

EVERY VOTE COUNTS

NEEDED: INCLUSIVE AGORAE



A European *Who's Who* asserts that, born in 1881, he died in 1952. Yet, I find him in February 1977 in an industrial city on the Danube River. At 96, he is very much alive. His daughter, son-in-law, a long-life friend, a photographer, and I can barely handle his *joie de vivre*.

I interview the famous *literatorus* for nine hours and am mesmerized by his vitality. It contrasts grotesquely with the landscape surrounding us. His country is one of ruin and despair, labeled "a Sahara of the spirit" not long ago.

The lunch is at an end. "Would you like to have an espresso?" asks his daughter.

"But of course. *Con molto piacere, mia cara*. A double one, please."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. I would appreciate it if my new, young friend—thirty-two, right?—will bring me to the window. I understand that it's a glorious day and want to see the ships on the Danube."

"But...but you are blind, aren't you?" someone said.

"And so what?" he bursts into laughter. "I am still alive and can see everything I want to. I was a poet, painter, piano player, and lawyer. Why would it be such a big deal to see the ships on my lovely Danube?"

It was one of the fundamental lessons I learned about people with disabilities and the people that disable them through ignorance, carelessness, or a mere lack of imagination. That European *Who's Who* actually considered and pronounced this poet dead when he became totally blind in 1952.

The ancient Greeks, the forbearers of democracy, used the heart of their cities or the central market—the *Agora*—as the place to practice political inclusiveness. Today's world is deeply in need of more inclusive agorae, strikingly so when it comes to exercising the right to vote. He who cannot see

this simple truth is truly disabled, for sometimes blindness is a state of mind.

This issue of our magazine pays homage to all brave persons with disabilities who fight for their right to vote. And, it is a red card to the ones who do not fulfill their duty of making sure that these votes are cast and counted properly. *Elections Today* has invited IFES' consultant on disabilities, Jerry Mindes, to be the Guest Editor of this issue, in recognition of his indefatigable work in a domain where changing the mindset will hopefully leave prejudice disabled for good.

Editor-in-Chief

