



**Speech of Ms. Marie-Dominique Simonet, Minister on Compulsory Education and Social Promotion, in the MIPIE conference, 1.–3.12.2010, Brussels (read by Jean-François Delsarte)**

*(Summary translation prepared by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education).*

On the 6<sup>th</sup> July 2010 we celebrated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Law on Special Education that was voted for unanimously in 1970. Since this date many texts have been proposed to the members of the EU that have influenced practice in the field of special needs education, such as Salamanca in 1994 and The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We all state clearly that every child or adult with disabilities as well as their families should enjoy the same right to a quality education as any other person in order to maximize their potential and to have them participate to an inclusive society, as well as the right to know-how and to adequate resources in order to satisfy their educational and rehabilitation needs.

When the signatories of the Salamanca statement reunited in Dublin 15 years after the agreement was signed, the importance of special needs education as a support and resource centre for inclusion projects was recalled.

Inclusive education is an ongoing process thanks to which mainstream schools have transformed into more welcoming environments for all kinds of pupils. It is obvious that this process requires a global system where special schools can function more and more as resource centers that offer educational and support services.

The whole process needs to be seen as a development towards a society that is inclusive for all. Inclusive education won't become a reality without networking and shared learning between all stakeholders. For this to be done, there is need for a common vision as well as energetic engagement in all levels.

In the French speaking community of Belgium we have been able to enjoy quality special needs education for almost 40 years now. The decree of 5<sup>th</sup> February 2009 has shown that integration within this domain has been fruitful. In 2009/2010, 523 SEN pupils have been integrated into mainstream education and have been able to receive appropriate support from the personnel working in SNE. There are almost 800 pupils that take part in this ambitious project for the school year 2010/2011.

In the French speaking community of Belgium parents have now three possibilities for their children. These are mainstream schools, special schools or integrated schools. The inclusive approach that we are developing does not exclude the possibility of a pupil with SEN to go to a special school if the analysis of her/his needs or the situation requires it. Our goal is to find a school where a pupil with SEN feels her-/himself in the best situation.

It must not be thought that the use of the term 'inclusive' would mean an intention to integrate all the pupils with SEN to mainstream schools which would mean the closing down of all special schools. We need expertise that is developed in the framework of partnership between mainstream schools and special schools for the good of the pupils that they educate.

This is the reason for which I think that the term 'education' is without a doubt more appropriate than the terms 'integration' or 'inclusion', when considering the reality in the French speaking community of Belgium, because it includes all the pupils whatever their needs might be. Therefore, the first goal consists of the development of their learning



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needs and their competencies so that they can integrate in our wider society and in the world of adults.

Mobilization is important in the level of educational teams around this ambitious project for the promotion of integration. The decree missions of 24<sup>th</sup> July 1997 specify that the educational project of each school should set choices and implement priority actions to promote the integration of the pupils with SEN. This means that every educational team has the obligation to reflect upon adapting their educational project from this point of view. This in itself is already a revolution!

Our political role consists therefore of building a future for our youngsters that we welcome in our schools. This is a big challenge, but with addressing the questions of integration and searching for solutions to them, whilst respecting transparency and all people, we can achieve our goal.

I hope that your work will contribute to this philosophy so that we can continue to promote our project.