

Minutes of the FERPA Executive Committee meeting held on 20 and 21 March 2019

(ITUH, Auditorium)

Present: Lajos Mayer, President; Agostino Siciliano, General Secretary; Angeles Briaies, Deputy General Secretary; Ernesto Fumagalli, Treasurer; ÖGB, Austria; FGTB-ABVV and CSC-ACV, Belgium; SUH, Croatia; PESYK-SEK and PA.SY.DY, Cyprus; FEJP-CC.OO, UJP-UGT and USO, Spain; UCR-CGT, UCR-FO, UNAR-CFTC, UNIR-CFE-CGC and UNSA-Retraitées, France; OSTOE, Greece; MASZSZ, Hungary; ICTU, Ireland; FNP-CISL, SPI-CGIL, UIL-UIL-P, Italy; LCGB and OGBL, Luxembourg; GWU, Malta; FNV, the Netherlands; FNSPR, Romania; ASRS, Serbia; UNIA, Switzerland; TUC, United Kingdom; Mireille Paume, President of the Women’s Committee; Danilo Toccane, President of the Financial Audit Committee

Apologies for absence: UCR-CFDT, France; INTER-REFOR. Da CGTP-IN, Portugal; SUS, Slovenia

Also present at the meeting:

- For the FERPA Secretariat: Jessica Montiel, Project Coordinator, and Henri Lourdelle, Special Advisor;
- and Oscar Capobianco, for the presentation of the new FERPA site.

The **President of FERPA**, Lajos Meyer, opened the meeting and, after welcoming the participants, gave the floor to Agostino Siciliano, the General Secretary.

The **General Secretary** firstly emphasised that the meeting was important for everyone, since it was the first meeting of all organisations since the Congress. He stated that he would not make a general speech, but would give a point-by-point contribution.

Two important events lie ahead for FERPA’s organisations:

- the European elections next May;
- and “operation postcards” (the postcards are available in three languages on the FERPA website).

For these two events, it is essential to mobilise all the organisations of FERPA. We need to give “visibility” to our organisation, so that we can get our message across.

In terms of “**operation postcards**”, each organisation must make arrangements with its members and its regional and local structures to send them to all candidates.

For the **26 April Demonstration**, the General Secretary emphasised that “it is also important that there are a lot of us behind the FERPA banner, at a time when we are demanding our full place within the bodies of ETUC”.

He also mentioned the **14th ETUC Congress** which will take place from 21 to 24 May in Vienna. The members of the Steering Committee are called upon to represent FERPA, which has 10 seats. What is at stake at this congress, which will be held at the time of the European

elections, is important for the future of Europe, and specifically for FERPA, since it will, for it, be about obtaining voting rights within ETUC bodies. The fact that it has not yet been given this right is seen as discriminatory, while the ETUC Youth Committee and the Women's Committee do have the right... The General Secretary sent a letter to the 33 organisations that abstained at the ETUC Mid-Term General Meeting, but only 2 or 3 replied. All FERPA organisations must therefore mobilise and appeal to their national organisations.

He confirmed that FERPA will have a stand at the Congress for which Henri will be responsible with the help of Werner and a few of his colleagues.

Following this short presentation by the General Secretary, the President, Lajos Mayer, opened the floor for **discussions**.

Firstly, a minute's silence was observed in memory of our colleague Georges Malotau, from the Belgian CSC, who had been one of the pillars of FERPA for a long time and who recently died. The Executive Committee was also informed of the resignation of Jeannine Martin, from CSC, who had been a member of the Steering Committee.

The Cypriot colleagues then intervened to reopen the debate on the new constitution, with which they still disagree, even though they were adopted unanimously at the last Congress in Brussels. They were told that this question was not on the agenda for this Executive Committee meeting, but that it would be included under "any other business" at the end of the meeting.

Next, the contributions concerned the issues at stake in the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament, and the attacks and threats to the future of the European Union by far right and populist parties. It is important to ensure a different Europe, one that is more social and attentive to its citizens, because there is real dissatisfaction, as evidenced by the various protest movements emerging in different countries. This also illustrates the fact that this social priority must also be developed and implemented at national level. However, in many countries the rights and incomes of retired persons are being seriously undermined. The problem that FERPA has to address is: how can pensions be changed for the better today? It is therefore necessary to defend pensions paid and guaranteed by "public" pension systems based on inter- and intragenerational solidarity.

"Operation postcards" and participation in the ETUC European Demonstration on 26 April, with which FERPA is associated, are positively welcomed and largely supported by the members of the Executive Committee. For them, it is important that FERPA "makes its voice heard" and is particularly "visible". However, some organisations pointed out that, for reasons of distance and resources, they will not be able to be in Brussels on 26 April, but will organise actions in their own countries.

Several contributions also referred to the ETUC Congress and agreed that, insofar as voting rights are concerned, FERPA cannot afford to suffer another failure like in 2005. Some members indicated that they had managed to convince their organisations that had not voted in favour at the Mid-Term Conference to change their position.

It is important to be heard and acknowledged within ETUC. However, several organisations have noted that there is little mention of retired persons and their problems and demands in the ETUC Congress documents.

Some of the documents do emphasise the issue of quality healthcare, as mentioned in the "postcard", because in some countries access to healthcare and/or medicines is restricted on

the pretext that the sick person is elderly. This leads to multi-tier health systems depending on whether you are younger or older.

The question of Brexit and its consequences for Ireland with, among other things, the undermining of the “Good Friday Agreement” (removal of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland) was also mentioned.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: PA.SY.DY, CSC/ACV, SPI-CGIL, UIL-UIL-P, UCR-CGT, FNV, UGT-E, ÖGB, UNIR-CFE-CGC, FGTB/ABVV, UNIA, MASZSZ, SZEZ, OGBL, SUH, USO, ICTU, FNSPR

In his **response**, the General Secretary stated that the discussion had “given him courage”. He recalled that he had not wanted a member of the ETUC Secretariat to speak so as to give the floor to the members of the Executive Committee.

He also stressed the importance of participation in the ETUC Demonstration.

Regarding the ETUC Congress, he informed the Executive Committee that, contrary to tradition, there would be no representatives from the Austrian Government for the opening of the Congress because, not being in favour of trade unions, certain members have not been invited and others declined the invitation sent to them. Only the leader of the Austrian opposition will be present and will speak.

With regard to the issue of pensions, the reasons behind the pension freeze must be examined. What do we mean when we talk about an “adequate” amount? How many future workers for how many retirees? It is therefore necessary to speak in full knowledge of the facts in order to find solutions together.

For the Demonstration, it will be necessary to stand behind FERPA’s banner and flags. It would also be interesting for the organisations to inform the General Secretary of the number of postcards sent to the candidates for election to the European Parliament.

And after the elections, it will be important to have representatives in Parliament, “to have a point of contact”, he added.

And he concluded with a general reflection on the political climate on the eve of the elections. The political climate is marred by populism which is exploiting certain distressing events that have occurred, such as the tram shooting in Utrecht in the Netherlands by a person of Turkish nationality, or the kidnapping of 51 children in Milan, in Italy. The General Secretary concluded that “we should not start hating others, foreigners, even in serious cases such as these”.

After the conclusion of this discussion, the President announced, in accordance with the agenda, the next item to be discussed, namely the presentation of the new **FERPA website**. He first gave the floor to the General Secretary for a brief introduction.

Agostino Siciliano emphasised the importance of the website, where everyone can find all the documentation and information about FERPA that he or she needs. It also showcases the activities and initiatives of the organisation and its members, such as “operation postcards” or the 26 April demonstration, for example.

He thanked UIL-P, which was responsible - including financially, at a cost of €3,000 - for modernising the website. Photos of the members of the Steering Committee will also be added. The site still needs to become operational.

The floor was then given to **Oscar Capobianco** National Secretary of UIL for retirees, who has been working on different data since 1996.

Acknowledging that the site was “dated”, he stated that the dominant colour would be blue, the colour of Europe. It will be possible to download documents that will be archived according to theme.

Several organisations stressed that, for them, the site must have two functions:

- serve as a showcase to the outside world;
- also serve as an instrument for exchange, communication.

It could therefore serve as a kind of “forum” to report on what is happening or indicate the contact persons in the countries.

Others also stated that the history of FERPA, “our history”, is missing. Some people regret the fact that the European map is no longer interactive.

Others raised the sensitive issue of access to the site: for FERPA members or for everyone. Should there not be an access key for documents reserved for members, such as the minutes of meetings?

To these questions, Oscar Capobianco replied that it was very appealing to have a technological platform, where anything was possible. Nevertheless, it needs content because if a site remains inactive, it quickly becomes obsolete.

As for the question of “who has access to what?”, a restricted intranet area can be created, with a login to access it. Regarding the geographical map, it is necessary to decide whether it is to be based on the country from where it is being viewed. Perhaps, for each country, there could be a “web manager” who is responsible for transposing it in each country.

Technology is a vector, which can indeed be useful in giving FERPA visibility, including within ETUC.

To **conclude** this presentation and discussion, the General Secretary noted that, via the discussion that had just taken place, we were going further than simply “updating” the website, which was the initial objective. And he questioned whether the availability and resources were there to implement everything that had been said? He is more in favour of a policy of “baby steps”. Coordination is certainly needed, but it is not necessary to aim for something too ambitious. There is a need to be realistic. “Let’s first agree to update the site while not removing anything that was there before. And let’s make sure, as the saying goes, that we learn to walk before we can run.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: SUH, FNV, UNSA-Retraitéés, CSC/ACV, FGTB/ABVV, OGBL, UNIR- CFE-CGC

After thanking the National Secretary of UIL for his contribution and explanations, the President of FERPA, Lajos Meyer, handed the floor back to the General Secretary to present **the new FERPA organisation.**

Agostino Siciliano firstly reiterated that FERPA needed to get off to a “good start” after the turbulence that it has experienced in recent times. He discussed this with the members of the Steering Committee at the two meetings that preceded this Executive Committee meeting. It is necessary to have a team assisting the General Secretary who can follow up on issues. This is not a binding agreement, but it is fundamental.

His depiction detailing the various issues to be dealt with was approved by the Steering Committee. Henri will be the “multi-issue coordinator”.

What will have to be done?

The aim will not be to write a “book” but to generate proposals for demands and activities on each of the themes.

Such as, for example, relating to “energy poverty”:

- What impact does it have on people? And retirees in particular? What data is available?
- What guarantees for retirees?
- What are the demands? What messages in all the countries?
- What actions should be developed?

Will the Executive Committee be the contact person to ensure successful completion of these projects? Of course, this is a complex process.

In the **discussion** that arose following this introduction from the General Secretary, several organisations acknowledged that this amounts to a new way of working with new procedures. They believe that they need documents with content that enables the various topics to be discussed.

Others wondered whether everyone was contributing to all the themes or whether they should specialise?

In general, everyone agreed on the General Secretary’s proposal not to repeat a general survey, but to produce a 2- or 3-page sheet in which positioning and demands would be defined, which would be a summary of a short questionnaire, containing key data, which would be sent beforehand.

The aim is to work “collectively” and to carry out “team work”, in particular using data from other countries, which implies exchanging e-mail addresses.

However, one question, concerning the “strengthening” of FERPA, was raised, which is not mentioned in the proposed work plan.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: UNIA, FGTB/ABVV, Spi-CGIL, FNV, USO, UJP-UGT, OSTOE, UNIR-CFE-CGC, UCR-FO, FNP-CISL, ASRS, CSC/ACV, ÖGB, UNAR-CFTC, UIL-UILP, UCR-CGT

In his **response**, the General Secretary thanked the organisations that contributed to the discussion. It is in fact a new way of working that introduces collective decision-making within a pyramid structure. He moreover confirmed that Henri would coordinate all the documents.

As for the questionnaires referred to on several occasions, the General Secretary wondered whether there was a faster way to get the information.

He concluded by saying that he hoped that an initial document could be submitted to the next Executive Committee meeting.

The President gave the floor to the Treasurer of FERPA, Ernesto Fumagalli (FNP-CISL), for a **presentation of the budget**.

First of all, regarding the 2018 budget, it has not yet been definitively settled because the auditors of ETUC’s accounts are still working on them.

As for the 2019 draft budget, he pointed out:

- that it includes a provision for the Congress;
- that items have been removed such as those relating to Carla's trips;
- that no provision has been made for updating the FERPA website because, as mentioned above, this expense is borne by UIL UIL-P;
- and finally, with regard to the travel costs for Brussels and the meals and accommodation of the General Secretary of FERPA, these are covered by his own organisation (UIL UIL-P).

He has endeavoured to limit expenses and will check whether the member organisations are up to date with their payments. Finally, he specified that, insofar as the ETUC Congress is concerned, FERPA will only cover the attendance costs of the President and the General Secretary. As for the other representatives of FERPA, the costs are covered by their respective organisations.

In the **discussion** that followed this presentation, several clarifications were requested, particularly with regard to "income" from ETUC or to find out whether FERPA was subsidised by the Commission.

The following **answers**, among others, were given:

- ETUC does indeed pay a subsidy to FERPA to support the organisation's activities;
- the Commission does not pay any subsidy to FERPA, but since it is considered to be an ETUC Working Group, the costs inherent to holding the Executive Committee meeting are borne by the Commission, such as, for example, travel and subsistence costs of one member per country, like for ETUC.

With these clarifications provided, the President proceeded with a vote on approving the provisional budget. The budget was **unanimously adopted**.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: FNV, ASRS, OSTOE, FGTB/ABVV, CSC/ACV

The President next gave **the floor to the ETUC General Secretary, Luca Visentini**.

Luca first reminded everyone that the 14th ETUC Congress will be held in Vienna from 22 to 25 May. He acknowledged that the situation is not very encouraging with the rise, in most countries, of far right and populist and xenophobic parties, which are attacking trade unions and questioning social protection and the benefits acquired by workers.

This is a difficult battle for trade unions due to austerity and the attacks to which they have been subjected for the last ten years.

It is about defending democracy, while at the same time educating and deciphering what is hidden behind the rhetoric of these parties.

A study shows that one third of trade union activists vote for far right parties and another third did not vote because they were too disillusioned.

We therefore need to be able to explain what is at stake and invest in not only democracy, but also in a different Europe.

For the European elections, ETUC has developed a 6-point action programme which focuses on:

- democracy;

- social justice;
- stable employment and better wages;
- the ability to protect workers from the challenges of climate change;
- a fair transition to meet the challenges of “decarbonisation”;
- more justice as regards taxation.

For ETUC, the movement that is undermining wages and pensions must be stopped, because purchasing power needs to be enhanced.

The General Secretary of ETUC welcomes the initiatives taken by FERPA along the same lines, such as “operation postcards” or the defence of the first pillar pension system.

The European social model must be rebuilt. This is an emergency situation that must be remedied.

There must be no mistake about who is responsible: what is happening in Europe is the responsibility of our own governments. It is they that must be targeted.

Democracy is being attacked because of migrants. However, we can see that where xenophobic or far right parties thrive is not always in areas with more migrants, but in regions where there is a lot of unemployment, poverty, or in rich areas where people are afraid of losing what they have or have acquired. We need to change society and defend our values.

The demonstration on 26 April in front of the European Parliament is important and FERPA has every right to defend our values on that occasion.

As regards our internal problems, there are some countries where pensioners are not really part of trade union structures. As the Secretariat of ETUC, “we are convinced of the merits of voting rights for FERPA”, added the ETUC General Secretary. “You need to intensify your contacts and your pressure: you need just 10% to reach the required 67%. Make yourself heard in your confederations and on 26 April show that FERPA is present and active”.

In **the discussion** that followed this presentation, all the organisations that spoke shared the ETUC General Secretary’s assessment and thanked him for his presentation. Nevertheless, all of them also noted that the problems of pensioners and especially women are rarely or too narrowly taken into account in the ETUC documents and action programme. However, everything is connected, as FERPA represents 10 million members and speaks on behalf of 100 million European pensioners.

They also insist that something must be done to restore public confidence in the European Union.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: ASRS, UNSA-Retraitées, SPI-CGIL, USO, FNV, FNP-CISL, FGTB/ABVV, UNIR-CFE-CGC, OSTOE, MASZSZ, UCR-FO

In his **response**, the General Secretary acknowledged that the policy component of the ETUC Action Plan has been adopted and cannot be changed, although it remains an open document, limited aspects of which can still be amended. And he pointed out that when ETUC fights for better wages and better incomes, this consequently means better pensions because the three are linked.

Concerning the Congress, the amendment on FERPA's right to vote will be discussed on the 1st day, i.e. when everyone will be there. For ETUC, FERPA is a genuine trade union. Furthermore, it will be invited to speak at each session of the Congress.

President Lajos Meyer, on behalf of the FERPA organisations, warmly thanked Luca for his attendance, his contribution and his responses.

He then gave the floor to **Mireille Paume** (UCR-CGT), Chair of the Women's Committee, to **report on the work of the Women's Commission**, which met on Wednesday in the early afternoon.

The Chairwoman stressed, at the beginning of her contribution, that this was the first meeting of the Committee following the Brussels Congress and was rich in discussions and contributions. Discussion within the Committee was based on the road map that she had previously presented. The aim is to transform the analyses already conducted into demands.

The work of the Committee should not be limited to 8 March or 25 November, but should continue on a permanent basis on issues specific to retired women (widow's pensions? How can wage inequalities be corrected in retirement? The question of carers: is this only for women? etc.). It would be interesting to have a database on these issues.

While making observations is, of course, useful, it is not sufficient. Real demands must be made and taken to European level. The Women's Committee must be the voice for defending women's rights.

We need to establish a working method, find a way to proceed and see how we can share the workload.

The aim would be to provide documents before each Committee meeting.

The Chairwoman concluded her contribution by thanking the Women's Committee for the quality of the exchanges and contributions.

The President of FERPA then moved on to **any other business**, which largely concerned the two types of objections raised by the Cypriot representative:

- the manner in which the Constitution was discussed and adopted;
- the conditions under which the General Secretary and the President were elected, which did not give rise to a formal voting procedure.

He also called for a vote on his proposal.

In the **discussion** that followed, it was recalled, in relation to the Constitution, that a document had been sent, following the work of the Committee for the Revision of the Constitution and the Internal Regulations, containing all the arguments and indicating the reasons why a particular amendment was not adopted. Perhaps things could have been done differently? Some organisations pointed out that everything can be improved, including the Constitution and Internal Regulations, but that it would be up to the next Congress to deal with it, if it receives the proposed amendments to the Constitution 6 months in advance. Others called for the Cypriot proposal to be further developed and for the requested vote to be postponed.

Regarding the last Congress, certain organisations stated that they did not like voting by acclamation.

Another request was made: to obtain a list of organisations that did not support FERPA's right to vote.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: PA.SY.DY, SUH, FNP-CISL, SPI-CGIL, FNV, ÖGB, UIL-UIL-P.

In **concluding** this discussion, the General Secretary recalled that he had written a letter relating to voting rights to all the General Secretaries.

He acknowledged that at the last Congress, individual procedural errors may have been made and that this could be discussed again at the October meeting of the Executive Committee.

With regard to the Cypriot proposal, once it has been thoroughly considered, it could be re-examined at one of the next meetings of the Executive Committee.

With regard to the revision of the constitution, there is nothing urgent and it could be discussed again...

At the next Congress, things will be improved. However, we also have a common desire to improve FERPA.

He concluded by thanking the organisations for their active participation over the two days.

There being no further business on the agenda, the President, in turn, thanked the participants in the Executive Committee meeting as well as the interpreters.

Henri