

**CLOSING CONFERENCE OF THE PILOT PROJECT 'BUILD FOR
ALL'**

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, STRASBOURG

ON 15 NOVEMBER, 2006

ADDRESS BY VLADIMIR ŠPIDLA,

EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER

**DIRECTORATE FOR EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND EQUAL
OPPORTUNITIES**

Ladies and gentlemen

The European Commission is a very strong supporter of creating an accessible built environment in the European Union. That is why we have chosen accessibility as a key theme when selecting pilot projects to fund with the money granted to the European Commission disability unit by the European Parliament for 2005-2006. I hope that this conference will illustrate to those of you who were instrumental in providing this money that the money has been well spent. For my part, I would like to congratulate the partnership co-ordinated by Info-Handicap for their very hard work in creating the Build for All Reference Manual launched to-day.

An accessible built environment is extremely important for all of us, not merely from the technical aspects of building construction but going well beyond that. It means being able to get into your place of education or workplace, in being able to travel either for work or leisure purposes, and in being able to play a full part in your communities. If you cannot get into your school or university building you will find it very difficult to get a good education. If you cannot enter your office building your employment opportunities will be greatly reduced. If public transport systems are not accessible then you may not even be able to get to the workplace even if it is accessible. If hospitals, banks, post offices and shops are not accessible you will not be able to conduct even the most basic business of daily living. Above all you risk being excluded from society and cannot play your full part in community life. And this exclusion affects all of us - not simply those of us who are disabled - because a diverse society is a strong and inclusive society and one that enriches everybody.

The technical aspects of building design and construction are largely matters for national authorities but the European institutions do have an important role to play. As many of you here will know, the newly adopted ESF and Structural Fund Regulations contain, for the very first time, provisions on accessibility for disabled persons. Article 16 of the new rules states that: "in particular accessibility for disabled persons shall be one of the criteria to be observed in defining operations co-financed by the funds and to be taken into account during the various stages of implementation".

I am therefore particularly pleased that within the Build for All project, the Info-Handicap partnership has chosen to concentrate on this particular aspect of accessibility, namely to produce the Build for All Reference Manual you will see here today. This manual is targeted in particular at national authorities who apply for public funding to finance buildings. It contains important advice partly from the point of view of why it is essential to make buildings accessible, and partly on how best to include accessibility in applications for financial assistance from the funds.

Our overall objective now is to ensure that public funds are never again used to finance buildings that disabled people, or any other user, cannot get into, move around in or use the services provided. We will therefore consider very carefully how best to take this work forward and to ensure that the Build for All Reference Manual it is made as widely available as possible.

Thank you.