

## European Disability Card – Intergroup PH

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**Pierre Gyselinck,**

**Chairman of BDF, board member of EDF**

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the invitation:

- A person with a disability is like any other citizen a full citizen. Fact! Like any other citizen, he or she must be able to move freely by public transport, enjoy a concert, register with a sports club, visit museums etc. Fact!
- The UNCRPD confirms this. With the ratification, the States has committed themselves to integrate it into the policies for people with disabilities.
- The free movement of all European citizens is one of the pillars of the European project.

- And yet, despite these texts, despite these commitments, the person with a disability does not de facto have access to the goods and services that are available to him. The environment as it is traditionally designed, still too often excludes people who are "different", so their fundamental rights are sometimes totally denied.
- Even in the best case, when the necessary adaptations, support or assistance are available, the disabled person must be able to prove his or her disability in order to be able to use this support. This is particularly true with many 'invisible' disabilities, which severely restrict the independence of the person concerned.
- Freedom of movement and social integration is therefore an illusion for citizens with disabilities. Not to mention what happens when a person with a disability travels to another country. For example, in the absence of a recognized document, a Belgian citizen with a disability does not have access in France to goods and services that a French citizen does have. So, some time ago, visiting a museum in Italy I marked at the ticket counter that persons with a disability

could get a reduced ticket and eventually the free use of an electric scooter to visit the vast museum.

Me, in those days walking with a walking cane, I presented myself as being disabled, "ok" the cashier said "can you officially prove it?", I couldn't and I told that an official statement of disability didn't exist in Belgium..., no proof no reduction..., luckily he was so kind to lend me the E-scooter, which when applying the rules strictly, he could have refused too.

- As a result, thousands of disabled people, and their families, never go to the theatre, to a concert or a football match. It is only because of his or her disability that the person in question loses the right to develop freely and to participate in social life. For anyone who wants to be able to live like others, this is obviously unacceptable.

- On the basis of these findings, the general assembly of the Belgian Disability Forum in January 2009 commissioned its secretariat to prepare a note on a card to promote the mobility of European citizens.

- After years of negotiation, European Commissioner for Social Affairs Marianne Thyssen decided in 2015 to launch a pilot project for the concrete introduction of the card.

Belgium, together with 7 other countries, responded to the call and formally committed itself to strengthen the inclusion and active participation of people with disabilities in the society. The EDC became a reality in Belgium in 2017.

- The philosophy and practical use of the card meets the needs of disabled people and their families, but also respects the regulatory framework of each country:

1. this card is intended for the greatest number of persons with disabilities
2. the cardholder him- or herself decides whether or not he or she will use the card
3. each country shall have a monopoly on the assessment of disability and recognized compensations for people in order to overcome environmental obstacles
4. each country remains in a mutual recognition system without any reservation to harmonization.

- Mr. Gauthier Cocle presented the framework of the EDC in Belgium, and I will add nothing more to this point. We users of the EDCs, are asking for just one

thing: that more and more providers are recognizing the card and that its development and validity is being generalized throughout the European Union. We also hope that this specific tool will help to change the way people with disabilities are considered every day.

- I would also like to draw your attention to two very important aspects in my view: the issue of accessibility in terms of economic prospects and the need for gradual harmonization of accessibility at European level.

1. The card is also a sesame for economic providers: the exclusion of disabled people represents a cost and a shortcoming for society. Inclusion is a factor in economic progress: the modern disabled person is a citizen who wants to participate, given the opportunity. How many healthy families do not visit cinema anymore, because the room is not accessible to people in wheelchairs, or the films are not subtitled or lacking audio description or there is no hearing loop provided. When one member of the family loses his or her independence, it is often not only this person who will not be visiting the exhibition, but also his or her partner, father or husband ... It

is also advisable to continuously widen the field of use of the card, transport, employment even exportability of rights....

2. I would also like to stress that accessibility must be part of a permanent process: the field of operators are not being asked to make their entire infrastructure accessible to all audiences in no time, though we need clear and harmonized rules. Concretely, I take the example of a trip between Brussels and Paris during which I will take the metro in Brussels and then the TGV from the Gare du Midi to Paris- Nord. And from there, I take the subway to go to the Louvre Museum. Well, you should know that I am often confused because I don't necessarily find the same pictograms depending on whether I am in the subway, the station or the museum. (Slides please) This patchwork of acronyms is a real obstacle to clarity and the ability to move independently. For people with disabilities but also for the elderly, tourists who do not speak French, etc.... The European Accessibility Act has not become the text we hoped for because it does not force States to make their built environment accessible. However,

we know that European standardization work is progressing.

The request of people with disabilities is now very simple: could we imagine that also pictograms would be subject to harmonized and binding standardization?

Thank you for your attention.