

Minutes of the FERPA Executive Committee in virtual mode 8/9/2021

Attended: Lajos MAYER, President, SZEf; Agostino SICILIANO, Secretary General, UIL-UILP; Angeles BRIALES, Deputy Secretary General, UJP-UGT; Tino FUMAGALLI, Treasurer, FNP-CISL; Eliane DE DOBBELEER, CSC- ACV; Dick DE GRAAF, FNC; Didier HOTTE, UCR-FO; Hubert SCHWIND, UCR-CGT; Werner THUM, ÖGB

Also present: Henri LOURDELLE, Special Advisor and Jessica MONTIEL, Project Coordinator

Absent: Mireille PAUME, President of the Women's Committee, UCR-CGT and Ivan PERETTI, SPI-CGIL

After a reminder of the usual technical instructions given by Jessica at the beginning of the meeting, the President, Lajos MAYER, opened the meeting by welcoming the members attending. He then adopted the agenda for the meeting, specifying that, as it was full, speaking time would be limited to 4 minutes for each intervention.

He then gave the floor to Dick De GRAAF to pay tribute to Roel DE VRIES of the FNV, who had been a member of the Steering Committee and the Executive Committee of FERPA for many years and who passed away on 18 August 2021 at the age of 78. A minute's silence was then observed in his memory.

The President then gave the floor to Henri to present the Draft Manifesto, as amended by the last FERPA Executive Committee in June. Henri clarified that it was not a question of reopening a new debate on the content but of checking whether this amended version, which he had sent after the meeting he had just mentioned, was suitable for the members of the Steering Committee. Indeed, we have come to the end of a work undertaken for two years, and we must now move on to the next step, i.e. to decide :

- how to disseminate the Manifesto and to whom? The Secretary General will speak on this point
- the priorities to be identified
- and the means of action.

It is on these points that the Management Committee is called upon today to give its opinion in order to present these proposals to the mid-term General Assembly and have them adopted.

In the short debate that followed this short introduction, all the speakers first thanked Henri for this document, which is perfectly acceptable today, although it can always be improved - but one must know how to stop - and which reflects the collective work that he has coordinated and the synthesis that he has produced. Subject to two editorial comments on page 2 and page 14/15 (in the English version?), the Draft Manifesto was adopted unanimously. Of course, it could still be "improved" by the Mid-term GA.

Henri thanked the members for their support for the Draft Manifesto.

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

The President then gave the floor to the General Secretary to present his proposals concerning the dissemination of the Manifesto once it had been adopted by the Mid-term General Assembly.

The Secretary General began by welcoming Ana MARTINEZ LOPEZ who has just joined the FERPA Steering Committee, replacing Metka ROKSANDIC who has resigned. He underlined the importance of avoiding overlapping responsibilities, especially at national level, in order to be available for European commitments. Returning to the Draft Manifesto, he stressed the excellent work done by all and that it was now time to make this document known to the participants at the Mid-term GA. Once it has been validated by the GA, it will be necessary to consider its dissemination. He pointed out that this is the first time we have had a Manifesto of this kind. It should therefore be sent to the various European institutions, to the ETUC and to the various countries. He then proposed that the letter should not only be signed by the Secretary General, but by all the Presidents/Secretaries General (as the case may be) of FERPA, with their name and that of their organisation. This will give visibility to FERPA but also to its organisations in the different countries. The aim is to make FERPA more effective and more visible.

In the debate that followed the Secretary General's proposal, all members agreed to this proposal, adding that the Manifesto should be on the website. Some proposed to send it also to organisations that are not close to FERPA, to show them what FERPA is doing. Some proposed to go further - although they would disagree on one of the following points, i.e. the actions to be taken - and to meet with some European Parliamentarians who are aware of this cause, or even with Commissioner Nicolas SCHMIT, to show them how the European Social Rights Base is translated for FERPA and retired people. We should also take advantage of the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October 2022 to continue our action.

In his response, the General Secretary underlined that FERPA's approach is twofold

- the dissemination of the Manifesto
- and the strategy, i.e. the possible actions, to involve the Institutions, while stressing that we will need allies.

The dissemination of the document is necessary but not sufficient. After its publication, actions will have to be taken to enforce our demands and priorities. "Let's use all our relationships, including our personal relationships", he said.

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

The President then gave the floor to Henri to talk about priorities.

He first indicated that following the FERPA Executive Committee meeting in June, he had sent an email to the members of the Management Committee asking them what their proposals were concerning the priorities to be implemented and what means of action to implement. He had proposed that they reply by 26 August, but unfortunately he had not received any replies. The Secretariat has therefore reflected and is now formulating some proposals.

Concerning the priorities, it is a fact that all the issues addressed in the Draft Manifesto are important and relevant, especially in the current period. But we cannot mobilise on all the subjects at once, otherwise we will lose focus and not address any of them properly. Moreover, our resources, particularly human resources, are limited and in our respective countries we also have our commitments and our specific mobilisations at times. It seemed, however, that the subject that could unite FERPA and which underpins all the others is that of pensions, poverty among the elderly and the introduction of a minimum old-age pension throughout Europe - i.e. above the poverty line - that would enable retired and elderly people to live in dignity. The ETUC is campaigning for the introduction of a minimum wage in Europe, and in connection with this demand, FERPA is strongly calling for the introduction of a decent minimum pension throughout the Union. When FERPA speaks of a minimum pension, it is not a question of demanding an identical "sum" for all elderly and retired people throughout Europe, but of setting a common benchmark, such as a certain percentage of GDP. Why the reference to GDP? Because GDP reflects the wealth of the country concerned. When it increases, it is normal that pensioners and elderly people benefit from the fruits of growth. But this could be another parameter, the most relevant possible, to be set together. But the important thing today is that the Management Committee commits itself to a priority to be submitted to the Mid-Term General Assembly.

In the debate that followed this presentation, all the speakers stressed that the issue of pensions and minimum pensions was indeed a fundamental priority - some spoke of a "linchpin" - and that it conditioned all the other subjects (access to health, decent housing, energy, etc.). There is the level of pensions and their indexation. To illustrate this priority, some people point out that in their country, an independent study has shown that pensions have fallen and will continue to do so: this is a sort of "programmed" growing poverty. However, prioritising does not mean ignoring the rest, which means that FERPA, depending on the moment and the opportunity, can always be part of other European initiatives with its logo. Finally, a member wondered about the reference to GDP. The Secretary General underlined that FERPA had defined a clear political line with the Draft Manifesto and the priority and that actions should then be defined. When talking about minimum pensions, one should not forget the funded services to which retired and elderly people can have access in some countries. The aim is to ensure that older people and pensioners have the means and resources to live a dignified life and to be above the poverty line. It will then be necessary to see how this objective can be achieved. This will be the work of the Executive Committees that will follow the mid-term General Assembly. In any case, the Steering Committee agrees to submit to the General Assembly, as a first priority, the mobilisation on pensions, the fight against poverty of the elderly and retired and the establishment of a decent minimum old age pension allowing them to live a dignified life.

In his reply, Henri first thanked the colleagues for their interventions and their rich contributions to the discussion. He also thanked them for the agreement to submit to the GA, as a first priority, the question of pensions and the establishment of a minimum old age pension.

The essential question is what income is left to the retired or elderly person when he or she has finished covering all the expenses he or she has to face (health, housing, energy, etc.). How to set the minimum old age pension? As he said, the reference to GDP is one possibility, there are others. This will be the subject of our subsequent discussions in order to concretise our demands. But he added, "without it taking two years! It will therefore be necessary to define a method of work and debate very quickly and to come up with concrete responses.

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

The floor was then given back to Henri on the actions to be implemented to support the Manifesto and try to make our demands succeed. This was a delicate exercise, as we had many ideas and desires, but we had to take into account our human and financial resources. To begin with, the Secretariat is proposing some ideas to the members of the Management Committee which, at first sight, may seem modest, but which are only the beginning of our strategy. Moreover, they are in line with some of those already mentioned in the previous debate. The first proposal is to draft a leaflet for activists to explain and clarify our demands, with a call for mobilisation to support our demands. Secondly, to organise, on the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October 2022, a FERPA mobilisation, both

- at national level, in forms to be decided by the member organisations
- and at European level, in the form of a delegation, composed of members of the Steering Committee and the Secretariat, which would go to the Commission and the European Parliament, to present our Manifesto and our demands for a minimum pension and pensions that allow all retired and elderly people to lead a dignified life and to be able to participate fully in social life.

In the debate that followed, all the members who spoke supported the proposal for a day of action on 1 October 2022, insisting in particular on the need to prepare for it well in advance and to "orchestrate" the various initiatives that would be envisaged on that day. The leaflet, which should be translated into all languages, presenting our demands and calling for mobilisation, appeared to be a necessity. Some also proposed a poster. A suggestion was also made to include the General Secretary of the ETUC in the delegation that would meet the European leaders. This last proposal raised reservations, as members feared that if the ETUC General Secretary was in the delegation, he would be the one the media would see, and this might obscure FERPA and its General Secretary. Of course, these proposals will be submitted to the Mid-term GA.

The Secretary General intervened to say that it was essential to organise and succeed in mobilising support for the Manifesto. The Executive Committee meeting on 1 and 2 December following the GA would be devoted to the implementation of mobilisation actions, whether on the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October 2022 or World Health Day on 7 April 2022. He believes that the ETUC will be able to accept our demands, but we will have to convince the Secretary General, as it is important to have their support. It will be a journey that will require a lot of work.

The Secretary General then referred to FERPA's response to the Commission's document on pensions and long-term care. However, he was surprised at the reaction of the French organisations on this issue. He recalled that a response had to be given in a very short time and he would have appreciated it if, instead of sending e-mails, French colleagues had phoned beforehand to get explanations, especially if a sentence was not appropriate. He insisted that no one was questioning the existing systems and that nothing in what FERPA had written suggested such a questioning.

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

The agenda for the mid-term GA was then discussed. The draft agenda was presented by the Secretary General and displayed on the screen. Members had questions about the rotation of Belgian organisations on the Management Committee, which had already been discussed at another Management Committee meeting and postponed, and which was to take place at the GA. It was pointed out that so far this has always been done in practice and that there is no specific regulation in the FERPA texts for the time being. Shouldn't we wait for the discussion that will take place in the Working Group that will study possible statutory changes, rather than reopening yet another debate on the statutes? The GA will confirm the existence of this Working Group.

Concerning this rotation, it was pointed out that the Belgian colleagues were proposing a man (Luc) to replace a woman (Eliane), so the Management Committee would lose a woman.

The Secretary General considered, as has always been the case, that a vote was essential, as the members of the Management Committee were elected, and therefore the Secretary General would ask for ratification of this rotation.

A member asked if there would be a report on the work of the Women's Committee? The answer was yes and this item was therefore added to the agenda.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: FNV, UCR-CGT, UCR-FO, UJP-UGT

In the context of other business, the President began by presenting the meetings on the Future of Europe in which he had participated on behalf of FERPA. He felt that these were very important meetings for putting across the actions and priorities of the ETUC and FERPA.

The General Secretary then reported on the meeting he had attended on "The Future of the ETUC". This was a discussion on a new organisation of the ETUC to relaunch it. A questionnaire had previously been sent to all members and FERPA had responded to it. According to the Secretary General, it was a very useful meeting, even if the proposals received were not very innovative. Within FERPA, it is important to be more aware of what is happening at European level. European events should be better taken into account, which is why we sometimes change the dates of meetings. There is a tendency to think "national level" and not enough "European level". Sometimes in ETUC meetings, we do not always have real debates: we talk a lot, but we do not listen enough to others.

There is agreement that the ETUC should be more "inclusive" and our objective is indeed "our" inclusion "in" the ETUC. It is not enough to say that we "want" to change, but that we "must" change.

The Secretary General ended his intervention by reminding the meeting that the Executive Committee in December would be addressing all the decisions taken at the Mid-term General Assembly and he reminded the meeting that FERPA defends all national pension systems and always takes into account the diversity between countries.

This concludes the meeting of the Executive Committee. The President thanked the members for their active participation. He also thanked the interpreters and the ETUC staff for their technical assistance and help.

Henri