

9 October 2014

**Dear Almunia, Montebourg and other European leaders,  
Autism is not an insult, it's a disability.**

**Following Commissioner Almunia's remarks insulting people with autism, Autism-Europe is calling on all European leaders to stop denigrating people with disabilities.**

On Tuesday, the European Commissioner for Competition, Joaquin Almunia, told an [official press conference](#): "I care. I am a person. I am not an autist."

His comment was made in a European Commission press conference in response to a journalist who asked him if he cared about the risks involved in a particular project that is receiving state aid from the EU.

Almunia's comment follows a string of recent incidents in which high profile European leaders have used the terms 'autism' and 'autistic' as insults.

In January, the then French Minister for Productivity, Arnaud Montebourg, was reported in [Le Monde](#) as insulting Almunia by saying he showed traits of autism.

In 2009, [The Guardian](#) reported the then French Minister for Europe, Pierre Lellouche, criticising the United Kingdom's Conservative Party by saying: "They have one line and they just repeat one line. It is a very bizarre sense of autism."

Autism-Europe's Director, Aurélie Baranger, responds: "Autism is not an insult. It is a disability."

Autism affects between 1 in 100 and 1 in 150 people. This amounts to at least 3 million people with autism in the European Union.

"European leaders must immediately refrain from using autism or any other mental or physical condition as an insult," Ms Baranger continues.

"As national and international leaders, they must demonstrate respect for human diversity and set a standard for others to follow".

The European Union has ratified the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) which calls for "Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity" (Article 3).

Autism-Europe calls on all current and upcoming Commissioners and other European leaders to make themselves familiar with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

"People with autism throughout Europe already face many barriers and much discrimination. Additional negative stereotyping in the media only leads to further stigmatisation and difficulties for them."

[Autism](#) is a lifelong disability that affects the development and functioning of the brain. People who have autism experience difficulty with communication, social interaction and often display restricted interests and repetitive behaviours. Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means that the symptoms vary between individuals, ranging from mild to severe.

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