

## *8Th FERPA CONGRESS, BRUSSELS, 16-17 OCTOBER 2018*

### Policy Outline by Agostino Siciliano, General Secretary-elect

Delegates, Mr Chairman, observers and guests,

The Congress of Ferpa, our great European trade union federation representing pensioners and older people, is always an important event.

And this Congress is particularly so, as it is being held earlier than normal so that we can revive the role of Ferpa and elect the new Steering Committee, starting with the General Secretary, a post that has been vacant ever since Carla Cantone, who was elected at the previous Congress in Budapest, resigned following her election as an Italian MP.

As I am the sole candidate for the post of General Secretary, the Ferpa Steering Committee of 12 September entrusted me with the task - which I am more than happy to do - of outlining the final resolution of the Congress and the policies for my term of office.

This Congress is taking place at a time of great turmoil for Europe, both from an economic and social point of view and from a political point of view, with budgetary rigour and austerity still the order of the day. In some countries, these policies have led to an increase in poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. They have also led to more widespread belief in anti-European ideas and movements, as well as a sense of insecurity and fear.

Moreover, during this period tensions have increased between the Member States and between individual countries and the European Union on the topic of migration.

The differing visions on how to manage this phenomenon, which involves hundreds of thousands of people (many of whom are children), the different opinions on how many migrants to distribute between the States, and the refusal of some to welcome migrants has led to a breakdown in relations between countries, when we instead need a calm, constructive dialogue to find solutions that can be shared by all to welcome migrants safely and enable them to find work and integrate socially.

On this thorny, delicate topic, I repeat what we all approved at our mid-term Conference last year in Rome, on the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome. And that is, that Ferpa fights against any kind of exclusion, discrimination, sexism, racism and xenophobia; that due to its history it opposes nationalism, deceptive and destructive populism, wherever it may come from, and the dangerous divisions that recall darker times.

I will say again that trying to resolve problems in our own countries by leaving the European Union - as the United Kingdom has done -, restoring borders and building walls does not help us find fair solutions that protect all countries and interested parties. On the contrary, it leads to isolation and a lack of belief in the founding ideals of the EU, with the risk of becoming insignificant, both as countries and as Europe, in an increasingly globalised world and with uncontrolled capitalism.

New social balance is therefore needed, with more cohesion and solidarity, more unity between the peoples of this continent, and a greater capacity for accommodation and integration.

As Ferpa, we must continue to work towards a Europe that is more united, less bureaucratic, and more just and supportive, in the conviction that the European Union's current policies require profound change.

This Europe has made us all experts in analysing the repercussions on individual countries' economies of exceeding the Stability and Growth Pact's limit, changing GDP by a few decimals, and the extremely high price that Member States must pay as interest with the increase in the spread.

But the Europe that I would like to see should also be making us experts on living together and on topics that unite peoples. It should be promoting dialogue and debate on the economic and development policy choices that can improve the living conditions of millions of European citizens. It should allow us to continue travelling freely without the risk of having to go back to showing our identity documents in order to move from one country to another. It should forge a desire among nations who are not yet members to join the single currency.

I am certain that it would be a great defeat for our generation if we were not to achieve a truly united Europe.

It would be a great defeat for everyone.

Including for the so-called nationalist parties that think the sovereignty of a nation and a people is more important than any outside authority.

Including for the so-called populist movements that think they can build a fairer Europe by being anti-establishment.

To avoid this scenario, I believe it is vital for us to continue fighting together to strengthen solidarity, equality, social cohesion and welfare within Europe for a more social Europe that respects all of its citizens - men, women, workers, pensioners, of any age and from any place - and their rights.

When we criticise this Europe, accusing it of being unjust and bureaucratic, we must also remember that the Council is composed of the heads of state and government and that the European Union's choices are the fruit of their agreements.

All of us, therefore, must support our vision of Europe from within our countries in order to avoid internal difficulties spilling out across Europe.

The EU anthem, Ode to Joy, which was adopted by the Council of Europe in 1972 and used from 1986, says:

*Thy magic power re-unites / All that custom has divided / All men become brothers /... / Whoever has created / An abiding friendship / All who can call at least one soul theirs / Join our song of praise.*

*You millions, I embrace you. This kiss is for all the world.*

I hope that this anthem will never be betrayed.

Since the Budapest Congress, following the serious crisis that devastated our continent, we have started to see signs of economic recovery. Various European nations, however, have not yet managed to recover the loss of wealth and jobs, and unemployment is still very high, particularly among young people, who are forced into precarious and low-quality work.

The reduced purchasing power of wages and pensions and the reduction in health and social care services have led to increased poverty and inequality.

Pensioners and older people are some of the most vulnerable groups; they have suffered and are suffering the most from the consequences of the crisis.

The upcoming European Parliament elections will be crucial for outlining a new vision for Europe, a new Europe.

We must all make an effort, during the electoral campaign, to ensure that fear and disintegration do not prevail, and that instead

Europe is revitalised.

Each of us, in our own countries, must meet with the candidates to discuss the topics that affect pensioners and older people in this ageing continent and to outline our ideas and proposals for Europe and for its economic policies, as these are what govern the current and future daily lives of every European citizen.

Citizens who are no longer in the world of work do not want to be classified as having no value or, even worse, as being a burden on society. They want to be seen as an opportunity and investment for their own countries and the whole of Europe.

Economic policy must allow older people and pensioners to continue living and growing old with dignity, with adequate pensions and efficient health and social care services. They must reduce growing poverty, particularly among older and retired women. As you are aware, women's pensions are on average lower than men's due to the discrimination they have suffered during their working lives, with lower income, fewer years of contributions, career interruptions, a lack of reconciliation between their personal and working lives, and the persistence of prejudices and stereotypes.

We must therefore take every opportunity to reiterate that older people want to continue playing an active role, as already happens in families and the world of volunteering. And they want the fundamental role they play to be recognised by society. It is their right.

We must oppose any discrimination related to age and sex and the many attempts, by those who pit youngsters and older people against one another, to build walls between the generations by claiming that, with their pensions, older people are robbing the young of their future.

The understanding between Ferpa and the ETUC Youth Committee sends out a very clear, united message: that together we will not put up with the provocation of those who want to sow discord between youngsters and older people. This kind of provocation serves only as an alibi for justifying the delays in implementing employment policies that focus on young people, and the cuts to welfare and pensions.

Older people, however, reject this kind of provocation for one simple reason: young people are their children and grandchildren. And they live with such bitterness and worry about younger people's uncertain future working and private lives. They devote much of their pensions and free time to supporting and helping younger people.

The memorandum of understanding between Ferpa and the ETUC Youth Committee is an excellent response to those who continue fuelling the generational divide.

Ferpa must gain more authority in all institutional and decision-making bodies. We must also demand a greater role within the ETUC on the topics concerning us: European social dialogue, active ageing, intergenerational solidarity and implementing the charter of rights for older people. It is therefore worth reiterating, on the occasion of this 8th Ferpa Congress, that older people and retirees demand the right to dignity, social support and security, and that they support younger generations and workers in their fight for employment rights.

In addition, they demand, as a priority, the right to a secure, adequate and fair pension guaranteed by public pension systems, with a rate of taxation that is as homogeneous as possible across Europe in order to avoid an exodus of pensioners to countries that apply a lower rate of taxation to pensions. They demand the right to universal, quality healthcare and long-term care to tackle their loss of independence, which leads to dependency and very high costs for both older people and their families.

One priority objective is therefore to demand policies, both in Europe and in our various countries, that take into account rising life expectancy and how ageing reduces self-sufficiency, with consequent increases in mobility and safety issues. We are therefore obliged to follow housing policy closely. Indeed, it is essential to upgrade houses, apartments and buildings, together with cities, roads and transport, to meet the needs of an ageing population. We must break down architectural barriers; introduce devices and aids to reduce accidents in the home (which affect older people and children the most); ensure that lifts meet the needs of wheelchair users and, where necessary, ensure that there are alternatives; tailor the urban environment to older people,

with more benches, parks, social spaces, better lighting, etc.; make urban transport more suited to the needs of older people; and promote innovative ways of living so that different families and generations can live alongside one another.

If elected, I will take on this important task. I would like to thank the Italian pensioners' unions - the Uilp (for which I am still the national secretary), as well as the Spi and Fnp, which jointly nominated me - for this opportunity. I am very grateful for what the three general secretaries, Romano Bellissima, Ivan Pedretti and Ermenegildo Bonfanti, wrote in their nomination letter. They said that, through this choice, they wanted to help strengthen Ferpa and its political and organisational prospects, capitalising on the work carried out in recent years by the Ferpa Steering Committee.

Taking on a prestigious role - and this holds true for all roles within Ferpa - also means taking on greater responsibility. If elected, I will do whatever I can to enable Ferpa to actively pursue its work.

The 10 million members from all of our organisations expect Ferpa to take on a more authoritative role and take more efficient action both within the European institutions and the ETUC itself.

I believe that the role of General Secretary and, as I have said before, all of the roles within Ferpa can only be a success if the Federation manages to develop its strategies and put them into practice; if Ferpa manages to achieve respect not only due to its large membership base but also because of the important cultural background and values that every single member carries with them. It is this culture and these values that gave birth to the European Union.

Every time I get the chance, I always stress that Ferpa is a major Federation that has great strength within it and a distinguished human library.

If you approve this proposal and the final resolution, they will be the policies for the next four years.

But if we want to achieve the objectives outlined in these policies, we need a Ferpa and a Steering Committee that is strong, united, and able to influence policy decisions within the EU and the ETUC.

Under the threat of Europe's disintegration, we must do the opposite; we must strengthen our role on the basis of our shared aims.

To manage this, first and foremost we need Ferpa to be recognised by the ETUC as a trade union federation with full voting rights.

It is a long-standing problem that we have been struggling with since 2003 when, during the Prague ETUC Congress, the outgoing General Secretary John Monks submitted a motion to recognise Ferpa as a European trade union federation. The motion was not passed, and has not been passed at subsequent congresses. For many years, Ferpa has remained a specific group of interest, like the Youth Committee and Women's Committee. At the 2015 Paris ETUC Congress however, the Youth Committee gained voting rights within the ETUC, as the Women's Committee had done before it. Ferpa remained the only specific group of interest. For this reason, Ferpa's recognition must be delayed no longer.

And we have made significant steps forward.

At the ETUC mid-term Conference in Rome in May 2017, our amendment only missed out on the two thirds of votes needed for approval by a small margin. The votes in favour were 111, with 30 against and 42 abstentions. This was a positive result as we obtained 60% of votes.

It was thanks to the work of Carla Cantone, and everyone who put pressure on the ETUC members, that we achieved this success.

We must also thank ETUC General Secretary Luca Visentini, a staunch supporter of our amendment, and the entire ETUC Secretariat, who voted in favour, for this result.

We will resubmit the amendment to the ETUC Congress in Vienna next year. In the months leading up to this Congress, we must reach out to all of the federations who abstained or voted against us previously, emphasising the reasons why we are driven to campaign for the right to vote.

My dear Luca, I ask that you continue to support us in achieving this objective so that Ferpa can represent the rights of older and retired people within the ETUC bodies and committees, as well as by participating in its work by voting, like all the other federations and like young people and women.

The campaign for voting rights is a campaign to achieve recognition of the dignity of all Ferpa members and staff: people who are no longer young, with years of political activism behind them in trade unions, and with rich, varied stories and experiences to share. Recognition, too, of the Ferpa representative within the ETUC bodies, who contributes and draws up policies yet, when the time comes to approve the work done together, is humiliated because their vote does not count.

Ferpa representatives have been working under these conditions for 15 years now. I believe it is time to rectify this injustice and grant Ferpa the dignity it deserves within the ETUC.

Over the next four years we must make our voices heard - and hopefully also within the ETUC - on the living conditions of millions of older people and pensioners.

We must make every effort to ensure that our requests become a reality, starting with a European day of activism encompassing all of the Ferpa affiliate organisations in all countries.

Again, we must also make our voices heard during the European Parliament elections which will take place in May 2019, because their success is vital for the future of the continent.

In order to tackle all of these topics and all of these battles, we need a federation that is more structurally functional.

For this reason, the last Congress voted to set up a committee to update the Charter, a committee on which I also sit. Since yesterday we therefore have a new Charter. My thanks go to Dick who has done sterling work as chair of this committee.

Today, if I am elected, Ferpa will also have a new General Secretary. I am however not so very new as I have been a member of the Steering Committee since the Venice 2011 Congress and I was the acting General Secretary for six months in 2017, elected first by the Steering Committee and subsequently by the Executive Committee, to temporarily replace Carla Cantone who was absent for family reasons.

I would also like to thank Carla for the trust she placed in me by nominating me, and all of you for having approved the nomination.

I am therefore a candidate who has already performed a six-month trial and I hope today to take on the role in full.

However, to avoid a repetition of this kind of temporary replacement, the new Charter provides for the appointment of a Deputy General Secretary who, in the absence of the General Secretary, will automatically take their place until the next Executive Committee meeting.

The Charter also provides for a Treasurer so that the budgets can be approved in good time and the financial statements kept up to date; Ferpa has few financial resources and they must therefore be carefully managed.

We must resolutely pursue the actions of the Women's Committee, which requires the staunch support of every one of us because the topics it deals with concern all of Ferpa and the women and men who are part of it.

In my opinion, the Women's Committee's work must be developed in two main areas.

Firstly, we must continue to strengthen the actions taken to overcome every kind of gender discrimination and to achieve a balance in representation between men and women within Ferpa.

We have taken a significant initial step forward by introducing a change to the Charter stipulating that the roles of General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary must be carried out by people of the opposite sex. Clearly, this alone is not enough and we must do more.

We will therefore also continue working to consider gender as part of our analyses. This means not only coming up with theoretical insights, which are of course useful, but also drawing up union policies that respond to the needs of pensioners and older men and women throughout Europe.

As you very well know, there are strong gender differences when it comes to the elderly: women live longer on average, have much lower pensions, and have a greater probability of spending their last years alone and with a loss of independence.

Together with the Women's Committee, we must also pursue their work against gender-based violence and in favour of a gender-positive culture, both within and outside Ferpa.

It is essential that, in conjunction with the ETUC Women's Committee, we reinforce the links between women across the generations and between workers and pensioners.

But these changes will not be enough to strengthen Ferpa without greater involvement from the Steering Committee and Executive Committee.

Executive Committee meetings must be more focused, with fewer points on the agenda so that we can go into more depth on each topic and make decisions after a collective reflection. This will mean that the approved motions are truly a part of our everyday actions within our respective unions.

The Steering Committee must strengthen its management role by setting up a working group on specific issues, giving rise to real European teamwork.

If Ferpa had more economic resources, it could hold more meetings of both the Steering and the Executive Committee.

Despite this not being possible, we can still overcome such limitations by improving how we exchange information, our communications and our dialogue through our website (which must always be kept up to date), and by using email more often.

We also have an age-old problem: the fact that we speak so many different languages. In the case of translation too we have budgetary limits and can therefore only translate official notices, and even then only into a few languages.

But we must not allow ourselves to be ruled by these limits. We must instead try to overcome them, for example by using simultaneous interpreting more as, even though it is not perfect, it is a way of communicating instantaneously while we wait for the official translations for Ferpa meetings.

The General Secretary has a crucial role to play in organising Ferpa's activities and ensuring that it runs smoothly. Therefore, together with Jessica and Henri, I will undertake to find the most suitable and practical solutions.

In conclusion, each one of us must do our utmost to ensure that our Federation operates effectively, rather than delegating to others what we can actually do ourselves. If we believe in ourselves and work hard, we will succeed.

I will make every effort to do this and I hope that you will too, because your help is essential.

It is essential not only for giving Ferpa more of a voice, but above all for giving more of a voice to the pensioners and older people in our countries who rely on us, who feel that they are European citizens and who want to continue feeling this way.

Long live Ferpa. And long live all of us who believe that fighting for your values and needs has no age limit.

