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NOTE

from : The Presidency
to : COUNCIL (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs)

Subject : Information from the Slovenian Presidency on the Conference on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – from words to reality (Kranjska Gora, 22–23 May 2008)

(Any other business item)

Delegations will find attached a note from Presidency.

**Information from the Slovenian Presidency on the
Conference on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – from words to reality
(Kranjska Gora, 22–23 May 2008)**

The Conference "*The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – from words to reality*" took place in Kranjska Gora on May 22-23 within the context of the Slovene Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The more than 350 participants were persons with disabilities, disability experts from the EU Member States, representatives of the European Commission and the European Parliament, high representatives from the ministries responsible for disability issues, NGO's and other representatives of civil society.

Parallel to the conference, the informal meeting of Ministers responsible for disability policies was held on 22 May 2008 in Kranjska Gora. The central topic of the meeting was the progress made by the Member States and by the EU as a whole in the ratification and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The conference began with opening speeches delivered by the current President of the EU Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council, Slovenian Minister Marjeta Cotman, the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Vladimir Špidla, the President of the European Disability Forum, Yannis Vardakastanis, the President of the Slovenian National Council of Persons with Disabilities, Boris Šuštaršič, and the Slovenian President, Dr Danilo Türk.

During the morning plenary session, the conference guests discussed accessibility for persons with disabilities and the mainstreaming of disability policy in the EU Member States; the afternoon session focused on living with disability in local communities and the implementation and monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. On the second day of the conference, a round table and a series of workshops took place, where the participants discussed how to contribute to putting the convention into practice. The workshops focused on three main areas: employment, accessibility and living in the local community.

Conclusions from the Conference were drawn in the final session by Minister Marjeta Cotman, the ambassador for social cohesion from France, Gilles de Robien, and the European Commission Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Nikolaus van der Pas.

Since 2008 is the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, emphasis was also put on a cultural programme. The conference programme was supported by Slovenian artists and performers with disabilities. The conference was also enhanced by the exhibition from new Member States - Disability organisations and Providers of programmes/services for persons with disabilities. The Conference exhibition was facilitated by the Slovenian Council of Disability Organizations and European Disability Forum.

The key messages of the conference addressed future challenges in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities in the Member States of the European Union:

- The implementation of the Convention should be an integral part of policy-making, programming and development, in developing coordinated policies which incorporate the concept of disability into all appropriate instruments and which are based on human rights, thus ensuring comprehensive social inclusion and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities,
- The EU Member States are convinced that ensuring the full enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities is an important contribution towards a society for all,
- The conference is one of the main events in the annual calendar for combating discrimination against persons with disabilities and in achieving equality and equal rights for them at Member State and EU level,
- In his opening speech, Mr Špidla confirmed that the Commission will propose a legislative initiative based on Article 13 (TEC) before the summer.
- Employment is still the area with the widest gap between people with disabilities and the rest of the population,

- Accessibility is a cornerstone in achieving an inclusive society based on non-discrimination - an accessible built environment, transport and Information and Communication Technology are crucial for an independent, active and economic life for persons with disabilities,
- Strengthening the vision of new possibilities in the community and accessible community services and facilities are of the highest importance in ensuring that persons with disabilities are included in society,
- Special attention must be paid to cooperation and dialogue with persons with disabilities and their organisations.

Presidency Conclusions following the second informal ministerial meeting on Disability issues: Kranjska Gora, 22 May 2008

Ministers responsible for disability issues from the Member States of the European Union, accession and candidate countries and the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) countries met in the framework of the Slovenian Presidency Conference in Kranjska Gora.

At the first informal ministerial meeting on disability issues of 11 June 2007, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities was endorsed as a fundamental step for the promotion, protection and full realisation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons with disabilities. Ministers undertook to further develop policies so as to ensure the full implementation of the convention in a coherent and coordinated way, and called on the European Commission to ensure that the new priorities of the European Disability Action Plan contribute to the effective implementation of the Convention.

On 3rd May 2008, the Convention entered into force. So far, 26 European Union Member States have signed and 3 Member States have ratified the convention and its optional protocol.

At the second ministerial meeting in Slovenia Ministers endorsed:

- The significance of quick ratification/conclusion in all Member States and by the European Community,
- The importance of the principle of close cooperation between the Community and the Member States,
- The usefulness of these ministerial disability meetings which contribute to the strengthening the human rights approach to disability,
- The relevance of the European Disability Action Plan 2008-2009 for the implementation of the Convention and its focus on accessibility as a priority for active inclusion, on fostering accessibility to the labour market, boosting the accessibility of goods, services and infrastructures, consolidating the Commission's analytical capacity to support accessibility, facilitating the implementation of the UN Convention and complementing the Community legislative framework of protection against discrimination.
- The Council Resolution of 17 March 2008 on the situation of persons with disabilities in the European Union invites the Commission and Member States, in accordance with their respective competences, to ensure that people with disabilities enjoy their human rights in full, by further developing a comprehensive policy mix of all appropriate instruments with a view both to eliminating discrimination and to including persons with disabilities in society, based on the human rights approach and the mainstreaming of disability, and examining any gaps that may exist in the current Community legislative framework of protection against discrimination, in particular on the grounds of disability, and considering appropriate and targeted responses.

Ministers underlined the need for all stakeholders – including persons with disabilities and their organizations - to maintain a dialogue with public authorities, strengthening the European human rights approach to disability.

Based on the information provided by the Member States and the discussion at the High Level Group, the following actions can be seen as being of common interest and providing added value for a quick and effective implementation of the UN-Convention:

1. The development of consistent and comparable data, targets and indicators.
2. The compliance of non-discrimination legislation with the Convention's provisions.
3. A common approach in the preparation of the Conference of State parties, including the nominations for the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but without prejudice to Member States' freedom of action at this level.
4. The exchange of good practice on the work of the independent mechanisms, required by the UN Convention, as well as the discussion of ways to encourage cooperation among these bodies.
5. Common approaches and formats for reporting to the UN from the Member States and the Community, in particular where there are shared competences.
6. The exchange of experience, information and good practices, starting with the following priorities in relation to the articles of the UN Convention: accessibility, legal capacity, access to justice, independent living, voting rights, monitoring mechanisms and the empowerment of people with disabilities.
7. Cooperation and coordination in the production of accessibility guidelines and standards for products and services, while making use of existing European infrastructures and resources.
8. Awareness-raising activities, as envisaged by the Convention, at national and European level that will have greater impact if organized by more than one Member State.
9. Facilitating the consultation and supporting the involvement of persons with disabilities and their organizations in the implementation of the UN Convention, including by ensuring accessible information.