FINISHED FILE

EDF

FEBRUARY 20, 2020

11:00 A.M.

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>> NAOMI MABITA: All right. Good morning. I hope you can hear me. Thank you. Good morning. It seems to have stopped. How do we know if people can hear us? I'm not sure. If you need sign language interpretation we are now sharing the screen. I think it is loading. So it is a bit blurry at the moment. And if you need captioning, the link is in the chat box at the very top. If you scroll all the way to the top you will find the link there. You can access it by telephone. There is the number somewhere that you will find. And yeah, we will be starting in about five minutes. So just please hold. You will hear more from Marie.   
 (Pause).

>> NAOMI MABITA: Hi again, everyone. If you have any technical difficulties, please let us know in the chat box. We will try to answer as quickly as possible. This webinar is being recorded. And there will be a transcript available. If you need sign language interpretation and captioning, there are links. I'm reading apparently in the wrong order.

So I'm going to start with the slide in front of me. Welcome. I just gave the housekeeping rules. Apologies, this is very messy. So there will be an introduction on the procedures on EU level and then a bit of a talk on the work of the Council and its presidencies including the differences on the different Councils, so you don't get too confused. And we will have the good practice example of the Latvian presidency of the EU presented by Gunta Anca. And then we will have question and answers.

If you have any questions you can add them in the question box. Now the people here, I'm Naomi Mabita, the communication assistant here at EDF. And we will have Marie Denninghaus, our policy coordinator explaining how the Council works and how it works at the EU level, et cetera, et cetera. Gunta Anca is an EDF secretary who will be talking about the Latvian presidencies and answering any questions.

I guess I have already read the different housekeeping rules. But again the webinar is being recorded and there will be a transcript. If you need alternative options, there are links in the chat box. There is a question box for questions and you can access from a mobile device.   
 Cool. So now we go to Marie, please.

>> MARIE DENNINGHAUS: Good morning, everyone. I hope that everyone can hear us. Raquel is still I think solving some technical issues. I will start with a short introduction about the decision making procedures on the EU level. Because if we talk about the Council, first of all, is the question what Council are we talking about. Some of you may have already followed our trainings on the EU institutions. So for you this will be a short recap. But for the others I think this might be quite useful to put this in the context.   
 So first of all, we have the structure of the EU institutions. Quite simplified version of this as you can see on the screen is the triangle shape. At the bottom you have the European Commission, the European Parliament and today I put on top the Council. Also I put it on top I will explain that also in later slides because in my opinion the Council is in some respects the most important institution because it can really influence a decision maker. It has the last word so to say.

Also what is important to know in this case the Council, remember it is the Member States. It is a bit of a complicated institution because it is both an EU institution and it is the national Governments. So it is also good to remember when I'm explaining to you later what the role of the Council is and the Council presidencies.   
 On the left‑hand side of this slide I have listed other institutions and bodies. They include, for example, the court of justice, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee. These are, of course, also relevant, but today I will not mention them. These are let's say lesser important bodies. And if you would like you can inform yourself about these at another stage.   
 So what I already mentioned before Council, counsel and consul, what are we talking about? This is what we are talking about today is the Council of the EU. And what this is it helps me sometimes to remember that it was usually ‑‑ it used to be known as Council of Ministers. And that means that it is the different policy configurations. So usually the Ministers for the different files. And this could be the Ministers of finance are meeting in the finance Council. Ministers of transport are meeting in the transport Council, et cetera. This is the second Council that I listed here the Heads of States of Government. They are meeting tomorrow on the Summit on the budget which is a very big and high level Summit. This is more of extraordinary meetings that happen as well in Brussels, but these are just the heads of state and Government. They take very high level political decisions. They do not go much in to detail of different policies. This is the difference. This is the representations of the different policy levels, usually this happens after a schedule that is I think ‑‑ they meet for presidency maybe four times depending on the subjects.

And last but not least what adds to the confusion is a very ‑‑ institution which has a similar name but is actually nothing to do with the EU and that is the Council of Europe. I put it very small here in the slides. So this is not good for accessibility but I did it on purpose. So actually you should forget this straight away. Do not remember the Council of Europe in this presentation. It is not an EU institution. It is an international organization based in Strasbourg, but it has been from outside the EU, for example, the Ukraine, et cetera. This is completely irrelevant at the moment.

The Council of the EU as I mentioned what we are talking about today is in some considerations the most powerful institution. As I said because in the decision making procedure they have the last word. Of course, it is all a negotiation and compromise between the different institutions. But if the Council does not adopt a position or does not agree to a legislative file, a proposal can be stuck basically forever. We have this example, you may all be aware of the proposal of the horizontal Equal Treatment Directive which was very important for our disability movement. And was proposed and by the commission, the Parliament put their position out there, but actually the Council completely stopped it. Has been frozen now for ten years. So just to illustrate the kind of power that the Council has. And even within the Council some Member States have also more power than others.

Normally every Member State has one vote, but in practice you can imagine that bigger Member States also have more influence on some files. And fortunately the Council is also the least transparent institution, at least for us to work with. That means that meetings are behind closed doors. There are no recordings, no minutes, nothing that is public apart from maybe a summary or an agenda. It makes it quite difficult for us to engage with. But that is also why we are having this training today, this webinar to see on what levels we can engage. Even though this is ‑‑ sounds negative I want you to think positive and see what we actually can do with a Council.   
 Again just to remind you the Council is not some far away EU institution. It is actually your national Governments and your national ministries. So remember that actually the Council is more approachable, sometimes from a national level than it is from Brussels. And what's also very useful to know is that for the Council we have this rotating presidency. So every six months a different Member State takes the lead. I will explain another slide in more detail how that works and why it is important. Finally what we usually understand as the Council is the permanent representations of the Member States. They have kind of an office in Brussels. Like the EDF has a Secretariat in Brussels, they have their representation in Brussels. And there they have an Ambassador and usually these Ambassadors and their staff attend the meetings which is not like the high level meetings. This is a little bit like their Delegation so to say in Brussels.   
 And as I said a quick recap of the decision making procedure, I don't want to scare you. I am just showing this slide with a very complicated graph with a lot of different institutions and arrows going back and forth. This is actually the decision making procedure as it is described officially. But I'm going to quickly skip this and show you a very simplified version which again maybe illustrates why the Council has such an influence and is so important. Because you can see now in my very simplified graph there are three institutions on top. So the commission, the Parliament and the Council. And it starts with a commission putting out a proposal which, of course, is also a very powerful position because they can decide already what is in the proposed text. But from the commission it usually goes to the European Parliament. And the Parliament will define their position in return. So they will say we like this part of the commission proposal but we do not like that part. We propose a different Article 2. We propose to add a reference to the CRPD and the recitals. So the Parliament can make proposals for changes. And then it goes to the Council. In theory actually it could go directly to the Council but in practice with many files it actually first goes to the Parliament and the Council is sometimes the last institution that actually defines that position which gives them already a little bit the advantage that they can first see the other ones and then kind of add their own position in the end.   
 Also just for your information, in the EU speak the Council position is called a general approach. So if you ever read this then you will maybe remember that this just is another word for the Council's policy position. And then and this is ‑‑ why I say it is very simplified because it is not how it is written in the books. Once these three institutions have defined their positions it goes in to what we call trilogs. And it is because there are three institutions and they negotiate informally. And adding this because actually 85% of all the laws are adopted following trilogs. So even though this is not an official procedure at all it is not mentioned anywhere in the Treaties, it is not official, since 85% of all laws are adopted this way, I think it is fair to say we can simplify and say this is the most common procedure. So in this trilog negotiations the three institutions sit together and they bargain you could say, they try to find a common position. And so what we have in the end when the trilog is successful is a compromised agreement.

Again as I said before the Council has the advantage that they can technically block an agreement. In many cases it happens that the commission is quite keen on getting the position adopted obviously because they make the proposal. They don't want to make too many changes, the same with the Parliament and then we have to see what comes out in the end.   
 So just to sum up, what should you remember from this first part of the presentation? The Council is not a very abstract, far away institution. It is actually the Member States. So it is your ministries, your head of state or government. So remember that actually is ‑‑ it is an interesting fact. Forget the Council of Europe. Don't even think about it. And the Council usually has the last word.

The second part of my introduction is more now about actually the work of the Council and the presidencies. And why they are important for us. Why we should remember them. And as I mentioned before a special case in the Council is that we have a rotating presidency. And I also may want to explain what is then the role of the President of the European Council if there is a rotating presidency and a permanent President which at the moment is Shadi Michelle from Belgium. The presidency rotates every six months. And this was originally done I think to give all Member States a fair shot at having a little bit their agenda or deciding on the agenda. It was maybe easier when there were fewer Member States. But now actually it becomes more and more complicated to keep some kind of coherence because six months is not very long if you think about how long it takes to adopt some legislation, which can be three, four years.

So six months is a very short time in Brussels' terms and decision making terms. So what was decided since the Lisbon Treaty, since 2009 was there should always be three presidencies working stronger together to set up more long‑term political vision is that not after six months a proposal is dropped or falls off the agenda because another presidency sets different priorities. And it has made a little bit more efficient than before. Also what the role of the presidency is, so now, for example, Croatia has the presidency. That means that every meeting in the Council even if it is on a technical level, so if the social questions working party meets, the Croatian attache will be sharing the meeting. They will be setting the agenda, writing the internal minutes that we don't get to see. This is the role of the presidency.

In theory they should be a neutral broker which in theory would be difficult. If you have your own political positions, before the presidency starts, you are still there as Croatia. And you have your own interests. And suddenly on the next day you start the presidency, you have to be completely neutral. You can imagine this is a bit tricky. But I think it is good because like this you get different viewpoints as well.   
 Finally, to explain, so what is now the role of Shadi Michelle. He was this position of the President of the European Council, assembles the head of state Government. It was to provide a bit more of a phase to the institution. I think it was the perception that the Council is even harder to access than other institutions. So it was decided to give also more continuity over this five‑year, four or five‑year term. So I think this is very roughly I think what the presidency is.

I'm now going to explain a little bit more what the tasks are apart from chairing the meeting. Just to give you an idea per presidency, there can be 200 to 300 legislative files. So there can be the Accessibility Act, the Equal Treatment Directive and this times basically 200. So you have really like a lot of different files.   
 And that means that per presidency, and this is an average number I found online, let's hope it is correct, there are about 1500 formal and informal meetings and events. This includes also the high level meetings. This includes all the working party meetings but also other informal events which can be, for example, cultural events to promote the presidency, et cetera. But I think Gunta will also explain later more about the events that ‑‑ meetings that can happen in the presidency.   
 The Council, the presidency also represents a Council in relations with other EU institutions. When the commission and the Parliament are meeting it is really the Croatians that represent the Council in this case. And then obviously they support the work of other EU institutions, if you have like, the higher representative of foreign affairs and security policy, for example, they support the work.   
 Now just to give you a quick reminder, most of you will more or less know, so the current presidency is Croatia. And the following presidencies will be Germany, Portugal, Slovenia and France and Czech Republic. And then we have Sweden which is only in 2023. I put it already so to see that you have to actually already be planning in advance at least I would say two years in order to really make sure you get the most out of the presidencies.   
 So this is a really short breakdown of the advice. As I said if you want to work with the presidencies and approach them and make the most out of it to make sure they include disability in their programs, they have a High‑Level Event on disability. They pick up the legislative files that are important to you. For example, if you want them to pick up the equal treatment directive, start early. Planning 2021‑2022 is in full swing, make sure. This is a long, long‑term plan. Use your national context. From Brussels we have less of an influence than you would have if you know who, for example, works on the files in the Ministry of Social Affairs, try to contact informally because they are trying to set the agendas. Gunta will include some of these tips later. Be proactive. You can suggest things. It is not that everything is decided beforehand but lobbying also helps.

And finally to look how you can get concrete outcomes. Something that you can get, for example, from a presidency is what they call Council conclusions which is a kind of recommendation that the Council gives at the end which is an official document and which can help you to then, for example, go back to your national Government or even go back to the commission and say the Council, for example, proposes to have a new legislation on accessibility. And so this is a way to put pressure on other institutions. And finally as I mentioned above meet with relevant national actors and just make your agenda heard.   
 Here are just some useful websites with general information. I know I gave you quite a lot now to think about. But you have also the presentation in the handout section of the webinar. And it will be circulated later. So feel free to click through the links. And you can check the document register of the Council and look at the status of different decision making procedures, et cetera. This was part of the presentation. I hand back to Naomi.

>> NAOMI MABITA: All right. Thank you very much. I want to make sure we communicate that the Council of Europe is an important entity. We don't want to bombard you with too much information in one presentation. I wanted to make that point. We are going to go to Gunta for a good practice example of the Latvian presidency in 2015. Gunta, can you hear us?

>> GUNTA ANCA: Hello. Hello. Do you hear me now?

>> NAOMI MABITA: Hi. Yes, we can hear you. Perfect.

>> GUNTA ANCA: That's great. That's great.

>> NAOMI MABITA: All right. Could you please give us a small introduction? This presentation does not have a slide show. We are going on a question and answer basis. Please give us an introduction.

>> GUNTA ANCA: Okay. Thank you. My name is Gunta. I am the secretary of the Disability Forum. I am a chairperson of the ‑‑ organizations for people with disabilities. I am working hard on a national level and I know exactly how it works.   
 Can you hear me? Is everything okay?

>> NAOMI MABITA: Is it possible to put your microphone louder?

>> GUNTA ANCA: I don't think so but I can try to speak louder.

>> NAOMI MABITA: Yeah, okay.

>> GUNTA ANCA: Is it better now?

>> NAOMI MABITA: Can you hear properly?

>> No.

>> NAOMI MABITA: If we can get two minutes and try to fix this.

>> GUNTA ANCA: Okay.

>> NAOMI MABITA: Okay. We start.

>> GUNTA ANCA: Is it better?

>> NAOMI MABITA: Yeah. Yeah, we can hear you. Okay.

(Talking at the same time).

>> GUNTA ANCA: Maybe you can continue by questions and then we will see how it works.

>> NAOMI MABITA: Okay. Perfect. So we wanted to know a bit more about how you prepared for the presidency and how disability was included in the presidency of the program and what events and meetings maybe you managed to organize as part of it.

>> GUNTA ANCA: Okay. So it starts by what Marie already said, it is very, very important to start your preparation at least two years before the presidency because it is important to understand how you can manage to have disability issues in your presidency. To be honest, we have seen there are two different kinds of events. There could be events which are directly connected with disability issues. And the other part could be events where people are talking about different issues with disability is mainstreamed in the event. And maybe I can tell you a little bit more about those events we had in Latvia. For example, in Latvia we had three big events and those three big events were high level meetings on disability which was in May. Then we had one more big event about disaster management for people with disabilities. And one more big event was about the institutionalization which is also very important for our country on that moment and for the European Union in that moment. So we were very happy to have them there. Those are the three biggest events.

And then we have quite a lot of smaller events we use to talk about during our presidency. And those small events were a very different one, like, for example, about employment in general, what we speak about people with disabilities, too. Then, for example, about gender equality and then we spoke about women with disabilities there. Then we had an event on health care for patients. And then we spoke about patients and disabilities. So we try to mainstream all those comments of issues there. And I think it was a very good approach how we can do that.   
 Is it okay? Can you hear me?

>> NAOMI MABITA: We can hear you. There is a lot of background noise. But we did hear you. So we will ask you more questions. Did you feel ‑‑ (cutting out) for them in the agenda and what were the difficulties that you were facing?

>> GUNTA ANCA: Of course, we are doing it very proactive. Nobody came to us and said, of course, you have to do that. But we are doing proactive. And we started ‑‑ we started with office of presidency. You know, we have the Secretariat of the presidency of the Council in European Union. And this Secretariat was the one which was the most involved in all activities. We started with that office. But we also started very practically by going to each ministry. And by trying to find the issues which are the responsibility of that ministry. And, of course, it is much more easier when you go, for example, to the Ministry of Social Affairs. So you can talk about employment and about different kinds of supports, but even when you go to the Ministry of Economic you can talk about entrepreneurship for people with disabilities. Then you can go to Ministry of Transport and talk about passenger rights for people with disabilities. And then you can go to Ministry of, I don't know, health and talk about health care opportunities for people with disabilities. And all of them are really important.   
 So something like that.

>> NAOMI MABITA: Okay. Thank you. Sorry, it was a bit confusing hearing the voices in the background. Did you think it was the best presidency in terms of long term legacy?

>> GUNTA ANCA: Could you repeat your question? It was difficult to hear.

>> NAOMI MABITA: Yes. Did you think it was worth investing in the presidency in your long‑term legacy?

>> GUNTA ANCA: I think it was a very important part for our work because it gives a possible to be much more visible. And to show the European things, it was also very important to have involvement of European Union in Latvia. For example, I have prepared an opinion in the European Economic and Social Committee about the institutionalizations. And the event was part of the possibility to present this opinion in the (inaudible) which was very important for us.

>> NAOMI MABITA: Okay. Thank you. And do you have any advice for other DPOs?

>> GUNTA ANCA: The advice for DPOs, it is very important to start the service, if possible. It is very important to talk with your presidency office and to talk about very practical things. But, for example, not only about the issues you can talk but also about the very positive transportation will be organized. How accessible your meetings will be. How you can organize accessible places for accommodations because you never know what kind of Delegates will come from different countries. And those practical issues are also very important. Also we involve quite a lot of volunteers. And they helped us with the different issues, like to find accessible eating places or to help people during the event. So ‑‑ and it is also very important to have some kind of training for these volunteers and also for staff of the presidency office because they shouldn't understand there is not only people in the wheelchairs. They could be at different kind of disabilities, like blind or deaf people. And we should take them in to account when we are organizing the presidency meetings.

>> NAOMI MABITA: Okay. One more question. Were you able to get funding from the relevant ministries?

>> GUNTA ANCA: Yeah, we were able to get funding. We get funding for those three bigger events which was very great and also the possibility to get the mainstream involvement of disability, shows a possibility to talk about disabilities without additional funding for those events because those events were already organized by somebody. Somebody get funding. And our task was just to say oh, that's a great issue. And we would like to talk about disabilities there, too.

>> NAOMI MABITA: Okay. Is there anything you would like to add that I may not have asked?

>> GUNTA ANCA: No. Not yet.

>> NAOMI MABITA: All right. Then I think we can wrap it up for the presentation. Thank you. I don't see any further ‑‑ if you have any questions, make yourselves known. Questions in the question box.   
 Okay. So we are going to refer back to a bit before about the Council of Europe. Marie, if you want to take that one.

>> MARIE DENNINGHAUS: We already received a question or it was more for comment actually saying that the Council of Europe is an important organization. And maybe I wasn't clear enough in my presentation. Of course, it is a very important organization. I really didn't want to minimalize it. I just really tried to highlight that in this presentation. We kind of have to leave it out of the context because I think it is very confusing in the more different Councils you have. So I can maybe just give you some bit of context or background information that the person mentioned also about the Council of Europe. So it is an Intergovernmental Human Rights body. It exists since 1949. And it is connected to the EU in some ways. It is not EU institutions, but obviously it also taking up important issues that we also discuss in the EU framework. So this maybe just to give some you background, we absolutely did not want to minimalize the role of the Council of Europe. Just to clarify this. Any more questions?

>> NAOMI MABITA: Okay. So we got one more question. This one I guess is for ‑‑ I think this is for both Gunta and Marie, France will have the presidency in two years, in 2022. What can be done now in France to prepare for the presidency? First, Gunta. Gunta, can you hear us?

>> GUNTA ANCA: Yeah, maybe it is a good idea if you have a presidency in two years as I can see, you can find out where is your office of presidency in France to start your conversation with them. To find out what kind of ideas they have already, do they have any ideas. And explain how important disability issues are and how important it is to include in the presidency. And when you get there, France presidency already, what do they have in their pocket, then you can try to explain more how you would be happy to be involved. Maybe it works.

>> MARIE DENNINGHAUS: Maybe I can add, in terms of organization the EDF Secretariat can also support you. This is one of the roles that we have. So, of course, your national organization in France and the member of EDF which is (inaudible) they will take the lead role, but we can support you in a sense that we coordinate a little bit the work towards the Council and the presidencies. So I can explain to you what we do already is that we have at our board meetings we meet regularly with the members that have upcoming presidencies to discuss informally what are the priorities that you see from a national level. And then we can combine this with priorities that we see on an EU level. What we do then is that we draft a paper with disability priorities for the presidency, which then you can use obviously when communicating with the presidency office, with the different ministries and with your contacts and that we can use on an EU level. And we are also helping you to organize high level meetings, for example, with the Ambassador.

So the permanent representative here in Brussels. So that when you come to Brussels we have the meeting also to brief the staff of the permanent representation to ‑‑ as Gunta mentioned, for example, to give training. I think this is something also quite important that you can then prepare and to also in some cases the permanent representation staff they are not ‑‑ mostly they are not experts on disability. This is also very important to know. So it is really good to first put disability on the agenda and the EDF Secretariat we are also there to support you.

>> NAOMI MABITA: All right. So we've got another question. This one is what were the disability priorities proposed by EDF to Croatia.

>> MARIE DENNINGHAUS: I hope I will remember. I am taking this question, Gunta. I hope you don't mind because I drafted the paper. We oriented it along the general lines of what policy issues are relevant at the moment. We, for example, put the budget, now still the negotiations about the EU budget to make sure that there will be money for DPOs in the budget. And also that accessibility, for example, is included in the structural funds regulations that there will be no EU money spent, for example, on new institutions. That is the part on the budget.

Then another priority under the Croatian presidency is at the moment the revision of the rail passengers rights regulation. So that is also high on the agenda. And then I know that from the national level, there was also a request to include disability assessment. That was something which was brought in and we will have actually a conference in May on exactly this topic, on disability assessment and also financing of DPOs I think this is also quite relevant. So we have really a mixture. All the relevant topics that are on the agenda at the moment are, of course, related to the implementation of the CRPD. But this is now just to mention a couple of concrete policy files. We have the document, of course. So I can ‑‑ we can also distribute it. I think it is even on our website already to be uploaded. So normally you should find it on our website, edf‑feph.org.

>> NAOMI MABITA: Okay. Any more questions? Okay. I don't think there will be any more questions. So this will all be recorded and available online. We will also have an accessible transcript. So yes, if you have any more questions you can contact us. Contact the people that you heard today from Marie Denninghaus and Gunta Anca. And that is all for today. Thank you to our live interpreters and our captionist. But we hope that you found this useful and that yeah, and that you have a lovely day. Thank you.

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