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**“The European employers in the public sector must not abuse their employees’ pensions to solve self-inflicted budgetary problems”, said Christian CHAPUIS, the president of the USSP/CESI.**

The Association of Public Sector Trade Unions of CESI (USSP) held a **conference on the future of pensions in the public service sector** in its offices in Brussels on Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> May. Experts from various countries and the member organisations of the USSP discussed the impact of the demographic change on Europe’s pension systems.

**Mr Ralf Jacob** of the Commission’s directorate-general Employment and social affairs gave a detailed report on the **“Open Method of Coordination”** (OMC). The OMC is a non-binding method which allows the EU member states to compare their pension systems as well as the efforts of reform made in the field. The process was launched in 2000 and will continue to raise important political questions.

**Mr Johan Janssens**, a senior official of the Belgian pensions’ administration, presented the national pension system and the measures taken by the government to stabilize it. Naturally, the **Belgian case** was debated in the setting of the high public debt, the decline in the birth rate and the increase in life-expectancy. Other examples were also highlighted and it soon became obvious that countries like Italy, Spain and Germany are most challenged by the demographic dip and its socio-economic consequences.

The conference also dealt with another specific national example. **Mr Daniel Jean**, the director-general of the **French PREFON**, an **complementary pension scheme for the civil servants**, explained what this optional scheme offers and how it works in France. The trade union representatives appreciated this as an interesting model to further promote sustainability. Still, they stressed that especially in the public service sector reliable and adequate pensions are an integral part of the fiduciary relation between the state as the employer and the civil servant or employee.

**“Public service employees and civil servants guarantee the rule of law. They are neutral and independent. They are there for the citizens. And they are loyal to the state. The state in return must be loyal and can’t use the public service as its piggy-bank”, insisted a German member of the USSP work-group.**

There was unanimity among the participants that the undeniable difficulties some member states are presently facing cannot be overcome by unfair cuts in the civil servants’ pensions.

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