

## **EASPD celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the European Parliament**

To celebrate its 15th anniversary, the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities invited all its members and friends on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2011 to the European Parliament.

The event was hosted by MEP Dieter Koch with the support of other leading MEPs and with special guests as Commissioner László Andor, Yannis Vardakastanis (President of the European Disability Forum), Brigitte Grouwels (Member of the Government of the Brussels Region, and in charge of disability issues), Johan Ten Geuzendam (Head of Unit for the Rights of People with Disabilities, European Commission) and Thorsten Afflerbach (Head of Integration of People with Disabilities Division, Council of Europe). Video messages from Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, and Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the European Commission and EU-Commissioner opened the ceremony.

Since 1996, EASPD has brought together 10.000 service providers from all over Europe and beyond: 15 years of decisive achievements and flourishing activities.

Luk Zelderloo, EASPD Secretary General and one of the founding fathers, stated during the event: *“Together with representatives of persons with disabilities and inspired by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we hope to contribute to the development of a more accessible, social and caring Europe which respects and empowers people in need. Our major challenge is to bring the support as much as possible to the people instead of bringing people to the support. Therefore we will build new relations with the mainstream services. These stakeholders such as schools, employers, municipalities, etc. will become our new indirect clients, in addition to persons with disabilities. We will use our experience and skills to help them support people in an appropriate way to build inclusive communities and empowering services.”*

During these years, EASPD has endeavoured to represent and fight for the needs of the sector at all levels, to inform its members about European and international policy developments as well as to support them to innovate their services for the

benefit of persons with disabilities. However, prompt technology developments, demographic change, new needs and wishes of persons experiencing disability have already a strong impact on our daily work and they will increasingly challenge our structures and methods.

Franz Wolfmayr, President of EASPD firmly declared: *“Today, on the basis of our experience and commitment, it is the responsibility of the service providers to be at the forefront of innovation in order to shape the future rather than to passively suffer the consequences of major societal changes. Join us in building services of tomorrow for the people of today. We want to use this celebration as a lever for a better quality of life in a Europe valuing diversity!”*

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*The European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) promotes the equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high quality service systems in Europe.*

*EASPD represents more than 10000 service provider organisations across Europe.*