

**37<sup>TH</sup>**  
EPRA  
**MEETING**

**KRAKÓW**  
8-10 May 2013



### Working Group 3

#### > Round Table on Access to Audiovisual Media Services for persons with disabilities

#### Summary of the discussion

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#### Introduction

Working group Chair **Damir Hajduk** opened the round table by introducing the topic. The issue of media and accessibility has already been twice on the agenda of an EPRA meeting, in Istanbul in October 2004 and in Tallinn in May 2009. Four years after that date, the issue of accessible audiovisual media services is still high on the European agenda. It is thus timely to re-examine the issue from the particular point of view of broadcasting regulatory authorities to report on changes and to measure any progress accomplished since the last EPRA mapping exercise.

**Mia Ahlgren**<sup>1</sup>, representing the [European Disability Forum](#) (EDF), an umbrella organization for European Disability NGOs and a network on ICT accessibility, presented the recent activities of EDF (inter alia the campaigns on Freedom of movement and web accessibility) and the issues at stake. She emphasized the changes in the portrayal of disability over the recent years with a shift from passive to active, in other words from a 'medical' model to a social, human right perspective. In parallel, the media landscape is also experiencing profound changes further to digitalization, with users gradually becoming more active and the development of multiple screens. Active involvement of users and users' organisations has proved its worth as illustrated by the 2010 Almedalen experiment for accessible live casting<sup>2</sup> or the Amara project<sup>3</sup>. She explained the differences between the different access services such as subtitles (closed, live), sign language interpretation (closed emerging), audio description and spoken subtitles (notably used in Finland and Denmark). She concluded by stressing the importance of monitoring from a user perspective (is the user informed about access services?), of quality indicators for accessibility usability (user reports), of sharing knowledge (on technical development, costs and user tests), a multi stakeholder approach especially concerning standards and innovation.

The presentation was followed by a lively exchange with the participants of the round table.

#### On the quality of access services

In the UK, the quality of live subtitling is a current concern. A consultation, which will focus on speed, accuracy and presentation to improve user experience, is scheduled for the end of May 2013<sup>4</sup>. A statement with the outcome of the consultation is expected for the end of the year. The 2011 review of the access services policy in Ireland also had a general focus on quality. In France, a Charter on the quality of subtitling was signed in 2011 between the regulator CSA, the Ministry and broadcasters. The charter is a soft-law instrument, yet the first results are encouraging. The focus is now on the quality of sign

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<sup>1</sup> Mia Ahlgren's presentation is available here: <http://www.epra.org/attachments/krakow-wg3-accessibility-presentation-by-mia-ahlgren>

<sup>2</sup> <http://westreamu.se/almedalen2010-en/>

<sup>3</sup> Amara gives individuals, communities, and larger organisations the power to overcome accessibility and language barriers for online video by providing free, open source collaborative tools to ease the work of subtitling and translating video: <http://www.amara.org/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.epra.org/news\\_items/accessibility-ofcom-s-proposals-to-improve-the-quality-of-subtitling](http://www.epra.org/news_items/accessibility-ofcom-s-proposals-to-improve-the-quality-of-subtitling)

language interpretation, an agreement on a non-binding instrument might be reached by the end of the year.

#### **On the issue of costs in a time of crisis**

A representative from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland reported about the development of access services in the Irish media, starting from introducing forcibly set incremental targets primarily around subtitles in 2005, to the two reviews of the system in 2008 and in 2011. The last review took place in a time of recession with major revenue drops for broadcasters, and saw some of the original targets lowered, and converted to ranges. This has caused some tensions with user groups, even though the cooperation with user groups is generally seen as positive and includes quarterly meetings.

In the Netherlands, it was reported that some niche/thematic PSB channels had a low level of compliance with access services and claimed that it was cost-related. The Dutch regulator experienced difficulties to assess the validity of the arguments.

In Slovakia, several broadcasters reported costs problems concerning audio description. The regulator undertook research on the issue of costs and the situation eventually improved.

It was remarked that as markets grow and a new business sector emerges, there has been a significant drop in costs for subtitling: in some jurisdictions from 60 EUR to only 3 or 4 EUR a minute.

In the UK, Ofcom intends to discuss the issue of costs with representative associations in the near future.

The ITU focus group on accessibility will also publish research on costs.

#### **On access services, democracy and participation**

In France, the CSA recently requested broadcasters to make the annual campaign on the protection of minors and official electoral campaigns (presidential and legislative) accessible to hearing and visually impaired persons. Similar obligations were introduced in Malta by the Broadcasting Authority during electoral campaigns. With only 400 000 inhabitants, Malta does not have legal provisions on the level of access services, even if the portrayal of disabled persons is addressed by the legal framework.

In order to allow disabled persons to play an active part in the community, the importance of accessible local news and children programmes was emphasized.

#### **Conclusions and follow-up**

It is important to adopt a holistic approach to accessibility (encompassing broadcasting, ICT and other sectors) as well as a multi-stakeholder approach.

The comparative document prepared by the EPRA Secretariat as a background document for the working group will be circulated among EPRA members for final comments and improvements prior to publication on the EPRA website.

<http://www.epra.org/attachments/krakow-wg3-accessibility-comparative-document-final-version>

EPRA members are warmly encouraged to keep the EPRA Secretariat informed about any significant development with regard to access services in their respective jurisdictions.