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Minutes of the FERPA Virtual Steering Committee meeting of 25 June 2020

Participants : Layos MAYER (SZEZ), President ; Agostino SICILIANO (UIL-P), Secretary General ; Angeles BRIALES (UJP-UGT), Deputy Secretary General ; Tino FUMAGALI (FNP-CISL), Treasurer ; Eliane DE DOBBELEER (CSC-ACV) ; Dick DE GRAAF (FNV) ; Didier HOTTE (UCR-FO) ; Domenico PANTALEO (SPI-CGIL) ; Hubert SCHWIND (UCR-CGT)

The meeting was also attended by Jessica MONTIEL, Project Coordinator and Henri LOURDELLE, Special Advisor.

Absent Excused: Mireille PAUME (UCR-CGT), President of the Women's Committee; Metka ROKSANDIC (SUS) and Werner THUM (ÖGB)

Given the exceptional circumstances following the COVID 19 pandemic, this meeting is being held virtually via the internet. It is chaired by the President of FERPA, Lajos MAYER and the technical management of the speeches is ensured by Jessica MONTIEL.

In opening the meeting, the President welcomed the participants and thanked them for their presence. Having had the agenda approved by the participants in the meeting, he then gave the floor to the Secretary General of FERPA for a few introductory words.

In his introductory speech, the General Secretary, Agostino SICILIANO, first of all resituated this meeting in the context of COVID 19. Then, he reminds that FERPA and in particular the Secretariat (and he takes this opportunity to thank Jessica and Henri for their work) have been particularly active during this particular and difficult period. In addition to the weekly meetings of the Secretariat (himself, Jessica and Henri), which were held virtually, he mentioned the various initiatives that had been taken, among others : the joint letter, with the ETUC Secretary General, sent to the President of the European Commission, the virtual meeting, at her request, with the EPSU which was followed by the sending with the EPSU of letters to the Presidents of the European Council and the Council of Europe, the drafting and sending of the survey on COVID 19, the participation, also virtual, in ETUC meetings : Steering Committee, Executive Committees, Social Protection Committee, etc. The ETUC also incorporated the amendments submitted to it by FERPA, which aimed to take better account of pensioners. The ETUC has also incorporated the amendments submitted to it by FERPA aimed at taking better account of pensioners and the elderly in its draft Declaration on COVID 19 and its social consequences, which should be adopted at the next ETUC Executive Committee meeting on 2 and 3 July next. The General Secretary concluded his intervention by insisting on the importance of being able to exchange between us today on how we have lived these moments.

The floor was then given to the members of the Committee for each of them to speak.

In the debate that follows, even if there are nuances within each of the Member States, common points emerge:

- Everyone agrees that the pandemic is not over, even if everywhere deconfinement measures, more or less important depending on the country, have been implemented. It is therefore necessary to remain vigilant and prudent and to continue to respect the measures of "social distancing".
- Several insist that the period is complex and that there will be several challenges to be met, particularly with regard to public health and society.
- The health crisis has exacerbated existing inequalities and the most affected victims have been the elderly, as they have been in terms of infection and mortality.
- The concerns of governments remain mainly economic rather than health-related.
- In this spirit, some also point out that the debate revolves around the necessary finances, but without questioning the use of European funds.

The following organisations intervened in this debate: UJP-UGT, FNV, UCR-CGT, SZEF, CSC-ACV, SPI-CGIL

Then Henri was given the floor to present the results of the survey on COVID 19 which was launched among FERPA organisations.

First of all Henri gave an overview of the responses received: 20 organisations out of the 30 or so that make up FERPA, representing 14 countries out of the 26 in which FERPA has members. Admittedly, the answers were not always easy for those who replied, as the situation was evolving and/or due to a lack of sufficient data in some countries. But also because, as has been pointed out, "trade unionists are not specialists in pandemics"! However, the aim of the survey was not to draw up statistics or scientific studies, but rather to enable FERPA and everyone else to have as accurate a picture as possible of the period and scale of this pandemic, and in particular of its impact on pensioners and the elderly, who have paid the heaviest price.

The relationship that is made today, he says:

- is not to engage in a detailed analysis of the survey results, as time is indeed short. But this will be done in a second phase and at the latest for the next FERPA Executive Committee,
- But to point out a certain number of lessons that have emerged, without this list being exhaustive today.

It then summarises, on the basis of the responses received, the way in which the various countries have been impacted and the reasons for these impacts.

Then, it asks why no country anticipated this pandemic, despite recent past experiences.

As to who has suffered most from the pandemic, it appears that in all countries, although the virus has affected everyone (except, with a few exceptions, young children), it is, however, older people - described as particularly "vulnerable" - who have been most often affected. For them, the virus was proportionally fatal...

With regard to the measures implemented by the public authorities, an initial general observation emerged: no country first of all took the measure of the scale of the health tragedy at stake. All of them initially minimised it. And when measures were taken, they were often taken very late.

As for the future, a great deal of scepticism has emerged from the responses: no more than yesterday, the organisations ask themselves, will the public authorities be able to draw conclusions from this new crisis?

Following this brief presentation, a small debate took place. The speakers, after thanking Henri for his presentation, made some slight clarifications or stressed the need to make very precise choices in future investments and, as far as care facilities for the elderly are concerned, to better design them in their favour.

The General Secretary concluded by stressing that it is an excellent report that gives the "picture" that FERPA needed. He recalled that he had been personally impacted by the death of his brother. It was important to react now. We need a different Europe and united trade unions in Europe. He said that Europe is aware of the ageing population, but, he wondered, what is it doing?

The organisations involved in this debate were : UJP-UGT, SZEZ, CSC-ACV, SPI-CGIL

Henri was then given the floor again to talk about current issues. He reminded the meeting that with the pandemic, the files have remained pending and that FERPA's efforts have focused on COVID 19 and its repercussions on the elderly. However, he noted that prior to the containment period, only 10 organizations, representing 6 countries, had returned the responses to the questionnaires sent to them. They should go back without too much delay, so that after a general presentation made by him, each leader could present the results of the file he is in charge of and the conclusions he draws from it in terms of actions to be implemented, firstly to the next Executive Committee and then for the General Assembly in Mid-Mandate next April.

The General Secretary supports this approach, adding that it's a way of making concrete progress, otherwise it's improvisation.

In the debate which follows, some organisations talk about the difficulties encountered as a result of confinement, either to be able to work with others from the same country to present a common work or because their files had remained within their organisation. Others announced that they would be sending a supplement to their file, for example to talk about care institutions.

Still others expressed their disappointment at the lack of responses received, even though everyone had made a commitment. We need to prioritise our actions and find a way to work," he added. It was also noted that the European Parliament, which should be met, has dealt with poverty issues. Similarly, it would also be interesting to contact Commissioner Nicolas SCHMIT who is in charge of employment and social rights within the Commission.

The General Secretary, speaking in the debate, confirmed his agreement to identify priorities and to meet the members of parliament. He added: "It is important to have an overview of all the dossiers in order to be able to make a selection and identify priorities".

The following organisations took part in the debate: UCR-FO, CSC-ACV, FNV, UCR-CGT, UJP-UGT.

The next point that is addressed is financial issues. The floor is then given to the Treasurer of FERPA, Tino FUMAGALLI.

The budget for 2019, which the Treasurer presented orally in broad outline, shows a surplus of + 15,870.39 euros, mainly due to the fact (these are just two examples) that in terms of expenditure, the Financial Commission has only met once or, due to the confinement, there have been fewer face-to-face meetings in Brussels.

Having made this presentation, the FNV intervened to request that a balance sheet table be sent to the members of the Steering Committee. The Treasurer replied that he would see what he could do.

Then the question of "late fees" was raised. The Treasurer reminded the meeting that this question had already been discussed and that it was now up to the Executive Committee to decide whether or not to cancel the debts of the organisations concerned:

- Greece: 2015- 2019: 2113.00 euros
- Bulgaria: 2015-2019: 485.00 euros
- the United Kingdom: 2016-2017: 1715.00 euros. It should also be noted that, as far as this organisation is concerned, it has never been able to indicate its precise number of members.

The Treasurer indicated that for the future, they will have to pay their dues on time, otherwise the provisions of the FERPA statutes will apply immediately.

The General Secretary added that the external "Auditors" are asking us to write to the organisations and take a decision on a situation that has been dragging on for several years.

In the ensuing debate, several members indicated that they understood the situation and pointed out that the situations between the three organisations were different. Some, however, pointed out that other countries are experiencing

similar difficulties. But all agreed that the FERPA constitution must be respected. Concerning the United Kingdom, it was suggested that contact should be made with the TUC, to which it was replied that contact had been made with the TUC office in Brussels, but that the information was being lost. Finally, the question was raised as to whether this issue was not within the competence of the Executive Committee?

The General Secretary intervened to say that it was not possible to postpone the decision to the Executive Committee in December, as this would cause FERPA to lose another year's membership fees, particularly those for the first half of 2020. For him, this decision engages the responsibility of the Steering Committee, it is advisable that today, it pronounces itself clearly in favour or not of the cancellation of the debt.

Finally, the Steering Committee unanimously voted in favour of cancelling the debt. A letter to this effect will be sent to the organisations concerned, reminding them of their obligations. This unanimous decision will be forwarded to the "Auditors". This decision will also be presented to the next Executive Committee.

The following organisations intervened in this debate: FNV, SZEf, UCR-CGT, etc.

Then the date of the next Executive Committee meeting is recalled: 3 and 4 December, in principle - if other provisions dictated by the authorities do not intervene by then - in person in Brussels. The UCR-CGT representative stressed, however, that this date posed a problem for his organisation, which had had to postpone its Congress, which it had set for 1 to 5 December.

Regarding other matters, the floor was first given to the representative of the FNV to present the joint statement made by the DGB and the FNV, encouraging more solidarity in Europe in the face of the disagreement between the Member States and the EU on how to finance the crisis caused by the pandemic. The representative of the FNV proposes that this joint declaration be sent to all members in order to raise public awareness.

Then the representative of the CSC-ACV presents the Resolution accepted by the Belgian Parliament on "the elaboration of an International Convention to combat discrimination against older people".

A short debate ensues. The members are in favour of sending these two documents to the organisations. However, regarding the Belgian resolution, it was stressed that Belgians should contact other countries for disclosure.

As for the FNV and DGB declaration, it goes in the right direction to achieve a more united Europe.

The General Secretary supports this sending.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: SZEf, FNV, UCR-FO

Three evocations are still being made:

- one by the CSC-ACV, about the work of the European Anti-Discrimination Network. It is going to send the link to the Secretariat
- the other by the representative of UJP- UGT relating to an AGE initiative. On this subject, it is recalled that this organisation is not a trade union organisation but that it was set up by the Commission, originally the FERPA for competition.
- By the FNV, which asked whether we already had an idea about the Mid-term GA and how it would be prepared. The Secretary General answers that it will take place in Budapest next April and that it will be extended by one day.

The agenda being exhausted, the President thanks all the participants and the interpreters as well as Evgenia and Julienne from ETUC who helped us with the technical management of the meeting.

Henri