



## EBU presents to interested MEPs its main concerns for the new legislature

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The European Blind Union (EBU) organised a cocktail at the European Parliament in Brussels on 18 February under the kind sponsorship of the Finnish MEP Li Andersson (The Left), Chairwoman of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL). The aim was to bring together some key MEPs of the new Assembly and representatives of EBU and national member organisations to exchange on the main concerns and expectations of blind and partially sighted citizens.

Addressing MEPs present and a representative of the European Commission, the EBU President, Tytti Matsinen, recalled some recent achievements of our organisation's campaigning in its 40 years of existence. Expressing great satisfaction that the European Parliament re-established its Disability Intergroup for another five years, Tytti Matsinen said: "The Disability Intergroup has been instrumental to advancing the cause of persons with disabilities in EU policy and law-making. We count on the support of its members throughout this legislature and look forward to collaborating with them".

Francesca Sbianchi, Chairwoman of our Advocacy Committee, highlighted four issues very topical to visually impaired people and their organisations:

- The European Accessibility Act mostly applies to the digital world, leaving out real and daily life products such as **household appliances**, the accessibility of which is crucial for the autonomous living of visually impaired people in their own homes.

- The EU Directive implementing the **Marrakesh Treaty**, contrary to the spirit of this WIPO Treaty, allows EU Member States to require authorised entities to pay compensation to rights-holders when exercising their rights under the treaty.
- The EU insufficiently promotes **audio description**, be it by using the leverage of EU funding – namely through the MEDIA strand of the Creative Europe programme – or through sufficiently strong accessibility requirements in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive.
- For the protection of vulnerable road users, if anything, the EU needs to strengthen its rules on acoustic vehicle alert system (AVAS) for **silent vehicles** (electric or hybrid), especially on speed below which AVAS is triggered and its sound level. Yet, worryingly, the position expressed by the European Commission at United Nations level indicates a desire to weaken the rules.

In her opening speech, Li Andersson pointed out that supporting people with special needs is not to the detriment of competitiveness. “I am proud to act as one of your allies”, she told EBU.

Lucie Davoine, Acting Head of the Disability Unit at the Commission’s DG Justice and Consumers, said that the Commission’s progress report halfway down the Disability Strategy and the EU review by the UN CRPD Committee will help identify the remaining gaps. “The EBU ideas are well noted and we will reflect on them”, she added.

Much commented during the cocktail was the Commission’s recent decision to withdraw in six months the proposed **Equal Treatment Directive**, blocked at the EU Council for 17 years with little sign of progress there. EBU deplors that no alternative initiative is announced to address discrimination across the board, beyond employment. “This undermines the EU commitment to full equality for persons with disabilities”, Tytti Matsinen said. “We call on the Commission to reconsider, on the Member States to swiftly get their act together on this important file, and on the European Parliament to make its voice heard.”

As early as September 2023 EBU had laid out in a [Statement](#) in the perspective of the European Elections our 10 key issues for the 2024-2029 legislative cycle, in line with the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Ends

**The European Blind Union (EBU)** – Interest Representative Register number 42378755934-87 – is a non-governmental, non-profit making European organisation founded in 1984. It is one of the six regional bodies of the World Blind Union, and it promotes the interests of blind and partially sighted people in Europe. It currently operates within a network of 42 national members including organisations from 26 European Union member states, candidate countries and other countries in geographical Europe.

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