

*Minutes of the FERPA Executive Committee in virtual mode 16-17 June 2021*

59 participants

The President of FERPA, Lajos MAYER, welcomed the members of the Executive Committee, as well as the interpreters and the ETUC staff who were providing technical assistance.

Following the unexpected absence of Mireille PAUME, due to serious personal problems, he announced a change in the agenda of the meeting with the deletion of the Women's Committee meeting, following Mireille's absence. This would leave a little more than the five minutes originally planned for interventions.

The agenda was adopted with this change as well as the minutes of the last FERPA Executive Committee meeting of 17 and 18 March 2021. He then gave the floor to the Secretary General, Agostino SICILIANO for his Communications.

He underlined at the beginning of his speech that this was the 3rd Executive Committee meeting held by video conference. He greeted Mireille, President of the FERPA Women's Committee and expressed the solidarity of the organisation. He congratulated Anatolio and Angeles who had been reappointed to their responsibilities at the UGT-E Pensioners' Congress which had ended a few weeks ago and announced that he had sent a message from FERPA to the CC. OO, as he had done for UGT-E, on the occasion of their Congress which will take place next week.

Although the virus was still present - the United Kingdom, which had planned to open its doors on 21 June, had postponed it until 21 July - he said that the vaccination campaign was going ahead, which would enable the economy of the European Union and of each of its member countries to be revived. This pandemic obliges us to change Europe to make it more united. He insisted on the need to be vaccinated: vaccines must be made available to everyone and their exclusivity in favour of the countries that invented them must be abolished.

The "Green Passport" will come into force on 1 July, but for the moment only 13 countries are able to issue it. Even if it will make it easier to travel, there is still a risk of exclusion. FERPA will express its views on this issue.

Pensioners are, for the moment, excluded from the Recovery and Resilience Plans. For FERPA, all citizens must be involved, whatever their age group. We need to break free from the obsolete approach to the economy, going beyond GDP and deficits. Austerity must be fought.

The Secretary General then referred to the Porto Social Summit of 7 May, which, in his opinion, had sent positive signals: there had been talk of a different, supportive Europe, which should "boost" the European Socle of Social Rights and the social partners had been involved. This Summit must "give legs" to the Socle. It was preceded the day before by the ETUC Trade Union Summit with the participation of high-level personalities: the Portuguese Prime Minister, Commissioner Nicolas SCHMIT, MEPs and trade union leaders. On the third day, there was an informal European Council with a joint declaration with the social partners, in which it was recognised that the European Social Rights Socle is part of the recovery and the common will to build a more united Europe was expressed.

Concerning the Conference on the Future of Europe, FERPA organisations have been instructed to support the 15 proposals of the ETUC. The Secretary General, for his part, added more specific points concerning FERPA in his response.

So, for example, in relation to digital technology, it can be an element of marginalisation for older and retired people. It is not for everyone. The ETUC has set up a committee on which the President and Jessica sit. We have a role in it.

An event was organised by the ETUC with other associations to prepare Porto. The Secretary General was invited to the closing ceremony.

There was also the final conference of the ETUC SocialAll project. All documents will be sent to the organisations. There was a lot of emphasis on the fact that pensions were not a burden and that they should be linked to the recovery. The General Secretary thanked Dick for participating in the small working group. Older people supported support for young couples to help boost the birth rate.

The ETUC has set up an External Relations Committee and FERPA has nominated President Lajos to be a member. The European Economic and Social Committee has a Liaison Group of Civil Society Organisations. The Secretary General of FERPA is part of it with Jessica and Henri, but it is Henri who follows the meetings and the Secretary General thanks him for this commitment.

Why does FERPA want to be everywhere, he wondered? It is to make our voice heard.

The Secretary General then spoke about FERPA's response to the Commission's Green Paper on demographic ageing. He said that FERPA had answered all the questions and that its response had been made in addition to that of the ETUC. He also indicated that the ETUC had been heard and that President Lajos had taken part in the hearing on behalf of FERPA and had highlighted the points that concerned us most.

Finally, he referred to the debate taking place within the ETUC concerning the taking into account of abstentions when voting in the organisation's bodies. Until now, abstentions have been considered as negative votes, which penalises us for obtaining the right to vote in the Executive Committee. When we vote on this question, we have more than half of the positive votes, but if we take into account abstentions, we do not reach the required quorum of 2/3 of the votes cast. He considered that they should not be counted in the quorum.

The Secretary General concluded his communications by insisting that the ETUC must be aware of what FERPA is doing, as it is the life of our federation and its organisations.

The President then opened the debate.

Several speakers thanked the Secretary General for the information he had given and emphasised the quality of the work done by FERPA, for example with regard to the response to the Green Paper, which was sometimes considered better than that of the ETUC, or the Manifesto.

It was pointed out that, from an economic point of view, relations between workers and pensioners are deteriorating. The health crisis has caused great damage to the working world. There is a risk that retired people will sometimes be seen as 'privileged'. Despite this, it is important to emphasise that the impact of the pandemic should not be borne by retired people alone. This needs to be emphasised, it is said on several occasions.

Going back to the Commission's Green Paper on demography, it was said that this is the first step in a process. FERPA should therefore "keep an eye" on the White Paper that will follow.

There was also agreement with the Secretary General that as far as votes in the ETUC were concerned, only votes for and against should be taken into account. It must be shown to the reluctant that FERPA is useful.

This is the case with the DGB. A suggestion was made: why should this organisation not be invited to the next FERPA Executive Committee to come and present the pension system in Germany and thus show that they are taken care of.

Others returned to the subject of vaccinations and vaccines, saying that it was scandalous that the laboratories had been able to make huge profits in this way, while there was a serious lack of funding for health and pensions. Patents" must be reviewed, he said. And the profits must allow everyone to be vaccinated, he added, especially those living in poorer countries.

Returning to the Porto Summit, despite the nuances provided by the Secretary General, many felt that his assessment was too optimistic. Where are the real commitments? Is this not just a list of "good intentions"? However, some of the speakers pointed out that although there were no "miracle solutions" to our problems in Porto, the Summit should be used to say that we do not want to return to a policy of austerity, because this is one of the lessons we have learned from the pandemic. We must therefore continue the fight to obtain concrete results.

Another nuance brought by some organisations to the Secretary General's communication is the question of demographic balance. It is true that there is a risk of calling into question the balance between contributions and pensions and a pretext for introducing capitalisation into these social systems. But the question of demography is not just a question of births, he said. There are many young people in the world who want to work, so migration policy must be reviewed. Migration flows must be managed at European level. Regarding the balance of pension systems, the question of wages, on which contributions are based, is also important. FERPA must be involved in the fight for a decent minimum wage. We must also continue to fight for equal pay for women and men, as the gender pay gap is getting worse and worse.

Regarding the Conference on the Future of Europe, it is important to make comments that carry weight. FERPA must do its utmost to be in the trade union delegation.

Turning to the pandemic, it was clear that it had forced everyone to change their attitude and approach. States must be primarily responsible for health, not only for the health of workers, but for the health of all.

It was also stressed that older people want to be involved in economic and social life. They represent 20% of the European population. They participate in the economy by consuming. The voice of the FERPA is important, as the spokesperson for these people. It must be a force for proposals and a stakeholder in the initiatives taken in favour of the elderly. This is why the Manifesto must be given life. For example, couldn't FERPA organise a European mobilisation before or at the end of the mid-term GA, to make known the most important points for elderly and retired people? How can the needs of older people be represented? It is necessary to establish relations with the associations that share them and to use the Manifesto for this purpose and to mobilise.

As far as the "green passport" is concerned, it is not COVID that has reduced freedom of movement, but the Member States, and a number of malfunctions have occurred.

The "green passport" is a response to this situation, but who is in charge of the pre-departure and arrival checks? Although relations between Switzerland and the EU are difficult - a framework agreement to "discipline" these relations is being negotiated - there is a "green passport" in Switzerland, issued by the Cantons, with mutual recognition between Switzerland and the EU. Swiss trade unions are in favour of strengthening relations with the EU based on economic and social development.

Referring to Mireille's absence, several delegates regretted that the restricted working group of the Women's Committee had not yet been set up, which would have enabled the FERPA Women's Committee to work even in the absence of its President.

As regards the participation of FERPA, in the person of its President, in the ETUC External Relations Committee, which no one disputes, a question was raised: would this not be a way of making progress alongside our German colleagues?

Indeed, it was stressed that FERPA should be in contact with the EU countries, particularly Germany, but also with the Mediterranean countries. Some of them spoke about the situation in Palestine and expressed their revolt against all the violence in the world, reaffirming that we are for peace.

In his answers, the Secretary General noted that the interventions confirmed the path that FERPA is following. He only spoke about the economy, which is directly related to pensioners, but the recovery concerns everyone, like health care, which must be universal, or taxation, which concerns the whole society. There are certainly universal rights, but it is very complicated. We cannot ignore what is happening today. The issue of pensions is very delicate. We must define together the notion of "sustainability". The birth rate must be taken into account. We need an intergenerational pact. It is not just about employment, it is also about the quality of employment. Everyone must be able to have a job. Vaccination in poor countries is very complicated. As far as relations with the ETUC are concerned, we have applied for the External Relations Committee, but we are not yet members. But we want to be present. As far as the evaluation of the Porto Summit is concerned, it is a step, but it is certainly not enough. But it was a step forward from a political point of view. The ETUC's objective was to be present, but it was not easy. BusinessEurope signed the Joint Declaration. It is not very ambitious but it is a change. It is up to us to ask the signatories to act. But it is at least a starting point. We need a more social Europe, which was not heard before. Concerning the Conference on the Future of Europe, we want to be part of the plenary but the places are very limited. We will reiterate our demands at the next ETUC High-Level Working Group on 28 June, including the members of the Working Group in which our President Lajos participated, and the members of the ETUC Executive Committee. As regards the right to vote and whether or not abstentions should be taken into account, we have needs. We are a trade union federation of retired people and we look at all the issues that relate to retired people. We are asking for "1 vote": this is not what will call into question the balance within the ETUC. But some organisations do not want us to have a "say". Returning to the issue of vaccination, the General Secretary pointed out that when people do not want to be vaccinated, the death toll of the pandemic is not forgotten.

However, it must be acknowledged that there has been some confusion in the management of vaccination. Regarding the work with associations, associations that are not part of the trade union movement should be involved, but on an equal basis. The General Secretary also indicated that he agreed with a day of mobilisation. We need to define our identity and be more incisive and determined. We must work to ensure that our ideas are recognised and shared.

The following organisations took part in the debate: UCR-FO, UCR-CGT, UNIR-CFE-CGC, FNV, UIL-UILP, SPI-CGIL, ÖGBL, UJP-UGT, CSC-ACV, USO.

The President then gave the floor to Henri LOURDELLE, FERPA Special Advisor, in charge of the work on the coordination of the dossiers.

Henri began by saying that we had reached the end of the first stage of what he called a "real trade union marathon". He recalled the initiative taken by the Secretary General, shortly after his election, to draw up "dossiers", taking up the essential demands of FERPA concerning elderly and retired people, giving the members of the Steering Committee responsibility for one of these dossiers and asking Henri to coordinate the whole. By 2019, the Steering Committee members were drafting and sending out a "state of play" questionnaire to help underpin our demands. The pandemic did not make the work of the Management Committee any easier. It took several reminders to get a significant number of responses, even if not everyone responded, including large FERPA organisations. But patience and perseverance finally paid off. As time went by and discussions between us, the "dossiers" that could have appeared as simple studies became a trade union demand document, a "Manifesto", which was sent to the Executive Committee members before the meeting.

Henri thanked all those who had contributed to this result through their responses. He then explained the work expected of the Executive Committee members:

- To validate the work done, even if it is not perfect and can be improved. However, he specified that not everything should be rewritten and that if amendments had to be proposed, they should be made by 30 June at the latest, so that they could be taken into account. He insisted that the amendments should be precise and clarifying. The objective was to arrive at a strategic document that was as consensual as possible so that everyone could use it in their trade union activities.
- To establish priorities, and if possible a timetable, which could be debated and validated at the mid-term General Assembly in order to be implemented.

With the President's permission, before entering into the debate, the members of the Steering Committee will, in a few minutes, share their work with you and explain their proposals if necessary. Henri then thanked the members of the Management Committee for their attention.

The President then gave the floor to the members of the Management Committee.

Dick DE GRAAF was the first to speak. He reminded the meeting that he was responsible for the issue of poverty among older people and the main questions that arose, such as

- Should a different "basket of goods and services" be defined for each country to avoid falling into poverty?
- What is the minimum pension level that allows a decent life? What strategy should be put in place against poverty in retirement?
- Are FERPA organisations ready to participate in a campaign on the issue of poverty among older and retired people?

Dick received several responses but no one was in favour of developing a FERPA campaign on this issue. It appeared that several issues were linked to the issue of pensions, particularly from two angles: the establishment of a decent minimum pension and the definition of a "basket of goods and services". It was therefore agreed with Didier that they would work together.

Didier HOTTE then took over to talk about the work he had done on pensions. He began by thanking Henri for the summary work he had done, which he considered extremely constructive. He recalled that the aim was to have a trade union platform that could be used by all organisations.

For Didier, he expressed

- First of all, a global demand: the minimum pension demanded by FERPA must be higher than the poverty line in each of the countries considered.
- And a position of principle: FERPA is opposed to extending the current length of contributions to be able to benefit from a full pension.

He then indicated that, for him, the document was satisfactory and that he would only make minor changes on points of detail. However, he raised a question: in the "health" dossier, on "the right to health care", there is talk of joining a European Network, which organisations are referred to? He would like clarification.

The floor was then given to Eliane DE DOBBELEER on health, long-term care and residential care. She too thanked Henri for his well-focused summary. Without going into detail, Eliane noted that there are major problems of access to quality health care for all. We are increasingly witnessing a two-speed medicine, to which is added the issue of privatisation. There is an increase in social inequalities by reducing universal access to quality care for all. The health crisis has aggravated gender inequalities. Women have been more affected than men, as careers in these sectors are mainly female. Investing in health means investing in prevention, such as paying attention to what we eat, and in the social determinants that influence health, such as promoting universal access to screening and vaccination as a guarantee of protection. In terms of accommodation in health facilities, particular attention must be paid to respect for human rights. In the proposed actions that Eliane took up, there were those of participating, under our own slogans, in the global theme days that are more specific to us, and joining and supporting the European Network Against Privatisation.

Next, Angeles BRIALES intervened on her dossier on energy poverty, which she explained. She recalled the work done and in particular the surveys carried out which show that this is a major problem in Europe. She focused her work on the impact of fuel poverty on older people, even if they are not the only victims: in particular, families in social insecurity with children are also dramatically affected by fuel poverty. In the demands listed in the "Manifesto", she points out, among other things, the right of households, and in particular of the elderly, to have their basic needs covered, either individually or collectively, by providing, for example, tax incentives. She concluded by emphasising that the collaboration had been important and the work done by Henri: it was a comprehensive and concrete summary.

Finally, Hubert SCHWIND spoke about his dossier on accommodation for the elderly and retired. He too began by thanking Henri for the work done, which he considered to be good. He said that the "dossiers" had been discussed in inter-union meetings between the French organisations of FERPA. He particularly insisted on the right to housing for elderly and retired people who could no longer afford decent housing because their pensions were too low, especially for women. He then took up the demands set out in the "Manifesto", such as the need to develop universal action at European level and reinvest in affordable housing for the retired people who need it. All of this should be developed, he adds, at the territorial level. Among the actions proposed, he recommended that FERPA propose to the retired people's trade unions that they take proactive action to ensure the right to appropriate and dignified housing for the elderly.

Having made these points, the President opened the debate.

All the speakers emphasised the work done by Henri and the members of the Executive Committee and thanked them. However, some were surprised that the people responsible for the dossiers had been given the floor again. On the substance, several changes, often minor, were proposed. Others wanted the introduction to include a reference to young people, their precariousness and difficulties, and proposed that intergenerational committees (retired and elderly people and young people) be set up at various levels. Emphasis should also be placed on the social inclusion and participation of older people and their participation in society, as well as on the right to cultural activity.

In relation to health, the wording on the "commercialisation" of institutions is ambiguous and may lead to the assumption that it is the staff who do not ensure quality. Could we not define an "ideal basket of care" at European level? On the other hand, when we talk about promoting home care for retired and elderly people, this should not be an obligation for them but a choice. Many suggested that the link between working people and pensioners should be emphasised: a good employment policy is the best guarantee for good pensions and the sustainability of the system. When reference is made to the pandemic, it is important to ask who will pay? As regards housing, the link should be made with the European policy of energy transition. When mentioning the work with NGOs or European Networks, it is important to insist on the fact that FERPA should not be the transmission belt, but the engine. We must invite them to come with us and not the other way around. Others, in the indexes taken as reference for the indexation of pensions, would like to add the indexation on construction prices. Concerning the presentation of the Manifesto, a distinction should be made between

- On the one hand, the demands. They are public and are addressed to the EU, the Member States and the various public authorities.
- On the other hand, the proposals or action plans which are more internal strategic documents, distinguishing between more immediate and longer-term actions and which require prior alliances. Priorities and a timetable should also be established.

Finally, one speaker suggested that beforehand, it would be necessary to check with the ETUC that it is in agreement with FERPA's demands, even if FERPA is part of the ETUC with its own demands. This consultation could take place informally, as with the ETUC Social Protection Committee.

The President gave the floor back to Henri to respond to the various interventions and proposals.

He began by thanking the members of the Executive Committee for the broad support they had given to the work carried out collectively with their colleagues and friends on the Management Committee, who had done a great deal of work in the background. And that is why, he added, he wanted them to have the floor today, despite a few repetitions as some felt, which is inevitable, but it is never a waste of time to pay tribute to the work done by all of them. He also indicated that he had taken good note of the suggested and proposed modifications and reiterated his request that they be forwarded to him by 30 June at the latest, as he had said in his opening remarks.

On the substance, first of all, if some of these proposals do not pose any problems a priori, some of them do, however, pose problems in "political" terms, i.e. in terms of "trade union policy". This is the case when it comes to working with NGOs or networks. As the General Secretary said in his Communications: "We need to work with and involve organisations that are not part of the trade union network, but on an equal basis and on our proposals. We can work with them, but we cannot be a back-up force for them. As many have said, we need to think carefully about the nature and modalities of the relationships we can develop."

He then agreed with those who had insisted on the social participation of older and retired people and the fight against social exclusion. He will look for a place to mention this. He also agreed to include a reference to young people in the introduction and to take into account the proposals of the French intersyndicale organisations. As regards the indexation of pensions, there was no problem in adding "automatic" as requested. Usually, for the indexation of pensions, two reference indices are used: salaries and/or prices, should we add a third one, the cost of construction, which has never been discussed and which is very partial, because, as was said in the discussion, it does not take into account the reference index for rents and land. Finally, the definition of an "ideal care basket" is tempting, but this depends on the situation in each country and the different needs of each person. Henri therefore proposed to keep the current wording. Finally, he questioned the suggestion to submit our "Manifesto" to the ETUC beforehand to obtain its approval and therefore its support, but he added, perhaps he had not understood correctly? That. These are specific demands of FERPA and its members and the retired and elderly people it represents. But the discussion is open and probably the Secretary General will come back to this point. He also said that, of course, the amended wording that he would propose would be submitted to the Management Committee in September.

On the form of the "Manifesto", he added a few words indicating that he found the proposal to distinguish between

- what is for external use: ETUC, Commission, European Parliament, public authorities
- And the timetable and means of action, which are internal.

We will have to be very "communicative" in order to make people want to read our "Manifesto" and for the organisations to be able to use it usefully. At the level of the Secretariat, with the Secretary General, we will study the best way to do this, depending on our financial possibilities.

Finally, some questions remain open, such as on which demands, on which theme of the Manifesto are we going to mobilise first? Will it be on the basis of current events? Or on the themes that seem most urgent to us? And with what timetable. This should be discussed and decided at the Mid-term GA. He said that the Secretariat needed the organisations to tell him what they thought and make suggestions.

He concluded by thanking once again the members of the Executive Committee for their rich participation.

The following organisations took part in the debate: SPI-CGIL, FGTB, UCR-FO, UNIA, ÖGBL CSC-ACV, FNP-CISL, FNV, USO, IR-CGTP IN, UCR-CFDT

The President then gave the floor to the Secretary General to make some clarifications.

First of all, however, the General Secretary paid tribute, on behalf of FERPA, to the memory of Marc GOBLET, whose Executive Committee had just learned of his death at the age of 64 following a long illness. Marc was General Secretary of the FGTB from 2014 to 2017 and a member of the Belgian House of Representatives from 2019 to 2021.

The General Secretary then thanked the Executive Committee for the good work done in collaboration with the Secretariat. He reiterated that there would be no further discussion of new topics. This was a political document, not a technical one. There will be adjustments, but no new content or new proposals. He reaffirmed that we are FERPA and that we will not follow anyone else.

He then said that he understood the concerns of the colleague who proposed to submit the Manifesto to the ETUC beforehand. Of course, the points concerning the elderly were likely to have economic consequences: health, pensions, transport, etc. But we wanted to develop these issues as FERPA. He did not think that we could have a common agenda with the ETUC. The affiliates are part of the ETUC member confederations. As for the Green Paper or the participation in the Consultation on the



Future of Europe, launched by the Commission, for example, FERPA was keen to make its own contributions and the General Secretary went beyond what the ETUC was saying. We are part of the ETUC. When there is a discussion in the ETUC Social Protection Committee, the Manifesto will be our reference. We are just clarifying some elements, there is no problem with our demands. The ETUC is busy working on other issues, such as employment and youth.

Didier HOTTE, from the UCR-FO, then asked for the floor to say, in colourful language, that there was no need to "get our brains in knots", as FERPA was "of age and vaccinated". And he asked: "Why should we be afraid of the ETUC? The Manifesto is in line with the implementation of the principles contained in the European Socle of Social Rights. He also added that he agreed with what Henri had said about relations with other organisations: we want to know which ones and why? He also agreed with the idea of a day of action, but wondered how to organise it.

Dick DE GRAAF of the FNV wanted to clarify that he had no doubts about the ETUC. The ETUC's Social Protection Committee could be consulted informally.

Eliane DE DOBBELEER of the CSC-ACV said that with regard to collaboration with the European Network, it was not a question of joining, but if we had the same demands, why not do it together. It is a question of mutual support on a common theme so that our voice carries further. It is about working together on an equal footing and with the same goal.

The Secretary General said, to close the debate, that the conclusions were those of Henri. To Eliane, he says that he is ready to discuss on an ad hoc basis. He took into account what Dick had said about the informal consultation of the Social Protection Committee. And he will ask the ETUC General Secretary to be present in our mobilisations.

FERPA has a consensual tool on the substance and this is important. The Manifesto, once it has been definitively adopted, will be our reference for our mobilisations and when we participate in the various ETUC working groups.

The President then welcomed Liina CARR, Confederal Secretary of the ETUC, who had come to speak to the Executive Committee, particularly about the Porto Summit.

Liina began her speech by excusing the ETUC General Secretary, Luca VISENTINI, and then presented the results of the Porto Summit. She recalled that the social partners had participated on 7 May in the Social Summit organised by the Portuguese Presidency. The most important result was the Porto Declaration signed by the President of the Council, the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Parliament, the Portuguese Prime Minister and the Secretaries-General of the social partners. For the record, in Göteborg, the social partners were not signatories to the final declaration. Here, there is a commitment to implement the Action Plan. She then spoke about the ups and downs of the Declaration, particularly on the employers' side. Nevertheless, there are quite a few elements in the social commitment that the Member States must implement with the Action Plan of the European Social Rights Base, notably

- At least 78% of people aged 20-64 should be in employment.
- At least 60% of adults should participate in training activities each year even before the health crisis (Member States had a rate of adults in training below 60%)
- The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million.
- Develop childcare and education services to reduce youth unemployment rates between 25 and 35.
- 80% of people aged 60-74 should be digitally literate.

There are also other important elements, such as the promotion of Social Dialogue as a structural element of European construction. It should be noted that BusinessEurope insisted on adding the adjective "autonomous" to Social Dialogue.

With regard to poverty in old age, this issue has yet to be addressed and should be dealt with as part of the overall fight against poverty.

The informal European Council Summit on social issues is a first. There was a commitment to tackle the consequences of the pandemic through quality jobs and the implementation of the 20 key principles of the European Social Rights Framework.

Governments should consult the social partners as part of resilience and recovery plans, but often this is only formal and weak consultation, so it is not enough. There needs to be a follow-up to the National Plans to see the impact of COVID-19 and to strengthen the health and social protection systems. The pandemic has, in fact, opened the eyes of governments to the importance of health and social protection.

The ETUC closed the SocialAll project and Liina thanked FERPA for the important role it played and for the quality of the work done.

Member States do not talk much about the risks of social exclusion of certain categories of the population, they talk about it in general. If you don't have a social dimension, you can't have a strong European economy," she added.

Next Saturday in Strasbourg, the plenary session on the Future of Europe opens with the aim of looking at the changes that should be made to improve the lives of all citizens. The ETUC will "put our priorities on the table". However, it is not clear how the direct involvement of the social partners and civil society will be done.

There are many events and debates at Member State level: social Europe must be at the heart of these debates.

It is difficult to make progress on the issue of taxation at European level, because it requires a unanimous vote. There is unfair competition within the EU, notably in the Netherlands, Malta, Cyprus, etc., by applying very low taxation to multinationals or the advantages granted to Amazon in Luxembourg.

Social policy is a matter for the Member States and the 20 principles of the EDS belong to the social field! What will happen at European level? At best, "coordination", but it is not possible for the Commission to impose anything.

Liina ended her speech by referring to the Conference on the Future of Europe. The ETUC had set 15 priority principles and had adopted a Resolution "For a new economic and social governance in Europe" recalling its demands, because until now, she concluded, European governance had been mainly oriented towards the economy and competitiveness but not towards improving the social dimension.

The President thanked Liina for her speech, which he considered very comprehensive, and opened the debate.

There was one point of clarification and two questions. Regarding the request for clarification, Liina said that the Porto commitment had been signed by the President of the Council, but this did not appear on the internet. As for the two questions, the first concerned the consideration of the elderly. One speaker pointed out that the Oporto Summit had not made sufficient mention of the elderly, even though they constituted a category of the population that was constantly increasing, as the Commission's Green Paper on demographic ageing had pointed out. What is the ETUC going to do to ensure that the Member States do more? The other question is that the ETUC says that with regard to the employment rate of women, equal pay must be "re-boosted". The question is: Is the ETUC working with the Committee of the Regions on these issues?

In her reply, Liina said that the document did not indeed bear the signature of Charles MICHEL, but that of Antonio COSTAS, as Prime Minister of Portugal. The President of the Commission had forwarded it to her for transmission to the Member States. Liina added that at the end of the Council Declaration, reference was made to 14 alternative indicators to say whether welfare was increasing or not. The ETUC agrees with these indicators.

Concerning the reference to the elderly, indeed whether in the Social Summit Declaration or the Council Declaration, and in similar terms, there is only one reference to them. But as far as the ETUC is concerned, it has a European project, SocialAll, which has examined the problems faced by retired people. Even though the final report of this project is not yet complete, there are some proposals for a new approach: to treat older people separately and to deal with the social inclusion of older people. And as far as the Committee of the Regions is concerned, there is work being done, but there are no structural relationships. As for the question of wages, it is important, because you have to be able to live on your wages. And if we want to fight child poverty, it is important to have decent wages. The following organisations took part in the debate: FNV, SPI-CGIL, UCR-CFDT

The floor was then given to the Treasurer of FERPA, Tino FUMAGALLI, for the presentation of the 2020 financial statement.

A table was projected showing the situation as at 31 December 2020, which he commented on. He pointed out that the pandemic had prevented the Financial Commission from meeting to check the accounts. He also noted that many amounts were lower than expected as FERPA had organised less activity. He said that he had only received the document the day before yesterday. But in substance there was nothing special to say. He also pointed out that there were 40,000 euros in provisions for the Congress. On the other hand, he said that he had not understood the questions from the French organisations that had been sent in writing before the meeting.

In the debate that followed, the French organisations explained that their letter had not called into question the work done, but as they had not been aware of the day's document, they had legitimate questions. But they now have the answers. Some pointed out that FERPA should have some room for manoeuvre. Others were surprised that there was no provision for the mid-term GA. Others were also surprised that the reserves were not shown, but that this was perhaps a problem of general presentation.

In this debate, the floor was also given to Jurgen, from the financial department of the ETUC, who is responsible for the ETUC's accounts. He explained that the annual accounts had three columns:

- first column: the draft budget as adopted by the Executive Committee;
- second column: the expenses incurred
- third column: the differences between the two.

This is the document that is sent to the auditors. After the audit report we will have a complete table with the reserves for example.

Jurgen also pointed out, because the question had been asked, that he also works for ETUC and Eurocadres. The accounts are closed in April-May. Then there is the audit process until the end of May. At the end of June, there is the audit and the auditors' report is sent at the end of July-beginning of August.

During the debate, it was also specified that, as the statutes state, the Financial Commission verifies the accuracy of the figures, it has a supervisory role. However, it is the Treasurer who draws up the

budget and is responsible for it. It was also noted that the 2020 balance sheet was closed with a positive balance of 5,391.64 euros.

The Secretary General intervened to say that he had asked Jurgen to reassure the members because the Treasurer and the Finance Committee could not control the accounts because of the pandemic. Before 2018 there was no treasurer and we put him in place because there was only the finance committee and sometimes there were problems. Also, it's not our responsibility today if you still can't get to our offices. It is a question of trust, as Jurgen's presence proves.

One organisation reacted to this last remark, saying that it was not a question of "trust", but a question of knowledge and clarity.

A vote was taken on the 2020 financial statement: it was unanimously approved.

The following organisations took part in the debate: UCR-FO, UCR- CFDT, SPI-CGIL

The next item concerned the Mid-Term General Assembly, initially scheduled for 5, 6 and 7 October 2021.

The Secretary General indicated that due to the pandemic, a face-to-face meeting seemed to be compromised on that date, including the ETUC having to postpone its Mid-Term Conference from July to November. And, for example, access to the ETUC building is very limited. There is no visibility on the end of the pandemic. The ETUC Steering Committee in early October will be held online.

As far as FERPA is concerned, the Secretary General proposed, if some members insisted on doing so in person, to reverse the dates of the Executive and the December GA, but noted that it seemed difficult to postpone the mid-term GA to December, as the EU General Assembly was meeting.

In the debate that followed, opinions were divided, although a majority seemed to be in favour of the virtual GA in October and the 3rd FERPA Executive Committee meeting on December 1st and 2nd in person. The reasons given in favour of this solution were that the health situation was still uncertain for October and that it was necessary to play it safe, even if some people said they were "saturated" with videoconferences.

Finally, the Secretary General said that for the moment face-to-face meetings were a problem in October, but not in December. We have to be careful. The Mid-Term GA will launch the Manifesto and the December Executive Committee will follow its implementation. He therefore proposed a virtual GA in October and the December Executive Committee in person. This proposal was put to the vote. It received almost unanimous support, minus one abstention and one vote against.

The following organisations took part in the debate: SPI-CGIL, UCR-CGT, UCR-FO, FNV, UIL-UILP, FGTB, UNIA, UCR-CFDT, UNIR-CFE-CGC, CSC-ACV, ÖGBL, CC. OO, FUPS-CSdl.

The statutory changes were then discussed.

The General Secretary welcomed Yvan PEDRETTI from SPI-CGIL, who was replacing Domenico PANTALEO on the Executive Committee. He thanked the latter for the work he had accomplished. He indicated that the SUH union had appointed Igor KNEZOVIC to sit on the Executive Committee. Concerning the replacement of the Slovenian colleague, as there was no candidature from her organisation, he proposed that Ana MARTINEZ, from the CC. OO, to join the Executive Committee until the next Congress, which would solve the problem of rotation within the Spanish organisations. This would mean that one woman would be replaced by another. She will be in charge of the file on solidarity between generations and she will work with Henri. This proposal was ratified unanimously with 5 abstentions.

The Executive Committee voted unanimously to readmit the Turkish trade union DISK/EMEKLIN-SEN as a member of FERPA.

For the working group on the modification of the statutes, which should be composed of members of the bureau, he proposed

- Dick DE GRAAF, as Chairman
- Werner THUM
- Yvan PEDRETTI
- Angeles BRIALES
- And the members of the Secretariat.

Some members of the Executive Committee wondered about the criteria for appointing members. Others were surprised that there were no members from their country (Belgium, France for example). The Secretary General said that the choice had been made taking into account the availability of the members of the Management Committee and that Dick already had experience of this work as he had chaired the Working Group on the modification of the Statutes before the last Congress. The composition of the working group was finally adopted unanimously with two abstentions.

The following organisations took part in the debate: UCR-CGT, UNIA, CSC-ACV, UCR-CFDT, UCR-FO

Then the various questions were addressed.

Beforehand, Jessica presented Henri's apologies, as he had to leave the meeting at that moment. One of his brothers had died of COVID-19 just a month ago and a tribute was being paid to him at the end of the afternoon and Henri had to attend.

She also apologised to the President who had encountered many technical problems during the meeting.

The first intervention was from Dick DE GRAAF.

He said that in my country there have been some spectacular court cases which may not be known or familiar to the members of the Executive Committee. But they seem important to him and that is why he wants to share them.

The Dutch environmental NGO Urgenda (which stands for Urgent Agenda) has sued the Dutch government because its policy instruments for CO2 reduction would not meet the targets set by the government itself. By doing so, the Dutch government was behaving inappropriately, endangering the environment and harming human welfare. The 2015 court case was won; the government's appeal in 2018 was lost by the government and the latest appeal to the High Court was also lost by the Dutch government. The judge therefore ruled that the Dutch government should reorient its policies and take additional measures to reduce CO2 emissions. This case has attracted a lot of international attention. In other countries (France, Ireland, Canada), cases have been brought, also successfully. Other cases are ongoing in other countries.

Another case. The Dutch environmental group Milieudefensie (Defence of the Environment) sued Royal Dutch Shell, one of the world's largest oil companies, based in the Netherlands. They argued that Shell's current policy did not have enough effect on reducing its carbon-based fuel activities and was therefore harming people and the environment. Last month, the judge ruled that Shell's policy was not sophisticated enough to have a significant effect and that the company should step up its greening efforts with immediate effect. He also recalls that at the ETUC Vienna Congress 2019, the Director General of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, Michael O'Flaherty, was invited to speak.

He challenged the trade union movement not only to fight for its rights through negotiations and actions, but also to use the legal processes to have these rights approved and put into practice. He therefore proposes that we, as trade unions and as FERPA, should think seriously about how to use the legal processes to our advantage. We have rights, set out in the social rights pillar, but it is always difficult to translate these rights into concrete results.

His proposal now would be to invite Michael O'Flaherty to our next FERPA Congress. We could ask Michael O'Flaherty how we, as FERPA, can also use legal procedures to make our rights a reality.

Werner THUM intervened in turn to reiterate his invitation to hold the next FERPA statutory Congress in Vienna.

Then our colleague CERISIER from the CSC-ACV intervened to say that the pandemic had moved the borders. For example, the G7 has proposed the taxation of multinationals. Can we be optimistic? In any case, changes are underway...

The Secretary General took his turn to close the Executive Committee meeting. He thanked the members, interpreters and colleagues of the ETUC for these two days of intense work. This was the third meeting in virtual mode and it had gone well. He also thanked for the positive votes. He indicated that

- The Steering Committee would take place on 8 September (and not on 9 September as originally planned).

- The Mid-Term Assembly would be held, in virtual mode, in October over two days.

He invited members to send in their amendments to the Manifesto in good time. He wished them a good holiday and looked forward to seeing them in the autumn, initially at the Executive Committee, to continue the trade union battle for a better society. He concluded by saying that FERPA represents "the memory of future generations".

Henri