



Joint 5th Joint AEMH-FEMS General Assembly 10-11 May 2024, Berlin, Germany

Members reports

Slovenia

- **Severe shortage of physicians and other health care workers**
- **The breakdown of the public health care system**
- **Government ignorance on actual problems in the health care system**

FIDES Report

Physicians in Slovenia have been on strike for over 100 days, which is likely one of the longest strikes in the European Union and the world. And the strike is still going on.

With the current Slovenian government, led by the party Gibanje Svoboda (Freedom Movement), physicians have already signed two strike agreements in October 2022 and January 2023. These were tied to improvement of working conditions and elimination of salary disparities in the career development of physicians. By signing these agreements, we have twice suspended the strike threat, but this same government has never implemented them. We are concerned about the government's actions, as it not only fails to fulfil its promises but also fails to fulfil the commitments she has signed and published in the Official Gazette. Despite promises of a thorough reform of the healthcare system, which Slovenia desperately needs, over the past two years, nothing has been done to reverse the trend of deterioration in Slovenian public healthcare.

Slovenian physicians are working in impossible conditions, and Slovenian public healthcare is only functioning based on ethical drive and the considerable overtime work of Slovenian physicians, who forfeit their right to a 40-hour workweek to keep public healthcare operational.

The government's thoughtless actions ignore all calls for action regarding the cessation of the strike and finding solutions for Slovenian public healthcare. The government's approaches, which we have not seen in Slovenia before, hinder the stabilization of the currently disastrous conditions in Slovenian public healthcare, which we, Slovenian physicians, aim to draw attention to with our strike.

The Slovenian government evidently wants to maintain a uniform salary system for the entire public sector at all costs, a system not known in such a form in any other EU country, even at the expense of sacrificing the public healthcare system. Many physicians, especially the young ones, do not want to work in such conditions anymore and are therefore leaving for abroad and the private sector. Since the government is not responsive to this, its actions will result in the flourishing of private healthcare and the collapse of the public sector, despite the government's declarative efforts to achieve the opposite.

The rhetoric of the Prime Minister and other representatives of the ruling Gibanje Svoboda party has personally affected physicians greatly, as there have been numerous insulting remarks publicly made against physicians in recent months. Physicians from all over Slovenia are therefore addressing the public with personal and collective letters that have flooded Slovenian media. Slovenian physicians have had enough; they will no longer accept such conditions and gross insults. Therefore, we are legitimately concerned about the existence of Slovenian public healthcare.

Already in December last year, with concern, we turned to the president of the FEMS in order to use his influence and word to somehow convince the current government to reach an agreement with the FIDES trade union and prevent the announced strike. This was followed by written support from the President of FEMS to FIDES and a video statement.

The strike was announced in mid-December last year, a warning one-day strike was carried out on 9 January, the next day we sat down with the government negotiating group at the negotiating table, and on 15 January a general strike by doctors began, which is still ongoing. At this point, I would like to say that, according to the law, we have very limited what we have to do during the strike, so some significant disruptions in the healing process were not noticed during the first month. Therefore, the union has decided to propose to doctors to revoke consent for overtime work, which an individual physician can voluntarily give to an employer. This is work in line with the European Working Time Directive and it was only this measure that showed how weak the public health care system is. Although not all physicians gave revocation of consent, it is estimated that there were about 40 to 50 percent of such physicians, the disruption in the system of patient treatment was quite significant. Employers warned of this, the union suffered a media lynching, but the government did not provide a solution to end the strike. The attempt at mediation also failed.

FEMS representative Jean-Paul Zerbib and HLS president (Renata Čulinović Čaić) visited us in mid-February this year. At a high-profile press conference, both were critical of the current government's actions, but nothing happened after that. In the meantime the negotiations with the government negotiating group were held without progress.

In mid-March Ljubljana hosted a CPME meeting. During the meeting, the presidents of the CPME (Christiaan Keijzer) and FEMS (Joao de Deus) appeared in front of the media. Unfortunately, their critical address to the government did not bring the views of the government and the trade union closer together. This led to the internationalization of the strike, which contributed to the written statement of CPME members to EU Commission and is added as an attachment.

Proof that the government does not intend to negotiate with us and implement the two signed agreements is also the fact that it is trying in any way to interrupt the strike or limit its

scope by playing the card fatigue of the participants in the strike. To this end, first through a government decree, it further tightened the conditions of the strike with administrative obligations for the doctor during the strike, followed by an amendment to the Medical Service Act, which added to the increased scope of work during the strike even higher penalties for non-compliance. The FIDES legal service has already submitted the government decree to the Constitutional Court for review, which has been delayed by a month. That is why an amendment to the law is now in force, which will also be subject to constitutional review.

FIDES continues its activities, encourages membership and keeps them informed. We're not going to end the strike unless something drastic happens. However, it is already clear to everyone that the public health care system is deteriorating and with a non-functioning government and not taking action in terms of solving accumulated problems there will be no more public health care system like we know.

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