

## Statement of Jan Březina on 4 June 2008 at 12:00

First of all I would like to thank the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic for welcoming us in their building and in this nice conference room.

The issue you are here to discuss today and tomorrow is interestingly very much linked with the Czech Republic. Inclusion Europe and Inclusion Czech Republic organized in Prague in 2005 the conference Europe in Action about "**Living in the community**". In November last year, the final conference of the project "**Deinstitutionalisation and community living - outcomes and costs**" took also place in Prague.

The common objective of all these three conferences includes the support of the **transition from institutions to community-based supported services**. This topic is also a key element of the social policy of the Czech government for the year 2008 onwards to favour the inclusion of users of social services in the community. The government plans focus on the quality of services and on the flexibility of services to answer the individual needs of all people. I hope we will be able to learn and share experiences also during these two days.

But now let's come back to the whole Europe.

The European Parliament represents all European citizens, also those with severe disabilities and with complex needs.

The Parliament has to decide for all citizens of the European Union and must make sure that **European legislation creates equal chances and opportunities**, without discrimination.

This study has shown that **people with severe disabilities** and/or complex needs **are in fact discriminated in all countries of the European Union**. It is the task of the Parliament to **ensure that positive action is taken** to stop this discrimination.

I have seen that at the core of this discrimination is often the assumption that this group of people anyway cannot participate or benefit from mainstream services or activities. What a limiting view of a person! This means that **the assumptions of society determine the level of abilities of a citizen**. Truly a "disabled person", in the sense of a person who is disabled by the attitudes of society.

Thus, I especially appreciate the proposals of the Study for a **European Action Plan**.

The present study has already **reviewed a lot of European policies and legislation** and has pointed out in which concrete areas people with severe disabilities are left out or are discriminated. **I call on the European Commission to develop positive action** to combat the exclusion of people with complex needs from European policies. They have the right to be considered also by us! A **Communication announcing the Commission's plans** and intentions in this area would be an important guiding step forward.

We also must make sure that all relevant European bodies or organizations take the issue of discrimination against people with severe disabilities into account, such as **the Disability Intergroup, the High Level Group and all European disability NGOs**. An interesting idea in this area is the exchange of experiences and of good practice in the framework of a **Special Interest Group on Severe Disabilities and Complex Needs**. Perhaps the Commission could provide support for regular meetings of such a group.

As a politician I also look of course at the **public opinion** on that matter. We have seen and heard that it is often public attitudes that are at the root of discrimination of people with severe disabilities. Therefore we should use all means at our disposal to **positively influence public opinion** about people with complex needs. Two excellent opportunities are indeed the **European Day of Disabled Persons in 2009** and the **European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2010**. Let us take these opportunities to undertake actions to raise awareness of the social exclusion of people with severe disabilities or complex needs and their families.