

English

Freedom Drive 2009

Peter Kichashki:

This is a very strange thing to say but I am pretty sure that some of us Bulgarian group will make a book about our trip to Strasbourg. We had a lot of problems: we started with forgotten passports; we had a flat tyre; another flat tyre; an inaccessible hotel that was supposed to be disabled friendly; and, so on and so forth. There were so many problems: everyday we had something. But, that is not the main thing. The main thing is that we survived and we are here and we are ready to make that trip every time and make that trip even if it is worse. We are ready to do it again and again because it is worth it. It does not matter what is happening, how hard it is, and it is worth it. It is something that everybody who has that focus, that base of disability issues, should do at least once in their life.

Strasbourg France 2009.

(Girls on Tram):

Strasbourg: Strasborg!.

European Network on Independent Living.

The Freedom Drive to EU Parliament.

Freedom Drivers on March:

Nothing about us without us!

500 disabled people from 22 countries.

Martin Naughton:

The Freedom Drivers demands, in a nutshell, are the opportunity and support to live like everybody else.

Bente Skansgård:

We are all products of the culture we come from but we still believe in the same philosophy and we are part of the grassroots movement called Independent Living that comes from America - started there in the 50's and 60's - inspired by, among others, Dr Martin Luther King.

Bente Skansgård:

Nothing about us without us is a good slogan because if we had our rightful place in society there would be disabled people in all - how do you say - all sections of society.

Johan Ten Geuzendam:

People with disabilities have the same rights as non-disabled people and they should have access to them in practise.

Horst Frehe:

The unreasonable demands to move into care homes or institutions far from the centre of social life, with set schedules and personal routines, with no choice of who will be the personal assistant, with a complete lack of privacy with double and multiple bedrooms, does not comply with the law.

Johan Ten Geuzendam:

But, having the law is often not sufficient; you also need to explain how it should be done in practise.

Adolf Ratzka:

I think our only way of some day succeeding here is proving the opposite for those of us who live outside, sharing with other disabled people and the public as much as possible about how we live, that we are ordinary. We are profoundly ordinary folks. We just want the same things as everybody else. We want to be recognised for the people we are, we want to be respected for what we do and need. And we want to be loved like everybody else. So if that message goes through, then maybe people, including ourselves, would realise that we deserve, we have the right, arm ourselves with the right to live like everybody else in the community. We are an enrichment to our families, to our neighbourhoods and to the community at large.

Caitriona Kenny:

Nothing about us without us!

Horst Frehe:

For the first time the convention of human rights not only serves to deter serious interference with the personal dignity and integrity of people. It prevents discrimination, protects against poverty but, also, safeguards entitlement to full inclusive participation, an accessible environment and comprehensive choice, and the arrangement of social security benefits in a self-determined life with equal opportunities in society.

Act Now. Stop Inequalities. Stop Segregation.

Johan Ten Geuzendam:

In many EU countries institutional care still accounts for more than half of public care expenditure.

There are 2 million people in institutions across Europe.

Johan Ten Geuzendam:

11 out of 27 member states have completed the ratification process but I would like to reassure you that all of them have signed the Convention. And, we are also convinced that all of them will ratify.

Adolf Ratzka:

So what we need is legislation that says, regardless of the financing bodies budget, that you are entitled to an amount that covers your actual needs, regardless of the budget situation.

Johan Ten Geuzendam:

It is not sufficient to come here and repeat the same mantra all over again: how important it is that the UN convention is implemented (etc.). You need also to find ways to do it in practise.

Rachela Sindicic

(in Croatian) Nothing about us without us!

Human Rights for All.

Tabitha Collingbourne

The right to full and effective participation in, and inclusion in, society; the respect for the diversity of people with disabilities as well as accepting them as part of humanity and human diversity.

David Walsh:

Nothing about us without us!

Adolf Ratzka:

Disabled people have not had a fair share. They have not been able to live like everybody else. And, even with the most well intentioned policies, the reality has been that we still have not had the practical means to live a full life because other people always determined what was best for us. Independent Living has changed that; giving power to the individual, to encourage him or her to make their own decisions, decide their own lives and what they want to do with their lives. We are the best: the experts of our needs. Then we tell the politicians: 'move over let us take the lead ourselves'. That is what Independent Living is all about.

Nicolo Della-Pupa:

We want to promote the entire council of Freedom Drive and we want Romania to be here in the great family of the European Disability Movement.

Rachela Sindicic

The situation is not very blessed you know. But we are trying hard. We have some problems with personal assistants as we only have them for 20 hours a week, from Monday to Friday, which is approximately 4 hours per day.

Elena Pečarič:

Personal assistants give me the power I need for everyday life. I can be independent. I can be what I am. I can live normally.

Portable Personal Assistance for All.

Freedom Drivers on March:

What do we want? Personal Assistants!

What do we want? Personal Assistants!

What do we want? Personal Assistants!

Stephanie Steiglechner:

(Provisional translation from German)

... to fight for the rights of disabled people so that a little quality of life becomes normal for everyone in Europe.

Robert Droy:

Independent Living is just a basic human right. Disabled people should be able to exercise choice and control over all areas of their life, including where they live. There are many, many, people who live in institutions where they are not given the same freedoms that non-disabled people take for granted. By disabled people having their own personal assistants, and being able to exercise choice and control over whom they employ and not what they do for them, then that is a really empowering experience and enables disabled people to feel just like every other member of society.

Freedom Drivers on March:

Article 19: ratify now!

Lyudmila Borisova:

(Provisional translation from Bulgarian)

Independent Living policies might help to really change society and make it a better place for everyone.

Panagiototis Tsinganos:

Freedom is not an option: it is an obligation for me. I do live on my own. I do live independently. But it is so hard to pay for this. I do work just to pay my assistant and this is a shame.

Freedom Drivers on March:

What do we want?

Human rights!

When do we want them?

Now!

Germany

Bulgaria

England

Norway

Ireland

Italy

Spain

Portugal

Greece ...

Freedom Drivers on March:

Slovenia

Latvia

Gordana Rakjov:

I am from Belgrade in Serbia and we are fighting for the personal assistance service and equality: trying to live a normal life, have a job, to get an education, just to have our families. Just like anyone else.

Make Article 19 of the UN Convention a reality.

Lyudmila Borisova:

(Provisional translation from Bulgarian)

It was difficult. It was Hard. We had a lot of challenges but this is what I see as really the way to freedom through the Freedom Drive. And, the way to freedom has a lot of challenges, but we have to overcome them.

Hubert Bernard:

(Provisional translation from German)

(in German) To our German participants. We need to put down the signs and posters. You can put them aside here against this wall. Then, we are allowed in. Thank you.

(in English) To all the others: please put down your posters. Put them by the side of the wall. This is a condition to get in. I think we all want to get in. Thank you.

Elena Pečarič:

I would have liked to have gone through the barricade, not to have to wait then until they opened the gate and without our messages on our backs because we had to put it away. I think this was a pity because they were important messages.

Martin Naughton:

We must. It is normal that we have to finish the protest here at the gates here. All groups do OK. It is not just us!

Paul Darke *(off-screen)*:

Do you think that it is right that we have to put down our banners to get in?

Gordana Rakjov:

No I do not think so, that is quite strange because our philosophy and our demands are on them.

Adolf Ratzka:

All citizens of the European Union, it doesn't matter where we come from whether it is Greece, Germany, Sweden, or Italy, we should be able to enjoy the same protection of our human rights just by the mere fact that we are citizens. In the same way we should enjoy the same protection of our human rights no matter what we look like, no matter how we move, or that we walk with a limp or use a wheelchair or have difficulty to hear or cannot see. It should not matter. We should still enjoy the same protection of our human rights because we are profoundly ordinary citizens, with the same aspirations and the same needs as everybody else. We want to be respected recognised and loved. We are profoundly ordinary people. Thank you.

John Evans:

I think this is a great day for all of us. We have come from all over Europe. We are here to celebrate 20 years of ENIL - The European Network of Independent Living. We know what is right. We know that personal assistants are our right. We are not going to let that go. We have come to the European Parliament to fight for that right and to let the EU parliamentarians know that what we are here for is our right and we are not going to let it go. It is great that we have so many people here today. We came here 8 years ago with 100 people and today we have almost 400; that shows progress. I wish you all well, but do not forget, celebrate the whole day; it is your right to celebrate this great occasion.

Gordana Rakjov:

(in Serbian) Nothing about us without us!

Kapka Panayotova:

I want to say that this time we have a great mixture of what they call the new and old member states. I would not agree to be a part of something that is not equal to the whole. So let's be together, old and new member states, and show them that personal assistants are for everyone in Europe. Independent Living is it for everyone? Is it for everyone?

Freedom Drivers (off-screen):

YES!

Kapka Panayotova:

That is why we are here.

Peter Kichashki:

(in Bulgarian) Nothing about us without us

Aage Gjesdal:

My name is Aage, I am from Norway and we are here today to make ourselves seen and heard, and show ourselves something to be proud of. We represent 10 percent of the population in Europe and we want our rights. We demand the right to be treated equally to own citizens whichever country we come from. We want equal opportunities and equal rights for everybody. Thank you.

Bente Skansgård:

It is the reality: people have to fight, to get out or not to be closed in an institution.

Gisele Caumont (translation from French to English spoken by Jean Pierre Ringler):

My name is Gisele. I am French but I have been living in Sweden for 3 years. I would like to speak a little about the situation in France. In France we have very many institutions, and the French government is planning to create 50,000 new places in institutions in the years to come (*the audience boo*). This means organised segregation across France. There are very few hours of personal assistance available in France except for the intellectual elite. There are not enough institutions in France for all the children, adolescence or adults. Many people are going to Belgium where there are, apparently, enough institutions to welcome them. This is not the kind of Europe that we want: we do not want that kind of Europe. In France, disabled people are mainly looked at from a medical point of view: we are all patients. It is not because we need assistance to wash ourselves or to go to the toilet that we

are sick or patients. But we think to get out of this situation in France is to work together at a European level. We would like to have control of our own lives, to live the life we choose. But in France, I repeat, the segregation is officially still organised. Thank you

Richard Howitt:

On the issue of de-institutionalization we must continue to ask questions and raise awareness, but that is not enough. On your other point, we succeeded in saying not one single Euro, not one single amount of money is spent from European funds in order to support institutionalisation.

Start Consulting with organisations run and controlled by disabled people with experience in Independent Living.

Peter Kichashki:

For me, this experience is so amazing, so great that I cannot express it with words. It is so thrilling and energetic. I think I have my batteries not only on my wheelchair but on myself. My batteries are full for a whole year or 2 years, till the next freedom drive. I am so filled with energy with all the positive people here who just want to make a change. I see a lot of people quoting the same things that I do and this is so exciting and so fascinating I cannot express it.

Bente Skansgård:

(in *Norwegian*) Nothing about us without us!

Martin Naughton:

I would start saving for 2011: I am already doing it. It is good fun and it is very, very powerful.

Adolf Ratzka:

But this is fun here! I have ... you get the sense that you are doing something meaningful.

Freedom Drivers (*singing in background*):

We walk hand in hand ...

Mairead McGuinness:

So I would urge you to use your rights as citizens, to email, write, lobby, telephone so they hear your message, if they are not here physically present. I will certainly spread the word. Thank you.

European Network of Independent Living www.enil.eu.

Jerzy Buzek:

I am open to everything you want to address. We can do it in any form you wish: through my colleagues here, other colleagues. Every Euro MP returns to their regions every weekend, so they are close because we are elected in all European regions from Finland to Portugal, from Ireland to Malta. In everyone's region there is someone from the European Parliament and they go home to their region every weekend. Every Monday morning we meet in the European Parliament in Brussels or Strasbourg. Please contact your representatives or the European Parliament directly, because we are waiting on proposals. We feel we have solidarity, you with us, we with you. We are absolutely the same: Citizens of the European Union.

Marion Stangl:

(in German) Nothing about us without us!

See you in 2011 at the next Freedom Drive.
