



## Information for the media, 26 September 2019

### Come to the Freedom Drive!

#### What is it about?

On 1 – 3 October, over 300 disabled activists from across Europe will gather in Brussels for the 9th Freedom Drive of the European Network on Independent Living - ENIL. At a time when most European Governments are cutting back on the rights of disabled people and other marginalised groups, they will be asking the new European Parliament and the European Commission to renew their commitment to the rights of disabled people.

#### What is going to happen during the Freedom Drive?

Activists, their personal assistants and allies will attend workshops, march through Brussels in protest against oppression and segregation and attend a hearing in the European Parliament on the freedom of movement and disability. A conference on Independent Living and the future European Disability Strategy will also take place, as well as a meeting of the World Independent Living Network (WIN), in cooperation with the Japanese Independent Living Centre. ENIL will also be celebrating its 30th anniversary.

#### When is the protest taking place?

The protest march will begin at 10:00 at Parc du Cinquantaire and end in front of the European Parliament. An art installation – a cage “funded by the European Union” – will be placed in front of the European Commission (DG Employment) during the protest.

#### What are the three Freedom Drive demands?

- Mainstream disability in all policy areas and ensure that the future European Disability Strategy is fully aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- End institutional care and promote access to community-based services and Personal Assistance for all those in need.
- Promote the freedom of movement for all by working towards a common European social framework.

#### Practical information:

- The overview of the week, agendas of the different events and locations of all the meetings can be found here: [https://enil.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Loud-and-Proud\\_web2409.pdf](https://enil.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Loud-and-Proud_web2409.pdf)
- For statements and interviews, please come to Parc du Cinquantaire on 2 October 2019 at 9:00, or call Frank Sioen (ENIL) at + 32 474888610
- Press contacts: Frank Sioen (ENIL) + 32 474888610 [frank.sioen@enil.eu](mailto:frank.sioen@enil.eu) and Nadia Hadad (ENIL) + 32 472 28 50 38
- For more information, see: <https://enil.eu/campaigns/freedom-drive/9th-enil-fd-sept-2oct-2019/>

## Who is coming to the Freedom Drive?



“When I was little, my mum used to call me ‘a little bird’. Probably, that is when I developed such a strong desire to move freely and do things my own way. So, as I became disabled, my home was turned into a cage and I got stuck all the time in this inaccessible world. I learned that I was simply unable to accept a way of life where I cannot spread my wings and fly. I just need to be free! So I am an Independent Living activist and a law student. I was born and grew up in Estonia and live in Sweden today.” (Mari Siilsalu, Estonia)



“My name is Nicolas Joncour. I’m a French non speaking autistic student (in Law). I’m almost 20 years old. In France, only 20% autistic children go to school, sometimes only for some hours a week but most of them are in an institution or in a psychiatric hospital with no education. But, I have fortunately always been at school, mainstreamed or home schooling. I would like to get a degree in disability rights. I am a member of the ENIL Youth Network, Clé-autisme (an association of autistic people who are against the medical model of disability) and CHA (the French independent living association). I was 16 when I joined ENIL’s Youth Network, because I started to realise how much we have to fight for our rights.” (Nicolas Joncour, France)



“When I was 20 years old, I got diagnosed with the neurological disease MS. It was a very hard time, not only for the worries and the anxiousness over my disease and how it would develop, but also how I felt like a less important citizen. Someone less valid, without a voice to listen to. After I came in contact with the Independent Living movement, everything has changed. I now feel like I’m in charge over my own life. I can continue my work and I have started to dance. But there are obstacles. I often think about how fragile our society is and that we have to attach value to, and look after our rights.” (Ylva Andersson, Sweden)



“As a blind person from birth, I have been fighting for my dignity and as much as possible independence. I received a degree in political science from Belgrade University in 1987. In 1991, I started to work for a blind association in Tuzla and I have stayed there during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. All the time, I have tried to motivate other blind young people to work on their independence and self esteem. I am preparing myself [for the Freedom Drive] to be loud and proud, and I want to meet as much as possible new people from different countries around Europe. Also, I think that most important is the motivation and support to young people to be much more active in advocacy for our right to independence and equality in the societies in which we are living.” (Suvad Zahirović, Bosnia and Herzegovina)



“I first got in contact with Independent Living about seven years ago and it was an immediate match with my vision of disability. Independent Living has become my base for all my life and work. I have been involved in many projects about Independent Living in Portugal, helping in the development and implementation of pilot-projects. I also use Independent Living principles in my daily work. Independent Living has changed my life forever, and had a huge impact on my quality of life, especially with personal assistance, making me able to become independent from my family and friends, to do what I want.” (Diogo Martins, Portugal)



“My name is Kamil Goungor, I am 31 and I live in Athens, Greece. I am a wheelchair user, with very limited mobility, therefore I need assistance almost 24 hours a day. In Greece we don't have Independent Living (IL) and Personal Assistance (PA), so my family has to play that role. Until 2013 I had no idea what IL and PA are, but then I was invited to be part of the first Greek delegation to the Freedom Drive 2013. Together with 10 other young disabled persons and our PAs, we went to Strasbourg and it was eye opening for us. We spoke with many Europeans and learnt what IL is. I, personally, understood how important it is, and that from Independent Living starts everything else, and decided to be more active. When we came back to Greece some of us decided that something needs to be done in the country, so we founded i-living, the first Independent Living Organization in Greece.” (Kamil Goungor, Greece)

## About the Freedom Drive

The ENIL Freedom Drive is one of the key campaigns of the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) – held every two years since 2003. It provides supporters of the Independent Living Movement with the unique opportunity to meet Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and promote human rights issues, and to share experiences and ideas with colleagues from around Europe. The first 6 editions of the event took place in Strasbourg, until 2015, when the venue was changed to Brussels for strategic reasons.

The ENIL 2019 Freedom Drive will take place in Brussels once again, between the 1st and 3rd of October. It will consist of a number of events, including workshops and a conference, and culminate in a protest march to the European Parliament on the 2nd of October. We will also use this opportunity to celebrate ENIL's 30th anniversary. Under the motto "Loud and Proud", we will reflect on our past achievements, as well as on the future that lies ahead.

## About the European Network on Independent Living

The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) is a Europe-wide network of disabled people, with members throughout Europe. ENIL is a forum for all disabled people, Independent Living organizations and their non-disabled allies on the issues of Independent Living. ENIL represents the disability movement for human rights and social inclusion based on solidarity, peer support, deinstitutionalization, democracy, self-representation, cross disability and self-determination.

ENIL's mission is to advocate and lobby for Independent Living values, principles and practices, namely for a barrier-free environment, provision of personal assistance support and adequate technical aids, together making full citizenship of disabled people possible. ENIL's activities target European, national and local administrations, politicians, media, and the general society. ENIL works to strengthen the empowerment of disabled people, mainly through providing resources for peer support and peer-to-peer training. ENIL enhances the European disability sector by providing an arena for the sharing of disabled people's experience of services and by providing economical, logistics and technical expertise on independent living. ENIL prides itself on providing a strong platform for grassroots activists and organizations.

For more information, visit [www.enil.eu](http://www.enil.eu)

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