

May and June 2017



# Europe for Us!

The Newsletter of the European Platform of Self-Advocates



**Europe in Action  
conference 2017**



# Introduction

Hello to all self-advocates!

It is the holiday season now.

So you can read this newsletter during your holidays!

This time, the main topic is our “Europe in Action” conference.

It took place in June in Prague.

The theme of the conference was Love, life and friendship.

You can read more about the conference on pages 3 to 7.

On pages 8 to 9, you can read about  
the European Platform of Self-Advocates.

They held their general meeting in Prague.

You will also read about two different people with intellectual disabilities.

We did an interview with a girl called Irit.

She and her sister climbed very high mountains in India.

This interview is on pages 10 to 13.

We did another interview with Robert Martin.

He is a self-advocate.

Robert is the first person with an intellectual disability  
to sit on a United Nations Committee.

You can read the interview on pages 14 to 16.

If you have any ideas for stories we should write about,  
please send them to [s.el-amrani@inclusion-europe.org](mailto:s.el-amrani@inclusion-europe.org).



**Editor**

Soufiane El-Amrani

### **Europe in Action conference on “Love, life and friendship”**

Inclusion Europe had its annual conference Europe in Action in Prague from the 1st until the 3rd of June.

Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic.

The title of this year’s Europe in Action conference was:

“Love, Life and friendship”.

The conference was organised together with Inclusion Czech Republic.

They are a member of Inclusion Europe.

A lot of people came to the conference.

The participants talked about how we can make sure that people with intellectual disabilities can experience love and friendship in their lives.

Just like everyone else.

#### **Maureen Piggot**

We heard from Inclusion Europe’s president Maureen Piggot.

She said that love and friendship are very powerful things.

Everyone should be able to find love and friendship.



## Senada Halilčević



We also heard from Senada Halilčević.

She is the chair of the European Platform of Self-Advocates (EPSA).

She is also a vice-president of Inclusion Europe.

Senada said that the conference could be a chance to find new friends.

Senada also talked about legal capacity

and how important it is for relationships.

**Legal capacity** means that people with intellectual disabilities can do things on their own.

Here are some examples of what they can do:

- Make choices about their lives.
- Get married.
- Start a family and raise children.
- Sign contracts (also working contracts).
- Make decisions about their health.

## Ellen Goodey



Another speaker was Ellen Goodey.

She works for Mencap.

Mencap is a member of Inclusion Europe in the United Kingdom.

Ellen talked about her friends and her family.

She also talked about her partner, Alan.

They found each other through a dating website for people with intellectual disabilities.

Ellen talked about the importance of relationships and that she hopes that all people with intellectual disabilities can have a relationship and get married if they want.

## **Juultje Holla**

Another speaker was Juultje Holla, who is from the Netherlands. Juultje talked about how she helps people with intellectual disabilities who leave an institution.



An institution is a place where people with intellectual disabilities live with other people with intellectual disabilities.

They live apart from other people.

They have to follow the rules of the institution and cannot decide for themselves.

Juultje helps people who leave an institution to find friends and hobbies.

Juultje told us about someone she helped.

He is called Jack.

Jack said that in the institution he had very little choice of what he wanted to do in his free time.

When Jack left the institution

Juultje helped him to find out what he likes to do as a hobby.

For example, volunteering in an animal shelter.

An **animal shelter** is a place where pets live which don't have a home.

Jack now has found a lot of friends

because of the activities he does in his free time.

Juultje said that it is important for people with intellectual disabilities to live outside of institutions.

When they live outside of institutions they can find out what they are really interested in.

And then they can also find friends with the same interests.

## Elisabeta Moldovan

There was another self-advocate who gave a speech.

Her name is Elisabeta Moldovan.

She works for Ceva de Spus.

Ceva de Spus is a Romanian member of Inclusion Europe.

Elisabeta said how important her friends are for her.

They help her to live in the community.

She said the following:

“If it wasn’t for my friends, I would be back in an institution by now.”

We also heard from other self-advocates:

## Héctor Santana Sánchez

For example, we heard from Héctor Santana Sánchez.

Héctor works for Inclusion Europe’s Spanish member Plena Inclusión.

Héctor has Down Syndrome and he is also **homosexual**.

**Homosexual** means that he loves other men and not women.

He also likes to have sex with men and not with women.

**Homosexual** is also the word for women who love other women and like to have sex with women and not men.



Héctor said that he experiences **discrimination**.

**Discrimination** means that you are treated unfairly or that you don't get the chances you deserve.

It is discrimination when it happens because of your disability.

It can also happen to other people.

For example people who have a different skin colour.

Or homosexual people.

Héctor said that he experiences discrimination because he has Down Syndrome and because he is homosexual.

But he also said positive things.

For example, that he found a boyfriend!

### **Jan Paleček – father and son**

We also heard from Jan Paleček and Jan Paleček son.

They have the same name and they are a father and his son.

They are active at Inclusion Czech Republic.

They talked about how parents can help their children to find love and friendships.

Participants really liked the Europe in Action conference.

They all said that the topic of the conference was very important.

They said that we still must do a lot for people with intellectual disabilities who want to find love and friendship.

You can see pictures of the conference here:

<http://bit.ly/2rvHke4>

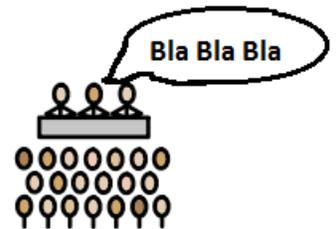


## Self-advocates meet in Prague

The European Platform of Self-Advocates (EPSA) met again at the Europe in Action conference in Prague, Czechia.

The members of EPSA talked about what EPSA had done in the last year.

They also did plans for the future.



Senada Halilčević is the chairperson of EPSA.

She said that the rules of EPSA need to be changed.

This needs to be done at the Inclusion Europe General Assembly.

She hopes that the rules can be changed next year.

The change would mean it would be easier for self-advocacy organisations to join EPSA.

The issue of new members

and who can be an EPSA member was raised.

EPSA has 2 new members.

There is one new member from Austria.

The member is called “People First – Self-advocacy centre Vienna”.

The other new member is from the Netherlands.

It is called “Association LFB”.

EPSA also voted for a new Steering Group.

The steering group at EPSA decides what EPSA should do.

The steering group also decides what is discussed at meetings.

The steering group has 5 members.

There were 5 candidates.

The candidates shared their ideas for EPSA for the next years.

These are the self-advocates elected to be a member of the EPSA steering group:

- Andreas Zehetner from Austria.
- Elisabeta Moldovan from Romania.
- László Bercse from Hungary.
- Senada Halilčević from Croatia.
- Harry Roche from England.

Senada Halilčević is again elected as EPSA Chair.

Three steering group members represent EPSA at the Board of Inclusion Europe.

The Chair of EPSA is also a vice-president of Inclusion Europe.

Senada Halilčević is the chair of EPSA and a vice-president of Inclusion Europe.

Harry Roche represents EPSA at the Board of Inclusion Europe.

One representative of EPSA to the Board will be elected in the near future.

## Interview

### Interview with Irit, who went to India to climb the mountains

Irit Regev is 29 years old.

She lives in Israel.

She is part of Inclusion Europe's member AKIM Israel.

She also plays in the theater group of AKIM Israel.

Irit has Down syndrome.

Irit went to India with her sister Lilach.



Irit and Lilach were part of a group of people with Down syndrome and their siblings.

They all went to India together.

They went to the Himalayas.

The Himalayas are a group of mountains.

They are the highest mountains in the World.



Inclusion Europe did an interview with Irit:

### **Why did you want to visit India and the Himalayas?**

In India the mountains are very close to the sky.

I wanted to climb them so I could be near to my grandmother.

My grandmother has died.

I believe that she is in heaven now.

I also wanted to feel the pride of climbing the mountains.

And I did it!

I did it even though it was difficult to climb and my legs often hurt.



### **What was the best part of the journey?**

I had fun with my big sister Lilach.

All the way Lilach took care of me.

Some parts of the journey were not easy for me.

But my sister never gave up on me.

### **Was there something you did not like that much?**

It was difficult to go up very high in the mountains.

You can become very ill.

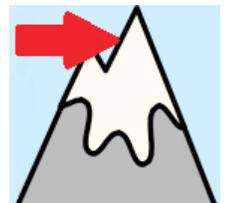
Everyone took pills so we would not get ill high up in the mountains.

I was afraid to be outside in the dark at night.

But my sister said I should return to my room to sleep.

And I got over it.

Once there was even a tiger at our place in Delhi!



## **How were the people like that you met during the journey?**

There were a lot of Indians who walked with our group, carried things,

cooked for us and also helped us walk.

They were very nice.

There were also people who did a film about our trip to the Himalayas.

The film is called "My Hero brother".

The people who did the film were also very nice.

I also liked the guide and the doctor who accompanied us.

## **What impressed you most about the Himalayas?**

The high mountains! They are so close to the sky.

This was excellent and very exciting.

## **How is the access for someone with intellectual disabilities?**

I walked with sticks.

Even for the people who don't have intellectual disabilities it was difficult to climb the Himalaya.

It was not easy for me to walk the route but I felt great.

It was very cold in India, and often it was raining.

Once we went down on our bottoms to go back down to the car because it was so slippery.

## How is the food in India?

The Indian food in the restaurants is tasty and sometimes spicy.

There was a lot of food.

The Indians cooked for us on the walk.

They brought us food with a lot of rice.

Here you can see a short version of the film “My Hero Brother”:

<http://bit.ly/2ttuVIU>



## Interview with Robert Martin

Robert Martin is a self-advocate from New Zealand.

He was elected to the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In short, the CRPD Committee.

The United Nations is an international organisation.

They work for peace and security everywhere in the world.

The CRPD Committee is a group of people

who keep track of what countries do

to make sure the rights of persons with disabilities are respected.

The CRPD Committee is based in Geneva, Switzerland.

Robert is the first person with an intellectual disability

to be on a United Nations Committee.



We did an interview with him because he started his work this year.

**How does it feel to be the first person with intellectual disabilities to have a seat on the UN Committee?**

I feel pretty proud being the first person with a learning disability on the UN Committee.

I want to do my best to represent people with learning disabilities and speak about their problems.

I'm the first person with learning disabilities but I don't want to be the last one.

I like to think that many other people can do the same.

I also would like to thank all the people that helped me to be here.

**How was your first day at the UN CRPD Committee?**

The first day I was a little nervous.

I did not know what was going to happen.

I knew it was going to be hard and that I was going to work a lot.

But I have the experience of being involved in the Convention and being at the UN before.

The other people on the Committee supported me a lot.

They accepted me as a committee member and I made a lot of new friends.

**What are the challenges in your daily work and what do you like most?**

One of the difficult things in my work is to read the documents and choose what to ask.

I have 2 assistants that help me with the texts and in the meetings.

Sometimes I need a bit more time to know what the Committee is talking about.

We work a lot during the evening and the weekends.

I like that in this job I can talk about the problems of the people with learning disabilities.

There are still a lot of countries that don't listen to people with a learning disability.

Part of my job is to prevent that.

I also really like being able to talk to people with other disabilities.

That makes me learn more about people with disabilities and what they need.

### **How do you like Geneva?**

I like Geneva.

It's a nice city.

The people are very friendly and it is easy to move through it.

The city has good public transport and people stand up for me when they see that I am disabled.

I like the history.

You can go to the old parts of the town.

The lake is nice.

They have a fountain where water goes up in the air!

### **Lebenshilfe Austria's 50th birthday**



Lebenshilfe Austria is a member of Inclusion Europe.

Lebenshilfe Austria has celebrated its 50th birthday.

They have been fighting for the rights of people with intellectual disabilities during the last 50 years.

They organised events and published articles for their birthday.

Many self-advocates spoke up during the events.

### **European Pillar of Social Rights**

The European Pillar of Social Rights is a project of the European Union.

The European Pillar of Social Rights wants to give more rights to people who live in the European Union.

It also wants to give more rights to people with disabilities.

For example their rights

- when they want to go to school
- when they search for work

This is very important for people with intellectual disabilities.

## European Union joins the Istanbul Convention

The European Union has joined the Istanbul Convention.

Inclusion Europe is happy about that.

The Istanbul convention wants to fight against violence against women.

Many women with intellectual disabilities suffer from violence.

Inclusion Europe is doing a project called “Life after violence”.

You can read more here:

<http://bit.ly/2rUuLNy>



## Events

### Leadership trainings

Inclusion Europe is organising an event which will bring together self-advocates and family members from across Europe.

They will learn new skills:

For example, how to advocate at European level.

They will learn new things:

For example, how to protect people with intellectual disabilities from violence.

They will meet new people:

self-advocates, family members, people working at the European Union.

The leadership training will happen from 26 to 28 September 2017.

Read more here: <http://bit.ly/2ugOlPe>



## Test summary

You have read a lot of important things today.

Maybe you would like to let others know.

Explain to your friends what you have learned:

1) What was the topic of this year's Europe in Action conference?

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2) Why is Héctor Santana Sánchez being discriminated against?  
There are two reasons.

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3) What did Elisabeta Moldovan say about her friends?

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4) What are the next events where you can meet other self-advocates from Europe?

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# Events

## Hear our voices

EPSA organises a conference for self-advocates. It is called “Hear our Voices”.

At this conference, self-advocates come together to share ideas and experiences about intellectual disability.

The next Hear our voices conference will take place from 5 to 7 December 2017 in Brussels, Belgium.

You can learn more here: <http://bit.ly/2tj6BNg>

## Contact Us



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