege and honor to address the 9th session of the conference of the state parties on behalf of the European Disability Forum and on behalf of the European Economic and Social Committee.

Indeed, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the CRPD. And for those of us who were present during the negotiations memories come very vivid in our minds. We all remember the real and the genuine partnership that was in existence among the Member States, Civil Society Organisations and DPO’s trying to achieve the CRPD…. Trying to really bring into existence the vision to provide persons of disabilities worldwide with their human rights.

Ten years have passed and we celebrate today the existence of CRPD. Not the way it has been implemented because there have been various ways of implementation. Positive and negative. we are here to celebrate the campaigns, the advocacy that DPO’s and Civil Society Organisations have undertaken in all members states to really persuade many members to become member states of this Convention. But we are here to think and to rethink whether or not, ten years after, the partnership that brought the CRPD to existence is still in place. Or we need to revitalize it. We believe Mr. President that we need to revitalize this partnership, in light also of the 2030 Agenda. The Sustainable Development Goals bring to us, to you, to the Member States, the DPO’s, a greater challenge. The Sustainable Development Agenda needs to be driven and guided by the CRPD. The CRPD needs to be mainstream and we need a new partnership not only between DPO’s and the Member States and the Civil Society but also with society as a whole, the Sustainable Development Agenda affects society as a whole. And therefore we would like to propose to members of the new Bureau of this Conference of the State Parties to dedicate the next 10th session of the Conference of State Parties next year to examine the “Nothing about us without us” because we are on the view that we say in the same way but we do not understand it the same way.

We need to revitalize the partnership. That’s the message. And Mr. President I don’t want to go away from the microphone without voicing what we all think. The Committee of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities needs to have greater gender balance. This is something we have all been thinking after the elections this morning. And this is something we cannot go away without at least discussing it in this conference of state parties. Next time we need more women and more women with disabilities in the Committee.

Thank you.

**Yannis Vardakastanis president of EDF, NCDP**