

Dear Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today.

As you may well know, I represent an old and historic education union, the Federation of Secondary Education State School Teachers – known as OLME, which has a great many struggles to show for the protection of free, public education. Upon occasion, OLME has submitted several proposals and suggestions for that matter at a European level and beyond.

I also come from a country that has been deeply hit by the extortionate implementation of Memoranda and is presently facing a huge humanitarian crisis. Recession and unemployment have skyrocketed, businesses continue to be closing down one after the other, and the health and education sectors are malfunctioning due to lack of sufficient funding. Surely, all these are corollaries of the implementation of extreme neoliberal policies and austerity practices in Europe, to which OLME has always been opposed.

Dear Colleagues,

It is a true fact that in the last period in the area of public education the present government in Greece has taken specific steps towards democratization. For one, we have seen the abolition of the authoritarian framework of disciplinary sanctions for teachers. What is more, we now have again elected teacher representatives in all service boards. We have also enjoyed the decriminalization of the fights conducted by students and teachers. We have the election of school principals and Assistant Principals done by the board of teachers in schools, and above all we have seen the reinstatement of all suspended and dismissed teachers. Additionally, improving interventions have been made in the school curriculum for Upper High School and very recently a law has been submitted for VET (Vocational Education and Training) education, which introduces a 4th optional year with specialization courses and student practical training.

And yet, the problems public education is currently facing are still multiple and very sharp, indeed.

The severe underfunding of education has pushed it to its limits. Public spending on education hardly came up to 2.47 of GDP this year (35,6% reduction compared to that of 2009). Teachers have lost about 45% of their income.

No permanent teacher recruitments have been made since 2009 and teacher vacancies cannot be filled by recruiting temporary teachers alone. Particularly in the domain of secondary education, we have about 28.000 fewer teachers today than those we had in 2010. Just a few days ago, OLME had to come forward with

mobilizations once again, marches and demonstrations asking for a substantial number of permanent teacher recruitments to take place at last. We are advocating also that the criteria for recruiting should take into consideration the many years of teaching experience temporary teachers have compiled.

In addition, OLME is also fighting along with the other trade unions so that the new law about retirement and social security will not pass. By this proposed new law, retirement age for teachers goes up to 67.

Dear Colleagues,

Besides the economic-humanitarian crisis, today in Greece we need to cope also with a new, very acute phenomenon, that of the massive influx of refugees and immigrants, who arrive in hundreds in Greece on a daily basis, particularly after the closing of the borders, a practice which is in sharp contrast with the European culture and the principles of humanism. Upon their arrival, the problems have been heightened even more.

We are very thankful, however, to the Greek people for their attitude towards these people and for their valuable contribution, which in many ways comes to complement the assistance provided by the official state.

These refugees constitute now the most vulnerable category. It is our duty though as teachers to fight so that refugee children are integrated efficiently in our schools without exclusions, by means of appropriate and updated teaching programs. We need to make the necessary provisions for their education, which is a universal good.

Dear Colleagues,

As always, we are looking forward to cooperating with you.

We can contribute with our proposals and ideas at a European and global level.

We can exchange experiences, practices, and concepts.

We stand in solidarity with teacher fights in every country in the world and we ask the same of you.

We ask you to stand in solidarity with us, the Greek teachers, particularly in our fight to protect free, public education in Greece in these rather critical times.

Thank you.

Venceremos