



**To:**

President Roberta Metsola  
European Parliament

President Ursula Von Der Leyen  
European Commission

**CC:**

Secretary General Alessandro Chiocchetti,  
European Parliament

Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli  
European Commission

**Brussels, 7 August 2023**  
Ref. EDF-23-69-YV-AM

**Subject: Continued improvement of the accessibility for persons with disabilities of the address of the State of the European Union.**

Dear Presidents,

As stated in our letters of 15 September 2022, the European Disability Forum welcomed last year's efforts by the European Commission and the European Parliament in introducing certain accessibility measures at the State of the European Union address. The addition of international sign interpretation on the European Commission's Twitter feed, as well as the provision of automatically generated live subtitling through a dedicated webpage by the European Parliament were steps in the right direction, which made this important debate more inclusive to millions of Europeans with disabilities.

Nevertheless, we ask to build on last year's measures and provide additional improvements.

European Disability Forum, Mundo Madou, 8 Ave des Arts, Brussels, Belgium Contact:  
[alejandromoledo@edf-feph.org](mailto:alejandromoledo@edf-feph.org)

There are many persons with disabilities who do not have access to certain social media platforms. Besides, many citizens with disabilities may not notice the accessibility features put in place by the European Commission and the European Parliament if there are delivered through different and separated ad hoc methods. We strongly recommend implementing accessibility measures in the mainstream communication channels of this important debate, as it also gives visibility to the diversity we stand for in the European Union.

We would also like to draw your attention to the fact that automatic captioning is not in line with [recommendations from representative organisations of persons with disabilities who are deaf and hard of hearing](#), less so in such important debate for the European Union.

Thus, to ensure that the event is inclusive and reaches all EU citizens, we request that the institutions coordinate and implement additional measures to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities, following the excellent examples implemented during the [5<sup>th</sup> European Parliament of Persons with Disabilities](#) jointly organised by the European Parliament and EDF.

As already stated in [our letter from last year](#), we call on the EU Institutions to:

- Provide real-time interpretation in international sign language in the main broadcasting channels of the institutions, including webstreams on the official websites.
- Provide human-generated live captioning with, if feasible, the possibility of automatic translation into other languages.
- Make available interpretation in national sign language through the national Liaison Offices of the European Parliament.
- Provide an “Easy to Read” summary of the speech of the President of the European Commission.

We thank you for providing a text version of the speech every year, which is essential for persons with disabilities and those unable to follow the live event.

These measures will ensure that the EU respects its commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. They will specifically advance the implementation of Article 9 (on accessibility) and Article 29 (on participation in political and public life).

We stand ready to support the continuation of the important accessibility advances of the last years’ debate, as we did during the 5<sup>th</sup> European Parliament of Persons with Disabilities. We believe that the level of accessibility of the webstreamed video of the latter should be the norm, not the exception, and we hope that the European Parliament will live up to the accessibility standards that it is capable to meet, also as host of the State of the European Union debate. In short, we ask you to continue to cement your legacy in making the EU institutions more inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

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Regarding the European Commission's political priorities, which will be set during this address, we applaud last year's inclusion of the initiative on the European Disability Card, and we encourage this Commission to continue its efforts in disability rights by considering the demands of the [European disability movement's manifesto](#) recently adopted at the European Parliament of Persons with Disabilities.

We thank you very much for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Yannis Vardakastanis', written in a cursive style.

**Yannis Vardakastanis**  
EDF President