



Interview with Fèlix Zapatero ▶ The president of the Federation of Elderly Associations talks

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The current president of the Federation of Associations of the Elderly, Fèlix Zapatero, presents to EL PERIÒDIC his point of view on the third payer, the problems of residences and supervised flats, pensions, covid, the objectives of the federation and whether he will remain in office.

–Why has the third payer arrived so late? It has been requested for many years.

–Maybe because of the conjunction of the stars, I don't know. It was one of the objectives that the federation had 20 years ago and at some point, it had to be achieved. But it's a medal for everyone involved, not just ours.

–And for this same reason shouldn't it be generalized?

–No!

–Why?

–Because the elderly people are the neediest and I worry about what is mine. A 30-year-old who works is not for me, even pensioners who live outside Andorra do not bother me. I am concerned about those who live here, which are 7,000. The associations that bring together the different groups of people who currently do not have the third payer and aspire to have it, must defend it as we have done.

– Regarding the drugs, do you understand that they took a little longer? The explanation for not putting them from the start was computer problems and the electronic prescription.

– I think that there can always be groups that are a little reluctant and that want to pressure and negotiate. Sometimes we have to understand the other. In the end, after waiting so many years, doing it now six months to have the medicines is nothing. In addition, we already have almost everything: laboratory, radiology, physiotherapy. And, from January 2nd, dentistry.

–Someone might think that all this comes now as an electoral measure.

– It seems so, but I can't think of it that way, and I think it's because the difficulties to do so are very important.

–Are you happy with how the third payer was introduced?

–Of course! What could have been done five years ago and for all groups? Yes. But in the same way that it could have been done in another five years. It's good to go step by step. And there were also arguments not to do it, and they were put aside. For me it is a positive view.

–In any case, do you think it still has shortcomings?

– Once we have dentistry and prescription drugs, everything will



Fèlix Zapatero

President of the Federation of Associations of the Elderly

«I'm happy to say that we will leave it better than how we started it»

be for people over 65 or disabled. However, it does have some shortcomings, but they are few.

–For example?

–That it should have been possible to do dentistry, drugs and generalize it from October 1st. Anyway, and in my opinion, this was a very high risk.

–And would you add additional services such as including other medications?

– It is possible, but this is linked to the chair of services that the Government has approved and is developing.



«The groups of people who do not have the third payer and aspire to have it, must defend it as we have done»

«The goal would be for 30% of the target population to join this prevention campaign [of colon and rectal cancer]»

– Last week the Executive launched the early detection program for colon and rectal cancer. One of the goals of the federation.

– We are very satisfied. It is important to remind the population that even if they do not have symptoms, they should be tested. Now, the purpose would be for 30% of the target population to enter this prevention campaign.

–But why is it only done to men and women between 50 and 74 years old?

– Very simple: by statistics. Among these ages is where there are more cases. I know it's very hard what I'm going to say, but if the campaigns were done from 15 to 95 years old, the figures for these two queues would be very low. Therefore, there would be no sick people in these areas and an expense would be incurred that has no recovery. On the other hand, in the center yes, it is where 90% is and where the population at risk is concentrated. In the end it's all made up, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends doing it between these ages.

–How important is prevention?

– Very much After all, it means less expense. It is not the same to find a cancer, of the rectum for example,

in an initial phase as in a metastatic phase.

-What other goals do you have now?

-Questions related to dermatology, ophthalmology or pancreas problems.

-And more with a vision of the future?

-We are thinking about an issue that will surely be for 2024 and beyond: attacking low pensions. We believe that it has a significant magnitude and that touching this means a lot of money. That they are paid by the Government, that is, by us with our taxes, but it has an implication that has to come from somewhere. And it's a risk.

-They also request a podiatry service. How is this work progressing?

-It is pending. Work still needs to be done and we don't know when it will arrive.

-What exactly are you asking for?

-Our idea is that the SAAS hire a salaried podiatrist and that he be given a program to go to the different primary care centers in each parish.

-But then we're not just talking about old people.

-No. The Executive must make a regulation regarding who has access, what type of attendance they must have, and what price they must pay. Obviously by appointment. In the same order should also come what monthly or quarterly care you can have depending on the disease you suffer from. All this must be regulated and it is not very difficult to do so.

-And which group should this be for, then?

-There may be a 30-year-old gentleman who also needs it, but we are not doctors. The Government has enough to decide which group, which frequency and which price.

-Yes, they are not in favor of this assistance being free.

-It's like this. This service must have a certain cost to the patient.

- Now it remains to start the campaign to prevent prostate cancer, which has the highest prevalence in men.

- Yes, and it's a relatively simple test, but we still don't know when it will arrive.

-Returning to pensions, as you said, it is an important and urgent issue.

-To the extent that I believe that the budget committee of the General Council is negotiating some specific reform within the 2023 budgets for these.

-What could they be?

-Basically two: extend the retirement age from 65 to 67 and increase contributions. This last issue is not complicated in the sense of passing each year a point of contribution from the illness branch to the retirement branch, so that the future deficit of this branch would be delayed.

-And do you think it is right to increase the retirement age?

-Yes. Little by little and in certain sectors that have favorable conditions.



«I think that some specific reform of pensions is being negotiated within the budgets for 2023»

-Regarding residences, are fees still a problem?

-Surely yes, but it depends on the income level of the people. Just like in neighboring countries, if you have a low income and want to go to a residence, you probably won't get there. It must also be said, here the law on social and socio-health resources requires the family to help, and there are many cases, and it is very sad, that the family ignores the elderly quite a bit. In addition, think that a residence has a very important personnel expense: workers 24 hours a day and with minimal training.

-Is there a lack of residences in the country?

-Yes, public residences, but the Government's idea is not to make them of this type because of the management they entail.

-The main problem with the residences is their management?

-Basically. Here the Executive prefers that the management be private because it takes the matter out of the way. Then you can make private agreements with them to negotiate certain numbers of places. It's not that he doesn't care, it's that somehow he passes the management on to someone else. Perhaps this way, moreover, the management of a residence is more effective.

-Similarly, are there any protected flats?

-Yes, because there are no new ones. There are a few in Ordino and Andorra la Vella, but in total they may reach fifteen. There is nothing more.

-They will now go to Sant Julià.

-Since the elections are coming up, everyone is saying what they will do. They are building protected apartments and rental apartments at subsidized prices. Also, they promise that they will, but these flats will be available at the end of 2024. And the problem is now, not the problem of 2024. Also, the conservatives have an affair.

-Which one?

-First of all, they are for a short period of your life, because either you die or you lose autonomy, and consequently you have to leave the flat. Secondly, that they are not easy to

do, because you have to build or buy flats and then adapt them.

-And what can be done to delay entry to social and health centers?

-This: subsidized flats and home care service.

-And day centers right?

-Yes, but they go with a trick. They are from 09.00 to 17.00 hours, they are not free and they are not available in all parishes. Once the center closes, what does it do with the person? Or during the weekend?

-In other words that is...

-That they are a partial solution.

-Could the Home Care Service (SAD) be implemented 24 hours a day?

-It could. The number of people should also be increased and turnover avoided. In addition to requiring a certain qualification, but without setting the bar too high because otherwise no one will go to work there. However, passing it from the municipalities to the Government brought good and bad parts.

-Which is?

-The positive thing is that an equal service is given to all people. But before, surely, in a small parish the service could be better than in a large one. In any case, the management of the SAAS team that provides service to the houses is brutal, it is not like any municipality in which the home care was four.

-Do you think there is good communication between the federation and the Government?

-Yes. In fact, we have good communication with different parliamentary groups because we are apolitical. They have come to see us and now, with the election campaign, I understand that they will return, and everyone, in their own way, is trying to do their bit so that ours can work. So we are at ease and we note that the Government and the ministers who look after us, Social Affairs and Health, are at ease with us.

-Covid is still one of the main concerns of the elderly?

-Beyond covid, there is persistent covid, mixed with flu, bronchiolitis, etc.

The problem with post-covid is that even doctors don't know why or what measures to take.

-Which ones do you think they should be?

-The same as in Spain and France. The fourth dose, encourage even more flu vaccination and wait to see what the Government and the WHO say.

-Do you think things were done well during the pandemic?

-Everything can be improved, but the period of Joan Martínez Benazet was very good. We were lucky that he extended as a minister. Being a sudden thing, it was a bit of trial and error. When something worked, great, and when it didn't, it was cancelled.

-A couple of weeks ago, the council of the elderly of Andorra la Vella was established. What do you think?

-I don't think it's a bad measure, but if it was done at the country level, I think it would be better. But the fact that only one parish does it implies that the rest should do it later, then the issue of parochialism begins.

-Are you happy with your work so far?

-A lot. The board I have is a satisfaction and it is an honor to preside over the federation. On the other hand, it is a great responsibility, behind me I have 7,000 people residing in the country and sometimes it is a lot.

-And there is nothing wrong?

-Sometimes I do have moments of sadness because I would like everything to go a little faster, but that doesn't take away from everything we've achieved in three and a half years.

- Will you repeat as president?

- Maybe no...

-Why?

-I think that four years is a long time and these are jobs that need to be renewed. Let new blood enter and people with a different vision. Maybe also look for other goals. At least I'm happy to say that if we end up in March or April, we'll leave it better than we started it. ≡

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