

# **EBU in Action - Seventh Episode: Cast your vote: the 2024 EU elections**

## **Intro**

[Music]

(Neven): Welcome to a new episode of the European Blind Union's podcast, "EBU in Action". This is a podcast where we bring you the latest updates in key areas in the lives of persons who are blind and partially sighted across Europe. My name is Neven Milivojevic and, here joining me, I have my co-host friend, Paweł Masarczyk. Hello, Paweł, Cześć.

(Paweł): Cześć, Neven. Hello, how are you?

(Neven): I'm very well, very well, and what about you?

(Paweł): Doing great. Happy about the spring, excited about things in general and also about this episode.

(Neven): So am I, I think it's going to be really interesting to talk about all these things we have to talk about today. And as always, we have some interesting subjects. And I mean, not only about EBU's latest work, but also bearing in mind that we very soon have this exciting 2024 European Parliament elections.

(Paweł): That's right. And since you mentioned them, I would like to draw your attention to our guests today, who are very interesting people indeed.

Because, of course, we'll be talking about how blind people play into the whole subject of democracy. And that means their ability to vote, but also to be voted for and be politicians themselves and running for the offices. So, in order to discuss this, we will talk to Fredrik Stockhaus, a Swedish visually impaired politician and Armin Rabitsch, a representative of Election-Watch.EU.

(Neven): Yeah, very interesting and exciting to talk to them. And, of course, we'll have the correspondent' section at the end of our podcast. And this time, we will listen to our friends from the Swiss Federation of the Blind and Visually Impaired. This is one of the three Swiss members within the European Blind Union. So, we look forward to that too. So a lot of things ahead of us.

(Paweł): Definitely. Let's go into it.

(Neven): Let's start.

## **News from EBU**

[Music]

(Neven): As in each episode, we will start learning more about what has been going on lately in the EBU. We are certainly at a crucial point of our agendas with the European elections coming up very soon. To learn more about what is going on and all these issues, we have, as always, our dear colleague, Nacho Lopez with us. Hola, Nacho. How are you?

(Nacho): Hola, Neven. How are you? I'm very fine. As Paweł mentioned, the spring is coming, the sun is coming. And well, I'm, as always, ready to join you for a new episode to discuss a lot of interesting things that have been going on at EBU lately.

(Neven): Oh, great. Well, I'm very excited to hear more about these European elections coming up. Tell us a little what's on there.

(Nacho): A legislative cycle comes to an end. Another one starts very soon. The 2024 European Parliament elections will be held across all EU countries between 6th and 9th June.

Based on its 2024 statement released in September last year, EBU launched its #StandForInclusiveEU campaign through its social media channels (Facebook, LinkedIn, and X). Through it, our organization aimed at raising awareness of the obstacles that blind and partially sighted people still face in key areas, such as culture and education, employment, safe mobility, and the built and digital environment.

The messages included in the campaign were echoed among our national members, as well as among EU political parties and European disability organizations. As we will discuss later on in this episode, we would like to encourage people with disabilities to make their voice heard. Don't be silent, cast your vote.

(Neven): Well, that's very true. Recently, our member from Lithuania actually wrote an article in Social Europe about political participation. Could you tell us a little more about that?

(Nacho): Yes, the Vice-President of our Lithuanian member, Vilmantas Balčikonis wrote an article at Social Europe. The title of the article was "European elections, a call for accessibility". In the piece, Vilmantas reflects on some of the solutions brought forward, but also some of the

remaining obstacles in the Lithuanian context, while also reflecting on what needs to be changed at the European level.

(Neven): Well, a lot of other things are happening too, of course. I mean, we have talked about it before, but I'm a little curious to hear more what's going on when it comes to the EU Disability Card and the European Parking Card, which have been discussed a lot. Do you have any news on that topic?

(Nacho): There have been very positive developments regarding the proposed EU Disability Card and European Parking Card for persons with disabilities. The European Parliament strengthened the European Commission's proposal on various points and the EU Council supported most of the improvements.

In the words of EBU's president, Tytti Matsinen, "This is a landmark development to ensure equal treatment in mobility for people with disabilities while respecting national differences and the competence of member States."

Parallel to this directive, the co-legislators also reached an agreement on the proposal to extend the new rules to third country nationals who reside in a member state and have a recognized disability status there. It now only remains to formally adopt the two directives as a package.

(Neven): But, as I understand, there was a failure when it comes to the possibility to transition between different countries. Is this correct?

(Nacho): Yes, in our focus press release, we stated that we regret, however, that the opportunity was missed to remedy the absence of temporary support in transition for people moving their residence to another member state, including for work or studies during the often lengthy process of reassessments of their disability status in the host country.

We ask the European Commission to quickly address this remaining gap as contemplated in the directive. It is, however, a step in the right direction that stays beyond three months, in the context of an EU mobility program, are covered after all, and that Member States may decide to apply the directive for stays longer than three months.

(Neven): Well, as we all know, we also have a huge anniversary, important anniversary this year. I know we have already had some

activities, but tell me, are any other things going on when it comes to the 40th Anniversary of the EBU?

(Nacho): As part of its 40th Anniversary celebration throughout the year, EBU launched a brochure featuring the main achievements of its four decades existence.

Among other highlights, our organization played a key role in advocating for the inception of legislative milestones such as the Marrakesh Treaty and the European Accessibility Act and the development of standards for pharmaceutical Braille. Other achievements include our campaigning for a more accessible Euro currency.

At the same time, the brochure also pinpoints several objectives to work on in the future, such as improving the accessibility of basic services or information, and ensuring that blind and partially sighted people can move freely and safely.

(Neven): So, this brochure, is it only in English or is it available in other languages too?

(Nacho): Yes, as of now, EBU's 40th Anniversary brochure is already available in the following languages: Bosnian, Spanish, Portuguese, Montenegrin, and Hungarian.

(Neven): Yeah, that sounds great to have it in so many languages and I'm sure more will come. So Nacho, thank you very, very much, once again for giving us all these news from the EBU and we look forward to hearing you again after the summer.

But between now and then, I really wish you and the colleagues at the EBU a great summer.

(Nacho): Thank you very much, Neven. See you after the summer.

(Neven): Bye. So Paweł, we hear a lot of interesting things going on at the EBU. What are your reflections on these?

(Paweł): A lot of Europe in it, isn't it?

(Neven): Yes, indeed.

(Paweł): It's the European Blind Union, but it's great to see this highlighted: that we are one Europe, and we are only as strong as we are united, and that we work towards making this world more accessible together.

(Neven): And very soon, we can all influence that, so the floor is yours.

(Paweł): Thank you.

## **Focus topic: the 2024 European Parliament elections**

[Music]

(Paweł): In a few days, between the 6th and 9th of June, the European elections are going to take place. It's an excellent occasion for the community of blind and partially sighted people, as well as the community of persons with disabilities at large, to raise their voices regarding the most important issues concerning them, such as personal mobility, digital accessibility, accessibility and employment.

In this segment of the episode, we will focus on the ability of persons with visual impairments to vote as well as run for office. In order to introduce this topics and discuss the solutions that have already been implemented, but also those that still could be, I would like to welcome two excellent guests, experts who can explain that very well.

First of all, welcome to you. Armin Rabitsch, the Democracy and Elections Expert at Election-Watch.EU. Hello, Armin.

(Armin): Hello.

(Paweł): How are you?

(Armin): Fine, thank you. Thank you for having me.

(Paweł): Great to have you today. And my second guest, today with me in the studio, Fredrik Stockhaus, a Swedish visually impaired politician. Welcome to you, Fredrik.

(Fredrik): Thank you, thank you for having me here.

(Paweł): Thanks also to you for being with us today. So Fredrik, I will turn to you with the first question, which is also of great importance for me, not only from this general landscape of human rights, but also because it touches upon me personally: how is it like to be a visually impaired voter? What is the Swedish context for that? And do you feel that you can vote independently, but most of all, in secret?

(Fredrik): Yes, thank you for the question. It's quite an interesting one. Just to clarify also that I'm not only visually impaired. I'm totally blind. So I will be speaking from the perspective of a totally blind person.

(Paweł): Same here.

(Fredrik): OK. Then, ever since I started voting, during the nineties, we have had this opportunity in Sweden for blind persons who are braille users to vote for a party independently. It is done, technically, in the following way: that you will be provided with envelopes with the party's names, with eight political parties that we're having for the moment, with their names and the level of the election in question.

So if you, for example, would like to vote for the Conservative Party, you will have to find the envelope which tells "This is the Conservative Party, municipal level". And inside the envelope, you will find the ballot, a paper, which says "This is the Conservative Party, municipal level."

And the same goes for regional level and, then, the state or the national level. So, blind persons or braille users are able to independently find the right, so to say, party for them and to cast their vote independently if they are, of course, able to transport themselves, either independently or with help, to the place for voting. Or if they would like to do it via the post office in advance, for example, this is how it works for blind persons that are braille users.

The problem starts (which I guess we will come back to later), for secret voting when it comes to another level of voting, namely, if you would like to make a personal choice. If you have preferences in terms of what candidate you would like to vote for, that is, as of now, impossible for a blind person or a visually impaired person to do independently because you're not able to identify individual candidates on the papers and to mark for who you would like to vote if you are interested in making a personal choice.

Because the system looks like this in the case of Sweden: that the parties are having candidates that are put onto a list. I mean, as I guess this is the same in every country, all the parties that are in the elections have made their own lists and they have like candidates on the first, second, third place, etcetera.

But those individuals can also make like independent election campaigns, in order to gain interest for themselves and to gain extra votes, so to say, in order for them to be able to advance on the list, so they can actually change position from a lower one to a higher one. But as a blind voter, you are not able to vote independently in that case.

(Paweł): I just wanted to say lucky you because I will just explain in a moment how this works in Poland. I see you have it even more complicated than I initially thought because the way it works in Poland is that every region sends out their politicians from all the parties and the numbers are fixed.

So, the party authorities decide which candidate holds which position. And this is globally transmitted, you can find this list so arranged on the internet. And then when you request a braille overlay for your ballot, you can trust those numbers that they are the right ones to choose from.

You don't get the list of the candidates numbered in braille, but you're expected to find the list elsewhere on the internet, most likely. And the only problem I have there is that the ballot, which is placed underneath the braille overlay, quite easily slips away from its original position.

So, this way it's very easy to unintentionally move the ballot away from the right position where you're supposed to mark your choice.

And this way you will not even know that you have cast an invalid vote. And so, I don't know if this could be solved easily because the system itself is not badly thought out. It's not the problem. It's just that, somehow, these ballots need to be more stabilized in order for this overlay to make fully sense.

I already managed, and a sighted person thankfully told me, that I already managed to move away my ballot from the original position, and I would, if I kept to that position, I would cast an invalid vote. But, well, what to do if I'm completely on my own? And that, that is a very difficult question, and I know, Poland is not the only country that's grappling with this issue.

But I see from what you're explaining that it's even more complicated in Sweden. And yeah, I think we are slowly reaching the limits of what can you do to replace sight, to replace your ability to read the paper and your ability to depend on things being in their own place. It's a little bit like having things moved around your house, so you don't find them anymore, I guess.

Now, we are coming to the second point and I will ask you, Armin, how has access evolved, access to voting, of course, in Europe in the last years when it comes to voting, when persons with disabilities vote and, especially and particular, which solutions do you see have been

implemented and could be implemented for blind and partially sighted people?

(Armin): We have seen a certain level of progress, but it's not sufficient yet. And definitely with the passing of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the United Nations level, there has been progress also within the European Union.

One needs to say that the European Court of Human Rights lags behind the United Nations Convention and lags behind the United Nations Committee on that Convention.

However, the European Commission seems to do a great effort in this respect. They recently published a guide on good electoral practice for addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities in electoral processes.

The European Commission is the guardian of the European treaties as well. They need to stimulate the Member States which are lagging behind in implementing the CRPD in full to embrace new solutions and new measures and, also, new legislation to enable everyone to have an independent right to vote and possibly without assistance.

That brings me to the second part of your question, which solutions have been applied for visually impaired voters. And here, we heard already the possibility of braille, but there's also the tactile stencils which can be used for visually impaired voters. It might be also easy or easier to have certain easy-to-read materials, meaning better quality of ballot papers with a higher, bigger, easier-to-read font.

But there is also the possibility of audio assistance, which can be provided by the election management bodies. Or like in the case of Estonia, there's the possibility of internet voting, which is probably the most advanced way of voting for visually impaired voters.

(Pawel): But apart from the right to vote, the beauty of democracy is that every one of us can run for office as well and, directly, influence the change by being a part of the politics in their own region, country, in a party, wherever they feel they're the most suitable. And you, Fredrik, are an excellent example of that because you are totally blind and you are a politician.

So if you could explain a little bit of your background story in terms of the obstacles that you faced on your way to that post, but also how do your



adaptations look like? Did the Swedish authorities equip you appropriately to carry out your duties?

(Fredrik): Thank you. I'm active in the Swedish Socialist Party, it's called "Vänsterpartiet" and I've been active there since, actually as, ever since I was a teenager on and off, so to say. But I have most actively been working in there, in the party the last 10 years or so. And as of now, I am also a representative of the party in the regional parliament here in my region, which is called the Västmanland.

So, I'm one of six persons that are representing the party here in this administrative region, which mostly deals with the healthcare issues and some cultural issues and some educational issues, not going into detail over the Swedish administrative system and the division of responsibilities.

But, in terms of your question, I have been able to use what I'm normally using in my everyday life, like the digital adaptations, like for screen readers and my mobile phone and so on. And my personal computer because most communication is being done the digital way nowadays, so that helps me a lot.

There have not been necessary for me to take on any additional measures in order to carry out my involvement in politics. But I have used what I would have been using normally to manage my everyday communication, braille display, screen reader and an iPhone with certain adaptations like voiceover and so on.

If we go into details over voting and debate in the parliament, we are using digital voting, and we are using also a digital solution to ask for the word and to make certain reservations and comments during the debate. And that is an ordinary digital, what you call, iPad or something like that, which could be used with voiceover in this case, so it works pretty much as at my home, so to say.

So, it hasn't been presenting any additional problems for me to take part in voting or asking for the word or certain things like that.

(Paweł): This is excellent to hear, that you were able to use, as I understand it, your private equipment or anything as close to your private equipment as possible.

Because in any kind of job, one of the struggles we face is that you have to- I mean, I agree, it's a great idea from a security standpoint that you

have a separate equipment to handle your business duties and to handle your private duties and that the data is separated. But then, you have to probably get used to a completely new environment, which also takes away your valuable time while onboarding.

But also, it increases the costs of all the licensing that needs to be involved. And probably, takes a lot of time to get it sorted out, especially like the larger the machine, the longer the waiting time, I would expect. So it's good to hear that you were allowed to carry out your duties with using the means that you're familiar with because this is very important.

And it definitely takes a lot of the stress away and, you know best, politics is probably a lot of stress. So why do we need more?

(Fredrik): That's right. If I may add something, the only thing that has been causing problems and which is still causing quite a lot of problems, for me personally, is actually the format in which the documents for the meetings are presented. Because it is in PDF format and that is usually not presenting any problem for blind users, but the way these PDF documents are structured really creates problems with me, in terms of reading it in advance.

So, I usually need to find personal solutions, like sharing the documents with myself over e-mail or something in order to get them in the right format. So, and I have been raising this issue with the administration of the regional parliament.

I have also been actually bringing it up officially as a principal question of accessibility for blind users, not only for politicians like myself, but for blind persons coming from the public, because we have strict laws in Sweden that documents that are for political meetings should be published in advance on, in this case, the region's website.

And if they are not accessible for blind users, then we cannot speak of a full-fledged democracy, right? So, I have been bringing it up both as an administrative issue for myself, but also as a principal one, as I mentioned in the parliament chamber.

(Paweł): Great, and it's an amazing work that you do because, if you will probably stay there for a long time, hopefully, but hopefully also, more blind and partially sighted people and people with disabilities in general, following your example and building upon the work that you have done, will decide to run for office as well.

And the awareness that you're raising could, and probably will, definitely contribute to the state of things being better for the future politicians to come. So it's really great that you're doing this. And your story is really remarkable. Unfortunately, though, it doesn't seem like there are many persons like Fredrik who have disabilities and, yet, are in the political power.

As the European Disability Forum underlined during the Day of Persons with Disabilities in 2023, so last year, less than 5 percent of the current European Parliament chamber is composed of politicians with disabilities. Armin, how do you think we can influence that so that this number increases?

(Armin): Well, Paweł, I think we could look into three different aspects of it. One is the advocacy and the awareness-raising, which you are doing and European Disability Forum is doing. That's very important to give everyone the information that they have the right to stand and to go into politics.

But it's also important for the legislators to understand that laws need to be changed, that practices need to be changed and be adopted, that everyone is able to access politics and to take part in politics.

When it comes to the second area, that would be, I would say, strategic litigation, and we have seen that especially in that aspect of persons with disabilities, moves and development and progress only was made due to strategic litigation or by persons with disabilities organizations which took the cause to the courts.

And then, due to that, changes were possible and made through court rulings in the electoral processes of those countries. And we have seen that in Germany and France, for example. But we are not there yet, and there's still more to be done.

And then, the third aspect is probably legislation itself. This is, on one hand, accompanying legislation which is currently drafted and propose additions, come up with advisory opinions and include the accessibility rights of persons with disabilities.

And on the other hand, also stimulate legislation, particularly on that right. And in this respect, those three measures together probably will enable more persons with disabilities to be represented in the European Parliament.

Having said that, there is also the question of public funding, and that's where Election-Watch.EU also proposes and recommends that especially those entities and state interlocutors who receive public funding, they have a special responsibility in this.

And here we have two entities that I would like to talk about. One is the public broadcaster: the public broadcaster receives taxpayers money and has a special responsibility to cover electoral campaigns and politicians, candidates in an appropriate manner that everyone is able to follow it and understands it and participates in it.

And the others, on the other hand, it is the political parties. And in the European Member States, political parties receive public funding from the state, also from the taxpayers. And here we see especially that most of them are not advanced enough to look into the aspect of providing accessible information to their campaigns.

And for example, Germany has looked into that aspect and checked what is the readability of these materials used in electoral campaigns for users of a screen reader, for example. And, in this respect, there are certain good practices where Member States can learn from each other and point out good practices, practices from one Member State to the other.

And we will try to do that also now during this election assessment mission, which is coming up of Election-Watch.EU, that we collect good practices in this respect and point out to election management bodies, which meet regularly as the European Cooperation Network on Elections to exchange what can be done better in this respect.

(Paweł): I really hope these measures will contribute to there being more political power in the hands of persons with disabilities, with persons who can raise the concerns that we have to a larger community, to a larger political power.

So here is to hoping that the new European government will have this power to make this change. And so my next question to you, Fredrik: is it easy being a politician with a disability, in your case a blind politician, to bring forward these issues that we have to the interest of the public institutions?

And also, do you feel that your role as a blind politician contributes to there being more blind people and partially sighted people motivated to vote, in general?

(Fredrik): To the second part of the question: first, even if the situation in Sweden isn't like overwhelming in terms of persons with disabilities, particularly blind people in this case, taking part in politics, I have to say that I have got acquainted to quite a lot of persons with disabilities actually taking part in policymaking and politics, persons with different disabilities.

I mean, there is a group of blind and partially sighted politicians in Sweden. Even if we are not like having an everyday contact, the national organization of the visually impaired has made some attempts to identify who is a candidate for which party and they have made up a list of us who have been addressed and who have admitted to be on that list so that people could see who is a blind or partially sighted representative of different parties.

And also, during the last election campaign, the national elections in 2022, almost two years back, their national organization also had an online seminar where some of us were invited to a debate over disability issues and, particularly, issues that are concerning blind and partially sighted.

So, there are attempts to put forward, so to say, persons that are blind and partially sighted to promote them and to also make it obvious to other persons that are blind and partially sighted that it is realistic to be a politician and that it is nothing to be afraid of, that you should give it a try.

So, of course, that is possible and I only hope that there will be more of us that will take part in politics, participate in decision-making processes, because that is one of the most effective ways of also having our say, not only in pure, so to say, disability issues, but in politics in general, and to make us as individuals and as a group visible, so to say, in the political life.

Because I am, as of now, one of the few with an impairment in politics here in Västmanland, at least. I'm definitely the only blind politician in the regional parliament. And I have used this opportunity also to put special focus on the disability issues, because in terms of the first part of your question, it is still necessary, at least here in Sweden, to keep the disability perspective alive in the political sphere.

Because I usually make a joke every time where I make a speech in the regional parliament here in Västmanland: "Now, it's time for the disability issues again and I haven't heard anything of them since I spoke last

time.” And that is actually the truth because I used to say that the disability issues are almost dead in most political parties and, sadly enough, also in my own party.

So, I also consider myself important in keeping them alive and bringing them up on the political agenda to make them more of a mainstream thing. So, it is still tough to reach out and to make disability a mainstream issue, but I think no one can make it better than ourselves. I mean, we politicians and decision-makers with our own disabilities.

(Paweł): I definitely agree. Our time is coming to an end, but before we say goodbye in this section, I would like to ask the very last question to you, Armin. Apart from everything we've discussed so far, which other solutions do you think would enhance the participation of persons with disabilities in voting?

One idea that comes to my mind is e-voting. Do you believe this is the future and this is the solution despite all the security concerns that surround it?

(Armin): Certainly, there are security concerns about e-voting, not necessarily in Estonia, where the trust is very high in the government. But if exported to countries which have less experience with democracy, there might be problems.

Now, in terms of technology, I see a big scope for possibilities to improve the voting for persons with disabilities. So this could be done by the election management bodies in conjunction and in cooperation with organizations of persons with disabilities, where especially this experience about how to vote could be used to improve, for example, postal ballots and to provide every blind or visually impaired voter with adequate resources to vote by himself or herself.

So that would be an option to personalise this assistance, which is needed. But then also, this technology could be used to understand from each other, the various member states and various election management bodies in the European Union, what has been done and what are the best practices.

So we have a lot of countries which are still lagging behind and a number of countries which are doing very well in assisting voters and providing adequate resources and emphasis on enhancing the right to vote. So I think in this sense, what's needed is more cooperation, more

communication, more exchange of data and information about how voting practices can be improved.

And then, also use the technology. It doesn't need to be e-voting, but it could be ways of voting independently, what we mentioned already, new technologies which could help in this respect.

(Paweł): Yes, thank you so much. Thanks to both of you for all that you've said, all of the valuable insights and information that you have provided. I really hope that the next upcoming European elections will prove that Europe is ready to have and welcome their voters with disabilities, and also politicians with disabilities, and that we will be at the table together with everybody else discussing what matters to us. Thank you so much and bye bye.

(Armin): Thank you, Paweł. Bye.

(Fredrik): Thank you.

## **Correspondent' section: Switzerland**

[Music]

(Neven): We have now reached our last section, the correspondent' section. This is the segment where we learn more about activities of EBU National Members. And today, very exciting, we have actually a guest from Switzerland, where we have no less than three EBU members.

But today, we're going to meet one of them and we're going to talk to Luana Schena, who is from the Swiss Federation of the Blind and Visually Impaired. So I say hello to you, Luana.

(Luana): Hello, Neven. Thanks for having me.

(Neven): Let's start with you telling us briefly about yourself. Who are you and, and what's your role in the organization?

(Luana): My name is Luana Schena. I'm 24 years old and a university student in Political Science and Geography. And I'm a board member of the Swiss Federation of the Blind and Visually Impaired and responsible for the areas of advocacy and youth.

(Neven): Interesting, interesting responsibilities. So, actually that takes us on to the first question I wanted to put you because I know that you'll be working with a revision of the Disability Discrimination Act in Switzerland. Could you tell us a little about that?

(Luana): Yes, the Federal Council has put forward a draft for consultation regarding a partial revision of that act. And unfortunately, it's not very pleasant. So, in fact, a lot of things that need improvement have not been done. And there are actually even some things that have been worsened, for example, that organisations are more limited in putting forward complaints in certain regards.

And the whole idea of transport has been completely eliminated from the act because in the original act, there was a span of 20 years for transport companies to adopt transport infrastructures and vehicles so that they are barrier-free. This has not been done or only got partially done and now, nothing happens and there is no consequences and nothing in this new version of the act, which is very disappointing.

(Neven): So, do you think it's going to be possible to influence this or this is going to be the new future?

(Luana): Well, a lot of disability organisations have put forward replies to the consultation, and I do hope that our replies and remarks will be taken seriously. I mean, one important point was also that disability organizations were not involved in the creation of this new draft, which is the main problem.

And ideally, they would shift all over again, but this is definitely not going to happen. So I just hope that they will consider a lot of the remarks that we made and improve it in that direction.

(Neven): Well, you are very active in Switzerland in different ways. And I mean, you have also a very active democracy. I also know that you have a system of initiatives and you have been preparing some kind of inclusive initiative. Could you tell us a little more about that initiative?

(Luana): Yes, so in Switzerland, we can make a popular initiative by collecting 100,000 signatures. And if that's achieved, the initiative is put to vote by all of the Swiss citizens. And we are currently collecting signatures for the so-called "Inclusion initiative" which aims at two things.

Firstly, the law shall ensure that people with disabilities are completely equally treated as persons without disabilities in all areas of life and therefore, it shall be ensured that they have the necessary support and adaptations, including especially personal and technical assistance, that there's really enough of this, which currently is often not the case.



And the second point is that people with disabilities should be completely free in choosing where and how they want to live.

(Neven): Interesting. Well, I also know you're very active in other topics. I know you had a big campaign for the moment. Could you tell us a little something about that?

(Luana): Yes, we are currently running a campaign on digital accessibility.

Firstly, we want to sensibilise companies, developers, but also politicians. And it's a very important message of ours to also raise awareness that we are a market segment. And if products are made accessible to us, that we are customers who will buy them and that it's in this way, actually, profitable for companies doing that.

And recently, this was also in the newsletter, there was a part about the hackathon that we had recently, where we had about 2000 developers who worked on different problems regarding accessibility. And there was one project which was really interesting, about a store assistant based on artificial intelligence.

And something that this hackathon also really demonstrated is that within a few hours, you can actually do quite a lot in making things successful.

(Neven): Interesting. Very much so. So, is there any other topic you would like to share with us from Switzerland before we wrap up?

(Luana): Well, a big concern for us is also currently the new EU Disability Card, how we can make sure that, or how we can try, to have this also accessible for third countries such as Switzerland, because we oftentimes travel to new countries and people from new countries also often travel to Switzerland or from Switzerland, for example, if you travel from Germany to Italy.

So we are currently working on that. And it's quite a difficult topic, obviously to influence that.

(Neven): Well, but it's great that you have a commitment in all these topics you mentioned. And I really understand that you are very active in in this this very important advocacy work you are doing.

So, we are very grateful that you took the time to share some of your thoughts with us from what's going on in Switzerland. And we would like

to wish you all the very best luck in your future work. And we will see you around within EBU activities further on again.

(Luana): Thank you.

(Neven): Thank you very much, Luana. So Paweł, that was today's episode. So tell me, do you have any exciting plans for the summer apart from voting, I mean, now I hope, in the European elections?

(Paweł): Yes, that's the early summer for you technically, but yes, I will do. Actually, I will celebrate the new election by means of some holidays in abroad in Europe, so I'm very excited about that.

(Neven): Excellent, so I wish you a fantastic summer and holidays, and I will speak to you again after summer.

(Paweł): Yes, same here, same here. Thanks for the episode and greetings to our listeners everywhere.

[Music]

(Neven): Well, now we are reaching the end of today's episode of "EBU in Action". And before wrapping up, first of all, we would like to say a great thanks to our sound master, Emiel Cornelisse in the Netherlands, who actually makes all the great sounds in this podcast.

Apart from that, we also would like to thank all our listeners and encourage you to subscribe to our podcast, "EBU in Action". And you can do that in your podcast reader. Or maybe you have some questions or comments to us. You can always find the contact details in the show notes and you're most welcome to contact us.

I would also like to take the opportunity to encourage all our listeners to now, when we have the upcoming elections to the European Parliament, to actually take the chance and to cast your vote and to actually participate. It's very important that all of us participate in these elections.

And by saying that I also would like to wish all our listeners a fantastic and great summer. Bye bye.

(Voiceover): "EBU in Action" is co-funded by the European Union.

END OF DOCUMENT