

A Step Forward for Autism: The New Declaration by European Union

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Introduction

“2015” can be considered “the year of Autism”. After the first Italian law on autism, approved by Italian Parliament on 7th July [1], a new progress has been achieved for the world of Autism.

In September, the European Union (EU) - European Parliament has officially adopted the Written Declaration on Autism [2]. This document has been co-signed by 418 members of the European Parliament and wants to be an official guide-line to all EU Member States to face the Autism, a syndrome which is striking down “the future of the world”: our children.

The text provides measures designed to ensure the protection of health, improvement of living conditions and the inclusion in the social life of people with autism spectrum disorders.

Until now, the only document adopted by the European Parliament was the “Charter for person with Autism”, drafted in 1996 by Autism-Europe, an international association whose main objective is to advance the rights of people with autism and their families and to help them improving their quality of life [3]. That document was a list of the rights of people with autism with reference to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Handicapped Persons (1971) and other relevant declaration of Human Rights.

In the last 20 years, the number of children diagnosed with autism has increased by more than 600% and a huge number of scientists are hardly working to investigate the causes of this dramatic increase. In United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), one child on 88 is affected by autism [4]. According to statistics made by Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), autism hits 1% of world population. In Italy there is no national statistical control on the syndrome and there are just few Regions, such as Emilia Romagna and Piemonte, which, independently, collect data on autism. It has been estimated that the families involved are approximately 500thousands.

The official European Parliament Written Declaration will give to all European States one common direction to understand, cure and rehabilitate children and adults with autism. The first step will be the creation of a database to collect and share, for a useful exchange of information and point of views, data about annual increasing of autism

and multidisciplinary researches all over the world. Indeed, what the Written Declaration should do is to call the European Union and its Member States to adopt a common European strategy for autism, including:

Harmonization of evidence-based approaches to autism across Europe, including detection and diagnosis procedures

Encouraging research on autism

Supporting exchange of best practices

All that should increase the knowledge about autism in order to allow EU Member States to respond more effectively to the needs of persons affected and their families. As happened in the past with the “Charter for persons with Autism”, probably the new Written Declaration of the European Parliament will be used to advocate for improvements in support for people with autism at national level. However, it is noteworthy to consider that that the Written Declaration on Autism is under the Rule 136 of Parliament’s Rules of Procedure, which expressly says that “The contents of such a declaration may not go beyond the form of a declaration. In particular, it may not call for any legislative action, contain any decision on matters for which specific procedures and competencies are laid down in these Rules of Procedure or deal with the subject of ongoing proceedings in Parliament” [5]. The European Parliament Written Declaration should be considered a new step towards the world of Autism; it could be considered as the sign and the common will to know more about this drama, which flows from the consciousness that Autism has now become epidemic.

References

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