

EUD Update

What's up for Deaf people in the European Union?

Volume 8

Number 5

January 2005

European Union of the Deaf

Coupure Rechts 314

B- 9000 Gent - Belgium

Fax: +32 9 225 08 34

E-mail: info@eudnet.org

Websites: www.eudeaf2003.org and www.eudnet.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EUD MEMBERS NEWS

Recognition of Flemish Sign Language: the time is now

EUD NEWS

EUD visits Cyprus

EDF NEWS

EDF demands towards the EU Luxembourg Presidency

EDF participated in hearing of the Council of Europe disability action plan drafting group

EUROPEAN UNION NEWS

European Commission Conference on Disability in Sofia, Bulgaria

New homepage of anti-discrimination unit now online

European Commission issues country reports on the implementation of anti-discrimination laws

DEAF NEWS AROUND EUROPE AND THE WORLD

Sign Language Chat continues on Finnish digital television

Majority of UK arts attractions not Deaf-aware

OTHER NEWS

Unesco International Mother Language Day 2005 devoted to Braille and Sign Languages

Sign language classes on the rise

Interpreting of unofficial languages in European Parliament banned

French Parliament adopts Government Bill to create Equality Body

WEBLINKS

Swedish democratic system in sign language

FORTHCOMING EVENTS/AGENDA

Workshop for Deaf researchers in Sign Language

EUD MEMBERS NEWS

Recognition of Flemish Sign Language: the time is now

Flemish Sign Language (VGT) is the first language or mother tongue of about 6000 Flemish people. It is an old and natural language which is passed on from generation to generation. VGT is not officially recognised in Flanders. There is however a practical level of recognition in that deaf people can be allocated interpreting hours, funded by the government. Deaf adults can get interpreters for specific situations and deaf children integrating in hearing schools get limited hours of interpreting.

The Flemish Deaf community has been lobbying for the recognition of their language for years, without results. Up till now.

In January 2004 a group of young people started the Deaf Action Front (DAF) with one goal: the recognition of the Flemish Sign Language. After meeting up with Fevlado (Flemish Federation of Deaf Organisations), the Flemish Sign Language Centre and member of Flemish Parliament Helga STEVENS, DAF started a petition for the recognition of VGT. The least we can say about this petition is that it was a huge success! During a period of 4 months 71330 signatures were gathered. These were handed over to the Flemish Parliament on Wednesday 26 January 2005.

In the meantime Fevlado continued their lobbying strategy in order to make the various ministries realise that the Flemish Deaf community demands that their language will be recognised. The ministers of Welfare, Equal Opportunities and Culture already said that they support this demand.

Also the member of Flemish Parliament, Helga STEVENS, is putting all her energy in realising the recognition of Flemish Sign Language. At this moment she is preparing a proposal for a decree that will recognise VGT. This proposal will be discussed in the Flemish Parliament. DAF, the Flemish Sign Language Centre and Fevlado will provide the government with recommendations about how the recognition of VGT should be drawn up.

Every one involved feels that the social and political climate is now right for the recognition of Flemish Sign Language as a language. Linguistic research has proven that this visual language is a natural and full language. Awareness raising has made the broad society see that discrimination of a language leads to social exclusion. The presence of a deaf lawyer in Parliament has confronted the political world with the existence of Flemish Sign Language in Flanders.

The first steps towards the recognition of the Flemish Sign Language have been taken and the Flemish Deaf community will keep on lobbying.

Written by: Fevlado (Federation of Flemish Deaf Organisations)

EUD NEWS

EUD visits Cyprus

On 22 January 2005 the Federation of the Deaf of Cyprus (FDC) organised a seminar with the following theme "Organising and Development Perspectives of the Deaf Community in Cyprus in an enlarged European Family".

The seminar was open to all Deaf Cypriots to join in and take a new concept at becoming EU citizens and took place at Intercollege in Nicosia. More than 80 participants joined in, among them was an interested crowd of young deaf, students and women. Many of the Board members of the deaf associations of Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca were present. Interesting was the presence of the 4 Turkish-Cypriots, who came from the Turkish part of Cyprus to attend the seminar. And EUD was also there!

Keynote speaker Mr Tassos ANASTASIOU, Vice-president of the FDC introduced the seminar. Greetings were spread to the attendance by Mr Yannis YANNAKIDES, President of FDC and representatives of the School of the Deaf, Association of Parents of Deaf children, Welfare Fund etc.

EUD Board Member Ms Helly CHRISTOPOULOU gave a presentation on EUD with a quick introduction of the general background, aims, work mission, visions and examples of EUD's continued work.

From the speech of the Director of the School of the Deaf (Mr Y. SAVVIDES) on the Education and the Deaf Community of Cyprus to the lecture of the Lecturer of Social Sciences of Intercollege (Mr Steve PRICE) on the wrong-identifying Psychology of Deaf individuals and systems to approach to Deaf experience: participants did not let the seminar go by unnoticed. There were discussions to attend, experiences to be shared etc.

After lunch and Christmas cake-cutting -with a hidden gold coin inside- (a tradition vividly kept in Cyprus and in Greece, too), wishes for "good luck" in 2005 were spread to all participants, followed a training session on the role of the FDC on national level regarding to legal questions.

Finally Helly CHRISTOPOULOU led a keynote speech on basis leadership with workshops, empowering the participants to push back frontiers and open up the horizon.

Mr Yannis YANNAKIDES, President of the FDC said: "We were very glad to have her here in Cyprus, who joins us in EUD! And we're very happy to join as a new member in the enlarged family of EUD soon!"

Written by: Helly CHRISTOPOULOU, EUD Board Member

EDF demands towards the EU Luxembourg Presidency

The Luxembourg government has taken over the Presidency of the European Union from the Netherlands on 1 January 2005, and will remain at the EU's helm for the 6-month period up to June. As the Presidency, it will have a key role in giving impetus to legislative and political decisions, as well as in negotiating agreements between member states and institutions.

EDF therefore set out in a letter addressed to the Luxembourg Presidency what it expects from the Presidency – which issues it should pay particular attention to in its agenda, what initiatives it could usefully take in different areas, and crucially, what kind of approach should it take to questions about Europe's future. EDF demands do not cover every policy area or issue which are set out in the Luxembourg Presidency priorities over the next 6 months, but only those areas where EDF believes the Presidency can have a significant impact.

Those demands address issues which EDF considers as key priorities for the next 6 months and can be summarised as follows :

To promote the **Structural Funds** as an essential specific legislation to reduce social exclusion and in which the “mainstreaming” approach based on accessibility and non-discrimination, should be promoted in an horizontal way in all national and European funds, to promote an accessible environment for all and to avoid that new barriers appear.

Mid-Term Review of the Lisbon Strategy : EDF calls the Luxembourg Presidency to ensure that people with disabilities, representing 15% of the active population are give equal opportunities within the information society, the area of innovation and research, education, training and lifelong learning. EDF takes this opportunity to remind about the key obstacles of the labour market to disabled people which are access, quality and limited promotion opportunities, and calls for the new national action programmes proposed by Mr KOK to take into consideration the social inclusion and non-discrimination strategies in the field of employment.

Social Policy Agenda : EDF calls for the inclusion of the Disability Specific Directive as key priority in this Social Policy Agenda which will be adopted in early 2005 and which will run from 2006 to 2010. Moreover, EDF calls for the Social Policy Agenda to obtain a more predominant position in the EU agenda as it is considered as an essential tool for the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Transport : EDF welcomes the inclusion of the Air passengers' rights Directive including people with reduced mobility in the Luxembourg Presidency priorities and calls for the Presidency to influence on the start of the procedure relating to the legislative package on common rail policy considering the accessibility and needs of rail passengers with reduced mobility.

The Luxembourg Presidency Website is now available on:
<http://www.eu2005.lu/en/index.html>

Source: EDF Weekly Mailing 01/2005

EDF participated in hearing of the Council of Europe disability action plan drafting group

The Council of Europe working group which is drafting the Council of Europe action plan on disability met in Paris on 17-19 January 2005. As in late November 2004, EDF was invited to a one day hearing on 17 January 2005 to state its proposals and comments to the last version (version 7) of the Council of Europe action plan. EDF was represented by EDF Advisor Stefan TRÖMEL.

Many of EDF previous comments (to version 6) had been taken into account in the new version 7 and most of the EDF comments made during the meeting on Monday 17 January 2005 were also well received.

Most relevant elements resulting from the discussion were:

Following an EDF proposal, it was agreed to include a section just before the action lines which will deal with three horizontal issues: anti discrimination legislation, mainstreaming of disability and the use of public funds and public procurement.

There is still no agreement on the issue of prevention, but most of the Governments (and EDF) oppose an action line of prevention of disability.

On the issue of deprivation of liberty (institutionalisation) as well as on the issue of legal capacity, EDF did oppose to the proposed text and reminded about the ongoing discussions about this issues in the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It would be better not to refer to these issues in the action plan than to do it in a way which is not acceptable for the disability organisations.

On monitoring and follow-up, EDF has insisted on the need for work both at national and at European level. The idea of Council of Europe recommendations to specific Member States (as proposed by EDF) met with opposition.

Finally, there was general agreement that there should be no European timetable for the implementation of the action plan, as the state of play is very diverse among Council of Europe Member States. However, there seems to be agreement for a revision of the action plan after some years have passed.

The next step in this process will be the meeting of the Council of Europe working group (not the drafting group), of which EDF is an observer member. This meeting will be in the second week of March in Strasbourg.

In terms of adoption of the action plan, the October 2005 meeting of the CD-P-RR (the Council of Europe Committee on Disability which is leading this process) seems to be the target date for the adoption.

As finally no agreement could be found to extend the work of the Council of Europe to all 46 Council of Europe Member States, the action plan will be adopted within the

CD-P-RR, but it could then be “upgraded” to become an action plan for all Council of Europe Member States through a decision of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers.

The extension of disability to all Council of Europe Member States will be discussed again later in the year. It seems that if the proposal is to move both disability and public health (the two elements of the Partial Agreement) to the general Council of Europe work, the proposal might be accepted. In fact, most of the opposition to the extension came from the public health sector, who didn't like to be “left behind” in the Partial Agreement.

Finally, efforts are being made to include a reference to this action plan in the conclusions of the Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State (the third in the Council of Europe history) which will take place in May 2005 in Warsaw.

Source: EDF Weekly Mailing 03/05

EUROPEAN UNION NEWS

European Commission Conference on Disability in Sofia, Bulgaria

A Conference on equal opportunities for people with disabilities took place on 9-11 December 2004 in Bulgaria. As the European Commission finalised enlargement negotiations with Bulgaria and Romania and set out plans to start accession negotiations with Turkey and Croatia, this event brought together participants from these 4 countries.

The aim was to allow them to discuss issues of common concern in the area of disability, together with participants from the EU, and to share experience and exchange best practice concerning disability in the area of employment and social policy. The conference was organised by the Commission, in cooperation with the Bulgarian Ministry for Labour and Social Policy. Through this conference, the Commission sought to raise awareness of disability issues and demonstrate its commitment to supporting the process of EU enlargement in the candidate countries. An important theme of the event was the need for action through dialogue and a stronger civil society.

Mrs Odile QUINTIN, the Commission Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, presented the EU social model and its approach to disability, highlighting the importance of a rights-based approach to people with disabilities and outlining the range of EU activities in the area. Mrs Christina CHRISTOVA, the Bulgarian Minister for Labour and Social Policy, outlined the Bulgarian disability strategy and the thrust of recent measures in Bulgaria. Mr Krassimir Petrov KOTZEV, President of the Union of People with Disabilities in Bulgaria, presented the views of his organisation on EU enlargement and its consequences for people with disabilities in the acceding countries. Mr Enis YETER, Turkish Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, spoke about the recent developments in his country.

The Conference presentations and pictures are now available online at http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/disability/conference_bulgaria/index_en.html

Source: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social

New homepage of anti-discrimination unit now online

The new homepage of the anti-discrimination and civil society unit is now online at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/index_en.htm

The revamped website contains extensive information on the anti-discrimination directives, including sections on rights and obligations under the new laws and on infringement proceedings against Member States. The site also includes information on the many activities funded under the six year 100€ million Community Action Programme to Combat Discrimination.

Source: E-mail Non-Discrimination Helpdesk

European Commission issues country reports on the implementation of anti-discrimination laws

The reports on the implementation of anti-discrimination laws are available on the website of the European Commission in the following link: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/public/pubsg_en.htm

These reports are a detailed analysis of the measures taken by the member states to implement the anti-discrimination laws. The reports describe the legal frameworks of every country and the legislation applied for the implementation. At the same time a condensed summary of all the reports as well as thematic analysis are also available on the same section.

Source: EDF Weekly Mailing 03/05

DEAF NEWS AROUND EUROPE AND THE WORLD

Sign Language Chat continues on Finnish digital television

A new series of Kohtaamispaikka ("Meeting Place"), a television programme offering a discussion forum, or chat, for Finnish Sign Language users will be broadcast in Finland this year. The first series was broadcast in Autumn 2004 on Diggari, a digital channel reaching 700,000 viewers. The one hour programme is broadcast once a week.

Kohtaamispaikka is aimed at viewers using Finnish Sign Language and Finnish as a discussion and meeting place. It aims to promote understanding of Sign Language culture as well as communication between cultures. At the same time it facilitates an opportunity for communication within the community of Sign Language users.

The programme can receive text messages and computerised video messages which are then interpreted into Sign Language by its two presenters who also act as interpreters. The presenters are students of Sign Language interpretation at the Polytechnic of Kuopio.

The series, which has been created by Prosign Ltd (a company producing television programmes, video games and multimedia in Sign Language), 3KTV (a cable and digital TV operator) and the Polytechnic of Kuopio, receives funding from the Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications.

Source: Mercator Newsletter 10 - January 2005 (<http://www.mercator-central.org>)

Majority of UK arts attractions not Deaf-aware

A recent RNID survey showed that the majority of arts attractions remain unprepared for the needs and requirements of Deaf people.

The survey was carried out before the revised Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) came into effect last October 2004. Deaf mystery shoppers visited 75 arts attractions around the country. Among the things they looked for were textphones, infra-red loops, subtitled recordings on TV screens and BSL-interpreted tours. They found that there was an 'endless catalogue of patchy access' for Deaf and hard of hearing people among these attractions and that only seven could be described as Deaf-aware.

While some, including the National Theatre and National Gallery in London were described as 'beacons of excellence', the majority were criticised for not making changes in order to meet the requirements set out by the DDA. Among those criticised were the Tower of London, St. Paul's Cathedral and Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre.

80% of surveyed attractions did not have a system that enabled Deaf people to make bookings while 50% did not have infra-red loops. Out of those that did have loops, 39% did not publicise them. Staff in places that had textphones and infra-red loops were not trained to use them, the report states.

Following the report's publication, the Tower of London said that it contained some 'extremely useful guidance and advice' and that they would be taking steps to implement the report's recommendations.

Source: SIGNMatters – January 2005

OTHER NEWS

Unesco International Mother Language Day 2005 devoted to Braille and Sign Languages

Linguistic and cultural diversity represent universal values that strengthen the unity and cohesion of societies. The recognition of the importance of linguistic diversity led to UNESCO's decision to celebrate International Mother Language Day.

The 30th session of the General Conference of UNESCO in 1999 decided that the Organization would launch and observe an International Mother Language Day on 21 February every year throughout the world.

This year International Mother Language Day 2005 will be devoted to Braille and Sign languages. UNESCO encourages countries to focus their celebration activities to this theme.

An exhibition on Braille and Sign languages will be organized from 17 to 23 February 2005 at UNESCO's Headquarters in Paris. The exhibition is organized jointly by UNESCO, the World Blind Union and the World Federation of the Deaf.

For more information: www.unesco.org/education

Source: www.unesco.org/education

Sign language classes are on the rise

Enrollments have soared in American Sign Language classes at colleges around the United States, but many of the students are not planning to become sign language interpreters or teachers for the deaf. Instead, they are looking for a way to avoid taking Spanish, French, or another spoken language.

"I thought, 'Cool you can talk with your hands'," said Marisol ARZATE, a student at Pierce College in Los Angeles. When she registered at Pierce for her first semester of American Sign Language, ARZATE said, her hunch was: "This should be easy. No big deal."

These days ARZATE warns that ASL is tough to master, and so do many others with normal hearing who have studied the language. Still, it is attracting many students who prefer to learn visually and who attend, or plan to enrol at, schools that approve ASL for meeting language requirements.

So many students have discovered ASL in recent years that it recorded the fastest enrolment growth rate of any so-called foreign language offered on US college campuses, according to the Modern Language Association. The group says ASL is now the fifth most widely studied foreign language in college, trailing Spanish, French, German, and Italian.

Academic leaders are divided on the educational merits. Although the list of colleges approving ASL for foreign-language entrance or graduation requirements keep growing, some prominent schools, including the University of Southern California, are holdouts. They say ASL –unlike French, for example- does not open a window into another country's culture.

The debate has not dampened students' enthusiasm.

The origins of ASL are traced at least to the late 1600s, when a form of sign language was used by the deaf community on Martha's Vineyard.

The language moved closer to its current form in the early 1800s when a Protestant minister –Thomas Hopkins GALLAUDET, for whom Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., is named- established a Connecticut school for the deaf.

Today, it is estimated that ASL is the primary language for as many as 500,000 people.

Academics have widely recognised ASL as a full-fledged language with complex grammar. It relies on arm and hand movements as well as body posture and facial expressions. Although deaf people sometimes sprinkle English into conversations by finger-spelling words, ASL has a distinct vocabulary. One dictionary lists more than 7000 entries.

Linguists overwhelmingly dismiss the notion that ASL is easy to learn, although it lacks a written literature and comes more quickly to some students than spoken languages.

Source: The Boston Globe (23/01/2005) –
http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2005/01/23/sign_language_classes_are_on_the_rise

Interpreting of unofficial languages in European Parliament banned

The President of the European Parliament, Josep BORRELL, decided on 13 October 2004, with the support of the Bureau, to ban interpreting from or into any unofficial language in the Parliament.

This decision contrasts with a report carried out by the Parliament’s legal service, according to which there are several ways in which unofficial languages could be used and translated, in order to be “more flexible”. However, Mr. BORRELL rejected the report’s proposals: despite he decided not to prevent MEPs from using unofficial languages in plenary meetings, in an attempt to avoid any more linguistic incidents, no interpreting will be provided. If MEPs use any unofficial language, the President of the Chamber will interrupt them in order to inform them that their speech will not be translated into the 20 official languages and that neither will it be recorded in the minutes of the sitting. If, nonetheless, a particular MEP wishes to proceed in the same language he/she will not be stopped.

Interestingly enough, just the day after making this decision the Bureau had to make an exception, as it allowed Kurdish Layla ZANA to speak in Catalan and her words were placed on record, since on the basis of the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament, “speeches delivered in one of the official languages shall be simultaneously interpreted into the other official languages and into any other language the Bureau may consider necessary” (Rule 138.2). Other relevant rules concerning the chamber’s linguistic regime are Rules 138.4, 201 and 202.

By contrast, as pointed out by the report of the Parliament’s legal service, one option would have been that MEPs wishing to speak in an unofficial language should ask the Parliament’s Bureau for permission in advance and submit to the interpreting service a translation of their speech into any of the official languages. In fact, this has

already been done in several occasions. In line with this option, the President of the Catalan Parliament, who met with Josep BORRELL on 21 October 2004, offered the possibility that the Parliament of Catalonia provides for the translation of Catalan MEPs speeches into an EU official language. Another option would have been to take advantage of the existing interpreters who have perfect knowledge of unofficial languages, therefore guaranteeing interpreting into at least one official language, which would then allow relay interpreting. In the case of Catalan, this would be highly feasible, as most staff interpreters working at the Spanish language division of the Interpreting Directorate are Catalan-speakers.

As regards the linguistic regime of EU institutions, the Commissioner for Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy, Margot WALLSTRÖM, said in the Parliament on 30 September 2004 that more languages should be added to the list of EU official and working languages, although she added that the EU is to the limit of its capacities from a practical point of view. She also stated that "Member States should find the best solutions to deal with the issue of smaller linguistic groups". Some days later she explained such words in a letter to several citizens who had protested (published in the newspaper www.diariparlem.com), by saying that her statement "had no reference at all with the absolute size of the group, but only with the status of a language which is not the majority language within a Member State and has not the status of an official language of the European Union. What I meant is that the rules to deal with linguistic issues are decided unanimously by Member States and the Commission must operate on the basis of those rules."

Source: Mercator Newsletter 9 – December 2004

French Parliament adopts Government Bill to create Equality Body

On 30 December 2004 the French Parliament adopted a government bill creating the High Authority against Discriminations and for Equality.

On 2 June 2003, Mr Bernard STASI, who was then Mediator of the Republic (Ombudsman), was personally mandated by the Prime Minister to preside over a preparatory mission charged with the task of evaluating and proposing the potential mandate and institutional form of a specialised body to be created in France to fight against all grounds of discrimination.

Altogether 140 hearings were undertaken between July 2003 and February 2004. These hearings allowed for the consultation of various actors of the public, NGO and labour sectors.

Mr STASI's report was submitted to the Prime Minister on 16 February 2004. On 15 July 2004, a government bill was introduced in the National Assembly. The bill was debated and finally adopted on 30 December in 2004.

The independent body, composed of 11 members nominated for a period of 5 years, will start its work in the 1st semester of 2005. Initially the authority will employ approximately 60 employees including 5 local delegations made up of 2 persons each. Besides conducting independent studies and advising the government, the equality authority will provide telephone assistance to

victims of discrimination and investigate, mediate and make recommendations in relation to claims of alleged victims. For more information on the "Haute Autorité de lutte contre les discriminations et pour l'égalité," please click here (<http://www.stop-discrimination.info/?RDCT=9f78104f96da7911c35f>) or visit www.le114.com (<http://www.stop-discrimination.info/?RDCT=0a23b7f92b79c44260de>)

Source: Stop Discrimination Newsletter January 2005

WEBLINKS

Swedish democratic system in sign language

For an overview of the Swedish democratic system in Teckenspråk (Swedish Sign Language) and in international signs, please see:

http://www.samhallsguiden.riksdagen.se/index_internationell.asp

FORTHCOMING EVENTS/AGENDA

Workshop for Deaf researchers in Sign Language

Deaf researchers in Sign Language are warmly welcome to the WORKSHOP for the Deaf Researchers in Sign Language on 26-28 September 2005 in Jyväskylä, Finland.

The workshop will be held at the University of Jyväskylä.

For more information, see <http://www.cc.jyu.fi/~jaakeski/first.html>

Source: E-mail from University of Jyväskylä (Finland)

Editorial note

EUD Update is published by EUD in English with support from the European Community – the European Union against discrimination.

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission, nor the official policy of EUD. The publication is for information only. Readers are invited to reproduce the information provided the source is quoted.

If you wish to receive EUD Update, please send us an email at: eudupdate@eudnet.org.

Should you wish to make any contribution or notify any e-mail address modification, please do not hesitate to contact the EUD secretariat, Fax: +32 9 225 08 34, E-mail: info@eudnet.org.

Editors: Helga STEVENS and Karin VAN PUYENBROECK.