

HL 2/12/2022

Minutes of the FERPA Steering Committee meeting 2.11.2022

Present: Lajos MAYER (SZEFE), President of FERPA; Agostino SICILIANO (UIL-UILP), Secretary General of FERPA, Angeles BRIALES (UJP-UGT), Deputy Secretary General; Silvana CAPPUCCIO, SPI-CGIL; Dick DE GRAAF (FNV); Didier HOTTE (UCR-FO); Luc JANSEN (FGTB/ABV), Treasurer of FERPA; Ana MARTINEZ LOPEZ (FEJP-CC. OO.); Hubert SCHWIND (UCR-CGT); Werner THUM (ÖGB)

Absent: excused Mireille PAUME (UCR-CGT), President of the FERPA Women's Committee; Tino FUMAGALLI (FNP-CISL),

Also present at the meeting: Henri LOURDELLE, Special Advisor of FERPA and Jessica MONTIEL, Project Coordinator, P.A. of FERPA's General Secretariat

The President of FERPA, Lajos MAYER opened the meeting by welcoming the members of the Executive Committee. After approving the agenda of the meeting, he gave the floor to the Secretary General of FERPA, Agostino SICILIANO for his Communications.

The Secretary General stressed that the meeting of tomorrow and the day after was of great importance. He then went back to the ETUC Executive Committee meeting of 27 and 28 October 2022 where, on Friday 28, FERPA had learned that the Commission had no money left to pay for the FERPA Executive Committee meeting to be held the following week. It was clarified that for the Commission FERPA is not a federation of pensioners, but for the Commission it is now called: "Permanent Committee ETUC, ETUC-Pensioners". The Secretariat reacted immediately by questioning Esther LYNCH, the Deputy General Secretary of the ETUC. At the same time, the question for the FERPA Secretary General was to decide whether to cancel the meeting, in order not to spend money, or to keep it. The decision had to be made immediately. Out of dignity for the participants, it was decided to make this financial investment and therefore to maintain the Executive Committee meeting, because we cannot accept to be treated like children and not react. It was therefore necessary to adopt a political response. But he wondered what to do if the Commission maintained its refusal to cover the costs of this Committee? He then proposed that the large organisations should pay the costs of their members and that FERPA should pay for the smaller organisations. He also pointed out that the costs of room hire and interpreting would be covered by the Commission as they were not included in the same budget line. Only the travel and accommodation costs of members are therefore concerned. He then mentioned the next ITUC Congress, which would be held from 17 to 22 November 2022 in Melbourne. At this Congress a new ITUC General Secretary will be elected. Luca is a candidate for this position, but as he is the only one, he will be elected. Therefore, he will resign as General Secretary of the ETUC as soon as he is elected. The ETUC Executive Committee appointed Esther LYNCH as interim General Secretary until the next ETUC Executive Committee meeting in December, when she will be elected. The Congress would then formally elect her as General Secretary, as she too was the only candidate. He also informed that he would be attending the ITUC Congress in Melbourne, with his home union organisation, Uilpensionati, paying all his expenses.

In addition, the ETUC is continuing its action against low wages and rising prices. The General Secretary explained the meeting we had as a Secretariat with Esther where we were able to convince her to include our Declaration of 1 October in the ETUC action. A small demonstration will take place in December in Brussels. He is thinking about what we can do. He recalled that pensioners need a revaluation of their pensions. We always have the impression of being the "invisible ones", he added. And he indicated that FERPA will participate in all ETUC initiatives.

Concerning the motion proposed by Didier, it was perfect, he said, but he had completed it as a FERPA document and it would be presented to the Executive Committee.

Concerning the draft Resolution, he had received only three reactions from the members of the Steering Committee, from Silvana, Dick and Didier. He did not know if the other members agreed with the Secretary General's draft. In view of the lack of reactions, he decided to send it to the members of the Executive Committee as it stood. He proposed to do as for the Manifesto, i.e. to present the amendments individually per country, respecting the date for sending the amendments fixed for 2 December 2022.

Opening the debate, the President thanked the Secretary General for his communications and said that we must be careful to remember that we represent the entire elderly population of the European Union. It is not only people who work that we have to worry about, but also retired people who have worked all their lives. And as far as he was concerned, he thought the motion was a positive thing. There are other organisations, such as in Hungary, which also work.

Most of the speeches were indignant about the Commission's refusal to reimburse the expenses of members who were going to participate in the Executive Committee, and this only a few days before the meeting. This is a unilateral initiative. We need to react. Some of the interventions propose that there should be a written protest. The motion presented by Didier was accepted, some members proposed some additions, indicating that it is not only energy that is increasing but many other things and this should be explicitly stated. Or, when talking about the minimum pension indexed to inflation, it was proposed to add "at least" to inflation. Others mentioned the difficulties encountered in their country regarding the cost of living and the low level of certain pensions which do not allow for living or even survival, even though in some countries bonuses of up to 300 euros have been paid or a mechanism exists for adapting the amount of the pension to inflation. The situation of those who worked in the health sector during the pandemic was also mentioned, and who were unable to cope with the many major problems they faced and were forced to resign, resulting in a shortage of staff in this sector. All this must be stated in the motion. A proposal was made, as not everyone had received it, to circulate it and give the organisations a fortnight to react and amend it. It was also mentioned that various protests had taken place in a number of countries, with demands similar to the one in Strasbourg organised by the ETUC, against inflation and for wage increases, in which several FERPA organisations had participated. In this respect, some members who attended were indignant about the absence of FERPA from the ETUC's concerns: neither the unions nor the ETUC at this event spoke about the problems of retired people. Several people also insisted that we are not second-class citizens and that we must explain to young people what we have done and why we are continuing. Finally, the question of taxation, which is not equal between employees and pensioners, was raised, with some also saying that we should talk about income and not just salaries, or adding that we should tax multi-millionaires more.

On the draft Congress Resolution, it was noted that a contribution had been received on the proposal to restructure the text and its numbering in line with the ETUC Resolutions.

In his response, the General Secretary began by commenting on the motion. If the organisations were given 15 days to react, it would no longer be a motion, but a "manifesto". He said that a motion was a motion to be discussed and adopted at the next Executive Committee. So it has to be dealt with immediately. But with this motion, we are taking a step forward. On the other hand, he agreed with those who said that pensioners were not being talked about. He repeated this at the last ETUC Executive Committee, where only two organisations mentioned pensioners. So this is a general problem and not just a FERPA problem. We must act on wages and pensions. We are part of the Confederations. We need European coordination. Pensions are not a gift, they are a due, the result of contributions paid throughout a working life to acquire it, we have paid for it. As regards the draft resolution, the organisations have until 2 December to propose their amendments, then Henri will put them into shape and this work will be discussed at the Steering Committee meeting on 26 January in order to agree on the text that will be sent to the Executive Committee on 13 February. If there are still major problems, the Secretary General accepts the proposal to set up a working group to try to solve them. Tomorrow at the Executive Committee he will present the draft resolution but there will be no discussion of the details. He then gave the floor to Jessica who reminded the members of the Executive Committee of what they had received for the meeting: the agenda, the draft budget proposal for 2023, the draft resolution, the draft budget for the Congress and the distribution of seats between each organisation. But they did not receive the motion. The General Secretary then reported in detail on the events of Friday concerning the non-financing of the next Executive Committee. At 12:34, Jörg TAGGER, Head of the Social Dialogue Unit of the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, phoned Jessica to tell her that the ETUC has an annual allocation for its Standing Committees, but that for this year the budget was exhausted. He also said that the ETUC had not sent the administrative papers for this meeting. However, everyone in the ETUC had done their work at the right time, especially when it was known that there was a general strike in Belgium on 9 November and that it was therefore not possible to bring members together on that date. When alerted to this situation, the ETUC showed solidarity and reacted immediately: the Commission must respect our Committee. The Secretary General of FERPA insisted that it is politically that we have maintained our Committee, so for next year we will reintroduce a request for funding. We are part of the Standing Committees of the ETUC, we are not changing anything. He concluded by thanking the organisations that had already said that they would accept, if necessary, to cover their own participation costs.

The following organisations took part in the debate: FNV, ÖGB, UCR-CGT, SPI-CGIL, UJP-UGT, FGTB/ABVV, FEJP-CC. OO, UCR-FO

The President then gave the floor to the General Secretary to introduce the next item on the organisation of the Executive Committee.

As decided, the motion sent by Didier and completed by the General Secretary would be presented to the Executive Committee by Didier. The General Secretary told him that he would have to stand next to Henri who would take note of the amendments proposed by the Executive Committee. This Committee will also have to formally elect Sylvana CAPUCCIO to replace Ivan PEDRETTI, who has resigned from SI-CGIL. Werner will give a PowerPoint presentation of the organisation of the Congress with all relevant information.

There will be the ratification of the Candidate of the current outgoing General Secretary for the position of General Secretary of FERPA, the only candidate that has been presented by the Italian and Hungarian unions. He said that when he was re-elected he would review the organisation of the Women's Committee, as there had been too many negative remarks on its functioning, or rather on the shortcomings of its functioning, including the absence of the President of the Women's Committee on that day and the following two days, due to other professional commitments. The bureau of the Executive Committee will be composed of the President, the Secretary General and half of the members of the Steering Committee on the first day (Angela, Dick, Hubert and Werner) and the other half on the second day (Silvana, Ana, Didier and Luc). Henri and Jessica would complete the bureau on both days. These proposals were accepted by the Steering Committee.

The President then gave the floor to Dick DE GRAAF, Chairman of the Working Group on Statute Reform, who said that he had prepared a PowerPoint presentation to the Executive Committee on his proposals for following up the Group's work. He added that he thought that the Cypriot representative would ask to speak on the issue of the Statutes. He proposed that the floor be given to him first after his presentation.

The Secretary General then returned to the preliminary draft resolution for the Congress. He said that it had been sent to the members of the Steering Committee, but that there had been only three reactions, from Dick, Didier and Silvana. He concluded that if the majority had not reacted, it was because they agreed with the proposed text. Therefore, this draft will be presented to the Executive Committee tomorrow in its original form and members will be asked to send their reactions as a unit per country. He asked Henri to take care of putting it back together, taking into account the amendments received. And, as he said, if, on 3 December, the Secretary General sees that there are a lot of changes and if the proposed changes are substantial, we will set up an Ad Hoc Commission. Silvana intervened to say that after 3 December, it seemed a bit late. The Secretary General reminded her that on 20 October he had sent a message to all members explaining the situation and indicating the procedure that would be followed to achieve good results. He said that it was important to know whether there would be many amendments or not, in order to know what course of action to take next. He also returned to Dick's request concerning the possible intervention of the Cypriot colleague. He said that once the Chairman of the Working Group had spoken, all members could speak in turn. President Lajos spoke along the same lines

There was no other business, but the Secretary General reminded the meeting that the other appointments to the various posts and functions to be filled within FERPA would be made at the next Executive Committee meeting to be held immediately after the Congress.

Finally, Ana indicated that Mireille had asked her to read her work and that she would limit herself to doing so. However, as she has a plane to catch at 3pm on the second day, she asked that the item on the Women's Committee be brought forward to the first day from 4pm to 5pm and that the item on the follow-up to the Congress be done on the second day, from 3pm to 4pm. Her request was accepted and the agenda of the Executive Committee would be amended accordingly.

After this final intervention, the President closed the meeting by thanking the participants for their presence and the interpreters for their help.

Henri