

Minutes of the FERPA Steering Committee meeting in virtual mode
22.6.2023

Participants: Hubert SCHWIND (UCR-CGT), President of FERPA; Agostino SICILIANO (UILP-UIL), Secretary General of FERPA; Ana MARTINEZ LOPEZ (CC. OO), Deputy Secretary General of FERPA; Silvana CAPPUCCIO (SPI-CGIL), President of the Women's Committee of FERPA; Dick DE GRAFF (FNV), Treasurer of FERPA; Maryvonne FLAHAUT (CSC/ACV); Maud GILOUX (UNIR-CFE-CGC); Michel MILLER (OGB-L); Jean-Marc SCHAEFFER (UNSA-R); Patrizia VOLPONI (FNP-CISL).

Also attending the meeting: Henri LOURDELLE from the Secretariat, Special Adviser to FERPA, who also took notes.

Absent Apologies: Monika KEMPERLE (ÖGB); Michalakis ROSSIS (PESYS-SEK) and Jessica MONTIEL RAMIREZ, from the FERPA Secretariat, Project Coordinator/PA to the Secretary General of FERPA.

President Hubert SCHWIND opened the meeting by welcoming the members and giving the floor in Visio to Jessica, who began by thanking Julienne from the ETUC, who had taken technical responsibility for launching the meeting, and Aldo, colleague from UIL, who would be taking over from her. She pointed out that the General Secretary of the ETUC had called an important meeting of all ETUC staff for the same day, which she would be attending, especially as the ETUC's move and the new premises to be allocated to FERPA would be discussed.

The President went on to underline the good work that had been done over the previous four years with the Manifesto: the task now, he added, was to implement it. He then submitted the agenda to the members of the Steering Committee for approval, which was unanimously adopted.

Two colleagues then asked to speak. Firstly, Michel MILLER, who wondered why the ETUC Congress in Berlin would be discussed and why the agenda did not include an item on the last FERPA Congress in Vienna. He added that a table of the improvements to be made should be drawn up for the next time. Dick DE GRAAF echoed Michel's comments on the FERPA Congress: how, he wondered, had we worked during the Vienna Congress? He then raised the issue of updating the FERPA website.

The President then gave the floor to the Secretary General of FERPA, Agostino SICILIANO, for his remarks.

The General Secretary began by pointing out that the agenda was fairly full. He emphasised that it was based on the decisions of the Congress. With regard to the updating of the website, he said that all the documents and photos from the FERPA Congress had been inserted.

As far as the Steering Committee was concerned, it would be necessary to wait until everyone had sent in their photo and their job description before the website could be updated in general. Returning to the Vienna Congress, a specific point had not been set, as he felt that it had been a good Congress and that the final resolution had been adopted unanimously, which would enable us to work well. There was therefore no reason to worry about the way the Congress had gone, because, he repeated, it had been a good Congress. With regard to the Berlin Congress, he first regretted that the FERPA delegation was not in full strength. He took the floor during three sessions: we

played an active role. In Berlin, the problems of the elderly were recognised.

We now need to look at how we can work more effectively. We need to decide today how to organise our activities. He also mentioned the next initiatives to be taken, which should focus on the fight against poverty and minimum pensions. ETUC General Secretary Esther Lynch had shown a keen interest in this subject, and she wanted to organise a joint ETUC/FERPA conference on minimum pensions.

With these clarifications, the President opened the debate.

First of all, a number of delegates felt that the issue of the elderly and retired had not been addressed in depth at the Berlin Congress, despite the interventions of the General Secretary, but this was also true within our organisations. Our objective must be to bring our problems back to the fore in an appropriate way in all our bodies. Every time an ETUC General Secretary attends our meetings, he agrees to take our problems into account, but this is not reflected in the Resolution. There was just one tiny point. The ETUC should better reflect the position of older people. Our participation in the ETUC is important. The issues it addresses have consequences for older people: we are the "users" of their work. It is important that there is a debate between the ETUC and FERPA: we must be taken seriously. On the question of the minimum pension and the Conference proposed by the General Secretary of the ETUC, the debate is more open among the members of the Executive Committee. While this proposal was generally well received, some speakers questioned it and felt, firstly, that there was no convergence within the organisations and, secondly, that there was no position on minimum pensions at European level. Why not work on minimum pensions, but how? Shouldn't we first update the pensions situation in our various countries? Before working on minimum pensions, shouldn't we first gain recognition? Others, though more numerous, insist that the question of minimum pensions is a priority. The proposed conference marks the start of a debate on minimum pensions. We need to come up with our own proposals, such as the structure of the Conference, the choice of speakers, etc. Starting the debate is always necessary before we can move on to implementation. For others, tackling this concrete subject shows that Europe is working on something concrete.

Others also point out that we must not forget the other issues that are important to older people and pensioners, such as healthcare and universal access to it, long-term care, etc. The ETUC is not really involved in these areas, so we have a lot of room for manoeuvre, but this means that we need to have a bit clearer ideas. The ETUC Resolution mentions the need to mobilise against austerity policies, and retired people need to be involved in this. The ETUC is going to organise a European demonstration, and FERPA must take part. Finally, a participant asked whether the FERPA Congress was going to be discussed.

In his reply, the General Secretary began by agreeing with those who had pointed out that the problems of retired people were still not taken into account by the ETUC. He intervened three times, but then nothing. But there is also the question of national organisations. The situation is quite complicated, which means that we need to change our modus operandi within the ETUC. He then recalled that the initiative on the minimum pension came from the Congress. It is clear that the Manifesto must be implemented in full, but we have to start somewhere. The fight against poverty among retired people requires a minimum pension. And this should be taken up in the forthcoming European elections.

Prioritising pensions does not exclude the rest, such as International Health Day. He also mentioned the fact that the ETUC would be leaving the Silver Square at the end of June and should be able to move into its new premises at the end of August.

The following organisations took part in the debate: SPI-CGIL; FNV; UNSA-R; CFE-CGC; OGB-L; CC. OO

The next point raised by the General Secretary concerned the operating rules of the Secretariat. He encouraged the members of the Steering Committee to make an extra effort over the next four years to devote as much time as possible to FERPA, to support the Manifesto more strongly. In this context, precise coordination work by the Secretariat on all FERPA activities is required. It is therefore essential that the members of the Steering Committee always inform the three members of the Secretariat of their activities in order to strengthen the joint work between them and the Secretariat.

As there was no discussion on this point, President Hubert SCHWIND gave the floor back to the Secretary General to present the next point, which concerned the issues to be dealt with by the members of the Steering Committee.

The General Secretary reminded the meeting that during the previous term of office, everyone had had a responsibility, and that this had been fulfilled through the Manifesto, which had been adopted unanimously, and thanks to Henri, who had compiled the various contributions made by members.

The members of the Steering Committee are therefore invited to take charge of the four "themes" that emerge from the priorities defined in Vienna, with two members per "theme". For each of these themes, the aim is to define the initiatives to be implemented to make them effective. In his reply, the General Secretary began by agreeing with those who had pointed out that the problems of retired people were still not taken into account by the ETUC. He intervened three times, but then nothing. But there is also the question of national organisations. The situation is quite complicated, which means that we need to change our modus operandi within the ETUC. He then recalled that the initiative on the minimum pension came from the Congress. It is clear that the Manifesto must be implemented in full, but we have to start somewhere. The fight against poverty among retired people requires a minimum pension. And this should be taken up in the forthcoming European elections.

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The first involves implementing the Manifesto by exploiting the various opportunities available.

The second concerns the management of the International Days (Health - April, the Elderly - October 1, etc.). The idea is to think, sufficiently in advance, about the initiatives to be taken so as not to be caught unprepared.

The third and fourth concern minimum pensions and poverty among the elderly respectively.

And of course there are all the women's issues, which are dealt with by the Women's Committee.

For each of these themes, the aim is to consider the political initiatives to be taken. All the members of the Steering Committee are involved in taking responsibility for one or other of these issues, with the exception of the Chairman, the General Secretary, the Treasurer and the Chairwoman of the Women's Committee, who already have their own responsibilities. For each theme, therefore, it will be necessary to find two "referents" who will be responsible for it, working closely with the Secretariat. Of course, all members are welcome to put forward ideas to contribute to the reflections of the "referees".

The Chairman then opened the debate.

The Chairwoman of the Women's Committee began by making a clarification. The Women's Committee would be expressing its opinion on the various issues dealt with by FERPA. She made it clear that she would not be a member of any of the four groups.

The Women's Committee Coordination Group will be set up at the next Committee meeting. It will be made up of 5 members from 5 different regions.

During the discussion, questions were raised about the way in which the group would work. Others also questioned the fact that the issue of digital technology, which is often a challenge for older people, had not been addressed. Others also feel that this will require a lot of cross-disciplinary work. The World Health Organisation is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. Why isn't there a health 'theme', including the health of the elderly, disability, etc.? With an ageing population, we need to pay attention to health issues at all levels. In the work to be done, we need to respect the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. take account of what can be done at local level: in fact, FERPA talks about the principles that can be implemented. We also need to think about how to mobilise the institutes that may be available to us. It would be good if we could invite someone from the European Agencies to each of our meetings. The theme of minimum pensions provides an important focus for the ageing population. Returning to the International Days, we need to establish interfaces with the other themes. Some people felt that the Manifesto was rather directed towards the ETUC, in other words, how are our ideas considered and taken up? We need to work with international trade union organisations. Once we have worked in the various groups, we will be able to take our demands to the European level. Some members felt that a distinction had to be made between going into the substance of the issues and going into more detail. One member expressed doubts about how all this would evolve. Another wondered about the mobilisation: mobilise around what? The Chairman also intervened to say that, in his opinion, the groups should first be set up and then it should be seen how everything would work.

In his reply, the General Secretary thanked the members for having shared this new *modus operandi*, while emphasising that it was not easy to organise a new working method and that we were once again committing ourselves to a long-term project. The group that will take charge of the Manifesto will have to think about how it will be disseminated and how it will be approached by national organisations. It will also be necessary to draft a circular letter focusing on health, as has been mentioned, but we will first have to see at the next meetings whether there is agreement to focus on this theme. Finally, as he said, everyone can also contribute to the various projects to support the colleagues who will be in charge of them. He would ask the two colleagues who were absent to join one or other of the projects. He expressed his satisfaction at having an Steering Committee that

analyses, proposes and focuses on the most important issues. The next Steering Committee meeting should focus on this new method. He concluded by asking members to send in their photos so that the FERPA website could be updated. The projects that each member will be responsible for will be indicated.

An update was then given on the work to date:

- Minimum pension: Patrizia VOLPONI (FNP-CISL) and Jean-Marc SCHAEFFER (UNSA-R)
- Poverty: Maryvonne FLAHAUT (CSC/ACV), a theme to which we could perhaps add health, and in particular the difficulty of obtaining medical treatment due to lack of funds...
- International Days: Maud GILLOUX (UNIR-CFE-CGC)
- On the implementation of the Manifesto: Michel MILLER (OGB-L).

Apart from the issue of the minimum pension, the three other issues still need to be addressed, as there is only one contact person.

The President of FERPA then gave the floor to the Secretary General to introduce the next item on the agenda, devoted to FERPA's financial resources.

He said that the activities envisaged had to be seen in the light of the resources available to us, which would enable us to go further. FERPA's former Finance Committee had insisted that FERPA's income, i.e. membership fees, should be reviewed. These have not been increased for over 10 years (2011). In some organisations, they are indexed to changes in pensions in the country concerned. The Treasurer will therefore have to do a good job to ensure that he has adequate resources. It will therefore be necessary to come to the Executive Committee with proposals.

The floor was then given to the Treasurer, Dick DE GRAFF. He indicated that he had asked for a meeting beforehand with the ETUC colleagues in charge of these issues. As the General Secretary had said, there was no system for indexing contributions at FERPA. Moreover, we are dependent on our own resources. He is currently working to come up with a standard system for indexing members' subscriptions that everyone can understand. There is of course the possibility of additional resources at European level, but we need our own contribution, so we need to think about this.

Opening the debate, the Chairman emphasised that in order to increase FERPA's finances, FERPA needed to be strengthened.

First of all, one organisation felt that indexation was not automatic, as all the organisations had problems at national level, so it was inconceivable for its organisation to increase dues for the time being. Another organisation supported the same position. Another organisation returned to the

possibility of seeking additional European funding, but in order to access projects, you need resources, including human resources. In the discussion, reference was also made to the President's initial remarks to the effect that FERPA needed to be strengthened.

Before giving the floor to the General Secretary, the Chairman indicated that the Treasurer should be left to work. The General Secretary agreed that this was a delicate issue and pointed out that it was not the General Secretary who wanted to increase subscriptions, but that he had merely repeated what the former Chairman of the Finance Committee had said. Of course, an alternative solution could be proposed, namely to increase the number of our members. He also pointed out that in September, new furniture would have to be purchased when FERPA moved into the new ETUC building, which would represent an "extra-ordinary" expense for the 2023 budget. We could also do away with all "face-to-face" meetings, but what would remain of the quality and richness of our exchanges? Or each participant will have to pay for his or her own transport and accommodation... Increasing the number of members is not easy either. For next year, we're going to see if it's possible to meet at the European Economic and Social Committee, although we know that we'll be dependent on the availability of their rooms. Holding a face-to-face meeting costs an extra 2,000 euros, not including accommodation and travel. The Steering Committee meeting in September will therefore be held by videoconference, and the meeting on the eve of the Executive Committee will be face-to-face. Dick would therefore have to make proposals, taking into account the resources available.

The Chairman confirmed that Dick had been given a mandate to make proposals.

The following organisations took part in the debate: SPI-CGIL; FNP-CISL; UNIR-CFE-CGC.

The dates of the next meetings were then given:

- Visio meeting of the Steering Committee on the morning of 19 September.
- 24 October afternoon, in person, Steering Committee meeting
- 25 and 26 October, in person, Executive Committee meeting.

Having clarified this point, a number of miscellaneous questions were asked.

- The first was from the Chair of the Women's Committee, Silvana CAPPUCCIO (SPI-CGIL), who asked whether it would be possible to hold the Women's Committee meeting on the afternoon of 26 October, after the Executive Committee meeting, from 2pm to 4pm, for example.

- The second by Dick DE GRAFF (FNV), former President of the Working Group on the Statutes, who also asked that we not forget that the next Executive Committee must ratify the changes made to the Rules of Procedure.
- The third contribution came from Michel Miller (OGB-L), who said that he had no comments on the dates, but on the future organisation: would it be possible to organise the FERPA Executive Committee before or after the ETUC Executive Committee, which would make it possible to have contacts with the members and exchange information. With the exception of the one in October, someone from outside should be invited to attend future Executive Committees. Finally, with regard to the Protocol signed in 2016 with the EC Youth Committee, what could be done to update it quickly? We could invite the President of the Youth Committee. Ana replied that she had already discussed this with her.
- Jean-Marc SCHAEFFER (UNSA-R) returned to the subject of the Minimum Pensions Group and its link with the Conference with ETUC members.

The General Secretary replied to Silvana that the reason for holding the Women's Committee during the Executive Committee was to enable all members to take part. The method could be changed, but it was absolutely necessary to close the Executive Committee at 4pm, as it would be paid for (in particular the interpreters and the hire of the room) by the Commission. The Chairwoman of the Women's Committee replied that a distinction had to be made: information could be given to the Executive Committee either when the Women's Committee had finished its work or at the next Executive Committee meeting. During the two days, a slot should be set aside for the Women's Committee, for example on the first day from 2.30pm, as we need to lay the foundations for the work and we need to do a decent job.

Following this exchange, the General Secretary proposed to bring this half-day working session to a close. He reminded everyone that we would be meeting by videoconference on 19 September. He thanked the interpreters and his UIL colleague Aldo, who had provided technical assistance during the meeting.

For his part, the Chairman thanked the participants for the discussions and the work they had done, and reminded them that he hoped that one day we would be able to talk about a subject close to his heart: peace.

Henri

