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Minutes of the FERPA Steering Committee meeting 20.2.2024

Participants: Hubert SCHWIND (UCR-CGT), President of FERPA; Agostino SICILIANO (UIL-UILP), Secretary General of FERPA; Ana MARTINEZ LOPEZ (FEJP-CC. OO), Deputy Secretary General of FERPA; Dick DE GRAAF (FNV), Treasurer of FERPA; Silvana CAPPUCIO (SPI-CGIL), President of the Women's Committee; Maud GILOUX (UNIR CFE-CGC) ; Maryvonne FLAHAUT (CSC/ACV); Monika KEMPERLE (ÖGB); Michel MILLER (OGBL); Michalis ROSSIS (SEK); Jean-Marc SCHAEFFER (UNSA Retraités); Patrizia VOLPONI (FNP-CISL).

The meeting was also attended by the FERPA Political Secretariat: Henri LOURDELLE, Special Adviser and Jessica MONTIEL RAMIREZ, ETUC Adviser for FERPA.

The Chairman opened the meeting and proceeded to vote on the agenda, which was adopted unanimously. However, the OGBL representative asked that each time FERPA took part in a meeting, minutes be taken and sent out. He also returned to the question raised by his Cypriot colleague concerning driving licences, which would be debated in the next few days in the European Parliament.

Having made these observations, he then gave the floor to the General Secretary for his Communications.

The General Secretary began by replying to the OGBL representative by saying

- First of all, all of FERPA's participation in meetings and events can be found on the FERPA website. In this respect, he emphasised that Henri had done a remarkable job, which was very detailed.

- As for the "driving licence" issue, this could be taken up by those on the Executive Committee who are not currently in charge of a specific dossier.

He also pointed out that at the moment everyone wants to talk to us, but these meetings will take place after the June elections to avoid political "recuperation" or "use". He then moved on to his "communications" proper.

He began by reminding everyone that this meeting of the Steering Committee was being convened to prepare for the Executive Committee meeting of the following two days.

He began by mentioning the current context of war and the assassination of the Russian opponent Alexei NAVALNY on 16 February.

He then mentioned the letter to the candidates in the European elections in June. He pointed out that it had been revised several times, and that the text to be presented to the next Executive Committee would incorporate the latest amendments sent in by the organisations.

Another important point to be dealt with at the Executive Committee will be presented by the Treasurer, Dick, and will concern FERPA's finances and more specifically what needs to be done to ensure viable and secure finances in the long term.

These will be important decisions to be taken, albeit calmly, but with a view to guaranteeing the future of our Federation. The next ETUC Executive Committee (26 and 27 March 2024) will address the issue of the European minimum pension in a Resolution. This will be the first time that this issue has been officially mentioned in an ETUC Resolution. The day after the

Executive Committee, there will be a Social Summit on the European Socle of Social Rights, with the support of the Belgian Presidency, in which FERPA will participate, to prepare the High-Level Interinstitutional Conference to be held, again under the Belgian Presidency, in La Hulpe on 15 and 16 April 2024.

With regard to the functioning of FERPA's Executive Committees, the Secretary General informed the meeting of the new rules set by the Commission for their funding as a result of the reduction in the resources allocated by the Commission. As Jessica explained, having discussed the matter with the head of the ETUC who manages the Working Groups with the Commission, from now on only 27 participants (1 per country) would be paid for by the Commission, on the basis of a single face-to-face meeting, the second of which would have to be held online (Visio). All the ETUC's Committees are affected, and the whole trade union movement is affected.

At the FERPA Executive Committee meeting over the next two days, the next FERPA Mid-Term General Assembly and the accession of the Macedonian union as a full member of FERPA will also be discussed. The President of the Women's Committee will also present the Committee's work programme.

Following the Secretary General's speech, the President opened the debate.

The Cypriot representative indicated that the PA.SY.DY organisation would ask to host the Mid-term Conference in Cyprus: it would have the capacity to bear all the expenses, he said. With regard to the letter to the candidates in the EP elections, it was considered to be correct from a European point of view and it was insisted that it be sent. Some people pointed out that they had sent in amendments, but these were only formal amendments, even though they would have liked it to have been a little shorter. Concerning the organisation of the Mid-Term Conference, it was hoped that it would be held in an easily accessible location. FERPA's financial situation was a hot and urgent topic for everyone. It was also pointed out that the ETUC only contributes 12,000 euros to FERPA, which some members feel is "scandalously" low. Many also pointed out that this contribution was "virtually non-existent". Others went on to say that such a derisory sum meant that FERPA was not being given the consideration it deserved, and added that all organisations were thinking along the same lines. It was also pointed out that we need to work on issues on which we can find solutions. We need to live in a world of reality, not a world of dreams. You have to develop your imagination to find solutions. How, he added, can we serve the ETUC and not the other way round? FERPA must be transparent in everything it does, because the organisations demand accountability. One organisation commented on the UN Convention on Older Persons, and in particular on fundamental rights and the concept of their universality. It felt that FERPA should support it. Other issues raised included the status of women in Europe, their situation of poverty and especially that of older women. A number of participants expressed the wish to have as many face-to-face meetings as possible.

There was also a discussion of "ageism". According to the Dutch Human Rights Organisation, it is possible to divide rights according to age. In its view, this is not strictly "discrimination", but it is an element of "distinction".

Some also felt that we should be able to take a stand on certain issues, which would lead FERPA to adopt more political positions.

The Treasurer also intervened in the debate to point out that the document he had sent on finances was supposed to be a discussion document. He had put forward two proposals on which a position would have to be taken in October. He would like the organisations to provide their membership figures earlier in the year - which would mean amending FERPA's internal rules, which is within the statutory powers of the Executive Committee - so that a more realistic budget forecast can be drawn up - FERPA has lost 1 million members. A question was asked about the system put in place by the ETUC for declaring membership, to which the Secretariat replied that this was done in July. It was also pointed out that 3 countries no longer had an organisation present at FERPA: the United Kingdom, which had also encountered organisational problems, had no pensioners' organisations, Bulgaria had a pensioners' organisation, but it had been dissolved, and Solidarnosc had withdrawn from FERPA. A member added that the ETUC calculated the number of its members by establishing an average over 4 years. On the question of provisions, it was stressed that they should only be used to deal with a one-off difficult situation. They must not be used to cover current expenditure, which would be dangerous for the viability of the organisation.

The General Secretary then responded to the various interventions. He said that he had listened very carefully to everything that had been said, but that it was his responsibility to tell the real story. It was true that savings had to be made, but to suggest that FERPA money was being spent left and right was unacceptable. He points out that since he became General Secretary, he has not visited any organisation. Is that a good thing? Is that right? But it was out of a concern not to spend money. At the same time, he pointed out that all his expenses were paid by UIL-P. If there were any unnecessary expenses, we would deal with them. We have to solve this financial problem by thinking things through. We mustn't think that all we have to do is ask the ETUC for more things. If we increase dues, what will Turkey, Serbia, etc. do? As far as the UN is concerned, Belgians are already divided among themselves. As for the driving licence issue, some members could take it on, like Michel, who has no particular file. It is within the Steering Committee that the strategy to be proposed to the Executive Committee must be defined. It's important to remember where we've been. With regard to the Letter to Candidates, the aim was not to rewrite it but to amend it.

One organisation returned to the ETUC, pointing out that FERPA's full autonomy should not be forgotten. Asking for more than the 12,000 euros allocated would mean getting involved in the ETUC's "projects" on intergenerational issues, health, etc. But with what human resources? Mainstreaming is needed within the ETUC. Finally, Michel said that he agreed to take charge of the driving licence issue, in the interests of FERPA. He would contact his Cypriot colleague. He added that if you make one person responsible, you make the whole organisation responsible. This discussion brought the Executive Committee meeting to a close.

The following organisations took part in the debate: UNSA Retraités; SPI-CGIL; CSC/ACV; UNIR CFE-CGC; OGBL; FNV

Henri