

Present: Lajos MAYER (SZEFE), President of FERPA; Agostino SICILIANO (UIL-UILP), Secretary General of FERPA; Mireille PAUME (UCR-CGT), President of the Women's Committee of FERPA; Luc JANSEN (FGTB/ABVV), Treasurer of FERPA; Dick DE GRAAF (FNV); Didier HOTTE (UCR-FO); Ana MARTINEZ LOPEZ (FEJP-CC. OO.); Hubert SCHWIND (UCR-CGT)

Absent excused: Angeles BRIALES (UJP-UGT), Deputy Secretary General; Tino FUMAGALLI (FNP-CISL), Ivan PEDRETTI (SPI-CGIL) and Werner THUM (ÖGB)

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

The President of FERPA, Lajos MAYER, opened the meeting by welcoming the members present and by expressing his pleasure at this first face-to-face meeting after more than two years following the pandemic. He wished everyone a successful meeting. He then asked if there was any other business for the agenda. Dick DE GRAAF from the FNV said that he had one. The President also indicated that item 4a could not be dealt with as the financial document was not yet ready. The President then gave the floor to the Secretary General of FERPA, Agostino SICILIANO, for his Communications.

The Secretary General recalled that we have not met face to face since December 2019, i.e. 2.5 years, because of the pandemic, but we have managed to be strong and we are pleased to meet today. He also apologised to those members who were absent today. He said that he would first go over the consequences of the War in Ukraine. He began by mentioning the lightning visit of the French President, Emmanuel MACRON, to Ukraine on 16 June, accompanied by the German and Italian leaders, Olaf SCHOLZ and Mario DRAGHI, joined in Kiev by the Romanian President, Klaus IOHANNIS. The issue of Ukraine's accession to the EU is expected to be central to this meeting. The situation in this aggressed country is getting more and more complicated. As FERPA, we have condemned the aggression of Ukraine by Russia. It is not known what will happen to the imprisoned people. We are also concerned for the women, children and elderly who, in general, did not want to leave their country, their homes and who, for the elderly in particular, will not have time to rebuild them and thus build a new future. This is a tragedy for their prospects. FERPA reaffirms its opposition to this war. In this context of permanent conquest of new territories, it is difficult to achieve peace. The Secretary General then reviewed the latest activities of FERPA in this context. He mentioned the letters sent to the heads of the European Institutions and the virtual meetings that took place and in which the members of the Executive Committee were able to participate. The people from the Commission sent a letter, as we unfortunately could not meet the President. From the President of the Council of the European Union, Mr. MACRON, we did not receive any reaction, neither before his election nor after.

We will have to see with his successor at the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. As agreed, we will have to meet again with Mr. Michel's cabinet and the European Parliament. During our meetings, these people were very open. In the next few days, the COVID Committee of the European Parliament will be installed.

On 1 October, the elderly will become tangible actors. We need to know what we are protesting against and what we are going to do. A demonstration? If so, against what? Or have a more open approach: write a document to analyse the situation of older people and do something next year, because we have to be able to involve as many people as possible. Concerning the Conference on the Future of Europe, the President will speak on this point later. However, the work done by the President and the members of the Steering Committee should be highlighted, as it had enabled the elderly to be taken into account. In the meantime, there was the Directive on the minimum wage, which still had to go before the Parliament for final adoption. It will not be binding, but it will have to be adapted in each country. Now that this step has been taken, the next step will be the minimum pension. In the ETUC we have been discussing this issue in connection with the minimum wage. FERPA demands a minimum pension that is above the poverty line. FERPA will promote this. The Manifesto in its different translations is now available on the FERPA website. In some countries, FERPA organisations have been very supportive of the Manifesto with their governments. The Secretary General is available to promote and publicise the Manifesto. FERPA is often perceived as a Brussels-based organisation. We need to explain what FERPA is, as was done at the UCR-FO Congress in Marseille, or in Ljubljana or at the FNP-CISL Congress. We must take advantage of all the meetings to do this work. The FERPA is a trade union federation that does not just collect information, but is an actor. For example, it is a stakeholder in the ETUC project, Social All. It will be present at the ETUC Summer School at the end of June in Paris.

Following this intervention, the President thanked the Secretary General and opened the debate. Echoing the remark of the Secretary General of FERPA that FERPA is not only the Secretariat in Brussels, some speakers insisted that FERPA exists, perhaps above all, through and thanks to the activities of its national affiliates and that in several countries it is recognised as the European organisation of older people and consulted as such. Others pointed out that in their country, as in Belgium for example, the minimum pension will be aligned with the minimum wage in 2024 and asked why what is possible in one country should not be possible in another? One speaker echoed what was said in the online discussion with one of the representatives of the EU Council, when we met him, that just as there was a growing consensus on a European minimum wage system, which did not seem likely a few years ago, a European agreement on a minimum pension system might also be possible in the not too distant future? However, it was pointed out in the debate that when we talk about a minimum pension at European level, we are not talking about a uniform amount throughout Europe. One speaker also mentioned that, in his country, the government had tried to partially dissociate the state pension from the evolution of the minimum wage, which was the rule until now. However, faced with the reaction of trade unions and pensioners' organisations, the government was forced to backtrack.

It is also recalled that retired people were the first victims of the economic crisis, but also of the health crisis. For example, in some countries, during the pandemic, health institutions were forbidden to provide emergency care to the elderly. Or there are fewer beds in public hospitals than before the crisis. And in institutions for the elderly, the situation for them is catastrophic. Concerning the FERPA Manifesto, it is a support point and a good tool to make FERPA known, but it is necessary to go further and make it more concrete.

Concerning the October 1st action, there seems to be a consensus that it should not necessarily be a demonstration, especially if we take into account the financial costs involved, but also the health aspect (the pandemic is far from being over). A strong FERPA Declaration could be envisaged, in particular on the minimum pension. In this respect, several speakers insisted that if there is a solemn Declaration of FERPA, it should not be a Declaration "against" but a Declaration "for": "for" the minimum pension, "for" purchasing power, "for" quality medicine, "for" a better life for the elderly... And if there is a Declaration, it will not be possible to ignore the War in Ukraine and what women are suffering, both in Ukraine and in Russia. One speaker insisted on the need to review income taxation. In several countries, retired people are taxed more than employed people. Finally, the UCR-FO representative thanked the General Secretary for coming to his Congress. He indicated that he himself had statutorily had to put an end to his responsibility within his organisation, so he would eventually be replaced in the FERPA bodies. But for the time being, his organisation had asked him to continue to sit on FERPA.

In his reply, the Secretary General thanked all the members who had intervened in the debate and noted that we had a common approach and that everyone agreed with what the Secretary General had said. Price increases are becoming a problem. Health, minimum pension ... are very important points. We need to take joint action on 1 October. He agreed on a Declaration "for". We will have to work together on this Declaration, which could be centred on a very precise point, such as the minimum pension. This does not exclude that we also have more targeted "declarations", such as housing, fuel poverty or institutions for the elderly. Governments must commit themselves to these issues.

The following organisations took part in the debate: FGTB/ABVV; UCR-FO; UCR-CGT; FNV; the President of the Women's Committee; CC. OO

The President then gave the floor back to the General Secretary to introduce the next item on the preparation of the Congress.

The General Secretary said that a Congress was first and foremost the conclusion of a journey but also a springboard for the future. Therefore, there was a need to work upstream, which would be done during the next Steering and Executive Committees. The amendments will be discussed before the Congress, as is the case in the ETUC. Only those on which there were still differences of opinion would be debated at Congress. He also added that the Congress was also a time for celebration, to look forward to the future. He then recalled the dates: 4, 5 and 6 April 2023. The costs in Vienna are very high.

The Congress will therefore start on the afternoon of 4 April with a working session that will last all afternoon and continue throughout the morning of 5 April. The afternoon will be devoted to a tour of the city and the evening to dinner, both hosted by the ÖGB. On the morning of 6 April, work will resume and the Congress will be closed, so that the delegates can return in the afternoon of 6 April. The September Steering Committee will need to have an outline of the draft resolution that will be presented to the November Executive Committee. As in September, we need to have a working outline for the Women's Committee. At the same time, Dick will work on the Statutes. The call for candidates for the next Secretary General should also be launched at that time.

Amendments to the General Resolution should be discussed at the February/March Steering Committee and if there is no unanimity/consensus, the remaining items should be referred to Congress. But the debates should only be on very specific points. It is important that the Resolution has the support of everyone and is the result of a common reflection and the development of a common strategic line. If we continue to move in the same direction, FERPA will be more and more recognised. The Secretary General then spoke about the finances of the Congress, pointing out that the Congress in Brussels was not to be taken as a reference, but rather the Congress in Budapest, which had cost 75,000 euros. The problem is that for the time being we do not have precise information on the budget, even if it seems likely that FERPA's provisional budget will not cover the costs, because of a lack of provision. But perhaps by looking at the reserves, solutions can be found. He mentioned the tradition of FERPA, established since the Venice Congress, of having the accommodation costs of full members covered by FERPA. He also recalled that at the Mid-term GA in Rome, a contribution for its organisation had been requested from the most important members. It would be necessary to reflect until September to take a decision on this subject which will be proposed to the Executive Committee in November, i.e.: does FERPA continue to pay only the accommodation costs, leaving the organisations to pay their own costs, but in return, it asks a contribution from the most important organisations. Or does the organisation pay its own accommodation costs, but then there would be no request for a contribution? But what about the smaller organisations, because Vienna, which had been chosen by the Executive Committee, was an expensive city, and in that case they would have to bear the consequences. Jessica intervened in the debate in her capacity as Project Coordinator to point out that the reason why an exceptional contribution had been requested for the Mid-Term GA in Rome was that, unlike the Congresses, the GA was not provided for in the statutes. It should also be noted that 165 people were expected to attend, for whom coffee breaks and water would have to be provided during the meetings, and that the cost of interpreters was 17,000 euros. She took the opportunity to apologise to the members for the computer problem she had encountered, which had led her to indicate the wrong date for the Congress in the agenda that had been sent out the first time. To conclude this item, the Secretary General asked the Treasurer to send a budget estimate for the Congress with several options to the Secretariat in July, so that it could be presented to the Management Committee in September.

The President then opened the debate.

The FNV representative wondered about the content of the Congress agenda, because he wondered whether it would not be interesting to have a short intervention (15-20 minutes) by the Director, Mr Michael O'FLAHERTY, of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, based in Vienna, who could enlighten us on what can be expected from a rights-based approach to ageing, which and a change of point of view in the approach to ageing. There was some interest in this proposal, although some said that they were not familiar with this Agency, nor where this intervention could be placed in the Congress proceedings. On the question of funding, several members felt that their organisation could cover the cost of accommodation, but wondered what this would mean for smaller organisations. In this respect, others wondered what degree of solidarity was being put in place for them? Participation in a "common pot"? Concerning the method of preparing the Congress, some reservations were expressed.

While there was agreement to work upstream, a certain mistrust appeared concerning work that would be "premature". The spontaneity of the Congress must not be blocked. We must be sufficiently flexible during the Congress. A Resolutions Committee could be set up during the Congress. The upstream work is not enough. And then who is going to write the draft? The General Secretary? Will there be any pre-preparation in the Steering Committee? A question was also asked about the place of the Women's Committee during the Congress. It was also asked to have a precise calendar in September of what needs to be done between now and the Congress (submission of amendments, declarations of candidacies, etc.). Finally, the President of the Working Group on the Statutes intervened to underline the work that awaited its members, even if for the moment it had received few proposals for amendments (Cyprus, UCR-FO, Women's Committee, UNIA, etc.). However, the deadline for proposing amendments was 30 June, so he wondered whether it would be appropriate to contact the organisations again. In his reply, the General Secretary returned to the "creative" aspect of the Congress. Creativity certainly had an important role to play, but it could be expressed in what was produced between February and April. He therefore agreed on creativity but on the basis of reflection. The date of June had been confirmed by the last Executive Committee for the submission of amendments to the Statutes. The Chair of the Working Group could send a reminder to the organisations. As for inviting an outsider, given the work that would be required, this could be problematic. However, the suggestion and the theme were interesting and he could be invited to a meeting of the Executive Committee after the Congress. Finally, the dates of the next statutory meetings of the year were reiterated: 8 September and 20 October Management Committee; 9 and 10 November Executive Committee.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: FNV; UCR-FO; FGTB/ABVV; the President of the Women's Committee

The General Secretary then introduced the item on finances. First of all, he recalled that, as the President had said at the beginning of the meeting, we would not be able to discuss the financial situation of FERPA as at 31 May 2022, as the Treasurer Luc JANSEN had not had time to prepare the necessary documents. However, for the September Steering Committee, the Treasurer will provide the requested documents which he will prepare and send to the Secretariat in July. It is important to have this information and, above all, to know how much money is available to organise the Congress.

Also in September, the FERPA Finance Committee will meet to review the 2019, 2020 and 2021 accounts. In November the Treasurer will present the provisional budget for 2023. Then the Secretary General will address the issues of write-offs and remissions. This is a policy debate, as the Executive Committee in November will have to take the decision. Indeed, formal deliberations are to be taken as they are indispensable for the "Auditors" of FERPA.

- First of all, as far as the Bulgarian Pensioners' Union is concerned, FERPA no longer has any contact with it and it does not reply to our letters. It is proposed to take note of the situation and to delete it from the member organisations of FERPA.

- The same goes for the Turkish trade union, Emekli-Sen, which has been banned from activities by the Turkish Government and therefore no longer exists. However, it is proposed to leave it as an "outstanding member", and therefore to remit its debt as well.

- Concerning the debt of ELA/STV (Spain), as this organisation did not participate in the Mid-term GA in Rome, it is logical to remit the debt related to the "contribution" that was requested from the participants for the organisation of the GA.

- Finally, as far as the TUC is concerned, it has never indicated the number of its members. Until 2019, it was paying a minimal flat-rate contribution of 500 euros. The ETUC proposes to reduce the TUC's membership fee by 50% with a corresponding reduction in their voting rights, as it is doing its utmost to keep them within the organisation. As far as FERPA is concerned, the rules should be respected: give them until September to tell us where they stand and thus give them time to pay their debt, or else be an "observer member", without paying dues.

This is what will be proposed to the Executive Committee.

After these presentations, the President opened the debate.

The members agreed with all these proposals. Concerning the situation of the TUC, several members were in favour of the position proposed by the ETUC, i.e. a reduction in dues and a corresponding reduction in their voting rights. The President made a double observation. There was no provision in the statutes for

- members in "suspense" or provisional suspension,

- There was no provision in the statutes for "suspended" members, nor for a reduction in membership fees, unless the statutes were amended.

As indicated, this question will be decided by the Executive Committee in November.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: FNV; UCR-CGT; the President of the Women's Committee

As indicated in the agenda, the President, Lajos MAYER, introduced the next item, which concerned the Closure of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

After multiple debates on the division of competences between the three Institutions in charge of the Conference (European Commission, European Parliament and Council of the European Union) which delayed the process as well as the pandemic, the Conference was officially launched on 9 May 2021 and ended on 9 May 2022, with a closing celebration and the publication of a final document. It gave rise to many debates, and as he said in the document he sent following the Conference, which was received by all member organisations and to which he refers, the President represented FERPA in the Working Group set up by the ETUC.

In his report he selected from the Final Document what is most interesting for us and which includes the points he defended in the ETUC Working Group. Everything he presented has been accepted and, thanks to Luca, has been included in the Final Document, in adapted forms

- because many of the points that concern us refer to and are included in the European Social Rights Framework. This is the case, for example

- the minimum pension above the poverty line, depending on the standard of living in the Member States

- the recognition that older people need more support for health and long-term care

- the funding of carers who need decent wages.

Another important element is the poverty that affects older people. An initiative should be taken on this subject by the Council and the Commission. Ms VAN DER LEYEN, President of the Commission, promised to pass on all these elements so that she could very soon work on implementing all these points.

For their part, President MACRON, current President of the Council of the European Union, and the President of the Parliament indicated that they were preparing something.

Finally, aid to Ukraine was mentioned. It is planned to organise a conference in the autumn of 2022 to inform citizens of the follow-up to this Conference on the Future of Europe.

In the debate that followed this presentation, only one intervention was made by the UCR-FO representative, who thanked the President for his Communication and said he agreed with him. However, he added, "speeches do not necessarily produce results. For example, we are still waiting for a directive on the minimum pension in Europe or nothing has been said about the indexation of pensions.

The Secretary General then informed the Executive Committee about the move of the ETUC headquarters, and therefore of FERPA, to the City Center. It is planned that in the new building, FERPA's offices will be on the same floor as those of the ETUC, which is positive in terms of recognition of FERPA within the ETUC and also of its visibility, including with the ETUC members. However, it appears that the offices allocated to FERPA (two, as at present) will not be located in the same vicinity. The members of the Steering Committee felt that these are not the criteria to be able to work in optimal conditions. It was therefore decided that the Steering Committee should send a letter to Luca to thank him for having put the FEAP premises on the same floor as those of the ETUC, but also to ask him to find a solution to enable FERPA members to work in optimal conditions. Indeed, we must seize this last opportunity offered to us with a Secretary General of the ETUC who is rather favourable to FERPA, but who is coming to the end of his mandate. It is therefore important that FERPA has its premises on the same floor as the ETUC.

The President then moved on to the last item on the agenda, which dealt with other business. Dick DE GRAAF intervened to recall that the ETUC had launched some time ago a Social All project, in which FERPA had participated and which had given rise to a Resolution which had been adopted by the ETUC Executive Committee of 4-5 October 2021, entitled: "Ageing with Dignity". He therefore wondered whether it would not be appropriate to put it on the FERPA website.

The Secretary General replied that it was good to feed the FERPA website, but that duplication should be avoided. He therefore suggested that this document, in case FERPA organisations had not seen it, be sent to them as an information item.

This item closed the Steering Committee. The President thanked all members for their active participation and the interpreters for their help.

Henri