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## Summary report of the FERPA Executive Committee in virtual format

25 and 26 November 2020

As this is the first time that the meeting is taking place with all the members of the Executive Committee in virtual form, technical explanations are first given by **Jessica**.

Then the **President** formally opened the meeting by welcoming the members of the Executive Committee and gave some instructions, in particular that of respecting the time limit for speeches (3 minutes) in view of the heavy agenda. A minute's silence was then proposed in memory of **Mr. TOTH**, recently deceased, former President of the Hungarian Pensioners' Union and former member of the Executive Committee of FERPA.

He also mentioned the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, on 25 November, which coincides with the holding of this Executive Committee meeting.

He then approved the agenda of this meeting and the minutes of the December 2019 meeting.

He then gave the floor to the **Secretary General** to present the various changes in FERPA's statutory bodies and in the Finance Committee. The Belgian organisations expressed their agreement to a rotation between their two organisations (CSC-ACV and FGVB) within the Steering Committee.

The **Women's Committee** then held its meeting, at the end of which **Mireille PAUME** presented the poster published for the International Day for the Fight against Violence against Women, which had been sent to FERPA organisations beforehand. She also mentioned the Committee's work plan up to the Mid-term Assembly, including reviewing the 2012 Charter and completing the report on women's work.

The **President** gives the floor to the **Secretary General** for his communications.

In the light of the meeting, which is being held in virtual form, the Secretary General notes with satisfaction that older people can do very good work with new technologies. FERPA continues to prove its effectiveness over time.

He then returned to the poster published by FERPA on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Concerning the consideration at European level of the seriousness of the COVID 19 pandemic, he welcomed the fact that there is now a common approach to financial aid between the different countries, which was not the case initially. ETUC and FERPA have been working hand in hand to denounce the problems that have become evident during the pandemic and in particular within institutions for the elderly. Letters were sent to the Commission and the European Parliament and initiatives were implemented. Similarly, a letter of solidarity was sent to the European Federation of Public Services (EPSU) to defend medical staff. In the current context it is therefore important to relaunch the health system in Europe: we must cooperate with the European Union to find solutions. It is also necessary to be attentive to what is happening in retirement and nursing homes. It is necessary to review their organisation and develop coordination at this level in order to be able to better respond to the problems that arise.

FERPA supports the ETUC's campaign on the introduction of a minimum wage in Europe, as this can be the way forward for the introduction of a minimum pension at European level, which is a necessity for all retired and elderly people in Europe. The implementation of the European Foundation of Social Rights should also be pursued, because with both the social and economic cost of the crisis, the question arises as to who will pay for the "stimulus", to ensure that there will be sufficient resources to pay for pensions. This is an important issue. So we need to move forward with our objectives, to organise ourselves internally to work effectively. The pandemic has changed the way we work. It is no longer the Secretary General alone, but competences distributed among the members. We have to communicate on what we are doing, and in this respect we have received a positive signal from the European Economic and Social Committee, which has asked us to participate in the Liaison Group that exists within it. This is a recognition of our work.

Finally, another encouraging sign is that the ETUC is in the process of modifying its operating rules, and in particular the rules for calculating votes in elections. It proposes that abstentions should no longer be taken into account in the 2/3 rule in favour of the election. This rule penalized us for obtaining the right to vote in the ETUC Executive Committee. We had a large majority of votes cast in our favour, but with abstentions we never reached the required 2/3.

The **President** then opened the debate.

Some organisations first of all express their agreement with what the Secretary General said about the work done by FERPA in the period. But they also point out that young people and women were also penalised during the period. It is therefore important to revive intergenerational solidarity, which does not exclude, however, in some countries tensions between young and old people. Returning to the question of the FERPA's right to vote, several nevertheless stress the need to convince the FGTB, the DGB, etc...

However, many of the interventions relate to :

- The pandemic, which mainly attacks the weakest and the elderly, and of which a new wave has emerged in several Member States,
- The situation of older people in retirement homes, where profitability often takes precedence and promiscuity kills and where the lack of staff is dramatic, creating untenable situations for both staff and residents,
- Lack of resources,
- And, to problems related to vaccines.

Pensions and their non-revaluation for several years according to the States, when they have not been reduced because of the economic crisis, are also of great concern to the members of the Executive Committee. Several members expressed the wish that on the occasion of FERPA's mid-term GA, a day of mobilisation be decided on this subject and, more broadly, on the consequences of the pandemic on the elderly. However, others expressed the difficulties of mobilising older people in this period, not only because of the health restrictions that are imposed here and there, but also because they do not dare to go out, use public transport... An effort must be made to break the isolation of older people.

Speakers in the debate: UILP-UIL, UCR-CGT, Interreformados CGTP-IN, SPI-CGIL, FNV, CFE-CGC, FGTB/ABVV, CSC/ACV, CC. OO

In his reply, the **Secretary General** recalled that the Secretariat tries to keep the organisations informed about FERPA's initiatives and its interactions with the ETUC through regular reports. He agreed that it was necessary to continue to fight against inequalities. And as far as vaccines and vaccination are concerned, FERPA remains mobilised. The distribution of vaccines and the priority given to the elderly without discrimination against them must be highlighted. It also agrees that older people should be given more visibility in society.

The **President** then gave the floor to **Henri** to introduce the debate on the dossiers. Henri reminded the meeting that the aim was to have both an overview and the most accurate possible picture of the living conditions of retired and elderly people and the problems they face. This, starting from :

- The observations drawn up, enabling these problems to be identified,
- In order to be able to clarify our demands,
- To be able to then propose actions or means of action to make them succeed.

To this end, each member of the Executive Committee has agreed to take responsibility for each of the aspects that make up the lives and daily lives of retired and elderly people.

A questionnaire was sent out to all FERPA organisations, and it became clear that the work of the members of the Executive Committee was not made any easier, as not all organisations - and sometimes not the least important ones - replied, or did so in a very summary manner. However, it must be stressed that some of them have carried out this task with great awareness and have done a remarkable job - and Henri would like to take this opportunity to thank them - which has enabled the persons in charge concerned to move forward. This is why, for this meeting, the people managing the files have been asked to summarise the information gathered, to open up perspectives, and even, if possible, to put forward claims. They await your reactions to their presentation and your proposals for the future, which they will integrate so that we can have an implementation framework to propose to the next Mid-term Assembly, after it has been discussed at the next Executive Committee meeting. This is the timetable that is proposed to you.

The floor is then given to each person in charge of a file. However, it is not a question here of going over the content of each dossier in detail and in an exhaustive manner. It is mainly a question of summarising the points which are more synthetic or which are more of a claim or strategic nature when they have been mentioned in the presentations. The aim of these minutes is to draw up an initial progress report that will be refined and completed after the meeting.

Thus, with regard to pensions, **Didier HOTTE** stated that, on the basis of the responses received, he had drafted a 9-page summary setting out 10 possible avenues for action: to call for a freeze on the increase in the retirement age; to set a timetable for reducing the pension gap between women and men; to extend the periods of maternity leave; to set up a collection of monitoring and reliable data to gain a better understanding of the situation (to be coordinated with the ETUC); to take account of "family carers"; and to abolish waiting

periods for the acquisition of pension rights: as soon as one has paid contributions, rights are acquired; index pensions to changes in Average Wage or at least to inflation; set a minimum pension as a percentage of the wage bill and, in any case, above the poverty line; ensure better health monitoring of retired and elderly people, with European monitoring (including for vaccinations) and, as regards dependency: help for independence.

Then, **Angeles BRIALES** summarises her dossier on energy poverty. She is delighted to have received very enriching information. It highlights the need to adapt housing for the elderly and bring it up to standard, which is not without weighing on the resources of the elderly, especially those on modest incomes. There is also a need for action to reduce energy bills. It also appears that certain illnesses are caused by energy poverty. FERPA should conduct an awareness campaign on the issue of energy poverty and its consequences for retired and elderly people. It should issue recommendations and continue its research on energy poverty. It should demand funding for housing improvement, especially in rural areas.

**Dick DE GRAFF** in turn summarised his work on old age poverty, but first he returned to the voting procedures at the ETUC. In his view, it was necessary to make sure that we knew where the main blockages came from on the ETUC organisations' side so that we could avoid blocking the voting procedure.

He then presented his work. He insisted on pillar 15 of the European Social Rights Base: the right to live in a dignified way, which led him to ask 4 questions:

- What is meant by "necessary needs"? Is it possible to define them?
- What does it mean to live in dignity?
- What is meant by the "basket of goods and services"?
- What is the strategy for moving forward?

A meeting in the European Parliament could be organised with his colleague who is now a Member of the European Parliament.

He then makes 6 proposals:

- To have more answers to better define the needs
- How to work on files
- Evaluating the results of SocialAll in which he represented FERPA
- Organise a meeting with Commissioner SCHMIDT
- Meet the European Parliament Committee in charge of the implementation of the European Social Rights Foundation
- Defining national strategies

**Hubert SCHWIND** in turn presented a summary of his work on housing. He pointed out that few organisations had responded. But from the answers received, several observations and/or claims emerge. First of all, the majority of FERPA's member trade union organisations are in favour of launching a debate on suitable and affordable quality housing for the elderly in the EU on the basis of the European Social Rights Framework. Rather than always wanting to

build something new, it is absolutely necessary to adapt existing housing facilities for the elderly first, by claiming additional allowances to cover the costs of adaptation, as well as for home care. In the debates on housing policies, it is necessary to integrate professionals, representatives of the first concerned, i.e. the elderly, in order to know their situations, needs and proposals as well as their financial possibilities before embarking on a project of adapted and affordable housing. In institutions for the elderly, it is necessary to provide appropriate medical care, with sufficient staff, including quality care assistants.

This must remain financially affordable and geographically accessible to all. We need to change the way we look at older people and ... help them change the way they look at themselves. Housing policy is still too much thought out for yesterday's needs, and not enough for today's needs, let alone tomorrow's needs. As a result, housing, which should be at the service of individuals and fully participate in their autonomy, mobility and fulfilment, is too often a source of concern, a hindrance and often even an obstacle.

**Eliane DE DOBBELEER** details her dossier on health and institutions for the elderly. She then makes several observations or proposals. First of all, we are facing important issues that require real political choices and not necessarily more resources. For believing that putting more resources into health care will solve the problem of the quality of life of the elderly and the population as a whole is a delusion.

Inequalities produce disease and reduce life expectancy. In view of demographic change, our model of care is no longer adapted to our needs. It makes quality of care and quality of life impossible and would require the opening of a rest home every fortnight. This is impossible from a budgetary point of view and therefore opens the door to privatisation and, as a corollary, to inequalities.

What we are experiencing with COVID 19 is only an epiphenomenon. This pandemic has shown that health care focused on acute care and not on public health and prevention has resulted in poor preparedness. Some countries fared better because there was a more developed public health policy: massive screening, protective equipment...

It is therefore a question of choice within the budget.

There is a need to invest in all the other social determinants that have a more global impact.

It is therefore a question of political choice and not of means.

The development of serviced residences and the creation of intergenerational housing that provides a quality of life for both the elderly and the youngest, requires a vision of housing, regional planning and a way of life that promotes social cohesion and local solidarity. Where there is intergenerationality, people live better.

Finally, on the basis of the different dossiers, FERPA could research and act for an integrated global policy taking into account the different factors analysed: poverty, pensions, housing, taxation, energy poverty... Without forgetting the specific point of view of women in all these areas.

And to propose two stages in the action :

- In the short term, to help solve the urgent problems of lack of personnel, lack of material...

- In the medium term, organise collaboration with the various actors who are/should be involved in the search for better dignified living conditions for older people.

And, finally, to go further, FERRPA should work together with all organisations working in the field of older people. It would then be possible to pool the different ideas and proposals in order to achieve our own objectives.

**Werner THUM** presents (on the second day, because the day before he could not participate) his dossier on taxation. First of all, he points out that unemployment is increasing among older people in Austria and that there is also an increase in temporary work. Taxation favours large companies and low incomes are more in demand than higher incomes. The central question is how the tax burden will be distributed. The FERPA will have to take a stand.

A final dossier was to be presented, that on intergenerational solidarity by **Metka ROKSANDIC**. However, as the colleague was absent, the presentation could not take place.

The **President** then opened the debate.

The members who spoke acknowledged that the dossiers provided very useful information and addressed the most important points. This is a good starting point, it is said. Several thanked the members of the Steering Committee for their work. Several also stressed the importance of health care, particularly in the current context. In some interventions, the poverty of pensioners, especially women pensioners, was stressed. The President of FERPA's Women's Committee said that the Committee would be drawing on the files. It was now necessary to find concrete solutions and to create a coherent document. Likewise, long-term priorities must be defined. One speaker insisted that the FERPA Mid-term GA should give priority to social issues.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: SUH, SPI-CGIL, CSC/ACV, FNV, UNIA, ÖGB-L and the President of the Women's Committee.

The General Secretary concluded this debate by noting the work that FERPA is doing to become an important organisation within the ETUC: we are giving a soul to our organisation. Now we have to go beyond the questionnaires and define our priorities in concrete terms. The Steering Committee will define the issues and the means to implement them. We need to know what to do quickly and give a mandate to the General Secretary to take decisions.

The President then gave the floor to **Maria Sole De SANTIS** from UIL, for the presentation of FERPA's new website, a very rich and detailed presentation. It was pointed out that the documents submitted for the site are not translated by FERPA. But there will be an automatic translation of the documents sent.

In the debate that followed, the members who spoke expressed their enthusiasm. The site is considered to be very useful and of good quality. But also the members expressed some of their questions. Are documents sent directly or should they be sent via the FERPA secretariat? Will there be a moderator to prevent slippage? Is there an intranet function that allows direct exchanges between members? And will people from outside the organisation be able to intervene? It is also important to have an up-to-date site, but also to have a historical memory of FERPA's activity and what it is. The site will have to be kept alive.

In reply, Maria Sole said that it was the Secretariat that would forward the documents. However, it would be impossible to publish personal data, but they could be sent internally, according to the decision of the Secretary General. It will also be possible to communicate from one organisation to another.

The following organisations took part in the debate: SPI-CGIL, FNV, UGT-E, CFE-CGC, UCR-FO, ÖGBL, USO, UIL-P, ÖGB, UNSA, UCR-CGT, UNIA, SZEFL.

To close this debate, the **Secretary General** first of all intervened to thank UILP-UIL and the young and dynamic team who participated in the elaboration of this lively site. In response to certain questions, he specified that the site must meet Belgian and European data protection requirements. It will be necessary to check that there are no "dead links" or errors. There will be no "censorship" on the information published: organisations are responsible for what they publish. The site is also open to outsiders to publicise our activities and positions.

The next item deals with the affiliation of the Pensioners' Union of Northern Macedonia as an observer member.

After a brief presentation and verification that this union meets the requirements of FERPA, this affiliation is unanimously accepted. The General Secretary underlined the political value of this affiliation and the President added that it is important to find as many members as possible when we know that more than 20% of the European population are elderly people.

The President then gave the floor to **Tino FUMAGALLI**, Treasurer of FERPA, to deal with the financial issues, which were dealt with in two parts:

- Firstly, the provisional balance sheet for 2019
- And then the provisional budget for 2021.

With regard to the provisional balance sheet for 2019, the Treasurer recalled that in view of the pandemic, the Financial Committee had not been able to meet to verify the veracity of the balance sheet accounts. The Secretary General resumed the debate and emphasised that, given the circumstances, the balance sheet should not be approved today.

In the short debate that followed this presentation of the 2019 balance sheet, some members wondered whether the surplus that appeared on the balance sheet was due to the reduction in activity caused by the pandemic. On the other hand, there is a certain amount of unpaid contributions, should they not be admitted as "non-values"? Concerning countries that have not paid their contributions for some years, are they included in the budget? Some, however, say that it is more important to focus on the central column of contributions.

The General Secretary intervened again to say that this balance sheet is provisional. Due to the non-meeting of the Finance Committee, it could not be finalised.

The Treasurer then presented the provisional budget for 2021.

In the debate that followed this presentation, several organisations regretted, for a better understanding, that there was no reference to the provisional budget for 2020, which had already been approved. Others felt that there was some confusion in the terms "balance sheet", "forecast" and "actual" and wondered how to improve. Some also wonder why the provision for Congress does not appear, or would like to know what the sum corresponds to in

the "publications-images" section. Several members said that what they want is to understand what the results are, what the provisions are.

The Treasurer said that there is no such thing as a "convention" line item, because if there is a provision, how to include it in the budget. As for the expenditure under the heading "publications-images", this corresponds to the site, posters and communication campaigns.

For his part, the Secretary General intervened to give some clarifications. Thus, as far as the 2020 budget is concerned, there is no problem in providing it.

Nothing had yet been decided on the use of surpluses. In 2020, there had been virtually no face-to-face meetings, hence the surplus. We find ourselves in a special situation.

In both debates, the organisations : UCR-FO, SPI-CGIL, UCR-CFDT, CSC/ACV, CFE-CGC, UCR-CGT, UNIA, FGTB/ABVV.

After thanking the Treasurer, the President proceeded to vote on the provisional budget for 2021. The budget was adopted unanimously, with 6 abstentions (UCR-CGT, UCR-FO, UCR-CFDT, CFE-CGC, FGTB/ABVV, CSC/ACV).

The **President** then welcomed **Luca VISENTINI**, ETUC General Secretary.

The **General Secretary** began by discussing the current situation and the trade union response to the pandemic. He emphasised the cooperation with the European Institutions in the framework of the recovery and resilience plan. The aim is to protect workers and jobs, older and retired people to ensure that their income is not affected and their needs are not ignored. This is the thrust of the joint FERPA and ETUC letter sent to the President of the Commission and the European Parliament. The aim is to protect the elderly when they are affected by COVID 19 and in particular to ensure that they can receive the necessary and adequate care. Social protection systems must be guaranteed so that they can cope with the consequences of the crisis, i.e. to oppose budget cuts and austerity measures. This implies profound and necessary changes, i.e. developing investments to guarantee incomes . Emergency measures have been put in place (Stability Pact funds, the SURE programme) but it must be ensured that these funds are well used to strengthen social protection and health systems, but not all of them are doing so. Moreover, these funds will not arrive before mid-2021, in particular because of the conflict over the rule of law with Poland, Hungary and Slovenia. As for vaccines, they should be readily available and freely accessible. But care must be taken to ensure that there are no indecent profits from pharmaceutical companies. Concerning the recovery plans for the future, there is a lot of divergence between the Member States, some would prefer to put in place austerity measures. Attention should also be paid to the social dimension of the digital and ecological transition and to the involvement of the social partners, especially at national government level. The end of the German Presidency of the European Union was marked by :

- An action plan for the implementation of the European Social Rights Foundation,
- A European framework for minimum income
- Income transparency to reduce pay and pension inequalities.



In April, there should be the Mid-term Conference in Lisbon, where FERPA should have its voting rights recognised, in particular by not counting votes and abstentions.

Finally, the Secretary General thanks FERPA for its contribution to the consideration of elderly and retired people.

The President warmly thanked the ETUC Secretary General for this rich intervention and opened the debate.

Everyone thanked Luca for his intervention and for his commitment to a better representation of FERPA within the ETUC. Several asked to speak also about the minimum pension and not only about the minimum wage.

Others asked him about the role of the ETUC, particularly in Poland, about the rule of law and the attitude of the trade unions. Indeed, it is important that Member States respect the rule of law. Concerning vaccines, it is important that they should be free, but what about vaccination campaigns outside the EU? How can we influence the action plan for the implementation of the European Social Rights Base, others ask, and as far as FERPA's voting right is concerned, how can the ETUC help to change the minds of those who are hostile to it? The focus should be on health care and pensions and there should be a commitment to have a universal and efficient health care system and fairer tax systems. In this crisis, many government measures, in some countries in particular, are being taken in favour of capital, leaving some people richer and some poorer. Great care must be taken to ensure that retirees and older persons do not again bear the brunt of austerity measures, especially older women. It is important to develop intergenerational solidarity, especially between FERPA and ETUC. Finally, it was asked whether the ETUC had been consulted by the Council on digitisation and, with regard to the Green Paper on Ageing, what elements the ETUC intended to highlight.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: UILP-UIL, SUH, FNV, UGT-E, CSC/ACV, FNP-CISL, SPI-CGIL, Interreformados CGTP-IN, UCR-CFDT, CFE-CGC, USO

In his reply, Luca first of all thanked all the members who intervened. With regard to the rule of law, in Poland and Hungary in particular the major trade unions in these countries are in line with their governments with regard to the veto on funds. For vaccines, the ETUC is in contact with the Council to support a fair and equitable distribution for non-EU countries that have cooperation agreements with the EU. The macroeconomic paradigm for recovery needs to change. The EU needs to seize the pandemic to change its economic model which is more sustainable and based on people's well-being. There has been a more general consultation process with the social partners. And after the publication of the recovery plan, there are interventions with Member States to ensure that it is implemented in consultation with the social partners. As far as the minimum pension is concerned, this will be integrated into the process and the FERPA will be consulted by the ETUC. Finally, as far as the right to vote is concerned, it is better to change the system because there is little hope of convincing the organisations that are opposed to it. The organisations are in favour at 62-63%, but taking into account the abstentions distorts the result.

The President and the Secretary General of FERPA thanked Luca again for his rich intervention.

The President reopened the discussion on the dossiers, which had been interrupted by the intervention of the ETUC General Secretary.

Several proposals were made, such as selecting a few important points to be strengthened, such as European cooperation in the field of health, but at the same time making a list of short-term priorities. Or to submit the dossier on taxation at the same time as that on pensions, as there are dossiers that are cross-cutting. This working method should also be applied for the Women's Committee.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: SPI-CGIL, FNC, ÖGB, CSC/ACV, FGTB/ABVV, UNSA, UCR-FO, the President of the Women's Committee

In conclusion, Henri recalled what the Secretary General said yesterday, namely that the time for questionnaires is over, we now have enough material to move forward.

He suggested that those in charge of the dossiers should send in their summaries based on the debates of these two days, or even provide clarifications. The organisations react by 15 January 2021. Then the people in charge will take them up again and draw up proposals for demands that could be discussed at the Steering Committee meeting on 18 February 2021 and submitted to the Executive Committee, which will then ratify them at the FERPA Mid-term Assembly.

The President then moved on to other business and gave the floor to the Secretary General on the agenda presented by SPI-CGIL concerning the rotation of Spanish organisations on the Steering Committee.

He recalled FERPA's consistent position that this was a strictly internal problem between the two organisations CC.OO and UGT-E and whose solution is neither within the competence of FERPA nor of its bodies. However, it proposes mediation, in the form of a face-to-face meeting with the Secretaries General of these two organisations as soon as the pandemic permits. The members of the Committee express their agreement with the Secretary General's remarks.

The following organisations intervened in the debate: UCR-FO, SPI-CGIL, CC. OO, UGT-E

The other point dealt with concerns FERPA's General Assembly in mid-May, which the Secretary General wishes to hold in person and therefore proposes to postpone it until October 2021 because of the continuing pandemic. The proposal was accepted. The decision will be taken by the next Executive Committee.

Then he concluded the meeting by underlining that we have had two very busy days with important contents. He pointed out that the ETUC General Secretary spoke about minimum pensions, which is a significant step forward, and he also mentioned health problems. He appreciated all these statements because it is necessary to work within the ETUC to insist on all these issues and FERPA wants to be present in the discussions. Similarly Luca was very firm on the right to vote. He ended by thanking Henri and Jessica from the Secretariat.

The President, for his part, closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their active participation, as well as the interpreters and the ETUC services for their efficient technical assistance.

Henri