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Minutes of the 8th FERPA Congress

(Brussels, ITUH Auditorium, 16 and 17 September 2018)

The 8th FERPA Congress was opened by **FERPA President Michel Devacht**.¹

After welcoming all of the attendees, he paid homage to and proposed a minute's silence in memory of:

- Robert Racke of the ÖGBL, who died on 9 April 2018 aged 76. Robert was elected President of FERPA at the 2011 Venice Congress and held the position until the 7th Congress, which took place in Budapest in 2015. A trade unionist at heart, Robert was a lifelong activist, a profound believer in Europe and deeply committed to FERPA.
- Gilbert Lonnoy of the FGTB, who died on 28 October 2016 aged 87. A railway worker by trade - he joined the SNCB in 1946 - Gilbert was a long-standing member of the FERPA Executive Committee known for his frankness and his convictions, which he defended doggedly.

As Michel Devacht said, these two activists have left us with a “European trade union legacy to defend and nurture”.

The FERPA President, who would also be chairing the morning session, then presented apologies from Luigina De Santis and Carla Cantone, former FERPA General Secretaries who, for personal or scheduling reasons, were unable to spare the two days to attend the Congress. At the same time, he welcomed Bruno Costantini, another former General Secretary, who had accepted the invitation to honour us with his presence at this 8th Congress.

He then presented apologies from:

- Romanian colleagues from the Romanian National Federation of Retirees who, due to unforeseen circumstances, found themselves unable to attend the 8th Congress at the last minute.
- Turkish colleagues from DISK / EMEKLI-SEN, who are victims of the trade union clampdown by the Turkish government and who have been barred by the country's courts from carrying out any activities defending the interests of retired Turks. As such, they were unable to attend the Congress.

The chair then gave the floor to **representatives of the Belgian trade union confederation** who had been invited to the 8th Congress.

The first to speak was **Anne Leonard, National Secretary of the CSC**². She firstly described the difficult, strained situation in Europe currently, which had seen the rise of the far-right and populism. She emphasised the major role that retired persons, particularly within FERPA, are

¹ As laid down in the by-laws, the 8th FERPA Congress was preceded by a meeting of the Executive Committee to approve the agenda for the Congress and its Rules of Procedure. These two documents were approved unanimously.

² Anne Leonard's speech is appended to these minutes

called to play. This includes both experience and memory, as well as being friends to trade unionists who are still involved in the union struggle for a fairer society.

She also said that the CSC supports FERPA's actions on key issues, which are shared by the "CSC seniors," such as pensions, opposition to the liberalisation of the care home and elderly care sectors, the lower refunds for medical costs, the end of psychological care for older people, etc.

To conclude, she reiterated that the CSC and the ETUC recognise the essential role that seniors play.

She then handed over to **Robert Vertenuel, President of the FGTB**. He began, with no small touch of irony, by welcoming everybody to beautiful Belgium, a country renowned for its hospitality towards exiles: Victor Hugo and Karl Marx in the past, and nowadays tax exiles such as Depardieu and Arnault.

On a more serious note, he too alluded to the European political situation, with the rise in "extremists" (the radical left, fascists) and the rejection of the EU, which represent a threat to democracy.

The trade union movement has many priorities for the May 2019 European elections: the environment, productive investment, mobility, Europe's place in the world, defending democracy, and above all a political and social Europe. Europe will either be the solution or a hindrance to these priorities.

But between now and then, he pointed out, we have a lot on our plates. Not only must we move forward on implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (and we know that certain Member States are unhappy with it and want to undermine it), but we must also defend the European social project, which means that the Pillar must go further than the current proposals. Pensions are being attacked all over Europe, and we need to work together on these topics. The speaker then highlighted the attitude that European leaders and the Member States must adopt: not simply talking about "how much we have" but about "how much we need" and taking action accordingly. He finished with a painfully topical quip by quoting Colbert, Minister of Finance to Louis XIV of France: "Tax the poor... There are more of them!"

After warmly thanking the two speakers, **the President of FERPA** presented the **FERPA Activity Report** for 2015- 2018³.

He firstly discussed the period that has just ended, which was not plain sailing. During this term of office, the General Secretary who had been elected at the Budapest Congress was initially absent due to serious family problems. Agostino Siciliano, the current General Secretary-Elect, therefore agreed to deputise during the General Secretary's absence; the President thanked him warmly for having done this.

At the start of this year, following Carla Cantone's election to the Italian Parliament, the Executive Committee asked President Michel Devacht to take on the role of General Secretary until the 8th Congress, which was consequently brought forward. It is for this reason that he was responsible for presenting the Activity Report.

After reminding us of what had been achieved prior to the FERPA Mid-Term General Assembly in Rome in 2017, the President listed all of the meetings that FERPA had since attended, namely:

³ The report is appended to these minutes

- within the ETUC: three meetings of the extended Steering Committee and one for the ETUC Congress Preparatory Committee (Vienna, 28 to 31 May 2019), five meetings of the Executive Committee, the ETUC Summer School in Montepulciano, Italy, and the Gothenburg Social Summit on the European Pillar of Social Rights, among others
- the consultation organised at the European Parliament on the new rules for the coordination of social security systems and activities implementing the autonomous framework agreement on active ageing and an inter-generational approach, within the context of European social dialogue.
- with the ETUC, on the public consultation organised by the Commission for Gender Equality and, as part of the European Economic and Social Committee, the consultation on “The future evolution of civil society in the European Union” and the 5th ECI Day

Internally, FERPA has held:

- two Executive Committee meetings as stipulated by the by-laws
- four Steering Committee meetings
- two preparatory working groups for the 8th Congress

The President also highlighted the work carried out during this mandate,

- both by the Women’s Committee chaired by Ana Martinez Lopez (CC.OO)
- and by the working group on the FERPA By-Laws and Rules of Procedure, coordinated and run by Dick De Graaf (FNV)

The President expressed his heartfelt thanks to everybody and to the FERPA Secretariat.

He also pointed out that we were not able to achieve everything that had been planned, in particular the National Mobilisation Days that had been approved at the Rome General Assembly, which the new team will be responsible for implementing, as well as FERPA’s involvement in the European election campaigns.

In conclusion, President Michel Devacht thanked the Steering Committee and the Executive Committee for the unfailing support that they had shown him, particularly during the most recent period, and he wished the best of luck to the new teams that would be elected to take over at the end of the 8th Congress.

Following this presentation, he gave the floor to **Ana Martinez Lopez (CC.OO), President of the Women’s Committee**, who gave a PowerPoint⁴ presentation on the committee’s work. The first thing that it had done, she explained, was to raise the profile in all European countries of the problems encountered by older and retired women and of their demands: a dignified pension, special attention for women’s health and, above all, equal pay between men and women in order to achieve equality in pension incomes. The FERPA Women’s Committee demands recognition of women’s value and their value as contributors, within both society and their own organisations. FERPA has an important role to play during these difficult times, as extremists and populists emerge. They question European Union membership and the values of solidarity, rights, social policies, intergenerational generosity and equality between men and women, all issues for which women most often pay the biggest price, hence the importance of the Women’s Committee’s work.

To conclude, she used her PowerPoint presentation to remind us of the various actions taken by the Women’s Committee, in particular on International Women’s Day on 8 March and its

⁴ Documents appended



participation in the campaigns and meetings organised by the ETUC and the conferences and congresses of FERPA organisations.

Michèle Jacotey, President of the FERPA Financial Audit Committee then took the floor to present her report.

Michèle started by explaining that Carla Cantone, the General Secretary, had asked the Financial Audit Committee - even though it was not listed in the by-laws as part of its remit - to draw up a draft budget for 2016, which was done on the basis of the 2015 budget. However, the 2016 balance sheet showed a bigger deficit than expected for three main reasons:

- outstanding invoices for interpretation at the Budapest Congress
- a significant increase in expenses for meetings, document translation and the website, which were budgeted for based on the stable previous three years
- a drop in subscription income

It should also be noted that there were significant delays in receiving subscription payments from affiliate organisations in 2016.

FERPA's running costs continued to rise in 2017, which led to the Financial Audit Committee alerting the Steering Committee at the May 2017 meeting. Despite the difficulties, the Financial Audit Committee submitted the 2017 estimated budget to the Secretariat on 10 July 2017.

For 2018, it was decided to reuse the 2017 budget.

As regards subscription payments, reminders were sent out and the situation improved in 2018. There is still the question of old amounts owed to us, and it will be up to the next Executive Committee to decide on how to deal with them: either attempt to collect them, or write them off.

The President of the Financial Audit Committee concluded by thanking Jessica for her help and saying that, even though the last three years had been hard for FERPA, they had been just as tough for the Financial Audit Committee. For this reason, it is particularly timely that the Steering Committee has approved the creation of the position of Treasurer and integrated it into the updates to the by-laws.

Following these presentations, President Michel Devacht opened the floor for **discussions**.

Despite the difficulties that had been encountered and experienced over the last three years, in particular the General Secretary's resignation during her term of office, several organisations nevertheless praised the work that had been carried out.

However, there were plenty who pointed out that, on a European level, not only had the situation not improved, but it had in fact deteriorated since the last Congress, and they were very concerned by the increase in far-right and populist parties. We are faced with a significant transformation in the world: Europe is like a tree being buffeted by intolerance and rejection. Moreover, poverty and social exclusion have not diminished; on the contrary, for some people it is a choice between eating and seeing their doctor. We must therefore prevent old age from becoming synonymous with poverty, suffering and isolation. The all-out attacks on pensioners, the questioning of our "rights," and the austerity policies being implemented throughout Europe have resulted in growing poverty and in bitterness between governments and the European Union. Nevertheless, some attendees stressed that this relapse is not irreversible, and



called for the mass fight to be intensified and European cooperation and solidarity to be reinforced to transform Europe into a workers' Europe.

Hence the priorities that were put forward: having better salaries during our working lives in order to have better pensions.

Other attendees raised the issue of what trade unions could do to be constructive. With this in mind, they addressed the question of FERPA's representativeness, in other words, the urgency for the organisation to open itself up to new members. Increasing our numbers is a major challenge.

The main thing, as some people said, is to work together and find common rules and objectives on which to move forward.

We must therefore develop the intergenerational dimension by placing more importance on the Protocol agreed between FERPA and the ETUC Youth Committee. We must tackle discrimination and bolster the rights we have won by demanding that the rights outlined in the European Pillar of Social Rights are applied. Access to healthcare is important and we must therefore fight against the privatisation of health and social care services. If there are no appropriate public services and if citizens, and in particular older and retired people, have no money, they will not have access to these services. We must of course fight violence against women as well as all forms of violence that affect older people. FERPA must find a new working method by communicating more widely and involving the Steering Committee members to a greater extent. We must establish two-way links between the grassroots and FERPA.

Several organisations also asked about the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI): is it being relaunched in the same form or in another form?

The upcoming European Parliament elections are a major milestone. Some people demanded that the ETUC take major action and broaden its scope at this time. With the elections in mind, numerous people demanded that we quickly approve a FERPA day of action in all of the European capitals, as approved at the Mid-Term Assembly in Rome. Between now and the spring, FERPA must urgently take action to create a Europe that is more attentive to the needs of older people. We must make sure that the voices of those who do not have the right to speak out are heard.

In other words, the organisations are demanding that FERPA play a more creative role. FERPA's retirees want to be the protagonists of the debate on "ageing with dignity". They want to "actively" continue their involvement. For the trade unions, they are an important resource in terms of activists. And it will be important to regularly review the contributions that retiree activists bring to trade unions and how they are received.

Older and retired people have a significant impact not only at the ballot box but also through volunteering.

It was proposed that a motion of support be drawn up and sent to our Turkish colleagues, who are the victims of their government's trade union repression.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: FEPJ-CC.OO, CSC-ACV, UCR-CFDT, UILP, UNSA, SPI-CGIL, UNIA, SUH, UCR-FO, Inter-Reformados CGTP-IN, UCR-CGT, ELA/STV, SUS, UJP-UGT, ÖGB, FNP-CISL, UNIR CFE-CGC, AJUP-USO

Once the discussion was over, the **chair of the afternoon session, Angeles Briales Gonzales** (UJP-UGT) gave the floor to **Dick De Graaf, coordinator of the working group on the amendments to the FERPA By-Laws and Rules of Procedure.**

Dick began his speech⁵ by reminding us of the decision made at the last Congress, in Budapest, to revise the FERPA By-Laws and Rules of Procedure. A working group was therefore set up. The aim of the task was not to fundamentally change the content of the existing texts, but to make them better reflect the reality of what FERPA is today. The working group met 8 times. Two major proposals were made after discussions with the Executive Committee in March 2018:

- the creation of the position of Deputy General Secretary in light of the events that had affected FERPA, particularly during the second half of the last term of office
- the creation of the position of Treasurer, given the difficulty that the Financial Audit Committee encountered when trying to carry out its work in the best conditions and in line with the existing texts

The working group received 34 comments or amendments. Out of these, five amendments were accepted or partially integrated, and one error was corrected.

The speaker finished by explaining that the new texts that would be submitted to the Congress for approval and which must receive at least two thirds of votes to be passed had already been adopted unanimously by the Steering Committee.

Following this presentation, there were no particular comments. The chair then proposed submitting FERPA's new governing texts to the Congress for approval. The results were:

- 65 votes FOR the adoption of the By-Laws and Rules of Procedure
- No votes AGAINST
- No ABSTENTIONS

The new By-Laws and Rules of Procedure were adopted.

The session chair thanked Dick and the members of the working group for their hard work.

On the second day of the Congress, the session chair, **Livio Melgari** (SPI-CGIL), held the statutory votes with the following results:

- **The activity report was adopted unanimously minus two abstentions**
- **The Women's Committee was elected unanimously minus three abstentions**
- **The Financial Audit Committee was elected unanimously minus two abstentions**

Agostino Sicilano, General Secretary-Elect, then took the floor to present the **General Resolution.**

In his speech⁶, General Secretary-Elect Agostino Siciliano emphasised the importance of a Congress for a trade union organisation. This particular Congress - which was not an "extraordinary" Congress but a "planned" one arising as a result of Carla Cantone's resignation following her election to the Italian Parliament - was especially important as it was taking place during a very difficult time for Europe, both economically and socially and in terms of the policies being followed, which were founded in austerity. It is important for FERPA to defend

⁵ Document appended to these minutes

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its vision of Europe: a Europe opposed to any kind of exclusion, discrimination, sexism, racism and xenophobia. Europe needs new social balances that make room for more cohesion and solidarity, more unity between peoples, and a greater capacity for welcoming and integrating refugees.

The role of retired persons must be recognised by society. We must learn to live together and build a united message that young people and older people must not be pitted against one another. We are all united in the fight against austerity: if there is no work for young people, there will be no pensions for them when they reach retirement age. We must do all we can during the European Parliament electoral campaign and meet with the candidates in our own countries to defend our demands, such as:

- Guaranteeing appropriate, reliable pensions for retired people by defending and maintaining public pensions
- Quality, long-term healthcare, and relaunching the initiative from a few years ago
- A housing policy that takes into account the ageing population
- Etc.

If we want to give shape to these demands, we must make every effort to be heard, for instance by organising a European mobilisation day for all of the FERPA affiliate organisations in our countries, as approved in principle during the Rome Mid-Term Assembly.

FERPA's older people and retirees do not want to be thought of as inactive or, worse, as a burden on society.

This recognition of FERPA's role must begin in our own trade union organisation, the ETUC. We must repair the injustice of FERPA, unlike the Youth Committee and the Women's Committee, being the only special structure with no voting rights within the ETUC. On a national level, we must all lobby the organisations that did not vote in favour of FERPA gaining this right.

We must get behind the work carried out in the past and capitalise on it. The General Secretary will be the coordinator for the work we do within FERPA and must have the backing of a strong, coherent leadership team. We must further develop our teamwork by communicating and exchanging information, even though our financial means limit us in the translation of official documents. IT and new communication technologies should however allow us to compensate for these issues. We must also uphold and develop a gender vision within all of our structures.

The General Secretary-Elect Agostino Siciliano ended his speech by thanking all three Italian trade union organisations for jointly nominating him, and by reaffirming his desire - with the support of all of his colleagues - to ensure that FERPA functions ever more effectively, "without delegating to others what we can do together!"

Following this speech, the chair of the session, Livio Margari, **opened the floor for discussions.**

While supporting General Secretary-Elect Agostino Siciliano's speech and calling for us to be "creative" with it, it was proposed that we focus on a small number of subjects, and above all on being heard. We must take actions that will make people talk about us, because "you won't change the world by whispering"!

Other interventions referred to the work done by Carla, despite the dramatic unforeseen events which included her partner's sudden illness. Her intention to travel to meet organisations in 19 different countries was mentioned.

It was also suggested that the ETUC General Secretary be sent a declaration demanding that FERPA be “fully” recognised by the ETUC.

The tragedy of Brexit, which will see 55 million UK citizens leave the European Union, not to mention the risk of a border being re-established between Ireland and Northern Ireland (reneging on the Good Friday Agreement), was also discussed.

Lastly, FERPA was asked to send a letter to all candidates.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: FNV, SPI-CGIL, ICTU, SZEF, ÖGB, UNSA

The chair of the session, Livio Melgari, then gave the floor to **Luca Visentini, ETUC General Secretary.**

The ETUC General Secretary began with the issue of FERPA's right to vote. He said that there was a significant bloc of trade union organisations where no retired persons' “trade unions” were represented. They were among their affiliates and were not accepted as a structure in their own right. They were composed of coordination bodies. These organisations are the TUC, DGB and Nordic countries which alone represent 50% of ETUC affiliates. The Secretariat supported FERPA's right to vote. It is worth contacting the trade unions that abstained. This amendment must be reconfirmed at the next Executive Committee meeting in order for it to be submitted at the next ETUC Congress.

The Congress will take place next May in Vienna, during the same week as the European elections.

It has already been said, but these elections are taking place at a time of increasing unemployment and a worrying social situation in Europe. Although we have seen a slight economic recovery, it has occurred either without the creation of new jobs or with precarious jobs. Social disillusionment is what lies behind Brexit. The social crisis underpins the political crisis. We must return to a social Europe and defend Europe on every level, including nationally and with all workers and retirees.

We want a “New Europe for workers” founded on democracy and social justice.

The ETUC has five priorities:

- Developing a different economic model
- Increasing the purchasing power of workers and retired persons in Europe
- Correctly managing the major changes that are currently taking place and which are phenomena that we cannot stop
- Rebuilding the European social model by demanding the same rights for atypical workers, for example
- Better managing the migration crisis by fighting exploitation: welcoming migrants but not to the detriment of other workers

The Europe that the ETUC wants is not a Europe that simply protects its borders, but a Europe that protects people

The session chair and the Congress warmly thanked the ETUC General Secretary for his speech and his continued support for FERPA's right to vote.

He then proposed moving on to the votes that were yet to take place:

- **The resolution was adopted unanimously**
- **The General Secretary, Agostino Siciliano, was elected by acclamation**

The Congress ratified the Steering Committee and the Executive Committee

The Congress adopted the motion of support⁷ for our Turkish colleagues (appended)

The chair of the session, Livio Melgari, then gave the floor to the **new General Secretary, Agostino Siciliano**, to close the Congress.

The General Secretary firstly thanked attendees for the quality of the work that had been carried out and for the trust they had placed in him by electing him. He asked all of the organisations in attendance to do everything in their power to ensure that FERPA's values would not be threatened by political changes. He advocated for wealth to be rebalanced so that all citizens could live a life of dignity. He thanked Luca for his commitment to full recognition for FERPA, adding that, "it is a question of dignity". And he confirmed to the Congress that the amendment presented in Malta on this topic would again be submitted to the next ETUC Executive Committee.

He finished by calling for everyone to mobilise before the elections in May in order to present our vision of Europe. The Steering Committee will present a policy document on "The Europe We Want". It will be sent to all candidates and parties.

There being no further business, Livio Melgari thanked the attendees and interpreters. He invited the members of the new Executive Committee to meet to elect a President, Deputy General Secretary and Treasurer as provided for in the new By-Laws.

Henri

⁷ Document appended to these minutes