

HL 17th October 2022

Minutes of the FERPA Steering Committee meeting 29.9.2022

Present: Lajos MAYER (SZEF), 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); Tino FUMAGALLI (FNP-CISL), Didier HOTTE (UCR-FO); Ana MARTINEZ LOPEZ (FEJP-CC. OO.); Hubert SCHWIND (UCR-CGT); Werner THUM (ÖGB)

Absent: Mireille PAUME (UCR-CGT), President of the FERPA Women's Committee; Luc JANSEN (FGTB/ABVV), Treasurer of FERPA;

Also present at the meeting: Henri LOURDELLE, Special Advisor of FERPA and Jessica MONTIEL, Project Coordinator, P.A. of the S.G of FERPA

The President of FERPA, Lajos MAYER, opened the meeting, welcoming all participants and proceeded to the approval of the agenda, which was unanimously adopted. He then gave the floor to the General Secretary of FERPA, Agostino SICILIANO for his Communications.

The General Secretary first of all returned to the context of the war in Ukraine and the extreme means that are being used or brandished by President Putin, such as the threat of the atomic bomb or the acts of terrorism concerning gas pipelines. He also expressed his concern about the various European countries that are moving towards the Far Right, such as Italy, which is going to be led by a centre-right party. He said he thought back to Altiero Spinelli, considered one of the fathers of Europe. It is in this context, he added, that the Executive Committee is meeting with our problems, even if we have not been able to change the situation. He recalled that he had attended the ETUC Summer School, where he had had the opportunity to speak about pensioners. In particular, he insisted that the ETUC could not forget the elderly, who make up 20% of the European population. He also mentioned our concerns, which are included in the Manifesto. In the ETUC document discussed at the last Steering Committee, there was mention of employment and the development of poverty, but not of poverty among older people. He therefore intervened again to raise this point. Esther LYNCH intervened to say that she would support FERPA in the ETUC - and we also support the ETUC - and she added that when we talk about "vulnerable" people, poor people or the increase in the cost of living, we are also talking about elderly people. The General Secretary felt that there should have been a sentence on pensioners. He gave the example that when we talk about the increase in the cost of energy, it cannot be compensated only by the increase in salaries, but also by the increase in pensions. It is in this context that the Secretariat met with Esther LYNCH on 29 September.

She agreed that our Declaration of 1 October would form an integral part of the ETUC's action and she would incorporate it into her own. Esther said that a small ETUC demonstration would take place on 5 October in front of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. On this occasion, an employee will come and explain his situation and in particular his difficulties to live in this crisis context.

She asked the FERPA to allow a pensioner to speak about the difficulties encountered in the face of the rising cost of living and energy, when one is living on a minimum pension which, moreover, is below the poverty line. As the demonstration was in Strasbourg, the French trade union organisations had been approached, but only one had replied, the UCR-CGT, with Hubert indicating that he himself would be in Strasbourg and that if necessary he could intervene, as the retired people he had approached had replied that they would not dare to speak at such a rally. The General Secretary said that he had taken note of the few responses he had received from French organisations and of the fact that no one, apart from Hubert, had volunteered to speak. In addition, he recalled that the Declaration of 1st October had been sent

- to the European Institutions, to whom FERPA had taken the opportunity to ask for a further meeting following the meeting that had taken place last March
- the ETUC
- and the UN Secretary General.

Yesterday, following this mailing, a meeting took place for an hour with the Cabinet of the President of the European Council, Mr. Charles MICHEL. We exchanged views and the cabinet representative mentioned the Tripartite Social Summit of October 2023. But as FERPA is not part of this Summit, the General Secretary insisted that we should continue our bilateral meetings. The Cabinet representative said that he remained available. The Secretary General then informed the Committee of the future changes in the ETUC. Luca VISENTINI, the current General Secretary of the ETUC, is a candidate for the post of General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), whose 5th World Congress will be held from 17 to 22 November 2022 in Melbourne (Australia). Esther LYNCH, the only candidate to replace him at the ETUC, should be elected, probably on an "ad interim" basis, at the ETUC Executive Committee in December, pending her formal election at the Berlin Congress in 2023. Concerning our amendment on our voting rights in the Executive Committee, Esther was of the opinion that we should look at things in perspective and wait for the next ETUC Mid-term Assembly in 2025, in order to build a winning strategy. The General Secretary, for his part, still wanted to present our amendment to the Berlin Congress. Dick DEGRAAF, Chair of our Working Group on the reform of the FERPA Statutes, will participate on behalf of our organisation in the next Congress Preparatory Committee (CPC), which will again examine our amendment.

He urged the members of the Executive Committee, especially those whose organisations did not vote FOR in Lisbon, to convince their organisations that either abstained (CC. OO, FGTB) or voted against (CGT, ÖGB) to vote in favour of this right. He wanted them to convince their organisations of the work that was being done by FERPA. The other point of information given by the General Secretary concerned the ETUC's move from the Trade Union House in December. The new building in City 2 should (in principle) be ready by next June. In the meantime, the ETUC must find a place for staff to work, although teleworking would be favoured and encouraged. The Secretary General ended his intervention by asking the members to be more "cohesive" within FERPA but again to convince our organisations.

President Lajos MAYER then opened the debate.

Some organisations thanked the Secretary General for his speech and agreed with what had been said, particularly with regard to the difficult situation faced by retired people and the fact that the Far Right was gaining more and more ground in Europe. For some, it is an economic conflict that is taking the form of a war on Europe's doorstep and some governments are using this war to attack social rights. Some explained why their representatives had abstained or voted against in Lisbon: it was a problem of understanding. According to these members, organisations do not know what FERPA does. We need to communicate better. Several of them said that they are working to change their vote to a positive one. Going back to the October 1st Declaration, members felt it was important that it be taken up everywhere. One organisation even proposed (and submitted a draft) to go further and that a motion be tabled to index pensions to the level of inflation. A signal must be given. Concerning the ETUC demonstration in front of the Strasbourg Parliament, some deplored the fact that they had not been warned earlier and that if the information had been circulated, they would certainly have found a retired person, including a woman, to intervene. It was also pointed out that "the poor are ashamed to speak out". Finally, one intervention denounced all the money that was going to be spent on going to Melbourne for the ITUC Congress and felt that it could have been better used. The last intervention was a call for unity.

In conclusion of this short debate, the General Secretary returned to the Strasbourg demonstration, stressing the fact that of the five French organisations to which we had sent an e-mail to find a representative of retired people, there had been no response. What to do in the next few days, he asked? Moreover, Italian was not available, so it was more logical and functional to turn to the French organisations.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: CC. OO, SPI-CGIL, UCR-CGT,

UCR-FO

The second topic discussed during the Committee was the next FERPA Executive Committee meeting on 3 and 4 November. The General Secretary first of all explained the reasons for the change of date. On 9 November, there would be a general strike in Belgium, which would of course affect transport. There was no question of not holding this meeting. The only possible dates, regarding the availability of the auditorium, were 3 and 4 November. He then read out the agenda for the next Executive Committee meeting:

- approval of the agenda of the 9th FERPA Congress
- Choice of the logo sent by mail
- first debate on the draft resolution of the next Congress
- intervention of Esther LYNCH
- Balance 2019, 2020, 2021 and budget forecast for 2023
- Report by Dick on the statutes.

He pointed out that there would be a big problem with the Women's Committee. Mireille, its President, would not be present at the Executive Committee meeting. She was to present a work plan for the Women's Committee until the next Congress and a first draft of the activity report to be discussed by the Committee.

In the ensuing debate, interventions focused on the change of dates. Several people asked to consult the organisations beforehand and made several proposals.

We can use the doodle for example. There needs to be a mechanism for everyone to be involved. It was also said that the President of the Women's Committee would not be standing for re-election, but that she would send a project for the future before the Committee.

In his reply, the Secretary General recalled that FERPA meetings are paid for by the Commission via the ETUC, otherwise we do not have the budget to hold them. FERPA is not less important than the member organisations. There are substitutes if the full member cannot participate. In Italy, for example, when there is a strike, the meeting is moved. It is up to the General Secretary to take the responsibility to postpone a meeting due to a sudden strike in Belgium, at the call of the confederal organisations which are also present in FERPA, taking into account the availability of rooms and also the fact that in December the ETUC buildings must be empty. Moreover, after three years of the pandemic, it was not wise to hold the Executive Committee in Visio.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: UCR-CGT, UGTE, SPI-CGIL

The next point of discussion concerned the Draft Resolution to be approved at our next Congress presented by the General Secretary and which was handed out at the meeting.

During the Congress, there is no time to involve all 42 organisations in the discussion. Therefore, it will be presented to the Executive Committee in November and discussed at the Executive Committee meeting on 14-15 February 2023 so that at the Congress there are only a few small changes to be made. The members of the Management Committee have until 14 October to send their contributions. After its November meeting the Executive Committee would have until 2 December to submit their amendments, which would be discussed at the January Steering Committee. The General Secretary indicated that he wanted to broaden the scope of the Manifesto. He had also introduced a point on the birth rate, which was an important subject. There would be the same route for the Women's Committee document. Nominations for the post of General Secretary should be received by 28 October. Concerning the Group's work on the statutes, it will be necessary to plan and hold the meeting(s) on video, in order to be able to arrive at the Congress with finalised proposals. For the other candidatures (FERPA Presidency, Women's Committee, Deputy General Secretary, etc.) this will be dealt with in February. He also pointed out that there was a peculiarity: while we had instituted the post of Treasurer, was there still any point in having a Financial Commission, whose sole role, statutorily speaking, was to check the accounts, when these were already checked by the ETUC Auditors? There is a duplication here. When the Treasurer's post did not exist, it was useful, but now, with the auditing of the ETUC Auditors, it is no longer useful.

Following this presentation, there was only one intervention, that of the UGTE, which asked about the hotel possibilities and where the Congress would be held. Werner, from the ÖGB, which is organising the Congress, replied that there were many hotels close to the underground station, which was two stops away from the Congress venue. Jessica added that the Congress would be held at the ÖGB headquarters, which was two stops from the hotel, as Werner had said. On the other hand, the final arrangements with the hotel have just been made. Everyone will be staying in the same hotel.

The General Secretary then introduced the financial point. He first noted the absence of the Treasurer. He then presented the financial situation as of 22 June. He recalled that the Executive Committee had approved the balance sheet for previous years with reservations, as the Finance Commission had not been able to meet due to the pandemic. The General Secretary had written to the Treasurer to tell him what he should do between now and the Steering Committee.

Luc finally sent a very partial document and so he and Jessica took on the task of doing all the work. He thanked Jessica for the work she had done, even though it was not her responsibility. He indicated that he and Jessica were responsible for this provisional budget. The Finance Committee which had met the previous day had approved the 2019, 2020 and 2021 balance sheets.

The reserves had progressed because there had been no meeting due to the pandemic, which explained the positive balance sheet. There were some small adjustments compared to the previous budget. For example, the provisional budget took into account the statutory increases to which Jessica is entitled, since, even though she is seconded, she remains a member of the ETUC and is therefore subject to this Collective Agreement. Similarly, there was a slight increase in the reimbursement of Henri's expenses, due to the rising price of fuel. He also noted that in the current period it was difficult to envisage an increase in membership fees. There has been a reduction in the cost of FERPA meetings and publications, which means that we have a positive balance sheet of about 4,000 euros, which allows us to deal with any problems that may arise. The General Secretary also thanked Carla DUARTE from the ETUC's accounting department, who had also been very helpful. Concerning the budget of the Congress, which was also presented, account had been taken of past practice, namely in particular that the hotel for full members was paid for by FERPA, but also of what was paid for by the ÖGB. He then gave the floor to Jessica who explained the work she had done. In particular, she said that, based on previous experiences with negative budgets, she had tried to come up with a positive solution. If the situation is good, it is because we have done everything possible to achieve this situation. She noted that she also does the translation work. Finally, she noted that as far as the telephone subscription was concerned, it was the strict application of Belgian law. In addition, the ETUC had abolished all fixed telephone lines, which meant that the telephone line in the operating costs was reduced.

In the debate that followed, the organisations that intervened thanked the General Secretary and Jessica for the work done and were pleased that the budget was positive. Some, however, deplored the fact that this positive result was at the expense of activity costs. Another speaker intervened to say that he had been asking for several years to present something that everyone understood. Finally, it was pointed out that the provisional budget was usually presented in comparison with the previous budget. On this particular point, Jessica intervened to say that the work she had been asked to do was to present a draft provisional budget for 2023.

For his part, in his reply, the General Secretary said that comparisons with previous budgets were difficult to make because of the pandemic.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: SPI-CGIL, FNV, ÖGB

Dick DEGRAAF was then given the floor to present his work on the statutes.

He began by reminding the meeting that the working group on the statutes was made up of six members. In August, he had sent them everything he had received and the preliminary work he had done. Then he asked for their comments. Only the UGTE reacted, and Henri said that he agreed with what he was presenting and proposing. The question is how to organise the working group meeting? In Visio? In person?

And when? His preference would be for a face-to-face meeting, to better facilitate exchanges. He also proposed not to forget the remarks of the Cypriot colleagues who are recurrent and who contest the procedure followed. He would have liked to be part of the Working Group, but the Steering Committee decided otherwise. His most important proposals would have to be taken into account, as some of them were merely formal remarks, and some priorities would have to be set. Returning to the Cypriot colleague's question as to why he was not part of the working group, Dick replied that it was not his responsibility but that of the Steering Committee and Avgoustis would ask that it be discussed at the next Executive Committee. Let's be ready, he concluded.

The President said he was sorry about the behaviour of the Cypriot colleague. He was a member of the Executive Committee, so he could speak, but he asked not to make this a personal discussion in FERPA. We should stick to the procedures decided collectively.

The General Secretary also intervened to say that he agreed with what the President had said. What the Constitution Group is going to do should help speed up the work of the Executive Committee and make small changes. It was decided that it was the members of the Management Committee who should be part of the Constitution Group.

Dick took the floor to say that it was never intended to open "Pandora's box". France had sent a 48-page document, but this was essentially drafting, and the Swiss had asked to take gender into account, but this was a translation problem. The major problems are the composition of the Steering Committee, voting, etc...

Jessica intervened to say that we have two or three working languages, so we need to find interpreters, a room...it costs 1,000 euros, so it is a budgetary problem.

Dick suggested asking the Belgian trade unions for free meeting rooms. This has been done in the past.

Jessica reminded that all the rooms at the International Trade Union House were taken and that with the move, everything had become more complicated.

In the small discussion that followed with the members, it was pointed out that there might be agreement to hold the next Group meeting on video, but that perhaps one meeting would not be enough. Another reaction concerned the October 1st Declaration and the question was asked: is FERPA coordinating its dissemination or is everyone responsible for presenting it to the European Institutions?

The Secretary General replied first of all on the latter point. Each organisation, as it was said in the note accompanying the sending of the Declaration, is in charge of its dissemination in its own country and its own authorities and as far as the European Institutions are concerned, it was sent to them by FERPA.

As for the Working Group, the General Secretary proposed that it meet in Visio. Dick agreed and a date would be sought with the members.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: UGTE, SPI-CGIL

This item closed the meeting of the Steering Committee. The President thanked the members for their participation and the interpreters for their help, despite the technical problems that had disrupted the start of the meeting.

Henri