

## Editorial: Interlinked interview with Martin SCHULZ, the president of the European Parliament, and Emmanuel CONSTANS, the president of LADAPT.



**Martin Schulz,**

President of the European Parliament

### What does an inclusive European society represent for you?

**M.S:** An inclusive society is first of all a society that is committed to fighting all differences in treatment of its citizens, whether in terms of their social origin, age, health or sexual orientation. It is a society that leaves no one behind, but on the contrary creates a shared living space where each person can find their place. It is a society that is open to others and that accepts difference. Discrimination is a major factor in loosening the social links that unite a society. It is rooted in incomprehension and fear of others. Others are different, so we reject them. This behaviour is quite simply unacceptable. Such reactions need to be confronted from an early age because they can lead to a distorted vision of the other, and to complete blindness of the riches to be drawn from otherness.

Discrimination towards disabled people is even more insidious since disability is too often a taboo subject. Contrary to certain received ideas, disability does not only affect other people. It affects around 80 million citizens in Europe, and disability concerns all of us, Europeans, directly or indirectly.

The families of disabled people alone cannot guarantee their integration into society. A collective effort on a European scale is absolutely needed to guarantee the access of each citizen to a truly inclusive European society.

### How is the European Parliament working towards improving employment for people with disabilities?

**M.S:** On a number of occasions, the Parliament has made its position clear on this subject and has helped change the situation.

It was the European Parliament that pushed for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted in 2006, to be finally ratified by the European Union in 2011. From a legal point of view, this ratification obliges the European Union and its member states to act in order to guarantee an equal participation of people with disabilities in society. This is a major step forward in guaranteeing the fundamental rights of these individuals.

On 7 July, in a plenary session the European Parliament adopted a report by the MEP Helga Stevens concerning the implementation of the convention, requiring the European Commission and the member states to allot the resources needed to meet their obligations.

The Parliament has also adopted numerous resolutions inviting the European Commission to put forward ambitious legislative proposals with the aim of improving the employment situation of people with disabilities.

In a resolution in 2015, the Parliament underlined the need to legislate to permit people with disabilities to use transport in an independent way – a fundamental condition for people to be able to commute to their workplace. Moreover, the issues of equality of opportunity and equality of access to the employment market were underlined.

I am firmly convinced that the European Parliament must set the example in the fight against discriminations and in favour of disabled people's

access to employment. The Parliament has notably adopted a code of good conduct for employing disabled people, including adaptation of working conditions to meet the specific needs of people with disabilities. The number of disabled MEPs has also increased since 2014, which is a highly positive signal for improving the representation of European citizens.

### What are the next steps planned by the European Parliament?

**M.S:** The Parliament is going to remain active and to continue to reinforce the rights of people with disabilities by fully playing its role as a co-legislator. In the next few months, Parliament will be asked to work on the Commission's proposed directive aiming to make products and services more accessible to disabled people and so strengthen the inclusive nature of European society.

Although Parliament is very active on this subject, its room for manoeuvre is limited. It is the role of the member states to commit themselves to ratifying the treaties seeking to protect the fundamental rights of disabled people: the Marrakesh Treaty, for example, which provides easier access to published works for blind and visually impaired people. Above all, it is vital for the member states to provide the financial means to match the promises and our shared ambitions.



**Emmanuel Constans,**  
President of LADAPT

### What is an inclusive society in your opinion?

**E.C.:** An inclusive society, for me, is an open, committed, respectful and collaborative society. Open to others and to new spaces for reflection. Committed to the full and complete citizenship of individuals. Respectful of the rights of each person in all sectors (social, cultural, professional, emotional life). Collaborative, because building a society such as this cannot be achieved without the participation of all its members: citizens, entrepreneurs, associations, institutions, politicians. The inclusion of fragile, young, old, disabled or disadvantaged people will necessarily involve the collaboration of all these groups and individuals. LADAPT has placed the citizenship of individuals affected by disability or debilitating illnesses at the heart of our combat, and we will continue to act so that everyone can, in a continually changing environment, "*Live together, equal and different*".

### In France, what are the initiatives undertaken by civil society that help towards the inclusive employment of people with disabilities?

**E.C.:** 2016 sees the 20<sup>th</sup> Disability Employment Week, which last year was renamed the European Disability Employment Week. And we are proud to see that an undertaking such as this, which was considered extravagant in the beginning, has been able to develop over the years, thanks to the support of its partners, but also of civil society, and today has reached beyond the borders and expanded to our European neighbours. For this 20<sup>th</sup> year, focused on the theme of safeguarding career paths, we have the chance to continue a dual opening: the one begun

at the creation of the Week, aimed at companies and civil society, which we encourage to mobilise even more alongside us this year, around a marvellous concept: the hackatons\*! More than just a mobilisation, we give them the chance, in fact, to be the "driving force" generation, a generation "of new ideas" working in favour of a society that is genuinely turned towards others.

We are also pursuing our opening towards Europe: although it is deeply rooted in France, the EDEW needs to be a medium of best practices, of progress on behalf of the inclusive employment of people with disabilities, in all the EU member states.

In France, the mobilisation of civil society at all levels helps towards opening up workplace culture to diversity, and contributes to safeguarding professional careers and maintaining people with disabilities in work.

### How does the French government and Europe support, in practice, the initiatives helping to reduce discriminations, for example, supported employment?

**E.C.:** Supported employment has existed in some European countries for 20 years! But it only exists because the social and solidarity economy - including the associations - in close collaboration with other economic players, and with companies above all, has worked relentlessly to include this approach in the law of member states! So supported employment is one of the responses arising from the mobilisation, the impulsion provided by civil society! And it is a response that has already proved its worth, with initiatives that are full of common sense.

So the government has decided, in concrete terms and at different times, to support these initiatives by giving them a legal framework.

The law of 10 July 1987 established the obligatory annual declaration of disabled workers (DOETH in French), setting the minimum threshold of 6% of disabled workers for private and public companies with over 20 employees.

In 2005, this law was strengthened by allowing companies to set up disability missions to integrate disabled workers in a professional environment.

Between the two, the law of February 2002 was voted, renewing social and medical-social initiatives.

And finally, more recently, article L.5213-2-1 of the draft bill relating to work, to modernising social dialogue social and to safeguarding professional careers states that "*disabled workers who are recognised through article L.5213-2 can benefit from a supported employment measure that is a support measure for people aiming to help them access and remain in paid employment on the job market.*" LADAPT warmly welcomes it.

In Europe, we can count on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to help reduce discrimination.

#### \*What is a Hackathon?

A contraction of "hack" in the sense of gaining access and – "athon" as in "marathon", this new model based on co-working promotes interactions in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

The event is generally organised for a duration of 48 hours, and gathers together people from different cultures, life experiences and wide-ranging skills, all brought together in the same place with a common goal: to find answers to a need, to an issue, to innovate in a particular domain. Each person brings their own intelligence and individuality. Exchanges take place throughout the Hackathon. Each person gives their ideas, their point of view, explains, exchanges and constructs, giving rise to a collective intelligence and the emergence of ideas, projects, concepts.