

Conference Presentations

1st Plenary Session

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Good morning. I am sorry for the minor accident¹. I failed to see the gap behind my wheelchair and we are experiencing a minor technical problem with the software. Until we log on with the computer, I would like to thank you for being here with us, to say that truly PROTEAS makes a very good effort in order to bring forward the best of results concerning employability of the motor disabled. And of course, PROTEAS is trying to link the programme with employers.

I would like to say a few general thanks which have already been reported but I cannot ignore them. But any way we should admit that repeating key items or ideas is necessary that also underline that good intensions are not always fruitful.

So, in Europe, it is common knowledge or has been repeated so many times and again we have 37.000.000 people with disabilities in Europe that is 20% motor disabilities. So this number of disabled people is equal to three times the population of Denmark. We have 900.000 motor disabled in Greece. There are a number of people who are not registered in Greece, so the desideratum is social inclusion that is inclusion into the social life of Greece. The basic means for integration of the motor disabled is to include them in the labour force of the country that is, we're talking about employment and jobs. Indeed employment for all people and social groups is considered the highest good, the highest quality for freedom.

Years ago freedom was the highest good but now it is work. In modern societies there is no freedom unless there is financial and economic freedom. It is even not possible to attain social integration without social acceptance, which is facilitated by allowing people to prove their own value but this is promoted through having people prove their abilities within work places within production. That is people should be allowed to prove their qualities in respective of their physical or other disabilities. It isn't possible that a disabled person should be allowed to feel the despondency, he or she should be encouraged to feel that he/she is a productive member of society. Therefore it is useless to talk about social inclusion, acceptance and equal rights unless we secure the disabled the right to employment. Particularly today when modern technologies and the fast developments in telecommunications have replaced strength with the spirit. We need to review our policies and strengthen the rights of the citizens, particularly those that are

¹ Mr. Stavrianopoulos' wheelchair tipped backwards of the edge of the podium as he approached the microphone to speak.

disabled. However this should be orchestrated through the wise actions, not through theories and good will and good intentions.

Talking about exclusion of motor disabled people from production is not specific to Greece. It is a matter of European dimension. Europe has done a lot of research and arrived at useful conclusions that lead to the design of actions for the promotion of the disabled, which I am going to list shortly if I had the time and along with the Proteas conclusions -I am going to use the Proteas conclusions and those of other organizations that deal with the disabled. In particular it was said earlier that is, by our member of parliament in the European community that she had some research in mind, she talked about a research results, that is between 16 and 64 years of age one has a good opportunity to find a job. However a person with a minor disability has only 47% success to find a job and a person with a serious disability has only a 25 % chance to find a job. Also the E.U acknowledges that people with disabilities face a number of multiple obstacles in their search for job. Also in education, in social services and very prompt risks particularly marginalization. It is important that in the Lisbon summit so we saw there the social will for a new model and a social model. There was an emphasis there on linking financial performance with social progress and the Lisbon summit concluded that if we need to have results through this model we must have a three part fit between democracy- economy and society. I will stay at this point here for a few moments.

First democracy, we need democracy to pass laws and regulations about human rights and discrimination. We need the economy to support these political policies and society to accept, to subscribe to them because unless society subscribes to these principles then of course the results will not be fruitful. The establishment of a social action programme was decided and therefore - on this occasion we are here. This programme 2001- 05 will encourage co-operation, exchange of information for good practices among the member states of the European Union with the aim to develop joint actions for combating exclusion and my data say that this budget is about 200.000.000 euros.

What is the main goal of this programme? It is to minimize exclusion of the disabled from the labour market. It is the provision of opportunities for work through employment policies. For education and management of human resources that all these secure a humanization in the work place, inclusion in the social life and independent and self-sustenance of disabled persons.

The key conclusion of the Nice summit recorded that we must encourage, promote access of the disabled in the job market, because these people find on an economic factor that leads to social inclusion. So in this direction we have declaration of 2003 for the people with disabilities and it advocates practices as a main pillar for achieving these results.

It is also important to see on the basis of our data, the allocation of ages for the disabled. 70% are between 18 and 65 that we already mentioned. 45% of the disabled are between 18 to 45 years old. But from this data we understand the need that should really concern us seriously about the current situation that the disabled are experiencing. In spite of that, we all acknowledge the employment problems for the disabled. And in order to speed up

my talk, we understand what the problems are and the policies should combat these problems.

First the negative attitude of the people towards disabilities which are created by prejudices, which is an impediment for work. Secondly it is lack of proper education and I will come back to that because it is important. The third is lack of access, inaccessibility, inaccessible to the environment to transportation, public services, social services, culture, sports, recreation, and inaccessibility in all these areas. This is a dominant need so in terms of accessibility I would have to come back to that.

Another issue that we must see is legislation. We believe that legislation is not harmonized behind this philosophy that I have been talking about. Legislation is rather not well structured it is rather an off-hand legislation, it is quite diffused whereas we should be practical and this practicality is absent from the Greek legislation. In spite of the fact that I am making a note of that, in spite of the fact that if state wishes to make good progress, the state does not need to have an innovative policy. But the state needs to implement its current legislation as is. One of the obstacles is the implementation of the policy of allowances which does not meet the expectations of disabled people. And there is confusion in terms of the differences between allowances, the minimum allowance allowed to the general public and the allowances provided to the prospective employers. So we must make a distinction between established allowances, and allowances that are provided to the disabled.

If a disabled person is not working then he should receive a minimum allowance. These are the main issues that we have recorded with respect to obstacles that must be lifted.

Now I will speak about two major issues from a group of five. We believe that training and education are necessary factors for attaining employment. A lack of education and training are the key factors that lead to social exclusion and poverty. The reasons are obvious. Children with disabilities are less likely to participate in basic education.

Only 59 % of children with disabilities complete their basic education and if there is a required support and this again ties with accessibility. 60 % percent of them believe that the support they receive through basic training is necessary for catching up with school activities, but however this percentage believes that there is even sufficient support. And only six or seven % of these people reach higher education. This diagram clearly illustrates that 60.5% of them believe that the conditions for their education are insufficient.

Now let us see on the basis of these results, the data come from our own sources and we do not claim that the data is reliable but they come from our own sources, so look at this pie, and we should conclude however that 15% of the disabled have not concluded elementary education. 20% of the disabled children have completed only a few grades from the elementary education. 40% have completed the elementary education. 10% have completed high school and 9% lyceum and we say 6% (the European say 7%) they have completed higher education. So it is obvious from this data, that unless there are policies

for the promotion of the disabled in education, we cannot have the fruitful results we talked about.

And now I will go to the second obstacle, the obstacle of accessibility. We believe it is of paramount importance because for us, the disabled it is a basic requirement for participation in the social life, in the life of the community. It is a must and we should have access to transportation means and will provide us the opportunity to become active citizens. So we file our view as a personal experience, an experience that we live every day. This fact has been acknowledged by the European Union, and the United Nations. Actually this commission understands this inaccessibility issue, the commission has talked about Europe without obstacles and barriers, which stand as a major obstacle for active citizens, for citizen participation.

So to combat this inaccessibility we need legislation. It is obvious that accessibility is the key to equal opportunities for the motor disabled and an obligation for the state. Now let me come back to the word "obligation of the state" and I will have to come back to another issue to say that the state has signed international conventions for accessibility, but actually the state does not meet the requirements of its international obligations. There is a myth, and allow me to persist on that, that it says that accessibility concerns only people with disabilities. That's a myth; really accessibility concerns the quality of life of all citizens. The fact that we do not have accessibility, we experience a disastrous situation, a kind of barbaric and discriminating circumstance in everyday life. What I mean by that, is that inaccessibility hits the disabled more than anyone else but it is a major issue, which concerns all citizens. For aged people, it is an issue, for women as well. Now in hospitals for example, 27% there is an issue of inaccessibility, which concerns the hospitals, we see that most hospitals do not feature those ramps that would allow the disabled to have access to health services. It is not only the hospitals, it is also other public services, Ministries 30% of them, allow only 30% accessibility. So ministries are virtually inaccessible, the same is the case with museums, there are 60 % inaccessible in the museums, theatres 62 %, cinemas 53%, so I think, and let me finish with this accessibility issue, because there is a misunderstanding about, some people say 'why should the employer go through the trouble of allowing a large scale accessibility, well, I should say that if the employer realizes and implements accessibility to his work-place, then this will increase his productivity. The employer really does not need to embark on a large project of restructuring his entrance, but are minor issues that the employers should cater for; and the employer himself really knows what he must do in order to affect accessibility for his employees.

I would like to say that PROTEAS, for example, believes that we cannot really talk about such major issues without the personal data, but PROTEAS has really done a very good job along with VPRC the poll company. So in March 2003 they did a poll that provided us with some valuable data, some of this data I presented earlier. However this polling company confirmed we mentioned of hundred thousand of the disabled are at that range, 64% of the disabled are men, we say 50, now there is a comparison between the VPRC polling data and our own, there are minor discrepancies. The data that we in VPRC have, say that the larger share of disabilities are found in the age range of 35 to 53.

Now another issue, talking about the familiar ties in Greece, 90% of the disabled lives with their families, so these results in the fact that the state relaxes, and shifts the responsibility to the families. However the family in Greece is very protective, is overly protective to such an extent that it strangulates the initiative of the disabled person to come out of the closet and say “I am here, I am here but what does that mean?” that means that the state should take up all its responsibilities, but actually the state needs the disabled people in the closet in the family environment.

Other statistics, 74% of the disabled have not looked for a job owing to inaccessibility issues. 56% of the disabled do not use transportation means, why? They are not accessible, therefore if we need to examine these issues seriously, we cannot only confine ourselves to questions such as “what would the employer do?”, will he do this or that? We must have a general view of the situation. We cannot confine ourselves to single issues only. So what we aspire is that and what we look forward to the workings of PROTEAS, we look forward to all co-operations and we can safely conclude from this meeting to say that we need to change the social attitude towards the disabled.

However, saying this is fruitless. We must find solutions, and we believe that solutions can be found through the promotion of the skills and abilities of the disabled involved with science and art. Secondly the requisition of skills, can be achieved through education and training. Thirdly, securing accessibility in the structured environment in work-places as a prerequisite unless we combat inaccessibility, we cannot achieve results but we must believe that accessibility is a concern for everyone, disabled or not. Finally, we need to harmonize our national legislation to the European legislation and support the people with motor disabilities. Now as far as legislation is concerned I shall say one thing; naturally of course that legislation, unless it is accepted by society, will not have positive results, however it will be useful, and I enjoy saying it a slogan that “legislation alone cannot dictate ethics, legislation alone cannot sensitize people however it can combat those people who raise obstacles”. Thank you very much, we don’t believe that there are different people.