EASPD: How We Engage the EU

I. What is the European Union?

Evolving from the European Economic Community, the **European Union** (EU) was founded in 1993 with the goals of forming a political and economic partnership between European states. Today the EU is comprised of 28 Member States (MS) in addition to 7 candidate and potential candidate countries.

The EU has 29 competences that are defined in the EU Treaties. These competences are spread out through three categories, an **exclusive competence** (i.e. competition rules etc) in which only the EU can act, **shared competences** (i.e. internal market, social policy, economic, social and territorial cohesion, area of freedom, security and justice etc)between the EU and MS in which MS can only act if the EU has chosen not to, and **competence to support, coordinate or supplement** (economic policy, employment, social policies, human health, education, vocational training, youth, civil protection etc) the actions of the MS.

Although the EU has signed the **United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with a Disability** (UNCRPD) and is the only international body to have signed the UNCRPD, the organisation of social services in the EU is a MS competence. The EU can however propose recommendations in regards to the organisation of social services, for example de-institutionalisation (DI). The EU is also active on several issues that are relevant for the social services sectors, including for instance; **public procurement**, **state aid**, **working conditions**, **training, vocational education,** **employment** (Youth Guarantee, Long Term Unemployment), **European Disability Strategy**, and the **European Semester**. Additionally, in efforts to advance and improve social services, the EU provides financial support for innovative social services projects through **European funds** (Structural or Direct).
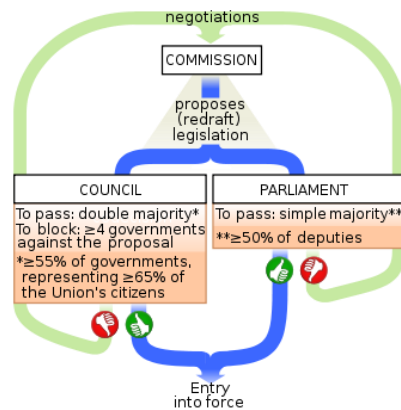
II. Setting the Agenda and Law Making

In order to develop policy, the EU deploys three main tools, including, legislation, coordination mechanisms and funding streams. The **European Council** is responsible for setting the overall political direction of the EU. However, the Council has no powers to pass laws.

Following the setting of the agenda, there are three separate EU bodies that are responsible for carrying out the agenda in various capacities:

- the **European Commission** (EC) comprised of 28 Directorate Generals (DG) each led by a Commissioner proposed by each MS. The EC is responsible for proposing new laws, which are then discussed and adopted by the Council of the EU and the EP, who act as co-legislators. Once passed by the EP and the Council of the EU, the Commission along with the MS are responsible for proper implementation of the legislation.
- the **European Parliament** (EP – directly representing European citizens) discuss and adopt proposals by the EC, as does the **Council of the European Union** (representing national governments).

III. Who's Who

- **Jean -Claude Juncker** is the President of the EC. The President of the EC is put forward by national leaders in the EC and must have the support of a majority of members in the EP in order to be elected.
- **Donald Tusk** is the President of the European Council. The President of the European Council is elected to a 2.5 year term and is elected under a qualified majority in the European Council. Members of the European Council are the heads of state for each MS. The President of the European Council may not serve as both a head of state and president at the same time.
- The Council of the EU has a 6 month rotating presidency. Currently, **Luxembourg** holds the presidency, and will be followed by the Netherlands, and then Slovakia. The heads of the government who holds the presidency serves as the leader for the Council of the EU.
- The president of the EP is **Martin Schultz**. The president of the EP is elected through a majority vote of parliament members.

IV. EU Institutions EASPD Works With

One of EASPD's three pillars is to *have an impact on European policy in areas that are important to our sector.* In order to accomplish this, EASPD has formed close relations with numerous EU institutions to ensure that service providers for persons with disabilities are well represented at European level. It is also crucial that we form close relations with EU institutions so that we can keep our members up-to-date and informed on issues being discussed at the European level that are of the utmost importance to them.

European Commission

When interacting with the EC, EASPD acts both **proactively** and **reactively**. Proactively, we push forward the EASPD agenda to Commission representatives through meetings, policy/position papers and conferences. In order to help prepare proposals, the Commission routinely launches public consultations on policy. EASPD (re)acts to these proposals through formal responses, letters, coordinated positions with other European networks and meetings with relevant EC officials.

EASPD actively engages in discussions with Commissioners and a variety of different representatives of the European Commission. Key stakeholders in the European Commission include **Marianne Thyssen**, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility**, Michel Servoz**, Director-General of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), **Stefan Olsson**, Director, Europe 2020: Social Policies and **Maria-Luisa Cabral**, Head of Unit, Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

European Parliament

Although there are 21 committees in the EP, EASPD primarily monitors the work of the following committees as they are the most relevant to our activities

- **Employment and Social Affairs** (EMPL)

- **Economic and Monetary Affairs** (ECON)

- **Culture and Education** (CULT)

- **Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs** (LIBE)

When the EP produces draft reports and opinions, we respond through proposed amendments and changes which are sent to all Members of European Parliament (MEPs) involved in the process. In addition to proposed amendments and changes to reports and opinions, EASPD regularly organises meetings with MEPs to further provide our expertise on these issues.

In addition to monitoring the work of the committees, EASPD also monitors the work of the **Social Economy Intergroup**, **Intergroup on Carers**, **Disability Intergroup**, and the **Public Services and Common Good Intergroup** in regards to topics that are of relevance to us. Furthermore, several times a year EASPD organises events in the EP in coordination with MEPs.

Several key MEPs for EASPD include the co-presidents of the Disability Intergroup, **Ádám Kósa** (EPP, Hungary), **Richard Howitt** (S&D, UK) and **Helga Stevens** (ECR, Belgium). Furthermore, EASPD is works closely with **Jean-Paul Denanot** (S&D, France) from the Public Services and Common Good Intergroup and **Jens Nilsson** (S&D, Sweden) from the Social Economy Intergroup. There are obviously several other key MEPs we continue to regularly interact with.

For a full list of MEPs in the following committees please click on the following links; EMPL, ECON, CULT, LIBE.

Council of the European Union

For EASPD, gaining access to the Council of the European Union is more challenging compared to the other institutions, due to the fact that it represents the national level. In this regard, our members have the opportunity to form more effective means of contact and communication with the Council of the EU. EASPD does however work with the rotating Presidencies which includes planning and attending meetings and conferences with the Presidencies.

European Economic and Social Committee

Through the EESC, EASPD holds membership status with the **NGO Liaison Group**. The goal of the Liaison Group is to create a mechanism for the EESC to be both a liaison body and a structure for political dialogue between this European advisory body and external civil society representatives. The chair of the Liaison Group is **Conny Reuter,** Secretary General of Solidar.

V. Additional Partnerships

In addition to close partnerships with the EU institutions, EASPD also works with other organisations to strengthen our message, projects and ideas. EASPD works with numerous EU wide networks including Caritas, European Disability Forum (EDF) and European Public Services Union (EPSU) and are members of networks such as Social Services Europe (SSE) and the Social Platform. To see a full list of our partnerships please click here.

For additional information and videos on the EU please click here.

For additional information, please contact:

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