

Minutes of the FERPA Executive Committee meeting in virtual mode of May 6, 2021

The meeting was attended by : Lajos MAYER (SZEF), President; Agostino SICILIANO (UIL-UILP), Secretary General; Angeles BRIALES (UJP-UGT), Deputy Secretary General; Mireille PAUME (UCR-CGT), President of the Women's Committee; Tino FUMAGALLI (FNP-CISL), Treasurer; Eliane DE DOBBELEER, CSC-ACV); Dick DE GRAAF, FNV; Didier Hotte, UCR-FO; Ivan PEDRETTI, SPI-CGIL; Hubert SCHWIND, UCR-CGT; Werner THUM, ÖGB

Also attending the meeting for the FERPA Secretariat: Henri LOURDELLE, Special Advisor and Jessica MONTIEL, Project Coordinator

The President of FERPA, Lajos MAYER, opened the meeting by welcoming the members of the Steering Committee. He asked the members to limit their interventions to a maximum of 5 minutes due to the agenda.

Before proceeding with the adoption of the agenda, Dick DE GRAAF asked under which item the question of the "Constitution" working group would be dealt with. The President replied that it would be under "Other business". With this clarification, the agenda for the meeting was adopted.

The President then gave the floor to the Secretary General, Agostino SICILIANO, for his Communications.

The Secretary General first welcomed the Secretary General of SPI-CGIL, Ivan PEDRETTI, who was replacing Domenico PANTALEO on the FERPA Executive Committee.

He then mentioned the various activities in which FERPA had been involved since the last Executive Committee: the response to the Commission's Green Paper on demography, participation in the meeting on the ETUC project entitled SocialAll, the webinar organised by the ETUC: "On the road to Oporto", etc. The President had also taken part in a meeting on "Demographic ageing". The Secretary General stressed that FERPA had participated in the ETUC's responses to the Commission's Green Paper, but had also been keen to provide its own response, based on the work done recently, particularly through the dossiers currently being finalised. As he said: "We are building a FERPA that can be there".

Referring to the Porto Social Summit to be held the following day, he insisted that it must translate the Commission's Action Plan on the European Social Rights Base into concrete measures. It must show the political will to implement the Action Plan in order to move forward. He also recalled that everything concerning the elderly should not be considered as a cost, but as a source of employment. Beyond the cost, a reflection supported by concrete measures is needed. Pensions should be indexed to the cost of living in the country concerned and when FERPA talks about a "decent" pension, it is not only talking about financial amounts but also about the support of services.

Speaking about the statutory changes to be adopted by the ETUC, he referred to the last meeting of the ETUC Steering Committee in which he had participated and during which the

issue of abstentions had been discussed, which, according to the ETUC General Secretary, Luca VISENTINI, should not be considered as negative votes.

The Nordic trade unions were unanimously opposed to this approach, as was the DGB, which saw it as a question of democracy. The FERPA Secretary General replied that abstentions are then in favour of the "against" minority and asked: is this democracy? Luca will write to all members of the ETUC Steering Committee to ask them to clarify their position on this issue.

Finally, he mentioned the change of the ETUC headquarters, which would be located a few metres away, but a little closer to the Gare du Nord.

Before opening the debate, the President pointed out that in most measures adopted by the European Parliament, abstentions were not considered as votes against, and asked why the ETUC did not do the same.

Most of the debate focused on the issue of abstentions. Some wondered how this rule of taking abstentions into account had been introduced into the ETUC statutes and how it was done in the Nordic countries. Others pointed out that this is a political issue and relates to FERPA's relations with the ETUC and with the confederal unions. It therefore implies action towards the national unions. Recognition of the right to vote will be achieved through FERPA's activity in the general debate. The role of older people in national organisations must be strengthened. Jessica recalled that the German organisations VERDI and IG Metall were originally members of FERPA. Then they disaffiliated. There was also a Nordic Cooperation Network which was not affiliated to FERPA but which had links with our organisation. On the other hand, it is recalled that trade union cultures and practices are different in different countries. For example, the Nordic unions only affiliate the "active" workers that they consider to be their work. In Germany and Austria, pensioners belong to pensioners' "associations", but these are not unionised. Others wonder whether, in some countries, recognition of pensioners' unions might not lead to imbalances in the unions' internal power relations. It is therefore necessary to find a way of reassuring the ETUC organisations that recognition of FERPA's right to vote will not change the balance of power within the ETUC bodies. And some called on the ETUC Secretary General to tackle the problem at its roots, i.e. to find ways of working with pensioners rather than ignoring them.

A few interventions, however, referred to the Green Paper, welcoming the contribution of FERPA. One organisation indicated that it had sent its contribution too late, which it felt could have been useful to FERPA.

In his reply, the General Secretary said that the battle for voting rights had to be fought within the ETUC. The Secretariat is convinced, but the problem comes from the ETUC Executive Committee. It is only 1 vote. FERPA is not asking for representation on the basis of its membership, which would upset the balance in the ETUC. In the Management Committee, only FERPA and CGIL expressed themselves positively.

How to respond? By showing that FERPA is still there, because it works.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: FNV, UJP-UGT, SPI-CGIL, UCR-FO, ÖGB, CSC-ACV, UCR-FO

The President then gave the floor to Henri to introduce the next item, which concerned the files for which he was responsible.

Henri briefly reminded the meeting that in order to facilitate the debate and enable progress to be made, he had summarised the work done by each of the people responsible for the dossiers and had, for this purpose, produced a working document which was a first draft of what could be the "FERPA Manifesto" - if it was called that - which set out the organisation's main demands and its proposals for action. He also specified that he had respected the work done, i.e. at this stage, he had not intervened on the content of the proposals, nor on the length of the different themes. All this would be discussed today.

The President then gave the floor to each of the members concerned.

Dick spoke first and began by thanking Henri for the draft. He also thanked Didier who had sent him his contribution. He felt that "Manifesto" was the right word, as it stimulated and encouraged action. The ETUC should be asked to support this Manifesto and to include it in its approach. He also found it positive that Henri, in his working document, had referred to the EU Charter of Fundamental Social Rights and to the EDCS. He noted that there was an imbalance between the different parts. For example, in the part dealing with health, there are elements that he does not find very useful. For the final version, the emphasis should be on what is specifically within the remit of FERPA, such as international health days or pensioners' days. The other topics could be included in the introduction.

The SPI-CGIL intervened and approved the title proposed by Henri and found it very positive to work in this way. He asked for a date to submit the amendments. Having a universal health system should be a priority action for him. We must take advantage of the support given by the EU to strengthen social protection. The economic crisis caused by the pandemic had accentuated the inequalities affecting young people, women and the elderly. A minimum pension and the recognition of periods of care must be guaranteed. This "Manifesto" is a useful platform for the years to come. A discussion with the voluntary associations is also needed in order to build an alliance action.

The ÖGB believes that the most important question is what will happen after the pandemic, who will pay for it all? We have to think, especially in terms of taxation, about who will pay for the consequences of this crisis.

Angeles agreed with Henri's document and what had been said about the files, particularly the words of the SPI-CGIL. She added a striking text on the pandemic which illustrated the inadequacy of the health systems. She felt that the files should be closed and agreed with the title "Manifesto". A reference to COVID should be made at the beginning of the document.

Eliane considers that the work done by Henri was a good summary. In her dossier, she had dealt with both health and accommodation in institutions, which explained the length of her contribution. It is important to fight against the causes that affect health. And it is important for her that FERPA is present in the International Days.

Didier congratulated Henri on his ability to synthesise and his...patience. For him, it is an excellent document. He fully agreed with the SPI-CGIL proposal and with Angeles: the

impact of COVID 19 should be introduced. The elderly were the first victims, they were sacrificed in the distribution of vaccines. They should not be the ones to pay the financial consequences. He also agreed that the document should be entitled "Manifesto", as this implies positions and demands.

Concerning the working method, you have to make observations on the whole text and then theme by theme.

Hubert, very briefly. He agreed on a short text, a sort of 4-page document that could be distributed to members, and to talk about the pandemic. He agreed with the presentation of the Manifesto

Mireille believes that the pandemic has revealed the policies being implemented and the breakdown of the health service. But we must not blame everything on the pandemic, the problems are earlier. Who will pay for the crisis?

At the end of this exchange, the President asked Henri to conclude.

He noted that there was agreement on the approach adopted in the document that had just been discussed, both in terms of the title "Manifesto" and in terms of the content, with some shortening, particularly in the health section. In the proposals for action made, it is necessary to remain "trade union" and not to take on too many general and/or societal considerations or approaches. The objective of the Manifesto is to be offensive. We will not be able to do everything, hence the choice of priorities. He agreed to include a section on the pandemic and its consequences, especially for the elderly, but not exclusively: women and young people are also victims.

He asked those responsible for the dossiers to send him their amendments or reorganisation of their section, if possible, by 20 May.

The President then gave the floor to the Treasurer of FERPA, Tino FUMAGALLI to deal with the financial part. He indicated that he had only received the material the day before yesterday, so he could not give an update on the various provisions of the budget. But he would send a copy of the balance sheet to everyone.

The Secretary General intervened to say that there was no point in incriminating anyone. But an online meeting would be organised with the ETUC accounting department, the Treasurer, the FERPA Secretariat and himself before the next Executive Committee meeting to be able to present the 2020 balance sheet.

The floor was then given to Mireille PAUME, President of the FERPA Women's Committee.

Mireille started by thanking the Secretary General of FERPA and the Secretariat for the working meeting that was organised with her on 15th April.

As she said, the Manifesto is also about women.

The work with the ETUC is complicated because everything revolves around feminised professions and the voice of retired women is difficult to make heard, even if the ETUC's approach is important. In response to Eliane, who asked why there was no Belgian representative on the Core Group, Mireille said that its membership had been limited to five countries.

The President then gave the floor to the Secretary General to discuss the next Mid-term GA. He indicated that it was not yet decided whether it would be held in person or virtually and it was not certain that by June everything would be finished. A decision would have to be made. If it is held face to face, what will happen to FERPA members who are not vaccinated and how to deal with the problems that might arise?

Opening the debate, the President said that as far as the host country is concerned, i.e. his own, it is not yet certain that everyone will be able to travel.

The Secretary General insisted that everyone should speak on the subject.

In the interventions that followed, some members acknowledged that the virtual meeting remains the safest option to date, to which is added the question of security, as FERRPA members remain a vulnerable group. This is a delicate situation and one is obliged to take into account the reality. However, the preference was for a face-to-face meeting, even if it meant moving the date. There was some support for this proposal, although some felt that it would be a political mistake to state now that there would be no face-to-face meeting. It should also be borne in mind that the meeting was being held in several languages and that the interpreters should be able to travel in the best possible conditions. Finally, the members of the Steering Committee felt that it was up to the June Executive Committee to decide on the issue.

The Secretary General was waiting for the Steering Committee to take a position, but in the end he would submit the matter to the Executive Committee in June. Everyone should move without fear, they should feel comfortable.

The statutory decisions were then discussed.

The first one concerned the membership of the Turkish pensioners' union. The General Secretary asked Jessica to give a historical overview. They were initially members of FERPA. However, in 2017, the Government dissolved this union, which, after appealing against this decision, was dismissed in court. Nevertheless, they decided to reorganise under the same name. They are affiliated to the DISK union, which is itself a member of the ETUC. They are asking to be integrated into FERPA, which has received their statutes. They have 1,000 members.

The Steering Committee gave a favourable opinion.

Concerning the Bulgarian pensioners' union, FERPA has no news from this organisation and cannot get any. Moreover, they have not paid their dues for several years. In accordance with the statutes, it is proposed to deregister them. The Steering Committee took note of this proposal.

With regard to the Spanish problem, the Secretary General had undertaken to resolve it. As the Slovenian colleague had resigned from the Steering Committee and as her organisation had not put forward any candidates to replace her, the Secretary General proposed, and this seemed to him the simplest solution, that the colleague from the CC.OO should join the Steering Committee, thus resolving the Spanish problem, it being understood that at the next Congress there would be a rebalancing of the representation of the organisations on the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee took note of this proposal.

The Committee was also to discuss the agenda for the next Executive Committee, which it had not been able to do due to time constraints. It would therefore be sent to members by e-mail.

Finally, Werner renewed his invitation to organise the next FERPA Congress in Vienna.

The meeting being over, the President thanked the members for their active participation. He also thanked the interpreters for their help and the colleagues of the ETUC Organisation Department for their efficient technical assistance.

Henri