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Minutes of the Steering Committee meeting of 6 June 2019

Present: Lajos Mayer, SZEFE, President of FERPA; Agostino Siciliano, UIL-UILP, General Secretary of FERPA; Angeles Briales, UJP-UGT, Deputy General Secretary of FERPA; Mireille Paume, UCR-CGT, President of the Women's Committee; Tino Fumagalli, FNP-CISL, Treasurer; Dick De Graaf, FNV; Didier Hotte, UCR-CGT; Domenico Pantaleo, SPI-CGIL; Metka Rokсандic, SUS; Hubert Schwind, UCR-CGT; Werner Thum, ÖGB

Also in attendance at the meeting: Jessica Montiel, Project Coordinator; Henri Lourdelle, Special Advisor

Apologies for absence: Eliane De Dobbeleer, CSC-ACV

Lajos Mayer, President of FERPA, opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and interpreters. He told the participants about the two changes made to the composition of the Steering Committee:

- The replacement of Livio Melgari (SPI-CGIL) by Domenico Pantaleo, from the same organisation
- The replacement of Jeannine Martin (CSC-ACV) by Eliane De Dobbeleer, from the same organisation
- The replacement on the Financial Committee of Slobodan Stojanovic by Djordje Lajsic (ASRS, Serbia)

He pointed out a minor change to the agenda of this Steering Committee meeting: the item concerning the ETUC Congress in Vienna from 21 to 24 May being moved to the end of the agenda, to give priority to the discussion concerning the development of the dossiers taken up by the members of the Steering Committee.

The amended agenda was adopted. He then gave the floor to the General Secretary.

Agostino Siciliano, General Secretary, returning to FERPA's presence and stand at the Congress in Vienna, first thanked Jessica and Henri for their investment in preparing and implementing the event, as well as the Austrian colleagues.

Then, addressing the issue of the "dossiers" to be taken up by the members of the Steering Committee, he insisted that these "dossiers" should above all be focused on the demand component, in other words indicate ways forward for changing/improving the situation of pensioners and the elderly at European level and, by extension, at national level. He wanted the entire Executive Committee to be involved in this process, under the responsibility of each of the members of the Steering Committee in charge of the various topics, in conjunction with Henri in charge of coordinating the various dossiers.

He also mentioned the structure of the document:

- A **quick definition of the subject:** What are we talking about for each of the dossiers to be handled? What are the issues? At European level, but also specifically, in each country.

- **Questioning** (short questionnaire!) of the members of the Executive Committee in order to have the most precise data possible concerning the issues encountered nationally/regionally, etc.
- From the responses received, **identify one or two or three demands**
- Then **propose actions (action plans)** to be presented and discussed within the Executive Committee and to be submitted for **the approval of the General Secretary**

As the General Secretary pointed out, this is a new, more direct method of communication within FERPA, between the delegates and all the members of the Executive. In order to simplify requests for data or other requests for information, they should be sent with the signature of the person in charge of the dossier, as well as that of Henri, the Coordinator of all the dossiers, and that of Jessica, as Coordinator of the activities of FERPA and the General Secretariat.

The General Secretary finished his intervention by insisting on the fact that the dossier should be prepared by compiling the data, in order to then be able to propose courses of action. As he said, the General Secretary's objective is to have a better organisation and better involvement between us.

During the discussion which followed this introduction by the General Secretary, the President of FERPA first gave the floor to **Dick De Graaf**, at his request, to explain the sheet he had already sent concerning the dossier for which he is responsible. Firstly, he confirmed what the General Secretary had said, namely that the work of FERPA is not just that of the Secretariat, but that of everyone, particularly the Steering Committee: we need to work in a more "cooperative" manner.

Then, returning to his dossier, he stressed that the issue of poverty, and that of pensioners and the elderly in particular, is the most important issue in Europe. The draft project he had prepared takes the following form:

- Determine at country level the pension amount needed to avoid poverty
- Then organise a campaign regarding this objective
- And have a document which summarises all this, to be sent to the European institutions.

He stressed the need for the support of the Executive Committee regarding pensions:

- What income do you need to "not be poor"? What do you need in the "basket of goods and services" for pensioners and the elderly?
- In its campaign, FERPA also needs the support of the ETUC, including its Social Protection Committee, for a "pension without poverty".

Following this intervention, the members of the Steering Committee shared their reactions. In general, everyone agreed that Dick's proposal was a step in the right direction and emphasised that, while FERPA must take the initiative, this is not a matter for it alone: it concerns the entire ETUC! Some people asked about how to proceed in order for things to be clear. We need to think carefully about the method, because the conditions for fighting poverty and the situations vary from country to country. In some countries, as a result of the austerity measures implemented, pensioners have lost their indexation system. What level of pension, for example, can we agree on at FERPA level? Do we need a monetary definition when, in some countries, such as Slovenia, the poverty threshold is EUR 600? Or a percentage reference, such as 60% of the median income? And what does the desire to

reintegrate pensioners into the labour market mean? Is this, in reality, a further postponement of the legal retirement age? In addition, how can we control the flow of information that will result from the questionnaires that will be sent to the organisations? Others pointed out that not just the pension amount is behind this theme of poverty. There are other qualitative aspects: energy poverty, health, housing, the poverty of retired and elderly women, etc. It is therefore necessary to link together all these aspects and questions in our approach and in our campaigns.

The President, Lajos Meyer, then gave the floor to the **General Secretary**, Agostino Siciliano, who highlighted the enormous challenges that FERPA must face. As far as the methodology is concerned, all the dossiers are in fact linked. One or two specific demands to be made by the members of the Executive Committee must be defined in each. And the need to act together must be emphasised. To do this, the General Secretary needs everyone's agreement.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: FNV, SPI-CGIL, ÖGB, UJP-CGT, UCR-CGT, SUS, FNP-CISL

The next item concerned organising the **next FERPA Executive Committee meeting on 5 and 6 December 2019**. The **General Secretary** pointed out the commitment he had made, at the last FERPA Executive Committee meeting on 20 and 21 March 2019, to revisit two specific points which will therefore be addressed, among other topics that will be included on the agenda:

- Analysis of the functioning of the last FERPA Congress in 2018
- The issues raised by Cyprus

The President opened **the discussion** regarding these two specific points.

First of all, it was said that following the exchange of correspondence that took place between Dick De Graaf and the Cypriot colleague, the latter does not want to revisit the functioning of the Congress, but wants a new Constitution. Some members thought that it was time to close this Cypriot dossier. The Congress is over, the Constitution has been adopted. As for their amendments, rules of procedure exist that are included in the Constitution. If the Cypriot colleagues want to, they can submit this item for the next Congress. Because, as was pointed out, everyone can make proposals to be discussed at the next Congress, bearing in mind, however, that of the 11 items raised by the Cypriot colleagues, most have already been answered in the new Constitution and others are unacceptable given FERPA's founding values.

With regard to the functioning of the Congress, certain points need to be clarified, notably the voting methods of the officials, and proposals need to be formulated that will be discussed in connecting with preparing for it.

Following this discussion, the **General Secretary** emphasised that it is not possible to question every decision adopted by the Congress. He is prepared to introduce any changes that may prove necessary, but in compliance with the rules by which we operate. He also asked Dick to respond to the Cypriot colleagues - since he was the one to whom they had

written - that the Steering Committee had examined their request and that the amendments would be discussed at the next Congress.

As for the last Congress, it went well overall, even though certain points do, however, need to be changed or clarified, with which he agreed.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: FNV, UJP-CGT, SZEF, ÖGB

The President, Lajos Meyer, then gave the floor to the Treasurer of FERPA, **Tino Fumagalli**, to introduce the item regarding **Finance**.

The Treasurer said that he had received the list of organisations which had paid their contributions and those which were late. A reminder will be sent to the organisations concerned. However, of these, two organisations have not paid for four years. With regard to them, after having asked for the opinion of the Financial Committee, which he will be convening shortly, a proposal will be made at the next Executive Committee meeting:

- Either to cancel the debt, but this solution, from his point of view, would not be fair on organisations which are themselves experiencing financial difficulties too but which, despite this, pay their contributions
- Or to meet with them and offer them staggered payments in order to settle their debts up to 2018. We must reaffirm the principle that everyone must pay.

In the short **discussion** which followed this presentation by the Treasurer, the organisations welcomed this second proposal and the fact that this is the first time that these problems have been able to be openly addressed, because FERPA now has a treasurer. Others insisted that it is the payment of the contribution that gives the right to participate in FERPA, and wondered how to help organisations that experience difficulties in paying their contributions.

The **General Secretary** revisited this positive element that FERPA's Constitution requires it to have a Treasurer, which makes it possible to have this type of discussion between members. He also thought that solutions needed to be found to manage arrears and prevent late payments from becoming too large. The Treasurer must therefore regularly monitor the intake of contributions and issue the timely reminders needed.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: SZEF, UCR-CGT, SPI-CGIL, ÖGB

The President then gave the floor to the **General Secretary** to address the next item, which relates to the **dispute between the two Spanish organisations, CC.OO and UGT**.

The FERPA Congress, last October, elected Angeles Briaies (UJP-UGT) to the Steering Committee and as Deputy General Secretary of FERPA.

However, prior to the Congress, the two Spanish organisations had met and decided on a rotation between them, every four years. As the FERPA Congress was anticipated, CC.OO is claiming that this rotation should start now.

The General Secretary, who was contacted by CC.OO, told them that he was waiting for a letter conveying their agreement, signed by their two organisations, with the request to proceed with the requested rotation. However, since the General Secretary had asked them

for this jointly signed letter, he had still not received anything. For the time being, therefore, things have remained as they were.

During the short **discussion** which followed, some organisations wondered whether it fell within the competence of the General Secretary of FERPA to resolve internal problems between organisations from the same country, adding that they generally resolve them themselves. Others considered that FERPA cannot ignore this situation, and wondered whether the solution might be to expand the Steering Committee?

In **his response**, the **General Secretary** pointed out, as underlined by the Steering Committee, that it was not within his competence to intervene in the internal discussions of national organisations. He also pointed out that he was still waiting for the joint letter signed by the two organisations, in order to make any change whatsoever within the Steering Committee.

As for the suggestion to expand the Steering Committee, the General Secretary specified that this could not be done, because

- This would be contrary to the Constitution, which sets the number of members of the Steering Committee;
- This does not resolve the issue of awarding the position of Deputy General Secretary. In this case, a call for applications should be organised and a new election held;
- Nor should we ignore the fact that an additional position on the Steering Committee entails an additional budgetary cost.

In conclusion, **the Steering Committee unanimously supported the position stated by the General Secretary** and asked him **to write** to the two organisations to this effect.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: UJP-CGT, UCR-CGT, SPI-CGIL

The next item concerned the **14th ETUC Congress** which took place in Vienna from 21 to 24 May 2019.

With its stand, FERPA had real visibility during this Congress. Henri, who was responsible for this, took the opportunity to thank

- the Austrian trade union, which delegated two activists who helped him to set up and man the stand during the week,
- and the colleagues from FERPA, particularly Angeles, Didier, Dick, the President, the General Secretary, etc., who either helped him during the Congress or came by the stand.

As for the right to vote, despite the efforts made, the result was negative. The General Secretary will send a circular on this subject to all the organisations. However, as he said, we now need to focus on other subjects. The work to be done on the dossiers and the investment demanded of the organisations are a good opportunity to give visibility to FERPA and to show the ETUC and the outside world what it is: a real trade union organisation that exists and acts for the good of its members.

In the **discussion** which followed, some organisations did not understand why major Confederations should not vote in favour of granting this right to vote. Aren't they demonstrating narrow "nationalism"? Or why organisations which have members of FERPA (CC.OO or the Belgian organisations for example) did not vote "for" or their votes were tied (CGT France: two "for" and two "abstentions"). Or why the Women's Committee or the Youth Committee on the one hand, and FERPA on the other should be treated differently. Some people also lamented the fact that, at its Congress, the ETUC did not sufficiently seize upon the fights waged by the trade unions and spent so much time on big discussions rather than focusing more on workers.

In connection with this discussion, Dick informed the Committee that, in the Netherlands, the trade unions are in the midst of the battle for the pension right and, in particular, the battle for freezing the pension age. FNV will launch a referendum among all the members of the organisation.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: FNV, UCR-CGT, UCR-FO

The **General Secretary** then intervened to insist on the need for the Steering Committee to invest in the functioning of FERPA. To succeed and move forward, he needed the support of all members. For example, he lamented the limited response from members when he asks for it. This was the case with the assessment that he had requested of the "postcards" operation: only four or five organisations responded.

He acknowledged that this is a new way of working and that it may disconcert members to begin with. However, as far as he is concerned, this is the key to success for FERPA. He therefore closed by encouraging them to become resolutely involved in the activities proposed, and restated his trust in all the members of the Steering Committee.

The President of FERPA, Lajos Meyer, thanked the General Secretary for his comments and gave the **schedule** for the subsequent statutory meetings:

Steering Committee:

- 12/9/2019
- 14/11/2019
- 13/02/2020

Executive Committee:

- 5-6/12/2019
- 25-26/3/2020

There being no further business on the agenda, the **President** closed the meeting by thanking the interpreters and the members of the Steering Committee for their attendance, and their active and constructive participation in the meeting.

Henri