

UEF KICK OFF MEETING 2016

10-11 September, Brussels

SESSION I: Focusing Political Priorities for the Next Year

UEF Secretary General started by describing the current political situation and the next initiatives that will serve as guidelines and boundaries for the work of the UEF.

The “Brexit” confirmation has been a game changer. It revealed the crumbling unity of Europe and its increasing instability. This event occurs in a Europe marked by different dividing lines. In spite of the possibilities opened up by the result of the referendum, most European politicians retrench rather than try to exploit the opportunity.

The upcoming Bratislava Summit could be an opportunity for reaction. While most likely taking the form of intergovernmental cooperation, the results of this meeting can nevertheless prove interesting. **UEF is to react to the outcome of this summit.**

Two new fronts are emerging and easier to tackle at the moment: security and defence. The European Parliament is however still working on constitutional issues, more particularly through three reports prepared by federalist Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) – Mr. Brok and Mrs. Bresso, Mr. Verhofstadt and Mrs. Berès and Mr. Böge respectively -, even though some of those encounter opposition.

Another interesting development is the enthusiasm shown by Prime Minister Renzi, who is particularly active and might want to use the symbolism of the anniversary of the Treaty of Rome in March 2017 in order to kick off a reform project.

Franco Spoltore, UEF Italy Secretary General, confirmed that the project of EU reform re-entered the political debate in Italy and that this is an opportunity to remobilise the public by translating UEF strategies into pragmatic replies. Luisa Trumellini (UEF Italy) underlined the necessity to use the post-Brexit conditions to create a new EU sovereignty, replacing national sovereignties. She stated her support to Mr. Verhofstadt’s report.

Pablo Faura, UEF Spain President, explained that attention shifted away from EU affairs to national politics in his country. The Brexit nevertheless caused a revival of pro-European feeling. UEF Spain supports Mr. Verhofstadt’s proposals and the call for a Convention. Domènec Ruiz Devesa (UEF Spain) suggested to collaborate with UEF Romania and Bulgaria in order to work on the issues encountered in Eastern Europe.

Florent Banfi, UEF France President, explained that national elections might bring ideas regarding EU reform in the public debate. UEF France supports for the proposal of a Convention. François Mennerat, (UEF France) expressed his support for outspoken federalist voices like Mr. Verhofstadt.

Michele Ciavarini Azzi, UEF Belgium President, told the assembly that the debate about the EU was poor and oriented on short-term consequences in Belgium. The upcoming activities organised by UEF Belgium were described. UEF Belgium suggested to offer a platform to the new generation of pro-European politicians during UEF events.

Ortrun Gauper, UEF Austria Deputy Chair, described how national elections are the only focus of the Austrian public debate. The refugee crisis and EU trade deals are big concerns. National politicians are potential candidates for positions within UEF, which would increase UEF's visibility.

Jacques Ducry, UEF Switzerland Vice-President, stressed that the Swiss section tries to focus first and foremost on citizens because of the implications of the democratic mechanisms in Switzerland. Ducry expressed his hope for a future UEF meeting in Switzerland.

Emil Dimitrov, UEF Bulgaria member, explained on behalf of Andrey Kovatchev that migration and defence are perceived as the main issues in Bulgaria. Bulgaria is broadly in favour of a stronger Eurozone but cannot commit to an uncertain future. UEF Bulgaria does not support Mr. Verhofstadt's approach. UEF Bulgaria underlined the need to be more vocal on issues such as the TTIP deal in order to help making progress the debate about the role of the EU.

Daphné Gogou, member of UEF Groupe-Europe, proposed to organise an event in Slovakia during the Council presidency to enhance collaboration with Eastern European sections.

The Secretary-General replied to questions. He clarified that the opposition encountered by Mr. Verhofstadt's report was linked to the very advanced nature of his ideas. He agreed that **UEF should collaborate with Eastern sections like Bulgaria and Slovakia for coming events**. Finally, **the issue of the mobilisation, raised by almost all attendees, should be worked on by each section**, among others in parallel with projects like UEF's action to commemorate the signature of the Treaty of Rome in March 2017.

SESSION II: WHAT TO DO AND HOW

Paolo Vacca opened the session by outlining the UEF activities undertaken at the European level. In the absence of a campaigning framework, the European Secretariat is working on three levels: the European Parliament, the sections and the Brussels circles.

Ophélie Omnes, JEF Europe Vice-President, presented JEF's campaigning method. She underlined the importance of the Board's role. The Board defines key, simple messages, which are simpler to implement. A Working Group cannot substitute the Board's role. Omnes stressed the relevance of partnership improvement and membership increase in the process of successful campaigning.

Peter Oomsels, Chair of the UEF FC Working Group "Campaigns, Actions and Outreach", presented his work (see attachment). The Working Group is working on a concept paper to be presented to the Bureau in the end of 2016. The goal is to support the development and implementation of UEF strategies where possible.

UEF France suggested to **introduce people from the sections into the Working Group to gain in experience**, which was agreed upon, provided that the timeline is respected and that efficiency is not reduced. UEF Italy introduced the idea of **structural cooperation with other UEF bodies**. The idea was approved by Oomsels who envisioned the creation of a position of Vice-Chair in charge of the translation of the political work into a messages adapted to the necessities of a campaign.

Paolo Vacca invited the sections to reflect on two possible scenarios: a pan-European campaign implemented by the national sections or on top of the national sections' activities.

UEF France remarked that the organisation's structure should not be a burden for action-taking. UEF Italy agreed that the UEF in general should work according to pre-defined goals and existing political

guidelines. **The UEF Bureau should work on goal definition** in order to strengthen the federal governance of the organisation.

Oomsels closed the discussion by assuring the attendance of the pragmatic nature of the concept paper, aimed at providing strategic and concrete solutions to the current issues in UEF work.

SESSION III: INITIATIVES FOR ROME MARCH 2017

The upcoming anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, in March 2017, can be used as an opportunity to mobilise civil society and citizens and an occasion to link UEF's work with political events, as it will most likely also be used by the Italian government to ask for an extraordinary summit to launch a reform process.

From the political point of view contacts have been taken by UEF Italy with UEF, EMI and JEF at the EU level. **UEF Italy will contact national bodies this month. The European level should be activated for November. Local Italian sections are to make the project circulate among local organisations and personalities.**

As regards the organisation side, **a vade-mecum is to be drafted to coordinate the participants' initiatives.** Bi-lateral meetings from regional sections are going to be fostered, **a newsletter is to be circulated, and media will be approached by January.**

Several attendees expressed their enthusiasm for the project. It was pointed that a document oriented towards the future could be drafted and that EU founding figures could be invited. **The creation of a national committee in order to coordinate the participating groups was proposed.** It was recalled that this event should be conceived in a broader framework of commemorations, including Montreux 2017 and towards The Hague in 2018.

The Secretary-General remarked that a non-identitarian demonstration, i.e. trying to involve other organisation and inevitably with a rather pro-European than federalist only approach, would be the best choice if a massive number of participants is to be attracted to Rome. He added that a demonstration is a great organisational and financial challenge.

SESSION IV: DEVELOPING NATIONAL SECTIONS

Secretary-General Paolo Vacca introduced the current situation in the national sections. Some sections like Europa-Union Deutschland (EUD) have increased their membership significantly. Other sections are dormant or unwilling to grow in membership. UEF UK has 130 members, but they have not been active for years. UEF Romania claims 50 members, but it seems to be politically inactive. UEF sections in the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Montenegro and Serbia report very few members.

Ophélie Omnes declared that the national sections must bear part of the responsibility. There is currently a gap between very big and very small sections within JEF. Growing middle-size sections is a priority.

Groupe-Europe has lost 20 members per year for the last five years.

It was proposed to use external events such as the Slovakian presidency to develop membership in particular sections.

UEF Italy declared that their membership is stable. There is a turnover as the number of regional and local sections increased. They appointed deputies to develop them.

Membership growth is a top priority for UEF France. The section is however following EM France.

UEF Spain described their strategy to partner up with other pro-European associations.

The situation of UEF Belgium is stable with 90-100 members. A membership task force has been recently created. A General Assembly is planned in October.

The membership situation is unchanged in Austria but there is a will to improve, among others by finding inspiration from JEF. The automatic yearly renewal of members' subscription is the rule in UEF Austria and could constitute a good practice to be followed.

There is a solid basis regarding membership in Switzerland. UEF Switzerland is very active on social media, in order to talk to the citizens. The Co-Presidents are each responsible of a language and plan to have a "section tour" to organize debates everywhere.

In UEF Luxemburg, the efforts are oriented towards the attraction of a different segments of audience through less political events. A General Assembly is coming in the next weeks.

SESSION V: PREPARING THE WORK OF THE FEDERAL COMMITTEE

Paolo Vacca introduced the agenda of the FC. Logistics were discussed. The newly elected members of the FC were invited to join the meeting. Political commissions should define the focus of the meeting that would help to decide on the external speakers. JEF PC are already working on proposals for resolutions. Joint PC meetings, like the one taking place in Lisbon in October, are meant to go into depth on key topics.

UEF Italy proposes to discuss Treaties and the Institutional reform towards Rome. UEF Belgium suggests to discuss long-term strategies at during the PC meetings and let the Bureau react on daily political developments. It is reminded that the FC meeting is meant for the finalisation of the political work, while joint PC meetings should be used to prepare the ground.

DELIVERABLES

Session I

- The UEF Secretariat will explore possibilities of collaboration with UEF Bulgaria on a future event.
- The UEF Secretariat will explore possibilities to organise a “Meet your MEP” event in Slovakia during the presidency.
- UEF France will explore possibilities to campaign during the French Presidency and discuss with UEF Europe possible support.
- UEF sections will work on mobilisation during the preparation of the Rome March 2017 project.

Session II

- UEF sections will contact the Working Group “Campaigns, Actions and Outreach” in a timely manner to propose members for input.
- Structural cooperation between the Working Group and the other bodies will be implemented.

Session III

Within the framework of the preparatory work towards the Marche in Rome in commemoration of the signature of the Treaty of Rome in March 2017:

- UEF Italy will contact national authorities in October.
- UEF Italy will contact authorities at the European level in November with the support of UEF Europe.
- UEF Italy’s local sections will make the project circulate at the local level.
- UEF Italy will approach the media in January.
- UEF Italy will draft a vade-mecum.
- UEF Italy will draft a newsletter.
- UEF Italy will create a national committee to supervise organisational matters.
- UEF will organise a Bureau meeting in January.